African Research Review

An Analysis of the Causes and Consequences of Kidnapping in Nigeria

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Abstract

Kidnapping is a serious crime and has potential for transforming into other felonious offenses, such as physical violence, financial victimisation, and murder. This paper did not focus only on the consequences of kidnapping but also examined its predisposing factors in Nigeria. Thus, the objectives of the study are: to examine the nexus between terrorism and kidnapping; to investigate the mutual reinforcement between corruption and kidnapping; to find out if kidnapping and poverty are correlated; and to examine the consequences of the problem. Using secondary qualitative data, the study found out that kidnapping has been taking place in Nigeria due to the activities of insurgent groups in the Niger Delta region, but it increased with the emergence of "Boko Haram" terrorism in the North-eastern Nigeria; corruption is not strongly related to kidnapping, but they have indirect connection whereby youth political thugs served corrupt political leaders and turned out to become kidnappers, sometimes for ransom from political opponents; poverty is correlated with kidnapping in Nigeria; and there are multiple

consequences of kidnapping, such as financial victimization, rape and even death of the victims. The paper therefore suggested that for kidnapping to be eradicated in Nigeria, poverty and corruption must also be significantly reduced. The paper also suggested that terrorism and insurgency should be fought as they involved abductions of innocent people, females and children in particular; thus, for Nigeria to address the kidnapping phenomenon, strategic security action should be onslaught against terrorism and insurgency, etc.

Key Words: Causes of Kidnapping, Kidnapping, Kidnapping in Nigeria, Abduction, Consequences of Kidnapping

Introduction

Civil unrest, terror threats, endemic corruption and ongoing abductions of Nigerians, including the well-publicised kidnapping of school-girls by terrorist group *Boko Haram*, underscore the continuing challenges of combating modern slavery in Nigeria (The Global Slavery Index, 2014). Modern slavery takes place within the context of human trafficking and, sometimes begins with kidnapping. Yet, kidnapping is not a new phenomenon. Religious parables found in the Holy Bible and the Holy Qur'an about the sly abduction of Prophet Joseph (may peace be unto him) are indications that kidnapping is as old as human history. However, Tzanelli (2006) mentioned that the modern usage of the term 'kidnapping' dates back to 17th-century Britain where infants ('kid') of rich families have been 'napped' (caught in the sleep) for ransom.

The trend is on the increase all over the world, because the Global Slavery Index (2014) reported that throughout 2014, men, women and children continue to be kidnapped in village raids and held as slaves by militias in eastern DRC (Democratic Republic of Congo). In April and May 2014, 267 women and girls suffered sexual violence by armed groups. In Nigeria, also, kidnapping is ongoing since the early 1990s (Hazen & Horner 2007). Kidnappings continue to contribute to a climate of insecurity in the South East, the Niger Delta and the South-western region. Hostages have most recently also been taken in the states of Northern Nigeria. Between 2008 and 2010, the Nigeria Police Force recorded 887 cases across the country (Action on Armed Violence, 2013). Kidnapping is taking place everywhere in Nigeria; it is a national problem that has eaten so deep into the fabric of the country (Dodo, 2010) but it takes place more in the moment of terrorism, insurgency and other forms of political violence. The kidnapping of 250 girls in a girls' secondary school in Chibok, Borno State in 2014 and many more by *Boko Haram* represent the growing incidence of the kidnapping in Nigeria.

Hazen and Horner (2007) reported that some groups in the Niger Delta have used the kidnapping of international oil workers to raise international attention regarding the plight of those living in the Delta, the environmental damage caused by oil spills and the oil industry, and the demand for more local ownership of the extraction of natural resources. The use of this tactic has not been entirely political in nature, as there are reports of significant ransom payments, which have then been used to fund the activities of these groups further. In fact, the tactic has proven so lucrative that a number of criminal groups appear to have taken on the task in order simply to make money. Apart from generating money, kidnapping has other serious consequences on the victims and their relatives, as well as the State at large. This requires a systematic

examination of the problem in order to identify its underlying factors and its devastating consequences for policy recommendations for tackling the problem in Nigeria and beyond.

