

## **“SCHOOL-GIRLS KIDNAP” SYNDROME AND GENDER EQUALITY IN NORTHERN NIGERIA**

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**ABSTRACT:** In the wake of incessant kidnappings of school children in Northern Nigeria, concerns over the number of out-of-school children and its attendant consequences have grown substantially. While girl-child education in Northern Nigeria is confronted with socioeconomic, religious and cultural impediments, insecurity has added to the list and threatens to reverse the gains made. Leveraging the rational choice theory, this paper examines the trend in the kidnap-for-ransom (K4R) incidents in Northern Nigeria with emphasis on school-girls kidnap which has become pervasive and threatens the achievement of Goal 5 (Gender Equality) of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Secondary research design was adopted and data were sourced from extant literature to substantiate the arguments of the paper. Content analysis was adopted in analysing the data. Consequently, the paper discusses the trend in K4R in Northern Nigeria which has targeted female-dominated schools leading to endless victimisation of school-girls in the region. The paper attributes the act to the rational choice of kidnappers towards achieving their sundry motives. Should the trend continue, the paper argues that school girls in the region would be denied access to education. Given the role of education in achieving gender equality, the paper concludes that the inability of girls to receive quality education under the prevailing atmosphere of insecurity would hinder the achievement of goal 5 of the SDGs. Thus, the paper recommends cogent ways to rejig schools' security architecture in order to safeguard the girl-child from imminent attack by kidnappers which would eventually lead to balanced gender representation.

**Keywords:** Education, Gender Equality, Girl-Child, Insecurity, Kidnap, Rational Choice

### **INTRODUCTION**

A decade into the fourth republic, Nigeria's travail with insecurity took a new turn with the onset of the Boko Haram insurgency. The insurgency which began in Borno State (Northeast Nigeria) in 2009 spread to other parts of the country displacing, majorly, women and children (Raji, Adekayaoja, Agaku, Akujobi, & hamzat, 2021; Aliyu & Abubakar, 2022). Furthermore, the relics of the old (Boko Haram) conflict have transformed into new seeds of conflicts in other regions such as the North Central and the North Western regions of the country (Onuoha & Akogwu, 2022). The new seeds have germinated into new versions of insecurity manifesting as farmer-herders conflict, communal disputes and violence, and to armed banditry and kidnap-for-ransom, etc. (Pally, 2020). The conflicts have taken various undertones such as ethnic cleansing attempts, Islamization of Nigeria, tricks to gain or retain political power, economic domination agenda, etc. The foregoing interpretations of the conflict are not only parochial and inaccurate, but they have shielded a true understanding of the dangers of the changing conflict

in the region. The different phases of the conflict hold varying degrees of implications for social life and national development which requires careful and adequate scholarly attention. In this academic piece, efforts are invested in exploring the phenomenon of kidnap-for-ransom in northern Nigeria and its implications for Goal 5 (Gender Equality) as encapsulated in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Given the history of kidnapping in Nigeria, the crime is reported to have evolved through numerous phases to its current phase of kidnap-for-ransom. Albert, Danjibo, and Albert (2020) explain that kidnapping in Nigeria began in around 1999 in the Niger Delta region where the act (in its first stage) was used as a tactic to seek political solutions to the social problems of the Niger Delta region. The authors stress that kidnapping evolved in three stages. In the second stage, kidnappers demanded ransom (in addition to political solutions) from the relations of hostages before their release. And in the last stage, the act of kidnapping itself became a criminal career with no societal-development dimension. Victims of kidnapping in the first phase were mainly the oil expatriates. In the second phase, victimization expanded to the families of expatriates and other wealthy individuals in the society. In the last phase (representing the current situation), all citizens in the country are susceptible to victimization by kidnappers.

The evolution of kidnapping into a full-time criminal career has endangered the lives of many citizens from high-ranking political office holders such as commissioners in various states, clergies and clerics, businessmen, teachers, students, and even to school children who have all been subjected to various episodes of kidnap-for-ransom. The frequency of these kidnaps in the country has shattered the hopes of an end to the phenomenon of kidnapping. The kidnap industry has grown into a very strong organized criminal activity through its robust ransom collection mechanism which has earned it over N650 million between July 2021 and June 2022 (Sanni, 2022). With the growing strength of kidnap-for-ransom in Nigeria, its multidimensional consequences cannot be ignored. This development draws the attention of this paper to unravel the consequences and implications of the incessant kidnap of school girls on the fate of SDG 5 – Gender Equality.

