Case Study.

KIDNAPPING IN NIGERIA: ISSUES AND COMMON SENSE WAYS OF SURVIVING

By

Kelechi Okengwu

Vice Chancellor’s Office, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Nigeria.
okengwu.kelechi@mouau.edu.ng, Phone number:+234 703-048-3594

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The increasing rate of kidnapping is becoming a source of concern. This paper looked at some incidents of kidnapping in Nigeria, identified the factors encouraging kidnapping to include failure of the government to provide basic amenities, unemployment, the use of cults, gangs and militants by politicians in the electoral process and inefficient and corrupt security system. The paper also outlined measures an individual can take to minimize the risk of being kidnapped, how the individual can survive the kidnapping and what friends and family members can do to facilitate the release of the kidnapped.

Key words: Factors encouraging kidnapping, Security system, Nigeria, Militias, Government.

Introduction

Kidnapping for ransom is fast gaining notoriety across the globe, some cities and countries have been described as the “kidnapping capital of the world,” Mexico, Columbia and Brazil are among the cities once named the world leaders in reported kidnapping (CNN, 2005; Politifact, 2010). One wonders if that “championship title” is coming to Nigeria.

Nigeria’s Niger Delta region especially the south east and south- south States have become characterized by heightened insecurity, and an increase in crime wave. Today, almost everyone knows someone who has been kidnapped, fear and panic grips the populace, as no one knows who will be the next victim. People now have to make several calls, security arrangements and get regular updates before travelling to the next town. Things have gone very bad, the presence of heavy security operatives notwithstanding. It has not always been this way. Prior to the 1990s, kidnapping for ransom was not a major issue in Nigeria, though it may not be entirely true to say it did not exist. People had been kidnapped and sold into slavery during the 18th and 19th centuries, others were kidnapped from their homes and assassinated as a result of quarrels over farmlands, child-napping was also not uncommon as children were abducted and used for money-making rituals.(Sanyaolu, 2009) Kidnapping in Nigeria before the 1990s was so minimal that there was no mention of incidents in Nigeria in the eighth United Nations survey on crime trends and operation of criminal justice systems conducted in 2002 by the United Nations office on Drug and Crime (Graham, 2005).

Earliest statistics on kidnapping in Nigeria can be found in the table below drawn up by the Hiscox Group (2001). That placed Nigeria as the 6th highest in kidnapping.

Table 1: Kidnappings for ransom reported by the Hiscox group, 1992 – 1999

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However, the Hiscox study admits that only about 10% of all kidnapping cases are reported to the authorities for fear that it will trigger further kidnapping. In 2009, Nigeria’s Inspector General of Police was quoted as saying that between 2008 and 2009 about 130 people were kidnapped in Nigeria and about N15billion have been paid as ransom to the kidnappers (Ijioma, 2009). Abogu,(2009) wrote that as at July 2009, more than 200 people had been kidnapped in the Southeast and released at the payment of ransoms by their families or friends/associates. Current events ridicule this figure. City residents from Aba say that an average of two people were abducted by militants daily between July and September 2010, there were also regular incidents of kidnapping in Rivers, Abia, Imo, Enugu, Anambra, and Bayelsa States within that period.(Sun Editor, 2010)(Chukwurah, 2010). It is obvious that only a fraction of the incidents are known, as Nwachineke,(2010) complained that a state government placed a ban on reporting the state of crime (kidnapping, robbery and all forms of killing) in the media.

**Methodology**

The methods used in this work are the descriptive and analytical methods. The use of library materials was employed. Related texts, journals, special publications and newspapers were analyzed. Kidnapping in Nigeria is a fairly recent issue, and not much has been written on the subject, hence the reliance on daily news as recorded by credible sources.

Sources also include interviews with Niger Delta Militants as well as people who were kidnapped and later released.

