Socio-economic dynamism and the expansion of child kidnapping for ransom in Nigeria

Paul Oluwatosin Bello

Abstract: Generally, kidnapping of children for ransom is a global menace and Nigeria is not an exception. Measures adopted by the State to combat the scourge have not really been effective. From the compilation of journal articles and corpus of media reports, this article examines the encumbrances within the socio-economic milieu that engender the growth of child kidnapping in Nigeria. Emile Durkheim’s Anomie theory and Robert Merton’s Strain theory of crime was drawn in explaining how systemic failures within the socio-economic structure of the society concomitantly impact in expanding criminalities. The paper concludes that until the socio-economic nuances that concretize the growth and proliferation of this illicit enterprise are addressed, attempts at combating the menace by the State will be counterproductive.

Subjects: Crime Control; Violent Crime; Crime and Crime Prevention

Keywords: child kidnapping; crime; socio-economic; ransom; Nigeria

1. Introduction

Child kidnapping is a phenomenon that affects countries all over the world—from Mexico, United States of America (USA) and Columbia, to many countries in Asia, Middle East, Africa, and beyond (Jolly & Vikram Sharma, 2021; Leonardo, 2018; Okwaqbole, 2020; Oliveira, 2019; Stubbert et al., 2015). Essien and Ben (2013) further aver that kidnapping generally is not really a recent incidence in human history, but it is relatively a fledgling menace in the African Continent (see, Essien & Ben, 2013; National Crime Research Centre, 2017). Many African countries have experienced incidents of kidnappings where children are preponderantly the victims (Australian Government, 2014; National Crime Research Centre, 2017; Onuoha, 2010).

Palpable trepidation among people over “who the next victim might be” has resulted in the emergence of several international insurance companies that provide personal and corporate

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr Paul Oluwatosin Bello is currently a Research Fellow in the College of Law, School of Criminal Justice, University of South Africa (UNISA), Pretoria, South Africa. He obtained his doctorate degree in Policing from Tshwane University of Technology, Pretoria, South Africa. Dr has published and presented peer reviewed papers on police legitimacy and procedural justice policing at local and international conferences. He is a member of Criminological Society of Africa.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

This paper focused on the menace of child kidnapping in Nigeria, which is widely acknowledged to be on the increase. It explains that child kidnapping has flourished in the country owing to certain socioeconomic factors within the country’s socioeconomic environment. These factors were considered, and two theories were adapted to provide explanations on how these factors have created an environment for child kidnapping to thrive in different parts of the country. The paper concludes, and makes some recommendations on how the menace can be addressed in the country.
kidnapping policies (Pharaoh, 2005). Because the menace is mostly underreported, there is a dearth of reliable statistics on the sternness of this crime on a global scale (see, E. M. Phillips, 2011). The problem is further worsened by variations in the definition and documentation of this crime between countries (E. M. Phillips, 2011). Many countries do not have proper documentation or records of child kidnapping, let alone its classifications; rather, reports of such nature are often interfaced with other analogous crimes. Notwithstanding this limitation, the crime has been adjudged as a serious problem in over 50 countries across the globe (Koudad & Chougueur, 2021; E. M. Phillips, 2011). Although victims of kidnapping are drawn from diverse segments of the population, studies have shown that children are the main victims of kidnappings in many countries (Australian Government, 2014; Hammer et al., 2002; Onuoha, 2010).

Child kidnapping generally refers to the unlawful act of capturing and the snatching away of a child, or children, against their will through the use of force, threats or enticement, and holding them in false incarceration in order to obtain money from their parents or guardian(s). Although the purpose of kidnapping varies from person-to-person, group-to-group, and organisation-to-organisation, but it is mostly rooted in exploitation (Tade et al., 2020). The context of kidnapping also differs from culture-to-culture and country-to-country (National Crime Research Centre, 2017). For instance, in the USA, kidnapping of children by family members is prevalent. It involves the abduction or kidnapping of a child by one parent without the consent of the other (Renfro, 2020). The basis for this type of kidnapping also differs and may be shaped by factors beyond the scope of this article. However, of all the different types, child kidnapping for ransom, experienced in many regions of the world (Briggs, 2001), has become a serious crime in which both familiar and unfamiliar children are targeted and entrapped by unscrupulous gangs for exploitation (Tade et al., 2020). Kidnapping for ransom has now become a booming business enterprise across the globe where an estimated 100,000 incidents occur every year (Christi, 2008; Stubbert et al., 2015). Furthermore, kidnappers often deploy different extractive strategies to procure ransom from the relations or acquaintances of their victims (Tade et al., 2020).

Child kidnapping for ransom is endemic in Nigeria. Okoli (2019: na) argues that “Nigeria has one of the world’s highest rates of kidnap-for-ransom cases”. Statistics also placed Nigeria as the third and fifth country in the world with reported cases of kidnapping (Perlberg, 2013). This crime poses serious threat to social order and has become pejorative, not only to many children and parents (or guardians) but to community safety, cohesion and national security (Tade et al., 2020). Kidnapped-child victims may also suffer prolonged post-traumatic stress and other ancillary psychological disorders (Carey, 2009). As Carey (2009) avers, about two-thirds of kidnapped children suffer lingering mental health problems such as depression and post-traumatic stress. Kidnapped victims may also exhibit narcissistic compulsive behaviours, passive aggressive behaviours, lack confidence and feel insecure, and have problems with interpersonal relationships (Madigan, 2003). Additionally, families are also traumatised when one of their children is killed or dies in kidnappers’ den, or when demanded ransoms cannot be raised (Hutchinson, 2009). Exasperations among people over the spate of the crime in the country (Nigeria) have often resulted in sporadic administration of jungle-justice (or mob justice) on suspected kidnappers in communities, albeit in contrast to the law (Usman, 2020). Many kidnappers have been lynched by irate youths long before any security officials could come to their rescue (see, Usman, 2020). Regardless of the poignancy and resentments that may accompany such incivility, child kidnapping is a gruesome violation of the rights of a child.

