



## Psychological Impact of Kidnapping on Mental Health and Well-being of Abductees: A Study of Abducted School Children in Kaduna State, Nigeria

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### Abstract

A rising insecurity problem in many parts of Nigeria presently is the organised crime of kidnapping. It is very pertinent to understand that kidnapping in Nigeria is not a new phenomenon in the country and, unfortunately, has of recent become a business for ransom that began in the Niger Delta region and has since then gradually grown roots into other states. The demeanour of kidnapping has impeded the country's development as a standard viable tourism attraction. Many intending visitors are constantly warned by their governments to be wary of visiting Nigeria. Episodes of kidnapping in northern Nigeria, especially in Kaduna state, have become alarming. Most victims of such kidnapping attacks have been students from primary to tertiary levels, among others. The students face various degrees of traumatic and life-threatening experiences in the hands of the kidnapers. The school, the parents or the Kaduna state government pay a ransom before the students are released. Afterwards, such students are taken to a nearby hospital for physical examination and treatment of injuries with little or no regard for the psychological and mental health well-being of such unfortunate victims. Thus, the research aimed to critically investigate the psychological and mental health problems associated with kidnap experiences in Kaduna state. This was achieved by documenting the experiences of kidnap victims, identifying their mental health problems and reviewing their coping mechanisms, which will form the basis for the study's recommendations. To achieve this, the researchers undertook a retrospective cross sectional survey. The authors identified a sample of 32 participants for the interview, but only 27 participants voluntarily consented to participate in the research. The data generated from the interview session was transcribed and subjected to content analysis resulting in some unique findings. The outcomes showed that kidnapped children were exposed to the wild, forced to live in unhealthy conditions and terrorised during such episodes. Those released were found to have comorbidities of depression and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) among others. The findings also showed that an effective coping mechanism does not exist, allowing victims to take responsibility for their psychological well-being. The Outcome of the interview with key informants showed good knowledge of the menace of kidnapping and ways to protect the schools and prevent future occurrence. These insights formed the basis for the recommendations, which includes that psychosocial support services be provided for victims and available to schools who may have suffered such incidents while helping to create safe spaces or strong coping mechanism for enabling psychological healing.

**Keywords:** Kidnapping; Mental Health; School Children; PTSD

## Introduction

Nigerian society today is bedevilled with multifaceted challenges, among which the social aspects are most conspicuous. These challenges are known to immerse themselves in the structural foundation and aggregate of the society, occurring through a structured pattern over different generations. One of the many social problems in Nigeria is the issue of insecurity/kidnapping. This problem has permeated many parts of the country with the presence of security challenges like the herdsmen, bandits, Boko Haram, Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), and a group of other social menaces to the country's security. Insecurity, according to Ezemenaka is increasingly prevalent in Nigeria [1]. The reason for making this claim is because it was observed that the Nigeria security system has been significantly ineffective, which has resulted in a tremendous level of violence across the country. Ezemenaka concluded that the ineffectiveness of the Nigerian security system had yielded organised crimes such as kidnapping, which possess a multi-causal connotation, including unavailability of required resources, and corruption, which exude the essence of the ineffectiveness of the security system [1]. Therefore, some authors have called for the need to be observant, to seek redress, and a complete replacement of the security agencies across the country, especially where crime are known to surpass the security system [1-3].

A rising insecurity problem in many parts of the country today is the organised crime of kidnapping. According to Uchenna, organised crime is regarded as a ferocious and undercover blackmailing event that is executed by a syndicate of criminals [4]. In addition, they espouse techniques to protect members of their group by ensuring that their unlawful act is not disturbed [4]. Therefore, this definition helps us to understand the ideology behind the criminal act of kidnapping, connoting that a successful kidnapping operation requires strategising by the culprits who intend to execute such an act. Hence, if not well planned, there is the tendency to have such an event being hampered by external forces that may or may not be unprecedented. Scholars have recognised kidnapping as an endemic social problem in Nigeria [4,5,7]. It is fast becoming a lucrative alternative for criminals [5]. It is very pertinent to understand that kidnapping in Nigeria is not a new phenomenon in the country, but what is relatively is the kidnapping for ransom that began its origin in the Niger Delta region and has since then gradually grown roots into other states

such as Abia, Anambra, Kaduna, Kastina, Niger, Yobe, Borno, Kwara, Abuja, and a host of other northern States. According to Abdulkabir and Ezemenaka, kidnapping rates have 'geometrically increased' [1,8]; it was reported that over 2000 people, including young Chibok girls, politicians, government officials, and kings, were kidnapped between 2014 – 2017. Briggs and Ezemenaka indicated that kidnapping is now a big business motivated by profit rather than principle [1,9].