**Origin of Kidnapping in Nigeria**

As mentioned earlier, kidnapping especially for ransom is a recent trend in Nigeria, this is not to say the there have not been incidents of kidnapping, we pointed out that in the slavery era of the 18th and 19th centuries, people were kidnapped and sold into slavery and children and virgins were abducted and murdered for money making rituals(Sanyaolu, 2009). Kidnapping for ransom started in the Niger Delta as a means of calling government attention to the neglect and underdevelopment of the areas by oil companies. However, the Democratic era of the 1990s and the early twenty first century heralded the dawn of an unprecedented upward surge in kidnapping and other violent crimes. The 1999 return to democratic rule and the struggle by politicians to secure power to control petroleum production and ensure personal advancement and group security led to the heightened state of insecurity (Joab- Peterside, 2007).

**Ethnic Militias**

Ethnic militias were formed to protest marginalization, unemployment and environmental degradation caused by oil companies, their modus operandi was vandalization of oil pipelines and installations, kidnapping expatriate oil company workers, illegal oil bunkery, drug sales (Joab- Peterside, 2007). These ethnic militias included the MEND formed by the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC), Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV), the bush boys, the Dodan barrack group, the Titanians among others. Also ethnic militias existed as communities struggled to create their own local governments or electoral districts as a means of securing access to Federal petroleum revenue (Watts et al, 2004).

**Bloody Politics**

**The use of cults and militias by politicians**

Since 1999 competitive electoral politics has assumed ruthless dimensions. Recent day political leadership and democracy is flawed by fraudulent electoral practices instead of being hinged on tolerance, moderation, fair play under the rule of law (Joab- Peterside, 2007). Many politicians aim at securing power and by all means and manipulating power for self aggrandizement. The political process is viewed as a war and the era of the use of cult groups and militias by political parties was born. Campus cult groups like the Vikings, Black Axe and KK were recruited by politicians to operate as thugs because of their fire-powers and paid heavily for their services thereby transforming violence into a commodity priced and purchased in the democratic process. (Joab- Peterside, 2007).

Perhaps, the first reported and pronounced case of abduction in Niger Delta is the Janay 11, 2006 abduction of four foreign Shell Petroleum workers working on the AE fields by militants in Port-Harcourt.

### Table 1: Continues

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*Former Soviet union comprises the Russian Federation and the 14 fully independent republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.
WHY KIDNAPPING THRIVES IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

1. Unemployment:
The high rate of unemployment has been identified as the principal cause of kidnapping, robbery and assassination in Nigeria. Raheem, (2010) quotes Bolande Gbonigi, the retired Bishop of Akure as saying that the high rate of kidnapping, robbery and assassination in the country is occasioned by the failure of governments to create employment for the teeming Nigerian Youth. Statistics released by the National Bureau of Statistics places the Nigerian unemployment figures at 10 Million and points out that the high unemployment rate aggravates youth restiveness and other vices in all parts of the country (Businessday, 2010). A Canadian Report also cited an article in the Guardian of January 11, 2000 that general upsurge in crime is due to high youth unemployment (Canadian Research Directorate Ottawa: 2000).

2. Failure of Government to Provide Basic Amenities
There is visible lack of amenities especially in the Niger-Delta communities (CIA, 2011). Clean water is hardly available; government water supply is virtually not existent in many communities, even in some state capitals. Power supply has become so rare that children’s excited screams of joy could be heard in the neighbourhood wherever the power supply comes on, the roads are also bad. Yet in the same town, muffled sounds of low noise industrial generating sets are heard all day in the houses of the leaders, they travel in their personal jets and their houses are fenced in like maximum security prisons. People are being owed months of unpaid salaries while the leaders build multiple mansions with mobile police unit commanders and men in the same city guarding them. This invokes anger and frustration and will eventually lead the people into crime. Wahab Oba, one of the journalists abducted in Abia State and later released, quotes his abductors as saying that they were kidnapped because of the injustice going on in the State (Onuoha, 2010). Thus fuelling the argument that if public amenities were functional, the motivation for kidnapping would be lessened.

