

**A STUDY OF FACTORS INFLUENCING KIDNAPPING IN
ZURMI LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF ZAMFARA
STATE, NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT: This article examines the factors that influence kidnapping in Zurmi local government area of Zamfara state, covering the periods between 2019–2023. Since the return to civilian rule in 1999, Nigeria has witnessed a catalogue of increased crimes and insecurity. Kidnapping and ransom collection are such, which have bedevilled especially in the Zurmi area of Zamfara state. Kidnapping has great adverse effects on the nation's socio-economic development. The act is closely linked to armed banditry, cattle rustling and armed robbery. The wealthy and low-income earners have been picked up by kidnapers who only free their victims after payments of ransom. This menace exerts enormous and far-reaching economic and social costs. It induces and creates a palpable ambience of fear and despair for all citizens, stultifies economic growth, and hinders sustainable development. This study adopted a mixed method utilising both in-depth interviews and structured questionnaires to identify the factors that influence kidnapping in Zurmi, Zamfara state. In terms of findings, the data revealed that the factors that influence kidnapping in the study area include poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, revenge, governmental negligence of herdsmen's grazing areas, antisocial tendencies, injustice and envy. Other factors include lacking religious faith, breach of trust among people, injustice of leaders, competition among people, desire for luxury, corruption, poor socialization, high level of immorality, poor parental control, drug abuse, lack of awareness, inequality in resource allocation, poor security system, disrespect of tradition leaders, parental negligence, and rampant divorce. The research adopted the Rational Choice Theory (RCT) as its theoretical frame of reference to explain the menace of kidnapping and its consequences on the community. RCT posits that in any course of action, individuals weigh up the likely benefits and disadvantages of each action. Before kidnapers go into the act, they must have weighed the options and concluded more rewards than punishment. In order to address the causes of kidnapping in the study area, the study offered recommendations. These include the need for the governments to create job opportunities for the teeming youth as well as an enabling environment so that private sectors can thrive. Also, there should be proper protection of the identities of the public members that supply useful information to security agencies.

Keywords: Kidnap, Factors, Ransom, Victims, Strategies, Rational Choice Theory, Crimes

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria has witnessed an overwhelming increase in kidnappings involving every level of society and motivated by many reasons, such as financial or political purposes. This menace portends serious negative consequences for the nation. At times, kidnappers hold their captives longer in order to demand huge amounts of money from the relatives of their victims. No one is free from being kidnapped in Nigeria. Every day, many people are kidnapped and forced to pay ransoms in millions; some are killed before they are rescued by their relatives (Kanu & Agbo, 2021).

In line with the above, Radda (2006) explained that the level of insecurity has increased since the return to democratic governance in May 1999. These insecurities are caused by communal clashes, ethnic/tribal conflicts, religious riots/conflicts, militancy and ritual killings, cultism and ethnic militia attacks and farmers-herdsmen conflicts (Akinola, 2016). Similarly, the arrival of the Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast from 2009 to date has fuelled the insecurity landscape, especially in the northern region. The level of insecurity heightened between 2010 and 2019 as farmer-herdsmen clashes evolved into banditry and cattle rustling. In some northern states, this insecurity not only involved banditry and cattle rustling but also included the kidnapping of individuals for ransom.

Also, kidnapping has a great adverse effect on the nation's socioeconomic development (Okorie-Ajah, Nwokeoma & Okpan, 2018). Inyang and Ubong (2013) noted that over the last few years, the wealthy and the income earners have been picked up by kidnappers who only free their victims after payments of ransom. Kidnapping exerts enormous and far-reaching economic and social costs. For them, it induces and creates a palpable ambience of fear and despair for all citizens and stultifies economic growth and sustainable development. It is one major development challenge bedevilling Nigeria today (Okorie-Ajah, et al. 2018). Against the above background, this article examines the factors that influence kidnapping in Zurmi local government area of Zamfara state.

