

Kidnapping and Victimization Experiences Among Commuters on the Ado-Akure Federal Road: Implications for Public Safety and Transportation Security in Nigeria

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Abstract: *Kidnapping has become a rampant and disturbing issue in Nigeria, especially along major transportation routes, creating lasting physical, psychological, and emotional consequences for victims. This study examines the experiences of kidnapping and victimization among commuters on the Ado-Akure Federal Road, exploring the dynamics of the crime, the tactics employed by kidnappers, and the profound impact on victims. Employing a qualitative approach, the study gathers primary data through in-depth interviews with victims and key informants to understand the lived experiences of those affected. The findings reveal the brutal methods used by kidnappers, including violent attacks, emotional manipulation, and the creation of an atmosphere of constant fear. Victims shared their traumatic experiences, recounting incidents of physical abuse, witnessing executions, and enduring sexual violence, with particular emphasis on the experiences of female commuters. Additionally, the study highlights the deep psychological toll on victims, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), sleep disturbances, and a general mistrust of others. The research underscores the critical need for effective interventions to address the increasing prevalence of kidnapping and victimization. Policy recommendations include strengthening security along critical transportation routes, improving legal responses to kidnapping, and establishing comprehensive victim support systems, including psychological counseling. This study contributes to the ongoing discourse on the rising insecurity in Nigeria, particularly focusing on the experiences of victims of kidnapping, and advocates for a more victim-centered approach to policy formulation and implementation in order to enhance public safety and national security.*

Keywords: kidnapping, victimization, commuters, insecurity, ransom, psychological trauma, public safety

INTRODUCTION

Kidnapping has become a deeply entrenched and evolving criminal activity in Nigeria, with profound implications for the safety and security of the nation's citizens. According to Ugwuoke et al. (2023), violent crimes on Nigerian highways, including kidnapping, have created a pervasive atmosphere of fear and anxiety among travelers, leading to long-term psychological trauma and insecurity. The dynamics of kidnapping, particularly along major transportation routes such as the Ado-Akure Federal Road, have garnered increasing attention due to the violent nature of these crimes and the long-lasting effects on victims. Okwuwada (2023) discusses the complex causes and consequences of kidnapping, emphasizing the socio-economic drivers of this crime, including poverty, unemployment, and the lack of effective law enforcement.

Kidnapping in Nigeria is often driven by both economic and political motives. Olaniyan (2024) explores how the existence of ungoverned spaces facilitates criminal activities, particularly kidnapping, as these areas become havens for criminal groups. The Ado-Akure Federal Road, a critical transport route, has become notorious for these activities, with kidnappers exploiting the road's heavy traffic and poorly patrolled sections to carry out abductions. Adeniran et al. (2024) highlight similar concerns in Akure, noting the prevalence of paratransit crimes that pose significant risks to commuters. Additionally, the poor infrastructural conditions of key roads exacerbate the problem, providing criminals with ample opportunities to ambush travelers and escape without facing significant resistance.

The socio-economic conditions in Nigeria, marked by rising unemployment, poverty, and inequality, have played a significant role in the proliferation of kidnapping. Many perpetrators of these crimes are driven by desperation, seeking quick monetary gain in a country where legitimate economic opportunities are scarce. This vicious cycle of economic hardship fueling criminal activities continues to destabilize the country and exacerbate the general sense of insecurity. Furthermore, the infrastructural deficiencies, particularly along critical roads like the Ado-Akure Federal Road, contribute to the ease with which kidnappers operate. Sections of the road remain poorly maintained, with inadequate police presence and insufficient security measures, allowing perpetrators to carry out their crimes with impunity. (Olulowo, Babawale, & Anani, 2021; Ayegbusi, 2024; Kayode, Fadipe, Durosaro, Uwadia, & Oluwawole, 2025).

The trauma experienced by kidnapping victims extends beyond physical harm, with psychological consequences often lingering long after the event. As noted by Tade and Olaitan (2024), victims of criminal activities like 'one-chance' robbery in Lagos experience severe emotional distress, including PTSD, insomnia, and hypervigilance. These experiences are compounded by the financial strain on victims' families, who are often forced to sell assets or take loans to pay the demanded ransom. Mmahi et al. (2022) further examine the broader economic implications of

kidnapping for ransom, arguing that it has a negative impact on foreign investment in Nigeria, as potential investors view the rising insecurity as a significant risk factor.

