

Rising Kidnapping Incidents in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja: An Overview of Its Threat to Safety of Lives and Property

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Abstract

The focus of this paper is to bring to the fore the reality of and rising cases of kidnappings as an existential threat to safety of lives and property in the Federal Capital territory, Abuja. The study postulates the Kidnappings and abductions have emerged in the FCT as it is in several other parts of the country. Criminality and ritual killings, political ambitions, lack of requisite consequences for offenders, general insecurity, and involvement of security agencies, unemployment and poverty were identified as some of the causes. Loss of money in the payment of ransom, emotional and trauma for both victims and their loved ones, decline in the number of potential investors, forced/early marriage of victims and above all, deaths were identified as consequences of kidnappings. Data for the study were obtained from secondary sources including text books, academic journals and credible online sources while the rational choice and the broken window theories were adopted. The study concludes that the Federal government and the FCT administration must synergize in providing an enabling environment for job creation, there must be transparency and decisiveness in dealing with suspected kidnappers in order to help restore public support and confidence in the people and visitors alike, to address kidnappings in the FCT, insecurity in neighboring states such as Nasarawa, Kaduna and Niger must be confronted frontally, intentionally and sincerely, activities of security personnel should be brought under strict scrutiny to fish out bad eggs and promote security and peace education in school.

Keywords: Kidnappings, Victims, Criminality, Federal Capital Territory, Consequences

Introduction

Rising insecurity in the form of kidnappings in Nigeria is gradually becoming a new normal and an anathema to the peace and safety of innocent citizens. News of kidnappings in Nigeria has become so frequent that they no longer make the headlines. Kidnappers have struck on our highways, streets, churches, mosques, farms, airports, schools, estates and other residential areas. No one in today's Nigeria is completely immune from being a victim of this crime. Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) has had its fair share of incessant kidnappings of residents and commuters in the last ten years. Abdulkabir (2017) opined that even though incidences of kidnappings are as old as man, his existence and society itself, it has

become one of the fast spreading, violent and dangerous crimes in our communities and cities. In the past decades, the South-South region otherwise referred to as the Niger Delta region was the hotbed of kidnap activities in Nigeria. This unfortunately has spread to Abuja in the past six years and with the rising cases of banditry in the north central states of the country. The decimation of criminal elements in the north east and the northwest has been identified as partly responsible for migration of bandits and other criminal elements into the fringes of the FCT (Abdulkadir, 2017). The fringes seem to provide a safe haven where little or nothing is known about them and their family members.

Residents of satellite towns in the FCT,

including Kubwa, Kuja, Gwagwalada, Tugan Maje, Abaji, and Bwari, all have their unpleasant accounts of kidnap incidences in their communities. For instance, in February of 2022, a journalist with The Punch newspaper, Okechukwu Nnodim, was abducted from his residence in Kubwa (Kalu, 2022). Several of such kidnaps go unreported and undocumented, begging for a researched and verifiable attention since most of the scholarly publications on kidnappings in Nigeria are centered on the Niger Delta region, the north east, north west and the north central without any particular focus on Abuja, the Federal capital Territory. An Abuja-Kaduna train was attacked on March 28, 2022 by bandits in Katari, Kaduna State and hundreds of passengers traveling from Abuja were kidnapped. Other victims were either killed or injured. On June 19, 2022, the lifeless body of a young lady was found around PW Bridge in Kubwa, Bwari Area Council, in Abuja. The victim was cut into pieces, packed in a bag and dumped at the river bank in the area (Kalu, 2022).

In early 2009, the remains which appeared to be that of a lady was found under a bridge in Wuse Area of Abuja. Her vital organs such as eyes and breasts were removed. In the Wuye District, three bodies were found dumped in a river after they were butchered. Also, seven mutilated human bodies were discovered between Area 1 and Berger Roundabout. There are many other similar cases not known to the general public (Alhassan & Bashir, 2009). Abductions, violent and ritual killings in several districts and communities in Abuja are becoming worrisome to residents, visitors and relevant authorities of the capital city.

In 2022, well over 69 Nigerians met their untimely and preventable deaths and 194 abducted in 194 criminal attacks carried out by criminal elements in Abuja (Sanusi, 2023). These included the Kidnap of 7 persons including a National Youth Service Corp (NYSC) member on December 6 in the Kubwa area of the city, gunmen abducting a male resident in Maitama and killed one person, bandits attack in the Abaji area during which a government employee was killed, and a herdsman that was abducted by gunmen in the Kwali area of Abuja. On April 20, kidnappers

abducted 4 family members in the Kuje area of the FCT (Sanusi, 2023). Similar cases which were never reported abound probably because the victims are mostly ordinary Nigerians or those who work in the informal sector.

