

---

## PSYCHO-SOCIAL ANALYSIS OF KIDNAPPING IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR RURAL CHILDREN

Awopetu Grace Ronke, Olabimitan Benjamin A

Psychology Unit, School of Arts and Sciences,  
University of The Gambia

### ABSTRACT

*Globally, kidnapping has become a debilitating and fast-growing epidemic with no recourse to possible solution in sight with severe implications for individuals and the country at large. A review of a study by Onyido (2019) reveals that Nigeria is currently and increasingly engulfed with various forms of violence ranging from kidnapping, banditry, corruption, terrorism, extra judicial killings to religious and electoral violence. These have left our society in a state of trauma, posttraumatic disorder, endless fears, heighten anxiety, chronic depression other psycho pathological disorders bewildering innocent citizens as a result of the menace. There is growing evidence to suggest that victims of kidnapping suffer both short- and long-term adverse effects particularly young children and women who might be raped during this period. Against this backdrop that the study explores the psychosocial analysis of kidnapping in Nigeria and its implication on our rural children by reviewing history of kidnapping in Nigeria, prevalence of kidnapping, theoretical and empirical analysis, and implications this could have on the innocent children in Nigeria and Nigeria's economy. The study therefore suggests a stiff punishment for the perpetrators of these dastardly acts and protects the rights of Nigerian children most especially, in the term of access to education.*

**Keywords:** *Psycho-social, kidnapping, Nigeria, rural children.*

---

**Corresponding author:** Ronke Grace Awopetu can be contacted  
rawopetu@utg.edu.gm

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The word “kidnap” derives its meaning from two English words principally ‘kid’ (meaning infant) and ‘nap’ (meaning sleep). Globally, kidnapping has a long-standing historical background dating back to the kidnapping of Abram’s nephew (Lot), Julius Caesar and Richard the Lion heart (Alenxander & Klien, 2009). According to Chidi (2014), he revealed that stealing of children had commenced in an unfriendly manner in the world since 1673, when children would be stolen from their parents and exported to the North American colonies as servants or laborers. These erratic and pathological behaviors found its ugly head into Nigeria as early as 18th and 19th centuries when children were kidnapped from their homes and sold into slavery while some were assassinated due to quarrels over land disputes (Okengwu, 2011). In 1874, a four-year old boy in Pennsylvania, United State, was abducted for ransom (Ezeibe & Eze, 2012).

As criminal as act of kidnapping is, the first indigenous kidnapping in Nigeria happened in 2006 when Niger Delta militants took hostages to protest against resource control and sharing inequality (Chidi, 2014). The reason behind the act was that the militants believed that Nigeria is built at the expense of the region which serves as cash cow for the whole nation. This action continued from kidnapping of government officials, religious leaders and their family members, politicians and their children, business moguls, to ordinary and innocent citizens. In another report, the first official kidnapping to be documented

in the criminological lexicon in Nigeria took place on the 4th of July 1984 where Nigerian government headed by the then Military head of state ordered and sponsored the kidnap of a former Minister of Transport with assistance of the Israeli Mossad in London (Ogefere, 2015). A review of recent study by Onyido (2019) revealed that Nigeria is currently and increasingly engulfed with various forms of violence ranging from kidnapping, corruption, terrorism, extra judicial killings to religious and electoral violence.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Psychoanalytic Theory of Kidnapping - Sigmund Freud (1856-1939)**

Sigmund Freud widely recognized as a father and propounded of Psychoanalysis theory, believed that the mind is mostly hidden. This theory, globally recognized, addresses the roots of all forms of violence under which kidnapping is classified (Anazonwu, Ifeyinwa & Igwilo, 2016). His fundamental argument for this theory lies in the fact there exists an 'unconscious mind'. According to him, human conscious awareness is like the part of an iceberg that floats above the surface. Under our awareness is the larger unconscious mind with its thoughts, wishes, feelings, and memories. Some of these thoughts were store temporarily in a preconscious area (Myers, 2010). The act of committing crime such as kidnapping borne out of human personality structure. In his view, human personality, including emotions and striving, arises from a conflict between impulse and restraint; that is, between our aggressive, pleasure -seeking biological urges and our internalized social controls over these urges. Sigmund Freud

---

believed that personality is the result of our efforts to resolve these basic conflicts by way of expressing this impulse in ways that bring satisfaction without also bringing punishment. In order to have a better understanding of dynamics of mind during conflict, Freud divided human personality into three: the id; ego; and superego.