Despite efforts by both government and non-governmental organizations to curb the rise in kidnappings, the prevalence of these crimes continues to grow, underscoring the inadequacy of current security frameworks. Oludare et al. (2021) suggest that there is an urgent need for comprehensive interventions, including robust legal frameworks, improved law enforcement, and victim support systems to address the rising tide of insecurity in Nigeria. Porter et al. (2025) further stress the importance of understanding the lived experiences of victims, particularly women, to develop more effective strategies to ensure the safety of travelers.

Given the complexity and gravity of the kidnapping problem, particularly along the Ado-Akure Federal Road, this study aims to explore the causes, prevalence, and consequences of kidnapping on commuters. The study will also assess the effectiveness of current preventive measures, providing a comprehensive analysis that contributes to the ongoing discourse on the impact of kidnapping on public safety, socio-economic stability, and national security in Nigeria.

Research Objectives

1. To assess the prevalence of kidnapping incidents among commuters on the Ado-Akure Federal Road.
2. To investigate the factors contributing to the vulnerability of commuters to kidnapping along the Ado-Akure Federal Road.
3. To explore the physical, psychological, and social consequences experienced by victims of kidnapping on the Ado-Akure Federal Road.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Kidnapping in Nigeria, particularly along routes such as the Ado-Akure Federal Road, remains a growing issue. Whether it is violent, nonviolent, or gendered, the consequences of this crime are far-reaching, affecting not only the victims but also the broader society. Interrogating the concept of kidnapping is critical to grasping the scale of this social phenomenon, particularly in the Nigeria where it has become a lucrative venture. While kidnapping as an organized crime was relatively rare in Nigeria before the Niger Delta crisis, it became entrenched during the rise of militancy in the region (Oriola, 2016). Initially targeting expatriate oil workers for ransom, kidnapping soon expanded as a tool of political retribution, with the families of political opponents becoming frequent targets. Over time, kidnapping has evolved into a common form of crime in Nigeria, often used by armed groups to meet financial demands or to exert political pressure. In the case of Nigeria, kidnapping is generally understood as the unlawful and forceful abduction, detention, and transportation of an individual against their will, often for ransom or other forms of gain (Yakubu, 2022; Inyang & Abraham, 2013; Onuoha & Okolie-Osemene, 2019). Though the definition varies by jurisdiction, kidnapping in Nigeria is commonly seen as organized crime that, despite its severe

consequences, remains a profitable venture, which has contributed to its persistence (Oludare, Okoye, & Tsado, 2021).

Kidnapping can take on multiple forms, each with distinct characteristics. Violent kidnappings, for example, are commonly associated with extreme physical violence and torture, sometimes resulting in death (Shirk & Wallman, 2015; Phillips, 2015). These kidnappings usually occur when there is resistance from the victims or their families, delays in the ransom payment, or interference from law enforcement (Otu et al., 2018). This type of abduction is more prevalent in high-risk areas like the Ado-Akure Federal Road, where criminal gangs exploit poorly monitored and often deserted road sections. On the other hand, nonviolent kidnappings, often seen in regions like the Niger Delta, involve abductions that do not result in physical harm but still aim to extract ransom from the families of the victims (Balogu & Okolo, 2020). Victims of such kidnappings might be released after a short period, with the primary aim being financial gain without the need for violence. Additionally, there is the phenomenon of gendered kidnapping, where women and children are disproportionately targeted. Female victims, in particular, are often subjected to sexual violence and exploitation, with numerous reports of forced marriages and abuse during captivity (Hadi, 2017; Searcey, 2017; Lowry, 2018). This type of abduction is especially alarming as it not only brings financial demands but also subjects the victims to deep emotional and physical trauma. As kidnapping in Nigeria has evolved, so too have the methods used by criminals. Mass kidnappings, such as the abduction of schoolchildren or government employees, represent a disturbing trend in which large groups are targeted to force governments into paying substantial ransoms. This trend has been particularly evident in the abduction of the Chibok schoolgirls in 2014 and the Dapchi schoolgirls in 2018, among other incidents (Iyekepolo, 2016; Pearson & Zenn, 2021). Roadside kidnappings, especially along poorly patrolled roads such as the Ado-Akure Federal Road, are also a major concern. Kidnappers typically ambush vehicles, often in isolated areas, to abduct passengers for ransom. This form of kidnapping is facilitated by the relative inaccessibility of these roads, which allows criminals to escape with ease after committing their crimes (Tade et al., 2020). Furthermore, house-to-house kidnappings have become prevalent, where kidnappers raid communities and abduct individuals, particularly at night. These incidents are often coordinated and result in significant emotional distress for victims and their families, as the kidnappers usually demand a ransom while inflicting psychological and physical harm (Isenyo, 2021b).

