DYNAMICS OF KIDNAPPING AND IT'S SOCIOECONOMIC IMPACTS IN NIGERIA

Alimi Abubakar Etsu

Abstract

Over the years, Kidnapping has been a major problem confronting the Nigeria state. The issue has become a topical discourse in the daily news and reports as it happens almost daily. This has highly affected the country negatively, especially the socio-economic aspects of the country. Big investors, foreigners, business owners and the general public now find it difficult to go about their daily activities due to the fear of kidnapping. This study addresses the dynamics of kidnapping in Nigeria and some of the socio-economic impacts it has on the country. The study adopted descriptive and historical methods, which precisely pursued to highlight related literatures such as books, journals, and current media reports on dynamics of the crime and its socioeconomic impacts in Nigeria. The study concluded that the government should be proactive in fighting kidnapping in Nigeria because of the evolving nature of the crime and its devastating effect on the economy.

Keywords: Kidnapping, Socio-Economic, Dynamics, Impacts.

Introduction

Kidnapping is described as "the unlawful imprisonment and forced seizing of a person beyond his or her will." It is a common law violation, and an unwelcome conduct in the country." (Asuquo, 2009). Kidnapping is defined as the wrongful confinement and abduction of a person against their will. It is the practice of grabbing a person and transporting him or her to different nation or place for forced servitude, or the conscription of females into military or naval labor (Uzorma and Nwanegbo-Ben, 2014). Kidnapping also means to take somebody away illegally and keep them as a prisoner, especially in order to take money or something else for returning them. (Oparaku, Nwaneri and Egbe, 2017). This means that kidnapping occurs whenever a person is illegally taken without his will with the goal of collecting ransom or extracting other advantages before his or her liberation.

Kidnapping is not a latest criminal occurrence or conduct in the world. It's a global phenomenon with varying parameters and settings. According to Constellis Q2 2022 figures, Africa continues to record the highest number of foreign national abductions. The continent is responsible for 48.1% of all reported instances between January and March, 2022. Nigerians remain the most victimized in the report. Maritime kidnapping in the Gulf of Guinea on the other hand went on to dominate kidnapping action during the last quarter of 2020 as per Hiscox, 2021. While the risk has been most severe along the coast and major highways of Nigeria, it has spread as far as Ghana to the west and Equatorial Guinea to the south. The extended geographical expansion, the rising number of events (both actual and attempted), and the developing techniques witnessed in recent times may indicate enhanced capacity by the criminal actors, which is likely connected to substantial ransom received in the majority of cases.

In nearby Cameroon, the peace and stability in the Western areas has worsened as a result of the Anglophone dispute. Separatist terrorists in this province have become increasingly adept at abduction, with more than 50 individuals abducted since the conflict began in September 2017. Whereas abduction was originally meant as a political tool, it is now being alleged that these groups are also utilizing it for financial benefit.

Furthermore, while these organizations first targeted mainly government officials and members of the security personnel, their scope has already grown to encompass foreign nationals and civilians, signaling a worrisome trend that should be properly observed in the months ahead (Constellis Report, 2018; HRW, 2019).

Kidnapping was uncommon in Nigeria earlier to the 1990s, and did not reflect in the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime's Eighth Survey on Crime Trends and Criminal Justice System Operation, which was done in 2002 (Obarisiagbon and Aderinto, 2018).The journey of latest big kidnaps in Nigeria, on the other hand, demonstrated that the overall average of abduction as a Nation is concerned has deteriorated from 0.001 per 100,000 people in 2013 to 40 in 2018, growing from 29 in 2016. Thus according Adebajo (2021), there were 1,353 occurrences of abduction in Nigeria in 2016, 1,386 in 2019 and 2,860 in 2020, and the Nigerian Police database indicated that abductors received about N955,000,000 in ransom and N2.4 billion from 2015 and 2017. As shown in a semi year crime index survey, Nigeria ranked fifth in Africa and seventeenth worldwide (Crime Index, 2022).

