

Proliferation of expired cooking gas cylinders wreaks havoc in homes amid regulatory failure

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Cooking gas retail shop in Ogba

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Nigeria's unregulated cooking gas market has become a ticking time bomb, with expired, rusty, and substandard cylinders flooding the market, claiming lives and leaving others with permanent disabilities. PUNCH Healthwise investigation reveals how the pursuit of profit is prioritised over public health and safety in this largely unregulated industry. SODIQ OJUROUNGBE and IDOWU ABDULLAHI report

When Medinat Jimoh, 49, started selling cooking gas a few months ago, she saw it as a lifeline, a means to keep her struggling family afloat in the unforgiving tides of Lagos life. She never imagined that the same business would become a portal to death, not only for her but for three generations of her family and nearly a dozen others.

If anyone had told her that one cylinder would snatch away her husband, her daughter, and her A in a single, agonising moment, she might have laughed it off as an impossible nightmare. But the events of April 6, 2025, would prove otherwise.

It was a hot Sunday afternoon in Badia, a densely populated part of Apapa-Iganmu in Lagos State, where homes lean against each other like tired shoulders.

In front of No. 12 Amusu Street, a gas delivery truck had just offloaded several cylinders for Medinat's small shop. Unfortunately, one of the cylinders that arrived that day was different.

It was bloated with rust, corroded at the base, its aging metal weakened by years of extensive use. It stood for only a few minutes before it gave way, started tipping and began to hiss.

Gas escaped into the air like a predator loose from its cage. Medinat, in a moment of desperation, used her bare hands to try and stop the leak. She didn't have gloves, safety gear, or even training. Just instinct and love for the family who waited inside her shop.

What followed was a tragedy that changed the fate of Medinat's family forever. It was an explosion that rewrote the family's history, leaving the imprints of broken dreams and a lifetime of trauma.

The blast, which people on Amusu Street could hear several blocks away, left behind a smouldering ruin of their family lives.

In that single, shattering moment, the lives of a husband, his wife, their grown daughter, and a bright-eyed granddaughter were snuffed away by the explosion sparked by the leaking gas cylinder.

One of the survivors of the incident, who is also Medinat's son, Teslim Jimoh, told PUNCH Healthwise that he survived death by a whisker.

“My mum, Medinat Jimoh, sells cooking gas for someone and gets paid at the end of the month. So, what happened was that they just supplied her gas that fateful day. But 30 minutes after the vehicle dropped the gas cylinders in front of her shop and left, she was yet to take them inside her shop when one of the cylinders fell and cut open towards the base.

“That 50kg gas cylinder was too old and rusty, which was why it could not stand like the others. So, immediately it fell, and it started leaking; my mother rushed and used her hands to press it to stop the leakage before thinking of what else to do. Unfortunately, the gas exploded on her a few minutes later,” he said.

The 13-year-old, who is the only survivor with his body badly burnt and eyes damaged beyond recognition, now lies in a hospital ward, swallowed by grief and surrounded by darkness.

“My own burns were not as severe as theirs because I was some metres away from the shop when the incident happened.

“The explosion happened in front of her shop. My daddy and sister were inside the shop, while my little niece was playing around the shop when the incident happened. They were severely burnt,” he recounted.

He noted that the explosion later snuffed out three generations in a single breath.

According to him, their lively home now holds echoes of a life that once brimmed with warmth and dreams.

Teslim listed his family members who tragically died in the incident as his father Mr. Tajudeen Jimoh, 57, his mother, Medinat, 49; his 18-year-old older sibling, Aliyat; and his one year-and-three-month-old niece, Hazimat Jamiu.

While they were admitted to the Trauma and Burnt Centre located at Gbagada General Hospital for treatment, Teslim said his parents died three days later.

He explained that Aliyat, who trained as a hairdresser, and his niece died at the Lagos State University Teaching, Ikeja four days after the incident due to complications of severe burns.

An eyewitness identified as Ibrahim said efforts by good Samaritans to rescue the victims were unsuccessful.

“Some of the victims who made it to the hospital alive did not survive,” he told our correspondent.

Explosions galore

Gas explosions are not uncommon in the country, where poor safety standards, substandard equipment, expired gas cylinders, and a lack of awareness continue to put lives at risk.

For many families, this tragedy is a constant reminder of how fragile safety can be when oversight fails.

In August 2015, nine members of a family breathed their last after a cooking gas cylinder exploded and caught fire. The fire, which engulfed the whole Lagos flat, roasted the Obidigwe family, who hail from Azia in the Ihiala Local Council of Anambra State.

Mrs. Obidigwe was preparing lunch for the family when the cooking gas cylinder exploded. Her husband, 51-year-old Charles Obidigwe, a patent medicine dealer, died instantly after an unsuccessful attempt to put out a fire that engulfed their three-bedroom apartment.

