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Kidnapping in Selected Coastal Communities of Akwa Ibom State: Causes, Effects and Effectiveness of Preventive Strategies

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Abstract

This study examined the causes and effects of kidnapping as well as the effectiveness of preventive strategies for kidnapping in selected coastal communities of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The paper employed an exploratory research design and gathered data from focus group discussions and in-depth interviews from133 respondents selected through purposive and snowball sampling methods. The findings revealed that poverty, unemployment, poor security networks, marginalisation and exploitation of natural resources, political influence, and quick-money syndrome were the major causes of kidnapping in the study area. The effects of kidnapping on individuals and society as a whole were devastating, ranging from physical harm to loss of lives, financial loss, displacement, fear, and emotional and psychological trauma. Furthermore, kidnapping damages the community's reputation, discourages potential investors, and cripples socio-economic activities. The existing preventive strategies, including community policing and awareness programmes, have been largely ineffective due to insufficient government support, inadequate resources, and the failure to address the root causes of crime. The study recommended that a community-driven security framework should be implemented, involving enhanced law enforcement, socio-economic development, and local engagement. This would strengthen law enforcement, foster a stronger relationship with communities, and empower local leaders and residents to ensure security.

Keywords*:* Kidnapping, Coastal Communities, Causes, Effects, Effectiveness of Preventive

Strategies

Introduction

Kidnapping is a phenomenon with both national and international concern (Okoli and Agada (2014). Kidnapping is condemned globally. It is an infringement on human rights. Regrettably, kidnapping has become a recurring decimal and common criminal offence in Africa and Nigeria in particular. Statistically, at least 21,000 kidnapped incidents occur annually, with Africa (26%), Latin America (24%), and the Middle East (16%); the remaining 3 per cent take place in North America and Europe combined (Bell, 2019). Surprisingly, several kidnapped cases have not been reported to the police. Kidnapping is largely considered a criminal offence and a security

concern in Nigeria (Okorie et al., 2021; Bakare, 2020). According to Odeku (2020), kidnapping is prohibited in Nigeria and subject to legal penalties under criminal law and other extant laws. It has impacted both economic activity and personal safety for many years (Odeku, 2020). Kidnapping involves the use of force to seize or remove an individual or group of individuals to gain political or financial advantage (Bakare (2020). Kidnapping is characterised by coercion, forced work, financial exploitation, terrorism, and other heinous crimes that jeopardise the internal security of Nigeria.

Nigeria is an epicentre for kidnapping activities (The Hindu, 2024; Okorie et al., 2021). According to Salami (2024), kidnapping occurrences and cases in Nigeria started to increase in 2014 with 84 events involving 897 victims and peaked in 2021 with 590 occurrences involving 5,287 victims. The socio-economic fallout from kidnapping in the nation includes the death of victims, payments for ransom, forced closure of companies and schools, and limitations on farming operations. Mahmoud et al. (2021) noted that kidnapping activities have negative effects on the country's image, deterring both foreign and domestic investors and causing a general sense of unease that prevents people from moving freely, particularly in areas where kidnapping is common. Mahmoud et al. (2021) opine that in Nigeria, kidnapping occurs in churches, mosques, marketplaces, schools, residences, and roadways. The experience of kidnapping traumatises the kidnapped victims and their relatives. Female victims can be raped (Asangausung et al., 2020). Nigeria is a scary place for foreign investors. Nigerian laws forbade kidnapping and imposed capital punishment on offenders. The United States and other developed countries have warned their citizens about the risks associated with visiting Nigeria (Odeku, 2020).

Kidnapping for ransom is becoming increasingly prevalent and intense in Akwa Ibom State. More than 50 kidnapping incidents and over 25 related fatalities were reported in Akwa Ibom State between January 2020 and March 2024 (Foundation for Partnership Initiatives in the Niger Delta [PIND], 2024). Recent data shows a rise in kidnapping incidents in the State. Many residents of coastal communities of Akwa Ibom State are living in fear due to incessant cases of kidnapping, armed robbery, sea piracy, and killings (Iyama, 2024). Victims of these criminal activities include and not limited to expatriates, politicians, businessmen, community leaders, school children and others.

There are instances of kidnapping in the coastal areas of the state as reported by the media. Ekponta (2024) reported that a traditional ruler was kidnapped in his palace in Ebughu. Another scenario was reported by Umo (2024) involving personnel of Ibom Community Watch (ICW) who were kidnapped, killed, and buried in shallow graves in Unyenghe. Chibundu (2023) reported that a High Court Judge was kidnapped and her security guard killed in Oron. *A medical doctor was kidnapped in Oron (*PIND, 2024).Ogiagboviogie (2021) reported in Ibaka thatseven (7) fishermen were kidnapped and released after payment of N3.6m ransom. Imukudo (2024) reported that within three months in 2022, gunmen abducted four high-profile persons including two clerics a medical doctor and a party chieftain in Mkpat Enin Local Government Area and all four kidnappings happened less than five kilometres apart.

Akwa Ibom State is implementing a combination of government-led security initiatives, community-based interventions, and private-sector responses to reduce kidnapping. The government has increased funding for security agencies, strengthened intelligence-gathering mechanisms, and emphasized collaboration between police, military, and local vigilante groups.

Community policing initiatives encourage residents to report criminal activities, while public awareness campaigns educate communities on security measures. The private sector has invested in surveillance systems and armed escorts to mitigate threats. NGOs and civil society organisations are advocating for policies addressing the socio-economic causes of kidnapping. However, challenges like corruption, inadequate security infrastructure, and weak judicial enforcement hinder the effectiveness of anti-kidnapping strategies (Brown et al., 2024).

Ofo (2010) pointed out that despite these efforts put in place, kidnappers are not deterred due to several persistent challenges. Asangausung et al. (2024) observed that weak law enforcement, exacerbated by corruption and inadequate funding, limits the effectiveness of security agencies in preventing and responding to kidnappings. The judicial system remains inefficient, with many arrested kidnappers escaping prosecution due to legal loopholes, lack of evidence, or compromised investigations. High levels of poverty and unemployment continue to push individuals, particularly youth, into criminal activities, as they see kidnapping as a lucrative means of survival. The complicity of local informants, who provide critical intelligence to criminals, further undermines security measures. Additionally, the vast and difficult-to-monitor coastal terrain of Akwa Ibom State provides kidnappers with escape routes and hideouts, making it challenging for law enforcement to track and apprehend them. The lack of sustained government commitment to long-term socio-economic reforms, coupled with the fear and distrust of security agencies within local communities, further emboldens criminals, ensuring that kidnapping remains a persistent threat.

