Predictors and Incidence of Kidnapping in Contemporary Nigeria: A Socio-Criminological Analysis

Nnam, M Uchenna[1], Otu, M Sorochi[2]

[1]Department of Sociology and Anthropology; Faculty of Social Sciences; Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki;
[2]Department of Sociology and Anthropology; Faculty of Social Sciences; Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki;

Abstract: **In this paper, which is essentially a literature review, the researcher undertook a critical investigation into the major predictors and incidence of kidnapping in contemporary Nigeria. The paper further reviewed the various scholars' and media pundits' perspectives on kidnapping. Nigeria is in the throes of kidnapping occasioned by a multiplicity of both individual risk factors and social forces. The rising incidence of kidnapping is disturbingly high and destructive to both human and capital development in the country. The current pattern or trend of kidnapping in contemporary Nigeria is a basket case; little wonder therefore that the latest global ranking placed Nigeria as the fourth most notorious kidnapping nation where people can be easily kidnapped with impunity. The quest to settle political differences, inordinate ambition to acquire and accumulate wealth, poverty and social exclusion, perpetual pains of unemployment, and reaction to existing detestable social and political developments are some of the main causes of kidnapping in Nigeria. The central policy implication of this paper is that it will guide security agencies and policy makers on crime and criminality in making reliable policies that will reduce the incidence of kidnapping in Nigeria to the barest minimum.**

Keywords: **Contemporary, Incidence, Kidnapping, Nigeria, Predictors, Socio-criminological Analysis.**

1. INTRODUCTION

Kidnapping is an unlawful and coercive act of taking away of a person or group of persons without their own volition to an undisclosed hostile environment often in order to demand and obtain a ransom, or to settle political scores or in pursuance of political vendetta before granting the captives freedom. Contemporary Nigeria represents an epochal period in the Nigerian social engineering and political reconstruction, which starts from 1999 through to the present political dispensation in the country. A socio-criminological analysis is a pragmatic and all-encompassing or broader perspective that examines the intricacies of kidnapping and kidnappers using not only individual risk factors (socio-demographic characteristics, criminal association, peer influence and pressure, general criminal lifestyle, among others) but also complex social forces and societal variables (poverty, social exclusion, anomic conditions, deviant neighbourhoods, social structure, political economy, environmental conditions, and the like), which in one way or another give rise to kidnapping. These conceptual clarifications will go some way towards keeping this paper in perspective and also fill a void in the core of the problem of kidnapping in Nigeria.

In addition, it is important to trace the historical development of kidnapping in Nigeria in order to strengthen, support and add local content to the existing knowledge and body of literature on the phenomenon. Reporting on the development of kidnapping and kidnappers in Nigeria, [1] admit that kidnapping and its perpetrators have been in existence since man began to live in group and the formation of society. However, the ugly incidence of kidnapping in Nigeria has increased since after the Civil War in 1970, which exposed many youths in the country with military experience to crime and criminality. The rapid urbanisation which was necessitated by industrialisation of urban centres has given rise to crime, especially kidnapping. This assertion is in accordance with [2] earlier sentiment, that the development of urban centres

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has destroyed the traditional sense of community that is associated with rural villages, thus undermining the informal mechanism of social control and giving room for different kinds of crime (such as kidnapping).

Several studies on kidnapping in Nigeria revealed that the floodgate of kidnapping activities was opened on 12 January, 2006, when MEND captured Four (4) expatriate oil workers in Ekeremo Local Government Area of Bayelsa State [3]. Kidnapping for ransom in Nigeria started in 1992 with a single incident, but government did not raise alarm until 26 February, 2006, when the Niger Delta militants kidnapped foreign oil workers to press home their demand [4]. Kidnapping began in the States that comprised the Niger Delta region, but has gradually crept into the neighbouring South East zone of Nigeria. But prior to the prevailing situation, kidnapping in Nigeria was rare and hardly in the same realm. The issue became rife in the later part of 2005 and early 2006 when members of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta turned to kidnapping of foreign oil workers to draw attention to their political cause [5].

