THE MENACE OF KIDNAPPING AND THE COPING STRATEGIES ADOPTED BY FEMALE HEADED RURAL HOUSEHOLDS IN BATSARI LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF KATSINA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract
This study investigates the scourge of kidnapping and the coping strategies adopted by rural female headed households to survive the menace. It looks at the causes of kidnapping, the forms it takes and its effects on rural women. The study examines the coping strategies adopted by rural female headed households to survive the difficulties of kidnapping. Data for the study was collected using secondary sources such as journals, reviews, gazettes, books amongst others. It was established that the activities of kidnappers have negatively affected the livelihood means of female headed households in the study area. They therefore adopt various strategies to survive. It was therefore recommended that both the federal, state and local authorities should focus on reducing tensions between herders and farmers that have led to destruction of lives of the people. One way they could do this is by expediting implementation of the national livestock plan. They should also support dialogue between the Hausa and Fulani, the region's two communities most closely tied to farming and herding, respectively. In addition, they need to improve security and law enforcement in the region in order to curb criminality and bolster its ability to protect citizens, as well as to step up efforts at addressing environmental and economic issues underlying the violence. In addition, Government should give conditional grants to widows generally and rural female headed households in particular whose husbands were lost as a result of banditry in order to alleviate their plight and help them cope better.

Keywords: Batsari Local Government Area, Coping Strategies, Female, Household, Katsina State, Kidnapping, Menace and Rural

Introduction

Kidnapping and violent crimes are the trending social problems that are ravaging rural communities in Batsari local government. Until recently, rural communities in the local government area were considered haven for people and farmers. The crime rate was low and kidnapping was at an infinitesimal level. This has now changed as the phenomenon has become a social problem in the

local government. According to Dodo (2010), kidnapping is a crime of seizing, confining, abducting or carrying away a person by force or fraud often to subject him or her to involuntary servitude in an attempt to demand a ransom. The crime involves un-lawfully seizing and carrying away a person by force or fraud or seizing and detaining a person against his or her will with the intent of carrying that person away at a later time (Garner, 2009). The strategies employed by kidnappers in the Batsari local government include the use of telephones to lure their unsuspecting victims or trailing them to any location considered safe for them to strike.

In the criminal law of Nigeria, kidnapping is the taking away or abduction of a person against the person's will, usually to hold the person in false imprisonment, a confinement without legal authority. This may be done for a ransom or in furtherance of another crime. Nseabasi, (2010) posited that kidnapping in Nigeria can be in different forms: the first form comprises of the ethnic militia who employ kidnapping as the major weapon of agitation from oppression, exploitation and environmental degradation. Another form is dislodged militias and other criminals that engage in kidnapping as a means of survival. The last form of kidnappers are not militants but elements in the society that engage in any venture they consider lucrative. Other recent and digital forms of kidnapping have since emerged; terrorists or political revolutionaries like the Islamic militias (Boko haram) who employ kidnapping as a tactic to extort or seek concessions from the government and the digital or online kidnapping.

The act of kidnapping pose serious development challenge to the people, residents and farmers in Batsari Local Government Area and Katsina State at large. For some time now many persons and farmers have continued to suffer in the hands of the kidnappers. While many who are heads and bread winners for their households have been taken away, many have been killed thereby forcing their spouses to become bread winners for such households. This social milieu has remained unabated and for such families to cope they deploy various coping strategies. This study therefore focused on identifying these coping strategies with a view to assessing them.

Clarification of concepts

Kidnapping

Kidnapping is defined by various scholars with varying degree of successes. According to Inyang and Abraham (2018) kidnapping is the forcible seizure, taking away and unlawful detention of a person against his/her will. It is a common law offence and the key part is that it is unwanted act on the part of the victim. Another definition is that offered by Fage and Alabi (2017) who conceived kidnapping as a forceful or fraudulent abduction of an individual or a group of individuals for reasons ranging from economic, political, and religious to self-determination. This implies that while political and economic factors can instigate kidnapping, the economic reason is the most common predisposing factor of the phenomenon.