The problem of Kidnapping in Nigeria has resulted in a menace that distorts the country's social order and national security since the inception of a democratic government in the late 90s. There are some problems associated with kidnapping; that are experienced on both the side of the kidnapper and the side of the victims who have been kidnapped. However, on the side of the victim, one of the major challenges experienced by surviving victims is the psychological effect of their experience while in captivity, resulting in various mental health challenges. It sometimes takes many years for the victims to go through a gradual process of healing from the psychological wounds inflicted upon them by their captors, and to an extent, some victims never completely recover. Kidnappings result in deep emotional and mental scars that leave victims battling issues of trust, independence, love, sex, respect, and a host of others. The development of mental health problems usually stem from the fact that kidnapping as a crime occurs as a sudden and unforeseen event to the victim, and has, in many cases, been proven to be life-threatening to the victims based on their experience.

"The terms mental health and mental illness encompass a broad collection of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural phenomena" [10]. Mental illness includes, for example, someone who is always consumed with thoughts of something happening around him while nothing happens. According to the World Health Organization, mental health includes "subjective well-being, perceived self-efficacy, autonomy, competence, inter-generational dependence, and self-actualization of one's intellectual and emotional potential, among others" [11]. The WHO further states that "the well-being of an individual is encompassed in the realization of their abilities, coping with normal stresses of life, productive work, and contribution to their community". However, most people beset by signs and symptoms of mental illness do not see themselves as mentally ill, nor are they identified in this way

by others such as friends, family, employers, physicians, or mental health professionals. Nadir, *et al.* identified three components of mental health: emotional well-being, psychological well-being and social well-being [12]. Emotional well-being includes happiness, interest in life, and satisfaction; psychological well-being includes liking most parts of one's personality, being good at managing the responsibilities of daily life, being satisfied with one's own life, having good relationships with others, while social well-being refers to "positive functioning and involves having something to contribute to society (social contribution), feeling part of a community (social integration), believing that society is becoming a better place for all people (social actualization) and that the way society works makes sense to them (social coherence)" [13].

Several studies have been done on kidnapping, as well as on mental health. Many of these studies revolved around the factors underlying the prevalence of kidnapping, the various efforts of government in mitigating the prevalence of kidnapping, ritualism as a factor for kidnapping, and typologies of kidnapping. However, very little has been done on the kidnapping experiences of school children and the resultant adverse mental health challenges that might occur after the survival of school children in captivity, either through the payment of ransom or escape or rescue of the children by the appropriate authority. Therefore, this study aims to examine the emergence of psychological or mental health problems that may arise from the experiences of school children in the hands of their captors.

## Materials and Methods

The population for this study consists of some abducted school children schooling and residing in Kaduna state. Appropriate stakeholders (school authorities, PTA chairman/chairperson, security officials, and mental health specialists) were also involved in this study. The sampling approach used in recruiting the research participants was the non-probability sampling technique. A multi-stage sampling combination of purposive, convenience, and key informant sampling techniques were used in selecting participants for this study. Within Kaduna state, there are 23 local governments, this selection was based on the local government that harbours schools that had once been attacked, and had their students abducted by miscreants. Therefore, Chikun local government out of these 23 local governments was selected for the study. In the first stage of selection, this study has purposively selected four (4) from

the twelve (12) political wards of the Chikun local government, thereby representing four strata. In the second stage, the study conveniently located students who had experienced abduction in each local government. In the third stage, a key informant approach was adopted to meet the expected sample size in the population. In the fourth stage, in-depth interviews were purposively conducted with the identified students after seeking their consent and that of their parents or the oldest household member. The selection criteria used in this study include;

- Being a student at the time of abduction
- Must have survived abduction either through ransom or escape, and
- Must be within the selected area of the research.