Beyond economic gain, kidnapping in Nigeria has also been employed for political purposes. Political kidnapping has been used as a means to intimidate or undermine political rivals. A notable example is the 2003 kidnapping of the governor-elect of Anambra State, Chris Ngige, as a result of political disputes (Offor & Eze, 2019). Kidnapping has also been a tactic used by militant groups and terrorist organizations, such as Boko Haram, to make political statements or secure the release of their members from government detention. The infamous abduction of 276 Chibok schoolgirls in 2014 was a strategic move by Boko Haram to oppose Western education and put pressure on the Nigerian government (Diep, 2019). Similarly, the kidnapping of the Dapchi girls in 2018

further highlighted the use of abductions as a means to engage in political negotiations (Oyewole & Onuoha, 2021). This type of kidnapping illustrates the intersections between crime and politics in Nigeria, where kidnappers are often seen as players in larger socio-political struggles.

Kidnapping and Public Safety and Security in Nigeria: A Review of Experiences Among Commuters on the Ado-Akure Federal Road

kidnapping remains a significant threat to public safety in Nigeria, especially for highway commuters. The causes of this crime are deeply rooted in Nigeria's socio-economic and political challenges, including poverty, unemployment, political instability, and corruption. Kidnapping in Nigeria has escalated into a pervasive criminal phenomenon, affecting individuals from all walks of life. It is no longer limited to the wealthy and powerful but has become a widespread issue that impacts a diverse array of victims, including commuters, business owners, politicians, students, and ordinary citizens. The misconception that kidnappers primarily target rural, ungoverned territories is incorrect, as such crimes frequently occur in both urban and rural communities, including areas traditionally perceived as safe (Kamaludeen et al., 2021).

Historically, kidnappers focused on high-profile individuals, keeping them alive to maximize ransom demands (Campbell, 2020). However, this landscape has shifted. Today, kidnappers target a broader range of victims, including everyday people from various social classes, and often abduct individuals for immediate financial gain. High-profile cases such as the abduction of Alhaji Alaga Olayemi in Kwara State (Saminu, Mohammed, & Empowerment, 2022) and Itakorodo Adebayo in Ekiti State (Saminu, Mohammed, & Empowerment, 2022) highlight the growing audacity of these criminals, with no socio-economic group left untouched. The rise of kidnapping has raised questions about the state's ability to protect its citizens, reflecting broader concerns regarding public safety and governance.

The kidnapping crisis in Nigeria began in earnest on February 25, 2006, with the abduction of expatriates working for oil companies in the Niger Delta region (Akpan, 2010). This marked the beginning of a wave of kidnappings that would spread across the country, moving beyond foreign nationals to include locals from all walks of life, including men, women, the elderly, and children. As Ikeje (2010) stated, kidnapping has grown into a "monster" that has expanded its reach, becoming a deeply embedded feature of Nigeria's security landscape. Between 2014 and 2017, over 2,000 people, including the Chibok girls, politicians, and government officials, were kidnapped (Abdulkabir, 2017).

The prevalence of kidnapping on highways, particularly on routes like the Ado-Akure Federal Road, has become a pressing issue. Highway abductions are not isolated to any one region but are a nationwide concern, with significant incidences recorded across Nigeria. These incidents disrupt not only the lives of those directly affected but also the socio-economic fabric of the communities involved. Factors driving these crimes include socio-political instability, economic hardships, and systemic flaws in law enforcement (Suleiman, 2023). Researchers have identified causes such as

greed, high unemployment rates, poverty, social injustice, political neglect, and the failed implementation of economic policies as major contributors to the increase in kidnapping incidents in the country (Fadipe, Uwadia, & Kayode, 2021).

Economic deprivation, particularly poverty, is a primary driver of kidnapping on highways. Extreme poverty and high unemployment rates compel individuals to seek desperate means of survival, with kidnapping perceived as a quick route to financial gain (Akpan, 2021). Poverty in Nigeria is severe, with a substantial portion of the population living below the poverty line, which exacerbates criminal behavior (Ojo, 2020). The United Nations defines poverty as a lack of basic necessities such as food, shelter, healthcare, and education (Hagenaars, 2017), and in Nigeria, the lack of opportunities forces many young people into criminal activities, including kidnapping, as a means of survival (Igbinovia, 2018).

