

KIDNAPPING AND THE NIGERIAN SOCIETY: A SOCIOLOGICAL INSIGHT

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Abstract

Kidnapping as a form of criminal behaviour is not entirely new around the world. However, its current dimension has become a serious menace especially in the Nigerian society. This is particularly disheartening given that kidnapping now assumes a renewed criminal dimension that is enabled by socio-economic, political and religious discontents. From a sociological perspective, the paper attempts to determine the socio-economic and psychological impact of kidnapping as well as the nexus between security and kidnapping, which has continued to undermine the wellbeing of the society. The paper rests on the theoretical assumptions of functionalism to explain the problem and why it persists in the country. Secondary method of data collection which involved in-depth content analysis was employed in the course of gathering information. The data collected were analyzed using qualitative models that involved conceptual and thematic narratives. Findings revealed kidnapping generates conditions that further undermine the socio-economic, political, psychological wellbeing and religious security as well as safety of persons in the country. It is therefore, the position of this paper that hard drugs, adverse socio-economic conditions, youth unemployment, social injustice as well as frustration arising from social strain, all contribute to the menace of kidnapping in Nigeria. The paper made some recommendations that if adopted by the relevant stakeholders would go a long way to mitigate the problem of kidnapping in Nigeria.

Keywords: Kidnapping, Security, Safety, Sociological insight, Nigeria.

Introduction

Kidnapping as a criminal behaviour is not entirely a new social problem in the world. It is a global phenomenon with different degrees and intensity in terms of its practice. Countries that have experienced the menace of kidnapping include Mexico, United States of America, Iraq, Cameroon, Nigeria among others. In Mexico for instance, kidnapping is pervasive and it is associated with drug-related violence and corrupt institutions. In 2012 alone, Mexico was reported to have suffered an estimated 105,682 kidnappings (U.S Department of State, 2014), while in 2013, it officially recorded 1,698 kidnappings, the highest number on record (*Washington Post*, 2014). That same year, Marian's Organization Association tallied kidnappings in Mexico at 3,038.

While the above figures are quite alarming, South America is not the only place bedevilled by the problem of kidnapping. In USA and European countries, cases of kidnapping especially of young children continue to filter into international news platforms. For instance, the disappearance of children in the United States is not unheard of and it is one of the things that the security apparatus in that country is working hard to overcome. According to the National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children, roughly 800,000 children are reported missing each year in the USA alone. Although other countries can reckon with the problem of kidnapping, the current dimension of the issue in Nigeria is particularly disheartening given its criminal and religious dimensions. Kidnapping has become endemic in the Nigerian society, with far reaching effect on our collective conscience. For instance, in the year 2008, Nigeria was placed sixth on the global kidnap index by an online tourism site. This rating puts the country among countries with serious kidnapping problems, such as Philippines, Venezuela, Columbia, Brazil, and Mexico (Ujumadu, 2008; Ekpe, 2009). According to Ekpe, (2009), Nigeria recorded 512 cases of kidnapping and 30 persons were reported to have died in their kidnappers' den that year as against 353 cases recorded throughout 2008. Similarly, Kyrian (2009) also reported that the former Inspector General of Police in Nigeria had noted that, kidnappers and hostage takers got about USD100 million between 2006 and 2009.

The menace of kidnapping has been a concern for the government, security agencies, the academia and all relevant stakeholders. This concern was amplified by a Christian music singer Chika Okpala, when he lamented that kidnappers had abducted his friend in one of his songs titled "Ndinto" (meaning "the kidnappers"). He stated that when they were asked why they did it, they said they needed money, and they did not have any jobs because of high unemployment rate in the country. Kidnapping undermines the social fabrics of society by eroding the sense of security and safety. Its cost could be tangible, intangible, economic, social, physical, psychological, primary and secondary on individual and society at large.