While Charles died instantly, the other eight members of his family, including his sister-in-law and her son, who were staying with them, died later in a Lagos hospital.

Away from Obidigwe’s family, on July 17, 2018, in Jigawa State, three siblings were burnt to death in a domestic gas explosion that rocked their home in Sara village.

After they were rushed to the Federal Medical Centre Birnin Kudu in Birnin Kudu LGA for medical attention, while three siblings were claimed by the incident, two others sustained varying degrees of injuries.

“The incident was a result of an explosion from a cooking gas cylinder. The victims, Zainab, Fati and Abdulrahman, died at the Aminu Kano Teaching Hospital. They were of ages 3, 2 and 4,” the then Spokesperson of Jigawa Police Command, ASP Abdu Jinjiri, said.

Regulatory silence fuels national grief

The tragedy that struck the Jimoh and Obidigwe families is not just an isolated incident; it is a mirror held up to a dangerous, festering crisis that has taken root across Nigeria.

An investigation by PUNCH Healthwise discovered that the Nigerian cooking gas market, largely unregulated and poorly monitored, has become a silent assassin in millions of homes across the country.

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In towns, cities, and villages alike, cooking gas cylinders that should have been safely decommissioned long ago are flooding the market, continuing to put lives at risk.

Our correspondents gathered that expired gas cylinders, many of them repainted to appear new, are being sold without any form of safety checks.

Cylinders in Nigeria are governed by clear safety protocols, or at least they should be. These standards are set out by the Nigerian Midstream and Downstream Petroleum Regulatory Authority, whose responsibility is to ensure the safe use of LPG across the country.

Under these guidelines, PUNCH Healthwise gathered that gas cylinders are supposed to be recertified, requalified, or withdrawn from use after a set number of years, typically after 15 years.

Once the gas cylinders exceed this age, they are expected to either be reconditioned or removed from circulation entirely.

The requalification process is designed to ensure that every cylinder undergoes a thorough inspection and pressure testing to determine if it is structurally sound enough to safely contain cooking gas.

It was learnt that if a cylinder fails this inspection, it is legally required to be withdrawn from circulation. In essence, these protocols are meant to ensure that outdated, corroded, or damaged cylinders, like the one that triggered the tragic explosion in Badia, are not allowed to remain in the market.

However, an investigation by PUNCH Healthwise revealed that many cooking gas cylinders currently circulating in Nigerian markets are long past their 15-year lifespan, compromised by years of rust, poor maintenance, and multiple unauthorised refills.

It was gathered that these cylinders are returned to circulation, some imported from abroad as scrap and given new life by unscrupulous dealers who wipe away expiry stamps and slap on fresh paint, turning ticking time bombs into merchandise.

Our correspondents who visited gas shops across Lagos and Ogun States confirmed this troubling trend. More than 10 gas shops were found selling substandard cylinders that were old, rusted, and long past their expiration dates.

It was discovered that these cylinders had no expiry dates and were sold without any safety checks, with little to no regulatory oversight.

Ignoring the risk for profit

Despite the country’s dependence on gas cookers and increase in gas cylinder usage, PUNCH Healthwise discovered that the unregulated gas market has become a breeding ground for substandard products, and the lack of oversight is becoming even more dangerous, especially as millions of Nigerian families rely on gas as their primary cooking energy source.

Some of these gas sellers who spoke with our correspondents confirmed that they were aware of the risks but continued to prioritise profits over the safety of their customers.

It was gathered that the increasing demand for cooking gas in the country, especially in urban centre, fuelled the rise of unscrupulous traders who are willing to bypass safety protocols in the pursuit of quick financial gain.

Findings showed that this profit-driven mentality led to the widespread circulation of expired gas cylinders that have been poorly maintained and improperly stored, worsening the problem.

Some of the gas sellers admitted that the gas cylinders they sell might be outdated, but they argued that as long as the cylinders do not visibly show cracks or leaks, they can still be sold.

One gas seller in Lagos, identified as Raheem, revealed, “We know some of these cylinders are old, but they are in good condition, and customers demand them because they are cheaper. If I don’t sell them, someone else will.”

In Alagbole, Ogun State, Mayegun Olusola, a gas vendor with years of experience in the business, said he sells gas cylinders to customers based on their financial strength.

“Here, I have several gas cylinders to cater to different strata of people in society. I offer everyone what their pockets can afford. With this economy, I just attend to people according to their budget when they come in need of cylinders,” Olusola explained.

Also speaking, a gas seller in Abeokuta, Taofeeq Adeyemi, explained that the materials used in manufacturing cylinders have significantly changed over the years.

According to him, cylinders produced by Nigerian companies often rust more easily due to the poor quality of iron used in their production.