In recognition of the urgency and serious threats kidnapping possess to the security and welfare of the people, the Senate of the Federal Republic of Nigeria on 22nd February, 2023 passed a bill which seeks to amend the Terrorism (Prevention) Act, 2013, as well as prohibit payment of ransom to kidnappers in the country. The bill prescribes death sentence for kidnappers in a case where the victim dies. The Senate believes that this will serve as further deterrence and protect lives and property which is the primary responsibility of any government.

This study is motivated by the need to do a scholarly account and analysis on the rate of kidnappings as an emerging crime in the FCT in the last five years thus bridging the gap occasioned by dearth of literature on this threat to the lives, peace and security of residents of the Federal Capital Territory.

Conceptual Discussion

Kidnapping like several other social science concepts has no universal definition. Ani and Ndubisi (2014) defined kidnapping as the act of taking a person or group of persons into captivity in order to achieve a defined aim. It is an unfortunate event whereby a human being is forcefully carried by another or group of persons (abductors) who maybe armed with dangerous weapons, to an unknown location against the will of their victims for selfish reasons (Abdulkabir, 2017). Sam (2009) sees kidnapping as the seizing and use of force to take away human beings against his/her will for alternate wants or achievements. On its own part, the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (7th Edition), defines kidnapping as the act of taking somebody away illegally and to keep him or her as prisoner, especially in order to get money or something else in return for the victim.

There are common denominators in the foregoing definitions. Kidnapping is forceful, against the will of the victim, and it is unlawful. It is an illegality perpetrated by criminal elements that could even be close associates, friends and loved ones. The victim is denied his

or her rights to freely move, associate, seek or obtain medical attention and engage in legitimate means of livelihood. Many victims have died in the process leaving their loved ones traumatized and facing hardship occasioned by the loss of their breadwinner to kidnappers. Section 364 of the Criminal Code Act in Nigeria states that any person who:

1. Unlawfully imprisons any person, and takes him out of Nigeria without his consent; or

2. unlawfully imprisons any person within Nigeria in such a manner as to prevent him from applying to a court for his release or from discovering to any other person the place where he is imprisoned, or in such a manner as to prevent any person entitled to have access to him from discovering the place where he is imprisoned, is guilty of a felony and is liable to imprisonment for ten years.

In every geo-political zone of Nigeria, there are at least two major security crises, and we have reached a sad state where the Nigerian military was, as at the month of December 2019, deployed to carry out policing duties in every state of the federation and the FCT. Kidnap for ransom has become a lucrative business in Nigeria (SB MORGAN, 2020). Intelligence analyzed data spanning the period of June 2011 to the end of March 2020 and using a collection of public sources, police and media reports, as well as SBM's extensive (research network spread across the country. What was found shows that between June 2011 and the end of March 2020, a whopping sum of at least \$18.34 million was paid to kidnappers as ransom in Nigeria (SB MORGAN, 2020). Some of these ransoms were contributed by friends, relations, colleagues and sometimes members of the same faith expression as both victims' relations and their communities were eager to get back their loved ones alive.

Kidnapping is further illustrated to be of two types: one is simple and the other is aggravated kidnapping. While simple kidnapping involves moving a person to a substantial distance without the victim's consent using force or fear, the aggravated kidnapping consists of physical, psychological torture and deprivations which are rampant in Nigeria (Abraham, 2010). The phenomenon is illegal, unacceptable and further typifies the weakness and failure of the state in

protecting lives and property of citizens who despite being tax payers are also left to pay ransom for their release and freedom.

Methodology

This paper relies on secondary data, including text books, related academic journal publications, newspaper publications and credible online sources.