Statement of the Research Problem

Zamfara State seems to have experienced this social menace at a scale unrivalled in other states in the northern part of Nigeria. Zamfara State in northwest Nigeria has been facing a deadly conflict that started in 2012 as a result of clashes between farmers and herders. Gradually, the conflict turned into armed banditry and kidnapping, with the first major attack in 'Yar Galadima in April 2014, where the culprits killed as many as 200 people. Since that time, the armed bandits will raid villages and kidnap people for ransom. No one is safe from kidnapping in Zamfara state, whether in the upper or lower class. Everyone is vulnerable and a potential victim. Armed bandits attack and abduct many in peasant communities at will. They kill and demand millions of naira as a ransom. Kidnapping for ransom continues in Zamfara State despite security reinforcement and billions of naira to improve the security situation (Amnesty International, 2018). This mainly affects the Zurmi Local Government area of Zamfara State. Recently, the acting inspector General of Police revealed that Zamfara State recorded the highest rates of kidnapping in the country in 2019 compared to what was reported as at December 2023 (Zamfara State NIPC, 2024).

On Monday, 28 January 2019, armed bandits attacked a community in Zamfara State, kidnapping a dozen people. The victims include a new bride and some nursing mothers. The incident happened in the Majemawa area in Zurmi local government at about 11:45 pm.

Residents said the heavily armed bandits shot sporadically in the air, scaring residents. Also, on Saturday, 27 January 2019, more than twenty suspected kidnapers stormed a football viewing centre in Zamfara state and kidnapped 7 people. The kidnapers arrived at the viewing centre at 10pm, wearing army and police uniforms, pretended to be genuine security men detailed to guard the viewing centre. Some minutes later they stormed the centre and kidnapped seven people. Another incident also took place on Wednesday, 24 October 2018, when the suspected gunmen abducted twins – would-be-brides in Dauran village in Zurmi local government area of Zamfara state.

Few attempts were made to examine kidnapping, like the study of Victor, Vershima, Felix and Alex (2021). Their study looked at factors influencing kidnapping but could not cover issues pertaining the consequences of kidnapping. While Okoli and Agada (2014) concentrated on kidnapping and national security in Nigeria but did not cover the challenges in controlling kidnapping, they neglected the predisposing factors of kidnapping. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to address that gap in the literature, contributing to knowledge by providing empirical data on the factors responsible for kidnapping in Zurmi Local Government of Zamfara state. It covers the period 2019 – 2023, during which the data collection took place. In line with the above, this article addresses the following research questions: What are the causes of kidnapping in Zurmi local government area of Zamfara state? What are the effects of kidnapping in the study area? What are the recommendations that will facilitate in addressing the menace in the study area?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Kidnapping, as a crime that generally constitutes a disturbing social phenomenon, has numerous drivers. The drivers may vary from society to society. Moreover, even similar factors may exhibit different extents or intensities across different societies. In this part, various kinds of literature on the factors are discussed to give the study a sound bedrock for analysis. Similarly, a theoretical framework was used as a lens with which the factors were gauged.

Conceptualizing Kidnaping

Kidnapping, like other terms in social sciences, does not have a generally acceptable definition and has been defined differently by different scholars. Nwadiaro and Nkwocha (2011:3) defined kidnapping as the “means to seize and detain a person unlawfully by force and fraud and to remove a person to an undisclosed location against their will and usually for use as a hostage or to extract ransom (Nwadiaro & Nkwocha, 2011:3). Another definition, provided by Inyang and Abraham (2013:532) focuses more on the basis of the crime. Kidnapping is identified as the “forcible seizure, taking away and unlawful detention of a person against his/her will” (Inyang and Abraham 2013:532). They further incorporated the end objective of kidnapping by expanding their definition as “an act of seizing, taking away and keeping a person in custody either by force or fraud... it includes that snatching and seizing of a person in order to collect a ransom in return or settle some scores of disagreements against people”. There are three types of kidnappings, according to Nwanunobi (2017). These include express kidnapping, miracle fishing, and tiger disappearances.

1. Express kidnapping: This is a kind of kidnapping that involves the abduction of people to coerce them into emptying their bank account from any available automated teller machines (ATMs) and handing the money to the kidnapers. Later, they may be released unhurt in a lonely place.

2. **Miracle Fishing:** This form is common along the highway through rural areas where illegal roadblocks are erected, and kidnappers are in fake police or military uniforms disguising to be law enforcement agents stopping vehicles and asking drivers to come down for identification, thereby taking passengers based on their appearance and likelihood to mobilise for ransom.
3. **Tiger kidnappings:** It is another form of kidnapping that appears like blackmail. A situation where a family member is abducted and kept hostage to force other member/members of the family to do something contrary to the law in favour of the kidnappers.