In response to the spate of the menace in the country, several states have introduced several measures to combat the scourge, including stringent regulatory frameworks, yet the menace is still on the rise unabatedly (Tade et al., 2020). Although stiffer punitive measures could possibly deter criminals and reduce the expansion of the crime, but are at best stopgap strategies, usually not adequate to stem the tide. Moreover, despite those measures, the menace is still increasing. Why has the menace persisted in Nigeria even after the efforts of the state in combating it? Using Emile Durkheim’s Anomie theory and Robert Merton’s Strain theory of crime, this article
investigates child kidnapping for ransom in Nigeria, and explains the socio-economic conditions that promulgate the proliferation of the crime in recent times. Besides contributing to raising awareness, this article also examines key resonating factors responsible for the growth of the crime in the country for appropriate policy formulation by policymakers and interventions by relevant stakeholders.

Additionally, previous research publications on kidnapping in Nigeria focused extensively on the adult population, specific regions of the country, dimensions of kidnapping, and the response of the state (see, Obarisiagbon & Aderinto, 2018; Oyewole, 2016; Tade et al., 2020). Notably, the menace of child kidnapping for ransom in Nigeria has only received sporadic consideration in scholarly literature. This current article therefore represents the first attempt to initiate a discussion on child kidnapping for ransom in Nigeria by explicating the socio-economic conditions that engender the growth of the menace in recent times.

1.1. Anomie-strain theory and child kidnapping in Nigeria

Anomie theory provides an explanatory value in understanding how socio-economic dynamics engender the growth of child kidnapping in Nigeria. It also serves as a veritable theoretical tool for understanding the relationship between social structure, culture and criminal behaviour. Emile Durkheim (1893) propounded anomie theory. As a proponent of structural functionalism, Durkheim considers the society and its social systems as organic unions (Durkheim, 1966, 1951). Both the system and sub-system (citizens) have vital roles to perform for the society to function effectively (Çam & Irmak, 2014). Moreover, societies are bound together by certain norms and cultures which create and nurture a sense of solidarity in people or what Durkheim described as “common consciousness”. It is this consciousness that set the pace for the introduction of regulatory frameworks or system of control for the effective functioning of societies and the sustainability of the relationship between the system and the people.

However, industrialisation does not only culminate in urban sprawl (mass exodus of people rural to urban centres) but revolutionised human wants and desires. It also heralded and established new norms and values that contradict the previously held ones. Ultimately, this new order weakens solidarity in societies and results in breakdown of law and order. It is these imbalances in social equilibrium that Durkheim referred to as “anomie” (Durkheim, 1951, pp. 241–276). Put differently, anomie occurs because of sudden crises that sprout out of political, economic and social changes (Çam & Irmak, 2014). Etymologically, the word “anomie” means normlessness, or the absence of norms, rules, or laws (Boudon, 2018; Bygnes, 2016). Anomie denotes a state of normlessness developing owing to the absence of social control or dysfunctionality of existing control mechanisms in a society because of socio-political and economic transition (Irmak & Çam, 2014). Therefore, crime or deviance is viewed as a direct outcome of ineffective normative and regulatory structures in societies.

For decades now, chains of socio-economic problems, such as poverty, unemployment, inequalities, bad leadership and governance, and corruption, to mention a few, have mired Nigeria. Most of these socio-economic encumbrances are caused not only by years of military rules and dictatorships, but compounded by incessant recycling of corrupt, insensitive and incompetent political leaders, especially in current democratic dispensation. The undulating consequence of these imbroglios has created a wide gap between normative and institutional mechanism for conformity in the country; resulting in incessant breakdown of law and order, and ultimately crime, which includes child kidnapping. Moreover, as Robert Merton (1938) overs, when ideal goals and means are strained in the society, people seek alternative means of achieving their goals, albeit in contrast to the established, or prevailing norms.

In Strain theory, Merton improved on anomie theory of deviance and crime by exploring the relationship between means and goals (end) in explaining social actions. According to Merton (1938), all societies consist of two core components—culture and social structure (Crossman,
Societal goals, values and identities are developed in the cultural sphere (Crossman, 2020). They are formed in response to the prevailing social frameworks that should ideally provide the means for people to realise their goals and project true or positive identities. Unfortunately, people often lack the means to achieve these culturally valued goals, leading them to feel strained, and possibly engage in criminal activities (Crossman, 2020). This occurs when the success goals are stressed beyond the acceptable limits of realising them. However, Merton admits that not all people are criminals by specifying five adaptive ways people often respond when under structural strains. Merton’s typology of individual adaptations to structural pressures is referred to as the “plus-minus model”. It includes Conformity: (+ +), Innovation: (+ −), Ritualism: (− +), Retreatism: (− −), and Rebellion: (± ±). The plus (+) sign implies acceptance, the minus sign (−) indicates rejection, and plus and minus (± ±) signs indicate rejection of both the institutionalised goals and means, and replacement of new goals and means (Merton, 1938; see also, Uchenna, 2014).

Merton’s analogy fits into the current situation in Nigeria—a society that culturally celebrates wealth and success. Hence, people are aware and truly accepts culturally set goals (+) but reject the legitimate means of achieving them (−). The innovator somewhat assumes criminal roles by employing illegitimate means to attain material success (Uchenna, 2014). The innovation approach is particularly the dominant feature of the lower class in the society (Merton, 1938). Notably, this model mirrors the current situation in Nigeria where access to legitimate means is limited (strains) owing to existing institutional and structural barriers, and “the strain towards anomie” is severe (Uchenna, 2014, p. 64). Where such strains are in place, people may adopt illegitimate means to achieve the culturally over-stressed goal (i.e., success). Therefore, people might have been compelled to engage in criminal activities, including child kidnapping out of the socio-economic condition of the Nigerian society. Igbo (2007) argues that Merton’s postulation mirrors the situation in Nigeria where material wealth has become the major yardstick for measuring success and where compliance to the rule of the game is not an option.