3. Dirty Politics
Retired Anglican Bishop of Akure, Bolande Gbonigi maintains that the nation’s democracy which is characterized by rigging has given birth to poverty, frustration, anxiety and anger (Raheem, 2010). The electoral process is viewed as a form of war and politicians now use cult groups and militias to fight the electoral war (Joab Peterside, 2007; Okengwu, 2004). The aftermath of politicians arming these criminal gangs during the electoral process is that political opponents are kidnapped or even assassinated. These gangs and militia are armed by the politicians and given financial and logistics support by politicians (Joab-Peterside, 2007). The problem is that when the electioneering process is over, they cannot retrieve the arms or even control the activities of these groups and individuals.

4. Traditional Rulers and Communities Encouraging Crime
It is generally believed that in areas where crimes such as armed robbery and kidnapping thrive, the perpetrators sometimes receive the blessings of the paramount rulers of the community. This usually ranges from a passive acceptance and permission to operate, to active participation and sponsorship of these criminals (Editor, Sun 2010). The Abia State Government, in July 2010, dethroned a traditional ruler and suspended three others believed to have been involved in sponsoring kidnappings and armed robbery in the State (Onuoha, 2010).

5. To Finance Militias, Cults and Criminal Gangs
Kidnapping has been identified as one source by which terrorist organizations have been known to obtain funding. It is mind-blowing to consider that criminal gangs are estimated to make up to $500 million a year in ransom payments from kidnapping (Ashaye, 2009).

So many cults, militia, ethnic vigilante, gangs, political ethnic and religious militia abound in Nigeria (Okengwu, 2004). Gangster cults like the Vikings, Black Axe, two two, KK, Buccaneer, Mafia exist in the Universities, especially the eastern and western universities. On the streets and creeks, the KK, Niger Delta vigilante, MEND, Bush boys, Icelanders, Dey well, Dey Bam, thrive; the Movement for the Actualization of the sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) the Odua Peoples’ Council (OPC). These organizations have their different political, ethnic, religious or criminal agenda as the case may be and while some are sponsored by legitimate businesses or external donors, the more criminally disposed groups resort to robbery, drug trade, illegal oil bunkery or kidnapping for funds.

6. Security Failure
“The police is your friend”. One wonders how many Nigerians would believe the slogan in this
Kidnapping methods

Kidnapping can happen anywhere, the office, home, public places like schools, churches, mosques, parks, tourist sites, parties or shows, the highways, hospitals (Sanyaolu, 2009). One could be a victim of a random scenario or a victim could specially be targeted to be kidnapped. (Olagoke, 2010;Editor, Sun, 2010;Okara,2010):

a. The kidnappers could walk into an office or a home neatly dressed as responsible citizens only to quietly escort the victim past the unsuspecting assistants or colleagues into their waiting vehicle after having sufficiently threatened him with guns or other weapons. The same “noiseless” abduction can happen in a social function or a religious service (Olaoye, 2009).

b. Victims can also be kidnapped by being shown photos of loved ones, children, wives, parents and being convinced that the abductors know their locations and will not hesitate to harm or kill their loved ones if the victim refuses.

c. Sometimes, the kidnappers dress like security operatives, the police or the army or government vigilante, identify themselves with fake identity cards and persuade or threaten the victim to go with them.

d. Other methods of kidnapping could be more dramatic, such as when the perpetrators open fire randomly or shoot into the air to cause panic or chaos, in this case, people are less likely to recognize them due to fear or due to the fact that they are masked, they then whisk the target away in the commando style attack (Abugu, 2009;Olagoke, 2010).

e. A more common type of abduction involves the kidnappers monitoring the person and his family members until the victim’s routine is well known and can be predicted by the kidnappers (Ashaye, 2009). They then stalk the victim and abduct him on the road as his car is sandwiched by theirs, even the victim’s security details are incapacitated and sometimes killed in the process. Alternatively, the kidnappers use surveillance to follow the victim home when the victim pulls into his or her driveway waiting for the gate to open, the attackers pull up behind and block the victim’s car (Onouha, 2010).

f. Opportunistic kidnapping occurs when the kidnappers have no particular individual in mind as a target, there is no study of the subject before abduction, people who look, wealthy or drive “flashy” cars are abducted, (Onwubiko, 2009). As the kidnapping rate increases and the kidnappers get more brazen, this type becomes common.