After reviewing the above literature, we can conclude that most of the definitions are relevant and apply to Zurmi and Zamfara. Thus, this body of literature helps us in understanding the concept and patterns of kidnapping in Zamfara state. Nevertheless, in Zamfara, kidnapping also involves some economics, and the status of the captive plays a role in the ransom payment. It involves erecting roadblocks with fake police or military uniforms disguised as law enforcement agents stopping vehicles and asking drivers to come down for identification, thereby taking passengers based on their appearance and likelihood to mobilise for ransom. Kidnapping and banditry have undermined human and livelihood security in Zamfara State. For example, in the etymology of kidnapping and banditry in Zamfara State, members of the Fulani group have been misconstrued as purely herders and bandits. At the same time, those of the Hausa extraction were wrongly interpreted as wholly farmers and vigilantes.

Factors Responsible for Kidnapping in Nigeria

Several ideas of causation surround the threat of kidnapping in Nigeria. In contrast, some others contend that it is caused by factors like unemployment, resource control agitation, and religious fanaticism; others conclude that it is political while pointing to a 'get rich quick mentality' among the youth (Olalekan et al. 2018). Without regard to the motive, no man shall kidnap another and demand a ransom. The recent rise in kidnapping instances is particularly concerning. Therefore, a body of literature by Olalekan et al. (2018), Kakwagh and Ikwuba (2010) and Okwuwada (2023) identify some of the factors that are responsible for the unlawful detention or holding of people for kidnapping as follows:

1. **Socio-Economic Deprivations:** The challenge of socio-economic deprivation relates to the issue of unemployment, poverty as well as illiteracy and a lack of access to basic infrastructure such as electricity, water and an excellent environment. Thus, socio-economic deprivation is a limitation to good life. The inability of individuals to live a good life and earn a decent living could lead to the commission of crimes such as kidnapping.
2. **Unemployment:** The persistent unemployment in Nigeria in this 21st century has geometrically increased, and all proactive measures forwarded by the federal government to hold back its menace have failed woefully to the extent that the numbers of unemployed youths continue to increase by the day. Some kidnappers are educated youth, and many even possess college degrees. This is a somewhat unique element with respect to the situation in Nigeria. A significant problem throughout Nigeria is that the country has a large cadre of jobless educated youths (Emanemua and Akintolu (2016) Suleiman, 2016). Similarly, Kakwagh and Ikwuba (2010) (Olalekan et al., 2018), and Okwuwada (2023) observed that a graduate who is unable to secure a job is psychologically bereft of other means of survival. This situation can lead to youth developing a negative attitude towards society and then attributing his or her failure to

society at large. Similarly, Kakwagh and Ikwuba (2010) and (Olalekan et al., 2018) posited differently that due to a lack of employment opportunities and the uncertain future, young Nigerians are forced, as it were, to engage in unorthodox means of survival while others engage in “casual” work which is highly irregular. They also explain that a significant factor in Nigeria’s youth unemployment is population growth. The growth of the labour pool has outpaced the growth of the labour market. Many youths move to urban areas in search of better economic opportunities but do not find them. This is why some will resort to unorthodox livelihoods.

