

# **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF KIDNAPPING IN THE CONTEXT OF ITS SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS IN NIGERIA**

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## **Abstract**

Kidnapping has become a bane to many African societies. This is because it is a crime that has been identified to attract so much money in the form of a ransom fee. In Nigeria, it has become commonplace for citizens to report cases of kidnapping almost on daily basis. It has been observed that kidnapping has gone beyond the transactional nature and it is now associated with robbery, terrorism, political strife and blackmailing. In light of the foregoing, this paper analyzed kidnapping in view of its trends in countries of the world, its conceptual definition, historical background, statistics on kidnapping in Nigeria, socio-economic implication of kidnapping and challenges to combating kidnapping in Nigeria. The study employed a qualitative meta-analysis of literatures on kidnapping. It was observed in this paper that one of the many reasons hindering the reduction of the frequency of kidnapping operations in Nigeria is centered on socio-economic reasons. This study recommends that government should partner with private sectors for the creation of jobs and also upgrade security architecture.

**Keywords:** Kidnapping, History, Socio-Economic and Security.

## **Introduction**

Kidnapping has become a fundamental issue all over the world. The pattern

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at which the crime is being perpetrated remains ever-changing. Kidnapping has been recorded to be a crime that cuts across the lower, middle and upper class. Whilst it has been observed that the crime is however perpetrated by both male and female (Enobakhare, Omage, & Anyamene, 2015). Globally, the crime is seen to be particularly unique in certain regions of the world, for example; England, Mexico, Nigeria and Colombia. Kidnapping is perceived to be a serious form of crime which is often described as an “aggravated form of false imprisonment” (Warburton, 2007). Lord Brandon articulated that kidnapping is an offence that involved deliberately taking an individual by force or trick.

Reports have revealed that the year 1999, Colombia had 5,181 cases, Mexico 1,434, former Soviet Union 250, Brazil 515, Philippines 512, Nigeria 34, India 76, Ecuador 66, Venezuela 109 and South Africa 11. In Europe, it has been noted that kidnapping is seen to take place in the form of “child abduction”. The offenders of this type of kidnapping were viewed to commit the crime in order to seek a ransom fee or sexual gratification. Existing data is yet to demonstrate whether this type of kidnapping is reported to authorities or widely commonplace. In South America, like Mexico and Colombia, reports have indicated that kidnapping has become a menace to the society. The motive of the crime is attributed to a highly influential organized crime carried out by drug lords. There is a background of violence intermixed with kidnapping during the course of the distribution of illegal drugs and guns. There is a sense of state organized crime to the amplification of kidnapping in those regions.

In Africa, like Nigeria, kidnapping from its embryonic state was merely a form of agitation against the undue exploitation and exploration of crude oil in the Niger Delta region. It is an already known fact that kidnapping in Nigeria was used by militant groups whose primary intention was to forestall further exploitations. Recently, the state of kidnapping has become economic, social and security problem in the country. The aim of this paper is to examine the historical background of kidnapping in an attempt to crystalize its social implications.

### **Conceptual definition of kidnapping**

Walsh and Adrian (1983) noted that kidnapping varies from country to

country; therefore, the term is uncertain and devoid of any straight jacket definition. The Chambers (1996) defined kidnapping as the illegal seizing and holding of someone as a prisoner and then demanding for a ransom for his/her release. Also, Dode (2007) defined kidnapping as a process of forcefully abducting a person or group of persons because of an injustice done. It has been highlighted that, cases within the ambit of injustice done is usually committed by annoyed fellows against politicians in the country. This corresponds with the views of Nwaorah (2009) who opined that kidnapping is often carried out by an angry fellow or group with the hope of taking hostage a person or people of significance and worth in the society. Similarly, Thomas and Nta (2009) defined kidnapping as robbery of the highest rank which has been proliferated in several dimensions.

### **Historical background of kidnapping**

There is evidence to show that the concept of kidnapping as a crime could be traced back to several decades ago. It is not a crime that became operational few years ago. From the biblical viewpoint, like the case of Joseph that was abducted and sold by his brothers. It has been established that during the period of “war” the victor of such wars usually took those who were left alive in the camp of the defeated as slaves which is a form of kidnapping. Turner (1998) examined the root cause of kidnapping in Europe. He noted that kidnapping started in the 17<sup>th</sup> century in England. In this case, children kidnapped were often sold to become slaves whilst their families remained in severe fear and uncertainty over the whereabouts of their children. There is strong evidence to show that children kidnapped were a form of symbols to demonstrate hegemony (Turner, 1998). The more children a perpetrator kidnapped the more accolades he/she was given in the social group. There is a noteworthy reoccurring phenomenon which was the kidnapping of children.