Several scholars have researched the causes and effects of kidnapping in Nigeria. For instance, Alimi et al. (2023) examined the influence of kidnapping on household economic security in Nigeria. Joseph et al. (2023) examined issues and trends of kidnapping for ransom (k4r) and human insecurity in Nigeria. Mahmoud et al. (2021) traced the historical account of the scourge of kidnapping in Nigeria and its implication on national security. Odeku (2020) examined the impact of kidnappings of international tourists on the hospitality sector in Nigeria. Ibrahim and Ahmad (2020)examined the causes of kidnapping in Nigeria and proposed solutions.John (2019) and Chi (2019) examined the causes and consequences of kidnapping in Nigeria. Okorie-Ajah et al. (2018) examined the socio-economic implications of kidnapping and hostage-taking in Southern Nigeria.

However, none of these studies was conducted in Akwa Ibom State to examine the causes and effects of kidnapping as well as the preventive measures for this type of crime in coastal communities of the state. This study has closed the gap.Against this background, this study examined the causes and effects of kidnapping, and the preventive strategies for kidnapping activities in selected coastal communities of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The main aim of this study was to examine the causes and effects of kidnapping as well as the effectiveness of preventive strategies for kidnapping in selected coastal communities of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Specific objectives were to:

1. Identify the causes of kidnapping in coastal communities of Akwa Ibom State.
2. Examine the effects of kidnapping in coastal communities of Akwa Ibom State.
3. Describe the effectiveness of preventive strategies for kidnapping in coastal communities of Akwa Ibom State.

Research Questions

1. What are the causes of kidnapping in coastal communities of Akwa Ibom State?
2. What are the effects of kidnapping in coastal communities of Akwa Ibom State?
3. How effective are the preventive strategies for kidnapping in coastal communities of Akwa Ibom State?

Literature/Empirical Review

Concept of Kidnapping

According to Asuquo (2009), kidnapping is hard to define precisely since it differs from state to state and jurisdiction to jurisdiction. It occurs when someone is forcibly taken and unlawfully detained against his will. Asuquo furthered that kidnapping is a criminal offence because it is against the provisions of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the Criminal Code (2004) which guarantees the protection of human rights. Siegel (2002) opines that kidnapping is a grievous offence. As defined by Ottuh & Aituf (2014), kidnapping is an illegal act of removing or transporting a person against his or her will. They claimed that the main reasons for doing this conduct may be to demand a ransom or kill the victim. The terms "child stealing" and "parental kidnapping" are frequently used to describe this type of kidnapping or abduction, especially when the goal is to keep the child permanently rather than get a ransom or other desired outcome for the "kidnapper".

Abraham (2010) describes kidnapping as the act of capturing, removing, and detaining a person through coercion or deception. It involves taking possession of an individual to demand a ransom in exchange for resolving personal grudges. Businessmen, public servants, traditional rulers, school pupils and students, and politicians are their main targets. Members of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government, as well as security professionals and their families, are all susceptible to kidnapping.One of the vices that presently threaten the peace and stability of the nation is kidnapping. It has evolved into a form of political terrorism to suppress opposition groups. Criminologists view it as political crime or terrorism, emphasising the use of violence as a tool for social change. The idea has taken on several shapes in modern times, including political, state-sponsored, revolutionary, and nationalistic terrorism. While there may not be a clear distinction between the two, some view it as a crime against humanity, while others view it as a violent political movement intended to bring about institutional change and national stability.

Table 2: Selected Incidences of kidnapping in coastal communities of Akwa Ibom State

S/N	Year	Location	Victims/casualties	Remark
1.	2024	Ebughu	Traditional Ruler, Okon Abang was kidnapped in his palace.	He regained freedom after payment of ransom.
2.	2024	Unyenghe	Kidnapped Personnel of the Ibom Community Watch (ICW).	They were kidnapped, killed, and buried in shallow graves. The Police apprehended the Village Head of Utit Antai, Okon Asuquo Etteokpo and 12 others for allegedly kidnapping and beheading three marine hunters.
3.	2021	Ibaka	Seven (7) fishermen were kidnapped.	They were released after payment of N3.6m ransom.
4.	2023	Oron	High Court Judge, Joy Unwana was	The Judge was freed after spending five (5)

			kidnapped while her security guard was shot dead.	days in captivity.
5.	2024	Oron	*John Esu, a medical doctor, was kidnapped.*	Regained freedom after payment of ransom
6.	2024	Ikot Abasi Akpan	Akparawa Ezekiel Paul, the retired school principal kidnapped	Regained freedom after payment of ransom
7.	2023	Ikot Obio	Mr. Macaulay Ufot, the pioneer General Manager of Atlantic FM Radio was kidnapped.	He was released after he became unconscious in captivity and died the next day at a hospital in Uyo.
8.		Ikot Ekpaw	a medical doctor was abducted in the theatre while carrying out surgery in the community cottage hospital.	He regained freedom after payment of the ransom.
9.	2022	Ibekwe Akpanya	The founder of Solid Rock Kingdom Church, Apostle John Okoriko was abducted in the church premises while conducting counselling.	He regained freedom after four days in captivity.
10	2022	Ikot Abasi Akpan	Reverend Father Alphonsus Uboh was abducted from his parsonage at St Pius X Parish, Ikot Abasi Akpan, Mkpat Enin.	Regained freedom after payment of ransom

Source: Compiled by the Authors (2024)

Table 1 presents a selection of kidnapping incidents in the coastal communities of Akwa Ibom State, highlighting the prevalence of the crime across different locations and years. The data indicates that kidnapping targets a wide range of individuals, including traditional rulers, religious leaders, jurists, security personnel, medical professionals, civil servants, and fishermen, demonstrating that no group is immune to the threat. Many victims were released after ransom payments, reinforcing the perception that kidnapping is a lucrative business for criminals. However, some cases resulted in fatalities, either through execution or health complications suffered during captivity, emphasising the life-threatening nature of these abductions. The recurrence of kidnapping in specific locations such as Oron, Mbo, and Mkpat Enin Local Government Areas suggests that these areas are particularly vulnerable due to factors such as weak security presence, challenging terrain, or established criminal networks. The fact that security personnel, including members of the Ibom Community Watch, have also fallen victim to kidnappers underscores the boldness of the perpetrators and the limitations of local security arrangements. The involvement of community leaders, such as a Village Head in Unyenghe, in facilitating kidnapping activities raises concerns about insider complicity, making counter-kidnapping efforts more difficult.