3. **Poverty:** In Nigeria today, poverty is one of the causative spectrums that led many people to turn out to be notorious criminals. Poverty is a financial incapacity or state of lacking basic requirements to live a rational life. Basic requirements such as money, food, water and shelter, among many others, are the scourge of poverty, which demoralised the less privileged to be inflicted with the wrath of anomaly (Suleiman, 2016). According to him, poverty has caused many youths to become disreputable kidnappers due to the abject poverty occasioned by environmental and economic factors, famine displacement from the means of survival, natural disasters such as floods, fire or new projects or the actions and inactions from the leaders of the country. In this respect, many people, out of options, decided to kidnap well-to-do people in the society because the widespread poverty in Nigeria has incurred outrageous predicaments to the lives of many Nigerians.
4. **Political Parochialism:** Another common factor ultimately feeding into the rise of kidnapping in Nigeria is political parochialism. The role of politicians in the upsurge of ruffians and higher killers in Nigeria, especially during the time of political campaigns, has metamorphosed into disparaging kidnappers that obtain ammunition from politicians and use it to capture them when trust has been contravened. Meanwhile, Emanemua and Akintolu (2016) emphasised that the political importance of thugs and hooligans to party aspirants during campaign periods seems to have had a trickle-down and spill-over influence on several innocent citizens. Previously jobless youths who were recruited by political godfathers to cause chaos, steal ballot boxes, and even kidnap viable political members from opposing parties have now taken up their seasonal jobs as full-time, full-time businesses. There is no gain in saying that politicians are the godfathers of kidnappers in Nigeria because they use their money to recruit jobless youths and train them to become monsters in preparation for the incoming election. In order to reduce the vices of kidnapping in Nigeria, politicians should not use their money and influence to conscript youths as political ruffians during the campaigns.
5. **Ritual and Spiritual Proclivity:** Another major cause of kidnapping in Nigeria is the preponderance of “ritual and spiritual proclivity”. Kidnapping for ritual involves killing or severing the body part of abducted persons for the purpose of using it as an object of ritual sacrifice, with the aims of acquiring ritual money, favour, fame, success, power and protection (Oyewole, 2016). Many politicians seek protection and victory in elections from spiritual forces by using rituals, charms and various forms of cultic practices. They use all forms of weapons to protect themselves against assassination and all that characterises the present political terrain (Jegade, 2014). Kidnapping for ritual is an unlawful seizure of a person in order to kill and/or sever part of his or her body for the purpose of ritual sacrifice (Oyewole, 2016). Meanwhile, many people were kidnapped and later recovered, with their heads being cut off, eyes removed, genital and breasts severed, and arms and legs amputated. All these parts of the body are being cut off as ingredients for sacrifice to acquire huge money, political appointments or fame.

6. **Income Gap:** A major contributing factor to the current situation in Nigeria is the drastic income gap in the country. Extravagant images of wealth are flashed before the eyes of the educated but jobless youths. Subsequently, some of these youths desire a method, by any means necessary, to obtain that same level of wealth. Also, the issue is partially aided by the culture in Nigeria, in which no one questions how others acquire their wealth. This lack of economic transparency in Nigeria leads to many youths misunderstanding the economy and instead craving the fastest possible path to riches. As a result of the prevalence of this crime throughout the country, kidnapping has created a state of panic among many travelling Nigerians. The culture has swiftly changed to one of distrust and fear. The level of insecurity in Nigeria also has increased the crime rate and terrorist attacks in different parts of the country, leaving disgusting consequences on the nation's economy and business growth.

Closely reviewing the above literature, one can agree that all the reviewed literature especially by Emanemua and Akintolu (2016); Suleiman (2016); Kakwagh and Ikwuba (2010); Olalekan et al., (2018); and Okwuwada (2023) that revealed that the factors responsible for kidnapping include: Socio-Economic Deprivations Unemployment, Poverty, Political Parochialism, Ritual and Spiritual Proclivity, as well as Income Gap all apply to Zurmi local government area of Zamfara state. But we can add a recent finding by Aina-Pelenu and Alade (2024), which indicated that the legal dimension which has been compromised by the politicians also has some socio-legal effects on Nigeria. This factor facilitates the commission of kidnapping and recidivism by the perpetrators in Zurmi, Zamfara state. This is because there is strong suspicion that some politicians are the sponsors of political thugs, who are kidnapers and when arrested, their godfathers get them released.

Despite the government's efforts to assuage the menace of insecurity in Nigeria, the country was ranked low in the global peace index (Okonkwo, Ndubuisi & Anagbogu, 2015). As a result of insecurity, vices such as insurgence, theft, kidnapping, and abduction are handled in Nigeria with a lukewarm attitude, which channels transformation and structural development to no avail. This is because when there is a security threat in the country -- money meant for such developments is often diverted into fighting such threats in the country (Usman & Mathew, 2014). At present, no part of the country is fully secured as different parts of the country are faced with one form of insecurity or another (Ariya, Omale & Ezeala, 2016).