Admittedly, Nigeria is currently besieged by a plethora of social problems, among which, is kidnapping. In reaction to this ugly development, debate and discussions on kidnapping and kidnappers in contemporary Nigeria have widely received academic attention, commonly heard in public gatherings and wherever people have the opportunity for self-expression in political, social and religious contexts. Based on this, the researcher sets out to contribute to the existing variegated perspectives of concerned scholars and media pundits on the subject of kidnapping in contemporary Nigeria and even beyond. The review is made in accordance with the following two objectives of the study:

1. To identify the predictors of kidnapping in Nigeria;

2. To examine the incidence of kidnapping in Nigeria;

2. PREDICTORS OF KIDNAPPING IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA

There are several factors that give rise to kidnapping in contemporary Nigeria. Some people take to kidnapping because it is the quickest and easiest way of making a huge sum of money with less risk of detection, apprehension and conviction. In addition, the act of kidnapping is actuated by the quest to settle political differences and vendetta. The frequent occurrence of this crime in Nigeria is resultant effects of poverty and social exclusion as well as insatiable lust for economic gains, sheer greediness. Emphatically, avarice and desperate ambition to acquire and accumulate wealth, even among those that are gainfully employed and the affluent contribute in no small way to the series of kidnapping cases in the modern day Nigeria. For instance, [6] posits that while most of the kidnappers are involved in the shady business owing to poverty, some are in the kidnapping business because of their insatiable desire to acquire wealth. Was it not reported by the same source that Omotayo Mobolaji Johnson, a Geologist and member of staff at Chevron PLC, who was arrested by the Nigeria Police in Lagos State for complicity in the kidnapping of a bank Executive in the State! Despite the fact that this Chevron employee earns ₦1.2million monthly, he still indulges in kidnapping activities.

The upsurge of unemployment and underemployment in Nigeria precipitate some people into kidnapping to eke out a living and, or as a coping mechanism to the vicissitudes of idle life. This claim is in tandem with the maxim of 'an idle mind is a devil's workshop'. Many unemployed and underemployed persons may refuse to accept a bleak future or be classified as the dregs of humanity because of the sorry state of their socio-economic backgrounds in the society. Confronted with unending excruciating pains of unemployment, certain individuals may resort to kidnapping as an escape route and easy way to a desired ends, success. On a similar point, [7] agrees with the researcher when he said that the high rate of unemployment among youths in Nigeria is one of the causes of kidnapping in the country while [8] is of the view that unemployment rate in Nigeria, especially in the urban areas is increasing at an alarming rate, with 149 percent of the youth between the ages of 15 and 25 unemployed. Thus, the rising wave of kidnapping in the country is a direct result of unemployment as there are many graduates today with no job to support them. In a laconic manner, [9] argues that the pervasive influence of kidnapping in Nigeria is linked to the unacceptable rate of unemployment in the country.

The problem of kidnapping in Nigeria is associated with capitalistic tendencies. Capitalism is a socio-politico-economic system which encourages unreasonable ownership and control of wealth by few individuals in the society at the expense of others, especially the masses or lower class people. It is a system that is characterised by a high sense of exploitation, individualism and selfish interest of few individuals in a society where anomic condition prevails. Although capitalism has its advantages, it encourages social dislocation and disorganisation, revolutions, crass materialism, alienation, relative deprivation, underclass, abject poverty and unmitigated social exclusion. The result of these impediments and weaknesses

observed in capitalism or capitalist-stricken society, according to [10], is increase in the spate of kidnapping, resulting from individualism and uncontrollable crave for and pursuit of wealth. This sorry state of affairs made [11] to draw the conclusion that capitalism is characteristically exploitive.