2. Method

This article is basically a compilation of reports from corpus of media coverage from both print and electronic sources, and academic journals on child kidnapping in Nigeria. Although international publications are considered, but most scholarly works explored focused on Nigeria. Specifically, the author harvested valuable information from library databases in social sciences (such as Social Services abstracts (CSA) and Sociological Abstracts), Google Scholar and other search engines using key words, such as “kidnapping”, “child kidnapping”, and “kidnapping for ransom”. Notably, only verifiable incidences of child kidnapping for ransom in Nigeria between 2018 and May 2020 are reported in this article, kidnappings of children above eighteen (18) years of age are excluded. From the compilations, this article presents a valuable information on the scourge of child kidnapping for ransom in Nigeria as a menace that has imbricking domino effect on socio-community cohesion, nation building and national solidarity, to mention a few. Additionally, it offers theoretical explanations on the convergence between socio-economic nuances and the prevalence of child kidnapping for ransom, by corroborating our submissions with appropriate references. Since research on child kidnapping for ransom has not really gained traction in Nigeria, most of the arguments are theoretically driven, and where necessary, appropriate literature was cited to support key assertions. However, the implications of the menace on the society and the state were essentially deduced from known and subjective evidence.

2.1. Overview of child kidnapping in Nigeria

Generally, child kidnapping is not a recent development in Nigeria. There are documentations of its prevalence in the country during the 18th and 19th century (Ikime, 2006; Obasisiagbon & Aderinto, 2018). During this epoch, people were kidnapped from their houses over farmland tussles; children were also kidnapped for money rituals and for spiritual fortifications (see, Sonyaulu, 2009). However, since the outset of democracy in 1999, the rate of kidnapping of both adult and children in Nigeria has skyrocketed. For instance, when kidnapping became pronounced in 2006, many attributed it to the growth of militancy and insurgency groups in the Niger-Delta region (Badiora, 2015). However, its
proliferation in other regions of the country today underscores its pervasiveness. Although reliable statistics on the current rate of the crime in Nigeria is scarce, anecdotal evidence suggests it is over 1,000 every year (Catlin Group, 2012; Ibrahim & Murkhtar, 2017). At any rate, child kidnapping cases, beyond its changing dynamics, are now more widespread (Sunday, 2019).

Contemporarily, child kidnapping has become a multi-million-dollar business venture where children have become essential commodities in the hands of ruthless criminals, who have ostensibly made a fortune out of them. Unlike in the past where kidnapping was based on land tussles, insurgencies, ethnic or religious sentiments, and where the targets were expatriates or political opponents, modern dimensions are basically for economic purposes and children are preponderantly the target (Okoli, 2019).

2.2. Actors involved in child kidnapping
Criminals involved in child kidnapping in Nigeria are much, and may sometimes be closely related family members, acquaintances, bank employees and security agencies (Osumah & Aghedo, 2011). Actors may also be insurgency and terrorist group members (see, Okolie-Osemene & Okolie-Osemene, 2019; Uzorma & Nwanegbo-Ben, 2014). Reports have shown that while representatives of the state negotiate with and paid kidnappers to secure the release of captives, bank employees and state security officials have occasionally been found as accomplices in the crime (Osumah & Aghedo, 2011). Kidnappers sometimes co-opt bank employees and engage the services of security agencies for a successful operation (Adekoye, 2009a). While bank employees provide financial details about prospective target’s guardian or parents to kidnappers, security agencies provide necessary protection to the kidnappers during the kidnapping cycle (see, Adekoye, 2009a).

For most child kidnapping for ransom transactions or operations, rigorous planning is involved, but operational strategies may vary, depending of the kidnapping types and resources at the disposal of the kidnappers. Notably, kidnappers consider several factors before carrying out their operations. They include but not limited to location, availability of suitable targets, economic status of proposed victims’ parents or guardian, preferred hideouts, quality of technology, and trustworthiness of informants (Adekoye, 2009b). Kidnapping decisions are often shaped by a prudent calculation of quick political concessions to their demands (see, Stubbert et al., 2015), and low probability of apprehension (Christi, 2008). Extensive planning is also involved in their operations—right from preparation to implementation stage. That is, the process of identifying or finding suitable targets, feasible hideouts, striking time, negotiation styles, and the duration of operation, to mention a few, are often properly fashioned out by kidnappers before the actual crime is committed (see, Yang et al., 2007).

For most single kidnapping deception, familiarity and impersonation are often used as tricks to kidnap children. However, for group kidnappings, kidnappers often move in troops—in a commando-like fashion, brandishing dangerous weapons, and adopt a hit-and-run tactics in the raid of children. The most recent case, and example of group kidnapping operation is the kidnapping of 110 schoolgirls from Dapchi in Yobe State, Nigeria, in 2018, by the dreaded Boko Haram terrorist group (see, Okolie-Osemene & Okolie-Osemene, 2019). Unlike the single kidnapping where there may be element of deception, in the case of group kidnapping, no decoy is involved and kidnappers often operate with relative impunity.

Ransom may vary depending on the group, but it is preponderantly in monetary form; that is, a situation where victims’ parents or guardians would have to pay cash in exchange for the release of their wards. However, ransom could also be in the form of trade-by-barter (see, Okolie-Osemene & Okolie-Osemene, 2019). Put differently, kidnappers may sometimes demand for the release of one of their members who had been captured in exchange for the release of kidnapped children in their custody, and sometimes demand high ransom from the state to raise funds for the survival of their group or organisation (see, Okolie-Osemene & Okolie-Osemene, 2019).
2.3. Factors engendering the prevalence and expansion of child kidnapping for ransom in Nigeria

The expansion of child kidnapping in Nigeria is staggeringly alarming, and therefore requires urgent actions from all relevant stakeholders in the country, including government at all levels, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), law enforcement officials, traditional rulers, and parents, to mention a few. Although several efforts have been made, especially by some state governors, including the introduction of stiffer punitive measures to stem the tide (Tade et al., 2020), yet the menace has persisted. It is contended that such persistency is inevitable owing to the failure of the state to address the major factors accountable for the proliferation of the menace in the country.