Whilst the literature on kidnapping particularly in Europe remained dynamic. It is a commonly held view that kidnapping is significantly linked to have gained entry as a crime/deviant behavior during the period of Ancient Rome. This was largely attributed to the era of the then Emperor Constantine (AD 315) who became worried over the increasing activities of kidnapping. It was based on an unprecedented increase of kidnapping cases that he

placed the punishment of “death” in order to reduce the kidnapping activities and also to form the basis of deterrence . The pattern at which kidnapping was perpetuated was viewed from the engagement of Robber-barons in the city that were kidnapping Merchants and holding them captive for a ransom fee.

In Africa, kidnapping has become cancerous and heinous. The social conditions of the African state tend to promulgate the crime. It has been recorded that kidnapping came into Africa during colonisation. This implied that the entry gained by the Portuguese, French, Spaniards and English also created a medium to the exploitation and exploration of the region. There is existing record to show that Africans were kidnapped from their communities by the colonial masters in order to build industries in Europe and to perform other roles needed by the colonial masters. Statistics present a gloomy picture of an influx rate of Africans shipped to Europe as slaves (Fage, 1969). Fage (1969) reported that approximately 15 million native Africans were transported to the “new world” in the years 1450 and 1900. Slave trade during the period of colonisation was linked to countries such as England, Portugal, France and Spain as major players in the business. The Du Bois Institute dataset shows that approximately 4,033 slaving voyages to America alone were recorded at that period.

In Nigeria, the historical background of kidnapping with the inclusion of slave trade began during the period of colonisation. Whilst some records trace the history of kidnapping to the agitation by the Niger Delta people against undue exploitation of the region. Akpan (2010) asserted that the origination and historical background of kidnapping could be traced to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In his view, he further reported that kidnapping was linked to slave trade imposed in the Niger Delta region. Ryder (1959) and Lloyds (1967) demonstrated that the active recruitment of young persons through abduction was done in the Niger Delta. In Ryder's account, he reported that the trade of the Benin Kingdom and its port of Ughton on the Upper Benin River from the preliminary visits of the Portuguese was about 1485. He further showed that the period of the Dutch activities to when the British Empire took over in 1897 kidnapping was perpetuated in a large scale. Akpan (2010) crystalized that kidnapping emerged as a consequence of total neglect of the Niger Delta by the multinational corporations and the

failure of governance in the fourth republic. According to Oyemwinmina and Osazuwa (2016), foreign investors as well as citizens were severely insecure to operate businesses subject on the unrelaxing kidnapping operations in many regions of Nigeria.

### Statistics on kidnapping in Nigeria

According to Hiscox Group (2011), Nigeria is ranked the 6<sup>th</sup> highest recorded on kidnapping. Adebata (2016) articulated that kidnapping of foreign nationals in exchange for ransoms was most prevalent in Nigeria. In 2014, the kidnapping of 276 school girls by the Jihadist group Boko Haram heightened the fears of Nigerians which was followed by the kidnapping of 110 girls in Dipachi. Adebata (2016) reported that no fewer than seven people including five expatriates were declared kidnapped by suspected militants in Calabar. Efeizomor (2017) highlighted that gun-men abducted a catholic priest in-charge of St. Patricks Catholic Church, Eku in Ethiope East Local Government Area of Delta State and a ransom fee of 10 million naira was demanded. Edike (2009) observed that in the southern region of Nigeria, namely: Abia, Enugu, Ebonyi and Imo States have been under the scourge of kidnapping, which is particularly hinged on kidnapping the rich. Chidi and Uche (2015) recorded that the cases of kidnapping were very high. They reported that about 353 cases of kidnapping were recorded in 2008 and 512 cases in the year 2009. The data harmonized by the Nigeria Police Force highlight that in 2009, kidnappers got approximately N15 million as ransom fee and between 2006-2008 it was estimated N100 million.

Kidnapping case	Year	Location
Professor Mabel Kamene Titi-Okonjo	2012	Delta State
Journalist with Nigeria Television Authority	2013	Ondo
276 Chibok Students	2014	Borno
Ese Rita Oruru	2015	Bayelsa

Rev. Fr. John Adeyi	201 6	Benue
Mr. Donatus Duru	201 7	Lagos
11 Schoolgirls at Government Girls Science and Technical College Dipachi	201 8	Yobe
Chinese Expatriates Sun Shicin & Mr. Way Quing	201 9	Ebonyi
80 Islamic pupils	202 0	Katsina
279 girls at Government Girls Science Secondary School in Janegede	202 1	Zamfar a
Bride to be abducted	202 2	Plateau

#### **Field Survey, 2022**

#### **Socio-economic implications of kidnapping in Nigeria**

The above table shows clearly that kidnapping has become a social problem across the nation. Kidnapping has however taken a multidimensional approach and however cutting across social status in the context of victimology. We strongly believe that kidnapping has a deep socio-economic implication in Nigeria. Firstly, the huge amounts in the form of ransom fees paid to kidnappers implicitly brings about a great depletion of families' means of survival. A family who pays a huge amount of 50 million naira is most likely not going to be financially responsible in the long run. In some cases, family members of victims of kidnapping might pick up criminal careers in order to survive. It is also perceived that kidnapping has led to the disruptions of school activities in Nigeria. Take for example, the Dipachi and Jangede schools where students were kidnapped, this customarily impaired the learning process in those schools. Invariably, students were left at home without being educated and more so leading them to pick up criminal careers. More so, kidnapping has taken the dimension of kidnap of foreign workers which has great economic implications. We assert here that those activities have a way of reducing the economic viability of regions. In the