Inadequate security infrastructure also plays a significant role in enabling kidnappers. Many Nigerian highways are poorly maintained, lacking proper security measures and law enforcement presence, making them attractive targets for criminals (Okoli & Agada, 2014). Kidnappers take advantage of isolated, poorly patrolled areas, where the likelihood of being apprehended is low. This vulnerability is compounded by systemic corruption within the security forces, further emboldening criminals (Alemika, 2013). In some cases, law enforcement officers themselves have been implicated in aiding kidnappers, revealing the extent of corruption that hampers efforts to tackle the issue (Arubi, 2010). Political and social instability have further worsen the kidnapping crisis. Areas with weak government oversight or lawlessness allow criminal organizations to operate with impunity. Additionally, politicians have been known to sponsor or engage in kidnappings to intimidate rivals or further their agendas (Dodo, 2010). The increase in political violence, including political assassinations, has made the situation even more volatile. The intertwining of political motives with criminal activities has amplified the kidnapping crisis, making it a tool of power struggles in some cases.

To address the growing threat of kidnapping, a comprehensive, multi-pronged approach is needed. One key measure is the improvement of the economy by providing enabling environment for job to trieve which I turn will create more jobs both formal and informal sector this will alleviate the economic pressures that drive many individuals toward criminal activities. By creating employment opportunities and improving the business environment, the government can reduce the incentives for kidnapping. Additionally, the government should implement strict anti-kidnapping laws, making it a capital offense with severe penalties, such as capital punishment, to deter potential offenders. Public awareness campaigns are crucial to educating the public on the dangers of kidnapping and encouraging them to report suspicious activities (Suleiman, 2023).

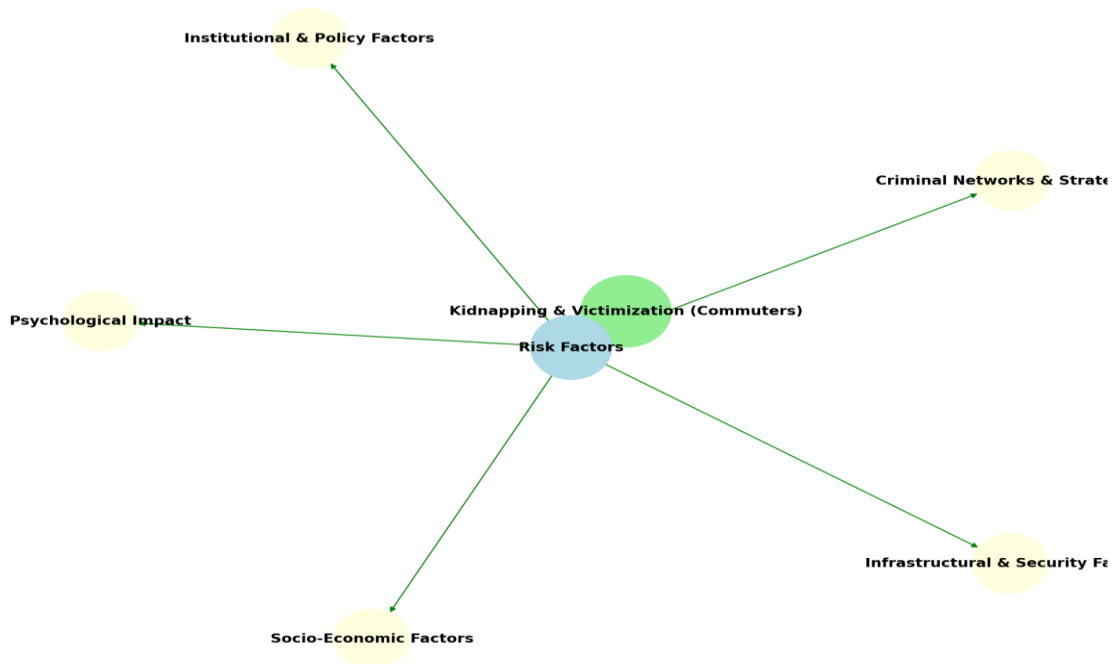
Strict SIM card registration is very important and must be enforced to improve communication tracking, allowing authorities to better trace kidnappers. Additionally, community policing should be strengthened, empowering local communities to collaborate with law enforcement to improve security. Finally, controlling the proliferation of small arms and light weapons is critical to reducing the ability of criminals to engage in kidnapping. Tightening border security and

monitoring local blacksmiths who manufacture illegal weapons are essential steps in controlling the flow of arms.