Broadly, many factors account for the prevalence and expansion of child kidnapping for ransom in Nigeria. Essien and Ben (2013) argue that the causative factors of kidnapping have expanded from socio-economic to politico-religious and psychological issues. According to them, these factors include absence of infrastructures and deprivations of the locals and high incidence of poverty (also see, National Crime Research Centre, 2017). Comparably, Okengwu (2011) also contends that the factors engendering kidnapping in Nigeria include failure of the state to provide basic amenities, high level unemployment, the use of thugs and militants by politicians during electoral process, and ineffective and corrupt security system. Additionally, attempts were able to identify and extrapolate key issues responsible for the growth of child kidnapping for ransom in Nigeria from research publications in reputable journals and newspaper articles. These factors are broad, multifaceted and interconnected. Hence, it will be impracticable to exhaust all in this article. To this end, they have been summarised and explained within the economic and social contexts.

2.4. Economic factors

The lump sum of money, and other booty procured from kidnapped children’s parents or guardians amidst severe economic asperities serve as a core promulgating factor of child kidnapping in the country. It also provides strong incentives for continuity and the desire of most child kidnappers to stay in the illicit business indefinitely. Research has shown that kidnapping will likely increase in countries with poorly performing economies and where there is economic downturn (Roberts, 2017). The economic quagmire in which Nigeria is currently enmeshed in has created a fertile ground for the emergence and growth of various criminal activities, including child kidnapping. Although Nigeria is richly endowed with both human and natural resources, many of its citizens (especially the youths) still wallow in abject poverty (Abati, 2009a). This has left many perplexed and wonder if Nigeria is truly the giant of Africa as often propagated in the media. Despite its enormous arable land, and numerous oil wells, paradoxically, the country is largely underdeveloped, and many of its citizens are impoverished (Osumah & Aghedo, 2011). Recent findings indicate that an estimate of 46% of Nigerian population is living below poverty line (Alfred et al., 2014; Fagbamigbe et al., 2021). That is, about 70 million Nigerians live below the poverty line, with an average income of about US$1 per day (see, Fagbamigbe et al., 2021; Alfred et al., 2014; Abati, 2009a).

The future of many children and youths has been mortgaged owing to the undulating impact of poverty, as many could neither afford or able secure quality education. Ultimately, since parents could not afford their school fees, many children and youths had to drop-out of school. Additionally, owing to the death of their parents or family breadwinners, many orphans have become destitute and homeless. Situations like these do not only project poverty as an economic malady, it also constitutes a serious threat to social control. In a bid to survive, youths from many impoverished homes often find a solace in gangs, and some have grown from such groups to become dangerous criminals engaging in kidnapping, robbery, shoplifting, among others.

Many youths in Nigeria are unemployed (Imhonopi et al., 2016). Bizarrely, Nigeria’s unemployment problem is compounded by increased nepotism and job-racketeering. Unlike the experience in the developed western societies, and relatively in some African societies where recruitment processes are fair, and excellence rewarded, recruitment process for most jobs in Nigeria are often
fraudulent and rooted in corrupt practices (Imhonopi et al., 2016). Recruitment in Nigeria is like an
unction that goes to the highest bidder (i.e., based on strong connection—as sarcastically
expressed in pastime jokes). If you do not belong to the aristocratic class or related to a highly
placed politician or influential personality in the society, your chances of securing a befitting job in
Nigeria is relatively slim. Therefore, academic prowess plays little or no role in generating promis-
ing jobs for most youths in Nigeria (Imhonopi et al., 2016; Oluwaniyi, 2011). Currently, there are
many educated youths roaming the streets with commensurate qualifications for jobs. Moreover,
since most of them have been excluded from public space owing to unemployment, many have
now carved out a social space for themselves in a marginal environment to commit crime
(including child kidnapping)—a culture that is resistant to the dominant or mainstream culture
(see, Abati, 2009a; Diouf, 2003; Osumah & Aghedo, 2011). Hence, the proliferation of child
kidnapping in Nigeria is not unexpected (see, Abati, 2009b). Table 1 below shows a compilation
of incidences of child kidnapping in Nigeria in recent years.

2.5. Social factors
Child kidnapping is not only nuanced or shaped by economic conditions. Social context also plays
significant role. Concomitantly with extreme poverty, inequalities, real or perceived inaccessibility
to social amenities, poor service delivery, moral decadence, and get-rich-quick syndrome, amongst
others have also been found to influence the growth of child kidnapping in the country (Inyang &
Abraham, 2013; Sunday, 2019). For decades now, even after successive regimes, many citizens still
live in tumbledown shacks, where electricity and water are non-existent. Such vicious living
conditions do not only impact negatively on the productively level of people but are found to
nurture feelings of neglect, apathy, distrust and frustration in the citizenry, which often provide
filip to child kidnapping in the country. For instance, and as previously accentuated, the magnitude
of kidnappings in the Niger-Delta region of the country since the early 2000s were mostly
attributed to socio-economic adversity or misery, and poor living conditions of people in that
region (see, Olufemi et al., 2018). Although about 80% of Nigeria’s revenue comes from oil that is
explored from the region, yet, many communities in the Niger-delta region of the country still lack
access to portable clean water (see, Oluwaniyi, 2010). Their farmlands are destroyed owing to
pollution from gas flaring and environmental degradation caused by oil spillage (Olufemi et al.,
2018; Oluwaniyi, 2010). Moreover, anecdotal evidences, and some case studies have suggested
that countries where skirmishes and corruption thrive are more likely to experience kidnapping
epidemics (S.F. Pires et al., 2017; also see, E. Phillips, 2009; Moor & Remijnse, 2008; Briggs, 2001).

Currently, most public roads in the country are in deplorable condition, laden with chuckholes.
Businesses are affected, prices of goods have skyrocketed and service charges are very expensive.
In fact, life has become unbearable not only to motorists but to many citizens owing to the
deplorability of most roads in the country (Sunday, 2019). Although many lives have been lost to
accidents on those roads, its deplorability have also been exploited by callous criminals to kidnap
people, including children (see, Sunday, 2019). Moreover, since most public spaces are in total
blackout owing to poor, and regular epileptic electricity supply, most kidnappers have found solace
in such conditions to perpetrate crimes including child kidnapping. In fact, it is commonplace in
Nigeria for criminals to lurk in the dark, leveraging on the poor state to infrastructure to commit
crime.

