

# Proliferation of Kidnapping in Nigeria: Causes and Consequences

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**Abstract:** - This scholarly article examined the proliferation of kidnapping in Nigeria: Causes and Consequences. The paper unveiled some common causes of kidnapping and their consequences in Nigeria as a nation state that is characterized by poverty, unemployment, insecurity, corruption, weak constitutional framework and poor policies implementation. Kidnapping simply connotes an act of illegally and forcefully capturing and detaining of human beings for the purpose of generating financial benefits from the relations of the detainee(s). Kidnapping has become a common criminal exercise and lucrative business in Nigeria of which the perpetrators often receive huge sum of money from their victims, sometimes the kidnappers' victims are murdered whenever the amount of money needed from them are paid and to some extent not redeemed. Poverty, unemployment and moral decadence are said to be the commonest causes of the evil called kidnapping in Nigeria. Content analysis/qualitative sources of data collection were employed for the realization of this scholarly work. Amongst other recommendations it is recommended that government should create jobs for the unemployed youths in tandem with skills development training that will help curtail the high levels of idleness as the mother of evil thoughts, evil plans and evil actions among Nigeria youths; Federal and State governments should properly equip and deploy forest guards into our forests that are serving as safe habitats for the kidnappers in order to curb the menace.

**Keywords:** Kidnapping, Kidnappers, poverty, unemployment, Nigeria

## I. INTRODUCTION

Kidnapping is one among the current major social problems that are negatively affecting the free movement of people and the socio-economic development of the country. Kidnapping which is mostly common in the southern parts of the country is now very popular in the Northern parts of the country due to different dimension of armed conflicts such as ethno-religious conflicts, farmers-herders conflict, Boko Haram insurgency among others. Most of the conflicts that have resulted to the proliferation of the evil known as kidnapping in Nigeria are mostly instigated by conflicts' entrepreneurs who are gaining from the conflicts either directly or indirectly. The menace of the proliferation of kidnapping has brought along with it problems of insecurity of lives and properties and a general fall in the number of economic activities as a result of the fear of the unforeseen. The acts known as kidnapping is considered by Okoli and Orinya, (2013) as organized crime. Walsh and Adrian, (1983) asserted 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 a person by force against his/her will. Robertson, (1968) sees kidnapping as a crime of seizing, confirming abducting or carrying away of persons by force or fraud often subject him or her to involuntary servitude in an attempt to demand a ransom or in furtherance of another crime.

## II. BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND FOR THE PROLIFERATION OF KIDNAPPING IN NIGERIA

Prior to the crisis of the militants in Niger Delta, kidnapping as an organized crime was rare in Nigeria. The sudden rush in the crime over the years has been attributed to the Niger Delta crisis. As the Niger Delta militancy degenerated, kidnapping became rather entrenched as one of the untoward legacies of the struggle. Expatriate oil workers were then targeted and kidnapped for handsome ransom. Overtime, a lot of social metamorphosis took place that led to the extension of the crime which got viral and also became a tool of political vengeance. Therefore, close relations of some political opponents became targets, just to retaliate the offences of their political opponents and make some money out of the process. However, Kidnapping has become a daily routine in Nigeria and they are often used by armed groups as mechanism for achieving the demands of the abductors or kidnappers. The proliferation of kidnapping in Nigeria has scared a lot of local and foreign investors away which also affected the socio-economic development of the country and give chance to other social vices in Nigeria. Foreign investors as well as citizens are scared to operate businesses in Nigeria because no investment thrives in an atmosphere of insecurity and this contributes to the joblessness and poverty of some youths who before now were absorbed by some of the companies or factories that have been closed down in the country which leads to economic meltdown. Nigeria is ranks the 6th highest recorded kidnapping cases in the world. The kidnapping of foreign nationals in exchange for ransoms was most prevalent in Nigeria before militants from the Niger Delta region were granted Amnesty by the government in 2009.

## III. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

### *Kidnapping*

Just as other concepts in social sciences, there is no a universally accepted or adopted definition of kidnapping because it varies from State to State and jurisdiction to

jurisdiction. It is the forceful seizure, taking away and unlawful detention of a person against his/her will. However, the concept of kidnapping seems to have originated around 1682 among those who perpetrate this crime (Mohamed, 2008). It is a common law offence and the key part is that, it is an unwanted act on the part of the victim. It is a restriction of someone else's liberty which violates the key fundamental of the freedom of movement as enshrined in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, where every other law takes its cue from. For this reason, kidnapping is a serious offence. Kidnapping is also seen as a crime of seizing, confining, abducting or carrying away of persons by force or fraud often subjecting him or her to involuntary servitude in an attempt to demand a ransom or in furtherance of another crime. Therefore, it is an act of snatching and seizing of a person in order to collect a ransom in return or settle some scores of disagreement among people.