The impact of kidnapping in Nigeria extends beyond the immediate trauma suffered by victims. It has significant economic consequences, particularly in sectors such as oil, where abductions of foreign workers have disrupted production and led to financial losses. For example, in 2006, the kidnapping of six foreign expatriates from Shell Petroleum led to a significant drop in gas production, costing Nigeria millions of dollars in lost revenue (Dode, 2007). The insecurity caused by kidnappings has also led to a decline in foreign direct investment (FDI), as investors are deterred by the unstable environment (Nwogwugwu et al., 2012). The International Monetary Fund (IMF) reported a decrease in Nigeria's GDP growth due to these security challenges (Knoema, 2019a). In addition to the economic toll, kidnapping has led to a breakdown in social trust. The pervasive fear of abduction has eroded traditional values of hospitality and mutual assistance, with many Nigerians becoming increasingly distrustful of strangers (Soyombo, 2009). This mistrust extends to everyday life, where people are reluctant to help others, particularly on highways, out of fear of being targeted by kidnapers.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Conceptual Framework for Kidnapping and Victimization Experiences Among Commuters on the Ado-Akure Federal Road



Authors Design, 2025

The Conceptual Framework for Kidnapping and Victimization Experiences Among Commuters on the Ado-Akure Federal Road illustrates the key factors and their interrelationships that contribute to the prevalence of kidnapping and victimization on this critical transportation route. The framework is structured around five key components:

1. **Socio-Economic Factors:** These include poverty, unemployment, and inequality, which create an environment where criminal activities like kidnapping are more likely to occur. Economic desperation and the lack of legitimate opportunities drive individuals to participate in organized crime, including kidnapping for ransom.
2. **Infrastructural and Security Factors:** The poor state of roads, inadequate lighting, and lack of law enforcement presence along the Ado-Akure Federal Road contribute to its vulnerability to kidnapping. These infrastructural and security deficiencies provide opportunities for kidnappers to carry out their operations with minimal resistance or detection.
3. **Criminal Networks and Strategies:** Kidnapping along this route is not a random act but part of organized criminal activities. These networks use specific tactics such as ambushes and psychological manipulation to target victims. They operate with the aim of demanding ransoms, and their strategies are often designed to maximize profit with minimal risk.
4. **Psychological and Emotional Impact:** The experience of being kidnapped causes severe psychological trauma for victims. This includes conditions such as PTSD, anxiety, and depression, which can persist long after the kidnapping. The emotional toll extends to the victims' families, who are often left to deal with the financial strain and the emotional distress of having a loved one abducted.
5. **Institutional and Policy Factors:** The legal and institutional frameworks in place to prevent and respond to kidnappings are often ineffective or poorly enforced. Corruption, weak law enforcement, and the absence of victim support systems further exacerbate the problem, allowing kidnapping to thrive.

These factors collectively contribute to the ongoing kidnapping crisis along the Ado-Akure Federal Road. The framework highlights how socio-economic conditions and infrastructural weaknesses feed into criminal activities, causing significant harm to both victims and their communities. By understanding the interconnectedness of these factors, policymakers can implement targeted interventions to address the root causes of kidnapping and provide support for victims.

METHODS AND RESULTS

This study will employ a qualitative research approach to explore the kidnapping and victimization experiences of commuters along the Ado-Akure Federal Road. Given the under-researched nature of kidnapping on this specific route, the study aims to provide in-depth insights into the nature of

the problem, the experiences of victims, and the effectiveness of existing security measures. The qualitative approach allows for a deeper understanding of the factors contributing to the rise in kidnapping, the psychological and emotional impact on victims, and the broader socio-economic implications of these criminal activities.

The target population for this study includes victims of kidnapping, law enforcement officers, and local community members residing along the Ado-Akure Federal Road, which spans approximately 80 kilometers and connects several communities in Ekiti and Ondo States. The estimated total population of individuals who are either directly or indirectly affected by this issue is around 15,000 people (Federal Road Safety Corps, 2024). The study will focus on commuters who regularly travel this route, as they are the primary group at risk of being targeted by kidnappers.