Another major factor that has given filip to child kidnapping in Nigeria is bad leadership and
governance (Sunday, 2019). Since her independence in 1960 to date, Nigeria seems to have been
unlucky in the aspect of leadership. Such woe has been compounded by several years of military
incursion into politics, military rule and dictatorship. However, when the country returned to
democracy, the public possibly presumed that normalcy would return since the jinx has been
broken; unfortunately, since 1999 to date, politics in Nigeria has been accompanied by misery and
misfortune. The contextual attribute of Nigeria’s political contestation has constantly been driven
by ethnic fragmentation (Oluwaniyi, 2011). Regardless of the shrillness of political campaigns for
public votes, the resonating motivation for contestations by most political actors has continually
Table 1. Exposed cases of child-kidnapped in Nigeria (2018–2020)

| S/N | Date       | State    | Incidence                                                                 | No of children kidnapped |
|-----|------------|----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1   | 27/05/2020 | Ebonyi   | Police rescue two kidnapped siblings (ages 10 & 5) *                      | 2                        |
| 2   | 22/05/2020 | Imo      | Man, fake’s wife, 2 children’s kidnap to dupe cousin*                    | 2                        |
| 3   | 18/04/2020 | Lagos    | Pastor’s two children kidnapped**                                        | 2                        |
| 4   | 22/02/2020 | Kwara    | 13 children kidnapped in Ilorin**                                         | 13                       |
| 5   | 16/01/2020 | Taraba   | Taraba NSCDC rescue 2 children abducted**                                 | 2                        |
| 6   | 17/12/2019 | Adamawa  | Gunmen abduct 2 nursing mothers, three children**                         | 3                        |
| 7   | 01/12/2019 | Kebbi    | DSS rescue additional 2 children from kidnappers**                       | 2                        |
| 8   | 30/10/2020 | Gombe    | 2 kidnapped children reunite with parent in Anambra**                     | 2                        |
| 9   | 29/08/2019 | Lagos    | Parents lament police refusal to rescue kidnapped children**             | 2                        |
| 10  | 26/06/2019 | Abuja    | Taxi driver lands in trouble for kidnapping 10 children*                 | 10                       |
| 11  | 04/05/2019 | Zamfara  | Woman losses 2 children and son in-law to kidnappers**                   | 2                        |
| 12  | 03/12/2018 | Lagos    | 2 Lagos school children kidnapped by nanny found in Benin Republic**      | 2                        |
| 13  | 07/06/2018 | Edo      | Police boss promises to rescue kidnapped children unhurt**               | 2 infants                |
| 14  | 19/02/2018 | Yobe     | 110 female students kidnapped in Dapchi**                                 | 110                      |
| 15  | 05/06/2018 | Zamfara  | Kidnapped commissioner's wife, children regained freedom in Zamfara**     | 3                        |

Source: Author’s compilation from two popular Nigerian newspapers (from 2018—May 2020)
*Retrieved from The Sun Newspaper. ** Retrieved from Punch Newspaper.
been the access to personal wealth accumulation, under the pretext of ethnic, or sometimes, perceived national interests (Oluwaniyi, 2011). After winning elections, the stage has consistently been set for endless looting of the country’s treasury, and constant diversion of funds meant for developmental projects into private accounts (Oluwaniyi, 2011). Today, many Nigerian politicians have laundered billions of taxpayers’ moneys meant for developmental projects into private accounts starched in foreign banks in many western countries, especially the USA and the United Kingdom (UK). No wonder the game of politics has become “a do-or-die-affair” in Nigeria. Such despicable acts were found to have nurtured greed and a “get-rich-quick” mentality in many citizens, especially among the youths (Osumah & Aghedo, 2011), who are ready to navigate through dangerous paths (including kidnapping for ransom) to realise their dreams of becoming wealthy.

During elections, thugs (mostly unemployed youths) are often hired and armed by politicians to disrupt seemingly peaceful voting process, snatch ballot boxes, cause mayhem in opponents’ stronghold wards, and sometimes kidnap the representatives of their opponents. Usually, after securing victory in fraudulent elections, those political thugs are oftentimes neglected and stylishly jettisoned by their principals, and the weapons with them are neither retrieved from them nor returned. In a bid to survive, such weapons have eventually become veritable tools in the hands of ruthless thugs for the perpetration of various crimes, including child-kidnapping, carjacking, and robbery (Oluwaniyi, 2011).

Additionally, during the era of military incursions into government, the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) was truncated and stylishly left out of the process of wealth accumulation, resulting in the insolvency of the NPF. To survive, most police officers (of all echelons) had to intensify corrupt and other unethical acts, initiating new means and tactics of actualising the goal of illegally enriching themselves (Oluwaniyi, 2011). Moreover, such blithesomeness towards the police persisted after the country return to democracy in 1999. Additionally, corruption within the NPF heightened in contemporary democratic dispensation particularly during election periods (Oluwaniyi, 2011). As politicians canvass for vote, some police officers are bribed to provide adequate security both for politicians and their political thugs. Such corrupt gestures are extended to political thugs after elections during acts of kidnapping. In fact, police officers have been complicit in child kidnapping.

It is important to emphasize that beyond the above-mentioned socioeconomic factors, the vulnerability of children to kidnapping in Nigeria are also propelled by certain structural factors. These factors include but not limited to the problem of child labour, poor security in schools, and parents ostentatious spending in social gatherings.

Nigeria profiles as one of the countries with a high rate of child labour in sub-Saharan Africa (Ihejieto, 2020), where children are forced to work in labour and sexual-related industries. Specifically, the high demand for cheap labour in the face of rising economic austerities have rendered many families impoverished. Many school children had to forfeit their education in order to support their parents with street vending and hawkings (Olusegun & Idowu, 2016). Moreover, the growing demand for cheap labour and the rising level of inequalities in the country have forced many parents to release their children to work in labour-related industries, where they are consistently exploited and violated (Azunwo & Sopuruchi, 2018).