The “id” is a Latin word for “it” is an instinctual and unconscious energy psychic energy that always strives to satisfy the biological heritage of survival, reproduction, and aggression. The principle of id is based on “pleasure”; it seeks immediate gratification. To understand how an Id-dominated person behaves, think of a newborn infant crying out for satisfaction, caring nothing for the outside world’s conditions and demands. Or think of people with present rather than future time perspective -- those who often use tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs, and would sooner party now than sacrifice today’s pleasure success and happiness (Keough et al., 1999). As the ego develops, the young child responds to the real world. The ego, operating on the ‘reality principle’, seeks to satisfy the demands of the id in realistic ways that will bring long-term pleasure. The ego contains our partly conscious perception, thoughts, judgement, and memories. Freud further theorized that a child’s ego recognizes the demands of the newly emerging “superego”, the voice of our moral compass (conscience) that compels the ego to consider not only the real but the ‘ideal’. This ideal that is consisted in superego regulates the excesses in behavior children internalize as a result of their great love for and attachment to their parents. Criminality and violent behavior such as kidnapping, banditry and other forms of violent acts were largely explained a failure of the superego,

a consequence of a failure to form healthy and loving relationship and strong attachment to parents.

## **2.2 Psychological Analysis of Kidnapping in Nigeria**

### **2.2.1 *Mental illness and Kidnapping***

The psychological effects of kidnapping could be highly overwhelming considering the emotional trauma the victims suffer in the hands of their abductors. As it was observed by Uzochukwu, (2015), that the type of these emotional effects includes such feelings of confusion and disbelief, with self-doubts. Shock, denial, anger, anxiety, feelings of guilt. Others may experience shame, feelings of sadness, hopelessness, social withdrawal from society, feeling betrayed and having difficulty trusting people again. Also, the degree at which kidnapping causes deep emotional and mental trauma leave victims to go through the trust issues on love, sex, independence, respect and other related affections, (Akwash, 2016), while many of these victims suffer physical torture and injuries when they are kidnapped resulting into physical effects such as insomnia, panic attacks, suicide anxiety or having recurrent nightmares, fatigue and tiredness, muscle tension, being on edge and jumping easily at loud or sudden noises, acute stress disorder(ASD), posttraumatic stress disorder(PSTD), racing heart beats and feeling numb among others. All these contribute to the mental health issues that may likely accompanied a kidnapped survivor.

### **2.2.2 *Personality and Kidnapping***

Personality can be explained in terms of its total reflection of an individual's belief, attitude, behaviors and ways of interacting

---

with the social world. It is overall of all human characteristics that make the individual different and unique among others. Human personality is composed of an array of traits, or discrete human characteristics. These traits can vary across human beings and will coalesce within some humans to form recognizable behavioral and cognitive orientations or patterns. These orientations, what we call “personality,” can be highly stable over time. Owing to the overlap between traits and the broader constellation of personality, it is sometimes difficult to clearly identify a criminological theory as either a trait or personality theory. Meanwhile, kidnapping is a criminal behavior as well as act of abnormality in the society (Anazonwu et al. 2016). The role of personality in relation to kidnapping and kidnapping behaviors cannot be overemphasized. According to Anazonwu, Ifeyinwa and Chekwuemeka (2016), personality traits have consistently failed to explain the behavioral types of an individual involved in kidnapping activities. He further reiterated that the role of personality traits has less significant influence in juxtaposing the contextual and situational factors surrounding kidnapping behaviors. However, Eysenck personality theory explained that a person with criminal personality rates higher on measures of extraversion, neuroticism, and psychoticism. In addition to being uneasy, jittery, and overly anxious, they tend not to learn from their mistakes. Therefore, it was postulated by personality theorists in understanding the connection between the personality and criminal behaviors, such as kidnapping, by explaining that specific abnormal, deviant people have the psychopathic, sociopath, or antisocial personality traits of a criminal. Absolute, ego centrism, callousness, and a lack of regret or empathy for