Kidnapping is an offence punishable by the law in Nigeria which comes with a penalty of about ten years imprisonment. States like Abia, Akwa-Ibom, Anambra, Enugu, Imo, Ebonyi, and Rivers have passed into law a bill termed "*Prohibition of Hostage Taking and Related Offences Law*," with death penalty as punishment for offenders (Inyang, 2009; Ekpe, 2009). Meanwhile, bills with capital punishment against kidnapping are awaiting subsequent readings for passage into law by the National Assembly. Unfortunately despite all these stringent laws, no reported case of kidnapping has been successfully prosecuted to serve as deterrent to other potential kidnappers.

From a sociological perspective, the paper attempts to determine the socio-economic and psychological impact of kidnapping as well as the nexus between security and kidnapping, which has continued to undermine the wellbeing of society. The paper contributes to the existing knowledge on kidnapping literature by revealing social dimensions of the menace and its adverse effect on the socio-economic, religious and political realms of the Nigerian society. It will also serve as a practical guide to the public, academia as well as policy makers in their attempt to find lasting solutions to the ugly incidence of kidnapping.

Conceptual Clarification

Asuquo (2009) noted that the term “kidnapping” is difficult to define with precision, because it varies from state to state and jurisdiction to jurisdiction. It is the forcible seizure, taking away and unlawful detention of a person against his/her will. It is a common offence against the law and the key part is that, it is considered an unwanted act on the part of the victim. It is 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. For this reason, Siegel (1986) sees it as a serious offence, while Abraham (2010), conceptualizes kidnapping as an act of seizing, taking away and keeping a person in custody either by force or fraud. However, it includes snatching and seizing of a person in order to collect a ransom in return or settle some scores of disagreement among people.

Walsh and Adrian (1983) also noted that, kidnapping varies from country to country; therefore the term is uncertain and devoid of any straight jacket definition. That is, it depends on who is defining it and from what perspective and for what purpose. They viewed kidnapping as unlawful seizure and detention of people by force, against their will. Also, as

an act of seizing a person and taking him/her to another country for involuntary servitude or the act of conscripting males into military or naval service by force or fraud. Furthermore, they cited the view of Robertson (1968), who saw kidnapping as a crime of seizing, confirming abducting or carrying away of persons by force or fraud, and often subjecting him or her to involuntary servitude, in an attempt to demand a ransom or in furtherance to another crime.

Thomas and Nta (2009) defined kidnapping as robbery of the highest order. According to them, it is an organized and systematic robbery which is not as deadly as armed-robbery, but more profitable than the former. The profitability has encouraged those that indulged in it to carry on with the act although there is a law prohibiting it. In criminal law, kidnapping is defined as taking away of a person by force, threat or deceit with intent to cause him/her to be detained against his or her will (Asuquo, 2009). Whereas Nwaorah (2009) viewed kidnapping as an act of an angry man who wants to take any person of value hostage, and who could be rescued by loved ones. In most cases, victims are often released after payment of ransom. According to Ogabido (2009) kidnapping means to abduct, capture, carry off, remove or steal away a person(s).

From the various definitions and or conceptualizations of kidnapping above, it is easy to point out that all of them seem to be united in agreement on some key facts, that kidnapping is a forceful and criminal act which violates the rights of the victims. However, a more common ground among the definitions is the fact that all of them agree that it is done for the purpose of ransom providing justification that socio-economic condition is the major driver of kidnapping anywhere in the world, without necessarily ruling out other contributory or intervening variables. For this work, kidnaping is viewed as the unlawful

act of capturing and carrying away of a person against his or her will and holding him hostage in order to demand a ransom.

Theoretical Framework: The Functionalist Perspective

The theory known as functionalism or structural functionalism is associated with the works of Emile Durkheim (1917), Robert K. Merton (1968) and Talcott Parsons (1979) among others. The basic assumption of the theory rests on the fact that society can be likened to a living organism made up of component parts, which function harmoniously for the survival of the whole system. Hence, if any part fails to contribute its functional quota or does not promote conditions that enable value consensus among members of the society, the attendant feedback is always dysfunctional outcomes that undermine the wellbeing of society (Schaefer, 2002).