5 in-depth interviews will be conducted with victims who have been abducted on this route, while 5 participants will be selected from security agencies. The purposive sampling technique will first identify frequent commuters and communities along the road with high incidences of kidnapping. These areas will be selected based on reported crime data and will help ensure that the study focuses on regions most affected by the issue. Subsequently, a random sampling method will be used to select individuals from these high-risk areas to ensure diversity in the participants. For the interviews with kidnapping victims, participants will be selected based on their direct experiences with abduction, ensuring that the data is highly relevant to the research objectives.

The qualitative data gathered from the interviews will be transcribed and coded, using content and thematic analysis to identify key themes and patterns. These themes will be grouped based on similarities and recurring topics that emerge from the data. This approach will help identify common experiences among victims, as well as the main factors contributing to the rise in kidnapping and the perceived effectiveness of current security measures. The findings will then be discussed in relation to the research objectives, focusing on the emotional, psychological, and socio-economic consequences of kidnapping for victims and their families.

Thematic Analysis of Key Informants from interview.

The thematic analysis provided by the key informants revealed five critical themes from their own personal experiences during captivity:

Witnessing Extreme Violence:

Many informants recounted horrifying incidents of witnessing the brutal killing of fellow victims. These acts of violence were used to instill fear and ensure compliance, leaving lasting psychological scars. Most key informants shared harrowing experiences of witnessing the brutal killing of other victims during their captivity. This theme highlights the psychological and emotional impact of such incidents. For example,

KI1 recounted, *“I watched helplessly as they slaughtered one of the men who tried to escape. It was terrifying, and the image has haunted me ever since.”* While KI4 recounted how he and others were beating and denied food for the five days he spent in the kidnapper's captivity. This narrative underscores the fear and trauma experienced by victims, particularly the lasting impact of witnessing such atrocities.

KI3 narrated a similar experience, stating, *“They killed one of the women in front of us to serve as a warning. It was meant to silence us, and it worked we were too scared to even move.”* These narratives are consistent with Tade, Ojedokun, and Aderinto (2020), who described how kidnappers often use extreme violence to maintain control and exert psychological dominance. Witnessing such atrocities leaves victims with lasting trauma, reinforcing a culture of fear.

Physical Brutalization

Physical violence emerged as a common method used by kidnappers to intimidate and control victims endured severe physical abuse, often as punishment or a means of exerting control. Informants described being beaten to the point of incapacitation, highlighting the kidnappers' complete disregard for human dignity. Female victims, in particular, were subjected to sexual violence, with informants recounting repeated abuse by their captors. This theme sheds light on the vulnerability of women and girls in such situations. While Captors employed threats, intimidation, and psychological tactics to break the victims' spirit. Informants shared how these strategies eroded their hope, created mistrust, and heightened their sense of helplessness. The long-term consequences of these experiences were evident in the informants' accounts of ongoing psychological distress, such as insomnia, hyper-vigilance, and difficulty trusting others, even after their release. KI2 described, *“They beat me so badly that I couldn't walk for days. The pain was unbearable, but we were given no medical attention.”*

This account highlights the physical suffering endured by victims and the neglect of their basic needs. KI4 shared, *“Even minor mistakes, like speaking without permission, would result in a beating. They treated us like animals.”* Such accounts illustrate the dehumanizing conditions under which victims were held. These accounts highlight the kidnappers' total disregard for human dignity, consistent with findings by Ilori and Adeleye (2023), who documented how victims of ransom kidnappings in Ekiti State endured brutal physical conditions to pressure families to pay quickly.

Sexual Exploitation and Rape

The narratives revealed that female victims, in particular, were subjected to sexual violence. KI3 disclosed, *“One of the captors would come to me at night. I couldn't stop him; resisting only made it worse.”* This account exposes the prevalence of sexual exploitation among kidnapped women and its devastating effects. While KI5 noted, *“I saw them take some of the younger girls away every night. It was heartbreaking, but we were powerless to help.”*

Such incidents mirror Akhigbe and Koleoso's (2013) findings, which highlighted the profound psychological impact of sexual violence on kidnapped women, including shame, depression, and long-term mental health struggles.