### **Objectives**

The paper seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- i. To examine the gender differentials in the victimisation of students by kidnappers in northern Nigeria;
- ii. To ascertain the effect of the victimization of students on gender equality in the education of youths in northern Nigeria.

### **Conceptual clarification**

The concepts used in this study are operationalized to convey the following intended meanings as conceived by the researchers:

- i. School are formal institutions established for the purpose of learning. The learning process spans across basic levels to tertiary levels. I.e. it includes primary, secondary, and post-secondary schools. Schools are usually established for the purpose of learning and transmission of knowledge guided by an approved curriculum and delivered within a

- stipulated duration. Therefore, school attendance becomes a major yardstick for measuring educational attainment.
- ii. School-girls refer to female students enrolled in schools for purpose of learning and acquiring the expected knowledge which the institution seeks to provide. Schools may be structured to accommodate only males or females. In some other instances, they accommodate both males and females.
  - iii. School-girls kidnap is the deliberate targeting of school-girls by kidnappers for sundry reasons including abhorrence for 'Western' education particularly for females. In most cases, the school-girls are captured and kept hostage until ransom is paid before they are released.
  - iv. Gender is the social differentiation between the two sexes (masculine and feminine) which assigns different role expectation to the different sexes. The differences in gender is founded upon the biological differences of masculinity and femininity where masculinity correlates with the male gender and femininity correlates with the female gender.
  - v. Gender equality is the desire and attempt to achieve an equitable distribution of society's valued resources among the genders in a way that both genders are accommodated without preference to any of the genders. The socially valued resources include education, healthcare, opportunity, income, and power, amongst others. The attainment of gender equality would enable both genders to attain self-actualization through healthy and favourable competition.

### **Theoretical Framework: Rational Choice Theory**

Theories are integral to all sociological explanations. This study is anchored on the rational choice theory as a theoretical framework for understanding kidnapping in schools. Cornish and Clarke (1987) developed the criminological version of the rational choice theory to explain why people choose to engage in a particular kind of crime. The theory kicks off with the premise that every crime committed by an individual is chosen and committed for specific reasons. Therefore, crime is the outcome of an individual thinking through the possible rewards and downsides of a criminal act. To the theorists, the commission of crime is after careful assessment of the criminal act where the 'rewards' are perceived to outweigh the costs. In the process of settling to commit a crime, the individual selects the best option of attaining the desired criminal goal. Four primary decisions (choices) that must be made by an offender in order to engage in a criminal act as follows:

- a. Whether or not to commit a crime;
- b. Whether or not to select a particular target;
- c. How frequently to offend; and
- d. Whether or not to desist from the crime.

The decisions to commit a crime is guided by the above choices which the potential offender must make before the offence is committed.

The crime of kidnapping can be explained using the rational choice theory as illustrated in Okoye et al. (2016). Kidnapping is a crime of rational choice of the kidnapper. The act of kidnapping is carried out with the intent to achieve the personal goals of the kidnappers. The goals in themselves may not be rational. But, the means to achieve such goals are rational and are carefully executed to achieve the goals. Using the rational choice theory, Okoye et al. (2016) explained how kidnapping is a manifestation of criminal desire is. In Nigeria, the

authors assert that kidnapping is a purposive behavior designed to meet the needs of the offender such as the desire to have money, enjoy status or sexual gratification among others. Therefore, kidnapping serves to please the interest of the offenders (kidnappers).

In this study, the same argument is applied. Kidnappers (such as Boko Haram members and other terror groups) abhor western education and are determined to halt its progress and development. Achieving such a target requires consistent demoralization of the attendees of schools through persistent kidnap and demands for ransom. In the course of executing their criminal acts, money and sexual gratifications are also secured. Moreover, because schools are soft targets which can be attacked with relative ease, they have become the frequent targets for kidnappers. The foregoing explanation provides insight on why the kidnappers attack schools, who they target in the schools and why they have been frequent with their attack on schools.

