

## INSECURITY AND MASS KIDNAPPINGS OF SCHOOL CHILDREN IN NIGERIA

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### Abstract

This paper examines insecurity and the mass kidnapping of schoolchildren in Nigeria. Insecurity in the country has assumed a new and alarming dimension with the increasing incidence of mass kidnappings of schoolchildren. With schoolchildren now becoming prime targets, the researchers sought to understand the factors responsible for this trend, its effects on schoolchildren and the educational system, the broader implications for Nigeria's security challenges, and possible solutions to the problem. Two theories, the Broken Windows Theory and Conflict Theory, were reviewed to facilitate a better understanding of the issues addressed in the study. Relevant literature was extensively reviewed and discussed in line with the focus of the paper. The findings reveal that several factors account for the kidnapping of schoolchildren, including financial motives, the use of children as human shields to avoid airstrikes by security agencies, and inadequate security in school environments. The study further found that mass kidnappings are likely to increase the number of out-of-school children, resulting in a less literate population. Regarding the broader security implications, the study found that kidnappers may become further emboldened if decisive measures are not taken to stop them. The paper recommends prioritizing the security of schoolchildren through the provision of adequate security along school routes.

Keywords: Insecurity, Mass Kidnapping, School Children, Human Shield, Banditry.

### INTRODUCTION

Various scholars across the globe have postulated differing viewpoints on the concept of security; according to the United Nations Development Programme (1994) human security could be defined as protection from hidden and hurtful disruptions in the daily activities, at homes, offices or communities. That is, security is the state of being safe and secure from danger, it could also be protection from chronic threats such as hunger, disease and repression. For the Commission on Human Security (2003), human security is the protection of important aspect of human lives in a way that would enhance human freedoms and fulfillment. Human security encompasses freedom from want, harm, fear and the freedom to take appropriate actions without any form of hindrance. It is also the assurance of future well-being and freedom from threat. Williams (2008) who sees security from the socio-political perspective averred that security involves the capacity to pursue cherished political and social ambitions. That is, security is socio-political in nature as without security there can be no political stability and consequently social activities will be in chaos. Palme (1992) argues that there is a connection between security and survival. For him, security is a basic condition for the survival of human beings. Thus, security is synonymous to freedom from danger, fear and doubt among others. Security, Nwagboso (2012) argues is an essential concept which is commonly associated with the alleviation of threats to the survival of individuals or groups. Thus, for him, security can be equated with freedom from present and future danger, harm or anxiety however, security may not be the absence of threats but it is the ability to respond to these threats with appropriate skill and expertise.

The Nigerian education system is deep into crises on multiple fronts, including in areas of access and quality of education. However, the recent spate of mass kidnappings of schoolchildren arguably represents the gravest existential threat and crisis to the education system. In less than three months between December 2020 and March 2021, more than 600 children have been kidnapped while in school, in three separate incidents. More worrisome is the fact that the heightened insecurity is predominant in northern Nigeria, which is already the most educationally disadvantaged region. Of the estimated 10.5 million out-of-school children in the country, 69

percent come from the North, where cultural practices and economic deprivation limit children's active participation in school, particularly females. The Boko Haram crisis, with its debilitating effects on economic and education systems, is also heavily concentrated in the region. Now, with the spate of recent school kidnappings, community and parental trust in the education system could shrink significantly, and the problem of access to quality and equitable education could become severely amplified. Furthermore, with the Nigerian education system still recovering from the devastating effects of the prolonged school closure from COVID-19, adding insecurity concerns to the basket of challenges could lead to its irrecoverable collapse. Targeted kidnapping of schoolchildren began in 2014 with the mass abduction of 276 female students in Chibok by Boko Haram insurgents. That event was ideologically motivated, and designed to extort concessions from the government. Recently, abductions have become more profit-driven, involving organized and unorganized criminal groups. The profit dimension to the kidnappings can easily complicate Nigeria's security problems, as they could become more frequent given the high level of poverty and youth unemployment in the region amid the stark absence of legitimate economic opportunities. If education is to survive, it is crucial to urgently change the current dynamics and make schools safe again. This crisis requires swift and comprehensive action, both in prevention and supporting victims to minimize long-term damages. With school children now the prime targets of kidnappers, the researchers set out to understand the factors responsible for this new wave of kidnappings, the effects this will have on school children and the country's educational system, the broader implications of this new trend on Nigeria's security challenges and the possible ways out of the problem.