others, along with charismatic, charming, and manipulative superficiality, are the defining interpersonal and affective traits of psychopaths. These could be accurately found in the behaviors of the kidnapers.

This was also demonstrated in a diagram below on how some of these traits translate into psychopathic behaviors leading to violence and criminality.

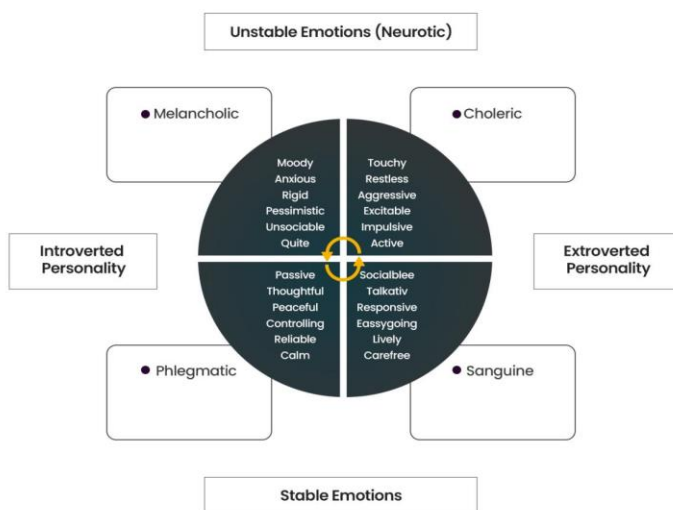


Figure 1. Different personality types of an individual which could likely predispose to violence and criminality

### 2.3 Social Analysis of Kidnapping in Nigeria

Social analysis of kidnapping centers on the sociological approach and understanding that crime is facilitated by some

social factors alien to the individual such as their experiences within the neighborhood, the peer pressure or group and family influence. Considering the social factors bewildering the generation of youth in Nigeria today, there is a conflict which exists between the ends and the wants (Ogbuehi (2018). The rate of unemployment is alarming, banditry on the increase and majority live below poverty level. This is justified by strain theory that Nigerians are generally desirous of the good life which entails material possession, wealth, power, and recognition. Everyone longs for good things of life regardless of their social standing (Siegel, 2010). "Strain is related to criminal motivation, people who feel economically and socially humiliated may perceive right to humiliate others in return" (Siegel, 2010). These theorists are of the opinion that the members of the lower class who are unable to achieve their live goals legitimately get angry and frustrated. This situation puts them in a position of taking to crimes such as kidnapping to make ends meet (Siegel, 2010).

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted a critical and systematic review of secondary data through library research, conceptual approach, daily newspapers, reports from non-governmental organizations and evidence based to collate and analyse the data on kidnapping rates.