When applying the theory to explain the social problem of kidnapping and its implication in Nigeria especially from a socio-economic perspective, structural functionalism would clearly indict the economy for being dysfunctional or not functioning optimally as to produce the desired outcome. The theory could also see the incapacity of the economic system as a secondary fallout of a primary malfunction that is associated with the failure of the political system to produce the requisite output necessary to enable the economy function properly. However, the end result of such dysfunctional situations howbeit primary or secondary is usually felt by the masses through widespread poverty, unemployment, deprivation as well as marginalization with attendant consequences of which kidnapping for ransom or economic gain is one.

The crime of kidnapping has been identified as profitable and functional to its perpetrators. The lucrative nature of kidnapping makes it very attractive. Kidnapping as observed in some parts of Nigeria, is identified as a functional measure of politicians to fight their opponents. The money collected as ransoms are means to destabilize the opponents and as well force them to back-out of the political race. In the Niger Delta, kidnapping of foreign expatriates has drawn government attention to look into the plight of the region. This is visualized in the post-amnesty programme initiated by former President Goodluck Jonathan's administration in 2012, which is expected to restore the much needed peace in the region and the country at large so that socio-economic activities could be conducted without obstruction. However, the structural functionalist theory is criticized for not being capable of explaining rapid social change or breakdown of societies and also for addressing the issues of a system as a "closed" concept (Charles, Ikoh, Iyamba & Charles, 2005). Despite these criticisms, the theory is justified for its ability to highlight the functional aspect of crime in our society.

Causes of Kidnapping

Many reasons are given as probable causes of kidnapping in Nigeria. Inyang (2009) linked the problem of unemployment as one of such reasons why kidnapping in Nigeria is often associated with youth unemployment. He used the widely acknowledged adage, which says that "an idle mind is the devil's workshop" to present the situation of unemployment in Nigeria. He noted that there are uncountable able-bodied men and women in Nigeria roaming the streets in search of non-existing jobs. Out of frustration

together with mounting responsibilities to tackle, many idle young persons have ventured into several criminal activities, of which kidnapping is not an exemption. Inyang further acknowledged that, a graduate who is unable to secure a job is psychologically bereft of other means of survival. Under such situation, the young person could develop a negative attitude towards society and attribute his failure to that society.

Furthermore, there is a correlation between the proliferation of arms as a result of political patronage of miscreants who were dumped after elections and kidnapping. Today there is a kidnapping situation comparable to the scourge of armed robbery in the early eighties where many young able-bodied men who fought during the Nigerian civil war were discharged and sent home with nothing. Meanwhile since the schools they left behind were destroyed and there were no jobs to engage them and keep them busy, many of them consequently took to armed robbery, since as ex-soldiers they were armed with weapons, having acquired the skills and guns during the war. The story is almost the same today as politicians employ most idle youths as political thugs and later dumped them after elections. Therefore, the now armed youths (previously political thugs) who have been abandoned by their masters after winning elections are now busy kidnapping innocent persons and relatives of those persons they worked for during elections. Similarly, just as the oil boom in the 1970's increased the scale of armed robbery dramatically in the country, the stupendous empowerment of political office holders and their cronies have led many who are far away from these juicy government contracts to turn to kidnapping in order to have their share of the "national cake" as their reward.

The issues of "moral decadence" and the "get-rich-quick" syndrome have been identified as some of the causative factors of kidnapping. Again Inyang (2009) confirmed these in his proposition that in Nigeria, nobody asks questions on how people make their wealth. According to him, a poor person today may show up with an expensive car tomorrow and nobody dares to question the sudden wealth. Also, people who have donated money to develop their communities are rewarded with chieftaincy titles thereby creating a wrong impression in the minds of Nigerian youths. The impression that the means through which one acquires money is irrelevant as honour can be bought and one can command respect with ill-gotten money. This encourages the youth thereafter to engage in kidnapping. The inconsistency between economic transparency and accountability in the running of normal government affairs and the desire to amass wealth among public office holders at different levels of government often also contribute as gateway reason to kidnapping for many idle but armed youths. They believe that, when those in government employment loot government treasury openly without fear, they too can as well take the laws into their hands by abducting people for ransom. An argument that easily turns insignificant when it is considered that businessmen, foreigners and other wealthy people who are very far from government's purse have also become victims to this criminal act.

