

KIDNAPPING IN THE SOUTH EAST REGION OF NIGERIA

By

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Abstract

The extent of social disorder experienced in recent times especially the menace of kidnapping has been a source of concern to all in the South East considering the devastating effect on all facets of the society. Thus the Phenomenon of kidnapping has assumed an alarming dimension leading to loss of lives, properties, money and rape has had a negative implication on all classes of people including women, men and children etc. It has also hampered development efforts by Government to transform the region. Thus, Nigeria's South East Region has attracted global attentions over the years both in the positive and negative dimension. On the positive side, the region harbours one of the largest world's markets. On the negative side, the region has witnessed various forms of violence and crime including kidnapping. This paper examines the socio-cultural cum religious implications of kidnapping in the South East of Nigeria. Attempts shall also be made to proffer solutions towards addressing the scourge of kidnapping for a crime free and harmonious society, so that development can thrive.

Keywords: Kidnapping, Socio-Cultural, Religious Implication.

Introduction

Defining what is kidnapping poses a number of definitional problems in relation to a country's legal and moral viewpoints as well as the availability of other variances as hostage taking and hijacking. However, the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary 6th Edition defines kidnapping as the act of taking somebody away illegally and keeping them as a prisoner, especially in order to get money or something else for returning them. Hakeem Jamiu (Media Wikipedia) defines kidnapping thus

It refers to forceful abduction of a human being with the intention to hold them for ransom, or seize them away for the motive of harassment (physically, mentally or sexually), taking them hostage and various other motives. It is done by the way of taking the kidnapped person to a place where they are likely to be found and unlikely to be released till abductors' demands are satisfied.

Kidnapping is a very serious crime but relatively unheard of in contemporary scholarship compared to robbery, burglary and other forms of societal vices. Kidnapping in whichever form has become a common occurrence in various parts of the world including the South Eastern Nigeria.

Although, statistics are hard to come by, reports suggest that the South Eastern (Nigeria) has the highest rate of kidnapping cases especially since the wake of the agitations by the people IBOP (Biafra). It is important to mention that the cases of kidnapping are numerous and continuous which this paper is not expected to treat.

Types of Kidnapping

- i. **Kidnapping from Forest:** This is the type of kidnapping where the victims are abducted along the road and kept in the forest. This is the most used method as the forest provides a safe haven for the kidnappers who also perfect their mission in the forest. For example, the kidnap of 5 people along Edem-Abbi road in Nsukka zone on the 5th of September 2022.

- ii. **Kidnapping in the high sea:** This happens when the victims are kidnapped on the high sea while traveling in the Nigerian water ways. An example is the kidnap of 14th April, 2009 involving some NLNG Staff at about 7:30pm along the Bonny water way. (Daily Sun. 02/06/2009).
- iii. **Kidnapping in the Church:** This happens when kidnappers abduct their victims from the church and other places of worship. In most cases, victims are the clergy, children and wives of wealthy church members.
- iv. **Kidnapping from Homes:** This is the most widely used method of kidnapping of victims from their house or offices and taken to unknown destinations. The kidnap of a commissioner's wife and a daughter Mrs. Edoga and her daughter from their house within the Isi-Uzo Local Government Area of Enugu State.

The menace of kidnapping has been identified to have some far reaching implications on the socio-cultural and religious life of the South Eastern people. Over the years, a number of scholars including anthropologists, religionists, Philosophers and social commentators have commented on the issues of kidnapping and the crime problem generally bodily to theories to ascertain the possible causes of kidnapping and crime. Iwarimie –Jaja (2010: 133) summed it up when he said that:

Most of such theories have focused attention on social behaviors or deviance which is a broad conceptual framework for understanding and explaining delinquency and criminality.

However, it has been established in many that poverty, frustration, unemployment and disorganized families are not the only reasons why people commit crime like theft, burglary, fraud, murder, or armed robbery.

Hence Iwarimie –Jaja (2010:193) succinctly opined that:

In fact, though these hold, the major cause of criminal acts is the association of the Adolescent, or adult, with persons who have a need that is not different from those of his peers, but the desire to satisfy this need does not explain why he should engage in delinquent act, or why at an adult age, he may commit crime.

At the same time, it is necessary to mention that contemporary social vices like kidnapping, militancy and hostage taking had their roots in the Judeo-Christian Bible, Conceptualized in the anodyne of Cain killing his younger brother Abel which attracted the wrath of the Almighty God who declared,

And now, thou art curse from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand, when thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee the strength, a fugitive and vagabond shall thou be on earth. (Genesis 4:11-13)

Today kidnapping has assumed a precarious dimension with a continuous rise in the number of cases. Whatever the factors are,

Kidnapping has formed part of the Nigerian vocabulary. Hence the need to unravel the socio-cultural and religious implications on the South East and Nigeria as a whole.

Theoretical Background

In recent times, sociologists have tried to x-ray the possible causes of some behaviour which work against the accepted norms of society. Some attribute it to societal influence. Others blame them on parental background.