Uzorma and Nwanegbo-Ben (2017) 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. It involves taking a person from their family forcefully without their consent with the motive of holding the person as a

hostage and earning a profit from their family. From the foregoing, the definition of kidnapping has no one best way to describe it, but it is clear that for an act to be deemed kidnapping, it shall involve coercive movement of a victim from one place to another, detention or seizure of that person be it a child or an adult. That is why Inyang and Abraham (2018). Added that it is legally regarded as a restriction of someone else's liberty which violates the provision of freedom of movement as enshrined in the constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria, where every other law takes its cue from. Ikpang (2011) argued that in kidnapping, the criminal motive for removing the victim is irrelevant for the crime to be committed. He noted that it is sufficient if the accused intends to deprive the victim of his freedom of movement or victim's parents or custodians of their control; the motive of the accused in depriving the victim of his freedom is to demand a ransom for his release, Akpan (2011) noted that kidnapping applies to all situations where persons are forcibly seized and transported to a destination were they are held against their will in unlawful confinement which may involve the use of force.

For this work, the concept of kidnapping is used to mean the act of seizure, and detention unlawfully of a person by force and fraud involving his removal to an undisclosed location against his will and usually for use as a hostage or to extract ransom.

Coping strategies

A coping strategy refers to a series of adaptive mechanisms used individuals or groups to survive series of adverse conditions exposed to at particular periods in their lives. They are a whole gamut of methods and techniques deployed by people to pass through trying periods in their lives. Coping strategies may be short term or short term. They are short term if they are deployed in alleviating the situation over a short period of time. Coping strategies are long term if they are deployed to adapt to a situation over a long duration of time pending the improvement of the situation. In this study, the concept of coping strategies is used to refer to those activities undertaken by single headed households to withstand challenges posed by kidnapping activities in Batsari Local Government Area.

Rural area

A rural area is an open swath of land that has few homes or other buildings, and not very many people. A rural area population density is very low. Many people live in a city, or urban area. Their homes and businesses are located very close to one another. In a rural area, there are fewer people, and their homes and businesses are located far away from one another. Agriculture is the primary industry in most rural areas. Most people live or work on farms or ranches. Hamlets, villages, towns, and other small settlements are in or surrounded by rural areas. Wildlife is more frequently found in rural areas than in cities because of the absence of people and buildings. In fact, rural areas are often called the country because residents can see and interact with the country's native wildlife. Throughout the world, more people live in rural areas than in urban areas. This has been changing rapidly, however. Urbanization is happening all over the world. In the United States, the Census Bureau classifies a rural area as a town with fewer than 1,000 people per 2.6 square kilometres (square mile), and surrounding areas with fewer than 500 people per 2.6 square kilometres (square mile).

In the United States, rural areas take up about 98 percent of the country but are home to only 25 percent of the population. In Ethiopia, a less-developed country where agricultural jobs are much more common, 87 percent of the people live in rural areas. In general, a rural area is a geographic area that is located outside towns and cities. For this study a rural area is defined as an area with fewer than 1, 000 people per 2.6 square miles, whose members' primary occupation is farming and is usually located outside the city.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical frame work for this study is the structural strain theory of Robert Merton. Merton (1968) insisted that crime in any society is as a result of an in balance between structural goals and means. Merton proposed that the lower class individuals are most likely to experience strains because they aim for the same goals as the rest of society, and have blocked opportunities for success. Strain as in Merton's formulation can be linked with kidnapping in Nigeria because what produces strain is blocked opportunity to success.

The theory suggests that mainstream culture is saturated with dreams of opportunity, freedom and prosperity. Such dreams become a powerful cultural and psychological motivator towards success. Merton also used the term anomie to describe a situation where there is a discrepancy between what the society expects of its citizens, and what those citizens could actually achieve. Therefore, if the social structure of opportunities is unequal and prevents the majority from realising their dream, some of them will turn to illegitimate means (crime) in order to realize it. Others will retreat or drop out into deviant subcultures, gang members, urban homeless, drunks and drug abusers (Siegel, 2008).

