

From OKEY SAMPSON,
Umuahia

WHEN Mr. Okechkwu Ogba, 64, from Akanu Item in Bende Local Government Area of Abia State invited the four children of his friend and former neighbour, aged 12, 10, nine and three, over to his house as he had done time and again, little did he or his friend, Chibuzor Ikwunze (the father of the four children) know that tragedy of monumental proportions was lurking.

Ogba and Ikwunze, *Saturday Sun* gathered, had lived together and this neighbourly settlement blossomed into bosom friendship. This friendship, it was gathered grew to a level that even when Ogba moved out of the area, he occasionally invited the children of his friend over for a little get together after which they would go back. However, this time around when Ogba invited the four children of his friend to his house, they did not go back alive.

This tragedy took place in Umueze, Umuakanu community in Umuahia North Local Government Area of Abia State on Tuesday night.

How did it happen?

Abel Emmanuel, a member of one of the security agencies in the state and a relation to Ogba said his brother had invited the children of his friend as he used to do before now.

Then on Tuesday evening, Ogba went out with his second son, Chigozie, 19, and on their way back home, the man bought Suya and two packs of fruit juice for members of the family and their guests.

Emmanuel disclosed that immediately after taking the Suya with the fruit juice, nine of them that partook in the meal started vomiting simultaneously and before any medical help could come, seven of them, including Ogba, his two sons, Chigozie, 19, Eberechi, 12, and all the four children of his friend, were dead. However, Ogba's wife, Chionyerem and their first daughter survived the death strike, but were rushed to hospital unconscious where they are still receiving medical treatment.

Man lost all four children

Collaborating Emmanuel's account, brother to the man that lost four children, Ken, said his brother called him early on Wednesday morning to reveal he had no children again.

"When my younger brother called me that he had no child again. I didn't understand what he meant as he has four children who are aged 12, 10, nine and three. I immediately drove down to his place, but met an ambulance and police van driving out. "He was crying and I asked what was the problem. He told me his neighbour who usually called the children over for a visit took the children to his place. They bought Suya and fruit juice drinks which the family took that night but unfortunately, none woke up on Wednesday morning. "The only person alive is the wife of Ogba and his daughter but they are both critically ill and still unconscious.



SYMPATHISERS AT THE MORTUARY

BARBECUE OF DEATH

How 7 family members perished after eating Suya

- Kinsman suspects fruit juice was poisoned
- We can't afford N2.8m autopsy fee –Family



OGBA'S WIFE

"We don't know if it was the Suya or the fruit juice that was poisoned, but all the children are dead now and have been deposited at the mortuary with also the corpse of the neighbour, Ogba"

Deaths remain a puzzle

The deaths of the seven people after the Suya meal truly remain a puzzle. Could it be the Suya or fruit juice drinks that were poisoned?

Emmanuel attempted an answer. "If the man's second son who died with him was alive, he would have been in a better position to explain what happened because he went out and came back with him.

"But we are suspecting someone may have given them poisoned fruit juice drinks and the man, on getting to where they



OGBA'S DAUGHTER

sold Suya, decided to buy some so they could take it with the fruit juice."

Emmanuel said he hinged his

assertion on the fact that they had carried out diligence investigations where Suya are sold in Umuahia and found out, the

poisoning could not be from the Suya. So, every action according to him should be focused on the fruit juice drinks, which he is suspecting someone might have given them.

While the four children of Ogba's friend were wiped out, Ogba's wife and daughter survived, but remain unconscious. First son is equally alive because he did not partake in the dangerous meal, as he was in school.

Relation can't afford autopsy fee

The call for autopsy to be carried out on the corpses to ascertain whether the poison was from the Suya or fruit juice may be a mirage if the state government did not come into the picture.

When Emmanuel was asked if autopsy have been conducted to ascertain what led to their death, he revealed that the family lacked the resources to conduct an autopsy.

"When we met a doctor at the Federal Medical Centre (FMC), for the conduct of autopsy to actually ascertain the cause of death, he said autopsy on each of the corpses would cost N400,000 and would amount to N2.8m. We don't have such money, we asked them to take N60, 000 they refused, we equally asked them to carry out autopsy on one, they said it must be collective."

Emmanuel is appealing to Abia State government and other well-meaning Nigerians to help them with the autopsy to reveal what led to the death of their loved ones. Confirming the incident, an official of the FMC, Umuahia said the wife of the deceased was the first to be brought to the hospital and was responding to treatment together with the daughter while seven bodies were deposited at the hospital's morgue.

Abia Govt reacts

Abia State Government has reacted to the death of seven family members in Umuahia, the state capital with Governor Okezie Ikpeazu directing a comprehensive autopsy for those who lost their lives.

A statement signed by the Commissioner for Information, Chief John Okiyi-Kalu said government was saddened over the incident.

"Governor Okezie Ikpeazu has directed authorities of the relevant medical facility where the surviving family members were treated and discharged to ensure a comprehensive autopsy for those who lost their lives.

"As is the standard practice worldwide, only a proper medical autopsy can determine the cause of death and as soon as the report is available we will make same public."

While government commiserated with the family and friends of the bereaved, it called for calm and patience to enable relevant medical authorities properly determine the cause of death of the seven persons."

The government called on all citizens and residents to maintain vigilance and remain law abiding as it said it has mobilized all relevant agencies of government to properly investigate the incident.