Theoretical Explanations

This paper adopts two theories: Rational Choice theory of Cornish and Clarke (1986) and the Broken Window Theory as proposed by James Q. Wilson and George Kelling (1982). The rational choice theory can be traced to "classical criminology" which assumes that the behaviour of an individual is the product of the choice he has made. The theory posits the following assumptions:

1. The individual is a rational being that decides and acts to maximize self-benefits. The individual acts in ways that will benefit him more. Consequently, an individual would naturally jettison a behaviour that he thinks will give no benefits in return.
2. Individual choose their preferences based on their understanding of what is best for them at the time. Behaviour such as crime is motivated mainly by the desire to maximize pleasure and minimize pain (Bentham, 1948 cited in Beauty-Cyr (2015). Abell (2000), postulated that individuals "do the best they can, given their circumstances as they see them". However, the best of the individual may not be the best for the objective mind. Circumstances therefore, have influence on behavioral patterns of individuals who ordinarily would act differently given different circumstance.
3. An individual's action is concerned ultimately with his welfare referred to as "self-regarding". The individual's behaviour is guided by benefits or utility derivable from such behaviour.

The Broken Window Theory credited to Wilson and Kelling (1982) states that little signs of untreated disorderliness

and anti-social activities in a community or society, such as a broken window, are an encouragement to petty crimes which ultimately leads to more serious crimes and criminality such as armed robbery, car theft and kidnappings. The theory suggests that crime fighting methods that target minor anti-social activities including pick-pocketing, loitering, vandalism, etc., before they metamorphosed into serious crimes would help create or engender law and order. In other words, crime fighting efforts should be proactive and focused on prevention.

The lack of consequences of several documented and undocumented crimes in Nigeria is an incentive for criminal element in society and a discouragement for the hardworking Nigerians who earn legitimate incomes and are law abiding. The consequences of no consequences are impunity on the streets, homes; and both in the public and private sectors.

In Nigerian local parlance, impunity refers to “nothing go happen”, “nothing go sele” and a general “I don't care attitude”. No arm of government is spared-the executive, legislature and the judiciary). This has fostered vices such as corruption, bribery, lack of diligence, absence of due process and infighting among public officials (Owasanoye, 2014). Deriving from the assumptions of the Rational Choice Theory, kidnappings in Nigeria is motivated by factors such as personal benefits from ransom paid by families of victims, circumstances prevalent in the society such as unemployment and poverty, greed and erosion of our noble cultural and societal norms of hard work and integrity.

Causes of Kidnappings in the FCT

Kidnappings in the FCT are largely driven by five common and interwoven factors traceable to the city's satellite towns and slumps. These factors are summarized as:

1. **Criminality:** People are kidnapped for rituals and sex, forced marriage, political vendetta, slavery, murder or assassination, sale, unlawful activities,

and for other purposes (NCRB, 2014). Abuja is a city with several urban slums inhabited by mostly the poor and neglected who must eke out a living in any way possible, including taking to crime. Taylor (2006) postulated that crime is the fault of a social system whose institutions do not work equally for all its members. Abuja is a city that seems to have catered more for the politicians and urban rich to the detriment of its poor. The gulf between rich and poor is growing, and thanks to the internet (which has increasingly made the world smaller) and global media, everyone can see how the rich are living. It breeds and fuels resentment among the poor and a desire for a bigger share (Group, 2012).

2. **Unemployment and poverty:** In Nigeria, as at the last quarter of 2020, general unemployment is put at 33.3 % while youth unemployment is put at 42.5% (NBS 2023, Q1). Poverty necessitated by unemployment constitutes a major strain on living conditions of the average Nigerian and the Abuja residence, pushing to the youths to deviant behaviour such as kidnappings and adoption. For (Ekechukwu, & Osaat, 2021), economic deprivation and a sense of desperation have planted the seeds of kidnapping as a quick way of getting money in poor communities. It can then become preferred way of life, even when legal alternatives become available. Besides, Inyang and Abraham (2016) posited that Nigeria has an army of young people who make their living on the streets with the government having no social welfare package for them. This gives them impetus to commit crimes without remorse.

3. **Politics in Nigeria** appears to be a do-or-die affair and politicians would do literally anything, including kidnapping and related crimes to win elections and to take control of what has been called “national cake”. Ibeanu (1997) confirmed that politicians recruit idle hands hired for

political-thuggery and abandon them after achieving their aim, leaving these thugs with unfulfilled promises. Consequently, the used and dumped frustrated armed youths will have to figure out how to survive by kidnapping relatives of these politicians (Ugwuoke, 2011).