There are other studies previously conducted on the kidnapping phenomenon. Freeman (2016) studied the incident of kidnapping at the international level but she confined it to child abduction, though she viewed it from the global perspective. File-Muriel (2013) also investigated the problem of kidnapping but set focused mainly on political kidnapping. A closer study was conducted by Uzorma and Nwanegbo-Ben (2014) on the subject of kidnapping and hostage-taking in the South-eastern Nigeria. Their study narrowed it the Southern Nigeria, where the causal factors might be limited to economic while the dominant factor for kidnapping in the South-south is environmental struggle, and in the Northwestern and Northeastern parts could be poverty and terrorism, respectively. In view of the above, the present study aims to examine the correlates of kidnapping in the entire Nigeria. The objectives of the study are:

1. to examine the nexus between terrorism and kidnapping;
2. to investigate the mutual reinforcement between corruption and kidnapping;
3. to find out if kidnapping and poverty are correlated; and then
4. to examine the consequences of kidnapping in Nigeria.

Conceptualising Kidnapping

Kidnapping is defined by various scholars with varying degree of successes. Firstly, Inyang and Abraham (2013, p. 532) defined it as "the forcible seizure, taking away and unlawful detention of a person against his/her will. It is a common law offence and the key part is that it is unwanted act on the part of the victim". Another definition is offered by Fage and Alabi (2017, p. 289) who conceived kidnapping as "forceful or fraudulent abduction of an individual or a group of individuals for reasons ranging from economic, political, and religious to [struggle for] self-determination". However, the authors later admitted that the forcefully or fraudulently abducted individuals are carried off as hostages for ransom purposes. This implies that while political and economic factors can instigate kidnapping, the economic reason is the most common predisposing factor of the phenomenon.

Uzorma and Nwanegbo-Ben (2014, p. 132), also defined kidnapping as the "act of seizing and detaining or carrying away a person by unlawful force or by fraud, and often with a demand for ransom. It involves taking a person from their family forcefully without their consent with the motive of holding the person as a hostage and earning a profit from their family". From the foregoing, the definition of kidnapping has no one best way to describe it, but it is clear that for an act to be deemed kidnapping, it shall involve coercive movement of a victim from one place to another, detention or seizure of that person be it a child or an adult. That is why Inyang and Abraham (2013) added that it is legally regarded as a restriction of someone else's liberty which violates the provision of freedom of movement as enshrined in the constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria, where every other law takes its cue from.

In addition, kidnapping is usually motivated by financial gain or political demand. Thus, opportunist or traditional criminals as well as political dissidents can resort to kidnapping in order to illegally obtain economic gains or have their demands granted.

Recent typologies of kidnapping, whether they originate in social science or business milieux, focus on criminal motivation. Some examples that belong to the sophisticated end of the analytical spectrum: criminologist and risk evaluator Elio Zannoni proposes a distinction between criminal (with economic motivation) and political (with political motivation) kidnapping (Zannoni, 2003), suggesting that 'in many instances 'kidnapping is a "business" involving a demand for ransom which may vary considerably, depending on the type of criminals involved and the victim's personal status' (2003, p. 1, as cited in Tnazelli, 2006). Two claims are important here: (a) that in every kidnapping a form of economics is involved, and (b) that the status of the hostage is of significance in the payment of ransom.

Theoretical Explanation

The primary goal of sociological enterprise is to understand and explain social phenomena; and the criminological enterprise is to create valid and accurate theories of crime causation. The paper will adopt two theories: one crime causation theory (social exchange theory) and one victimisation theory (lifestyle theory). Social exchange theory was propounded by George Homans (1961, as cited in Ibrahim & Mukhtar, 2016) and the theory is an off-shoot of rational choice approach, which views "human behaviour as being guided by hedonistic principle or pleasure-seeking" tendency (Ibrahim & Mukhtar, 2016, p. 81).