### **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **4.1 Prevalence of Kidnapping in Nigeria**

Statistically, available data on kidnapping in Nigeria revealed a very disturbing and heartbreaking figures and it is becoming



everybody's nightmare. According to Ogbuechi (2018), kidnapping takes various form in Nigeria today. These include kidnapping by Niger Delta Militants, kidnap operation by Boko Haram and Ansaru terrorist groups, self-planned kidnapping, kidnapping by Fulani herdsmen, kidnapping by armed bandits in some Nigerian major roads- Abuja-Kaduna Road, Birnin- Gwari Road, Bennin- Ore Road, Bauchi-Maiduguri Road etc. According to Reuters (2009), a total of 512 kidnapping cases was reported between 2008 and 2009 where the majority of the kidnapping occurred in the South-East and South-south regions of Nigeria. Moreover, it was documented that Nigeria recorded 1177 cases of kidnapping within the period of 14 months between 2016 and 2017 (The eagle Online, 2017). In a related development, it is observed that some of the kidnappings are not reported to the respected authorities. While a study conducted by Hisco admitted that only 10% of all the kidnapping cases are reported to the authorities for fear of triggering further kidnapping, between 2008 and 2009, about 130 persons were kidnapped and ransom of #15 billion was paid in Nigeria (Ijioma, 2009) and in southeast alone, about 200 people had been kidnapped and released on condition of ransom paid by family members and friends.

Table 1. High profile kidnapping cases between 2015 and 2016

S/N	Personality	Year	Location	Abductors	Ransom #/\$
1	John Mikel Obi's Father	2015 and 2018	Undisclosed	Unknown Gunmen	Undisclosed

2	Toyin Owosowon, the Reagent of Akungba-Akoko in Ondo State	June 2015	Akugba- Akoko, Ondo State	Unknown gunmen	Undisclosed
3	Professor James Adichie (The father of Chimamanda Adichie	May,2015	Undisclosed	Unknown Gunmen	#50 million demanded and Undisclosed paid
4	Olu Falae, Former Finance Minister	September 2015	Akure, Ondo State	Fulani Herdsmen	N100m demanded, an undisclosed sum paid
5	Madam Beauty Siasia (The mother of Samson Siasia - exSuper Eagles Coach	November 2015	Odoni Village Bayelsa	Unknown Gunmen	Not Disclosed
6	Ex-Senator Patrick Ani	2015	In his Calabar farm	Unknown Gunmen	Not Disclosed
7	Sheik Adam Idoko (UNN's Chief Imam)	2015	Enugu Ezike	Unknown Gunmen	N20m demanded, N2m paid
8	Rev. Father John Adeyi	2016	Otukpo, Benue State	Unknown Gunmen	Murdered after a ransom of N2m was paid
9	Lagos Monarch Oba Oniba of Ibaland	2016	Lagos state	Suspected Niger Delta Militants	Undisclosed
10	Colonel Samaila Inusa	March 2016	Eastern Bypass Kaduna	Unknown Gunmen	Murdered, no ransom was paid
11	Ngozi Okonjo Iweala's mother	2016	Her husband's palace in Delta	Unknown Gunmen	Undisclosed
12	Mrs. Margret Emiefele (The wife of Nigeria CBN Governor	2016	Benin - Agbor Road	Unknown Gunmen	Undisclosed

13	Mr. Pius and Mrs. Laurentia Mallam (Mrs. Mallam was an ex-minister of Environment)	2016	The Bwari-Jere axis of Abuja/Kaduna Road	Unknown Gunmen	Undisclosed
14	Two wives of Nasarawa state commissioner	2016	Lafia, Nasarawa state	Unknown Gunmen	Undisclosed
15	Mr. Bagudu Hirse (Former Foreign Affairs Minister)	2016	Kaduna state	Unknown Gunmen	Undisclosed
16	Three Osun State Government Officials	2016	Kogi State	Unknown Gunmen	Undisclosed
17	Senator Iyabo Anisulowo	2016	Ogun State	Unknown Gunmen	Undisclosed
18	Four residents of Lekki Gardens in Isheri	2016	Lagos	Unknown Gunmen	N2bn demanded, an undisclosed sum paid
19	Sierra Leone's Deputy High Commissioner to Nigeria	-	Abuja	Unknown Gunmen	\$40m ransom demanded but an undisclosed sum was paid for his released

Source: Ogbuehi (2018) and modified.