g. Other victims of abduction are drugged by their captors during parties, at a neighbour’s or fast food joints with the assistance of maids, waiters or other people. Date rape drugs which are odourless and tasteless such as GHB or Rohypol are used which induce a medical condition called “retrograde amnesia” where the victim is unable to remember what transpired during this period.

h. Group abduction is also on the rise. Journalists, families travelling for burials or weddings and school children have all been abducted (Sanyaolu,2009; Editor, Sun, 2010;Chukwurah, 2010). the kidnappers usually pursue them, take over the wheels and force a detour. Kidnappers usually abduct groups when they want to make a statement, it usually draws more attention to their cause and makes people and governments more willing to negotiate considering how many lives are at stake. Also when money is the motivation, the ransom is usually extremely high.

i. This paper will be incomplete if no mention is made of using supernatural hypnosis and voodoo rituals by cults, militia and criminal gangs in Nigeria. They hypnotize or bewitch the victim into abduction, people who look, wealthy or drive as a target, there is no study of the subject before kidnapping thrives in Nigerian because of the porous nature of our security network and the fact that past perpetuators were not brought to book (Canadian Research Directorate, 2000; Sanyaolu,2009).
usually taken to camps and hideout of the kidnappers, which could be an uncompleted building in the bush or isolated houses which are fenced in. The victims are usually blindfolded, fed and sometimes provided with “comfort women” to satisfy their sexual desires, of course, the more the “comfort and enjoyment” the more money paid as ransom. Sometimes, those who try to resist abduction or try to cause trouble are assassinated.

Recommendations

Measures to Avoid being kidnapped

1. People should not behave like arrogant aristocratic oppressors. Kidnappers, freedom fighters, militiamen, cult members and most criminals always have a grudge against the rich in the society. It is perceived that they are the ones who loot the nation’s treasury and live in affluence while fellow citizens suffer therefore, those who are wealthy and arrogant often become targets. People should avoid isolating or shutting themselves in. People should not make themselves prisoners in their own environment, tint their car glasses or have 12 foot walls with security wires and five gates. Blending into the environment is encouraged, for instance, wearing a three piece designer suit and a golden watch strolling in the night around an unsafe neighbourhood does not blend in. Knowledge of the right clothes to wear is necessary so that one does not look odd in an environment.

2. Public areas known to be hangouts for criminals, cult members, and places where drugs, alcohol and marijuana flow freely should be avoided. When invited to functions, high profile persons should confirm that their hosts have made adequate arrangements for security and the local authorities are well aware of the function.

3. Care should be taken when discussing travel arrangement and sensitive issues with people who cannot be trusted. Details of transactions, movements, and family are not for public consumption.

4. Children should be trained to be wary of strangers, and taught not to disclose personal or family details to people they are not sure of.

5. People and organizations should exercise caution and thoroughness when hiring assistants, maids, secretaries drivers, security guards and other staff, some have criminal contacts and are planted to monitor movements. Be sure their references check out.

6. It helps to be cautious about areas that are unprotected that could increase one’s vulnerability. Night clubs, and night functions and travelling at night increase vulnerability.

7. People are encouraged to be aware of their surroundings, to train themselves to quickly recognize anything that is abnormal in the home, work and community environment. Being able to recognize strange movements, strange vehicles and strange repair men or utility crew reduces vulnerability to kidnapping. Upon sensing an unusual repair crew, the water board man or the people who take meter readings for electric company can be asked to come back later while their references and identities are being checked out. loafers and aimless wanderers who pass the area too frequently asking for direction or loitering should be discreetly observed.

8. It is important to be careful with waiters, barmen and ushers in public functions, to be especially alert when ushers say “please come this way.” People who are carried away with those beautiful ladies “who’ve got it and flaunt it” may just be ushered into the waiting arms of kidnappers.

9. It is true that most successful people are people of routine, for example, they wake up every morning by 6a.m., take a cup of tea at 6.45, pick the kids by 4p.m. and drive through Road A, jog every Saturday by 6a.m. and make their hair at exclusive salon, but the job is more difficult for people sent to monitor individuals when their routine is unpredictable. When at risk of being kidnapped or in times of insecurity, a routine change may be necessary.