Meanwhile, the failure of successive administrations in Nigeria to address challenges such as poverty, unemployment and equitable distribution of wealth among ethnic nationalists ultimately resulted in anger, agitation and violent crimes against the Nigerian states by some individuals and groups. Such crimes include militancy, kidnapping, banditry, armed robbery, and vandalism, among others. Furthermore, other scholars such as Dodo (2010), and Yusuf and Abdullahi (2020) identify factors contributing to the problems of kidnapping in Nigeria. They have elaborated on the causes of kidnapping in Nigeria, such as abject poverty, corruption and fraud, political influence, joblessness, terrorism, lack of capital punishment by the government, the changing value system and quick-money syndrome, among others. Below are the details:

- i. **The Changing Value System in Nigeria:** According to Umez (2000 as cited in Yusuf & Abdullahi, 2020), the governing value system in contemporary Nigeria endorses and glorifies illegal and corrupt means as necessary and sufficient means to earn; it now reshapes most Nigerians moral integrity, including the youths, is a whole reverse of the traditional system, which was basically predicated on good morals and hard work. Odey (2000) has stated that a society that is keen on condemning its youths for

- being dishonest and lazy and for instituting a menace to the rest of the people, such as kidnapping, armed robbery and materialism, should equally be keen on providing better economic, social, and moral alternatives that will dissolve immoralities to be less attractive and thus drain their current drift to criminal life.
- ii. Lack of Capital Punishment by the Government: Most traditional legal systems in Africa use capital punishment as the last option for capital crimes; the lack of strict penalties on kidnapers is why the menace is deteriorating in Nigeria. Kidnapers see this unlawful business as rich fortune and, therefore, find it difficult to quit. This is because there is little risk of action for traffickers; hence, the trade thrives. As an effective deterrent, the National Assembly should, as a matter of urgency, legislate an enabling law that would impose capital punishment for kidnapping in Nigeria.
 - iii. Quick-Money Syndrome: Accordingly, one of the causes of kidnapping in Nigeria is the rich-quick syndrome as many Nigerians are not willing to strive. At the same time, survival of the fittest is the norm in contemporary Nigeria. Thus, you cannot harvest what you did not plant. Most Nigerian youths are people with big dreams; through rich-quick syndrome without working, they decide to achieve those dreams upon kidnapping for ransom (Sunday, Nuyong & Nancwat, 2022).
 - iv. Abject Poverty: The poverty situation in Nigeria is another reason that triggered people to partake in the kidnapping. They view it as a means of exit from the track of poverty for riches. This is because when an individual is kidnapped, a huge ransom is demanded. Until that ransom is delivered to the kidnapers, the kidnapper will never be released to his people. When the kidnapers secured the ransom, they suddenly turned rich compared to their former miserable poverty state (Yusuf & Abdullahi, 2020).
 - v. Political Influence: There is no gainsaying in the fact that lots of politicians in Nigeria are hungry for power and are indeed resolutely committed to killing in order to acquire power by all means. The incidence escalations of political assassinations in the country is transparent that most politicians turn evil by kidnapping fellow Nigerians for ritual purposes and political assassinations to attain their goals. It is surprising and, in fact, unfortunate to observe that, as the election approaches, children and individuals with abnormalities, such as imbeciles and psychologically ill people, are the targeted subjects for rituals. Parents and relatives are strictly warned about the whereabouts of individuals and to take precautions because of the ritual kidnapers who are often agents of politicians. This type of kidnapping usually occurs in Nigeria as preparation for a political campaign for an election (Sunday et al., 2022).
 - vi. Terrorism: Some jobless and hungry youths in Nigeria have taken it upon themselves that terrorism is the solution to their numerous problems, as exemplified by the Nigerian government's long period of exploitation of the Niger Delta people, which reflects on other agonised youths to used kidnapping as an alternate remedy to their problem. Odey (2000) also observed that the youth exclusion triggered their obsession with heinous crimes as a means of survival.

In addition to the above, unemployment was a significant causative factor for the emergence of kidnapping in Zamfara State. High rates of youth unemployment are particularly alarming, as a lot of young people face challenges in finding opportunities for personal and professional development. Many criminal gangs exploit this demographic group by offering an irresistible sense of empowerment and belonging. Equally, many young people in Zurmi who are facing unemployment in rural areas migrate to urban centres in search of job opportunities. The non-availability of job opportunities put young people in Zurmi in economically precarious situations, increasing their susceptibility to criminal involvement.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a mixed concurrent design, which involves a survey and in-depth interviews. The survey was undertaken by the administration of structured questionnaires. An in-depth interview was conducted with Traditional Rulers, Religious leaders, Vigilantes, Military and police officers and Victims of Kidnapping in the study area. The research design was adopted because it is appropriate for gathering information on factors responsible for kidnapping in Zurmi, Zamfara State. Therefore, this research design assists in producing good responses from people concerning the study. The population of the study consist of the people of Zurmi local government area, both males and females, who are 18 years and above. The population also included the traditional rulers, civilian joint task force, military and police officers and victims of kidnapping.