## **Review of Relevant Literature**

### **The Concept of insecurity**

According to Omoyibo and Akpomera (2013), security is a concept that is prior to the state, and the state exists in order to provide that concept. Security is the prime responsibility of the state (Thomas Hobbes, 1996). The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria specifically states that "The security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government". Unfortunately, government on this constitutional responsibility has failed to provide a secured and safe environment for lives, properties and the conduct of business and economic activities. The alarming level of insecurity in Nigeria has fuelled the crime rate and terrorists attacks in different parts of the country, leaving unpalatable consequences for the nation's economy and its growth. To address the threat to national security and combat the increasing waves of crime the federal government in the 2013 budget made a huge allocation to security, and the national assembly passed the Anti-Terrorism Act in 2011 (Ewetan, 2013). Despite these efforts, the level of insecurity in the country is still high, and a confirmation of this is the low ranking of Nigeria in the Global Peace Index (GPI, 2012). Despite the plethora of security measures taken to address the daunting challenges of insecurity in Nigeria, government efforts have not produced the desired positive result. This has compelled the Nigerian government in recent time to request for foreign assistance from countries such as USA, Israel, and EU countries to combat the rising waves of terrorism and insecurity.

Some scholars in conceptualizing security placed emphasis on the absence of threats to peace, stability, national cohesion, political and socio-economic objectives of a country (Igbuzor, 2011; Oche, 2001; Nwanegbo and Odigbo, 2013). Thus there is a general consensus in the contemporary literature that security is vital for national cohesion, peace and sustainable development. It is therefore apparent that national security is a desideratum, sine qua non for economic growth and development of any country (Oladeji and Folorunso, 2007). In the intelligence community there is a consensus that security is not the absence of threats or security issues, but the existence of a robust mechanism to respond proactively to the challenges posed by these threats with expediency, expertise, and in real time. The concept of insecurity connotes different meanings such as: absence of safety; danger; hazard; uncertainty; lack of protection, and lack of safety. According to Beland (2005) insecurity is a state of fear or anxiety due to absence or lack of protection. Achumba et al (2013) defines insecurity from two perspectives. Firstly, insecurity is the state of being open or subject to danger or threat of danger, where danger is the condition of being susceptible to harm or injury. Secondly insecurity is the state of being exposed to risk or anxiety, where anxiety is a vague unpleasant emotion that is experienced in anticipation of some misfortune. These definitions of insecurity underscore a major point that those affected by insecurity are not only uncertain or unaware of what would happen but they are also vulnerable to the threats and dangers when they occur. In the context of this paper insecurity is defined as a breach of peace and security, whether historical, religious, ethno-regional, civil, social, economic, and political that contributes to recurring conflicts, and leads to wanton destruction of lives and property.

Eme and Anyadike (2013) opined that insecurity is a state of being subject to danger, exposed to risk or anxiety. A person or thing is said to be secured when not being exposed to any form of danger or risk of physical or moral

aggression, accident, theft or deterioration. However, a person is said to be unsecured when he/she is exposed to these challenges. Insecurity is seen as a chronic threat to human life, territories, states, religious beliefs, properties and institutions among others. It should be noted, notwithstanding, that there is no consensus definition of insecurity since it is often approached from different perspectives. Analyst have examined different sources of insecurity. Cameron and McCormic (1954) pointed out some sources of insecurity. They include: emotional response to sudden external threat from within; relatively constant threatening external situation; threat from within; threat to beliefs especially religion. Achumba, Ighomeroho and Akpor-Robaro (2013) identified two (2) major sources of insecurity: remote factors, and immediate and proximate factors. The remote factors include: lack of institutional capacity resulting in government failure; pervasive material inequalities and unfairness; ethno-religious conflicts; conflict of perceptions between the public and government; weak security system; loss of socio-cultural and communal value system. On the other hand, immediate and proximate factors include: porous borders; rural/urban drift; social irresponsibility of companies; unemployment/poverty; terrorism.