Relatedly, children from impoverished homes are extremely vulnerable to trafficking—which occasionally involve their kidnapping for exploitative purposes (see, Bello, 2017). Kidnapped children are sometimes trafficked to serve as domestic servants in wealthy homes, as labourer in farms or construction sites, as well as for prostitution in pubs (Azunwo & Sopuruchi, 2018).

In addition, many schools in Nigeria are porous. Such porosity and other security lapses have often been exploited by kidnappers to capture children for ransom purpose (Weeraratne, 2017).
Although some of such kidnapping incidences have been reported to be politically motivated or rooted in religious extremism, but many are caused by the porous nature of many schools, especially in the Northern parts of the country (Ukaeje, 2021).

What's more, the ostentatious spending of some parents in social gatherings as a way of displaying their affluence or success have often attracted the unsolicited attention of kidnappers. Generally, Nigerian society is known for ostentatious spendings, arrogancy and for wealth exhibiting. Children of parents who display extreme affluence and engage in ostentatious spending in parties, and other social gatherings, are often targeted by kidnappers (Olulowo et al., 2021; Tade & Aliyu, 2011).

3. Recommendations and conclusion

Child kidnapping for ransom is rampant in Nigeria and its impacts are extensive. The more kidnappers gain ground and the menace spread, the more risk it poses to the society, especially by threatening existing societal bonds and solidarity. The dreadfulness of this crime may have lasting impacts on survivors and their relatives. Therefore, combating child kidnapping should be a top priority issue for the Nigerian state. Effective response to a crime of this magnitude cannot be achieved through a quick fix strategy, but by the development of a robust, yet specific approach to address the resonating factors that promote the menace in the country. Such cannot be developed solely by the state, but through the collaborative efforts of all relevant stakeholders, such as parents, traditional leaders, government at all levels, religious organisations, security and educational institutions, and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), to mention a few.

Also, such response will be effective when it is region-specific. Just as the nature and spread of child kidnapping is not even across the regions of the country, so should the response be. The dynamism of child trafficking in different parts of the country is such that a uniform approach for all the regions of the country may not be effective. The peculiarity of the crime in each region should be taken into consideration. For instance, kidnapping of learners is commonplace in the northern part of Nigeria, and it is higher in that region than other regions of the country. Therefore, response to child kidnapping in that region should be different from other regions of the country.

One noteworthy region-specific approach that can be adopted in combating the scourge of child kidnapping in northern Nigeria is the use of education and enlightenment. The introduction of a compulsory educational policy in the north will undoubtedly help drive ideological change and transformation. Vibrant orientation programmes should be organised by the federal government and the state government, in collaboration with other above-mentioned stakeholders, on the value of education. This is particularly imperative against the background of the resonating ideology of the Boko-Haram insurgency organisation that specialises in the kidnapping of female students in the northern part of the country. For instance, the kidnapped of 110 female students at Dapchi in 2018 was to press home the ideologies of Boko Haram insurgents that girl-child has no business in school. Such ideology needs to be changed or transformed. Efforts should also be made to enlighten northern youths, and repentant terrorists on how to channel their energy to productive activities for nation building. The importance of education for both genders should also be stressed, as well as the benefit that will accrue to them from it.

In the South Eastern, South Western and the South-South regions, counter-kidnapping responses should focus on revamping and boosting community security. Since kidnappers in these regions are not driven by religious ideology or socio-cultural and religious sentiments, but by the gap in socio-political and economical environments. Bridging these gaps and transforming the society will help discourage people from engaging in kidnapping of children in these parts of the country.

In all of these, security is critical to effective efforts at combating child kidnapping in any country. Arguably, the security architecture of the country is currently in a bad shape. For instance,
most incidences of child kidnapping were successful in the northern region owing to the porous nature of many schools, and the weak security structure of many communities there. The absence of Close Circuit Cameras (CCTV) and other security gadgets, including intermittent power supply and faulty street lights, made it easy for kidnappers to operate with impunity. Security lapses were also responsible for the spread of child kidnapping in other regions of the country. Therefore, the government needs to revamp the security architecture of the country, and if possible, declare a state of emergency in the entire of the country. The government should also fortify security personnel with more sophisticated equipment and weapons, provide high technology information system for detecting, tracking, monitoring and apprehending kidnappers. Such investments should also cater for the purchase of patrol vehicles, communication gadgets and modern ammunitions—the type that can match the sophisticated ammunitions often wielded by the insurgents during their kidnapping operations.

As earlier stated, effective response to child kidnapping cannot be left solely in the hands of the government, other stakeholders have roles to play. Specifically, parents have major roles to play in the entire efforts at combating the scourge. Parents should limit and if possible, stop ostentatious spendings and display of wealth in the public to avoid drawing unnecessary attention to themselves and their children. Instead of affluence display and show-off in parties and other social gatherings, parents should be good role models to their children and the society. They should also not shift their responsibilities towards their children to school teachers, domestic servants, and religious leaders, to mention a few. Effective parenting will arguably help contain kidnapping in the society.

The government should also collaborate with NGOs, local securities or neighborhood security watch to provide effective security and safety for children and educational institutions in the country. NGOs should help organize workshops, seminars, and trainings on the dynamics of child-kidnapping operations, kidnappers’ modus operandi, and counter-kidnapping strategies, to students, parents, educators, and communities, to mention a few. NGOs could also help organize and create vibrant awareness and sensitization programmes in communities experiencing increased cases of child kidnapping in Nigeria.

Communities in volatile areas should set-up vibrant security outfits to assist them with securities. Members of such security group should be properly trained and well equipped with modern security gadget for effective performance. They should operate within the ambit the law, and in collaboration with the Nigerian Police Force (NPF). Additionally, the security group should be funded by both corporate and private institutions, and efforts should be made to sensitize community members about their operations. Members of these groups should also be known the communities they serve. Functioning telecommunication lines should also be introduced for communication purposes with vibrant reporting system for people to lodge their complaints or report their suspicions.

Law enforcement agencies should also collaborate with telecommunication subscribers to provide functional toll-free lines to members of the public (as part of their corporate social responsibilities). Law enforcement institutions (especially the police) should also change their attitudinal approach to investigation and not make demands from people before they swing into action, when distress calls are put through to them, or when citizens approach them for assistance.

