

# Lucky escape

- Police rescue 7-month-old baby, mum, other kids from kidnappers' den in Imo

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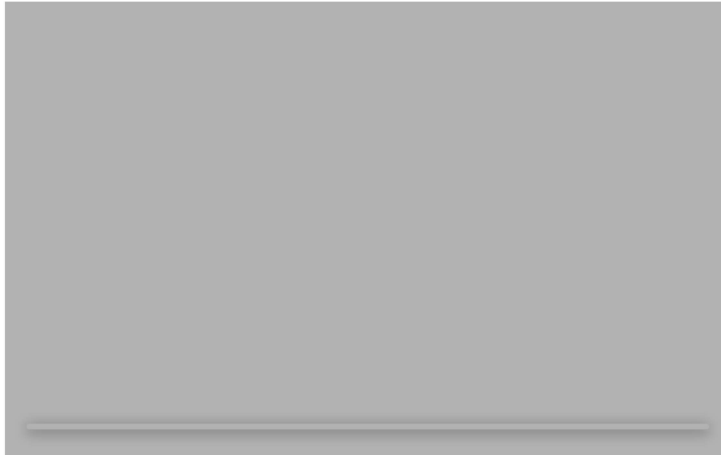
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By Ngozi Uwujare

**The Anti-Kidnapping Squad of the Imo State Police Command, in a joint operation with operatives of Ngor Okpala Police Division, Imo State Police Command has rescued four kidnapped victims from their abductors. The victims are Chinenye Odika, 27, who was kidnapped with her seven-month-old baby, Princess Odika; Chika Mark, 9, and Chisom Mark, 14.**

Their abductors, who were four in number, had demanded N10million ransom and the husband of Chinenye Odika paid N2.5 million. The suspects allegedly took the money but kept the victims for four days in their custody. But luck ran out on them as they were intercepted by the police. Three of the suspected kidnappers were picked up at Mbutu Oke-Chia Central School in Ngorokpala Local Government Area of Imo State.



Imo State Commissioner of Police, Mr Hussaini Rabiú told *Saturday Sun* that four kidnappers abducted the four rescued victims close to their residence on August 19, 2021 at Human Race Estate, Naze, in Owerri North Local Government Area of Imo State, adding that the kidnappers demanded a N10 million ransom.

He said the husband of the victim, Valentina Obinna Odika came to the control room on August 20, 2021 over the kidnapping of his wife, his daughter and two children of his siblings.

"I immediately ordered the Commander, Anti-Kidnapping Squad to act on the matter. He and his operatives in a joint operation with Ngor Okpala Police Division swung into action and intercepted the three kidnappers who are identified as Udochukwu Onyeneho, 37, of Ezinihitte in Mbaíse Local Government Area of Imo State, Uba Onyeneho, 45, of Ezinihitte in Mbaíse Local Government Area of Imo State and John Okafor, 33, from Amucha Isu Njaba Local Government Area of Imo State.

He said while waiting for the husband of the victim, who had already paid N2.5 million to the kidnappers so they could hand over his wife, daughter and the two other family members to him, the police intercepted the kidnappers.

The police boss recalled that there was a gun duel between the police operatives and the kidnappers, noting that one of the kidnappers was neutralised while two were arrested with bullet injuries and were taken to the Police Medical Centre for treatment.

The Anti-Kidnapping Squad Commander, Oladimeji Odeyeyiwa, a Superintendent of Police, said the kidnappers were consequently led to their hideout in Ngor Okpala Local Government Area of Imo State by the police.

“We recovered one pump action gun, two locally made pistols, ten rounds of live cartridges and N361, 000 being part of the ransom money collected. We also recovered a Sienna Vehicle with registration number Imo WER909ZE which they used to transport the four rescued victims,” he said.

CP Rabiun explained further that the same kidnappers' gang had also abducted one Ekwe Lambort, 54, of Obogma Enyiongugu, Aboh Mbaire Local Government Area of Imo State. He told *Saturday Sun* that the man was kidnapped on August 19 around 4:00 pm at his fuel station after Enyiongugu by four armed men operating in a RX Lexus SUV with registration number FK4720JLE. They allegedly demanded N5m for them to release the victims. The family raised and paid N2.5 million, and the man was released the fifth day, on August 23 at Ihiti Junction in Ngor Okpala.