Furthermore, it seems reasonable to conjecture that social disconnection and social dislocation breed crime and violence. It makes sense here to argue that the crime of kidnapping in Nigeria can be explained and understood within the context of social discontent theory. This suggests that people sometimes choose to get involved in kidnapping as an expression of total displeasure and disenchantment with loathsome social and political arrangements in their society. The implication is that not all kidnapping cases are committed essentially and primarily for material or monetary gains, but as a backlash or means of voicing out social discontentment with and or disapproval of an existing political regime, framework, process, and culture. For instance, [12] states that when MEND made its first capture of four expatriate oil workers on 12 January, 2006, all efforts (including payment of ransom) to secure their release proved abortive as MEND refused to budge. In a similar manner, [13] suggests that kidnapping was initially an activity with no monetary attachment as the key motivation factor, and in most cases, it was part of the outcome of a confrontation between MEND and oil interest groups or the Federal Government of Nigeria.

From the standpoint of social discontent theory, it is obvious that certain class of people (particularly the lower class) in contemporary Nigeria has been socially, politically and economically disconnected over time and their constitutional rights denied with impunity. When people are deprived of their rightful entitlements and essential 'goods' and 'services' denied without cautions, frustration will invariably ensue and consequently lead to the acting out of their displeasure and aggression through all means, including crime. Thus, the ugly incidence of kidnapping in Nigeria is an implicit explanation and response to the oppressive and suppressive social and political developments in the country. To [14], the long years of neglect by successive government to develop the two regions and the failure of the multinational oil companies to integrate the oil-producing communities into the oil economy result in the feeling of deprivation and subsequent crises that make kidnapping become a pervasive crime in Nigeria today.

Corrupt or weak social structure and political economy are also major predictors of kidnapping in contemporary Nigeria. Politicians have in one way or another exposed many Nigerian youths to criminal behaviour by providing them with all the paraphernalia of crime during electioneering. Their inability or failure to disarm these political thugs makes kidnapping a common phenomenon in the country. In a similar argument, [15] explains that the spate of kidnapping has its roots in the inequality, unemployment and breakdown of the educational system, social structures and value system in Nigeria. Kidnapping is a lucrative business in our society because the entire system is apparently faulty: bad governance, lax legislation and week law enforcement make kidnapping easy and possible to carry out.

3. INCIDENCE OF KIDNAPPING IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA

The incidence of kidnapping as contextually used in this paper aligns itself with the rate, extent, frequency, dimension, pattern and ever-growing trend of this dastardly act that is ravaging Nigeria. The incidence of kidnapping has taken an alarming dimension since 2006, and the situation seems to be exacerbated in present-day Nigeria. Hence, it stands to reason that every citizenry in the country is a potential victim of kidnapping, or perhaps stands the risk of falling prey to the eagled-eyed kidnappers. To say that contemporary Nigeria is enmeshed in kidnapping and the excesses of kidnappers are unbridled in recent times is not an erroneous conclusion or assumption or exaggeration. This is the actual situation of the problem in Nigeria, given the researcher's daily observances in justification of his affirmation. Scholarly reports and investigative reportage of media pundits have been recently documented on the incidence of kidnapping in the country; for instance, [16] reports that 1, 500 persons were said to have been kidnapped in Nigeria in 2009. This was against 512 person in 2008 and 353 in 2007. The South East geopolitical zone of Nigeria appears to be currently the headquarters of kidnappers in the country.

For the past three year in Nigeria, major high profile kidnapping operations were spearheaded by a kidnap kingpin, Mr Obioma Nwankwo (AKA Osisikankwu), who voluntarily resigned from active armed robbery and took up the kidnapping vocation. Reaffirming this claim, [17] avers that "Osisikankwu and his gang carried out their kidnapping activities with impunity, and sometimes, tortured and even murdered the unfortunate ones when the ransom they demanded for was not fast coming". Indeed, Osisikankwu and his Boys almost held the entire Abia State and its environs to a standstill