In view of Thomas and Nta, (2009) kidnapping is termed as robbery of the highest rank. 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. Nwaorah, (2009) defined 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. 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).

#### IV. THEORETICAL CONSIDERATION

There are many theories which elucidate the influence of poverty and unemployment on crime, especially in the discipline of Sociology. However, this paper employed **Social Structure and Anomie** theory to analyze the causes and consequences of the proliferation of kidnapping in Nigeria. In other words, the theory is suitable in explaining the link between poverty, unemployment, morale decadence and kidnapping in Nigeria. It is worth noting that, kidnapping is an outcome of poverty, unemployment and morale decadence in our dear society.

Social Structure and Anomie theory is attributed to Robert K. Merton (1938, as cited in Muhammad, Mukhtar and Saleh 2015). Merton himself was inspired by Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), in his analysis of suicide which led to the development of "anomie" theory. Thus the theory is an offshoot of traditional functionalist perspective. For Merton, criminal or deviant behaviours are products of society's norms and values. Merton begins by arguing that society defines culturally approved goals to members; being successful in terms of certain goals (that is financial security) but does not always provide equal means (which could be schooling and good jobs) to reach these goals or cultural expectations.

Therefore, patterns of rule breaking depend on whether or not people accept society's goals and whether or not they have the opportunity to reach them. Robert Merton identified five modes of adaptation under which all individuals are falling in one or the other. The first, **conformity** is non-deviant because it accepts both the goals and the means of achieving the goals. The other four are guilty of violating either of the cultural expectations: the goals or means. **Innovator** rejects the means and accepts the goals; **ritualist** accepts means and rejects the goal; **retreatist** rejects the means and the goals; and **rebellion** decided to change both means and goals (Muhammad *et al.* 2015).

Therefore, one of the most relevant theories that relate society's dysfunction with criminal behaviour is the anomie theory. Evidence exists about the several segments of society that are severely restricted from legitimate avenues to success. In addition, formations of militant groups in Nigeria are largely responses to the feelings of discomfort by the teeming unemployed and neglected youth. Ogbonnaya and Ehigiamusoe, (2013) observed that, most crises in the Niger Delta manifests in various ways namely, militancy, hostage taking and kidnapping of oil workers and frequent disruption of oil production activities. It is important to note that, **Boko Haram** and the **Niger Delta Militants** are all rebellion in the Merton's mode of adaptations. Social structure and anomie theory explained why many deviant and criminal behaviors and insecurity are taking place due to structural inequality, and excessive expectation of societal norms and values for members of society to achieve some stated success, which are not readily available to all members of the society.

The theory is been criticized for emphasizing materialism as a motivation for deviance or crime. The theory also sees crime and deviance coming from the aggrieved activities of the poor rather than population. Literally, both rich and poor commit crimes. Mukhtar, (2015) also criticizes the theory on the basis of labeling **ritualist** that is someone who lives by organizational rules as a deviant. Finally, the theory does not clarify why some individuals adapt to **innovation** and not **retreatism** or adapt to **rebellion** rather than **ritualism**.

#### V. CAUSES OF KIDNAPPING IN NIGERIA

The common causes of Kidnapping in Nigeria are identified and articulated below:

- Poverty
- Unemployment and
- Morale decadence

##### *Poverty*

In view of Mukhtar, Mukhtar and Abdullahi, (2014) Poverty is a multi-dimensional and complex phenomenon, encompassing not only material deprivation, but also other forms of deprivation, such as unemployment, ill-health, and lack of education, vulnerability, powerlessness and social exclusion. This definition link the concept of poverty and unemployment as well as other aspects of poverty which have

serious consequences on the living condition of the people and consequently on the socio-economic and political security of a nation which may prompt some of the youths into the activity of kidnapping. According to Farraro, (2003) poverty is the state of human beings who are poor; they have little or no material means of surviving either with little food, shelter, clothes, healthcare, education, and other physical means of living and improving one's life. Nigeria, a sub – Saharan African country, has at least half of its population living in abject poverty (Ojo, 2008). Ogwumike, (2002) reveals that poverty reduction is the most difficult challenge any developing country is facing, where on the average, majority of the population is considered poor.