Merton argue that Cultural goals of success are proposed for all members of the society, but not all groups have equal access to the means for their attainment. This discrepancy between cultural prescription and access to desired goals create an acute sense of strain on the individual level. Merton proposed that individual strain is most likely among lower-class members of the society who internalize cultural goals of wealth and statues but recognize blocks to conventional means for their attainment.

The basic assumption of the structural strain theory is that society's structure can create conditions that lead to deviant or criminal behaviour. The theory further assumes that, when there is a disconnect between culturally approved goals and the legitimate means available to achieve those goals, individuals may experience strain. This strain, in turn, can push them towards deviant or criminal actions as they seek alternative ways to attain their desired goals.

The theory identifies five possible ways individuals might respond to this strain:

i. **Conformity:** Individuals continue to pursue culturally approved goals through legitimate means.

ii. **Innovation:** Individuals accept cultural goals but use unconventional or deviant means to achieve them (e.g., turning to criminal activities like kidnapping).

iii. **Ritualism:** Individuals abandon the pursuit of cultural goals but rigidly adhere to the legitimate means.

iv. **Retreatism:** Individuals reject both cultural goals and the legitimate means, often retreating into drug abuse or alternative lifestyles.

v. **Rebellion:** Individuals reject both the cultural goals and the legitimate means and instead advocate for new goals and means to achieve them, often through revolutionary or countercultural movements.

Overall, the structural strain theory helps explain how societal structures and inequalities can lead to deviance and criminal behavior as individuals navigate the tension between their aspirations and the opportunities available to them. According to Olalenye (2010) a lot of youths who are not working due to lack of adequate skills, lack funds and therefore get involved in various criminal activities such as kidnapping. Moreover, kidnapping is a crime that is perpetuated to gain ransom from the victim or victims' relatives. Kidnapping in Nigeria can therefore be linked to structural strain theory of Robert Merton, because it tries to show that over emphasis on economic goals exert pressure for deviance.

Causes of kidnapping

Hazen and Horner (2016), noted that people engage in kidnapping for two obvious reasons which are:

i. Political bargaining

ii. Economic gains

These two aspects give a broad and vivid classification of kidnapping in order to clearly understand the underlying factors of the menace, especially regarding the idea of ransom. However, apart from these two broad reasons stated above, many have been kidnapped and abducted by criminals for different reasons and intentions, which include illicit intercourse, rape, selling of human parts for ritual sacrifice, political revenge, slavery, ransom-takingg, marriage, murder or assassination, sale, unlawful activities, and for other purposes (NCRB, 2020).

Considering the type of kidnapping recently experienced in Nigeria, it is obvious that unemployment is a major cause of kidnapping. Some frustrated graduates, after searching for jobs for up to three or more years, decide to engage in this atrocity for the sole aim of survival. Ibrahim and Mukhar (2021) maintained that lack of available employment opportunities among the youths also plays a fundamental role in the rise of kidnapping. Similarly, Inyang and Abraham (2016) observed that Nigeria has a large number of adolescents living and making a living on the streets without help from the government and besides, the government is not interested in helping. The fact that they are neglected gives them the morale to terrorize the society without remorse.

In Nigeria and many other developing countries in Africa and Asia, the political factor is another cause of kidnapping. Many politicians engage the services of youths to kidnap and deal with their political opponents. Zannoni (2003) call this type of kidnapping as "political kidnapping" where the overall objective is to promote the political aims of a particular political group or movement. In this case, a ransom is usually demanded to obtain money for the group in order to fund their campaign and other activities. The Catlin Group (2017) added that political extremists use kidnapping as a political weapon and as a source of financing.

In addition, religious and other political extremists use kidnapping as political weapons and as means of financing their activities Catlin Group, (2020). Economic deprivation and a sense of desperation have planted the seeds of kidnapping as a way of getting money in poor communities.