However, 32 participants were purposively recruited in this study. This sample size was chosen following the recommendation of an average sample size of 30 for qualitative research [14]. The data were collected with the aid of interview guides, the Key Informant Interview guide and the In-depth Interview guide comprised of relevant probe questions which guide the discussion along the study objectives. Additional notes were also taken in the course of the interviews to complement the data recording processes.

### Key informant interview (KII) guide

It is important to obtain information about stakeholders' (School authorities, security officials, PTA chairperson, and mental health specialist) perceptions and knowledge. It involved interviews with professionals with the knowledge and firsthand information about kidnapping, mental health problems and cautions. A total number of 8 KIIs was conducted. There were questions on KIIs to elicit responses from school authorities, security officials, PTA chairpersons, and mental health specialists. This study elicited information from the participants on the effect of kidnapping experiences on mental health, the potential dangers of kidnapping experiences, and preventive measures on the side of all necessary stakeholders to mitigate the risk of kidnapping.

### In-depth interview (IDI)

This comprises semi-structured in-depth interviews. A total of 24 respondents were interviewed, mainly the sufferers' experiences and the effect the experiences have had on them.

This was done to elicit information on incidents of kidnapping, potential mental health problems as a result of the aftermath of the kidnapping experiences, as well as the coping mechanisms that the abducted students had espoused.

Therefore, a table has been created to describe the research tools that best fit the category of participants of the study to delineate and narrow tools aligning with the study population.

Population	In-depth Interview (IDI)	Key informant interview (KII)
Political ward 1	6	
Political ward 2	6	
Political ward 3	6	
Political ward 4	6	
School Authority/PTA Chairman in Selected Schools		4
Security Officials		2
Mental Health Specialist		2
Total	24	8

Table a

### Results and Discussion

The findings obtained from the interviews were discussed and interpreted per each study objective. This presentation is displayed in sections in relation to the research objectives of this study. A total of twenty seven participants were interviewed to generate responses that helped understand the final aim of the study. Data obtained were analyzed, interpreted, and presented as thus;

#### Demographic characteristics of the participants

Table 1 showed the demographic characteristics of the participants. There was an unequal proportion of gender amongst the study participants, 19 (70.4%) were males and 8 (29.6%) were females. Nine of the participants (40.9%) were first born of their families, and just three (13.6%) of the study participants were the sixth and last born of their families. Finally, a large majority (36.4%) of the study participants were Senior Secondary 2 (SS2) students, while a minimal proportion (9.1%) of the study participants were SS3 students. Nearly all (90.9%) of the participants have both parents, and almost all (68.2%) of the study participants are

from a nuclear family, while (31.8%) of the study participants are from an extended family. Meanwhile, the majority (45.5%) of the study participants were from the family of five, (22.7%) were of the family of four, while (18.2%) of the study were from the family of six, (9.1%) of the participant are of the family of seven, and (4.5%) were from the family of two. A majority (60%) of the key informants had a postgraduate degree as their highest educational qualification, while (20%) had either a National certificate or bachelor’s degree as the highest educational qualification. Two participants (40%) of the key informant had spent 21-30 years in service as the longest serving public servant, likewise two (40%) of the key informants had spent 11-20 years in service, while only one (20%) of the key informant had spent less than ten years in the position held in the course of this study. The key informants’ responsibilities and duties vary due to their different professions.

Variables	Categories	Frequency	percentage
Gender	Male	19	70.4%
	Female	8	29.6%
Position in the family	1 <sup>st</sup>	9	40.9%
	2 <sup>nd</sup>	4	18.2%
	4 <sup>th</sup>	6	27.3%
	6 <sup>th</sup>	3	13.6%
Level of Study	JSS3	4	18.2%
	SS1	5	22.7%
	SS2	8	36.4%
	SS3	2	9.1%
	JSS 2	3	13.6%
Highest Educational Qualification	M.Sc	3	60%
	B.Sc	1	20%
	NCE	1	20%
No of parents living	Dead	2	9.1%
	Alive	20	90.9%
Total No of family members	2	1	4.6%
	4	5	22.7%
	5	10	45.5%
	6	4	18.2%
	7	2	9.1%
Type of family	Nuclear	15	68.2%
	Extended	7	31.8%