Haralambus and Holbom(2006) hold that "In everyday language, to deviate means to story from acceptable part". They see the deviants as consisting of those acts which do not conform to the standards and expectations of a given society. However, they contend that deviants may be positively.

Sanctioned (rewards) or negatively sanctioned (punished). They could also be left alone without reward or punished as the case may be. In another respect, the opine that the term deviant is relative. In this wise, there is no absolute way of determining who actually is deviating. The behaviours of deviants can only be defined in consonance to a particular standard and since no standard way of behaviour is universally acceptable, the act of deviance could be socially defined. Similarly, an act can be considered deviant today but could be accepted as normal in the near future.

Haralambus and Holborn (2006) quoting Emile Durkheim (1938) see crime as an “inevitable and normal aspect of social life”, in the view of Durkheim (1938) as cited by Haralambus and Holborn(2006) “Crime is present in every society”, They go further to say that the crime rate in the developed world is for more than what is experienced in the developing nations. To Durkheim, crime is an inevitable aspect of all societies.

It seems that every society is involved with one crime or the other. In South East of Nigeria the crime of kidnapping has become the order of the day.

In this paper what the writer is saying is that the ritualist and kidnappers has taking the crime as the part of their life style that they practice every day of their life. Kidnapping has become very rampant in South East that nobody can move freely because of kidnappers, people are fearing of being kidnapped when they are traveling or even at their homes.

The youth of this era do not even have moral commitment again whatever that comes out of their heart is what they are doing. My prayer to God is to restore the moral behaviour of our youth. It is what Durkheim say that crime is an inevitable, if God did not restore the moral behaviour of youth crime will continue to increase.

According to Durkheim, it is not possible for everyone to have equal level of moral commitment. As a result, while some may like to obey the laws and keep to the norms of society, some others may be very reluctant to obey the law.

The South East People

The area referred to as the South East region was limited to the geopolitical zone occupied by the old Eastern region of Nigeria. This comprises the five states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. The South East occupies a central place in Nigeria. It is the hub of the nation economy. It accounts for over 80% of the human population. The region is largely on agrarian one, with vast arable land for agricultural purposes. There is also the presence of Rivers, lakes stream for fishing. The vegetable is thick with timber and wildlife for game. The people are highly religious. The religious tradition of the various ethnic groups is based purely on their culture and has been practiced from generation to generation, despite the introduction of modern religions like Islam and Christianity.

When we speak of African religion we mean the indigenous religion of Africans. It is the religion that has been handed down from generation to generation of Africans. It is not a fossil religion (a thing of the past) but a religion that Africans today have made theirs by living it and practicing it. (Awolalu and Donpamu 1979). The people engage in fishing and farming as their economic mainstay. The South East region which had remained peaceful prior to the marginalization, deprivation and dehumanization in the region has witnessed a lot of agitations, snowballing into Robbery, Cultism, Ritualist, Kidnapping e.t.c. and all forms of criminality. No wonder Obodoegbulam and Abraham (2012:1) submitted thus:

The struggle for self determination arises as a result of perceived marginalization, deprivation and dehumanization. It usually unacceptable for any individual to watch other misuse items or materials of value to him.

However, this is not to say that criminality of any form should be encouraged because of perceived injustice.

Government Palliative Measures

1. The use of government security agents.
2. The use of vigilante groups.
3. Media sensitizations.
4. Resort to prayer.
5. Legislations.
6. Establishment of development agencies e.t.c.

Socio-Cultural Implications

There are negative socio-cultural implications on the people.

1. Kidnapping of people is a source of the violation of human rights guaranteed by the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.
In most cases of kidnapping, the right of association, freedom of movement and the right to life are normally violated. It is a crime against humanity and the rights of persons and nations as guaranteed by the universal declaration of human rights especially articles 3,4 and 5, as indicated herein. Article 3 – everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of persons. Article 4 – no one shall be held in slavery or servitude in all their forms. Article 5 – no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. The African charter on human and people's rights adopted June, 27, 1981 and takes effect from October 21, 1986 also domesticated the principles and articles of the universal declaration of human rights to the effect that every person is entitled to freedom of movement, respect for his life, protection, and the right to liberty and security of his person. Kidnapping, no doubt negates all these rights as persons are captured, detained against murdered.
2. Kidnapping is a threat to the survival of the society or the governments as people are innocently embarrassed on daily basis. This according to Ikechukwu Ezech (Oral Information 2019/2022), causes tension and disregard to laid down cultural norms of the society. Sometimes it could lead to family disunity especially when there is suspicion among them.
3. It leads to increase in crime rate as kidnapping is infectious. This is because many unemployed graduates will be tempted to take to crime. Such youth are made to imbibe some form of negative orientations and seem to believe that kidnapping is a lucrative venture that ought to be embraced. Children were highly traumatized and tend to see a beclouded future of military, thurgery and killings.