Ever since early 1990s, the number of kidnappings has increased dramatically. (Hazen and Horner, 2007). During 2014 and 2017, students, politicians, traditional leaders, preachers, clerics, and tourists have been shown to be abducted in Nigeria at a proportionally rising pace (Abdulkabir, 2017). Nigeria is rated sixth in the globe for abduction instances, after Mexico, Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela, and the Philippines, according to the Hiscox Group (2021). Kidnapping occurs throughout the nation; it is a nationwide problem that has infiltrated the social fabric (Dodo, 2010), which takes the shape of terrorism, banditry, militancy among others. The most unlucky captives of Nigeria's abduction epidemic typically die in the process, while the privileged ones are freed after suffering terrible torment and paying large sums in exchange for freedom.

History of Kidnapping in Nigeria
The practice of kidnapping extends back to the 17th century in Britain, when wealthy families' children were 'napped' for ransom (Tzanelli, 2017). It began with the abduction of children for ransom (Ezeibe & Eze, 2016). Charlie Ross, a 4-year old boy from Philadelphia, was abducted in 1874, and a ransom of 20,000 dollars was demanded (Ugwuoke, 2010).

The origins of kidnapping in Africa will inevitably take us to the practice of slave trade and slavery that spread throughout the region in the 16th century. The slave market, sometimes known as the triangle commerce was based on intimidation and kidnapping as a way of obtaining victims. "Kidnapping is a tragic rejuvenation of the odious slave trade," as noted by Umukoro (2010). Human sacrifice was used to keep abduction alive in early Nigerian civilization. People were kidnapped for ceremonial or societal purposes (Ugwuoke, 2010). Ancient African devotees engaged in sacrifices to satisfy the deities. The rituals may go beyond livestock to human blood sacrifice; in order to carry out this type of sacrifice, the desired individual could be kidnapped and slain in a blood sacrifice.

In contemporary Nigeria, kidnapping is thought to be the result of "discontent over inhumane treatment and hardship in the nation's Niger Delta." (Ugwulebo, 2011). It was a way of bringing domestic and worldwide awareness to the region's lack of advancement, ecological destruction, and residents' hardship (Ijediogor, 2010). Initially, ransom was seldom sought and captives were foreign oil professionals, but now many are natives and not particularly affluent; anybody whose family might pay a ransom can be kidnapped.

Dynamics of Kidnapping in Nigeria
Kidnappers and by extension other organized criminal groups as per Zinn, (2008) operate under distinct social circumstances which can mostly be distinguished by their social characteristics, such as motivation and modes of operation. This accounts for the significant difference in the approaches adopted by different criminal gangs

operating in the different regions of the country.

Kidnapping in Nigeria has over the last decades, metamorphosed into a lasting, comprehensive security threat, fast-paced and versatile criminal enterprise. A crime which was originally restricted to the Niger Delta region in sophistication is now perpetrated by diverse armed groups and criminal gangs operating across the country, on land, at sea, pursuing different agendas and driven by different motivations (Assanvo & Okereke, 2019). Kidnapping which witnessed a steady spread from the Niger Delta region to the Southeast, where it became the most dominant criminal enterprise, then to the Southwest, Northcentral, Northeast and the Northwest has over the years featured in over 32 of the 36 states in the country (Ukoji & Okolie-Osemene, 2016).

Presently, the north western region of the country has suddenly become the hot bed for kidnapping (Ayuba, 2020) with Kaduna, Katsina and Zamfara being the worst hit (Godwin, 2019). The North West has thus overtaken the other regions as the hub for kidnapping in contemporary times. In an online newspaper, Toromade (2019) quoted an Acting Inspector-General of Police during the Quarterly Northern Traditional Rulers' Council meeting as saying that the northern region recorded 79.8% of the total kidnappings in the country in 2019, with the North West witnessing the kidnap of over 365 people within the first quarter of the year alone. The danger however lies in the fact that unlike their counterparts in the Niger Delta, kidnappers operating in the North West geo political zone and by extension, the northern region of the country do so with total disregard to the net worth of their target victims. Rather, they concentrate on abducting minors, students and poor citizens alike thereby increasing the state of uncertainty and fear in a region already bedeviled with series of security challenges.