Position in Organisation	Vice Principal	1	20%
	Assistant Superintendent of Police	1	20%
	PTA Secretary	1	20%
	Teacher Chief	1	20%
	Superintendent of Correctional Facility	1	20%
Years in Service	Less Than 10 years	2	40%
	11-20 Years	2	40%
	21-30 Years	1	25%

**Table 1:** Socio-demographic Result of all Study Participants.

### The result of various experiences encountered by school children in the days of their captivity

This section reveals the perspectives of interviewed school children in narrating the manner in which they were kidnapped, the participants described the forms of treatment they received, how they were kept in the den while in captivity and the type of abuse and humiliation such as beating, abuses and sexual rape.

### Description of how their kidnap incident took place

The manner in which the students were abducted from their hostels could be testified from the narration of one the students below:

“I was at the hostel after prep the light went off, we all went to the hostel, I fell asleep with the intention of waking up later to continue reading. I was sleeping when I heard some kind of noise I woke up I found one of my mates hiding under the bunk I was confused. I immediately laid down flat on my bed then I heard a voice asking us to wake up put on our clothes and come out, that they are here to help us. I stood up because our principal already told us JTF were coming to help us, so I came down from the bed and follow them outside, we laid down there for some minutes then they led us through the back fence and broke the fence so we matched through the bush and trek for almost 17 hours before we

reached the main camp we had some stop over, many of us were terribly weak and our feet were hurt when they saw that some of us were weak they sent for bike to come pick some of us. I wasn’t fortunate to get the bike so I trekked to the camp and I lay down”. (FEMALE SS1 Student).

From the above narration, students had prior knowledge through the school authority of the possibility of being kidnapped by a group of people and imminent help was on the way, this encouraged their gullibility when a group of people walked into their hostel and mentioned they were there to help them. However, amongst other participants there is another perspective yet similar but succinct than the previously shared narration. This narration emanates from the view of a male student still awake when the incident happened. In this case, the participant was of the expression that:

“Around 12 am Sunday night they came into the hostel because the doors were open. All the students thought they were soldiers because they were on camouflage, we came out and saw them with Fulani rubber shoes that was when we understood they were not soldiers, so they carried us and we trekked for like 15hours in the bush we stayed with them for like two weeks, then helicopter came and was releasing bomb that was how they changed our location”. (Male SS3 Student).

The above narration revealed that the appropriate authorities had to submit to the biddings of the abductors in order to have and ensure the safety of the abducted school children, and as a result, bombs were exchange for the location of the abducted school children with the terrorist group responsible for kidnapping the school children. The narration is a continuum of the previous narration.

### How the participants described the way and manner they were treated while in the hands of their abductors

Narrations and expressions of the various experiences by abducted school children have revealed and indicated that school children abducted in Kaduna State Nigeria, were treated badly and terribly. This implies that at the kidnapper’s den, they were un-kept and it wasn’t a conducive place for living. A participant expressed that:

“It was terrible because that day we were tired and they still asked us to go and cook. We were treated badly. We lived in a very bad way, we were made to fetch firewood from the thick bush, and some of us got injured. We use dirty water for bathing and cooking, we just allow it to settle and remove the neat part for cooking”. (MALE JSS3 student).

The narration form above possesses all indication that the abducted school children were not living under good condition, contrary to the living condition they had in school, and were even susceptible to physical health problems, such as water borne diseases and bruises or cuts on any part of their bodies as indicated that a few of the students got injured. Another participant buttressed the argument of the first speaker, by describing the form of treatment he received which he considered as a terrible treatment. He expressed that;

“It was terrible because that day we were tired and they still asked us to go and cook white rice with firewood. There was a time they brought in food from another camp that was bad, rice and beans in water the food was like 3 days old we had to wash the cooked rice and beans in water and re-cook it still it was not good enough and there was a time they gave us small portion of rice, we had to measure it with cup and put in our hands that was what we ate for like 4 days. We stayed for 4 days like that. We used to go to the main bush to get firewood and scorpion stung me on the neck. Sometimes before they get food for us it will be around 1 or 2 in the morning, they will wake us up while we were already asleep, we would go to the stream to get water in that thick bush in the night. Sometimes the guards will pity us and get us “Omo”(detergent) to take our bath in the river and sometimes we had our bath while they were there”. (MALE SS2 Student).

