The Psychological Impact of mass abduction of Students in Nigeria and Students' Attitude to Education

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Abstract
The study examined mass abduction of students in Nigeria and students' attitude to education. The paper clearly noted that since the outbreak of Boko Haram (which means western education is a sin) terrorist group in 2009, both insurgents and bandits have attacked many educational institutions and several teachers and learners killed. The terrorists have added educational stakeholders kidnapping to their nefarious and heartless activities in Nigeria. School kidnapping is simply the act of taking students hostage in mass. Sometimes, the terrorists kidnap the students to make money through ransom payment by the government or the relatives of the victims. In some cases, they kidnap the students just to spite the government and in some other cases they use the students as human shields and also as aids; this has brought fear and negative attitude to schooling. Some reported cases of school abductions in Nigeria since 2014 were discussed. Importantly, the paper examined the negative implications of this menace on the educational and economic development of Nigeria. It therefore recommended among others that governments at all levels should immediately beef up security in Nigerian schools to forestall further abduction of students in schools. It was also recommended that to effectively combat all forms kidnapping, the government should fight insurgency to a complete standstill 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 actualize their unholy agenda.

Keywords: Psychological Impact, Mass abduction, Students' Attitude, Education, Nigeria

Introduction

Among other criminal cases in Nigeria, kidnapping appears to be one of the most technical and most lucrative in nature, considering the fact that a lot of people are involved unannounced. Kidnappers have a powerful mode of operation which creates fear in individuals because they are uncertain of the next person to be kidnapped. The operators of armed robbery can kidnap immediate family members and divulge all round information about whoever is their target. Kidnapping is not new in Nigeria and is one of the challenges facing the country and educational stakeholders at present. Though it takes place in all parts of the country, it is most rampant in the North, North-East and South-South because of oil business with foreigners (Onovo, 2020).

In recent times, apart from the Boko Haram and Fulani herdsmen terrorism, attention has been turned to the issue of kidnapping. Both National and International bodies are coming together to see if the incidence can be curbed. Many engage in kidnapping business for different purposes and missions. Some are politically masterminded, especially among political opponents. Some do it for ritual sacrifice; that is, in situations where the kidnapped persons are never seen again even after huge ransoms are paid. Some engage in this heinous crime solely for the sake of money; in this case, the victims are released after the payment of the agreed ransom. In all, kidnapping can be grouped according to motives into: political kidnapping, kidnapping for marriage, ritual kidnapping and monetary kidnapping. There has been several news of mass abduction of students all around the country which has resulted to students' nonchalant attitude or lack of interest in education (Balogun, 2023).

Investigations have shown that ordinary citizens participate in this atrocious crime in order to fill their pockets, usually the youths employed by rich men who conduct kidnapping as a modern business. They target rich families and sometimes demand colossal amounts of money as ransom. Also, it has been traced among community leaders and religious leaders who are in the business of divulging information with the aim of receiving their share after the deal. This has raised suspense among Nigerians about who to trust or confide in (Balogun, 2023).

Since kidnapping is on the increase in Nigeria, there is a corresponding increase in the level of insecurity in the country. The Government and their security agents ranging from police, military personnel and Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) have not achieved considerable results, and many security personnel have been killed by kidnappers who are sophisticatedly equipped. Most often, the security agents meet kidnappers unprepared and considering the fact that the kind of guns these security officers possess are inferior, they stand the risk of losing their lives. Yet, it is within the jurisdiction of the government to make provision for the security of its citizenry. It is no longer an exaggeration to say that the Nigerian police are poorly trained and poorly equipped. Moreover, to worsen the situation, the government of today appears to have a mission different from the security of the people. Many have been raped, traumatized and killed without receiving any help from the government (Shuaibu, 2015). Since it is obvious that security in Nigeria is porous, it becomes imperative for all persons to protect themselves and be vigilant at all times. People in churches, mosques, markets, schools and homes, as well as the highway motorists, are susceptible to this menace and they should try—as a matter of urgency—to pray to God for divine security and intervention.

According to Dantala (2014), one of the greatest challenges facing the education in Nigeria is mass abduction of students, which is part of the insecurity issues in the country. The consequences of mass abduction on the Nigerian educational system can be seen in its lack of growth and development. For more than two decades now, it has been observed that educational institutions are the major targets of the kidnappers. The kidnappers see lecturers, proprietors, principals and some school teachers as wealthy men and women in the society. In their conception, education is a lucrative business. Several incidents of mass abduction have been recorded among educational personnel. Many university lecturers, school proprietors and principals have been kidnapped at one point or the other. Some paid through their noses as huge ransoms were demanded for their freedom. In most cases, some lost their lives (Shuaibu, 2015)..