4. Lack of consequences: minor crimes grow into serious ones if perpetrators are not arrested expeditiously, prosecuted and justice meted out to the offender. Situating this with the Broken Window Theory, the lack of punishment for kidnappers over time has made it look attractive for potential criminals who believe they can commit similar crimes and go scot free. Kelling and Wilson (1982) observed that a signal of indifference and lack of consequences, leads to increased fear of crime and weakening of social controls, thus paving the way for bigger transgressions.
5. General insecurity: threats to security of lives and businesses have been on the increase in the last two decades. Economic and social dysfunctions have contributed to waves of criminality, terrorism, ritual killings; abduction and kidnapping of citizens including women and children have become the bane of public safety. According to Chinwokwu (2014) all the indices for criminality are prevalent in the country which include population explosion with its attendant unemployment, corruption, gross indiscipline among politicians, kidnapping, poor wages, poor living conditions, poor health care delivery, inadequate public transportation and housing infrastructure. In Addition, Abuja shares common border with states like Kaduna, Nassarawa, Kogi and Niger that have been epicenter of kidnappings and related crimes in the past two years (Rotberg, 2002), relates to the above indices as signs of a weak and failed state.
6. Involvement of security agencies: - security agencies have been accused of

complicity and insincerity in the fight against insecurity across the country. In Nigeria in general and Abuja in particular, kidnapping has continued to worsen in recent times because of the complicity and participation of security agents, some of the security agents are part of the kidnapping. They are involved; they are in the pay list of the kidnappers (Ezinwa, 2019). It is a worrying perspective when state agencies, financed with tax payers' money and who are supposed to protect lives and properties are alleged to be complicit in such illegality.

Consequences of Kidnappings

This paper has identified five broad consequences of kidnappings in the Federal Territory, Abuja. These consequences affect both the victims, their relations, businesses and the entire community.

Psychological Challenges: Most kidnapped victims experience traumatic disorders, particularly when no medical treatment is administered after their release. For instance, victims of kidnapping are susceptible to emotional stress, trauma and stress related disorders. They may become psychologically impaired and experience nightmares, flashbacks, confusion, memory loss, agitation, irritability, and insomnia, avoidance of certain places or situations, headaches, depression, anxiety, fear, emotional detachment (Olafioye, 2021).

Socio-economic: The socio-economic consequences of kidnappings in Abuja are very huge. Victims and their families suffer loss of money through the payment of ransom, depending on the "Kidnap Ransom Value" of the kidnappee. Okoli & Agada (2014) posited that a Kidnap Ransom Value (KRV) is what is described as "the strategic worth of a kidnappee", which, in essence, makes the kidnappee a worthwhile kidnap target. The underlying logic of the kidnapping business is that the victim is worth a good ransom value and that he/she has the capacity to pay, whether by self or proxy. Some families and friends go as far as borrowing to bail their relatives out from kidnappers' den. The victim's work-place and

productivity is also affected adversely by his or her absence (Inyang, & Abraham, 2013).

Kidnappings have crumbled family businesses from where monies were sourced to pay ransom and the consequences include job losses, unemployment and poverty as Inyang & Abraham (2013) observed that in many cases, it is often the bread winners of families that are usually targeted. The economic and social implications of kidnapping and its auxiliary psychological and emotional trauma are our collective nightmare (Peterside, 2022). It is a nightmare not only to the victim but also to relatives, friends and the community at large.

Loss of lives: Several victims of kidnapping in the FCT have paid the supreme price, particularly, kidnappings that are executed for ritual purposes where the victims have 99% chances of being killed. The dynamics behind kidnapping for rituals is totally horrible. This is because the ritual kidnappers cut off human body in parts, taking away vital organs like head, heart, breast, arm, eyes, legs, and genitals for the spiritualist (Oyewole, 2016b). According to Beacon Consulting report (2023), about 70 persons in Abuja lost their lives to abductors in 2022, including women and children. Mutilated human body parts have been found in various areas of the capital city, including Wuse, Kubwa, Garki, and Wuye with all linked to kidnappings and rituals by the FCT police command (Alhasan & Bashir, 2009; Sahara Reporters, 2023). This is scary particularly for would be visitors and investors who need a safe and secure environment for their businesses to thrive.

Lack of investments: Kidnappings scare investors who would rather take their investments to a safer economy. It de-markets in the comity of nations, promotes negative perception of the country on the international scene, with its negative consequences on trade, tourism and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). It has often led to loss of investment capital, closure of businesses, and unemployment etc. (Okoli, & Agada, 2014). Insecurity in the form of kidnappings makes the investment environment deplorable for everyone. No investor can be comfortable in an environment where it is evident that anyone with some

ransom value can be a victim. According to Ajufo (2013) ...businesses are in comatose, settlements are displaced, and investments are constrained, while people live in fear amid abject poverty due to low productivity and rising unemployment (Ajufo, 2013). Every form of insecurity in Abuja, including kidnapping is bad for investment.