Due to the delicate and complex nature of this research, it employs purposive sampling for both the quantitative component (questionnaire) as well as the qualitative component of the data (interviews). A purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique that involves selecting participants based on specific characteristics, rather than randomly. It is also known as judgmental or selective sampling. The justification for adopting this is to ensure that enough suitable respondents were reached. The advantages of this method include focusing on specific areas of interest to gather in-depth data on kidnapping; utilizing the most of the limited resources effectively; and to include information-rich cases that are likely to provide the best information for the subject matter in the study area. In terms of the victims of kidnapping, snowball was utilized, where one respondent would refer the researcher to other resourceful or potential respondents. The rationale behind adopting these methods is because there is no sampling frame – a list of all the respondents to be drawn from, which would have qualified a probability sampling to be adopted. The above method reduces researcher bias and provides reliability to the data collected.

The quantitative data generated was processed with the Social Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) vision 20. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used during the analysis and presented in the form of tables, frequencies, charts and percentages. Correlation of relevant tables was presented. The qualitative data generated were translated and transcribed and used to complement the quantitative data. No software was used for the qualitative data analysis. Instead, the researcher uses thematic analysis to analyse the data, focusing on the major themes that made up the research objective: the causes of kidnapping in Zurmi local government area of Zamfara state, the effects of kidnapping in the study area and recommendations that will facilitate in addressing the menace in the study area. A thematic analysis is a method for analysing qualitative data, which describes opinions, thoughts, feelings, and other information. It is a method in social sciences research that helps researchers to identify broad themes across a variety of qualitative sources.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted Rational Choice Theory (RCT) as its Theoretical Framework. It is rooted in classical criminology during the late 18th century, as seen in the work of Cesare Beccaria. Since then, the theory has been expanded upon and extended to other perspectives, such as deterrence, situational crime prevention and routine activity theory. RCT adopted a utilitarian belief that humans are reasoning actors who weigh means and ends, costs and benefits, in order to make a rational choice. The originator of rational choice theory anchored its argument on the economic principle of “cost-benefit analysis”. According to these neoclassical

criminologists, people commit crimes after weighing their options and being convinced that the benefits of committing the crime outweigh its risks and costs. How individuals decide what will serve them best is dependent on personal preferences. For example, one individual may decide that abstaining from smoking is best for them because they want to protect their health. Another individual will decide they want to smoke because it relieves their stress. Although the choices are opposite, both individuals make these choices to get the best result for themselves. They insist that crime will decrease when opportunities are limited, benefits are reduced, and costs are increased (Schmalleger, 1997).

This dysfunction within the society causes deprivation as well as marginalisation. It also causes high levels of poverty, unemployment and low per capita. The result is visualised in the high crime rate of kidnapping and banditry at the forefront. This crime has been identified as profitable and functional to its perpetrators and disastrous to the economy at large. It is a theory for understanding and often modelling social and economic as well as individual behaviour. RCT is a branch of criminology that sees individuals as rational actors: individuals are capable of making their own choices, which includes choosing to commit a crime. In any course of action, individuals weigh up the likely benefits and disadvantages of each action. It was developed by Clarke and Cornish (1985) and generally begins with the consideration of the choice behaviour of one or more individuals before jumping into action. It holds that individuals, as reasoning actors, usually act under free will and, in doing so, seek to avoid costs and weigh the rewards of an action or behaviour against those costs before making a choice. The theory suggests that individuals are unlikely to go through such deliberate, calculating mental processes and intuit the values and costs of an action, being unable to process information to the level assumed by this normative model (Cherniak, 1986).