Apart from University lecturers and school proprietors/principals, Nigeria has witnessed several cases of mass abduction of school children. The greatest among them is the kidnap of the Chibok girls during President Goodluck Jonathan's regime. Their abduction came as a challenge not just to the Federal Government but to States, religious bodies and every Nigerian. The Federal Government spent huge sum of money to effect their release, all to no avail as there was no trace of the kidnappers, let alone the girls. It took some years before some of the girls were released and one could imagine what would have been the experience of their parents throughout these periods. It is on the national papers that cases of kidnapping are increasing day by day without any assurance of a lasting solution.

Beside Chibok and Dapchi mass abductions of students, the following is a chronicle of recent events in the abductions of school students, undergraduates of Tertiary institution and staff across the Federation:

i. March 2, 2016, gunmen invaded the female hostel of Babington Macaulay Junior Secondary School in Ikorodu, Lagos where they abducted 5 female students, a hostel mistress, Cook and Teacher.
ii. January, 2017, 5 students and 3 staff members of the Nigerian-Turkish International College, Isheri, Ogun state were kidnapped by unknown armed men.
iii. December, 15, 2020, bandits invaded Government Science Secondary School, GSSS Kankara in Katsina State and abducted 344 students.
iv. February, 17, 2021, bandits invaded Government College in Kagara, Niger State and abducted 42 students including 3 teachers and 9 family members while one student was killed in the raid.

v. February, 26, 2021, armed bandits raided Government Girls Science Secondary School in Jangebe in Zamfara State and abducted 279 female students.
vi. March 11, 2021, bandits struck at Federal College of Forestry Mechanization, Afaka, Kaduna State and abducted 39 students.
vii. April 20, 2021, bandits struck at Greenfield University, a private institution located in Kasarachi, Chikun Local Government Area of Kaduna State and abducted 23 students while 5 of them were murdered.
viii. July 5, 2021, 140 students of Bethel High School in Kaduna State were abducted after bandits opened fire and overpowered security guards of the school.
ix. March 10, 2024, 15 students of Islamic school in Gidan Bakuso Sokoto State. The gunmen raided the school premises in North Western Nigeria

The list of abduction of students is endless as the bandits continue their onslaught with little or no resistance from the security agencies. It is however important to note that some of the abducted students in some of these incidents have regained their freedom after millions of Naira were paid as ransom to these bandits.

The effect of mass abduction of students remains traumatic as the victims pass through excruciating pains. One can imagine what those Chibok girls passed through in the hands of those kidnappers. Adofu and Alpaslan (2018) asserted that kidnapping and other insecurity matters sooner or later will reduce the manpower needed for the growth and development of the nation. Investigations confirmed that there is fear among lecturers and other personnel in the education industry. Due to the ugly experience of kidnapping, many lecturers and teachers have refused to come back to the teaching profession for fear of kidnappers while it has dwindled students' academic interest. Some refused to accept transfer letters, especially to those areas where cases of kidnapping are rampant. Some schools are deserted as parents are afraid of sending their children to those schools where kidnappers attacked at one time or the other. Some schools now experience lack of qualified teachers to handle core subjects, the reason being that the qualified ones cannot afford to lose their lives in the hands of kidnappers.

Furthermore, the money the government spent to fight kidnapping could have been used to provide infrastructural development in the education sector. Also, the school environment is constantly threatened by kidnapping. Ordinarily, for education to be effective, the atmosphere should be peaceful, otherwise the aims and objectives of education, as contained in national policy of education, cannot be achieved. Parents, on the other hand,

suffer severe trauma and some die as a result of the shock emanating from the menace of kidnapping.

Concept of Kidnapping

According to Inyang and Abraham (2013), kidnapping is defined as "the forcible seizure, taking away and unlawful detention of a person against his/her will". In another definition, Fage and Alabi (2017) presented kidnapping as the "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". In agreement with the two definitions above, kidnapping is usually motivated by financial gains or political benefits. Thus, opportunists or regular criminals as well as political opponents can resort to kidnapping in order to illegally obtain economic benefits or have their demands granted. In many cases, kidnapping is a business involving a demand for ransom, which may vary considerably depending on the victim's personal status.

Likewise, Uzorma and Nwanegbo-Ben (2014) 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". For an act to be deemed kidnapping, it must involve coercive movement of a victim from one place to another. The detention or seizure of that person-be it a child or an adult-is for a period of time, depending on the willingness of the relatives to respond positively to the negotiations. In most cases, the victims' eyes are blindfolded so that they cannot see or locate the place of detention. Many are detained in places far away from their families. In their forceful movement, a lot of gunshots may be released into the air to create fear and tension, Consequently, resistance, struggling and refusal to obey and follow the kidnappers have led to the untimely death of some victims. The perpetrators are often tempted to shoot sporadically for safety in order to accomplish the mission, not minding who gets affected. From the foregoing, there is no best way of defining kidnapping. However, in a nutshell, kidnapping refers to the abduction and captivity of a person, typically to obtain a ransom. Sometimes, kidnappers hold their captives longer in order to demand more ransom from the victims' relatives or friends. Some families go as far as borrowing money from outsiders or selling their properties in order to save the lives of their beloved ones. The danger of not responding immediately could lead to the untimely death of the victim. Many have died during the time of torture, especially those with health challenges. Inyang and Abraham (2013) added that it is allegedly regarded as a restriction of someone's liberty, which violates the provision of freedom of movement as stipulated in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, where every other law takes its root.