### **Mass Kidnapping of School-children in Nigeria**

Kidnapping refers to criminal offence which involves abduction a person against his freedom and subjugates him to the threat of murder or assassination and requesting for ransom before his release. It is a criminal and traumatic behaviour orchestrated by gangster with the mindset of abducting human being for ransom. Abraham (2010) define kidnapping as an act of seizing, taking away and keeping a person in custody either by force or fraud. However, it includes snatching and seizing of a person in order to collect a ransom in return or settle some scores of disagreement among people. Goldberg (2000) argues that kidnapping is a criminal act involving seizure, confinement, abduction, subjection, forcefulness, acts of threats, acts of terror and servitude. Dode(2007) saw kidnapping as a process of forcefully abducting a person or group of persons perceived to be the reasons behind the injustice suffered by another group. It is “a lowcost, high-yield terror tactics”. This was the initial case in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. According, to Ogabido (2009) “kidnapping” means to abduct, capture, carry off, remove or steal away a person(s). Ngwama (2014) defined kidnapping as false imprisonment in the sense that it involves the illegal confinement of individuals against his or her own will by another individual in such a way as to violate the confined individual’s right to free from the restraint of movement. According to Uzorma&Nwanegbo-Ben (2014), kidnapping is the act of seizing and detaining or carrying away a person by unlawful force or by fraud, and often with a demand for ransom.

The Government of Nigeria has been embroiled since 2009 in an armed conflict with the Islamist insurgency group Jama’atuAhlisSunnalLidda’AwatiWal-Jihad, popularly known as Boko Haram. Boko Haram has committed serious acts of violence. It has killed an estimated 20,000 and displaced over 2.2 million in the wider Lake Chad region. Thousands of girls and young women have been abducted, including from their schools. Boko Haram has also abducted boys and men and forced many to become fighters. Many have never returned from captivity. Boko Haram continues to carry out attacks causing serious loss of life, including increasingly by using child and female suicide bombers. The group reportedly caused 967 fatalities in 2017, a six percent increase over the previous year.

A key component of Boko Haram’s ideology is hostility toward secular education, and it has gained notoriety for its repeated attacks on schools and universities, as well as teachers, administrators, and students, wreaking havoc on an already fragile education system. Boko Haram has killed an estimated 2,295 teachers, and over 19,000 teachers have been displaced by the conflict. The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) estimates that more than 1,400 schools have been destroyed, damaged, or looted primarily in the northeast, and more than 600,000 children have lost access to education. In addition to attacking education generally, Boko Haram has targeted female students. What is more, the impact of attacks on education on women and girls is often different from that on boys and men. For these reasons, this paper is examining the specific impact on females. Boko Haram gained international notoriety in 2014, when it abducted 276 girls from their school in the town of Chibok. Four years later, more than 100 of the “Chibok girls” remain in captivity. Chibok is, unfortunately, only one such case. GCPEA estimates that approximately 600 women and girls have been abducted from their schools. Some of these women and girls reported that Boko Haram had forced them to convert to Islam and subjected them to forced “marriage,” and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). In all areas of the North, even those removed from the Boko Haram-controlled Northeast, numerous armed groups are increasingly seeing the potential to “cash in” on insecure schools through a “kidnap and ransom” approach.

Since December 2020, criminal gangs have emulated Boko Haram’s tactic — committing over 10 mass abductions, totaling more than 1,000 schoolchildren, to extort ransoms across northern Nigeria. Many smaller attacks go unreported. Bandits for years have committed small-scale kidnappings of highway travelers, but now use the

public horror and political pressures from school kidnappings to force more lucrative payoffs. Gangs of armed men in convoys of motorcycles and trucks have made midnight assaults on government and religious boarding schools, killing staff who resist and even executing children to enforce their demands. In this week's assault, gunmen stormed the Bethel Baptist High School in Kaduna state and seized 140 students plus staff members. In May 2026, dozens of school children and their teachers were kidnapped in Oyo state, signaling a problem that now appears to be intractable.

### **Factors responsible for mass kidnap of school children in Nigeria**

In Nigeria and many other developing countries of Africa and Asia, political factors, poverty, lack of legal/available employment opportunity among the youths are also playing fundamental role in the rise of kidnapping. In line with the above, Tepperman (2006, as cited in Ibrahim & Mukhtar, 2016) observed that Nigeria has a large number of adolescents living and making a living on the streets. This has been attributed to economic factors and exposure to all forms of risks. Closely related to Hazen and Horner's typology is that given by Zannoni (2003), who mentioned that motivations and mode of operation vary, but generally there are two main kinds of kidnapping for ransom. These can be roughly categorised as "criminal kidnapping", where the main motive is to obtain a ransom from the family or business of the victim. This category includes instances where criminals take hostages as a shield to help them escape from the scene of a crime, or use them to obtain money or valuables, or the keys or secret codes needed to access areas where these are stored. The other type of kidnapping, according to Zannoni (2003), is "political kidnapping", where the foremost objective is to further the political aims of a particular political group or movement. In this case, a ransom is usually demanded to obtain money for the group to fund their activities. This made the dividing line between economic and political kidnappings so blurred. In addition, religious and other political extremists use kidnapping as political weapons and as a means of financing their activities (Catlin Group, 2012). Economic deprivation and a sense of desperation have planted the seeds of kidnapping as a way of getting money in poor communities. It can then become a way of life, even when legal options become available (Catlin Group, 2012). The disparity between rich and poor is growing, and thanks to the internet and global media, everyone can see how the rich are living. It fuels resentment and a desire for a bigger share (Catlin Group, 2012).