To reduce crime in the society, Cornish and Clarke (1987) suggest increasing the barriers to actualizing the criminal intent. Such barriers should increase the cost of crime and make its benefits unattractive. Although, the theory is relevant to understanding the argument of this paper, it is challenged in its attribution of crimes to rational choice. For example, O'Grady (2011) faults the theory for assuming that persons with the Not Criminally Responsible on account of Mental Disorder (NCRMD) can be said to be rational. Similarly, crimes committed out of anger or vengeance may not completely be a rational choice rather an emotionally triggered reaction. The suitability of the theory in this study draws from the fact that most cases of kidnapping reported are usually accompanied by demands for ransom. Furthermore, the amount generated from ransom payment in Nigeria suggests that the act is born of rationality and not emotions or mental disorder.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The paper adopts a secondary research design wherein secondary data were utilized. Data were extracted from Google Scholar database through the use of keywords that reflect the content of the paper. Thus, "kidnapping in Nigeria", "mass abductions in schools", "insecurity and SDGs", "cases of school girls kidnap in Nigeria" "school-girls kidnap and gender equality in Nigeria" were all used to run searches on the database. Data were also extracted from Amnesty international, the Nigeria Security tracker, Humangle, and the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) to extract relevant information and statistics for use. Similarly, authentic news reports were also utilized to further support the findings in the literature and also provide needed clarifications. Content analysis was used to analyse the data extracted from the utilized sources. Relevant themes to the paper were identified, examined, and utilized in the paper.

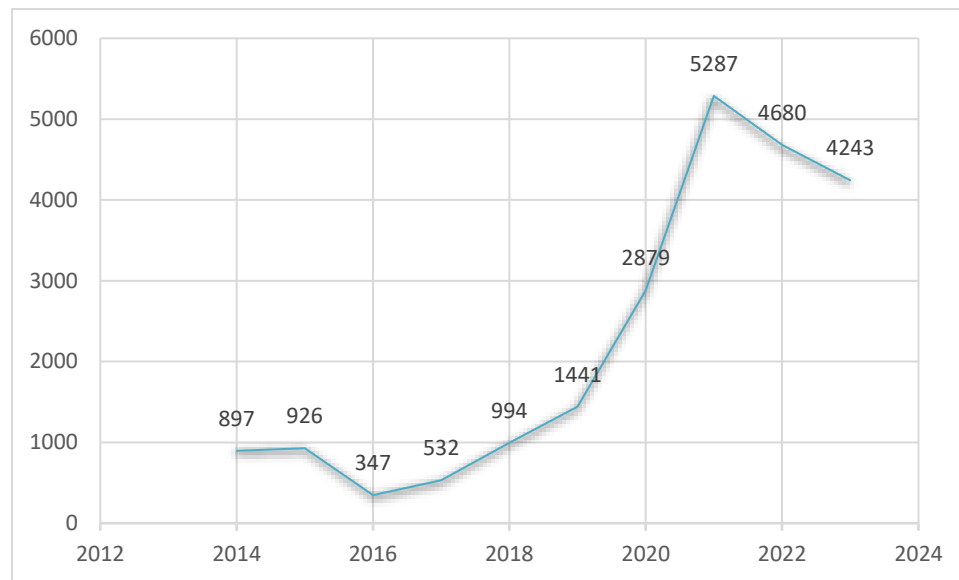
## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **Reported Kidnap Cases in Nigeria and Trends in Girl-Child Victimization**

From the reports on the number of victims kidnapped between 2014 and 2023, it is evident that kidnapping in Nigeria has not only persisted, but has increased tremendously spreading to several parts of the country despite efforts to contain it. Figures of abductions have continued to surge steadily as the uncertain security atmosphere continues to become widespread. In 2021, figures of kidnapped victims peaked with 5,287 people taken into captivity by kidnappers. The 2021 figure alone is more than the number of people kidnapped from 2014 to

2019. The sudden surge in the frequency of kidnappings in the country can be attributed to the outcomes of each successful event of kidnap for ransom. The rate at which ransom is being paid in Nigeria drives the act as kidnappers have taken to demanding outrageous amount which are usually paid by the victims and their relations.