Socio-economic Desperation and Kidnapping

It is often noted that the police force personnel lack resources to cope with criminal activities. In addition, corruption within the law enforcement agencies sometimes thwarts serious effort in crime prevention. This was the view of the President of the Philippine

Senate, Blas Ople, who observed that 52% of kidnappings in the Philippines involve active and retired police and military men.

Also, many people today who are desperate in economic and social needs are often the ones who engage in kidnappings. So, where the gap between the rich and the poor is constantly widening and where the possibilities to earn money in an honest way are often difficult to attain, kidnapping turns out to be a lucrative means to fall back on and to draw attention to what is considered an intolerable situation. Nwaorah (2009) noted that, in a situation where government officials, especially top ranking persons in civil services who are custodians of government resources spend recklessly or loot, it could automatically encourage some of the dissatisfied persons to vent their anger on them and their relatives. Ogabido (2009:7) agreed that “the issue of poverty and unemployment of youths as well as social injustice and unfair distribution of the nation’s resources are potent causes of kidnapping in Nigeria. These factors have caused the youths to engage in kidnapping and criminal activities as a way of getting their share of national wealth”. He blamed the federal government for lack of equity and fairness in the business of governance as well as lack of responsible leadership that is not complacent or gives incentives to people’s yearnings and aspirations.

Dode (2007) observed that this harsh reality has placed the Nigerian youth against the Federal Government and the oil producing companies, hence the incessant rate of kidnapping. Citing Ibeanu (1997), Dode further affirmed that the level of political imbalance in the country leads to marginalization and unfair federalism. The conventional wisdom and official position in Nigeria is that such crime like kidnapping arises out of local dissatisfaction over material compensation paid by oil companies and government for exploration right and ecological damage. Inyang (2006) noted that this was the initial intention of the Niger Delta militants who engaged in abducting expatriate workers of the oil exploring multinational cooperation in Port Harcourt, who were operating from a number of rig sites. Throughout history, greed has caused many persons to take part in heinous criminal acts and perhaps kidnapping is one crime that promotes greed and despair on the human person. For many, it is greed that pushes perpetrators to brutalize and torture a stranger and put his family through a cruel ordeal for weeks, months or even years.

Influence of Hard Drugs on Kidnapping

Okoli (2009) linked the upsurge of kidnapping in Nigeria to high consumption and trafficking of hard drugs. He used Abia State to illustrate the correlation between kidnapping and hard drug consumption as well as trafficking. According to him, Abia State is admired for its commerce and flourishing entrepreneurs that have contributed significantly to the economy of the country. On the other hand, Abia State has acquired a notorious status as the highest hard drug consuming and trafficking state, east of Nigeria. The barons have ensured the ready availability of drugs not only in Abia State but also in the five neighboring states of Imo, Akwa-Ibom, Rivers, Cross River and Bayelsa.

The widespread use of hard drugs mostly among youths has led to the upsurge in violent crimes such as kidnapping and armed robbery within Abia and its adjoining States. Cocaine and heroin have become common drugs of abuse with arrest and seizure recorded in most local government areas of the State. Numerous drugs sale joints are springing up every day where criminal activities are planned, perfected and executed. He further noted

that, some streets in Aba such as York and Park have turned into no-go areas for law abiding residents of Aba metropolis as unscrupulous miscreants have turned them into ghettos and haven for their hard drugs operations.