More so, kidnappers have emerged in varying forms with distinct modus operandi depending on where, when, how and who is involved in the kidnapping franchise. They operate as bandits, militants, terrorists and Fulani herdsmen among other criminal designations. Family members including parents now organize themselves into kidnap gangs depicting erosion of parental guidance and strong moral values; traditional rulers have been arrested and paraded for masterminding, providing logistics and safe havens to kidnappers; Security officials to whom the populace run to for safety are now actively involved in the kidnap business; so also are clergymen, politically exposed people and estranged lovers.

More recently, kidnapping has metamorphosed into a thriving enterprise or seen by those hitherto unsuspected members of the public as one of the quickest ways of attaining wealth. There have been reported cases of wives or husbands or even children masterminding their own abduction or of their loved ones to extort money. The justification provided by some of the perpetrators included being in desperate need of money or the excuse that no other way would make their targets part with their monies except when they are tricked due to their tight-fistedness (Ogbuehi, 2018).

Perhaps, the success with which such acts of kidnapping often go undetected and the lure the proceeds of kidnapping often attract has further bolstered the determination of criminal elements to take their stock-in-trade to before-now uncharted territories such as the "last bastions of hope" of the common man-places of worship.

Methodology
This research used descriptive and historical approaches to emphasize linked existing literature on processes and their socioeconomic implications in Nigeria, such as books, journals, and contemporary press stories. This technique was chosen since it was deemed the greatest efficient way for obtaining accurate facts on this horrible crime in Nigeria, as well as the most powerful approach for comprehending the scope and risk of elevated abduction in Nigeria.

Socio-Economic Impacts of Kidnapping in Nigeria
Inyang & Ubong (2013) categorized the impacts

of kidnapping on socio-economic development in terms of direct and indirect economic costs. While the direct economic cost includes monies paid to the abductors as ransom by individuals and government, the indirect cost covers spending targeted at reducing to a large extent the risks of being kidnapped which includes cost of emplacing advanced technological physical security measures such as trained guards, access control mechanism, Close Circuit Television among others. In most cases where the bread winners of families are the victim of kidnapping, such families suffer indebtedness, forceful closure of businesses, unplanned relocation, loss of properties and adverse alteration in usual lifestyle (Benjamin, Bonaventure & Okpan, 2018; Chukuigwe & Albert, 2015).

Ransom payment have attendant consequences on the sustainable development of a nation's economy as jobs are lost as a result of business closure, brain drain as well as increased cycle of violence and criminal activities occasioned by unemployment and poverty. Nigeria has lost significant local and foreign investments as a result of insecurity resulting in slow economic growth and national development (Iyang and Ubong, 2013). Kidnapping also has a detrimental effects on financial activity as well as the provision of political dividends.

As the victims endure agonizing sufferings, the consequence of kidnapping remains devastating. Kidnapping and other insecurity issues, according to Adofu and Alpaslan (2018), would eventually limit the personnel required for the country's progress and expansion.

Fear exists among academics and other members of the education business, according to studies. Many professors and instructors have refused to return to the teaching profession because of the dreadful experience of being kidnapped. Several people declined to receive transfer letters, particularly to places where kidnappings are seen to be common. Parents are terrified of taking their kids to schools where kidnappers have assaulted at one time or another, hence certain schools remain vacant. Several schools currently have a

shortage of trained instructors to teach fundamental topics, owing to the fact that experienced teachers cannot manage to put their lives at risk to kidnappers. The zeal to conduct academic research in these areas has also diminished for fear of being kidnapped (Ameh et al, 2020). Researchers now prefer relatively peaceful areas to conduct their study resulting in paucity of literature in areas that requires critical and analytic interventions for socio-economic development and national security.