Homan's main interest was on the history of rewards and costs, which lead people to do what they do. Basically, Homans argued, people continue to do what they have found to be rewarding in the past. Conversely, they cease doing what has proved to be costly in the past. To understand behaviour, we need to understand an individual's history of rewards and costs. Using exchange theory, kidnapping and receiving a ransom for returning hostages can be viewed as special kind of give and take. The reciprocal characteristic of this type of crime is that, it involves give and take because the kidnappers ask for money or make demands for something other than money (Ibrahim & Mukhtar, 2016: 85).

The second theory to be used in explaining kidnapping in Nigeria is lifestyle theory. The major premise of lifestyle theory is that victimisation risk is increased when people have a high-risk lifestyle. The theory contends that "placing oneself at risk by going out to dangerous places results in increased the likelihood of victimisation" (Siegel, 2010, p. 81). Thus, victimisation risk is increased by such behaviours as associating with young men, going out in public places late at night, and living in an urban area. Conversely, one's chances of victimisation can be reduced by staying home at night, moving to a rural area, staying out of public places, earning more money, and getting married (Siegel, 2010). The basis of lifestyle theory is that crime is not a random occurrence but rather a function of the victim's lifestyle. For example, due to their lifestyle and demographic makeup, college campuses contain large concentrations of young women who may be at greater risk for rape and other forms of sexual assault than women in the general population.

The strength of the theory, according to Siegel (2010), is that it explains victimisation patterns in the social structure. Males, young people, and the poor have high victimisation rates because they have a higher-risk lifestyle than females, the elderly, and the affluent. Based on some empirical data, Siegel (2010, p. 77) mentioned that groups that have an extremely risky life, such as young runaways living on the street, are at high risk for victimisation; the more time they are exposed to street life, the greater their risk of becoming crime victims. Teenage males have an extremely high victimisation risk because their lifestyle places them at risk both at school and once they leave the school grounds. They spend a great deal of time hanging out with friends and pursuing recreational fun.

Kidnapping in Nigeria

Kidnapping is on the increase in Nigeria. Statistically, Nigeria records more than 1,000 kidnapping incidents a year, and there are undoubtedly many that are unreported (Catlin Group, 2012). The British government has decried the fact that at least 25 British and dual British citizens and more than 200 other foreign nationals who have been kidnapped in the Niger Delta area since January 2007 alone. That is why Fage and Alabi (2017) recognized that one of the elements of militancy and/or insurgency in the Niger Delta is kidnapping.

From the unstable situation in the Niger Delta, kidnapping has spread across the country. These kidnappings can either be for financial or political gain. Victims were originally foreign oil workers, but today many are locals, often employees of international oil and oil service companies, and not necessarily wealthy; anyone whose family might pay a ransom can be targeted. In June 2012, police rescued international footballer Christian Obodo who had been kidnapped in front of a church (Catlin Group, 2012).

There remains a high threat of kidnapping and other armed attacks targeting oil and gas facilities and workers. This also applies to ships and oil rigs at sea off the coast of the Niger Delta. In January 2012, kidnappers abducted a US citizen from his vehicle in the Delta and killed his security guard. In April 2012, criminals kidnapped a US national in Imo State and a Spanish citizen in Enugu State in separate incidents. In May 2012, criminals kidnapped an Italian national in Kwara State. On the 7 May a Lebanese national was kidnapped in Kaduna State and his Lebanese colleague was mercilessly killed during the abduction. More on the kidnapping incidences in Nigeria, it was also reported that two engineers – one British and one Italian – were killed by their captors in March 2012 when Nigerian security forces, with support from Britain, attempted to rescue them. They had been held by elements of the Islamic fundamentalist group *Boko Haram* for ten months (Catlin Group, 2012).