The implications of these findings are far-reaching. The frequent targeting of professionals such as judges, doctors, and religious leaders has significant social consequences, eroding trust in security institutions and creating a climate of fear that discourages economic and social activities. The economic impact is evident, as businesses and professionals may either leave the

region or adopt costly security measures, further exacerbating financial hardship. The willingness of victims' families to pay ransom perpetuates the cycle of kidnapping, emboldening criminals and increasing the likelihood of future incidents. Moreover, the table suggests a failure in law enforcement and judicial processes, as despite arrests in some cases, kidnapping remains rampant, with perpetrators often evading lasting consequences. Table 1 provides a snapshot of the severity of kidnapping in coastal Akwa Ibom State, emphasizing the urgent need for more effective preventive and law enforcement strategies. The persistence of these incidents highlights systemic weaknesses in security, governance, and socio-economic stability, which must be addressed to curb the menace of kidnapping in the region.

Causes of Kidnapping in Nigeria

The causes of kidnapping in Nigeria were determined by Ibrahim and Ahmad (2020), who also provided some solutions to the issue. The study used a qualitative approach to gather and examine its findings. The results obtained from the descriptive and historical methods demonstrated that the main reasons for abduction in Nigeria include extreme poverty, political influence, corruption and fraud, unemployment, terrorism, the absence of the death penalty in the country, a shifting moral compass, and the quick-money syndrome.Ibrahim and Ahmad's (2020) research provides important insights into the causes of kidnapping in Nigeria. However, there are a few potential gaps in the literature that further research could fill. While the study offers a general overview of the elements that lead to abduction in Nigeria, it was unable to fully capture the unique dynamics observed in some regions, such as the coastal areas of Akwa Ibom State. The perspectives and experiences of residents of coastal towns where abduction has become a regular issue may have gone unresearched in this study. There may have been developments or changes to the factors influencing abduction since the study was carried out in 2020.

Similarly, John (2020) examined the causes and effects of the increase in kidnappings in Nigeria. This study relied on secondary sources of data and content analysis was employed. Based on the findings, it is believed that the most common causes of kidnapping in Nigeria were poverty, unemployment, moral degradation, insecurity, corruption, a weak constitutional framework, and inadequate policy implementation. As a result, those who commit kidnapping frequently obtain enormous quantities of money from their victims; occasionally, the victims of kidnappers are killed once the required amount of money is provided and, to some extent, not redeemed. While John's research provided a more thorough examination of the national trend of abduction in Nigeria and identified comparable causes and consequences, it did not specifically explore the regional factors that contribute to kidnapping in coastal communities. Therefore, further research is needed to completely understand the unique challenges that these specific locations face and to look at specialist techniques for solving this issue in their unique setting.

In a related development, Chi (2019) looked at the reasons behind and effects of kidnapping in modern-day Nigeria. In this study, the descriptive methodology was used. It draws from both primary and secondary sources; primary sources are mostly oral histories and testimonies; secondary sources are pertinent books, newspapers, and magazine articles. The findings indicated that several criminals turn to kidnapping as a means of income in part due to poverty, unemployment, and the government's extended neglect of its residents' needs. Furthermore, some young men and women have been persuaded to engage in hostage-taking and kidnapping as a lucrative and successful business due to a lack of moral teaching from their families and society as well as a desire to make quick money. Chi's research illuminated the broader causes

and consequences of kidnapping in contemporary Nigeria, but it overlooked the unique challenges and contextual factors that could contribute to kidnapping in coastal communities. To effectively tackle these specific issues, further research is needed to fully comprehend them and provide targeted answers.

Effects of Kidnapping in Nigeria

Joseph et al. (2023) investigated the effects of kidnapping for ransom on human security in Nigeria. The study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to data analysis with documented evidence of kidnapping incidents. The findings showed that the effects of kidnapping include wasting resources through payment for the release of the victim, emotional and psychological trauma, threats to one's life, and a fear of a negotiation breakdown. Joseph et al. (2023) provided insights into the broader problem of kidnapping for ransom in Nigeria and its effects on human security, but they did not specifically look at the localised factors that may lead to abduction within coastal communities. Therefore, more research is needed to completely understand these community-specific issues and develop targeted solutions to appropriately address them. Ene (2018) examined the socioeconomic and psychological effects of kidnapping. To obtain information, a secondary data collection strategy that involves thorough content analysis was used. Thematic and conceptual narratives were used in the analysis of the data utilising qualitative models. Results showed that kidnapping creates circumstances that worsen the nation's socio-economic, political, psychological, and religious security as well as people's safety.

The impact of kidnapping on the financial stability of Nigerian households was studied by Alimi et al. in 2023. The study used a survey research design. A total of 400 households with eligible respondents were chosen for the study from four designated areas (Borno, Kaduna, Rivers, and Lagos States) using a multistage sampling technique. The study employed mean ratings from the different replies and mean descriptive analysis, resulting in a cumulative mean of 3.15 that showed that abduction operations negatively impact household employment, household income, and household property security in Nigeria.Alimi et al. (2023) provided useful data regarding the effect of kidnapping on household economic security in Nigeria, but they did not examine the particular circumstances of several coastal communities in Akwa Ibom State. This could be a gap in the body of knowledge on the current study in the literature. Thus, further research is necessary to ascertain the direct impact of abduction on the financial stability of households in these specific coastal locations and to develop targeted preventive measures that effectively tackle these consequences.

The effects of kidnapping in Nigeria were studied by Ibrahim and Mukhtar (2017). Secondary data were a major component of the investigation. The results showed that rape, financial victimisation, and even death of victims were consequences of kidnapping in Northern Nigeria and the Niger Delta. Ibrahim and Mukhtar's (2017) study did not pay close attention to any of the coastal communities in Akwa Ibom State. Thus, further research is needed to specifically examine the impact of kidnapping in coastal communities of Akwa Ibom State to develop targeted preventative interventions suitable for this particular geographic setting.

Effectiveness of Preventive Strategies for Kidnapping in Nigeria

Emmanuel (2024) investigated the use of drones as a viable substitute for vehicle patrols in Nigeria; a total of 203 policemen formed the sample size. The study employed descriptive

statistics to address its research questions, and R^2 value regression analysis was utilised to evaluate its hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings demonstrated that, in Nigeria, drones significantly reduce the likelihood of armed robberies, kidnappings, communal killings, and other crimes. The possible weakness in Emmanuel's (2024) study is the lack of attention to qualitative research in examining the preventive strategies for kidnapping in coastal communities of Akwa Ibom State. Emmanuel's study examined the use of drones as a useful deterrent against a variety of crimes, but it does not if drones could be used to curb the menace occasioned by kidnapers in coastal communities in Akwa Ibom State.