Ibrahim and Mukhtar (2017); Orset (2008) and Echeburua et al (2003) in different studies have argued that the forceful removal of a family member can lead to memorable trauma both for those involved and their loved ones thereby creating a high level of fear, anxiety and insecurity. The traumatizing experience of the victims who were sexually assaulted could even last for a long time or a lifetime not precluding the possibilities of contracting sexually transmitted diseases or unwanted pregnancies.

Kidnapping has had serious impact on the finances, politics, security, tourism, socio-cultural, and most importantly, nation brand influence on Nigeria. (Akpan, 2010). Deliberate efforts are targeted towards the abductions of foreign nationals including include international employees and business partners possibly with the belief that they would yield fat ransom. This places an enormous economic burden on the nation since it scares away prospective business collaborators and deprives the country the benefits of such collaborations. With the increase in daily kidnappings, existing and prospective entrepreneurs are afraid to do commerce in many sections of the nation (Akpan, 2010).

Kidnapping has impacted the daily lives and relationships of some Nigerians since they are held captive in their houses from dusk to morning for worry of being abducted (Inyang and Ubong 2013). Soyombo (2009) had earlier insisted that the fear of kidnapping is making people to increasingly barricade themselves in their homes and increase their demand for Police personnel that could be deployed to fight other forms of

crime, especially those often committed on the streets. People feel obliged to give their homes an unfinished, impoverished appearance by not painting the exterior walls. Many people are terrified of being kidnapped if they acquire or utilize a new automobile. According to him, wealthy individuals have resorted to travelling in taxi cabs and commercial motorcycles known as Okadas to markets, schools, workplaces, and recreational excursions in order to keep hostage takers at bay.

Without empirical proof, Wajim (2020) claims that one of the probable consequences of kidnapping in Nigeria on interpersonal relationship is a reasonably high level of distrust among people, as few people still extend the traditional African generosity to strangers. The author hypothesized that some people would not acknowledge or return greeting by strangers nor oblige strangers asking for direction, in addition to the unwillingness to render help on the expressway.

The abduction issues in the country especially with the coming of the democratic era has tarnished the country's reputation across the world (Ilechuckwu et al. 2015). According to Thom-Otuya (2010), a nation's image and reputation are extremely crucial in the game of international relations. If Nigeria's image, which should lure global investors, is tarnished, it will be difficult for her to make friends and attract foreign investment.

Causes of Kidnapping in Nigeria
The scourge of abduction in Nigeria continues to worsen due to the high level of corrupt practices, joblessness, government insensitivity to sociocultural needs, economic and political exploitation, and social deterioration, which has produced many skilled, educated and jobless youngsters, forcing them to frantically seek a way out to meet their needs. Kidnapping is associated with the continuance of young unemployment, gangsters, communal hooliganisms, and extortionists, terrorists, ritualism, spiritualists of various religious groups. According to Ibrahim and Mukhar (2016), a lack of viable work

opportunities among youngsters also plays a significant part in the development of abduction. Likewise, Inyang and Abraham (2016) noted that Nigeria has a big number of teenagers surviving and earning a livelihood on the roads with no assistance from the government. The fact that they are ignored gives them the motivation to terrify civilization without guilt.

Political factors are another source of abduction in Nigeria and several other emerging nations in Africa and Asia. Many political leader hire captors to cope with political adversaries and their political influence, fame, and financial strength. Zannoni (2003) referred to this as "political kidnapping," when the main goal is to promote the political goals of a certain political party or movement. In this situation, a ransom is typically required for the purpose of raising funds for the group to support their campaign and other operations. According to Catlin Group (2012), political radicals utilize abduction as a political tool and a way of funding their operations.