Another cause of kidnapping is greed and inordinate ambition to amass wealth as well as corruption amongst Nigerians. Adibe (2019). Asserts that corruption among the Nigerian Police Force contributes immensely to kidnapping in Nigeria. He insisted that the police contribute to kidnapping through hiring their weapons to kidnappers who then use them to terrorize members of the community. Olebera (2019) observe that politicians contribute to kidnapping by arming the youth to help them secure electoral victory and thereafter leave them with the weapons which they use in threatening innocent people and kidnapping them.

Poverty is another major factor in the kidnapping dilemma. According to Ekpeyong. Ukommi, and Agha (2010), Nigeria in spite of its abundant mineral resources is considered as one of the poorest countries in the world. The World Bank report of 2021 indicated that over 70% of Nigerians live below the poverty line. The report added that a substantial proportion of this number lives in the country's northern region. The highest number of out of school children also lives in the north. When the most populated region in Nigeria is also home to the highest number of the poor and out of school children, kidnappers may easily find an army of willing recruits. This partly explains why kidnapping and other criminal tendencies are rapidly thriving in the north.

The Coping Strategies Adopted by Rural Female Headed Households to survive the challenges of kidnapping

Rural female headed households adopt several coping strategies aimed at mitigating the challenges faced by kidnapping. These are discussed below:

Productive asset depletion

Several female headed households sell their livestock at a low price, kill calves (to save their mother), and slaughter adult animals as distress coping strategies – i.e. those which result in the depletion of productive assets. Many families had to resort to slaughtering and eating their livestock, including their breeding stock, because they were unable to travel to markets to sell their animals because of the activities of kidnappers. It was however found that a lower proportion of households in target communities relied on these asset-depleting coping mechanisms during the period kidnapping activities were rampant in the area. Many refuse to deplete their stock citing various reasons.

Migration-related coping strategies

Migration with livestock to far away safer areas in search of pasture was found to be a widely used and preferred coping strategy that enables single female headed households adopt in order to maintain the integrity of their herds in terms of number and health. This is thus considered a 'positive' or adaptive strategy as it is reversible. As conditions change, pastoralists can change their location, and migrate in search of more favourable conditions. It was however found that this coping was more

favourable for female headed households that have matured male members who could move the herds to distant land where kidnapping was not prevalent.

Source of livelihood diversification

Many of the single female headed households in target areas reported having to rely on engaging in several income generating activities with their children to survive. Moving away from their homes to IDP camps or staying with relatives in towns provide them with the opportunity to diversify to new sources of income. While others have diversified with members starting businesses and getting new jobs. Some individuals engage in more than one job where they work for longer hours but with increased incomes. Such jobs include, working on farms, teaching children at home, baby seaters and nannies, cleaning of homes and washing of clothes for families. Still, not everyone has the skills to get a new job or the resources to start a business. Such people engage in begging those businesses that some female headed households engaged in include, hawking of food items, sale of food in makeshift shops, sale of groceries, etc.

Humanitarian Assistance from Government, N.G.Os and other International Organizations

This has been one of the coping strategies by single female headed households in the study area. The federal, state and local government officials from time to time share food stuff, money, toiletries, clothing and other personal effects to the people displaced as a result of kidnapping activities. Additionally, cash donations and conditional cash transfers from the government and well to do individuals as well as NGOs proves to be an important source of coping by these families.

Neighbourhood Collaboration

The neighbourhood is an important staging ground for collaboration to meet needs, as some of the key challenges people face can only be addressed locally. The household conversations in the study highlighted how people found ways to work together, particularly to address the lack of basic services such as electricity, water, firewood, health and other basic needs that single female headed households cannot afford on their own. They therefore cooperate to provide them. For example, when households need water, they purchase a water tanker to fill their tank. Often, households can no longer afford to purchase a whole tanker, so several neighbours split the cost and share the water and even give free of charge to those who are less privileged.