Kidnappings of western nationals for ransom have also been attributed to *Boko Haram*. Some cases include the kidnapping of a French priest, Georges Vandebeusch, in November 2013 as well as that of a seven-member French family, which is believed to have produced a ransom of USD 3 million. Both of these kidnappings took place in Cameroon (Barna, 2014). It has also attacked schools and universities: the massacre of sleeping students in dormitories in February 2014 (Barna, 2014). On 14th April, 2014 the sect kidnapped 250 female students from Government Girl's Secondary School Chibok Borno State (Shuaibu, Salleh, & Shehu, 2015). Another associated group,

Ansaru, has also targeted Western nationals (kidnappings), Christians and the government. It is active in the northern states, primarily Kano, Katsina, Yobe, Bauchi and Borno. The existence of tactics similar to those of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) has led some to suggest that another potential leader of the organisation is Khalid al-Barnawi, who was a member of AQIM and trained in Algeria and might be the link between the two organisations (Barna, 2014). In the Catlin Group's (2012) report, military-led rescue attempts can end in the deaths of hostages.

Causes of Kidnapping in Nigeria

Kidnapping, as a violent criminal offence, is a rather complex phenomenon. It takes place in various contexts and for various reasons. Its causes and consequences are also many. Hazen and Horner (2007) observe that hostages have been taken for two primary reasons: political bargaining and economic gain. This broad classification of kidnapping is very important for understanding the underlying factors for the problem, especially kidnapping for ransom. But beyond these broad typologies, persons are kidnapped and abducted by criminals for various reasons and intentions, such as for adoption, begging, camel racing, illicit intercourse, marriage, prostitution, ransom, revenge, sale, selling body parts, slavery, unlawful activity, murder and for other purposes (NCRB, 2014). Considering the influence of globalisation on the expansion on the increase in crimes as transcending national borders, termed as trans-border crimes, like commercial sex by under-age and human trafficking (Ibrahim & Mukhtar, 2016), today physical movement across the borders by (il)legal organised syndicates has become commonplace.

In Nigeria and many other developing countries of Africa and Asia, political factors, poverty, lack of legal/available employment opportunity among the youths are also playing fundamental role in the rise of kidnapping. In line with the above, Tepperman (2006, as cited in Ibrahim & Mukhtar, 2016) observed that Nigeria has a large number of adolescents living and making a living on the streets. This has been attributed to economic factors and exposure to all forms of risks.

Closely related to Hazen and Horner's typology is that given by Zannoni (2003), who mentioned that motivations and mode of operation vary, but generally there are two main kinds of kidnapping for ransom. These can be roughly categorised as "criminal kidnapping", where the main motive is to obtain a ransom from the family or business of the victim. This category includes instances where criminals take hostages as a shield to help them escape from the scene of a crime, or use them to obtain money or valuables, or the keys or secret codes needed to access areas where these are stored. The other type of kidnapping, according to Zannoni (2003), is "political kidnapping", where the foremost objective is to further the political aims of a particular political group or movement. In this case, a ransom is usually demanded to obtain money for the group to fund their activities. This made the dividing line between economic and political kidnappings so blurred. In addition, religious and other political extremists use kidnapping as political weapons and as a means of financing their activities (Catlin Group, 2012).

Economic deprivation and a sense of desperation have planted the seeds of kidnapping as a way of getting money in poor communities. It can then become a way of life, even when legal options become available (Catlin Group, 2012). The disparity between rich

and poor is growing, and thanks to the internet and global media, everyone can see how the rich are living. It fuels resentment and a desire for a bigger share (Catlin Group, 2012).

Consequences of Kidnapping on Victims

Irrespective of the type of kidnapping and the motive for its perpetration, the psychological and financial impact of the problem can be quite devastating, both for the victims and their significant others. Victims of kidnapping differ in age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, level of education, and country of origin. Although anyone can become a victim of trafficking, certain populations are especially vulnerable to this form of victimisation (Kaylor, 2015). The paper will first examine the effect of child kidnapping, which is more common and a deep-rooted crime worldwide. Not only does forceful removal of a child from his/her family traumatises the victim, it also unravels the lives of his/her parents, family, and community (Orset, 2008). One common effect of the abduction which seemed memorably traumatic for those concerned, and which was raised many times was the lack of contact for many parents with their children during the period that they were away. This was often because the left-behind parent did not know the children's whereabouts (Freeman, 2006). Child sexual abuse as a result of kidnapping also exposes child to the risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases.

