

Fritzl planned to build dungeon

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VIENNA: Austrian police said yesterday that Josef Fritzl had started planning a secret dungeon when his daughter was 12, years before he imprisoned her and started forcing her to bear seven children.

Fritzl, 73, built an extension to his house in Amstetten between 1978 - when he received planning permission - and 1983.

"We believe that the intention must have been there to build . . . a secret area, a small dungeon," chief investigator Franz Polzer told journalists.

Fritzl, now in custody, has admitted to police that he imprisoned and sexually abused his daughter, Elisabeth, now 42, in a cramped bunker beneath the family home since 1984 when she was 18.

Initially, Elisabeth was held in a single room of 35m², but when she became pregnant from the sexual abuse and gave birth to several children, Fritzl extended the dungeon, Polzer explained.

By 1993, after Fritzl had broken through walls into other unused cellar rooms beneath the older part of the house, the dungeon comprised three rooms measuring a total 55m², the investigator said.

Polzer said they had found an earlier entrance to the dungeon, a half-ton concrete door, that had clearly been used before the two reinforced steel doors initially discovered by investigators. In all, "if you want to get into the dungeon, you have to go through eight locked doors" and electronic combinations were needed to open the last three, he said.

For the past week, about 30 investigators have been examining the cellar where Elisabeth Fritzl and three of her children were kept prisoner.

A total of seven children were born from the abuse, three of whom were kept incarcerated in the dungeon.

Another three were legally adopted by Fritzl and lived with him in the house upstairs. The seventh child died just after birth and Fritzl told investigators he had disposed of the body in a wood-fired boiler in the cellar.

Polzer suggested that Fritzl might have been trying to "recreate" his first family, but this time with a younger, prettier woman. Fritzl had previously fathered seven children with his wife, Rosemarie, 69.

Doctors looking after the family since their release said their health and psychological state was gradually improving. The eldest incest child, 19-year-old Kerstin, had "improved", said hospital chief Albert Reiter, although she remained in an artificial coma. It was her admission to hospital on April 19 that eventually led to the discovery of Fritzl's crime. The other family members - Elisabeth, Rosemarie and the five remaining children - have been reunited and are in a psychiatric clinic.

Fritzl's lawyer, Rudolf Mayer, said his client would plead insanity. - Sapa-AFP

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About the Author

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