EFFECTS OF KIDNAPPING –RELATED HEALTH RISKS ON THE WELFARE OF VICTIMS IN KAJURU LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF KADUNA STATE, NIGERIA

Patrick Joseph Matthias[1], Prof Usman Yusuf Alhaji[2], Daniel Leku Ishaya PhD[3], Dr Hilary Yacham Zaggi[4], & Farida Mohammed[5]

[1,2,3]Department of Sociology Faculty of Social Sciences
Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria
[4]Department of Sociology Faculty of Social Sciences
Kaduna State University, Kaduna, Nigeria
Corresponding Email: patrickjosephmatthias@gmail.com

Abstract

Kidnapping poses a very serious health threat to victims and their families in Nigeria, particularly in Kajuru Local Government Area of Kaduna State. This local government area has suffered severe continued bandits and kidnapper's attacks. Majority of victims have been displaced from their ancestral communities seeking refuge in some Internally Displaced Persons' Camps (IDPs) which are mostly primary schools. Kaduna State has no single permanent IDPs camp built by any of the past and incumbent government. Kajuru Local Government Area is famous with long term incessant conflicts between the indigenes (Adara) and the settlers who are mostly Hausa/Fulani ethnic groups. The kind of kidnapping in this region is mostly that of religious type of kidnapping than ransom kidnapping. This qualitative study aimed to investigate the health risks associated with kidnapping on victims 'well-being. The study adopted qualitative method encompassing Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and In-depth Interviews (IDIs) for the collection of data with 72 participants. The data were analyzed using ethnographic analysis of Morgan's approach of 1968.The findings highlight the severe physical and emotional health risks associated with kidnapping, including injuries, illnesses, psychological trauma, and mental health disorders. Ethnographic analysis highlighted the long-term physical and psychological impacts on victims. The study recommends government, non-governmental organizations, communities and individuals to aggressively and massively initiate comprehensive support services, including counseling programs, rehabilitation, psychotherapy, and social support and welfare to help victims recover from their trauma and rebuild their lives.

Keywords: Kidnapping; Health; trauma; Ransom; Victims

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1. Introduction

Kidnapping is a global phenomenon affecting millions worldwide. According to the United Nations (2020), approximately 40,000 people are kidnapped annually. Kidnapping has significant physical and mental health consequences, including anxiety, depression, and post-

traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (WHO, 2020). Kidnapping victims have nuance experiences while in the hands of kidnappers as some victims encountered near death experiences due to physical brutality and psychological trauma meted upon by their ruthless abductors.

In Africa, kidnapping is prevalent, particularly in countries with conflict zones like Somalia, Sudan, and Nigeria and among others. The African Union (2020) reports that kidnapping affects over 100,000 people annually. Nigeria, Somalia, and South Sudan are among the countries with the highest kidnapping rates (ISS, 2020).

Nigeria has experienced a surge in kidnapping cases, with over 1,500 reported incidents in 2020 (NPF, 2020). Kidnapping has become a lucrative business, with ransom payments exceeding ₦10 billion annually (SBM Intelligence, 2020). The Nigerian government has implemented measures to combat kidnapping, including establishing the National Security Adviser's Office (NSAO) and the Nigeria Police Force's Anti-Kidnapping Unit (AKU) Federal Ministry of Information (FMOI, 2020).

Kaduna State is one of the most affected states in Nigeria, with over 5052 reported kidnapping cases in 2020 Kaduna State Government (KDSG, 2020). The rate of kidnapping in Kajuru Local Government Area has increased from 10 persons per 1000 to 18.0 in January 2024 making it a hotspot for kidnapping, accounting for 30% of cases and 15,292 victims kidnapped between 2020 and 2024 (KDSG, 2020).

To accentuate this, for instance, Oyinlola et al., (2020) adds that 60% of kidnapping victims in Nigeria experienced anxiety mental disorder and depression, aggression insomnia and among others. According to Akintoye et al., (2020) more than 40% of kidnapping victims suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Similarly, Abdullahi et al (2020) reported that 30% of victims in Kaduna State have experienced physical injuries due to brutality experienced in kidnappers' captivity or during the process of kidnapping the victims). This study is carried out to answer the research the question as thus: what are the health risks associated with kidnapping on victim in Kajuru LGA of Kaduna State.

2. Literature Review

Kidnapping can have severe and prolonged health challenges on victims encompassing physical injuries, psychological trauma, emotional distress, insomnia, nutritional deficiencies, health complications, suicidal thoughts, substance abuse and among others. These effects can have lasting impacts on the victims' physical and mental health, demanding prompt medical attention and support.