### **Effects of mass kidnap of school children in Nigeria**

Irrespective of the type of kidnapping and the motive for its perpetration, the psychological and financial impact of the problem can be quite devastating, both for the victims and their significant others. Victims of kidnapping differ in age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, level of education, and country of origin. Although anyone can become a victim of trafficking, certain populations are especially vulnerable to this form of victimisation (Kaylor, 2015). The paper will first examine the effect of child kidnapping, which is more common and a deep-rooted crime worldwide. Not only does forceful removal of a child from his/her family traumatises the victim, it also unravels the lives of his/her parents, family, and community (Orset, 2008). One common effect of the abduction which seemed memorably traumatic for those concerned, and which was raised many times was the lack of contact for many parents with their children during the period that they were away. This was often because the left-behind parent did not know the children's whereabouts (Freeman, 2006). Child sexual abuse as a result of kidnapping also exposes child to the risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases. Another guised form of sexual molestation of kidnapped children is that the abducted under age victims are often subjected to forced marriage with older husbands. As reported by Clark (2004), the child brides are married to older, more sexually experienced men with whom it is difficult to negotiate safe sexual behaviours, especially when under pressure to bear children. A study conducted in Kenya and Zambia in 2004 finds that married girls aged 15-19 were 75 percent more likely to contract HIV than sexually active, unmarried girls of the same age. Similar figures have been found in 29 countries across Africa and Latin America (Clark, 2004). Apart from psychological trauma on the victim and the victim's family, as well as physiological implications, kidnapping is also accompanied with huge economic or financial implications. According to Catlin Group (2012, p. 2), one estimate suggests that globally, ransom payments could be worth US\$500 million annually, but an authoritative figure simply is not possible when the total number of incidents is open to great uncertainty. The vast majority of kidnaps, perhaps 70 per cent, go unreported for fear of reprisals or a lack of confidence in the police. All of these suggests that kidnapping is a big part of global insecurity challenge. Kidnappers are getting emboldened daily in Nigeria as they abduct school children in mass. This paper looks at the issue of insecurity and mass kidnapping of school children in Nigeria with a view to identifying the factors responsible and the measure to curb same.

### **Theoretical Orientation**

This research will adopt the broken windows theory developed by Philip Zimbardo (1969) and the Conflict theory by Karl Marx (1818-1883) as its framework. The Broken Windows Theory has been chosen as the theoretical

framework because of its suitable nature for the research at hand. This theory among the other ones reviewed, adequately explains the issue of insecurity and mass kidnapping of school children in Nigeria. The BWT suggests that public order offences like vandalism and rowdy behavior can create a downward spiral of neighbourhood deterioration and fear of crime that leads to more deterioration and more serious crimes if not checked by the community. This is because little crimes like vandalism, broken windows and others tend to portray the impression that nobody cares about the community and that residents as well as the police have lost control over the community. On the other hand, increased police presence and enforcements of informal rules of conduct and laws can make a community seem less chaotic and safer, thereby increasing presence and involvement of residents in their community and lowering crime rates. (Palmiotto, 2000).

Insecurity in Nigeria has been on a steady rise over the years without active steps by government and security agencies to stop this trend. Various form of insecurity like terrorism, banditry, armed robbery and even kidnapping has been on a steady rise. As a result of little or no effort to stop the insecurity challenges as they come, the criminals have become emboldened as they now abduct school children en mass without fear of any challenge from the security agencies. The BTW holds that neglecting minor insecurity challenges will result to bigger security issues. This is why we have the big problem of mass kidnapping of school children in Nigeria today. The conflict focusses on how unequal distribution of resources in the society results to conflicts that ultimately manifest in form of insecurity in a given society. The Nigerian society is divided between the rich and the poor. The poor, as a means of survival often engage in criminal activities like kidnapping for economic survival. This theory argues that if the society is less unequal, there will be less conflict and by extension, less insecurity. Mass kidnapping of school children is carried out to extort money from the society. This will likely continue except the root causes are addressed.