The above statement reveals a few of the health problems the abducted school children were susceptible to, such as having diarrhea from the source of water used in cooking, drinking and/or bathing, or infection from animal bites/stings. Another participant buttressed the argument of the previous speakers that treatments received at the camp were bad and not conducive. She expressed that;

“Very badly, no conducive area to eat and sleep, we slept on the floor”. (FEMALE JSS3 Student).

However, quite a number of the students described the treatment they received while at the den was fair because no one was killed. A participant described his view as;

“We were treated fairly since nobody was killed. It was terrible, it was a place of discomfort, the anxiety of not been killed, shot or abuse, the sleep, no shade, no mosquito net, insult, it was totally terrible”. (MALE JSS2 Student).

Basically, the views that existed on how the participants were treated and how living in the camp was like revealed that school children kidnapped were treated terribly, made to sleep under a tree, on bare floor, insulted and humiliated. This implies that the victims of kidnapping are mostly poor treated, and were exposed to health and emotional hazards.

#### **The feelings they developed after being released from the captors and ways they have experienced any of these feelings**

Findings from the study through the shared experiences of the abducted school children revealed that the kidnapped school children developed some mental health conditions after their release just as was expected of anyone who goes through this kind of trauma. Some of the mental health conditions suffered by the study participants included but not limited to; insomnia, shortness of breath, and feeling faint, anxiety and so on. On that basis, a participant expressed that:

“Since I came back home, I have completely lost my appetite, and I have found it difficult to eat. The only thing I have majorly been eating was tea and spaghetti, not until yesterday that I was able to eat Tuwo since I have come back. Also, I hardly have complete sleep without waking up in the middle of the night and up till now I have had blood transfusion twice.” (FEMALE SS2 Student).

The report from the above victim has revealed that participants not only suffer mental or psychological breakdown after their release, but also tend to suffer physical health damage due to the environment they have resided in the last few days/weeks, and as such can react to such environmental condition. Another participant buttressed the narration of the first speaker but with a similar yet different explanation from the previous speaker. She was happy at first but few days after gaining freedom the mental health conditions set in. She expressed her view as;

"I was happy the first two to three days after that I was always depressed, having nightmare, scared and these feelings have seriously affected my health negatively". (FEMALE SS 2 Student).

The aforementioned from all indications revealed the possibility of such participant suffering from depression, as well as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). This resulted from the culmination of various negative and unconventional experiences suffered from the captive's den. Another participant buttressed the report of the previous speakers but with a similar yet different explanation. He explained that he does experience night mares, insomnia and so on. The participant described his view as;

"I felt excited when they released us because of my loved ones but when I got home I easily got scared. I do experience night mares, mood change, get weak and tired easily. Also have issues concentrating, difficulty in sleeping and waking up too early. It affected my behaviour in the sense that if I am in the midst of people they will be talking to me and I will be carried away. I won't even respond to them". (MALE SS 2 Student).

Findings from the narrations of participants, they exhibited symptoms of various mental health conditions that are the aftermaths of a kidnapping experience. These participants have shown symptoms of anxiety, depression, panic attack, hyper arousal, PTSD and so on. However, participant developed symptoms of this mental health conditions in stages after being released from the captors. In addition, the ways they have experienced any of the mental health problems indicate that all of the victims developed more than one mental health problem. The most prevalent mental health conditions experienced by the abductees were PTSD (with symptoms of nightmares), Insomnia (with symptoms of sleepless nights), and Anxiety (with symptoms of tiredness). This implies that everyone abducted are prone to have one or two mental health problems because of the experiences they encounter in the hands of the abductors.

### Coping mechanisms adopted after the kidnapping experience

It is for a fact that the abducted school children in the area of Kaduna State, Nigeria were treated badly and terribly hence developed one or mental health problems like anxiety, insomnia, PTSD and so on. It is on this note that victims took some steps to help them cope with the new development and some of the

measures taken by victims and their parents are going to the hospital for proper checkup, therapy, getting busy and so on. A participant expressed that:

"I was taken to the hospital because I started vomiting and purging so I was rushed to the hospital". (FEMALE SS2 Student).