Table 2. Kidnapping Rate based on states of the Federation in 2022

State	Reported number of kidnapped cases
Abuja	90
Abia	89
Adamawa	5
Akwa Ibom	7
Anambra	38
Bauchi	15

---

Bayelsa	14
Benue	25
Borno	56
Cross River	27
Delta	44
Ebonyi	13
Edo	61
Ekiti	19
Enugu	98
Gombe	0
Imo	69
Jigawa	5
Kaduna	1,150
Kano	5
Kastina	468
Kebbi	59
Kogi	137
Kwara	50
Lagos	4
Nassarrava	14
Niger	725
Ogun	24
Ondo	71
Osun	3
Oyo	19
Plateau	127
Rivers	111
Sokoto	256
Taraba	59
Yobe	8
Zamfara	694

---

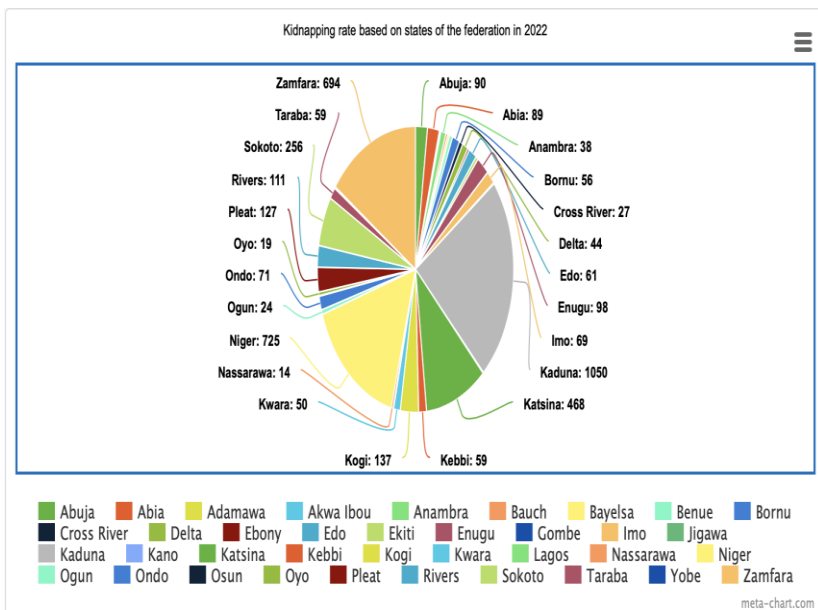


Figure 2. Kidnapping rates across the 36 States of Nigeria Including Abuja

Kaduna has highest reported cases of kidnapping followed by Niger, Zamfara and Kastina while Gombe recorded zero kidnapping rate.

Table 3. Kidnapping Rate of School Children in Nigeria

Date	Name of School	No of cases	Status
On 6 July 2013	Government Secondary School in the village of <i>Mamudo</i> in <i>Yobe State</i>	42	Most of them were killed (students)
On February 25, 2014	Federal Government College of Buni Yadi in <i>Yobe State</i>	59	Many Lost their lives
14th April, 2014	Chibork Girls	276	Not all released
January 1, 2015	Malari	40	Not known
On February 19, 2018	Government Girls' Science and Technical College (GGSTC), Dapchi-Yobe state	110	Not all released (5 died & Shaibu Leah held for not converting to Islam)
December 11, 2020 (Vangurd Report)	Government Science Secondary School, Kankara, Kastina State	344	Released
December 2020	Abu-Zaria	9	Released (Ransom paid)
February 17th, 2021	Government Science College Kagara, Shiroro Local Government Area of Niger State	41	41 (27 students were among)
February 26th, 2021	Government Girls Science Secondary School Jangebe in Jangebe, Zamfara State	317	(Girls)
On July 5, 2021	Bethel Baptist High School in Kaduna,	121	Released (Ransom paid)
On March 11, 2021	<i>Federal College of Forestry Mechanisation</i> , Afaka, Kaduna State	27	Released (Ransom paid)

#### 4.2 Reasons for Kidnapping School Children

*Ransom:* One of the major reasons for kidnapping school children is because of huge amount of money involved in negotiating the release of the victims. Series of school kidnapping involving school children and students were made possible because it is believed that government would be involved in the negotiation which could mean millions of Naira in paying the ransom.