throughout his kidnapping saga in the South East region of Nigeria. This villainous gentle-looking outlaw met his waterloo when he kidnapped 15 school children in Aba, Abia State. In a bid to rescue these children, coupled with the general insecurity situation in the State, the Federal Government of Nigeria was left with no option but to deploy a special Taskforce comprising Soldiers and specially trained Mobile Police combatants to rid Abia and its neighbouring States of kidnapping and kidnappers, with Osisikankwu and his men as prime targets. The end of this kidnap linchpin came as a result of his inability to withstand the intense firepower of the Joint Taskforce (JTF) and socio-cultural forces during the 'Operation Jubilee'. This tumultuous operation was carried out in an evil forest near Obokwe market in Ukwa West Local Government Area of Abia State, where the two diametrically opposed social actors (Osisikankwu's team and the JTF) engaged each other in an open-fire confrontation.

A comprehensive and informative diary containing the incidence of kidnapping in contemporary Nigeria shows thus: On 27 January, 2007, Hon Ego Cordelia, the Anambra State Commissioner for Women Affairs and her son were abducted by hoodlums at Nsugbe in Anambra State with N50 million ransom demanded by the kidnappers. On the same day, month and year, Pius Ogbuawa, a business tycoon in Anambra State was kidnapped and a ransom of N20 million was demanded. On 26 April, 2008, His Royal Highness (HRH), Patrick Mbamalu Okeke, a 73-year-old traditional ruler of Abagana in Njikoka Local Government Area of Anambra State was kidnapped. On 8 June, 2008, in Benin City, Bob Izua, the Managing Director of Bob Izua Motors, was kidnapped and later released after a ransom of N5 million was paid. On 25 August, 2008, Kelechi Nwankpa, the Chairman of Obingwa Local Government Area of Abia State, was kidnapped together with his driver who was shot dead in the scene of the incident; the Chairman was released three days after the government paid a huge ransom of N10 million. On 15 November, 2008, Joseph Dimobi, a member of the Anambra State House of Assembly, representing Aniocha II Federal Constituency, was kidnapped and a ransom of N30 million was demanded for his release. On 21 November, 2008, Eberechi Dick, the traditional ruler of Mgboko Ngwa Autonomous Community and the Chairman of Obingwa Traditional Ruler Council, was kidnapped. He was kidnapped in his Amaise Village in Abia State and was released seven days when a ransom of N10 million was paid [18].

Still on the incidence of kidnapping in contemporary Nigeria, the above source further reports that unknown gunmen kidnapped Pete Edochie, a movie star in Onitsha, a commercial town in Anambra State, on 16 August, 2009. On 20 August, 2009, Grace Mamah, the wife of Ifesinachi Transport Chief Executive Officer, was abducted by two unknown gunmen at Nsukka; the same day a veteran Nigerian actor, Nkem Owoh (AKA Osuofia), was kidnapped along Enugu-Port Harcourt expressway and the kidnappers demanded a ransom of N15 million from his family. In September 2009, Waje Yayok, Secretary to the Kaduna State Government (SSG) was kidnapped in his country home. The kidnappers asked for N40 million as ransom for his release, and this was the first high-profile kidnapping in Kaduna State. On 28 October, 2009, Simon Soludo, the father of former Governor of Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), Prof Chukwuma Soludo, who was at that time the Governorship candidate of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), was accosted and later kidnapped at his home in Isuofia community. The kidnappers demanded for a ransom of N5 billion to cover 'political expenses' arising from the PDP primaries before Prof Soludo's father will be released. Anyasi Agwu, the Chairman of Enyimba Football Club, was also kidnapped on this fateful day.