Niger Delta, many servicing oil companies have relocated because of the frequent kidnapping of their workers and militant operations. In addition, owing to the widespread of kidnap cases nationwide, many Nigerians are frightened to setup industries that would gainfully engage youth in the country. In the year 2008, many owners of filling stations in Benin City were abducted because it is a commonly held view that owners of such businesses have huge financial resources. We move further to demonstrate the spate of kidnapping in connection to its socio-economic implications under the following:

- I. There is evidence to show that kidnapping has become a problem in many African states particularly Nigeria, because it is perceived to have been inherited from the colonial masters. This has brought about a widespread of kidnapping in many African states because it was indoctrinated by the imperialists. It is a commonly held view that Africans have adopted the approach used by the colonial masters during their conquest.
- ii. It has also been determined that one of the socio-economic implications of kidnapping is that it reduced investment rates because it has largely increased the state of insecurity nationwide. There are certain regions in Nigeria where kidnapping is commonplace, it is revealed that it has drastically reduced socio-economic activities of those regions. Like in Nigeria, certain international companies have stopped investing and forestalled future investments in the country all because of the fear of being kidnapped.
- iii. There is an implication that individuals have begun to kidnap friends, family members and close associates because of a ransom fee.
- iv. There is a corridor of self-kidnapping in order to make money. It has been reported that individuals have started posing to be kidnapped in order to derive a ransom fee from family members, friends and close associates.

### **Challenges to combating kidnapping in Nigeria**

The challenges of combating kidnapping in Nigeria include the following:

One of the challenges to combating kidnapping in Nigeria is that of politics of

kidnapping. Politics fueling kidnapping has become a fundamental issue in the country for quite some time now. It has been observed that some government activities are enshrined with corruption practices. Many political actors have taken elections as a do or die affair. This implies that when they are unable to fully bribe their way to swing votes their way, they however kidnap their close rival in order to win election. Enobakhare, Omage, and Anyamene, (2015) reported that this is a political form of kidnapping.

It has been reported that there is an issue of lack of solid or adequate information given to the security agents. When someone is kidnapped in Nigeria, the information that gets to the police is not sufficient to track down the offenders. In most cases, individuals are reluctant to divulge information to the police because of fear of being perceived as a suspect of the crime.

Another significant challenge to eliminating kidnapping in Nigeria is that of lack of security gadgets and equipment for police investigation. It has been noted that many at times when the police are about to apprehend a suspect, they have in most cases been impeded by lack of vehicle to chase or having solid gadgets such as CCTV or lie detector to reveal causes and offenders of crimes.

It is known fact that some officers in the Nigeria Police Force are corrupt. It is perceived that oftentimes some of the officers have been seen to collect money from law abiding citizens and any member of the society. This culture has downplayed on their credibility and efficiency to do their job. It is believed that some police officers carrying out stop and search do not check cars that may have kidnapping suspects because their judgment has been faulted by bribes.

One other challenge to combating kidnapping in Nigeria is the idea of poverty shown in the Niger Delta. The unfair share of crude oil earnings has been linked to spur kidnapping in the southern region of Nigeria. In some cases, it started as an agitation against the unfair share of crude oil which has now evolved into several dimensions of kidnapping in the region.

## **Conclusion**

This work briefly examined the trends of kidnapping around the world and thereafter it highlighted the conceptual definition of kidnapping, historical



background of kidnapping, statistics on kidnapping, socio-economic implications of kidnapping and challenges to combating kidnapping in Nigeria. This work was able to present some of the integral issues hindering the eradication of kidnapping in Nigeria which is significantly linked to insecurity, politics and the Nigeria Police Force.

### **Recommendation**

This paper having examined the historical development of kidnapping in light of its socio-economic implications. This paper suggests that the police culture of bribery should be promptly addressed so that police duty of stop and search should not implicitly represent a method of money making. In other words, modalities should be put in place to regularly monitor, check and discipline offending officers. We also recommend that officers should be subjected to periodic and timely trainings on proper behavioural disposition. In other spheres, the unending issue of militancy in the Niger Delta should be tackled from its root. We strongly believe that town hall meetings should be instituted for major stakeholders to address the problem. We reckon with a poor economy being one of the major drivers of a colossal state of unemployment. In this regards, it is recommended that government should partner with private sector to establish industries across states in Nigeria. This means reducing the gigantic taxes commonly given to an already fragile capitalist state. Lastly, technical and vocational skills should be encouraged in schools in order for young people to harness skills to enable them start an enterprise of their choosing after mastery. This would help reduce the spate of kidnapping a friend, neighbour, colleague and even self-kidnapping in connection to economic motive of kidnapping.

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