Another important reason of abduction in Nigeria is poverty. Anecdotal experience, scholarly publications, newspapers, radio, and television all show that, despite its abundant resources and oil money, Nigeria remains impoverished. Since the late 1990s, the condition has deteriorated to the point that the nation is regarded as one of the 20 poorest in the world; more than 70% of the populace is categorized as poor, with around 35% living in extreme poverty (Rural Poverty Portal, 2008). According to Olulowo (2017), poverty is closely tied to crime. He claims that if individuals do not have enough food, they would steal to survive. People who are starving for food and other requirements would steal and even kill to obtain what they require. According to the 2004 Human Development Indicators, Nigeria ranks 151 out of 177 nations. Poverty is often regarded as the leading cause of abduction in Nigeria.

The weak foundations of institutional framework in Nigeria which have provoked a deterioration of state governance and democratic accountability and paralyzing existing formal and legitimate rules nested in the hierarchy of social order has

been observed by Ochumba, (2013) as an important predictor for kidnapping. This view is shared by Igbuzor (2011) and Ayuba (2020) who sees the state of insecurity as a function of governance failure.

What is more, the law enforcement agency is often not well equipped to handle medium to sophisticated acts of kidnapping. In this regard, Olukoya (2009) highlighted that in most of the kidnaps carried out by the Niger Delta militants, their victims were often ferried unchallenged to the creeks for custody as the Nigerian Navy did not have enough functional equipment to monitor and secure the porous waterways. Same can be said about the activities of bandits in the north who abduct hundreds of students, passengers and villagers, and transport them to their dens without encountering any law enforcement agent (Ajibulu, 2021; Akinwotu, 2021). Even in instances where the law enforcement agency is notified, security responses to kidnap incidents are inconsistent and unpredictable. This is further intensified by the palpable fear and distrust which exist in the minds of the general public as those to whom the civil populace run to in cases of crimes such as kidnapping (security agents) have also been fingered as active participants in the kidnap enterprise either as the master minds or the suppliers of weapon (Eyo, 2020).

Furthermore, prompt payment of ransom by family members of kidnapped victims afraid of losing their loved ones has also been adduced as one of the factors that have continued to embolden the criminal abductors who consider it a lucrative venture (Ayuba, 2020). Ransom payment however does not guarantee the safety of kidnapped victims as literature has revealed that some had lost their lives even after ransom had been paid by their loved ones. Ayuba's view buttresses the initial observation by Reissman, Akhter & Park (2019) that the global figures on kidnapping points to the fact that barely 40% of victims of the crime are released by their captors unharmed even upon payment of ransom, while about 11% are lucky to regain their freedom without payment out of fear by the kidnappers or inability of the victims to meet ransom demand.

In addition, proliferation of Small and light Weapons as noted by Inyang (2009) also contributes to the frequency of kidnapping in the country. Nigeria is said to account for about 70% of illegal small arms in West Africa (Eribake, 2016), most of which come into the country through its porous borders. Ene (2018) in a sociological analysis of the effect of kidnapping on the Nigerian society draws a strong nexus between the illegal arming of political thugs by desperate politicians who are later dumped after elections without proper disarmament and empowerment on one hand and an increase in the scourge of kidnapping and other related crimes in Nigeria on the other.

Conclusion

The dynamics of kidnapping in the country has continued to evolve taking on more sophistication and aggravation depending on the type and actors involved. From the Niger Delta militants to bandits and iterant herders in the north, kidnapping has become a daily occurrence with its attendant negative socio-economic impact on the nation. Several causes of kidnapping in Nigeria were identified to include poverty, politics, unemployment, ill-equipped law enforcement and poor governance.

Recommendations

From the foregoing, it is recommended that government:

- work with other partners to combat the proliferation of small and light weapons (SALW), which promotes violent crime in the country.
- Make deliberate steps towards eradication of poverty and unemployment.
- Intensifies effort to link all active GSM sims and ensure they are duly registered to create legitimate identity for easy tracking of kidnappers.
- Conduct specialized trainings with adequate equipment for law enforcement agencies to better position them to combat the menace of kidnapping.

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