Injustices, inequalities and sectionalist approach to governance should be addressed. Service delivery should be core goal of the government at all levels; and such services should be rendered to all citizens regardless political affiliations or regions. Basic amenities should be provided and accessible to all citizens, and infrastructure be created for developmental purposes. These will engender creativity and allow for the development of skills and talents. Ultimately, it will help many youths channel their energy to the right direction and concomitantly help shift their attentions from sharp practices and inordinate ambitions.
From the foregoing, it is obvious that child kidnapping for ransom is a serious problem facing the Nigerian State. It has also been exposed that several factors are responsible for the growth of the menace in the country. These problems have been summarised within the socio-economic contexts. Ongoing investigation into the modus-operandi of child kidnappers is fundamental because the menace appears relatively benign in comparison to other forms of kidnapping in the country, such as political kidnapping and kidnapping for ritual purposes, to mention a few. Although the article expatiates that the menace is a grave violation of children's rights and condemns the act in its entirety, it is also fundamental to emphasise that the kidnappers are not the only culprit in the entire episode. The long chain of culprits includes some government functionaries at all levels, politicians, security officials, bank officials, and social institution agents. The clandestine nature of child kidnapping, concomitantly with the factors and forces that fuel the crime, portend that the phenomenon is very complex. Therefore, sustainable interventions are inevitable. Importantly, it is only when understanding infuses society that child kidnapping for ransom is shaped by complex factors that are embedded in the milieu within which the society operates, will counter-kidnapping strategies be effective, and the crime effectively combated in the country.

Bygnes, S. (2016). Are they leaving because of the crisis? The sociological significance of anomie as a motivation for migration. Sociology, 51(2), 258–273. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038515589300

Cam, T & Irmak, F. (2014). An overview of Durkheim and Melton's Anomie. Journal of Human Sciences, 11(2), 2097–1305.

Carey, B. (2009). For long-timate captives, a complex road home. The New York Times. August 31. http://www. ocala.com/article/20090901/ZNYT02/909013015

Catlin Group (2012). Kidnap and ransom today. A report by Catlin Group Limited.

Christi, I. P. (2008). Kidnapping is booming business. Crossman, A. (2020). Deviance and Strain Theory in Sociology. https://www.thoughtco.com/structural-strain-theory-3026632

Dliou, M. (2003). Engaging postcolonial cultures: African youth and public space. African Studies Review, 46(2), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.2307/2514523

Durkheim, E. (1951). Suicide: A study in Sociology. The Free Press.

Durkheim, E. (1964). The Division of Labor in Society. The Free Press.

Essien, A. M., & Ben, E. E. (2013). The socio-religious perspective of kidnapping and democratic sustainability in Akwa Ibom State. International Journal of Humanities and Social Science, 3(4), 273–284.

Fagbamigbe, A. F., Olaseinde, O., & Fagbamigbe, O. S. (2021). Timing of first antenatal care contact, its associated factors and state-level analysis in Nigeria: A cross-sectional assessment of compliance with the WHO guidelines. BMJ open, 11(9), e047835. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2020-047835

Hammer, H., Finkelhor, D., & Sedlak, A. J. (2002). Children abduced by family members: National estimates and characteristics. Juvenile Justice Bulletin- NCJ196466, 1–12. Order #MC17.

Hutchinson, D. (2009). A wave of kidnappings in Kenya. AFRICA TV1, August 12. http://africa4tv.com/Dawala/a-wave-of-kidnappings-in-kenya/

Ibrahim, B., & Murkhtar, J. (2017). An analysis of the causes and consequences of kidnapping in Nigeria. African Research Review: An International Multidisciplinary Journal, 11(4), 134–143. https://doi.org/10.4316/afrev.v11i4.11

Igbo, E. M. (ed.). (2007). Introduction to criminology. University of Nigeria.

Ihejieto, C. (2020). Child labour, child education and pov- erty: a study of children on the street in Nigeria.
[Unpublished Doctoral dissertation, University of Sunderland.]

Ikime, O. (2006). History, the historian and the Nation: The voice of a Nigerian Historian. HEBN Publishers.

Imhongopi, D., Urim, U., Waribo, Y., Kasumu, T., & Igbadumhe, F. (2016). The politics of change, precarisation youth unemployment and labour market policies in Nigeria. A paper presented at the International Sociological Association Conference, University of Vienna, Austria, July 10th to 14th.

Iyang, J. D., & Abraham, U. E. (2013). The social problem of kidnapping and its implications on the socio-economic development of Nigeria: A study of Uyo metropolis. Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences, 4(6), 531-531.

Jolly, S., & Vikram Sharma, A. (2021). Domestic violence and inter-country child abduction: An Indian judicial and legislative exploration. International Journal of Private International Law, 17(1), 114–146. https://doi.org/10.1080/17441048.2021.1892953

Koudad, F. Z., & Chougueur, D. (2021). Anti-kidnapping system for children. [Unpublished doctoral dissertation], University Ahmed Draya-Adrar, Leonarda, J. T. (2018). International parental kidnapping: An overview of federal resources to assist your investigation and prosecution. Dept of Just. J. Fed. L. & Proc, 66, 159.

Madigan, N. (2003). Abducted girl's relatives say her captor brainwashed her. March, 17. http://www.nytimes.com/2003/03/17/us/abducted-girl-s-relatives-say-her-captorbrainwashed-her.html.

Merton, R. (1938). Social structure and Anomie. American Sociological Review, 3(5), 672–682. https://doi.org/10.2307/2084686

Moor, M., & Remijine, S. (2008). Kidnapping is a booming business. IKV PAX Christi.

National Crime Research Centre, (2017). Emerging crimes: The case of kidnapping in Kenya. http://crimere search.go.ke/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Kidnappings-in-Kenya-Report.pdf

Obariasgan, E. I., & Adernito, A. A. (2018). Kidnapping and the challenges affecting the administration of criminal justice in selected states of Nigeria. African Journal of Criminology and Justice Studies, 11, 41–53.

