

I felt like dying after losing wife, four kids in gas explosion – Oyo man

A former security agent from Oyo State, Esan Onibuore, tells ABDULLATEEF FOWEWE how he lost his wife and four children in a gas explosion in Ibadan in 2015 and how efforts to raise funds to save his wife and his surviving son left him homeless

CAN you recall how the incident happened? It happened in 2015. One morning when our neighbour wanted to cook, she turned on the gas and started looking for a lighter. As soon as she saw the lighter and lit the gas cooker, it exploded. She was the first casualty of the explosion.

My wife was critically injured by the explosion. I had to force myself into the fire to look for our children. I found one alive and brought him out. He was in a pool of blood. I fainted immediately after we got out of the fire; people around poured water on me before I regained consciousness later that day. When I woke up, we rushed my son and wife to the University College Hospital, Ibadan, Oyo State.

Where were you when the incident occurred?

I went out with one of my female children to see my business partner. I would not have gone out with the child that day, but she was crying that she wanted to follow me.

How did you know about the explosion?

The place I went to wasn't too far from our house; it was just two kilometres away from the house. Some minutes after I left the house I started hearing people shouting that the house was burning and immediately I realised the shout was coming from my street. I left what I was doing and rushed to the house. As I entered the street people came to me, telling me to calm down before I got to the house. That was when I knew that it was my house that was burning. My neighbours and I rushed my wife and son to the hospital. The rest had died, so we didn't bother to carry them to the hospital to avoid unnecessary charges.

How many children did you have?

I had six children at that time, and they were all twins. My wife had three sets of twins, but unfortunately, four of them died in the incident. I have two left - the one that went out with me that day, and the one I rescued from the fire.

What happened when you got to the hospital, how did the doctors react?

When we got to the hospital, they treated us nicely and admitted them forthwith. They (my wife and son) were carried to the burn unit, and they asked us to make a deposit which I did immediately before they started treating them.

What was your occupation at that time and how were you able to cope financially with the hospital bills?

I was a security agent then, and I made a lot of money from it. However, it later got to a stage where I used all the salaries of people working for me to pay the hospital bills. I sought their permission before doing that, and they all considered my situation and permitted me to use it.

How did your family members' condition affect you as a father?

It is still affecting me because I have sold my property. I have sold the house, and I have sold all my vehicles, including the commercial

vehicle. I don't own anything as I speak with you. It is affecting me to the extent that I have to beg for money from my friends before my children and I can eat.

What was the condition of the house before you sold it?

It is not even the house I sold, it is land because the house was burnt to ashes.

Do you mean you could not salvage anything from the house?

No. Nobody, including our neighbours, was able to take anything out of it. Everything was burnt to ashes. The house didn't have insurance. I didn't think of insurance then, and I didn't have anyone to advise me to insure it.

What do you do for a living now?

Nothing really. You remember I told you I was once a security agent, so some people still call me to provide services. When they call me like that, I ask them to pay me before I can look for the guard they need. People

call once in a while; so it feels like I have nothing to do.

What about your extended family members? Have they been supportive?

They are doing their best, but they are not financially capable. It is not as if they are not willing to help.

You said earlier that you were managing to feed your two children. What happened to your wife who was rushed to a hospital?

My wife later died in hospital four years after the incident (2019). Only my son survived the explosion.

However, he is still battling with the injury at the moment because we did not complete his treatment before we left the hospital due to lack of money.

There are some surgeries we are supposed to do that we didn't do.

How were you informed about her death?

I knew my wife had died when a doctor sent a nurse to come and call me, and started talking to me in the parables. I didn't let him finish talking before I walked out and went to the hall to confirm what had happened.

How did you feel when you confirmed her death?

I felt sad, and I felt like dying with her, because she was such a good wife every man should pray for.

What was the reaction of your wife's parents and siblings?

They visited me, sympathised with me, and advised me to marry another wife to help take care of the children, and that I should not think of being single for the rest of my life because my first wife had died.

Do you plan to have another wife?

No, and I have never thought of it since the death of my wife.

When was your son discharged from the hospital?