Rational choice theory is based on numerous assumptions, one of which is individualism. The offender sees himself as an individual. The second is that individuals have to and maximise their goals, and the third is that individuals are self-interested. Offenders are thinking about themselves and how to advance their personal goals. The above assumptions of rational choice theory show that the offenders (kidnappers) see themselves as individuals who have freedom of choice and action. They use calculations to make choices and achieve outcomes that are aligned with their personal goals. This indicates that criminals (kidnappers) in Zamfara state choose to commit the act of kidnapping for them to achieve their personal goals. The theory also assumes that the offenders (kidnappers) as individuals are rational actors using rational information to actively try to maximize their advantages and goals in every situation. Individuals, therefore, are assumed to be sensitive to the consequences of their actions and thus make reasoned judgments after considering the costs and benefits. Based on the foregoing, the rational choice theorists advocated for very stringent punishment in order to deter further commission of crime. Essentially, the central points of the Rational Choice Theory are:

- i. The human being is a rational actor;
- ii. Rationality involves ends/means calculation;
- iii. People freely choose behaviour, both conforming and deviant, based on their rational calculation;
- iv. The central element of calculation involves a cost-benefit analysis: pleasure versus pain or hedonistic calculus;
- v. Choice with all other conditions equal will be directed towards the maximization of individual pleasure;
- vi. Choice can be controlled through the perception and understanding of the potential pain or punishment that will follow an act judged to be in violation of the social goal;

- vii. The state is responsible for maintaining order and preserving the common goals through a system of laws (this system is the embodiment of the social contract) and,
- viii. The swiftness, severity and certainty of punishment are the key elements in understanding a ruling class ability to control their citizen's behaviour.

Igbo (2017) agreed with the notion that free will and hedonistic tendencies of man as a rational pleasure, seeking pleasure-seeking animal that chooses what will bring pleasure and not pain or suffering. Agha (2010) observes that one desirable thing for man is pleasure or happiness to be sought by an individual. To control crime with this orientation in mind, severe punishment will serve as an adequate deterrent to intended offenders by making the crime unattractive to all potential criminals in society. According to this theory, therefore, people choose to commit crimes (such as kidnapping) after they analyse the costs and benefits. The weight of the options of potential cost and benefit of an illegal act led to choosing the violation of crime in their pursuit of societal goals. Furthermore, rational choice theory shows that the offenders (kidnappers) are self-interested. Self-interest refers to actions that elicit personal benefit. The kidnappers in Zamfara state and Zurmi local government, in particular, are acting with their own self-interest in mind, which they think can create benefits for them.

The Rational Choice Theory advocated for stronger punishment as a deterrent to crime, which Kidnapping is typical. Punishment of kidnapping, both positive and negative punishment, could be applied systematically as a panacea for kidnapping in Zamfara. Rational Choice Theory saw kidnapping as a conscious or voluntary behaviour. Indeed, it could be strongly argued that the escalation witnessed in kidnapping activities in Zamfara is being sustained by the non-application of a strong and effective punishment regimen by the justice system. The policies that are based on the Rational Choice Theory involve increasing the punishment for crimes in the hope that the pain outweighs the gain and, therefore, preventing future crime.

Consequently, kidnapping acts are premeditated, conceived, planned and executed for the personal and idiosyncratic goals of the perpetrators. Kidnappers are conscious and voluntary violators of the common law, which guarantees freedom of movement for every law-abiding citizen of Zamfara. Kidnappers willingly and wilfully transgress against the common good, which amounts to flagrant abuse and disobedience to the Nigerian Constitution. They may be considered atavists and recidivists who are aware of the social, economic, psychological and political implications of their dastardly criminal disposition. It could be stated that the Rational Choice Theory took a clear position concerning crime and criminal behaviour. They expressly stated that (1) choice can be controlled through the perception and understanding of the potential pain or punishment that will follow an act judged to violate the social goal, the social contract, (2) the state is responsible for maintaining order and preserving the common good through a system of laws; and (3) that the swiftness, severity and certainty of punishment are the key elements in a law's ability to control human behaviours. Conclusively, Rational Choice Theory helps us understand kidnapping in Zurmi as it provides a rigorous framework for analysing kidnappers' behaviour. By assuming that individuals act rationally, the theory provides a clear and systematic way to analyse the motivations and decisions of the culprits.