Effects in mass abduction of Students and their Attitude to Education

The prevalence of abduction of school children in Nigeria has a lot of devastating effects on education, economy and the victims both within the Northern region and the entire country. One of the implications on education is that this scourge of school kidnapping, if not checked, will create school apathy in children and parents. Many children and parents especially in the Northern part of Nigeria may lose interest completely in western education. This will be a clear actualization of the barbaric goal of the Boko Haram fighters whose mantra is that western education is a sin. The loss of interest in formal schooling will apparently worsen the number of out-of-school children, which UNICEF put at over 10.5 million in Nigeria (Ibraham and Mukhtar, 2017)..

Another adverse effect of school kidnapping is disruption of academic activities**.** As has been observed, and often the case, the immediate impact of closure of schools due to the activities of kidnappers is the distortion of academic activities in affected schools. For instance, some States in the North recently announced closure of schools because of the fear that more students could be kidnapped. Throughout the period that the schools will remain closed, teaching and learning will be grounded. This development will further disrupt the school system which is just recovering from the heavy setback it suffered due to the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent lockdowns in the country.

Another implication of the rising wave of school abductions is the wrong signals they send to the international community. Mass kidnapping of students and all forms of kidnapping activities create negative headline news in local and international media which dents the image of Nigeria globally and thus discourages investors. This unarguably leads to economic paralysis (Fage and Alabi, 2017).

Furthermore, the growing incidence of school abductions could lead to increase in crime among children whose education has been abruptly halted due to the closure of schools because of fear of further attacks**.** It is common knowledge that when children are not in school, some of them become idle, and an idle mind, they say, is the devil's workshop. Some of the children could embrace anti-social behaviour and criminal activities as a result of the idleness forced on them by these criminals and the government that has failed to decisively deal with them and bring this negative enterprise to an end.

Apart from death and serious physical and psychological injuries some of the kidnapped students suffer in the hands of their captors, the prevalence of school kidnapping also is the feelings of being kidnap, the emotional trauma, fear of never been united with their loved ones, decision-making which in turn discourages investment in education. Many

families who were eking out a living in several Northern States and were investing in the educational development of their children have had to relocate to parts of the country with less threat of their kids being kidnapped in school and incidents of school closure (Dodo, 2023). The prevalence of school kidnapping portends danger for educational and economic growth in the entire Nigeria because whatever affects any part of Nigeria, affects all parts of the country.

Conclusion

Kidnapping is still on the increase because the government's effort is not enough to curb the menace. Such human trafficking should not be handled as an ordinary thing, rather it requires drastic measures to jettison it. The six geo-political zones in Nigeria are faced with different versions of kidnapping. In the North East and North West, kidnapping is Boko Haram insurgency and herdsmen attacks. In the Niger Delta region or the South-South and South East, militants have adopted kidnapping as an insurgent strategy to abduct foreigners and to seek ransom to champion their violent movement. The willingness of the government to combat corruption will help to reduce the rate of kidnapping and other criminal activities going on in the country. It is obvious that criminal opportunists also commit kidnapping for ransom. Investigation recently carried out confirmed poverty as a contributory factor in the increase of kidnapping in Nigeria. One can imagine a situation where most of the unemployed youths engage in this business of kidnapping as a means of getting money (ransom) and as a survival strategy. Corruption is strongly connected with kidnapping; politicians use youths as political thugs to kidnap opponents and their family members, and make certain demands.

Suggestions

In order to address the challenge of kidnapping, there is an urgent need for collective effort of the government, foreign government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Communities, families and other vulnerable groups should team up to address the menace. Adequate measures against kidnapping should be taken. These measures require immediate attention. It is further recommended that:

1. There is a greater need for the Nigerian government to revisit poverty alleviation programmes and employment opportunities. This will help to engage the unemployed graduates who feel frustrated in life.
2. For effective combat of kidnapping, the level of laxity in the law implementation process to prosecute offenders should be addressed as urgently as possible. The perpetrators of

kidnapping should be arrested for thorough investigation and appropriate punishment, otherwise the menace will still be on the increase.

3. In most cases, kidnappers hide in different villages and localities, there is a need to engage the community leaders, especially the kings, chiefs and other traditional title holders in the fight against kidnapping. They can assist in fishing out kidnappers in their various communities.
4. Non-governmental organizations should also participate in the war against kidnapping in Nigeria and neighbouring States. Their contributions can come through the creation of public awareness either in a form of seminars or orientation programmes.

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