Child/Early marriage: Young female victims of kidnapping have been forced into child or early marriage which is a violation of their freedom of choice. Any human being that is less than 18 years is considered a child. Nigeria is home to over 23 million child brides; 2 in 5 young women were married in childhood (UNICEF, 2022). Clark (2004) opined that the child brides are married to older, more sexually experienced men with whom it is difficult to negotiate safe sexual behaviours, especially when under pressure to bear children. Forced marriages deny these young girls their right to education, employment, and empowerment and plunges them into preventable state of poverty.

Conclusion

The most scientific and pragmatic approach to stem the tide of kidnappings in the FCT is to identify both the remote and immediate causes of the menace. It is a common saying that "a problem once identified is half solved". Having identified some of the causes, this study makes the following conclusions and postulations:

1. Victims of kidnappings must undergo thorough medical examination and therapeutic treatment after their release from captivity. This is to address any post traumatic disorder and other diseases resulting from their period of captivity.
2. The federal government and the FCT administration must urgently begin to create the enabling environment for job creation that will cater for the needs of young Nigerians who cannot find opportunities to earn a living. Provision of regular electricity would promote self-employment and go a long way to addressing the unemployment situation in the capital city.
3. There must be consequences for crimes and criminality. A situation where arrested suspects are only paraded before

newsmen with no further information on any punishment meted out to them must change. According to the theory of the broken windows, crimes thrive where there are no consequences for minor offences. After most incidences of kidnappings and abductions, the Nigerian police and other security agencies would, predictably so, assure Nigerians that they are “on top of the situation”. However, the facts on ground are mostly different with no evidence of actions that can deter people with criminal intentions

4. To address kidnappings in the FCT, insecurity in neighboring states must be confronted frontally, intentionally and sincerely. Some of the cases of kidnappings in Abuja were said to have perpetrated by criminal elements from neighboring states like Kaduna, Niger, Kogi and Nassarawa that have recently become the hotbed of terrorism and kidnappings.
5. Activities and operations of security agencies must be put under tighter scrutiny to forestall incidences of compromise among the security agencies. In Ezinwa, (2019) postulation observed that in Nigeria, kidnapping has continued to worsen in recent times because of the participation of security agents, some of the security agents are part of the kidnapping, some of whom have been arrested and accused of gun running and supplying sensitive information to kidnapers.
6. Security Education- governments at all levels, including the FCT should promote peace advocacy, enlightenment and education to equip citizens on behaviours that enhance their safety. A good knowledge of actions to take in the face of threats to lives and property, the language of peace; and unlearning stereotypes, religious and ethnic biases are strategic with long run benefits.

It has become evident that kidnapping as a violent crime (undesirably so) is now a reality of an aspect of the daily lives and activities in Nigeria's capital city, Abuja. The motivation

might vary from what primary drives kidnappings in the Niger Delta and other regions of the country but statistics indicate that cases of kidnappings in the FCT have consistently been on the increase in the last ten years. Chapter 2, section 14 (2b) of the 1999 constitution as amended states that, the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government. The death of 69 persons and abduction of 194 persons in one hundred and ninety four attacks in 2022 by criminal elements in Abuja and who were still at large call for serious attention by both the FCT administration and the federal government, security agencies and well-meaning Nigerians. More so, the fear of such criminality and insecurity affects businesses and other economic activities which may not operate optimally. According to Nwosu (2023), economic security is a value enjoyed where people or society is protected and safe from disruptions of their means of livelihood, harm or danger.

Transparency and decisiveness on the part of the authorities concerned in dealing with suspected kidnapers will help in restoring and building public support and confidence of residence and visitors alike. Security is a value for which serious nations and leaders strive to enhance and preserve for the good of the greater majority. Its absence is an existential threat to humanity and all we hold and preserve dearly. Security of lives and property is an essential source of happiness, patriotism, development, justice and national unity (Nwosu, 2023). Kidnapping, as emerging as it may be in the FCT must be dealt with by both kinetic and non-kinetic approaches before it assumes worsening dimensions.

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