He was discharged in 2020 when I was unable to pay the hospital bills anymore. After that, I took him to the orthopaedic hospital in Igbobi, Lagos State, with the hope that the bill there would be cheaper than UCH, where we came from. So, after they carried out the test at orthopaedic

hospital, they said they would do a surgery on his legs, and that the right leg, which was the cheapest to work on, would cost N2.4m at that time. That was why we left Igbobi and went home for self-medication.

How old was your son when the incident happened?

He was eight years old at that time. He is 16 years old now.

How has the incident affected his education?

It is affecting his education now because he first stopped going to school a long time ago when I didn't have the money to sponsor him to a private school before I enrolled him in a public school. I didn't allow him to go to school when he started feeling pain in his legs. So, he is always with me most of the time. This is also slowing down his education. He would have been in Senior Secondary School Two, but now, he is just about to begin Junior Secondary School Three.

What about your surviving daughter? Where is she?

She lives with one of my family members in Lagos. I miss my wife like a man who misses his parents. I know that if she were alive, I would not suffer like this. She always stood by me like my mother. My surviving children are all aware that their mother is dead. They also know about the death of their siblings. On some days, we hardly find food to eat.

Where have you been living since you lost the house?

We are living in a kiosk with a mat.

Are you the owner of the kiosk?

No. Someone gave it to us to manage till we get better accommodation. The owner used it for commercial purposes before giving it to us. Sometimes, the person usually gives us food items.

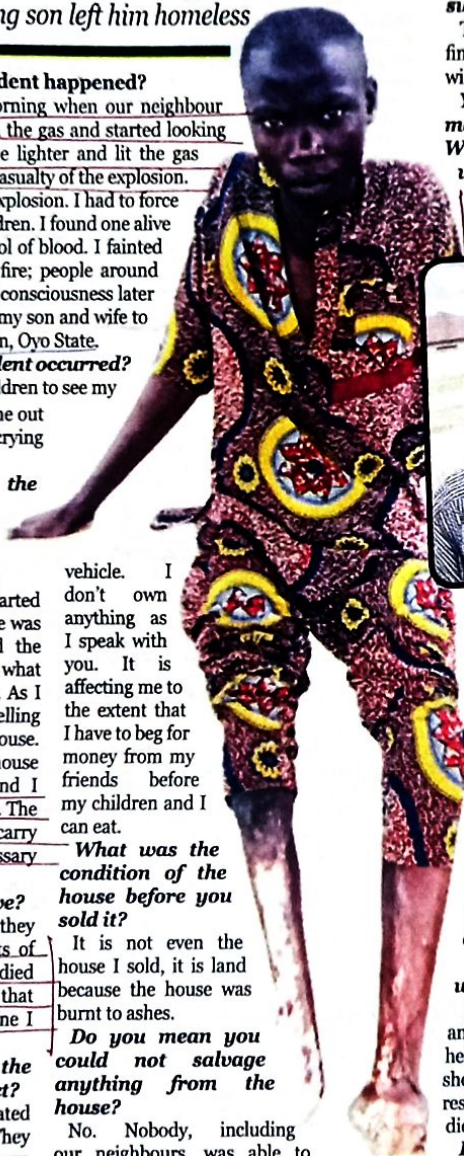
My experience taught me that a fire incident can take someone back to where he started, and transform a millionaire into a pauper. Fire is the most dangerous incident that can happen to human beings and I pray it does not happen to anyone again.

Many Nigerians use gas for cooking in their homes. What do you think they should know?

My advice is that anybody that knows they cannot operate a gas cooker should not risk operating it without being taught. People who can operate it should not take it for granted. They should always operate it with care. Prevention is far better than cure. People should follow safety measures while operating gas. They should always remember to keep the regulator knob off when not in use, and they should not place inflammable plastics in the kitchen near gas. With what happened to me, I can never use gas again.

What type of help do you require from Nigerians?

The first thing is the surgery for my son's leg, which is paramount to me because when the pain starts, it makes him unable to walk. Most of the time, when the bone ache starts, I carry him on my back when I go out because I cannot leave him alone. I want Nigerians to help me out on that. I also need a job, because I am not doing anything that can fetch me money. I am even planning to sell my mobile phone today so that I can buy some drugs for him (my son), and use the rest to feed.



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