Another guised form of sexual molestation of kidnapped children is that the abducted under age victims are often subjected to forced marriage with older husbands. As reported by Clark (2004), the child brides are married to older, more sexually experienced men with whom it is difficult to negotiate safe sexual behaviours, especially when under pressure to bear children. A study conducted in Kenya and Zambia in 2004 finds that married girls aged 15-19 were 75 percent more likely to contract HIV than sexually active, unmarried girls of the same age. Similar figures have been found in 29 countries across Africa and Latin America (Clark, 2004)

Apart from psychological trauma on the victim and the victim's family, as well as physiological implications, kidnapping is also accompanied with huge economic or financial implications. According to Catlin Group (2012, p. 2), one estimate suggests that globally, ransom payments could be worth US$500 million annually, but an authoritative figure simply is not possible when the total number of incidents is open to great uncertainty. The vast majority of kidnaps, perhaps 70 per cent, go unreported for fear of reprisals or a lack of confidence in the police.

In some interviews, Freeman (2006, p. 29) also mentioned that some left-behind parents disclosed having thoughts of extreme violence at that time as well as finding solace through religious faith. Others talked of their inability to settle while knowing that their children was somewhere else and of feeling constantly depressed and ill. Examples of this were given when these parents spoke of: losing their hair, physical sickness, becoming dependent on pills and alcohol, feeling suicidal, being unable to function properly, the feeling of helplessness, feeling "in limbo", as if waiting for a medical diagnosis, and the fear of having lost their children forever.

Conclusion

Kidnapping is on the increase in Nigeria and it is prevalent across all the geopolitical zones. In the Niger Delta Region or the south-south and the south-east, militiamen are using kidnapping as an insurgent tactic to abduct foreigners and to seek for ransom in order to finance their violent movement. Opportunist criminals also commit kidnapping for ransom. In the Northern parts of the country, Boko Haram and other gang groups are reported to have committed large scale kidnapping. Conclusively, poverty leads to kidnapping in Nigeria because some of the unemployed youths are turning out to kidnapping and they are using the kidnapping to get money (ransom) as a survival strategy. Corruption is not strongly linked with kidnapping, but there is indirect link between the two whereby unscrupulous politicians are using youths as political thugs to kidnap opponents or their family members with a certain demand or to intimidate them.

Recommendations

The paper made the following recommendations in order to address the kidnapping correlates and by implication to provide the opportunity for reducing kidnapping in Nigeria. The recommendations will task government, foreign governments, NGOs, communities, families and the vulnerable groups in devising various measures toward fighting kidnapping.

1. The Nigerian Government shall come up with poverty alleviation programmes and employment opportunities, targeting youths who are mostly involved in abductions and kidnappings out of economic frustration, such as unemployment.

2. Poverty alleviation programmes should also be directed towards addressing high incidence of poverty among women and children who are vulnerable segment of the population mostly kidnapped by terrorists or insurgents and trapped by organised criminals, ending up in abduction for force labour.

3. To effectively combat kidnapping, the government shall also fight insurgency because the various insurgent groups in the northern and southern parts of the country are all resorting to kidnapping of innocent population in their efforts to further their causes.

4. Anti-terrorism programmes should be made side-by-side with anti-kidnapping programmes in Nigeria.

5. Foreign governments should also participate in the war on kidnapping in Nigeria because the activity is a transnational crime usually involving movement out of the country.

6. Non-governmental organisations should also be part of the war on kidnapping in Nigeria and neighbouring states, through awareness creation programmes.

7. The law enforcement agents, such as the police as well as other agencies meant for anti-human trafficking shall also intensify surveillance on the fight against kidnapping. They shall be receiving special trainings on how to identify victims of kidnapping and be able to take them from the kidnappers without them being hurt.

8. Constitutionally, there shall be sections pronouncing the specific severe penalties against kidnappers. This might serve as deterrence for those already involved and those willing to be involved.

9. Nigerian government shall ban prostitution because it is one of the easy baits for kidnapping involving some people in sex slaves.

10. Finally, self-help groups shall be formed to offer peer counseling on how to avoid been kidnapped or offer therapeutic lessons for primary and secondary victims of kidnappings.

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