Building on this, in a study conducted by Jibrin (2021) titled: Long-term Psychological Effects of Kidnapping on Children in Kaduna State to examine the long-term psychological effects of kidnapping on child victims' longitudinal study with psychological assessments of child victims over five years. The study revealed that Persistent anxiety, behavioural issues, and learning difficulties in child victims could be attributed as severe effects of kidnapping among victims.

The study concluded that, kidnapping has profound and lasting psychological effects on children and therefore, recommended that there should be Long-term psychological care and educational support for child victims. Jibril's study failed to also examine the physiological and socio-economic effects of kidnapping on the victims. However, this research work underscores psychological, physiological and socio-economic effects of kidnapping on the victims.

Similarly, Eze (2020) conducted a study titled: Long-term Health Consequences of Kidnapping in Kaduna State to examine the long-term health consequences of kidnapping using longitudinal health assessments and interviews with victims. The finding of the study showed that chronic health issues, including hypertension and psychological disorders. The study concluded that kidnapping has lasting health impacts on victims and recommended long-term healthcare support and monitoring for victims in Kaduna State. Eze's finding too did not include physiological effects of kidnapping on victims however; this research work observed that kidnapping also affects the physical wellbeing of the victims.

This study is in consonance with the study conducted by Ojo (2022) titled: Kidnapping and Its Impact on Mental Health in Kaduna State with the aim to investigate the mental health consequences of kidnapping on victims of kidnapping using psychological evaluations and interviews with 30 victims. The study revealed that high prevalence of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD) were among the effect experienced by some of the victims of kidnapping. The study concludes that kidnapping severely affects mental health of victims of kidnapping and therefore, recommended comprehensive mental health services and awareness programs for all victims of kidnapping in Kaduna State.

In another similar study carried out by Abiola (2020) titled, Kidnapping and Its Impact on Public Health in Kaduna State. The study aimed to investigate the impact of kidnapping on public health by using public health assessments and interviews with health officials. The study revealed that increased public health challenges and reduced access to health services were the major effect of kidnapping among public health officials. The study concluded that kidnapping

negatively impacts public health in Kaduna State and recommended strengthening public health infrastructure and emergency response capabilities in Kaduna State.

In a similar study conducted by Fadeyi (2020) titled: The Impact of Kidnapping on Health Services in Kaduna State. The study aimed to investigate the effect of kidnapping on health services using surveys and interviews with healthcare providers and patients. The study revealed that kidnapping disrupted health services, increased stress among healthcare workers were among major effects of kidnapping on the health services in Kaduna State. The study concluded that kidnapping negatively impacts health service delivery in Kaduna State and therefore, recommended enhancing security for healthcare facilities and support for healthcare workers in Kaduna State.

In another study conducted by Ayomide & Joseph (2023) titled Nature and pattern of Kidnapping for Ransom in Ekiti State, Nigeria. It was gathered that majority of the respondents constituting 52% revealed that kidnapped victims that are raped by the kidnappers can contract sexually transmitted disease and among other life-threatening diseases like; Human Papilloma virus (HPV), Herpes, Human immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), Chlamydia, Syphilis, Gonorrhoea, Trichomoniasis. Even though, 48% of the respondents didn't subscribe to the view of the majority. It is sacrosanct to note that the first three aforementioned diseases cannot be cured while the last ones can be curable with early detection and treatment.

3. Methodology

Research Design and Methodology

This study was a community-based qualitative study conducted across 6 political wards out of 12 political wards in Kajuru Local Government Area of Kaduna State. The following political wards were purposively selected for the study includes: Kasuwan Magani, Kajuru, Kufana, Idon, Rimau and Maro. Victims of kidnapping were reached out through snow-ball sampling technique. In each of the political ward, the researcher first arrived at the community leader's house and introduced himself and the purpose of his presence in the community. The researcher demanded if there were kidnapping incidents in their community. In each of the 6 political wards, the researcher interviewed 10 victims identified by the community members using in-depth interview guide designed by the researcher. 1 key informant comprising the community leader and 1 religious leader were also interviewed in each of the political ward purposively selected. Before the commencement of the interviews, the researcher sought for their permission of the interviewees to record their responses using his mobile phone. A total

of 60 victims were interviewed using the in-depth interviews while 12 key informants participated in the key informant interviews

4. Results and Discussions

Majority of the interviewees across the political wards affirmed that kidnapping has become ubiquitous threat, leaving victims with physical scars that serve as a constant reminder of their ordeal. One of the victims of kidnapping was aptly captured expressing his ordeal in the hands of the kidnappers while in their captivity. He says as thus:

> *I never knew I would come back alive due to the physical brutality I experienced while in kidnappers' captivity. I suffered severe physical injuries to the extent that my hands were paralyze due to the way I was tied hands and legs with ropes for longer hours. I could not use the hands for like two months even after I was secured from captivity by own people. Imagine me being fed, bathed like a little child. As a matter of virtually everything was for me until the services of a physiotherapist was engaged to help me recuperate faster. While in the camp, there were other victims whose hands were broken while others their legs were broken because of shear ruthlessness. The brutality victims of kidnapping experience while in captivity know no bound but thank God at last, I survived.*
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> ***25-4-2024 Maro Ward***

Majority of the interviewees across the 6 political wards of Kajuru Local Government Area affirmed that kidnapping is associated with mental health of victims. Majority of the victims of kidnapping interviewed identified certain factors that contribute to the development of mental health challenges, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety disorders, social stigma and others. Among the community and religious leaders interviewed as key informants reported that most victims of kidnapping suffered severe brutalities while in captivity of the kidnappers due to delay payment of ransom. They recounted how most victims went through neardeath experiences in the hands of their abductors. One of the victims interviewed in Kasuwan Magani says as thus:

> *Kidnapping is a life-threatening phenomenon which has bedeviled our entire total existence. Kidnapping involves a direct threat to one's life, which can evoke intense fear, anxiety, and helplessness among us. We are all living in perpetual fear now in this community because we do not know when the bandits and kidnappers will invade our community and kidnap us again. I do not want to recall what I went through in the hands of the kidnappers. I went through hell in their hands while in their camp. I was tortured, starved for days, ill-treated by the kidnappers. I almost lost my life while in their camp. It is by the grace of God I am still alive today.*
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> ***25-4-2024 Kasuwan Magani Ward***

Being kidnapped can be agonizing and dehumanizing. Kidnapping can be degrading as it reduces one's dignity irrespective of victim's socio-economic status. This assertion is buttressed by one of the victims interviewed in Kufana. The victim recounted that when one is in the hands of kidnappers; he loses control of his life and can lead to some kind of feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness. The victim was captured saying:

> *Life in the captivity of the kidnappers can be so painful and annoying. No matter socio-economic status in the society, once you're in the hands of the kidnappers you're powerless and nothing before these hostile barbarians. Your life is being regimented as if you're in military barracks. They way kidnappers always point at their guns at their victims usually made their victims feel hopeless and despair. Even among the community members there is fear of being kidnapped and so this makes people choose where to go to, what time to return. Kidnapping has made people powerless and hopeless even their personal homes because they not know when they would invade their homes.*
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> ***25-4-2024 Kufana Ward***

Many kidnapping victims experience physical and emotional abuse, which can exacerbate the traumatic impact. Not only that, but it also leads to separation from family and friends, leading to feelings of isolation, loneliness, and disconnection. The unpredictable nature of kidnapping, including uncertainty about one's fate, can create chronic stress and anxiety. When one is held captive by kidnappers, one's fate is hung in a balance because one does not know when, how is getting released from captivity.

Another thing is that, one does not know whether he is leaving the camp alive or not. This alone be so stressful and frustrating. In some cases, victims may experience trauma bonding with their captors, leading to complex emotions and conflicting loyalties. Kidnapping victims may face social stigma, shame, or guilt upon release, which can further exacerbate mental health issues. This kind of scenario is usually associated with rape leading to unwanted pregnancies especially among female victims. The pains and shame of being raped and carrying an unwanted pregnancy can be demoralizing, agonizing and stigmatizing.

Kidnapping is a traumatic experience that can have a profound and lasting impact on victims' psychological well-being. The sudden and violent separation from loved ones, coupled with the uncertainty and fear of the unknown, can trigger a cascade of psychological reactions. Majority of kidnapping victims interviewed in all the political wards of Kajuru Local Government Area reported that victims of kidnapping in Kajuru Local Government Area often experienced intense emotional distress; including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). A participant, a 35-year-old male resident of Kajuru Local Government Area, Kaduna State, was a victim of kidnapping in 2020. He was held captive for three weeks

and witnessed physical and emotional abuse. The participant agreed to share his experiences and insights on how kidnapping affects the psychological well-being of victims in Kajuru. The participant reported experiencing intense fear, anxiety, and helplessness during his captivity. He described the experience as thus:

> *My situation is like living in a nightmare and being trapped in a situation with no control. The trauma and anxiety I went through in the hands of my abductors still persisted even after my release, affecting my daily life and relationships.*
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> ***25-4-2024 Kajuru Ward***

The participant expressed feelings of mistrust and betrayal towards his community and the government. This was what he says:

> *While kidnappers' captivity, I felt that the authorities failed to protect me and my family, leading to a sense of vulnerability and powerlessness. This also made me struggling to trust other people in my family, friends, and members of my community, due to the trauma I went through.*
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> ***25-4-2024 Kajuru Ward***

Kidnapping can be associated with emotional distress and depression among victims. The psychological trauma experienced by victims can be enormous which affects the psychological well-being of the victims. A certain interviewee, the vice-principal of Government Secondary School Idon Hanya said he was kidnapped and spent two weeks in captivity before gaining freedom after his ransom was paid. He described experiencing intense emotional distress, including feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and despair. According to what he says:

> *I have been struggling to cope with the emotional pain and feeling overwhelmed by my emotions. I also struggled with depression, which affected my motivation, appetite, and sleep patterns. Everything about me was not pleasant. I felt as if that was the end of the world because I was hopeless.*
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> ***25-5-2024*** **Idon Hanya**

Kidnapping can also lead to social isolation and stigma among victims especially involving the female victims who experienced rape leading to unwanted pregnancies. Such female victims are usually overwhelmed by feelings of suicide due to the stigmatization experienced in the hands of family and community members. A certain female Idon Hanya victim reported as thus:

> *While I was in the kidnappers' captivity, I was asked to choose between making love to the kidnappers to get my freedom and refusing their advances to continue to remain in their captivity. When I refused, they continued to rape every day until my ransom was paid. It was when I was released, I realized that I was pregnant for the bastards. That kept traumatizing me and felt socially isolated and stigmatized by my community. I felt that people viewed me as "damaged goods" or "a victim," which made me feel ashamed and embarrassed with no fault of mine. The social*

isolation and stigma increased my emotional distress and made it harder for me to seek help

25-5-2024 **Idon Hanya**

Research has identified several factors that contribute to the development of resilience and coping mechanisms in kidnapping victims: In all the political wards majority of the victims confirmed that individual victims of kidnapping can be supported to become optimistic, hopeful, and adaptable personalities to be able to develop better coping mechanisms. Secondly, it was also gathered that if strong social support is all given to victims of kidnapping by their family members, friends, and community can provide emotional support, practical assistance, and a sense of belonging among victims.

Thirdly, many interviewees affirmed that effective coping skills, such as problem-solving, emotional regulation, and cognitive reappraisal, can help individuals manage stress and trauma. This implies that if victims of kidnapping are given the opportunity to develop coping skills, they cannot manage stress and trauma. Fourthly, making victims of kidnapping to find their lives having meaning, purpose, or significance in the experience, can help them make sense of their trauma and develop a sense of control. Lastly, when victims cultivate sense of spiritual beliefs and practices, it can help provide comfort, solace, and a sense of transcendence among them.

Kidnapping is a traumatic experience that can have enormous effects on a victim's physical, emotional, and psychological well-being. Resilience refers to the capacity to withstand, recover, and adapt in the face of adversity. Coping mechanisms are the strategies, techniques, and behaviours that individuals use to manage stress, trauma, and other challenging situations.

Despite the overwhelming health challenges, many kidnapping victims develop remarkable resilience and coping mechanisms that enable them to survive and even thrive after their bizarre ordeal. All the interviewees from the in-depth and Key informant interviewees confirmed that despite the trauma and challenges kidnapping victims encountered in the hands of the bandits and kidnappers, the participants reported developing resilience and coping mechanisms. One of the victims from Rimau Political ward spoke bitterly stressing how he was kidnapped from the farm and spent nearly all the farming season due to delay in settling his ransom. Upon his release from captivity, he says as thus:

Thank God for his mercy and sufficient grace upon me for surviving in the hands of the kidnappers. Initially when I was released from captivity, I thought I would not be able to find solace but my faith, family, and friends, all helped me to heal and recover.

25-5-2024 Rimau Ward

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has provided valuable insights into the traumatic experiences of kidnapping victims. The findings highlight the severe physical and emotional health risks associated with kidnapping, including injuries, illnesses, psychological trauma, and mental health disorders. Based on the findings highlighted in this paper, the following recommendations are made as follows:

i. Government should establish comprehensive victim support services, encompassing counselling, and rehabilitation.

ii. Government should give financial assistance to the victims of kidnapping to offset financial expenses.

iii. Free medical treatment should be given to victims of kidnapping who have undergone severe brutalities and post-traumatic stress disorders (PTDS).

iv. Policy reforms to address the root cause of kidnapping by address poverty, and unemployment improving education and healthcare and enhancing governance and accountability

v. Government should reinforce security measures and law enforcement in the affected areas through increased surveillance, intelligence gathering, and community policing.

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