“Most cylinders produced in Nigeria are not of good quality. Imported cylinders don’t rust like others. Though they don’t rust, they have expiry dates. The majority of the imported cylinders have expired before getting to the Nigerian market, but because they don’t show visible signs of cracks or rust, we can still use them here.

“When companies selling gas to us retailers tell us the cylinders we came to refill have expired, we always argue with them that they haven’t because they still look good with no sign of cracks or rust,” Adeyemi explained.

The gas seller also claimed that most gas stations don’t ask about the expiry dates of the cylinders, adding that they are more concerned about their profits.

When asked if there is a regulatory body coming regularly to check if their cylinders are in good condition, Adeyemi said they hardly see any, accusing the association of gas retailers of only being concerned with the levy fee rather than safety.

Importing expired gas

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At Ojodu Berger, Lagos, Onyebuchi, another gas retailer, offered a blunt critique of the market’s practices.

He discussed the proliferation of second-hand cylinders, many of which are imported from countries abroad.

According to him, these imported cylinders, often discarded scrap from other nations, are treated as ‘pristine’ by many Nigerian customers, especially because they tend to rate imported products more highly, regardless of their expiration dates.

“We have several types of cylinders; we have second-hand, and we have new ones. The prices are also different. Some are produced here and branded ‘Made in China’. There are imported ones too, which are not new anyway. Most imported ones are already used and discarded abroad before they find their way onto our shores,” said Onyebuchi.

He added that the cylinders that are rusty or show signs of wear and tear often spend long periods in storage before being sold to Nigerian consumers.

“Nothing gets expired in Nigeria, and Nigerians rate whatever comes from overseas more, even though they are expired products,” he remarked.

Reps intervention

Worried by the destruction caused by rising explosions, on February 6, 2025, the House of Representatives directed the Standards Organisation of Nigeria and the Nigeria Customs Service to put in place measures to ensure that only new and standard gas cylinders and kits are imported into the country.

The lawmakers gave the directive after adopting a motion moved by the member representing Ibarapa East/Ido Federal Constituency, Oyo State, Aderemi Oseni, during plenary.

Leading the debate, Oseni attributed the crisis of recurrent gas explosions to the influx of expired cylinders and substandard gas kits, which entered the market due to lapses by SON and NCS personnel at the country’s ports and borders.

“The House is worried that experts have attributed these explosions to expired gas cylinders, substandard imported cylinders, tanks, and kits, as well as improperly fabricated local cylinders made with inferior materials.

“The House is further alarmed that, beyond cooking gas, CNG-powered vehicles have also been involved in explosions. Some of these incidents have been linked to substandard and locally fabricated cylinders, produced by welders without the requisite technical expertise.

“The House is deeply concerned that in 2024 alone, over 100 casualties were recorded in various gas explosion incidents across Nigeria. The most recent case occurred in Port Harcourt on January 7, 2025, leaving 17 people injured,” he said.

The lawmakers, however, directed SON and NCS to ensure that only standard, unexpired, and high-quality gas cylinders, tanks, trucks, and kits are permitted for importation.

Lonely journey of trauma

The ruins of her family’s lives, particularly the remembrance of her daughter’s bright smile and giggle that used to drift through open windows, have now left Nofisat Jamiu with darkness.

Nofisat, who is the first child of Jimoh’s family and mother of a one-year-old and three-month-old daughter who died in the explosion, blamed the poor state of the cylinder for the deaths of her parents, sister and daughter.

Sharing her pain with PUNCH Healthwise, the inconsolable 27-year-old mother of two said she was yet to come off the shock.

Nofisat said that though she was deeply pained by her daughter’s death, she was

particularly pained by the mother’s death, who had been struggling all her life to put food on their table and was only six months into the gas business, which is not even her own.

Fighting back tears, she said the unfortunate development had stolen her joy and left her with perpetual grief.

“She was practically new to the business. Before she got the job, she was doing laundry for people from house to house and was also into petty trade as a side hustle to make ends meet.

“My father was into artwork but suffered a stroke in 2023, and since then, life has been hard for my family, turning my mother into a breadwinner. My father usually comes to her shop to check on her. So, that faithful day, he came a few minutes to check on her before the gas explosion, while my daughter went to her shop to play with her.

“I am so heartbroken. The leakage, I believe, was because the cylinder was old.

“I also sell gas in Apapa for the woman who hired my mother, but not in the same location as my mum’s shop. Some of the gas cylinders are too old and rusted. My husband had warned me not to return to that business because of how my mother died. I’m a trained fashion designer but do not have the resources to get sewing machines and a shop for myself”, she lamented.

Exposure to gas, explosion life-threatening – Experts

Meanwhile, safety and public health experts have warned that exposure to gas leaks leading to explosions portends dangers, and its effect leaves scars for survivors.

Speaking to PUNCH Healthwise, a public health physician, Igwe Akujobi, said aside from its flammable nature, the resultant effects take tolls on families, communities and society at large.