Possible strategies for preventing abduction and extortion, which have detrimental effects on both the victims and society at large, were discussed in a report published by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2021). Using the most up-to-date methods and instruments, member State representatives and counterterrorism officials came up with preventive measures and responses, like supporting weaker and war-torn states' ability to enable their criminal justice systems, intelligence agencies, and law enforcement institutions to effectively combat kidnapping and extortion. The UNODC report from 2021 lacks a specific focus on the preventive strategies for kidnapping in coastal areas of Akwa Ibom State. Although the UNODC report discusses preventative measures and national and international responses to kidnapping, it makes no mention of the particular circumstances that these coastal communities face or provides insights into the localised factors that contribute to kidnapping in this area. Thus, a qualitative study that examines these specific issues within the context of Akwa Ibom State is necessary to develop targeted preventative policies for this area.

Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by the assumptions of Lawrence E. Cohen and Marcus Felson's Routine Activity Theory (RAT) developed in 1979. RAT provides a framework for understanding crime based on everyday activities. The theory focuses on three core elements that must converge for a crime to occur: First, motivated offender- an individual who is willing and capable of committing a crime; second, suitable target -a person or object that is vulnerable or attractive to the offender; and third, absence of capable guardians - lack of security measures or persons (such as law enforcement agents or community vigilance) to prevent the crime. These assumptions can be applied to the study of kidnapping in selected coastal communities in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Kidnappers in the coastal regions are motivated by socio-economic factors such as poverty, unemployment, or criminal gang activity. The instability in the region fosters the emergence of individuals or groups motivated to engage in criminal acts such as kidnapping. Individuals in these communities, especially wealthy or influential persons, expatriates, or vulnerable people like women and children, may be considered ideal targets for kidnappers. Also, tourists and business persons operating in these coastal areas have become targets for kidnappers due to their vulnerability. The study might reveal that a lack of adequate law enforcement, security infrastructure, and community vigilance makes it easier for kidnappers to operate. The remoteness and difficult terrain in some coastal areas have contributed to the absence of capable guardians (police officers), facilitating the crime.

Methodology

The exploratory survey design was adopted in the study and a qualitative approach for data collection of data and analysis. The study was carried out in Akwa Ibom State, where Ikot Abasi, Eastern Obolo, Mkpat Enin, Onna, Eket, Esit Eket, Ibeno, Okobo, Oron, Mbo, Udung Uko, and

Urue Offong/Oruko Local Government Areas were the study locations. These LGAs have coastlines along the Atlantic Ocean, making them important for fishing, oil exploration, and other maritime activities. Several cases of kidnapping were reported in these locations (). The target population for the study were community leaders, youth leaders, business owners, residents, victims of kidnapping, Non-Governmental Organisations, and the police who were 18 years of age and above. The total population of the selected LGAs is 1,822,322. The sample size for this study was 133. This Sample size was determined based on data redundancy or saturation (where there was no new information from the participants). The purposive sampling technique was used in the study. The focus group discussion (FGD) and In-depth Interviews (IDI) were the methods of data collection. The interview schedule was the instrument for the collection of primary data. The socio-demographic data of the participants were presented using frequency tables and simple percentages and the qualitative data were analysed in themes using the thematic and conversation analysis methods. The excerpts of the FGDs and IDIs aided the analysis.

Table 2: Distribution of samples according to LGAs and methods of data collection (N = 133)

Location	FGD	IDI	Total
Ikot Abasi	9	2	11
Eastern Obolo	8	3	11
Mkpat Enin	10	2	12
Onna	9	3	12
Eket	8	2	10
Esit Eket	7	3	10
Ibeno	9	3	12
Okobo	9	2	11
Oron	10	2	12
Mbo	8	3	11
Udung Uko	7	3	10
Urue Offong/Oruko	9	2	11
Total	103	30	133

Source: Field data (2024)

The distribution across the selected Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Akwa Ibom State as indicated in Table 2 reflects a balanced sampling approach, incorporating both Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) to gather comprehensive insights on kidnapping. With a total of 133 participants, FGDs formed the larger part of data collection (103 participants), while IDIs accounted for 30 participants. This suggests that the study relied heavily on group interactions, which can provide diverse perspectives on the causes, effects, and preventive strategies for kidnapping. The variation in sample size across LGAs appears minimal, ensuring representation across different coastal communities. The relatively even distribution suggests that kidnapping is a widespread concern rather than being concentrated in a few locations. The inclusion of IDIs alongside FGDs strengthens the study by capturing both collective and individual perspectives, allowing for a deeper exploration of personal experiences, expert opinions, and community-driven solutions.

Given that these LGAs are coastal, they likely share similar socio-economic characteristics, including fishing, trading, and farming, which are common occupations in the area. The uniformity in sampling further indicates that kidnapping might be influenced by common regional factors such as economic hardship, weak law enforcement, and geographical vulnerabilities. Table 2 provides a well-structured representation of how data was collected and suggests that the findings will be reflective of broader trends across coastal Akwa Ibom State. The combination of FGDs and IDIs enhances the reliability of the study by integrating both community-wide narratives and individual insights into the phenomenon of kidnapping.

Table 3: Distribution according to category of participants (N = 133)

Category	FGD	IDI	Total
Community leaders	21	6	27
Youth leaders	15	5	20
Business owners	24	4	28
Residents	16	4	20
Victims of kidnapping	9	4	13
NGOs	6	4	10
Police officers	12	3	15
Total	103	30	133

Source: Field data (2024).

The distribution of participants by category in the study highlights a diverse representation of stakeholders affected by or involved in addressing kidnapping in the coastal communities of Akwa Ibom State. Community leaders, youth leaders, business owners, residents, kidnapped victims, NGOs, and police officers were all included, ensuring a well-rounded perspective on the issue. The strong representation of community leaders suggests an emphasis on traditional and

local governance perspectives, reflecting their influence on community security matters. The inclusion of youth leaders indicates recognition of their role in either perpetuating or combating kidnapping, given that youths are often both victims and perpetrators of such crimes. Business owners, who are frequently targeted for ransom, also form a significant part of the sample, suggesting an economic dimension to kidnapping in the region.The presence of kidnapping victims provides first-hand accounts of the experience, consequences, and potential flaws in security systems. NGOs, though a smaller proportion, contribute a civil society perspective, likely offering insights into advocacy, intervention programs, and policy recommendations. Police officers are also represented, which is crucial for understanding the law enforcement challenges and responses to kidnapping incidents.

The combination of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) suggests a methodology that balances collective insights with individual experiences. The predominance of FGDs indicates a reliance on shared community narratives, while IDIs allow for more personal, detailed perspectives, particularly from victims and key stakeholders such as police officers and NGO representatives. Overall, the composition of participants suggests that the study takes a comprehensive approach to understanding kidnapping by integrating perspectives from governance, law enforcement, victims, and economic actors. This diversity strengthens the validity of the findings and ensures that any recommendations for prevention strategies will be grounded in the lived experiences of those most affected.