He said the family of the victim didn't report the case to the police adding that it was later when the victim heard that the three kidnappers were arrested that he came and identified the suspects, he said.

The husband of the victim, Valentina Obinna Odika, 43, spoke with *Saturday Sun*. Hear him: “I am from Eneoha Mgbidi Oru West Local Government Area of Imo State. On August 19, 2021 around 10:00am, my wife left for her shop to sell her interior decoration items and kitchen utensils. At the Naze Junction, when she was close to the house, four armed gunmen intercepted her and pointed a gun at her. They took my wife to their own Gold coloured Highlander SUV while the hoodlums equally took over the steering of my wife's RX 300 Black Lexus SUV with my daughter and two children of my sibling. They abducted them and took them to an unknown destination.

“The kidnappers demanded N10 million as ransom. Later the kidnappers called me through my wife's phone. I had to pay N2.5 million. The kidnappers told me that I should meet them at Mbutu Oke Chia Central School in Ngor Okpala L.G.A Imo State. They said I should come with a towing van to recover my car. That prompted me to report the case to the Anti-Kidnapping Squad Personnel to accompany me to recover my wife's car. It was through there that the Anti-Kidnapping personnel and Ngor Okpala police division intercepted them and rescued the four victims – my wife and three children.”

The victim, Chinenye Promise Odika explained that she had stopped to buy food for the children when the kidnappers ambushed her.

“As I was about to enter my car, I was intercepted by four armed men operating in a Toyota Highlander. They took me and the other children inside the Highlander. They took my phone on the way and blindfolded me. Later, I was asked to call my husband around 9:00pm on August 21.

“They demanded N10 million, but my husband paid N2.5 million. They removed us from their camp and took us in their Sienna car before the police intercepted them and we were rescued by the police while three of the kidnappers were arrested. I was able to identify them,” she said.

The suspect Udochukwu Onyeneho also spoke with *Saturday Sun*. “I am from Ezinihitte in Mbaire L.G.A Imo State. I attended Community Primary School Iswreuta. I dropped out in Primary 3. My father died in 1988. My elder brother, Uba Onyeneho was not

involved in the kidnapping. We are four gang members who kidnapped the four victims. We took them to one of our gang members' house in an uncompleted building. It was our gang leader, known as 'Sky' who led the operation. It was the gang leader who called the victim's husband and demanded N10 million ransom, and later, he paid N2.5 million.

"I was given N250,000. It was when the victim's husband paid the ransom that I called my elder brother, Uba to come with his Sienna car. I said I had an occasion and was going to the village but I was stranded on the road. My elder brother came to carry us and saw a woman and three children. I lied to him that it was my friend's family. It was during the process that the police operatives intercepted us and arrested three of us, while our gang leader, 'Sky' escaped from the scene of crime.

"My major role was to monitor the four kidnapped victims. I went to a Correctional Centre in 2009 for bunkering in Owerri and I was released in December 2020. I was involved in the attempted kidnapping of a victim in May 2021, but we didn't succeed."

One of those arrested, Uba Onyeneho, 50, also stated his own side of the story.

"Udochukwu Onyenebo is my younger brother. I am a transporter by profession. It was my brother Udochukwu who called me that he was stranded and I should come to Ngor Okpala Road. I got there, I saw a woman and three children, I asked my brother who they were, but he lied to me. It was when they were entering my Sienna car that the police operatives intercepted us. I didn't collect one kobo from them. I didn't know that my brother is into kidnapping. I want justice to be done in my case," he pleaded.

Another suspect, John Okafor, 37, also explained his role in the kidnap saga.

"I am from Amucha Umuduru in Njaba L.G.A of Imo State. My duty is to carry the victim kidnapped with my motorcycle and to monitor them. I also monitor the husband of the victim in his Honda Pilot. I called my gang leader, 'Sky' on the phone and we arrived at Ngor Okapala Junction and we collected the ransom. I was given N15,000 as my own share. It was while waiting for the husband of the victim that the police operatives intercepted us and arrested us" he said.

CP Rabiū commended the quick response of the command's officers and men. He also praised them for the gallantry exhibited in the rescue of the four kidnapped victims.

He said the police would go after the gang leader who is at large, adding that the arrested suspects will soon be charged to court.

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