Other key facilities available at the neighbourhood level are the local shops embedded in the community where people are known, enabling households to have a line of credit they could use and pay at a later date. While this practice is part of business, it is also part of the social connection and social capital maintained on both sides. For firewood, families cooperate by coming together and going out in groups to fetch firewood in the company of escorts. Through this way, they may overpower kidnappers during attacks

Changes in consumption pattern

Most households had changed their food consumption pattern during this time.by reducing the quantity of non-staple foods such as meat, eggs, vegetables, dairy products, and fruit. Fresh food was

not available. The few that was available was unaffordable for most households. Single headed households also cut down quantity of food consumed. They also reduce spending on nutrition and family well-being. Indeed, households adjust to reduced food purchasing power by shifting to cheaper, less diverse diets. Women tend to buffer the impact through extreme strategies: reducing their own consumption to feed others, selling personal effects such as clothing, plates, beddings, and even taking on risky jobs etc to ensure their children eat.

Concluding Remarks/Recommendation

Views on how to resolve the problem of kidnapping are usually envisaged on a number of issues which are assumed to be useful in eliminating the recent spate of kidnapping in Nigeria which has led to untold hardship to the rural people especially women and children. According to Osaghae (2009), many state houses of assembly and the national assembly have enacted laws against kidnapping in order to alleviate the hardship faced by the people especially rural dwellers to no avail. Many of these laws prescribe various punishments for violators including the death penalty for kidnappers. However, this has not deterred offenders. Nwadiora and Nkwocha (2015) on their part opined that the enactment of laws alone will not stop offenders from engaging in the act until concrete steps are taken to improve the living conditions of the people.

The registration of SIM cards is an effort to curb the incidence of kidnapping in Nigeria. Ugwulebo (2017) therefore noted that the global system of mobile communication (GSM) telephone service providers should fast-track their data capturing exercise. He explained that this will help the security agents to know who is making the call and the location of the call and once ownership of numbers can be identified, handsets can be tracked, and their geographical locations become identifiable - then any call made to solicit for ransom would help to locate the kidnappers. Lawal, etal (2017) suggested that government should re-organize the security agencies to take them through a new re-orientation via training. Meanwhile, one of the major problems of security agents is training in order to match the well-armed criminals. He is therefore of the view that police training must include infantry, weapon handling, and anti - terrorist training in order to match the well-armed criminals. He also opined that prison warders must co-operate in the fight against kidnapping because criminals that act outside are known by the inmates.

Bergen (2020) suggested that the application of community policing initiatives in Nigerian villages would obviously allow the various communities and police departments to work together to reduce crime of violence such as kidnapping and to improve the quality of life of Nigerian citizens. He added that addressing the issue of kidnapping in Nigeria would require a multifaceted approach that involves various stakeholders and strategies. Other possible solutions include:

Improved Law Enforcement: Strengthening the capacity and effectiveness of law enforcement agencies to investigate and respond to kidnapping cases is crucial. This includes better training, equipment, and coordination among different agencies.

Community Engagement: this will require promoting community involvement in crime prevention through neighbourhood watch programs that would help deter kidnappings and other crimes.

Economic Opportunities: Creating job opportunities, vocational training, and entrepreneurship programs can provide alternatives to criminal activities for marginalized individuals thereby reducing their susceptibility to involvement in kidnappings.

Education and Awareness: Implementing educational programs that raise awareness about the negative consequences of kidnapping and crime can help change social norms and attitudes.

Judicial Reforms: Improving the efficiency of the judicial system, ensuring fair trials, and increasing the likelihood of convictions for kidnappers can act as a deterrent. Government should implement the reports of judicial commissions of enquiry into civil disturbances in the country.

International Cooperation: Collaborating with neighbouring countries to share intelligence, coordinate efforts, and track cross-border criminal activities can be effective in combating kidnapping.

Stricter Border Control: Enhancing border security measures to prevent the movement of criminals and victims across borders can help contain kidnapping activities. In Nigeria especially where boarders are very porous would require stricter enforcement of entry and exit laws. The current situation where anybody can enter Nigeria even without proper documentation is not helping matters.

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