10. Memorizing emergency numbers, ensuring that phones have available calling credit, and keeping phone batteries charged may save people in times of emergency when there may be need to use the phone to call for help. Also, it is encouraged to be discreet when answering phone calls from strange people and never disclose personal details.
11. Being vigilant when driving along the expressway, and always being alert for signals from other road users saves a lot of trouble. When people wave down traffic at different points, they may be trying to signal that there is danger ahead. On a usually busy day, the absence of traffic from the opposite direction may be because robbers or criminals are operating and vehicles either reverse or park to escape danger.

12. It is best to use registered taxi operators and to board vehicles from official loading bays. It is easy to locate the driver if anything goes wrong. Taxi users should be alert when boarding the same vehicle with strange people. Local taxis should not be permitted to deviate from normal routes.

13. Law enforcement agents should be notified of any threats or moves or any confirmed unusual movements around.

Maintain adequate security in home and office premises. It pays to ensure that doors, windows, locks and bolts are in good order. The main gate to residential areas should not be left ajar always. Family members should be advised to consciously close the gates. This will act as a deterrent or an inhibitor and buy time in a case of unauthorized entry. Security analysis of the environment should be done to determine porous areas

WHAT TO DO IN A KIDNAP SITUATION

A The Individual Kidnapped

It is possible to still be kidnapped, despite security training or deployment. In Nigeria, Army Generals have been kidnapped (Olagoke, 2010; Olaoye, 2009). The individual’s survival, release, or death depends on his actions within the period. Below are some recommendations that will increase the chances of survival:

a. Survival is the main objective and not to take risks. Hollywood action movies are just what they are, it does not always work like that in real life.

b. The victim should try to ascertain the real motive or reason for the kidnap. Knowing whether it is political, religious, or criminally motivated could help inform the victims’ choice of actions and utterances during this period so as not to trigger dangerously volatile sentiments that could make the kidnappers kill in anger. It is safer not to be seen as the enemy. Also if they are suicidal, having an escape plan may be necessary.

c. The victim should try as much as possible to remember details of what the abductors look like, are there any scars? Tattoos accents? What did they say? What are their ages number and emotional disposition do they use drugs or alcohol

d. frequently? It is possible to observe these details without giving the impression that they are being watched too closely. Criminals, militants, freedom fighters or whatever names they go by do not like being watched or observed. These details can help apprehend the culprits or help security agents in rescue attempts.

e. The abducted should stay alive and alert, mentally and physically try to do sit ups and other forms of physical training as permitted by the captors. Abductees should also read or play games if permitted. The mind and muscles should not be allowed to grow numb and rusty.

f. The abducted should culture the will to win, develop a positive image of survival. Kidnapped individuals should think survival. They should be positive and remind themselves that they will survive and get out of there alive. The will to win keeps hope alive and can preserve the individual’s life even after having sustained serious injuries.

g. From the point of abduction to the place of holding, victims should observe the environment, even when blindfolded, kidnapped victims can make a mental note of the turnings and intervals. Take note of landmarks, are there signs of gas flaring? Machinery? River? abductees can take note of the general background noise, is the place a mill? Abandoned site? A stone quarry site? Is there an unusual smell or stench? Could it be a brewery, dye factory, carbide smell of mechanic workshop? This is useful information if abductees are able to secretly communicate with the outside world or send a signal for rescue.

h. Abductees should inform the captors of any health conditions they may have. The captors should be notified if the victim requires special drugs such as drugs for asthma, heart or liver troubles. If they are really interested in the ransom, the abducted is better alive than dead, they may provide the needed medications.

i. It is of utmost important for the abducted to avoid heated arguments with the captors, avoid been seen as unnecessarily antagonistic or hysterical. When the opportunity presents itself, the victim should appreciate the captors’ position, tell them the government is stupid for not providing jobs or good leadership, and for allowing poverty ravage a country that is richly blessed. It helps to identify their agitation and make them believe the abducted sees their point, (They see themselves as victims too). This will make them relax and identify with the kidnapped as a person, not as an
easily disposable statistic, it may make it harder for
them to pull the trigger to kill the kidnapped.