**Figure 1: Number of Kidnapped Victims in Nigeria from 2014 – 2023**



*Source: Nigeria Security Tracker*

While kidnap-for-ransom persists mostly in Northern Nigeria, its high prevalence among schools and higher institutions of learning have become issues of grave concern (Onuoha & Akogwu, 2022). The kidnap incidents in schools is a reflection of the situation in the country at large. Many schools in the northern States of Nigeria such as Adamawa, Borno, Kaduna, Kebbi, Niger, Yobe, and Zamfara, have witnessed several incidents of mass abductions of students from schools. Onuoha and Akogwu (2022) observe that the Chibok School mass abduction orchestrated by the dreaded Boko Haram terror group served as the curtain raiser for mass abductions from schools especially in the northern part Nigeria. The trend in the kidnap of school students has, since then, exploded. Schools hosting girls have become major targets for kidnappers who easily execute their criminal act on the innocent students. Numerous gangs are responsible for the kidnap. All gangs who target schools have targeted female-dominated schools possibly due to the sundry reasons some of which have been explained in the theoretical framework section. Table 1 shows some reported kidnap cases recorded in schools and the number of girls abducted.

**Table 1: Reported School Kidnap Cases and Number of Girls Abducted**

S/N	Year	Case Location	No. of Abductees	No. of Girls	% of Girls
1	April 2014	GGSS, Chibok	276	276	100
2	February 2018	GGST College, Dapchi	110	110	100
3	December 2020	Islamiya School Pupils, Mahuta	80	N.A	N.A
4	December 2020	GSSS Kankara	300 (Boys)	0	0

5	February 2021	GSC Kagara	27 (Boys)	0	0
6	February 2021	GGSS Jangebe	317	317	100
7	March 2021	Fed. Col. of Forestry Mech. Afaka	39	23	59
8	April 2021	Greenfield University Kaduna	23	14	61
9	June 2021	Nuhu Bamali Polytechnic, Zaria	8	2	25
10	June 2021	FGC Birnin Yauri	96	N.A	N.A
11	July 2021	Bethel Baptist High School Kaduna	153	N.A	N.A
12	September 2023	Federal University Gusau	24	24	100
13	October 2023	Federal University Dutsinma	5	5	100
14	October 2023	Nasarawa State University, Keffi	4	4	100
15	January 2024	Apostolic Faith Schools, Emure	9	6	67
16	March 2024	Kuriga Schools, Kaduna	287	N.A	N.A
17	March 2024	Islamic School Gidan Bakuso	15	N.A	N.A

*Source: Adapted from Yusuf (2021); Nasiru (2021); and Hassan Wuyo (2021); Adesina & Ojiego (2023); Amnesty International (2024); Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED)*

Table 1 shows reported cases of students kidnap in Nigeria. The table shows the extent to which school-girls especially in northern Nigeria have been the major victims of kidnap-for-ransom. Records which specify the sex of the victims have shown that girls are mostly affected than boys in the documented cases of kidnap. Of the 17 cases reported in Table 1, victims of six cases were girls. Similarly, 3 more cases involved higher percentage of girls than boys. In the aforementioned cases, girls constituted a minimum of 59 percent of victims. Other cases reported did not specify the number of boys and girls abducted. However, in such cases, both boys and girls are affected. The foregoing cases are exclusive of kidnap cases involving girls of school ages who are kidnapped from their homes. A typical scenario is the case of six sisters who were kidnapped from their residence in Abuja (Sanusi, 2024).

In most cases, the victims are only released after payment of ransoms. However, the additional danger posed to girls in captivity is the incidence of forceful marriage and teenage pregnancy all of which amount to sexually based gender violence (SBGV). Ransom payment determines the duration of stay in the kidnapers' custody. Nevertheless, it does not guarantee living the den alive. For those who are unable to raise the ransom fee, death or forceful marriages have become inescapable. Girls in such situations are used by the kidnapers as sex slaves leaving the young girls traumatized and depressed. Thus, kidnapping in northern Nigeria has turned school-girls to sex slaves and young mothers thereby truncating their future aspirations. It is therefore apt to reexamine the phenomenon of kidnapping in northern Nigeria and its impact on girl-child education.