Economic Effects of Kidnapping

The economic effects of kidnapping include direct and indirect costs. At the individual level, the costs include the economic value of money that may be lost to kidnappers, while the indirect economic cost of kidnapping include expenditures on preventive measures, such as the employment of private security personnel. At the governmental level, the economic effects of kidnapping involve the expenditure on security and security agencies. The federal government budget for 2016 for police formations and command was over 100 billion. The Lagos State government was also reported to have spent three billion naira in two years on security alone. Much money has been spent on ransom payments. The former Inspector General of Police, Sir Mike Okiro, disclosed that 15 billion have been paid as ransom to kidnappers between 2006 and 2009 (Kyrian, 2009). The large sum of money spent as ransom payment could affect any state's economy drastically, as it could have been used for meaningful economic development. Also, the nation loses a lot of revenue when expatriates working in the multinational oil companies are attacked. Out of fear, people tend to steer clear from their work place and the adverse effect is always on the economy. Dode (2007) noted that, in 2006, when kidnappers abducted six foreign expatriates from Shell Petroleum Development Company premises, the company was forced to close down and this led to the loss of millions of standard cubic feet per day of gas production for the country.

In Uyo metropolis, many people are kidnapped often and a lot of money is given out as ransom. This situation affects both the state and household economy. Some people usually go as far as borrowing to bail their relatives out from the hands of hoodlums. In many instances, it is often the bread winners of families that are usually targeted, the implication is always felt particularly within the family, whereby members of such families will have to feed themselves and adjust to their normal daily activities, until they secure the release of the victim. The victim's work-place will also be affected adversely. If the victim was a business man or woman, the business will suffer some setback pending his or her return. In a formal organization, the challenges are enormous as the absence of the victim will cause problem within the system, and the output will automatically be affected as well.

Social and Psychological Effects of Kidnapping

Kidnapping affects the social life and social relations of many people who are held hostage in their homes from dusk to dawn, for the fear of being kidnapped. As a result of kidnapping, night travel has become a high risk venture.

Furthermore, many people have been forced out of their newly completed houses by kidnappers. People are compelled to present an unfinished look on their houses depicting poverty by not painting the external walls of their houses. Many people are afraid to buy or use new motor vehicles for fear of kidnappers. It was reported that rich people in most states of Nigeria have resorted to riding in taxi cabs and commercial motorcycles

popularly called *okada* to markets, schools and social outings as a means to check hostage takers.

With regards to inter-personal relationship, kidnapping has also contributed to a relatively high level of mistrust among people. Few people still extend the traditional African hospitality to strangers. Some people do not acknowledge or return greeting by strangers nor oblige strangers asking for direction. Also, most people are unwilling to render help to people in distress for fear of being kidnapped. Few people would venture to stop to assist people calling for help on the express way. Increasingly, many people nowadays barricade themselves in their homes (Soyombo, 2009).

Most devastatingly, it has been noted that, it is the fear of kidnapping that has contributed to the current high demand for police escort by diverse public officials in the country, thereby further depleting the inadequate police personnel that could have been deployed to street crime control (Soyombo, 2009). Most people live in fear, as they do not know who will be next to be kidnapped. Some have problem with going out in the night. Commercial motorcyclists have been banned from operation between 6.00am-6.30pm due to the fear of their involvement in kidnapping activities.

Conclusion

The paper identified the basic drivers of kidnapping as hard drug consumption among youths and adverse socio-economic conditions caused by poverty and youth unemployment. It clearly pointed out that kidnapping, whatever the cause, has had far reaching negative socio-economic and psychological consequences in the Nigerian society. As a result, the submission of this paper is that government has a role to play in checking the problem of kidnapping, to find out the strength of the Nigerian constitution in respect of the problem of kidnapping, ascertain whether kidnapping in Nigeria has political dimensions and proffer useful suggestions as remedies to the problem of kidnapping in the country.

Also there is serious negative implication on the peoples culture, that although government at both the federal and state levels have adopted diverse measures to check the menace, yet the problem lies with the laxity on legal implementation over the Act. Again, that the proliferation of kidnapping in Nigeria has little to do with political activities, the main motive is economic gain by way of ransom payment of money. Therefore, it is recommended that families and relatives of victims should reject payment of ransom to kidnappers, because ransom payment has been found to be the motivational factor for the criminal activities and operations of the criminals.