Results

Table 4: Distribution of the participants according to their personal information (N = 133)

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sex:		
Male	87	65.41
Female	46	34.59
Age bracket (years)		
18-28	23	17.29
29-40	35	26.32
41-51	33	24.81
52-62	30	22.56
63+	12	9.02
Level of education		
Primary	12	9.02

Secondary	67	50.38
Tertiary	54	40.60
Occupation:		
Trading	24	18.05
Farming	25	18.80
Paid employment	20	15.04
Traditional ruler	20	15.04
Fishing	30	22.56
Artisan	9	6.77
Others	5	3.76
Religion:		
Christianity	127	95.49
Islam	0	0.00
Indigenous Beliefs	6	4.51

Source: Field data (2024)

The socio-demographic data collected from 133 participants in selected coastal communities of Akwa Ibom State, provided insight into the socio-economic and cultural factors that influenced kidnapping in the area. The gender distribution shows male dominance (65.41%), suggesting that men are more actively engaged in discussions on security issues, possibly due to their roles in community leadership, fishing, and security matters.The age distribution indicates that most respondents fall within the age range of 29-51 years (51.13%), representing the most economically active group. This is significant because individuals in this bracket are more likely to be affected by or involved in issues related to security, including kidnapping. Younger respondents (18-28 years) make up 17.29 per cent, while those above 63 years constitute the smallest proportion (9.02%), implying that kidnapping concerns may primarily impact the working-age population.

Educational levels reveal that over 90 per cent of respondents have at least a secondary education, with 40.60 per cent having tertiary education. This relatively high level of education suggests that the population is aware of security challenges and their implications, which could influence their perspectives on preventive measures. Occupation data highlights the economic structure of these communities, with fishing (22.56%) and farming (18.80%) being the most common activities. These occupations are predominantly carried out in rural and coastal areas,

which are often targeted by kidnappers due to their relative isolation and weak security presence. The presence of traditional rulers (15.04%) in the sample underscores the importance of local leadership in security discussions. Paid employment (15.04%) and trading (18.05%) also feature significantly, suggesting that economic factors play a role in both vulnerability to and prevention of kidnapping.

Religious affiliation is overwhelmingly Christian (95.49%), with a small proportion following indigenous beliefs (4.51%). The absence of Islamic representation suggests that religious diversity is limited in these communities. This homogeneity may influence collective responses to kidnapping, particularly in terms of reliance on faith-based interventions or traditional security measures.

Analysis of Qualitative Data

Theme 1: Causes of Kidnapping in the Coastal Communities of Akwa Ibom State

Table 5: Summary of the Causes of Kidnapping in Coastal Communities of Akwa Ibom State

Category	Identified Causes of Kidnapping
Community Leaders	Weak law enforcement, poverty, lack of employment opportunities, and ineffective traditional security measures.
Youth Leaders	Unemployment, peer pressure, involvement in cultism, and political influence in criminal activities.
Business Owners	Economic hardship, demand for ransom, inadequate security for business premises, and corruption in law enforcement
Residents	Poor policing, lack of surveillance in rural/coastal areas, and high cost of living lead to criminal activities.
Victims of Kidnapping	Insider collaboration, inadequate government response, lack of proper security structures, and desperation for wealth.
NGOs	Weak judicial system, lack of community awareness, government neglect, and high youth unemployment.
Police Officers	Poor funding of security agencies, corruption within security forces, lack of modern surveillance technology, and complicity of local informants.

Source: Field data (2024)

Table 5 highlights the multifaceted causes of kidnapping in coastal communities of Akwa Ibom State, with each group identifying several factors contributing to the growing problem. The causes identified range from structural issues, such as weak law enforcement and poverty, to more localized concerns like corruption and lack of modern surveillance.

For community leaders, the focus is on institutional weaknesses, with poverty, unemployment, and inadequate traditional security measures seen as key drivers. Their perspective suggests that local law enforcement, while possibly well-intentioned, lacks the resources and support to effectively deter criminal activities like kidnapping. This reflects a broader issue of systemic failure in addressing crime prevention. A community leader said thus: *One of the biggest challenges we face is the lack of effective law enforcement. The police are underfunded and often slow to respond. Our people are struggling with poverty and unemployment, which pushes some into desperate measures. Traditional security structures that once helped maintain order are no longer effective because criminals now have sophisticated weapons and connections*.

Youth leaders emphasised the role of unemployment, peer pressure, and involvement in cultism, along with political influence, suggesting that young people, who may already feel disenfranchised due to economic hardship, are being lured into criminal activities. Their response highlights the vulnerability of youth in the area, where the lack of economic opportunities and social support systems makes them prime targets for criminal groups. A particular youth leader had this to say: "*Many youths in our communities have no jobs and no means of survival. This has led to an increase in cult activities and peer pressure to engage in crime. Some politicians even recruit young men for illegal activities, and after elections, they abandon them, leaving them to use their acquired skills for criminal purposes. Kidnapping has become one of the quickest ways to make money".*

From the business owners' perspective, economic hardship and inadequate security for businesses are highlighted as primary causes. Their frustration stems from the insufficient support from law enforcement and the high cost of securing premises. The financial strain of operating in such an environment, coupled with the rising demands for ransom, has created an untenable situation for businesses in the region. A business owner in the area said: "*Running a business in this region is becoming increasingly dangerous. Criminals target business owners for ransom because they assume we have money. Security is inadequate, and sometimes, even law enforcement officers collaborate with criminals. The economic hardship makes people desperate, and this has fueled the rise in kidnappings".*

Residents of coastal communities identified the lack of effective policing and surveillance in rural and coastal areas as a critical issue. The high cost of living, coupled with poor law enforcement, creates an environment through which criminal activities, including kidnapping, flourish. This perspective underscores the direct link between socioeconomic factors and criminal behaviour in these communities. A resident narrated thus: "*We live in constant fear because the security presence in our communities is weak. At night, the streets are unsafe, and we lack surveillance in many areas. The high cost of living makes the situation worse because people are struggling to survive, and some resort to crime as a means of survival".*

For the victims of kidnapping, insider collaboration and inadequate government response were the central concerns. The perception that the government has not responded adequately to the crisis reflects a deep sense of disillusionment and distrust in both the political system and security agencies. The victims also highlight the desperation for wealth as a motivating factor, underscoring the role of economic inequality in fueling criminal activities. A kidnapped victim had this to say: "*What hurt me the most was realising that some people in my community were involved in my kidnapping. Insiders give information to criminals about their targets. The government's response was slow, and even after I was released, I received no protection. Many victims are left traumatised, and the kidnappers continue to operate freely".*