### **The Impact of School-Girls Kidnap Syndrome on Girl-Child Education in Northern Nigeria**

The school-girls kidnap has become a syndrome in northern Nigeria and its persistence holds far-reaching consequences for girl-child education. Already, girls constitute the higher proportion of out-of-school children in Nigeria (UNICEF, 2022). Thus, the continuous act of kidnapping school girls across schools would further complicate the existing problem thereby further widening the gender inequality between the genders. Today, many parents in northern Nigeria are reluctant to allow their daughters to return to school owing to the rising spate of kidnappings in schools. In fact, some parents have resorted to withdrawing their wards from

schools as a proactive measure to forestall the danger of kidnapping (Gloria & Rwang, 2022; Abe, 2023). Similarly, the closure of some schools in the northern region further adds to the problem of educational inequality between the genders as some students are unable to access alternative schools from their places of origin. Consequently, aside from the parents' reluctance, the school closures have also contributed in making the girls resist attempts to enrol or return to (other) schools (Gloria & Rwang, 2022). These constitute the acute consequences of school-girls kidnap.

On the other hand, there are chronic consequences. Unlike the acute consequences of school-girls kidnap, the chronic consequences are the long-term effects of kidnapping school-girls which may manifest several years after occurrence of the incidents. Kelleher (2011) notes that there is feminization of teaching in Nigeria. In other words, the teaching profession, especially at the early ages, is dominated by female teachers. Consequently, the younger generation who are expected to take over from the present set of female teachers have become endangered and may not be interested in education. This implies that teachers may not be replaced as they wither naturally. This implies that there would be reduced female participation in the teaching profession thereby allowing for male domination. Considering the role of education in human capital development, girls and women would eventually be unable to compete favourably with their male counterparts due to the limited opportunities at their disposal.

### **Implications for the Sustainable Development Goals**

Although the overall interest of this paper is the consequence of school-girls kidnap on Goal 5 of the SDGs, the crux of this paper cannot be addressed without establishing the connection between the fourth (Quality education) and the fifth goal (Gender Equality) of the SDGs. Quality education is a gateway to attaining gender equality and this explains why the goals are in their prevailing sequence. With quality education, girls are afforded the opportunity for liberation and actualization of their professional ambitions. Unfortunately, the spike in kidnappings in Nigeria has crippled the education sector given the unplanned of over 11,000 schools in northern Nigeria with no viable alternatives provided (Abdullahi, 2022). This would inadvertently lead to an increase in the number of out-of-school children and would eventually hamper the actualization of the goal of quality education.

Without quality education, the drive towards gender equality may be severely threatened. This is because education serves as a viable tool towards alleviating poverty among women and ensuring they enjoy improved social security. The prevailing episodes in kidnapping school girls (as illustrated in table 1) implies a reversal in the gains of girl-child education in Nigeria. The gender parity index (GPI) is used to measure the extent of gender inequality on annual basis. As at 2023, Nigeria fell three places below its 2022 rank (from position 134 to 137) in the GPI (World Economic Forum, 2023). The worsening state of insecurity is largely responsible for the downward trend. The report further shows that female enrolment in schools at all levels has dropped behind male enrolment. With barely y years left to the termination of the SDGs, negative indicators such as the poor ranking on the GPI signals the need for more concerted on actualizing Goal 5. An impediment to education constitutes an impediment to achieving gender equality.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the above facts and submissions, the paper recommends the following measures:

- i. Special security arrangements should be initiated in schools generally. However, special attention should be paid to female dominated schools as a proactive measure towards preventing their abduction by kidnappers. Such security arrangement should incorporate use of advanced technology for monitoring and tracking.
- ii. Security arrangement in schools should incorporate community stakeholders as a way to boost the confidence of parents towards enrolling their children in schools. Collective security frameworks designed by the government and the community stakeholders would enhance response to distress and in turn boost the confidence of parents and the prospective students towards attending schools.
- iii. Government, both at federal and state levels, should provide social support services to victims of kidnap in order to ease their reintegration into the society and resuscitate their interest in education. Such support services should cut across medical, psychological and financial services.

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