Another participant buttressed the narration of the other speaker but with a similar yet different explanation. That she gets busy and also read motivation books. To further buttress the points of the previous speakers, another participant opined that he too was taken to the hospital before going back home to his family. He described that;

"I was taken to the hospital by the government for like two days I can't even remember, and then they release us back to our parents. Before the incident I am a printer by profession, so I try to go back there and whenever I am tired I go home to sleep". (MALE SS2 Student).

From the foregoing, many of the study participants visit the healthcare facility for checkup as a first step taken after regaining their freedom, and experience unusual symptoms in their body and/or in their minds. In addition, the respondents were asked if they have resumed school or not. From the study most of the respondents claimed to have resumed school while some have not. The respondents who have resumed school were further asked how they feel after resumption. Some of them said they felt more relaxed while some felt insecure and tensed. A participant expressed that;

"At times, I feel tensed, but I am trying to get along with my friends". (FEMALE SS2 Student).

The narration from the above revealed that a number of the study participants were constantly in fear, thinking there might be a repeat of their previous ordeal, which suggest that they are constantly vigilant, suffering from panic attack and/or attention deficit. Nevertheless, another participant buttressed the report of the previous speaker but in a different way. He said he felt excited but still has that fear sometimes. This implies that even at the joy of gaining freedom there is still some psychological impact on the victims.

"I was actually excited but sometime I still have that fear when I came back". (MALE SS2 Student).

The most common measures taken by victims and their parents were; going to the hospital for proper checkup, therapy, and general social support. While some of the victims have resumed school some have not. This implies that most parents and guardians have taken some appropriate measures to help their family members get back to their normal selves.

### Outcome of key informant interview

#### Preventive measures taken to mitigate the prevalence of school children kidnapping

This section reveals the perspectives of interviewed participants to describe the preventive measures taken to mitigate the prevalence of school children's kidnapping. It is on this note that the steps they think school children who develop symptoms of mental health should take and how often are they to take these steps, what extent do you think these steps can help abducted school children recover from their health problems.

#### Knowledge of kidnapping in your locality

It has become obvious and conspicuous that kidnapping is rampant in our society today. There is no gainsaying that the kidnapping of school children in many northern states has recently become a phenomenon of significant concern and has called the attention of the security agencies and other stakeholders in the northern part of Nigeria. However, kidnapping as an organised crime is not a recent event in the northern parts of the country. It is on this note that some key informants describe their knowledge of kidnapping in the area and as such, a participant expressed that:

"It has been here for so long, it started from these miscreants coming to deprive us of our benefits probably when we finish working they will come and steal our things they started kidnapping our animals and now they have started kidnapping us and our children. It has been there for long and it's increasing because of the insecurity" (KII/MALE/PTA SECRETARY/KADUNA/2021).

The participants have elaborately exuded that kidnapping as a phenomenon in the northern part of the country, and Kaduna state in particular. Kidnapping did not just suddenly commence, but started with a petty crime of stealing food items, and animals, and has overtime grown into the act of kidnapping individuals, which has particularly been fueled by the high rate of insecurity with the state, and the country at large. On that note, another participant

buttressed the perception of the previous speaker but took it a bit further, specifically to the emergence of the prevalence of kidnapping. The participant expressed that:

"This whole thing started when we were in school. We started hearing about kidnapping in Nigeria, in Kaduna, then they started coming to my place. This whole thing started in 2018, like a riot, some chiefs were killed in the southern part, especially in Kaduna, my own chief was kidnapped and finally killed and up till date has not been restored. So this kidnapping started getting worse. 2019 we heard of kidnapping in other schools like Engravers, there was a kidnapping incident of students and staff. 2020 it expanded to universities and forestry, the whole thing started getting closer to us, there was a school they went to in Kujama, and they discover the school has vacated then they strike our school on the 5th of July 2012". (KII/MALE/VICE PRINCIPAL/KADUNA/2021).