NGO Representatives focused on the weakness of the judicial system and lack of community awareness, alongside government neglect and high youth unemployment. Their assessment indicates that even when preventive programs are initiated, they often fail due to poor enforcement and inadequate community engagement. NGO Representative said thus: "*The weak judicial system is a major problem. Many kidnappers are arrested but never prosecuted effectively. Government neglect has left many young people unemployed, and community awareness about security is very low. Until we strengthen our justice system and improve social programmes, kidnapping will continue to thrive".*

Finally, police officers pointed to internal issues within the security forces, such as corruption and insufficient funding, as major contributors to the ongoing kidnapping crisis. The lack of modern technology for surveillance and the complicity of local informants further complicates their ability to combat crime. Their response shows how the failure of law enforcement is deeply intertwined with systemic corruption and insufficient resources. A Police Officer in Mbo said "*We are doing our best, but we face many challenges. Our resources are limited, and some officers are underpaid, which leads to corruption within the force. Intelligence gathering is difficult because informants sometimes collaborate with criminals. Without better funding and modern surveillance technology, fighting kidnapping will remain a struggle".*

In conclusion, the data illustrates a complex interplay of factors at both the local and systemic levels. The common thread across all categories is the interplay between economic hardships, poor governance, and inadequate security measures. The responses from each group reflect a broader systemic failure to address the root causes of kidnapping, highlighting the need for comprehensive reform in law enforcement, economic development, and social support systems.

Theme 2: Effect of Kidnapping in Coastal Communities of Akwa Ibom State

Table 6: Summary of the Effects of Kidnapping in Coastal Communities of Akwa Ibom State

Category	Effects of Kidnapping
Community Leaders	Breakdown of traditional authority, loss of community trust, fear among residents, and disruption of social cohesion.
Youth Leaders	Increased youth involvement in crime, destruction of prospects, and migration of young people to safer areas.
Business Owners	Economic decline, closure of businesses, reduced investment in local enterprises, and increased cost of security.
Residents	Psychological trauma, restriction of movement, reduced social activities, and fear of night movement.
Victims of Kidnapping	Physical and emotional trauma, financial ruin due to ransom payments, loss of confidence in security agencies, and stigmatisation.
NGO Representatives	Increased humanitarian crises, higher displacement rates, decline in social development programmes, and reduced donor support.
Police Officers	Increased pressure on law enforcement, low morale among officers due to poor funding, difficulty in intelligence gathering, and public distrust in security agencies.

Source: Field data (2024)

Table 6 outlines the far-reaching effects of kidnapping in coastal communities of Akwa Ibom State, shedding light on its profound and multifaceted impact on both individuals and the broader societal structure. Across all participant categories, the responses reveal a stark picture of the destruction caused by kidnapping, extending beyond immediate physical harm to encompass significant social, economic, psychological, and governance-related consequences.

Socially, the effects are most evident in the breakdown of traditional authority and social cohesion. Community leaders note a loss of trust and a rise in fear, which erodes the fabric of the community. A community leader said: *"Kidnapping has severely undermined the traditional authority we used to have in our communities. There is a growing sense of fear among residents, and trust has eroded. People no longer feel safe, and it is disrupting the very fabric of our social cohesion. We used to be close-knit, but now there is constant tension and uncertainty".*

This fear, shared by residents, significantly affects day-to-day life, limiting mobility and reducing social interactions, ultimately contributing to a fractured and isolated social environment. A particular resident narrated thus: "*Living in this community is a constant battle with fear. I've experienced psychological trauma, and there's a real restriction of movement. We can no longer move freely, and social activities have greatly decreased. People avoid going out after dark, and many of us stay indoors out of fear of being targeted by kidnappers*".

For youth, the consequences are particularly alarming, as increased involvement in criminal activities and migration to safer areas disrupt the potential for growth and prospects. These shifts further hinder the community's ability to foster positive development, perpetuating a cycle of insecurity. A youth leader said: "*The consequences of kidnapping are especially hard on the youth. Many young people are turning to crime as a way to make money, and the prospects for those who stay are bleak. We are losing a lot of our young people to safer areas because they feel they have no future here. The sense of fear and instability is pushing them away*".

Economically, the repercussions are devastating. Business owners report a decline in economic activities, business closures, and a reduction in investments, as the threat of kidnapping grows. The increased costs of security measures, coupled with a slowing economy, heighten the strain on local businesses. This economic decline exacerbates the region's vulnerability, contributing to a cycle of poverty and instability. A business owner had this to say: *"The impact on the local economy is profound. Kidnapping has led to the closure of businesses, and those of us still operating are seeing fewer customers and more expenses, particularly for security. Investment in the area has dropped significantly because no one wants to risk doing business here. The costs of security are rising, and it's becoming harder to sustain operations*".

Victims of kidnapping, who experience both physical and emotional trauma, are left financially ruined due to ransom payments, which can lead to long-term economic instability for families. The emotional scars of these experiences extend to a general loss of confidence in the authorities meant to protect them. The stigma faced by victims further alienates them from their communities, contributing to a cycle of suffering. A kidnapped victim in Ibaka had this to say: "*The impact on me has been devastating. Not only did I suffer physical and emotional trauma, but I also lost everything due to the ransom payments. I had to sell almost all my assets just to get my family back. I no longer trust the security agencies – they weren't able to protect me or provide any meaningful help afterwards. There's also the stigma I carry as a victim, which makes it even harder to rebuild my life*".

From a humanitarian perspective, NGOs highlight an increase in crises, displacement, and a decline in social development programs. The insecurity and instability brought on by kidnapping have redirected both resources and focus away from community development, resulting in a diminished ability to address the needs of the population. Additionally, reduced donor support further limits the capacity of NGOs to intervene effectively in mitigating the consequences of kidnapping. NGO Representative said thus: "*The scale of the problem has triggered a humanitarian crisis. More people are displaced, and we are seeing fewer resources available for social development programs. Kidnapping is diverting attention away from the urgent needs of the community, and donor support is drying up as the situation gets worse. It's a vicious cycle that keeps everyone trapped in poverty and insecurity*".

The law enforcement sector is not immune to the strain. Police officers experience increased pressure, with low morale and difficulties in intelligence gathering. Corruption within the force

further exacerbates the challenges in addressing kidnapping, and public distrust in security agencies undermines their ability to collaborate with communities to prevent and respond to these crimes. A Police Officer said thus: "*The police force is under immense pressure. Our resources are stretched thin, and it's hard to gather reliable intelligence when we lack the tools to do so. Officers' morale is low, and there's widespread public distrust in law enforcement. The inability to effectively respond to the crime is wearing us down, and it's affecting how we interact with the community*". In conclusion, the effects of kidnapping in Akwa Ibom State are widespread, touching nearly every aspect of life in these coastal communities. The combination of social, economic, psychological, and governance-related challenges creates a toxic environment where security concerns perpetuate broader issues of instability.