According to him, leakage of gas could lead to suffocation because the gas, being heavier than air, displaces oxygen.

“We know that leaked gas is highly flammable. Just a little spark can ignite fire everywhere—next thing, houses are burning, and people become homeless.

“Sometimes, you can have degrees of burns that are life-threatening, causing trauma cases that need emergency intervention, especially if the person is badly burned,” Akujobi said.

Speaking on likely injuries that can be sustained during cooking gas explosions, he said, “The common ones are burns—burns to the skin, throat, and even the face.

“The burns can be so severe that limbs might become unusable. Someone might lose an arm or hand. In some cases, without medical intervention, people may lose fingers. If the burn degree is high, the affected area becomes stiff and may require surgical reconstruction,” he added.

He said the health and economic impact of gas explosions is enormous on households and individuals.

Continuing, Akujobi said, “It’s emotionally and financially draining. There are also long hospital stays and extended periods of isolation.

“Some people are also left with disabilities, like losing their sight. Imagine a security guard going blind. Who will employ a blind security guard? Most employers will discharge the person. It’s a serious issue.

“Also, imagine a beautiful lady coming out of a fire, looking at herself in the mirror—she’s not going to be the same again, even after interventions. That affects mental health. Some people lose their jobs because of how serious their injuries are.”

How gas can leak, cause explosions

A health emergency practitioner, Paschal Achunine, revealed that gas leaks can occur from faulty valves, loose pipe fittings, cracked hoses, or damaged regulators.

According to him, improperly installed gas appliances, faulty appliances, lack of proper ventilation, and natural disasters can also lead to gas leaks.

To prevent gas explosions at home, the expert said users should watch out for signs like the smell of rotten eggs or sulphur, hissing, whistling, or roaring sounds near a gas line, meter, or appliance.

He also listed white clouds or dust near gas lines, visible damage to a gas line, or fire coming from a hole.

Achunine, who is the Executive Director of the Health Emergency Initiative, urged users to pay attention and adhere to safety measures.

“Check the tube annually with soapy water for any leaks, and if a leak is suspected, the tube should be replaced.

“When connecting a cylinder to the regulator, ensure there are no naked flames around. The regulator should be properly seated before opening the cylinder knob. In case of any trouble, immediately switch off the knob,” he told PUNCH Healthwise.

Achunine highlighted the importance of storing cylinders outside the home, safely and with proper roofing.

“Such storage should be done by professional vendors using ISI-approved materials, shut-off valves, and high-quality copper pipelines,” he added.

Corroborating Achunine, a health and safety expert, Ehi Iden stressed that gas cylinders should never be stored inside the kitchen.

“Most explosions occur within the kitchen area. Gas cylinders should be kept outside because, in the event of an explosion or fire, it’s easier to manage or control the situation if it happens outside,” he explained.

Meanwhile, efforts to speak to the SON on measures being taken and the effectiveness of the enforcement of gas cylinder safety regulations have proved abortive.

When PUNCH Healthwise reached out to SON’s Press Liaison Officer, Angela Okisor, to get the organisation’s reaction, she said the expert on safety regulations on the topic wasn’t available.

She, however, promised to connect our correspondent to the expert once available, but she had yet to do so as of the time of going to press.

What we are doing- Lagos govt

The Director General of the Lagos State Safety Commission, Lanre Mojola, said the draft laws for regulations and safety standards for retailers and distributors of cooking are currently being considered by the Ministry of Justice.

“Yes, there are safety guidelines and standards for gas retailing operations. Draft regulations are currently receiving legal attention at the Ministry of Justice preparatory to being sent to the House of Assembly for consideration, public hearing and passing into law,” the DG said in a statement personally made available to PUNCH Healthwise.

On enforcement, he added, “Weekly enforcement exercises are carried out with the help of the Lagos State Environmental Task Force – during which non-compliant outlets are shut and cylinders confiscated.”

Mojola explained that the commission collaborates with the association of gas retailers (both LPG & Industrial gases) – liquefied Petroleum Gas Retailers to curb the circulation of substandard or expired gas cylinders in Lagos markets as provided in the safety inspection checklist.

“The safety inspection checklist was designed in conjunction with the association to monitor expired gas cylinders. Items 12 & 13 on that checklist take care of monitoring and ensuring if the cylinders are in good condition and not more than 15 years and if the customers with expired or defective cylinders turned back.

“Also, we go through Retail Gas Ambassadors – Leadership of each unit at the 57 LGAs/LCDAs have been appointed Retail Gas Ambassadors by the Commission to monitor the quality of cylinders at all retail facilities,”

According to him, cylinders are expected to carry clearly marked manufacturing and expiry dates, as well as SON certification numbers for traceability.

“We are also collaborating with SON –There is a programme aimed at withdrawing expired cylinders from circulation and crush them for other uses,” he added.