The key informants were further asked what they thought could be responsible for the kidnapping problem. Some informants believe it is political while others think it is a religion issue. It is on this note that the informants described that;

"I think on my own it is political and religion undertone of this issue, trying to suppress or Islamize or to make another ethnic group to be subjected to another or intimidate just like a network put in place deep underline just like if you read history some planted kidnapping and it is coming to be prominent". (KII/MALE/VICE PRINCIPAL/KADUNA/2021).

The key informant in the above narration believes that the two major factors responsible for the sudden increase and prevalent problem of kidnapping are; politics and religion. However, another participant buttressed his own argument with a contrary perception to the previous speakers, emphasizing on destabilization rather than politics or religion. The informant explained that he does not think there is something specific that can be said to be the cause of the kidnap. The participant described his view as:

"I don't think there is anything responsible for this kidnapping I think these people behind the kidnapping are just trying to destabilize us and rip us of our benefits now they are trying to deny our children education in the name of trying to create insecurity and the government is doing so little" (KII/MALE/PTA SECRETARY/KADUNA/2021).

### Preventive measures

From the study, it can be deduced that the school management has been taking some preventive measure to ensure adequate security in the school. Likewise, the parents of the victims played a very important role in the release of the victims. A participant from the study enunciated that;

“They have been so supportive coming here every day for prayers, we know how we tax ourselves, call ourselves paying the ransoms these kidnappers want, on each number of children released to us we have the amount of ransom being paid and it is not with the help of the government. It is we the parents that have been doing it just to get our children back”. (KII/MALE/PARENT/KADUNA/2021).

Regarding the security measures that the security personnel have been taken to prevent this from happening in other schools, the informants interviewed described that they have told most schools that they need good and proper fencing with hidden cameras. ASP expressed that.

“Most schools, we have told them they need good fencing, other devices like CCTV, and maybe they should hide cameras somewhere to be able to capture these perpetrators”. (KII/MALE/ASP/2021).

Furthermore, the informants were asked about the measure the state government has put in place. The informants were of the perception that the Government is putting some policies in place to help curb the menace. If these intending policies are implemented through the right channels and with the right stakeholders involved in the formulation and implementation of these policies, there is a significant ratio for the success of the policies that will be implemented in curbing the menace of kidnapping not just within the state, but also across the country. In lieu of this, a key informant expressed that;

“Well the government is doing their part, the officers also we also have our part. The government has set up a counter surveillance program, training and retraining, including the local vigilantes”. (KII/MALE/CSC/2021).

### Discussion

In response to the rise of kidnapping and other associated insecurity issues in Kaduna state, this research tried to examine

the psychological, emotional and physical implications of such developments on the abductees within the context of abducted school children in Kaduna state. To this end, a range of background issues was clarified as it relates to the broader issue of insecurity in the state and its attendant mental health implication, given the scope of previous research on the subject matter in different domains. From the review of the research background issues, some fundamental issues were noted, including the psychosocial implication of banditry and kidnapping and the failure of existing research to effectively explore the mental health implication of this development which has become the norm in recent times. Thus, the research has focused on documenting the experience of school children who have been victims of captivity in Kaduna state, identifying the mental health problem faced by children who have been released, explore the coping mechanism of such children. It was assumed that addressing these objectives would set the basis for managing the mental health of children who have been victims of insurgency and expand the scope of existing research on the subject matter in recent times. The findings in our study has corroborated with the findings of other authors that PTSD is the most prevalent mental disorder experienced by kidnap victims, irrespective of the captivity duration, and universally observed is the certain risks and effects associated to mental health [15-17]. They contended that short-term psychological effects begin with symptoms exhibition just within the first month of gaining freedom. The common mental illnesses within this period include anxiety and post-traumatic symptoms such as physical tension, insomnia, hyper-arousal, and reminiscing on the event of their abduction. As expected, children are more vulnerable to long-term mental health effects after a kidnapping incident. Younger children tend to have more behavioural and emotional issues. No significant gender differences have been documented between boys and girls. But adult women tend to have long term mental health effects after kidnapping incidents than men [18].