DATA ANALYSES AND DISCUSSIONS

The data generated from the study revealed that the factors responsible for kidnapping in Zurmi LGA are: poverty (85%), injustice (76.7%), unemployment (86.7%), illiteracy (90.9%), bad leadership (87.5%), and economic hardship (70.0). This signifies that several factors were responsible for kidnapping in the study area. Corroborating the above, a civilian joint task force

officer in Mashema Ward explained that there are several factors responsible for kidnapping; after poverty and unemployment, there are other factors such as illiteracy, revenge, antisocial tendencies, injustice and envy, as well as governmental negligence of the herdsman. Again, an interview with a religious leader further explained that:

Those who engage in kidnapping are lacking religious faith. The main factor responsible for kidnapping was going against the command of God. Other factors include breach of trust among people, injustice of leaders, competition among people, desire for luxury, corruption, poor socialisation, a high level of immorality, poor parental control, and so many others (IDI with Religious Leader in Zurmi Ward, 2023).

Moreover, as narrated by the traditional ruler in Mayasa/Kuturu Ward, a lot of factors were responsible for the kidnapping; these factors include drug abuse, lack of awareness, inequality in resource allocation, poor security system, and disrespect for tradition and traditional leaders. Also, Military officers narrated that factors such as overpopulation, parental negligence, large family size and divorce were responsible for the kidnapping.

The correlation between the reasons for kidnapping and the factors contributing to kidnapping was analysed using Pearson's correlation coefficient. The results indicated a correlation coefficient of 0.089 with a significance level (2-tailed) of 0.097. This analysis was based on a sample size of 351 observations for both variables.

The results show an extremely weak positive but statistically non-significant correlation between selecting poor security systems as a reason for kidnappings and views on responsible factors ($r = .089$, $p = .097$). The positive coefficient suggests that those citing security issues tend to rate the given factors slightly higher as well, but the tiny effect means little relationship in practice. With $p > .05$, there is no evidence this tiny association exists in the broader population instead of reflecting random chance. The statistical relevance of the above is that kidnapping in Zurmi impacts national security, increases poverty and unemployment, causes a lack of moral education, breeds corruption and fraud, has some legal implications, is linked to political influence, cattle rustling, terrorism, affects capital punishment and disrupts moral values.

In summary, beliefs about security and other kidnapping factors appear largely unrelated in this sample, with no significant linear dependency detected. The quantitative data show that, as a result of the poor security systems, vices such as insurgence, theft, kidnapping, and abduction are handled in Zurmi with a lukewarm attitude, which channels transformation and structural development to no avail. Again, the purpose of kidnapping was for ransom and vengeance from herders. The form of kidnapping that is business-oriented, or economic kidnapping, was originally done to threaten rivals or curb competition as a result of the exploitation of herders and grievances, threat, cheating, and seizing of their grazing areas in Burtalai by the farmers.

Conclusions

This study examined the factors that influence kidnapping in Zurmi local government area of Zamfara state, covering the periods 2019–2023. Utilizing a mixed methods approach, the study adopted the use of both questionnaires and interviews to generate data in order to provide answer to the research questions posed in this research. They include: What are the causes of kidnapping in Zurmi local government area of Zamfara state? What are the effects of

kidnapping in the study area? What are the recommendations that will facilitate in addressing the menace in the study area? concludes that factors such as poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, revenge, governmental negligence of herdsmen's, antisocial tendencies, injustice and envy. Other factors include lacking religious faith, breach of trust among people, injustice of leaders, competition among people, desire for luxury, corruption, poor socialisation, high level of immorality, poor parental control, drug abuse, lack of awareness, inequality in resource allocation, poor security system, disrespect of tradition leaders, parental negligence, large family size, divorce and so many others.

Recommendations

Considering the data and the findings, the following recommendations are hereby proffered:

1. Both federal and state governments should try to create jobs and job opportunities and create an enabling environment so that private sectors can create jobs for the young generation.
2. The identities of public members who supply useful information to security agencies should be properly protected.
3. Individuals found conniving with kidnappers should be dealt with no matter how wealthy, politically or religiously exposed the person may be.
4. In order to reduce the vices of kidnapping in Zurmi, Zamfara state, politicians should not use their money and influence to conscript youths as political mercenaries during election campaigns.
5. The military, all security agencies and community members, having realized that they need each other more than they can imagine, should continue to take some proactive measures towards enhancing the relationships among security agencies.
6. There is a need for constant forums with opinion leaders (traditional rulers, religious and political leaders, journalists, and NGOs, among others) to discuss issues that could help strengthen the relationship between the civil populace and security.
7. The current strategy for dealing with kidnapping in Nigeria needs to be reviewed. In particular, the extant laws and the extent to which they are being enforced need to be explored to establish their efficacy.

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