The latest rating of Nigeria as the fourth most notorious kidnapping nation in the world speaks volumes about the alarming rate of this crime in the country. Similarly, [19], [20] and [22] share similar views when they said that the scourge of kidnapping for ransom is sweeping across Nigeria like a wildfire without any indication of ever quenching it. Kidnapping has surely become a thorn in the flesh of government and society at large. Nobody seems to be safe at the moment and statistics of kidnapping in Nigeria are by every standard intimidating. Between 2008 and 2010, the country recorded over 887 kidnap cases. In his reportage, [23] states that 16 Ebonyi traders were kidnapped by a local Sea Pirates along Okono/Iboroya Creek of Mbo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. To the researcher, the latest high profile kidnapping even though it has terrorism undertone, the researcher observed, occurred on 14 April, 2014 where over 200 Chibok school girls were kidnapped by the 'Boko Haram' Islamic extremists in Borno State of Nigeria, and these children are yet to be released as at the time of this study.

Be that as it may, statistics of kidnapping and kidnappers in Nigeria should be accepted with skepticism. It should be taken with the proverbial pinch of salt. This is because the figures may be misleading since the visible part of the crime known, reported, investigated and charged to courts is just a tip of the iceberg. This shortcoming constitutes a popular dark figure in kidnapping statistics. At issue here is that kidnap victim's family may not like to disclose the incident to

formal agents of social control, particularly the police owing to threats of death impose on victims and their families by kidnappers, or perceived gross misconducts, mistrust and inadequacies in the police subsystem. This is because people's attitude of mind towards the police in Nigeria is in depths of despair–highly discouraging, strained and estranged. A typical Nigerian perceives the police as corrupt, unfriendly, extortionist, trigger-happy, incompetent and accomplice. Based on this, it is of little or no importance for people to call upon the police when any of their relatives is kidnapped. Rather, relatives of kidnap victims may resolve to rescue their sons and daughters through the payment of ransom and other ritual sacrifices that may be attached to the act.

4. CONCLUSION

Thus far, kidnapping and kidnappers in Nigeria have been explored. Through the literature review, the major perspectives on predictors and incidence of kidnapping were identified and discussed. In the first instance, the researcher carefully and contextually explained certain keywords in this paper for clarity and easy and broad level understanding as well as to put the topic under investigation in perspective. From the review, a number of comments and contributions are made on both local and international media as well as in the academia regarding the ever-increasing rate of kidnapping and gruesome activities of kidnappers in Nigeria. The current global ranking of Nigeria as the fourth kidnapping is a clear that this heinous crime is disturbingly high in the country. Indeed, contemporary Nigeria is in the throes of kidnapping. The escalated trend of this crime in Nigeria had scared away potential investors and retarded development stride in the mostly effected parts of the country. The conclusion was also reached that the incidence of kidnapping has drastically reduced the number of available foreign and home investors in Nigeria–kidnapping is anti-development. Specifically, most of the oil company workers and other captains of industry have fled the South South and South East regions of Nigeria for dear life. The volume of investments and foreign capital flows to Nigeria has plummeted as a result of widespread kidnapping in the country.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Keeping with the review of this paper, the following recommendations are hereby made:

- The paper will guide security agencies and policy makers on crime and criminality in making reliable policies that will reduce the incidence of kidnapping in Nigeria to the barest minimum.

- The Nigerian criminal justice system should expedite action in the prosecution and punishment of any person accused of kidnapping, for justice delayed is justice denied. This development will go a long way towards discouraging offenders from relapsing into kidnapping and also deter potential kidnappers.

- All assets, particularly houses belonging to a known kidnapper in Nigeria should be demolished and the parcel of land confiscated and owned by the government.

- From the review, it is clear that unemployment, poverty and social exclusion give rise to kidnapping in Nigeria. The researcher therefore calls for urgent attention to address these social problems by all levels of government: Local, State and Federal with a view to combating this crime in the country.

- Crime Mapping Technology (CMT) should be used in the fight against kidnapping and kidnappers in Nigeria. Rather than spending a great deal of time and energy reviewing crime reports on statistical tables, CMT makes it easier for security operatives to convert crime data into useful and meaningful nugget of information for effective prediction, prevention and control of kidnapping in the society. This scientific device will make for easy tracking down of kidnappers and quick rescue of kidnap victims.

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