RELIGIOUS IMPLICATIONS

1. The incessant cases of kidnapping have affected the worship of God (Church activities) negatively due to the fear of men, women and children to be kidnapped. Cosmas Ezema (Oral Information 22/9/2022) holds that why the people are always afraid of being kidnapped.

Not all those that were kidnapped were lucky enough to leave the kidnappers den alive. Some of them died either in the process of resistance or as a result of the trauma they go through.

The effect according to the report was not only the death of some persons (Church members) who attempted to prevent the kidnappers but a decline in the number of

- members for fear of another attack. There was even suspicion among members who felt that some of their “members” were informants to the kidnappers.
2. Religiously too, money that could have been used to support the work of God was diverted to the payment of ransom to the kidnappers. Some Christians in attempt to escape being noticed by the kidnappers withhold their financial support for the church.
 3. Kidnapping has also affected the level of attendance in church burials and other activities especially wake keep in honours of deed members.

Security and National Development

It has been established in many fora that development cannot thrive in an atmosphere of insecurity, rancor, suspicion, disunity and acrimony. Essentially, it is quite evident that crisis of many forms is a regular phenomenon in Nigeria and evidently according to Opoola (2010:8) “these crises erupted because people do not want to acknowledge the rights of individuals to practice his or her religious beliefs and tenets, control their resources and the lopsided nature of our federalism.”

Thus, to ensure harmony and development of Nigeria, Obodegbulam and Abraham (2011:6) advocated,

That people cultivate the spirit of give and take. They should be able to carry everyone along as they attend to their individual and collective needs.

This according to them will reduce insecurity in all the regions of this country for socio-economic, religious and political transformation of Nigeria. Afolabi (2012:10) lamented thus: Today insecurity is so pronounced in the country that even citizens are not sure of what is going to happen to them, while foreigners are frightened, are no longer desirous to visit Nigeria. Perhaps, that is why many foreign investors are scared.

To worsen the matter, Opoola (2010:7) said, our times are characterized by living daily with the combined forces of destructiveness, untold number of wars of religion, warrior specialist, persecutors, inquisitions, violent intolerance, societal bigotries, various forces of religion disorientation and begetting restlessness.

Although kidnapping in the South Eastern region is the case study, it is important to assert that insecurity appears to be the second name of Nigeria, as terrorism is the order of the day. This no doubt has hampered development in all regions of this country. The resultant effect is the abandonment in many developmental projects like the East – West Road and other projects within the region and the country. The problem of unemployment is heightened because investors are scared of losing both their lives and investing in a highly volatile country.

Myriads of anomalies have obviously necessitated transformation in Nigeria. Over the years, Nigeria had been battling with serious and unbridled Maladies and or straits.

For instances, corruption, nepotism, administrative bottle-necks, fraud, child trafficking, cling trafficking. Advanced free fraud(419), kidnapping, assassination e.t.c. have been on the increase. It is obvious that the astronomical increase in the above mention orgies is giving virtually everybody enormous concern. The earlier we address these problems especially the crime problem in Nigeria, the more development and transformations can be achieved in this country. Developmental here implies the process in which something passes degrees to a different state especially a more advanced and matured state (Bikisu 2008).

Recommendations

This paper recommends the following:

1. Government should continue to tackle the problem of unemployment to reduce the rate at which the youth of today embrace kidnapping as a means of livelihood.
2. Government at all levels should intensify efforts through a joint police and vigilante patrol to forestall wandering at odd times, thereby reducing the risk of kidnapping especially in night.
3. The community members (traditional rulers/elders) should teach their members especially the youth morals to discourage their indulgence in atrocious activities like kidnapping.
4. The South East issues of deprivation, cheating and underdevelopment should be addressed in order to reduce the rate of agitations by the people, leading to kidnapping for ransom.
5. There is need to apply traditional religious methods of identifying and punishing kidnappers to serve as deterrents to others who could have resorted to such atrocious deeds.
6. Corruption at all levels of governance should be discouraged. Hence all corruption cases should be given accelerated and expeditious hearing and the culprits (no matter their status) should be punished.
7. The church and other religious bodies should continue to preach peace, love and unity of all persons irrespective of their religious beliefs.

Conclusion

The menace of kidnapping has assumed a dangerous proportion, if not check is capable of Balkanizing the entire country. It is the considered opinion of this paper that the root cause of kidnapping should be addressed by both the government and the community, at least to ensure a harmonious society devoid of rancor and acrimony. This is in line with the position of Lawrence Hart(2009:31).

Africans are religious people, so the aspect of crime detection and other social vices should not only be handled secularly but religious too. The job of crime detection should not be handled by the police alone. The Dibias, Babalawos, the traditional priest e.t.c. should be called upon to help out in cases where the police cannot succeed. These traditionalists have the spiritual abilities to fish out those who are responsible for social disorder in the society.

On the part of the citizen, there is need for re-orientation and a paradigm shift to the effect that kidnapping is barbaric, devilish and that kidnappers are bound to suffer death penalty when caught.

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