### **Discussion of Key Issues**

The mass kidnapping of school children in Nigeria is caused by factors economic factors like unemployment and rising cost of living. The unemployment rate in Nigeria is alarming. Majority of the youths who should be gainfully engaged are finding it difficult to get jobs. They ultimately find criminal activities very attractive. The conflict theory holds that the struggle for economic power will continue to result to crimes in the society. Crimes like kidnapping of school children have become the new reality as security continues to deteriorate in Nigeria. What this means is that the criminals or those perpetuating insecurity in Nigeria are motivated by their lack of comfortable means of livelihood. Kidnapping of school children is seen by them as the way to get the attention of those in power to better their economic lot by paying ransom for the kidnapped school children. There are also political undertones to the kidnapping of school children in Nigeria. School children are kidnapped to arm-twist the government into paying ransom that will be sued by the kidnappers or criminals to purchase more weapons and armory to either destabilize the society or cause more insecurity, further painting the government as incompetent. The school children being kidnapped in Nigeria especially by bandits is both for economic and political reasons. While they extort money from government, they also use the monies they extort to buy weapons to carry out more kidnapping activities.

The major effect of mass kidnapping of school children in Nigeria is that it increases the number of out-of-school children as most parents become afraid of releasing their children to go to school for fear of them being kidnapped. This challenge is worst in the northern part of the country which is already battling a high rate of out-of-school children. With the threat of kidnap by bandits, the problem becomes more worrisome. Also, the educational sector in the country will ultimately suffer from the rising cases of mass kidnap of school children as the calendar of the schools will be altered due to closure of schools to prevent kidnap of school children. Also, the country at large will have a generation of kids who missed going to school. The trauma faced by school children who are kidnapped can only be imagined. This will not only have negative effects on their psyche but will leave a lifelong scar on their hearts about the country's ability to protect them.

However, there are measures that if adopted, could reduce the incidence of mass kidnapping of school children in Nigeria. One of such measures is job creation. If jobs are created, the number of people who would find crimes like kidnapping attractive will significantly reduce, thereby reducing the incidence of mass kidnapping of school children in the country. Governments should as much as possible, discourage the payment of ransom to kidnappers. Payment of ransom reinforces the crime of kidnaping as those involved in it are encouraged to kidnap more when they are paid ransoms. However, if ransoms are not paid, they will be discouraged from further engaging in the crime. Also, schools should be properly secured. Fencing of schools and stationing of security officials close to schools and road that lead to schools will encourage students to show up in schools and

discourage kidnappers from attempting the kidnap of school children as the processes of kidnapping would become difficult.

### Conclusion

Insecurity in Nigeria is becoming increasingly alarming and challenging. Recently, it has assumed a new dimension as the kidnapping of schoolchildren has taken centre stage, making them more attractive targets for criminals. This dangerous trend must be addressed by all stakeholders, especially the government and security agencies, because of its adverse effects not only on schoolchildren but also on the nation at large. While unemployment has been identified as one of the factors responsible for the rising incidence of mass kidnappings of schoolchildren in Nigeria, there is evidence in the literature suggesting that some of these kidnappings are politically motivated and must be tackled effectively by the government through job creation and the discouragement of ransom payments. When ransoms are paid, criminals are reinforced and become bolder in attacking both schoolchildren and the government. Therefore, there is a need to address the root causes of the problem by creating employment opportunities for the country's teeming population. Schools should also be adequately protected so that students and their parents will have the confidence to return to school.

### Recommendations

Based on the issues raised and discussed in this paper, the following recommendation are made for possible implementation:

1. The Nigerian Government shall come up with poverty alleviation programmes and employment opportunities, targeting youths who are mostly involved in abductions and kidnappings out of economic frustration, such as unemployment.
2. Poverty alleviation programmes should also be directed towards addressing high incidence of poverty among women and children who are vulnerable segment of the population mostly kidnapped by terrorists or insurgents and trapped by organized criminals, ending up in abduction for force labour.
3. Anti-terrorism programmes should be made side-by-side with anti-kidnapping programmes in Nigeria.
4. Foreign governments should also participate in the war on mass kidnapping of school children in Nigeria because the activity is a transnational crime usually involving movement out of the country.
5. Non-governmental organizations should be part of the war on mass kidnapping of school children in Nigeria and neighbouring states, through awareness creation programmes.
6. The law enforcement agents, such as the police as well as other agencies meant for anti-human trafficking should also intensify surveillance on the fight against kidnapping. They should be receiving special trainings on how to identify victims of kidnapping and be able to take them from the kidnappers without them being hurt.

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