Theme 3: Effectiveness of Preventive Strategies for Kidnapping in Coastal Communities of Akwa Ibom State

Table 7: Summary of the Effectiveness of Preventive Strategies for Kidnapping in Coastal Communities of Akwa Ibom State

Category	Effectiveness of Preventive Strategies
Community Leaders	Partially effective due to community policing, but lack of government support weakens enforcement.
Youth Leaders	Limited effectiveness as youth empowerment programmes are inadequate, leaving many vulnerable to crime.
Business Owners	Ineffective; private security measures are expensive, and police response time remains slow.
Residents	Not very effective; fear persists due to poor surveillance and weak law enforcement.
Victims of Kidnapping	Ineffective; kidnappers operate with impunity, and victims receive little protection after incidents.
NGO Representatives	Partially effective; awareness programs help, but weak judicial enforcement limits impact.
Police Officers	Efforts are hindered by lack of funding, poor intelligence-sharing, and corruption.

Source: Field data (2024)

Table 7 presents an assessment of the effectiveness of preventive strategies for kidnapping in coastal communities of Akwa Ibom State, as perceived by different stakeholders. Overall, the responses indicate that while some measures have been put in place, they are largely ineffective or only partially successful due to systemic weaknesses. Community leaders acknowledged the role of community policing in addressing kidnapping but highlighted the lack of government support, which undermines enforcement. One of the community leaders said: "*The community policing strategy is one of the few things keeping us somewhat safe. However, it's only partially effective because the government isn't providing enough support for proper enforcement. We are left to rely on our resources, which is not enough to tackle the growing problem of kidnapping*".

Youth leaders pointed to the inadequacy of empowerment programmes, which leaves many young people vulnerable to crime, suggesting that preventive efforts are not effectively addressing the root causes of kidnapping. A youth leader said: *"The youth empowerment programmes in our communities are simply not enough. Many youths are still unemployed, and there are not enough opportunities for them to have a better future. This makes it easy for criminal activities like kidnapping to seem like a quick solution. We need more programmes that can steer young people away from crime".* Business owners express frustration over the ineffectiveness of security measures, emphasizing the high cost of private security and the slow

response from law enforcement agencies. A business owner opined that "*Private security is an option, but it is costly, and it does not guarantee safety. Even with security measures in place, police response times are slow, which makes it hard to trust that the law will protect us. Businesses are suffering because of this – we constantly have to spend more on security while dealing with minimal protection from the authorities*".

Similarly, residents feel that preventive strategies are weak, as poor surveillance and law enforcement failures contribute to persistent fear in their communities. A particular resident said "*The preventive strategies do not seem to be working. We still live in constant fear because there is not enough surveillance, especially in rural areas. The police do not have the resources to patrol effectively, and as a result, kidnappers operate freely. We need stronger measures, but the fear of getting caught is always there*".Victims of kidnapping reported that preventive measures have failed, as kidnappers continue to operate with little consequence, and survivors receive minimal protection even after their ordeal. A kidnapped victim had this to say "*Nothing has changed since I was kidnapped. The kidnappers acted with impunity, and the response from the authorities after the incident was minimal. They did not offer any protection, and I feel like nothing is being done to stop future kidnappings. These preventive strategies don't seem to be helping anyone*".

NGO representatives recognised the value of awareness programmes but stressed that the weak judicial system limits their effectiveness, allowing criminal activities to persist. One of them said "*We try to make a difference with our awareness programs, but the judicial system is too weak to hold kidnappers accountable. We can only do so much when the legal framework and government enforcement are inadequate. There is some impact, but it's limited because there is no real follow-through*".

Police officers face significant challenges in enforcing preventive measures due to limited funding, poor intelligence-sharing, and corruption within security agencies. This suggests that even within law enforcement, structural deficiencies hinder the success of kidnapping prevention strategies. A Police Officer said: "*The efforts to prevent kidnapping are very challenging. We simply do not have the resources needed to tackle this issue properly. Funding is low, intelligence-sharing is often ineffective, and unfortunately, corruption within the police force makes it difficult to fight this crime in a meaningful way. We need better funding, training, and support from the government to be truly effective*". Overall, the responses indicate that while some preventive initiatives exist, they are largely ineffective due to inadequate funding, weak enforcement, insufficient government support, and systemic corruption. The general sentiment is that without stronger institutional backing, improved community-government collaboration, and better socio-economic interventions, kidnapping will remain a significant security threat in these coastal communities.

Discussion and Findings

Causes of Kidnapping in the Coastal Communities of Akwa Ibom State

The findings on the causes of kidnapping in the coastal communities of Akwa Ibom State reveal a complex web of interrelated factors that contribute to the widespread occurrence of this crime. These causes span both structural issues at the national level and more localized challenges within the communities themselves, creating a multifaceted environment where kidnapping thrives. The findings point to key issues such as weak law enforcement, economic hardship, high

levels of unemployment, and corruption, each of which exacerbates the conditions that foster criminal activities, including kidnapping. This conclusion is supported by the works of Ibrahim and Ahmad (2020), John (2020), and Chi (2019).A fundamental concern across all groups is the ineffectiveness of law enforcement, both in terms of resources and response. The inadequacy of the police force, compounded by poor funding and corruption within security agencies, severely limits their ability to prevent or address kidnappings. Many respondents pointed to a lack of modern surveillance technology and insufficient intelligence-gathering capabilities as significant barriers to effective policing. This failure is further aggravated by the complicity of local informants, who, whether driven by financial incentives or social ties, assist criminals by providing valuable information on potential targets. These deficiencies within law enforcement create an environment where criminals, including kidnappers, can operate with relative impunity, knowing that the risk of arrest or punishment is low.

Economic hardship is another critical factor that drives people into crime, particularly kidnapping. The combination of high poverty levels and a lack of employment opportunities makes individuals, especially youth, vulnerable to criminal activities. As the findings indicate, many young people in the area, feeling disenfranchised and without viable alternatives, are lured into gangs or involved in cultism. These groups are often engaged in illegal activities, including kidnapping, as a means of financial survival. The lack of social support systems or meaningful youth empowerment programs compounds the problem, with young people seeing crime, particularly kidnapping, as a shortcut to wealth and status. This situation highlights a vicious cycle where economic instability breeds criminal behaviour, which, in turn, perpetuates the instability. For business owners, the combination of insecurity and economic decline poses significant challenges. Kidnapping for ransom has become a common tactic used against businesses, which are perceived as having the financial means to pay large sums. The lack of adequate security infrastructure in the region, coupled with the slow and often ineffective response from law enforcement, leaves business owners vulnerable to these crimes. The high costs of hiring private security measures further exacerbate the financial strain on local businesses, making it difficult for them to operate sustainably. This economic burden, combined with the general decline in economic activity, reduces investment and limits the growth potential, deepening the region's socio-economic challenges.