*State Governors Involvement:* It is believed that the state actors or some political gladiators from red zone state are indirectly involved in kidnapping of the school children. It was reported by Orjinmo (2021) that some state governors were fueling the kidnapping of school children. This is because former head of state, President Muhammadu Buhari noted that some state governors must review their policy of rewarding bandits/kidnappers with money and that such policy has the capability of backfiring with calamitous end. For example, a review of abduction of more than 300 students of in Kastina State revealed that the master-minder of the abduction was pardoned by the Zamfara State governor and later promised befitting accommodation and his gang. He further promised them two cows for every AK-47 gun surrendered.

*Sexual Desire:* Another reason why women and girls (school children) were kidnapped was because the kidnapers intentionally want to rape and assault these innocent children sexually in order to satisfy their sexual urge or desires, forced marriages and labor. Some of the female kidnapped victims reported being sexually abused by their abductors. Also, some experience threatening comments of a sexual assault in the

---

hands of the kidnappers. United Nations (2015) reported that the Nigerian army rescued 293 abducted women and children from the Boko Haram stronghold in Sambisa Forest. Many of the women and girls were reportedly pregnant, while some gave birth.

*Hatred for Western Education:* The kidnapping of school children especially girls by the terrorists, kidnappers, banditry, Boko Haram as the case has been due to belief that girls should not be educated and as such they should be used for cooking and sex slaves. This was justified by the attack on Government Secondary School in Mamudo, Yobe State, on 6th of July 2013 by men of boko haram killing at least 42 people and kidnapped many of the girls.

*Retribution:* The kidnappers carry out this dastardly act with an intention or simply to enact retribution or revenge against government of the day.

#### **4.3 Implications of Kidnapping for Nigerian Children- “Rural Children”**

The rate at which Nigerian children most especially the school children are being kidnapped by armed bandits, or boko haram which has led to more than 1,680 schoolchildren having suffered and victims since the 2014; abduction of 276 schoolgirls from Chibok in Borno State, with fear of attacks stopping them from ever attending school, the implication of these are not far-fetched. Rural children in Nigeria today are going through a lot of learning crisis. Their access to their right to education is being truncated by kidnapping, banditry and the like. Several attacks on these innocent children affect the



---

children mental health and well-being and this could have a long-lasting effect on their lives.

The act of kidnapping the school children alone undoubtedly would leave the rural children traumatized, scared, and parents may lose confidence in the authority/management of the school and the overall security architecture for not able to provide adequate security and guarantee the safety of their children. Beyond the psychological implication, the educational and social implications cannot be overemphasized.

Educationally, the future of rural children in rural communities is very bleak. The frequent attacks which sometimes in mass destruction of school facilities discouraging any attempt by individuals or government opening a new school in the rural communities. Also, rural children in kidnapping zones or regions may be denied their ability to attain the peak of their educational career in terms of becoming a graduate in life. This in turn could affect the manpower development in such rural areas. With the current spate of kidnapping of school children regardless of the community or zone, the confidence of the parents is totally jeopardized in sending their children to acquire education which out rightly is one of fundamental human right of a child.

The social implication is more than what one could think of. This is far more disturbing because lack of education resulting from kidnapping is equally among the root causes of criminality, banditry, and terrorism in Northern Nigeria. Having a high rate of unemployment and unemployable youths in the future will make things work and may destroy the nation in the nearest future.