Psychological Manipulation and Post-Trauma Effects

Kidnappers employed psychological tactics to instill fear and ensure compliance and to get families of victims to pay ransom. KI1 stated, *"They told us no one would come for us, that we had been abandoned. It crushed our hope."* This reflects the psychological warfare employed by kidnappers to weaken victims' resolve. KI4 added, *"They constantly threatened to kill us, even playing Russian roulette with some of the men. It was terrifying."*

Victims expressed how the traumatic events continued to affect them long after their release. KI2 shared, *"I still can't sleep at night. Every sound reminds me of that place."* This narrative points to the long-term psychological impact of the kidnapping experience. KI5 stated, *"Even now, I can't trust people easily. It feels like I'm always looking over my shoulder."* Such post-traumatic symptoms reflect Akhigbe and Koleoso's (2013) case study on the psychological aftermath of ransom kidnappings, which emphasized the need for targeted therapeutic interventions for survivors.

KI6 a Security personnel shared his experience regarding the challenges faced by law enforcement in curbing kidnapping incidents along major highways. He emphasized the lack of adequate resources for policing these vast areas, which makes it difficult to prevent abductions or intercept kidnappers in real-time. He noted, *"Our patrols are limited, and the road networks are poorly maintained, which gives criminals the upper hand."*

The challenges faced by security agencies in tackling the rising wave of kidnappings along the Ado-Akure Federal Road were highlighted by the responses of three security personnel. KI6, a security officer, discussed the issue of limited resources, citing that the road network's poor condition hampers patrols, leaving significant stretches vulnerable to criminal activities. This observation aligns with findings from Okunola (2009), who noted that poor infrastructure and insufficient police presence on highways create an enabling environment for criminal activities such as kidnapping.

KI7 another security agent expressed concern about coordination issues within law enforcement agencies, suggesting that there is often a lack of communication between different security forces, which affects their ability to respond swiftly to kidnapping incidents. He pointed out, *"There is often a delay in mobilizing forces, and sometimes the kidnappers have already moved the victims before we can act."* Moreover, the lack of effective communication and coordination between various security agencies is a recurring theme in studies by Oludare et al. (2021) and Odia (2023), who argue that this fragmentation hinders the speed and effectiveness of law enforcement interventions, allowing criminals to operate with relative impunity.

Furthermore, KI8, further revealed that corruption within the security forces as a serious the problem. This is consistent with Okwuwada (2023), who highlighted that corruption and lack of accountability within security forces are among the primary enablers of kidnapping in Nigeria. The lack of effective deterrents allows kidnapers to act with confidence, knowing that the chances of facing consequences are minimal.

Community leaders, on the other hand, shared valuable insights into the psychological and social impact of kidnapping on local communities. KI9, a community leader, discussed the fear and mistrust that kidnapping instills among residents, stating, "*People are afraid to speak out about kidnapping incidents because they fear retribution from the kidnapers.*" This point reflects the community paralysis mentioned in Tade & Olaitan (2024), where fear of retaliation from criminal elements often discourages people from cooperating with law enforcement. This also highlights the psychological manipulation often used by kidnapers to foster a culture of silence, as noted by Adeniran et al. (2024).

KI10, another community leader, emphasized the importance of community-based security initiatives and local collaboration with law enforcement. "*The local communities need to take the lead in organizing neighborhood watch groups,*" he suggested. This ties in with Olaniyan (2024)'s argument that community engagement plays a pivotal role in intelligence gathering and the early detection of criminal activities. Community-driven efforts to monitor suspicious activities and reporting incidents are crucial for improving local security. Ugwuoke et al. (2023) highlighted how violent crimes and insecurity on Nigerian highways have become systematic and widespread, making it difficult for commuters to feel safe. The violence experienced by victims, as described in this study, also aligns with Tade & Olaitan (2024), who documented extreme violence used by criminals to intimidate and control victims in urban transport corridors.

Similarly, Kayode et al. (2025) explored the psychological impacts of kidnapping, emphasizing the long-lasting trauma such as insomnia, hyper-vigilance, and trust issues, which were also reported by the victims in this study. The fear tactics employed by kidnapers, such as threatening to kill or psychological manipulation, mirror findings in Okwuwada (2023) and Akhigbe & Koleoso (2013), who also noted that such tactics are central to the kidnapers' strategy to exert control over their victims.