#### *Unemployment*

Inyang, (2009) associated 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 job. Out of frustration together with mounting responsibilities to tackle many idle young persons have ventured into criminal activities of which kidnapping are not an exemption. He further acknowledged that, a graduate who is unable to secure a job is psychologically bereft of other means of survival. In such situation, the young person could develop a negative attitude towards society and attribute his failure to the society. Inyang, (2009) further asserted that, the proliferation of arms as a result of political patronage of miscreants who were dumped after elections may indirectly encourage and enhanced kidnapping. He also associated today’s kidnapping situation to the scourge of arm 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 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 youths (thugs) who have been abandoned by their masters after winning elections are now busy kidnapping innocent persons and relatives of those persons they surged to be wealthy. Maitama (2015) corroborated that “an Idle mind thinks nothing but evil, plans nothing but evil, and wants to do nothing but evil”.

#### *Moral Decadence*

The issue of “moral decadence” and the “quest to get rich quick” syndrome has been identified as one among the causes of kidnapping. Inyang, (2009) asserted that in Nigeria, nobody ask questions on how people make their wealth; to him, a poor person today can show up with an expensive car tomorrow

and nobody dare 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 who thereafter take to 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 to the influence by kidnappers. They believe that, when those in government settings loot government treasury openly without fear, they too can as well take the laws into their hands by abducting people for ransom in order to live in luxury.

Above all, poverty, unemployment and morale decadence are the major tripartite evils instigating the proliferation of kidnapping in Nigeria.

#### VI. CONSEQUENCES OF KIDNAPPING IN NIGERIA

In Nigeria, the current wave of kidnapping began with the abduction of expatriate oil workers by the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger-Delta (MEND) in late 2005 as a means of alerting the world of the many years of injustice, exploitation, marginalization and underdevelopment of Niger-Delta region (Onduku, 2001). Statistics shows that Nigeria records more than 1,000 kidnapping incidents a year, and there are undoubtedly many that are unreported (Catlin Group, 2012). The ‘business’ of kidnapping in Nigeria can be traced to what Townsend, (2008) referred to as “natural resource nationalism” which is the tendency to seek bigger shares of the returns from nation’s natural resources. Omeje, (2010) termed kidnapping trade as “accumulation politics” which is the tendency for the ruling class to be involved in endless accumulation of natural resource rents accruing from the owner’s region through deliberate act of marginalization and deprivation

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).

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 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 stay clear from their work place and the adverse effect is always on the economy. Dode (2007) noted that, in 2006, when kidnapers 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.

Above all, kidnapping as one among the social problems that are bedeviling Nigeria has greatly affected our socio-economic development by scaring investors away from the country including some professionals who would have been plus to the country among several others. These menace are worsened by poverty, unemployment and morale decadence, abandoned of the youths by some politicians, corruption, inadequate of relevant information to the security agents by citizens on where and when kidnapping incidents are taking place, inadequate of sophisticated equipments for our security agencies for the tracking down of criminals etcetera.

## VII. CONCLUSION

It's high time for the government of Nigeria to take drastic measures to curb the proliferation of kidnapping in Nigeria and the dimensions in which the act is taking because it may result to the abandonment of residential places by residents and even government offices in order not to be captured and murdered by aggrieved unemployed youths in the aspect of poor relatives and not having the money to free oneself from the cocoon of the abductors. Unemployment, poverty and moral decadence must be properly dealt with to the bearable level in order to curtail the rate of people who have resorted to engage in criminal activities because of idleness as source of livelihood. Which is concomitant with what Maitama Sule (2015) unveiled that "an Idle mind thinks nothing but evil, plans nothing but evil, and wants to do nothing but evil".

## VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

- Government should create jobs for the unemployed youths in tandem with skills development training that will help curtail the high levels of idleness as the mother of evil thoughts, evil plans and evil actions among Nigeria youths
- Federal and State governments should properly equip and deploy forest guards into our forests that are serving as safe and conducive habitats for the kidnapers to perpetrate their activities in order to curb the menace.
- Political leaders should desist from seeing their biological children as assets but using other unemployed youths as thugs by providing them with rifles and ammunitions to destabilize electoral process during election periods in order to achieve their selfish aim and later dumps them. Because

whenever the unemployed youths are dumped they will judiciously make use of the weapons at their disposal to commit crime in order to survive since they are without jobs.

- Youths should be self employed and avoid being dependent wholly on government and political leaders.

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