---

The Amnesty International (Okunola, 2021), reported that a drastic increase in child marriage and teenage pregnancies resulting from insecurity and kidnapping most especially in some red zones (Northwest and Northeast). Since many of these young girls have been displaced by bandits/kidnappers, their parents have given them out for marriage. A report from 16-year-old girls ““Since many of my friends were kidnapped in school, my parents decided to give me out in marriage for my own safety””.

## **5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

With the current spate kidnapping of the rural children schooling in respective states of Nigeria, the future of education of the children in the rural communities is very bleak. Coupled with frequent attacks which in some cases results into vandalism, breakdown of facilities, total destruction of equipment and so on, may discourage educational authorities to invest in such communities, rather government, donor agencies and philanthropists may divert their resources on other development projects to dealing with fallout from kidnapping cases. Educational attainment of these victims and vulnerable children in terms of quality of graduate and manpower development may suffer and likely impact on the overall development goals of quality education in the communities. Therefore, there is an urgent need to secure future for our rural children, protect them from kidnapping, enforce stiff penalty for the perpetrators of the evil act and finally create an enabling environment for our rural children so that they can develop a healthy relationship, sound well-being and be psychologically stable.

---

## REFERENCES

- Akwash, F.A. (2016). The psychological impact of kidnapping. *Scholarly Journal of Science, Research and Essay*, 5(1), 1-5.
- Alexander, D.A & Klein, S. (2009). Kidnapping and hostage taking: A review of effects, coping and resilience. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 12 (1), 16-21.
- Anazonwu, C. O., Ifeyinwa, O. C. & Chukwuemeka, I. (2016). Psychology of Kidnapping. *Practicum Psychologia* 6, 104-120. <http://unizikpsychologia.org/> ISSN: 2006-6640 *Archives of Business Research*, 7 (3), 143-148
- Chidi, N. J. (2014). Kidnapping in Nigeria: An Emerging Social Crime and the Implications for the Labour Market. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 4(1): 133-145.
- Ezeibe, C.C. & Eze, M.O. (2012). Political Economy of Kidnapping in Nigeria- The South East Experience. *Journal of Liberal Studies*, 15(1), 231.
- Keough, K. A., Zimbardo, P. G., & Boyd, J. N. (1999). Who's smoking, drinking, and using drugs? Time perspective as a predictor of substance use. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 21, 149-164.
- Meyers, D.G. (2010). *Exploring Psychology* Ninth Edition in Modules. Worth Publishers 41 Madison Avenue New York, NY 10010 [www.worthpublishers.co](http://www.worthpublishers.co).
- Ogbuehi, V. N (2018). Kidnapping in Nigeria: The Way Forward. *Journal of Criminology and Forensic Studies*. 1(3): 180014 <https://chembiopublishers.com/JOCFS/>.
- Okunola, A. (2021). What's Behind the Spate of School Kidnappings in Nigeria? Global Citizen Explains. [What's](#)

---

Behind the Spate of School Kidnappings in Nigeria?  
([globalcitizen.org](http://globalcitizen.org)).

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

Orjinmo, N. (2021). Nigeria's school abductions: Why children are being targeted. BBC News, Abuja. [Nigeria's school abductions: Why children are being targeted - BBC News](#).

Onyido, J. A. (2019). Kidnapping in Nigeria. The Impact on Girl-child Education.

Reuter, P. (2009). Systemic violence in drug markets. *Crime Law and Social Change*. DOI: 10.1007/s10611-009-9197-x  
<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/226471389>

United Nations (2015). Violations and abuses committed by Boko Haram and the impact on human rights in the countries affected. Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. [A-HRC-30-67\\_en.docx \(live.com\)](#)

Uzochukwu, M. (2013). Kidnapping: Overview, causes, effects and solutions. Retrieved on 20/10/2022, from <http://www.ow/cation.com>

Siegel, L. J. (2010) *Criminology: Theories, Patterns, and Typologies*. (10th edn), Cengage Learning, Ohio, Belmont: Wadsworth. USA.