j. If the kidnappers start getting agitated and making
threats in the event of their demands not being
met. It is safer to stay far away from them, they
usually grab and shoot the available victim to
convince people that they are serious; the
abductees should stay out of their line of fire. This
also applies if they are high on drugs and alcohol.

k. Sometimes people are abducted by terrorist
groups with suicidal tendencies. If the victims
determine that their objective is to perish all
captured to make a statement, and not
necessarily for ransom, then the victims should try
to escape or overpower them. Look around for
any items that could be used as a weapon, belts,
laptops, keys shoes, pieces of iron and hard
substances. The help of the other captives should
be enlisted as the victims think of a workable plan
of escape. Fighting may be the only chance of
saving lives.

l. If there is a rescue attempt by the police military
or any other security agency or individuals,
abductees should obey the rescuers' instructions.
In such situations, any quick movement could be
misread due to the tension. The victims should
not try to pick a criminal's weapon unless
expressly told to by the rescuer. Anyone with a
weapon is seen as an enemy. The first response
is to lie on the floor and wait for instructions to
avoid getting cut down by the crossfire.

B. Family and Friends

a. Families and friends of the kidnapped should
report to relevant authorities. Kidnappers who
abduct for ransom always issue their first
instruction. “Do not involve security agents”. This
instruction should be disregarded unless one is a
trained expert on security issue. The abductors
usually say it to discourage people from seeking
professional help so they can continue in
amateurish methods. It is helpful to report the
incident to the security agents. However, caution
should be exercised as some police people may
have ties to criminals and provide them with
information (Onuoha, 2010).

b. If a friend or family member is kidnapped in a
foreign country, Friends and family should report
to the embassy officials. It is always better to let
them handle the talks, negotiations or rescue
attempt from the top the local authorities will take
them more seriously knowing the diplomatic
implications.

c. It is important to be cautious of actions or
utterances in this emotion laden period. Negotiators, lawyers and experts should be
consulted to avoid making rash decisions.

d. The authorities should be informed of medical
conditions and the health status of the kidnapped
and cooperate with certified and trusted personnel
if they need details of business or personal
contacts or activities to determine the motive for
the kidnap.

e. Friends and family should try to remember the little
details and recent suspicious activities. Fixing the
jigsaw of unusual occurrences may be helpful in
determining what to do to help. What kind people did
the kidnap victim meet with? any suspicious phone
calls?

f. Friends or family members should not tell the
 kidnappers that their demands will not be met; this
will further infuriate them and make them try to
harm the victim. They should play for time and
hope for the best.

C. The Government And Society

a. The problems of unemployment and the rapid
collapse of social infrastructure should be tackled
by government to discourage people from
resorting to crimes. Power, water and good roads
enhance productivity and encourage hard work.

b. The recent increase in crime wave is to a very
large extent, as a result of the prevalent get-rich-
quick mindset of the society and the celebration of
corrupt individuals who gained questionable
wealth. The society should encourage a complete
re-orientation, not just rebranding and recycling
obsolete methods and corrupt leadership.

c. There should be definite and severe laws against
kidnapping and terrorism and a solid mechanism
to punish offenders in order to serve as a
deterrent to others.

d. Security agencies should work hard to restore the
trust and integrity of the police, army, and other
relevant agencies. Corruption in the police force
should be seriously discouraged if there is to be
an improvement in the security situation.

e. Telecommunication companies should assist in
tracing and determining the location of kidnappers
and other criminals by tracing and monitoring calls
made by the kidnappers to the victims and their
families.

f. The use of cults, militants and thugs by politicians
should be discouraged. It is sad to even imagine
that people who want to lead often import small
arms for these criminal gangs to threaten,
terrorize or even assassinate their political
opponents.
Conclusion

The incidents of kidnapping especially for ransom are fast rising. Bloody politics, the use of militia and cults, failure of the government to provide basic amenities and security failure are some of the factors responsible for the rise. This paper has outlined certain measures people can take to avoid being kidnapped and what the victim, friends and family members can do in the event of a kidnap.

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