The concept of kidnapping was advanced as an emerging security threat as supported by a range of local and international narratives on the subject, leading to an overview of kidnapping in the Nigerian context. Another relevant aspect of the kidnapping literature was reviewed, including how kidnapping occurs, the causal factors and the documented negative implication. According to Abamara and Dike, abduction victims are usually held hostage, and they are subjected to various forms of violence and, in some

cases, traded by their captors to other people indefinitely [19]. For balance, the notion of mental health, which is the broad cover for psychological concerns, was also reviewed with appropriate consideration of the state of mental health and other broad issues relating to mental health. Furthermore, Abamara and Dike found that mental state examination of victims revealed victims to be anxious and mildly depressed [19]. However, the study found the absence of psychotic illness symptoms. More so, the narrative explored the discourse on coping mechanisms, which was crucial to benchmarking with the coping mechanism identified from the primary data collected. These issues were put in perspective with appropriate consideration of the relevant theoretical framework, which further served as the conceptual underpinning of the research. Specifically, the biopsychosocial model formed the basis for rethinking the nexus between kidnapping and the psychological wellbeing of children in Kaduna.

In a bid to collect relevant primary data to assess the psychological impact of kidnapping on the mental health and wellbeing of abductees (school children) in Kaduna state, a suitable methodology was crafted, appropriately justified and presented in the course of the study. The design followed the process of the retrospective cross sectional survey design was considered crucial in studying issues of kidnapping and the aftermath implication on the mental health of the victims. The study population included abducted and released school children in Kaduna state, and the sample size was 30, considering the qualitative methodology. As such, the researcher utilized the Key Informant Interview Guide and In-depth Interview Guide to collect appropriate data from the population segment, including stakeholder segments such as the Parent Teachers Association (PTA) and school authorities. The data from 27 participants who willingly participated in the research was subject to thematic content analysis, the basis on which key findings were observed as presented.

### Limitation

This study could have been more interesting if it had been spread to other geographical regions in Nigeria since kidnapping has engulfed the whole country.

### Conclusion

With regards to the experiences encountered by school children in their days of captivity, it was found that the students were

treated terribly and badly, they were placed under unhealthy living conditions, access to drinking water was a challenge, they were exposed to infection and animal attack but to a large extent, most of them considered their treatment as fair since no one was killed. With regards to the mental health problems facing such students, it was found that most of the victims had negative feelings with some level of insomnia, anxiety disorders and others. There were also indications of depression and PTSD among the survivors of kidnapping. In terms of coping mechanisms, it was observed that some of them were taken to the hospital for physical treatment, some of them struggle to cope with maintaining relationship with their friends, and others were not conscious of the mental health implication of the kidnap episodes.

In view of the findings, which significantly addressed the research objectives and the leading questions, the researchers conclude that kidnapping has diverse psychological impacts on the mental health and well-being of abducted school children in Kaduna state. Yet, society and the victims are not fully aware of the mental health implication, nor is an appropriate mechanism put in place to meet the psychosocial needs of such victims towards reintegrating them into the society. This key conclusion and the findings formed the basis for the following recommendations:

- **Awareness and capacity building:** The findings showed a gap in awareness and capacity building among school children to develop their capacity to stay safe in order to avoid the risk of kidnapping. Therefore, security agencies need to step into the space to build the capacity of young ones to take preventive measures towards reducing the incidence of kidnapping in schools.
- **Improvement of school security and establishment of early warning system:** Schools need to go beyond engagement of local security guards to having modernized technologies such as artificial intelligence surveillance system that uses GIS data to check their environment and routinely scan for security threat. The management also needs to build relation with host communities for early warning systems and intelligence to improve outcomes.
- **Improved psychosocial support services in schools:** In addition to customary roles such as school guidance and counselling units, there is a need to have counsellors and therapists engaged in such schools to help provide

psychosocial support to such students throughout the course of their learning.

- **Establishment of reintegration program:** The current effort of taking victims to hospitals is good but may not be sufficient to meet their mental health needs. As such, the state government needs to work towards establishing mental health and psychological services department in hospitals with structured procedures for the reintegration of such victims into the society while creating safe spaces to address mental health concerns.
- The government need to work towards improving the general state of security in the state towards minimizing episodes of insecurity and this may require multi-level stakeholder and agency collaboration towards safeguarding schools and improving the mental health of such students.

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### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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