Okengwu, K. (2011). Kidnapping in Nigeria: Issues and common-sense ways of surviving. Global Journal of Educational Research, 1(1), 1–8.

Okechukwu, J. (2019). Kidnapping for ransom has become Nigeria’s latest security problem. The Conversation. May 20. http://www.theconversation.com

Okolie-Osemere, J., & Okolie-Osemere, R. (2019). Nigerian women and the trends of kidnapping in the era of Boko Haram insurgency: Patterns and evolution. Small Wars & Insurgencies, 30(6–7), 1151–1168. https://doi.org/10.1080/089493318.2019.1712051

Okwagbule, U. (2020). Kidnapping: Overview, causes, effects, and solutions. Owlization. https://owlization.com/social-sciences/Kidnapping-Overview-Causes-Effects-and-Solutions

Oliveira, G. (2019). 'Here and There': Children and youth’s perspectives of borders in Mexico–United States Migration. Children & Society, 33(6), 540–555. https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12337

Olufemi, A., Bello, P., & Mji, A. (2018). Conflict implications of coal mining and environmental pollution in South Africa: Lessons from Niger Delta, Nigeria. African Journal on Conflict Resolution, 18 (1), 7–35.

Olulowo, S. A., Babawale, S. T., Anani, K. M., & Anani, K. M. (2021). An examination of the causes of kidnapping and its attendant challenges in Ogun State, Nigeria. Journal of Religion and Human Relations, 13(1), 133–171. https://doi.org/10.4314/jrhr.v13i1.7

Olusegun, O. O., & Idowu, A. A. (2016). Child abuse in Nigeria: Dimension, reasons for its persistence and probable. Child and Family Law Journal, 4(1), 1–23.

Oluwuniyi, O. (2010). Oil and youth militancy in Nigeria’s Niger-Delta Region. Journal of Asian and African Studies, 45(3), 309–325. https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909610367767

Oluwuniyi, O. (2011). Post amnesty programme in the Niger Delta: Challenges and prospects. Conflict Trends, 4, 46–54.

Onuoha, C. (2010). Kidnappers promised us a share if ransom is paid Oba. Daily Sun, The Sun Publishers, Monday July 19, 7.

Osumah, O., & Aghedo, I. (2011). Who wants to be a Millionaire? Nigerian youths and the commodification of kidnapping. Review of African Political Economy, 38(128), 277–287. https://doi.org/10.1080/03056244.2011.582769

Oyewole, S. (2016). Kidnapping for rituals article of faith and insecurity in Nigeria. Africology: The Journal Of Pan African Studies, 9, 35–52.

Pereira, S. (2013). The 29 countries where people get kidnapped the most. https://www.thrillist.com

Pharaoh, R. (2005). An unknown quantity: Kidnapping for ransom in South Africa. South African Crime Quarterly, 4, 23–28.

Phillips, E. (2009). The business of kidnap for ransom. In D. Canter (Ed.), The faces of terrorism: Multidisciplinary perspectives (pp. 189–207). Wiley Blackwell.

Phillips, E. M. (2013). Pain, suffering, and humiliation: The systematization of violence in kidnapping for ransom. Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment and Trauma, 20(8), 845–869. https://doi.org/10.1080/10926771.2011.626512

Pires, S. F., Guerette, R. T., & Stubbert, C. H. (2014). The crime triangle of kidnap- ping for ransom incidents in Colombia, South America: A ‘Litmus’ test for situational crime prevention. British Journal of Criminology, 54(5), 784–808. https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/auz044

Renfro, P. M. (2020). Stranger danger: Family values, children, and the American Carceral State. Oxford University Press.

Roberts, I. (2017). Satow’s diplomatic practice. Oxford University Press.

Sanyoulu, K. (2009). Between robbery and kidnapping. The Guardian, Sunday February 15.

Stubbert, C., Pires, S., & Guerette, R. (2015) Crime science and crime mapping in developing countries: A reflection on kidnapping for ransom in Colombia, South America. Crime Science, 4(23), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40163-015-0034-5

Sunday, O. (2019). Nigeria’s kidnapping cartels thrive in the absence of governance. TRT World, September 5. http://www.trtworld.com

Tade, O., & Aliyu, I. (2011). Social organization of Internet fraud among university undergraduates in Nigeria. International Journal of Cyber Crimeology, 5(2), 860.

Tade, O., Ojedokun, U., & Adernito, A. (2020). ‘I went through hell': Strategies for kidnapping and victims’ experiences in Nigeria. Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma, 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1080/10926771.2019.1628155

Uchenne, N. (2014). Kidnapping in the Southeastern states of contemporary Nigeria: An empirical
investigation into the social and demographic char-
acteristics of offenders. International Journal of
Development and Management Review, 9(1), 62–75.
Ukaeje, O. (2021). Forest governance and rural banditry
in Nigeria’s Northwest Region: Interrogating the
Implication for National Security. University of
Nigeria Journal of Political Economy, 11(2),
314–333.
United Nations Trafficking Protocol. (2000). Protocol to
prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons,
especially women and children, supplementing the
United Nations Convention against Transnational
Organised Crime. Retrieved April 10, 2016, from
https://www.osce.org/odihr/19223?download=true
Usman, E. (2020). Mob attack three suspected kidnappers
in Lagos. Vanguard newspaper. http://www.van
gaurdngr.com
Uzorma, P. N., & Nwanegbo-Ben, J. (2014). Challenges of
hostage-taking and kidnapping in the South-eastern
Nigeria. International Journal of Research in
Humanities, Arts and Literature, 2(6), 131–142.
Vannini, M., McCannon, B., & Delatto, C. (2012).
Understanding ransom kidnapping and its duration.
Centre for North South Economic Research,
University of Cagliari and Sassari.
Weeraratne, S. (2017). Theorizing the expansion of the
Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. Terrorism and
Political Violence, 29(4), 610–634. https://doi.org/10.
1080/09546553.2015.1005742
Yang, S. L., Wu, B., & Huang, S. L. (2007). Kidnapping in
Taiwan the significance of geographic proximity,
improvisation, and fluidity. International Journal of
Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology, 51(3),
324–339. https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624X06291472