The study's findings also reinforce the idea that kidnapping for ransom has evolved into a lucrative business model for many criminals, and economic factors such as poverty, unemployment, and corruption are critical contributors to the phenomenon. This is consistent with Olulowo, Babawale, & Anani (2021), who examined the economic drivers of kidnapping in Nigeria and concluded that socio-economic instability and lack of opportunities play a significant role in motivating individuals to engage in criminal activities, including kidnapping.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has provided a comprehensive analysis of the lived experiences of kidnapping victims along the Ado-Akure Federal Road, revealing the profound physical, psychological, and emotional toll of such traumatic events. Through thematic analysis of key informant narratives, five critical themes emerged: witnessing extreme violence, physical brutalization, sexual exploitation and rape, psychological manipulation and fear, and post-trauma effects. These themes emphasize the disturbing realities faced by victims and underscore the sophisticated and brutal methods used by kidnapers to instill fear, control, and extort ransom.

The findings of this study align with existing literature, highlighting the systematic violence, dehumanization, and psychological distress experienced by kidnapping victims. The narratives further illustrate the long-term consequences, including insomnia, hypervigilance, difficulty trusting others, and chronic emotional distress, all of which hinder victims' ability to reintegrate into society and resume normal lives after trauma.

This research underscores the urgent need for comprehensive interventions to address the growing challenge of kidnapping in Nigeria. While the resilience of survivors is notable, significant gaps in legal frameworks, psychological support, and social services remain. The normalization of kidnapping as a criminal enterprise poses a substantial threat to public safety and security, requiring immediate and sustained action from all sectors.

To combat this menace effectively, multi-pronged strategies focusing on prevention, victim support, and systemic reforms are essential. Prevention must be driven by improved security measures, robust intelligence gathering, and rigorous enforcement of anti-kidnapping laws. Victim support should encompass a holistic approach, providing both psychological and medical care to address immediate and long-term needs. Public awareness campaigns, alongside stronger community partnerships, can contribute significantly to reducing the prevalence of kidnapping.

Recommendations

1. **Infrastructural Development:** The government should prioritize the repair and maintenance of roads, particularly on routes identified as hotspots for kidnapping. Poor road conditions, including potholes, abandoned sections, and inadequate lighting, create opportunities for kidnapers to ambush victims. A comprehensive road maintenance plan should focus on eliminating these vulnerabilities, ensuring that highways are secure and well-lit, especially at night.
2. **Enhanced Security Measures:** Increasing the presence of security personnel along the Ado-Akure Federal Road through frequent patrols, strategically located checkpoints, and surveillance systems will enhance safety. Security should be intensified during nighttime

hours when kidnapers tend to operate, with the use of drones and intelligent surveillance technologies to monitor vulnerable areas in real-time.

3. **Community Engagement and Reporting:** Strengthening partnerships between local communities and security agencies will improve intelligence gathering and lead to quicker responses to potential threats. The formation of community-based security networks can enable local residents to act as eyes and ears for law enforcement. Encouraging commuters to adopt safety measures, such as traveling in groups or using safer routes, can also reduce the likelihood of becoming victims. Community policing initiatives should be encouraged to build trust between law enforcement and residents.
4. **Public Awareness and Advocacy:** Launching national awareness campaigns to educate the public about safety practices and the importance of reporting suspicious activities will be critical in tackling the kidnapping crisis. Collaborating with media organizations to report accurately and consistently on kidnapping incidents can help reduce public panic while fostering increased vigilance. Advocacy should also focus on the consequences of kidnapping, aiming to deter potential offenders by highlighting the social, economic, and legal ramifications of such crimes.
5. **Policy and Governance:** Strengthening anti-kidnapping policies and advocating for harsher penalties for perpetrators can act as a powerful deterrent. The National Assembly should prioritize the enactment of laws that impose capital punishment for kidnapers involved in high-profile cases, while ensuring the swift prosecution of offenders. Additionally, introducing financial incentives for whistleblowers or those who assist law enforcement in kidnapping cases can promote a culture of transparency and cooperation.
6. **Victim Support Systems:** Establishing comprehensive support systems for victims, including psychological counseling, medical care, and financial assistance, is essential for their recovery and reintegration into society. Victim support should focus on the long-term emotional impacts of kidnapping, such as PTSD, anxiety, and depression, with specialized services tailored to the needs of survivors. Furthermore, community rehabilitation programs can assist victims in rebuilding their lives, empowering them to become active participants in society again.
7. **Technology and Innovation:** Leveraging technology to enhance security along major highways is essential. Smart highway systems equipped with surveillance cameras, sensors, and automated alert systems could be implemented to detect unusual activities in real-time, allowing law enforcement to respond promptly. Additionally, integrating mobile apps for reporting incidents or sending distress signals could empower commuters to alert authorities instantly, facilitating quicker interventions.

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