Recommendations

Following the submissions and conclusion reached in this paper, the following recommendations are made:

- *Law enforcement:* State-of-the-art operational facilities related to crime management especially intelligence gathering on kidnappers should be given to the police to assist in their proper functioning to combat the menace of kidnapping in the country. The joint security forces instituted to check kidnapping should be sustained and given free role to report kidnappers' hideouts. When they are

rendered homeless, it will be difficult for them to carry-out their regular criminal operations. It is also necessary to enforce laws against any political/government official/public office holder found collaborating with kidnappers directly or indirectly. Such a person should be disqualified from holding, contesting/vying for any position in government. This will serve as deterrent to others who may want to venture into such criminal activities.

- *Appropriate sanctions:* Curbing this social malaise is a collective effort, while we advocate that the culprits should be apprehended and punished as appropriate, more importantly public officers should shun corruption and ostentatious display of wealth. Focus should be centred on good governance with accountability, transparency and fair play. With these variables in place, kidnapping will become less attractive and in turn stimulate more sense of compassion, patriotism, sustainable development and nation building.
- *Public awareness:* There is need to encourage the media to organize public awareness programmes against the menace. When adequate information is given about the various measures to curb kidnapping, it could serve as threat to the perpetrators and could also assist them to change from their evil ways. Henceforth families and relatives of victims should reject payment of ransom to kidnappers, because ransom payment has been noted to act as a motivational factor for the operations of the criminal activities. Effective and well equipped anti-hostage/kidnapping agencies should be set up by the government in order to give stiff resistance to the perpetrators of kidnapping. Those found to have paid ransom to hostage takers should be warned to refrain from aiding and abetting crime. It is believed that this would go a long way to deter the act of kidnapping in Nigeria.
- *Job creation:* The fact that the death penalty which is widely proposed by the affected states of the federation against kidnapping is yet to be implemented suggests laxity in the law implementation process although capital punishment may not be the only way to curb such crime. It also implies that, the would-be criminals who have the intention of adopting the crime as a means of livelihood would do so easily without deterrence. Therefore, it is time for government and relevant agencies to do something about our teeming unemployed youths who are vulnerable to criminality in order to ensure a crime free society susceptible to positive socioeconomic engagement. This can be done in the following ways:

i. **Awareness creation through partnership**

Government should partner with Labour Market Institutions. It is high time the government revisited some institutions that facilitate information between the potential employee and the employer. In the good old days, there were job centres in the Ministry of Labour, and other private consulting organizations that helped to bring the suppliers and demands of labour together. Since labour market is an abstract concept. Fajana (2000) posited that jobs may be in existence and the suppliers of labour resources are not aware of the existence of such vacancies.

Diversification of the economy

Solution to the problem of youth unemployment must therefore be found in the diversification of the economy from oil to agriculture and agro-allied industries. If employment must be generated, the curriculum in both secondary and tertiary institutions must be reviewed in line with the demands of economic diversification.

ii. Human resource development

The government should revamp National Directorate of Employment (NDE) programme. This will assist in providing training for young people who are out of school and out of work, but there should be caution to ensure that the training provides the young people with marketable skills. Inadequate and faulty educational system in Nigeria is really a source of concern; there is a disturbing and growing mismatch between the skills of those looking for work and the skills employers seek to hire. If left unchecked, this could lead to a situation of a "lost generation," where those with the necessary skills do very well while those without the desired skills will struggle economically for the remainder of their lives. We may be seeing a shift in the labour force widening the gap here between haves and have-nots. As long as this situation is unchecked, it will be difficult contending with restiveness, crimes, kidnapping and other negative tendencies associated with our young people. The government should ensure that the resources of the country are harnessed and they should also promote national prosperity. This government has a responsibility, without being told, to ensure that every Nigerian is secured. The government must ensure that every Nigerian is gainfully employed and that social infrastructure is provided for the people of the country.

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