The role of insider collaboration, where local individuals are involved in orchestrating kidnappings, further complicates the situation. For victims, this betrayal can be particularly painful, as they realize that people, they trust are actively enabling their victimization. The perceived inadequacy of the government's response—both in terms of prevention and post-kidnapping support—only adds to the sense of helplessness and frustration. Many victims, having endured the trauma of abduction, face ongoing challenges such as financial ruin due to ransom payments, stigmatization by their communities, and a general loss of confidence in the ability of authorities to protect them.The weaknesses within the judicial system also play a crucial role in sustaining the cycle of kidnapping. While many perpetrators are arrested, the failure to prosecute them effectively or provide lasting deterrence allows criminal activities to continue unabated. The failure of the judicial system to hold kidnappers accountable weakens the broader efforts to curb the crime and leaves many feeling that the legal system is unable or unwilling to provide justice. This lack of accountability feeds into the belief that crime can be committed without significant consequences, further encouraging criminal behaviour.

Effects of Kidnapping in Coastal Communities of Akwa Ibom State

The findings presented in the analysis of the effects of kidnapping in coastal communities of Akwa Ibom State underscore the pervasive and multifaceted impact of this crime on the local population. Kidnapping has proven to be not only a direct security threat but also a catalyst for a range of interconnected socio-economic, psychological, and governance-related challenges. The repercussions are felt across all sectors of society, with the damage extending far beyond immediate financial losses or physical harm. This conclusion is supported by the works of Joseph et al. (2023), Ene (2018), Alimi et al. (2023), Okorie-Ajah et al. (2018), and Ibrahim and Mukhtar (2017).

One of the most profound social consequences of kidnapping is the erosion of trust and the breakdown of traditional authority structures. As noted, the pervasive fear created by kidnappers has severely disrupted the social fabric of these communities. The loss of community trust, compounded by an ever-present sense of fear, has resulted in an isolationist mentality where residents are more inward-focused, avoiding social interactions and limiting their participation in communal activities. This has weakened the cohesion and solidarity that once characterized these coastal communities, making it difficult for individuals to unite and collectively address shared challenges. The disintegration of social cohesion in turn exacerbates feelings of helplessness and insecurity, leaving residents vulnerable to further exploitation and violence.From an economic perspective, the effect of kidnapping has been deeply destructive. Business owners have reported a significant decline in economic activity, with many enterprises forced to shut down or significantly scale back operations due to the heightened risk of kidnapping. The cost of private security measures has further strained local businesses, reducing profits and deterring potential investments. The economic decline also contributes to the broader cycle of poverty, with reduced investment leading to fewer employment opportunities, which in turn fuels the vulnerability of the community to criminal activities like kidnapping. This economic downturn further amplifies the feelings of insecurity, as communities become less equipped to deal with the consequences of crime, creating a vicious cycle of decline.

For the youth, the consequences of kidnapping have been particularly dire, affecting their prospects and contributing to an increase in criminal involvement. With limited opportunities and a sense of despair, many young people have resorted to crime, including kidnapping, as a means of survival. Moreover, the prevailing insecurity has led many to migrate to safer regions, further depleting the community of its youth population and exacerbating the social and economic instability. These developments highlight the critical need for more robust youth empowerment programs and a greater focus on providing opportunities that can steer young people away from crime and into more constructive pursuits.Victims of kidnapping endure both immediate and long-term effects that ripple throughout their lives. Apart from the physical and emotional trauma of the kidnapping itself, victims often face financial ruin due to the large sums of money required to secure their release. The psychological toll, including a loss of trust in security forces and stigmatization by their communities, can linger for years, further isolating victims and complicating their reintegration into society. These long-lasting effects not only harm the individual but also contribute to a broader sense of distrust and dissatisfaction with the law enforcement and justice systems.

From a humanitarian perspective, the widespread insecurity exacerbates already existing crises, resulting in increased displacement, reduced support for social development programs,

and a shift in resources away from community advancement. NGOs working in the region have highlighted how kidnapping has strained their ability to effectively address the pressing needs of the population, with limited donor support compounding the challenges. The focus of international and local organizations has shifted toward providing emergency aid and responding to security concerns, leaving critical development projects sidelined.

The police force, tasked with maintaining security and responding to crimes, is similarly overwhelmed by the pressures of tackling kidnapping. Poorly funded, undertrained, and plagued by corruption, the police are unable to effectively address the crime. The lack of resources and the absence of coordination between law enforcement agencies contribute to low morale among officers, which diminishes their effectiveness and creates a deep divide between the police and the communities they are meant to protect. This lack of trust in law enforcement further compounds the problem, as residents become less inclined to cooperate with the police, which in turn hampers efforts to prevent and solve kidnappings. In sum, the findings highlighted the profound and far-reaching consequences of kidnapping on the coastal communities of Akwa Ibom State. The combination of social breakdown, economic hardship, psychological trauma, and institutional dysfunction creates a vicious cycle that perpetuates insecurity and instability in the region. The effects are deeply felt across all levels of society, from individuals to local businesses, law enforcement, and NGOs.

Effectiveness of Preventive Strategies to Curb Kidnapping in Coastal Communities of Akwa Ibom State

The findings indicated that the preventive strategies for combating kidnapping in coastal communities of Akwa Ibom State are largely ineffective or only partially successful due to several systemic issues. Although some initiatives exist, such as community policing and awareness programs, they fail to address the root causes of the problem and are hindered by a lack of resources, inadequate government support, and institutional challenges. This conclusion is supported by the works of Alimi et al. (2023), Ibrahim and Ahmad (2020), John (2020), and Ibrahim and Mukhtar (2017).

One significant issue highlighted is the insufficient government support for local initiatives. While community-based policing has made some impact in enhancing security, the absence of sustained government backing has weakened its effectiveness. This lack of support limits the ability of local communities to address the growing issue of kidnapping independently, leading to a situation where local efforts are not adequately empowered or resourced to combat the problem. Another key factor contributing to the ineffectiveness of preventive measures is the limited success of programs designed to address the root causes of crime. Economic hardship, unemployment, and a lack of opportunities, particularly for young people, create an environment where criminal activities, including kidnapping, thrive. Although there are some youth empowerment programs in place, they remain inadequate to meaningfully address the high levels of unemployment and social discontent that make crime an attractive option for many individuals. This situation underscores the need for comprehensive programs that not only provide immediate security measures but also target the socio-economic factors contributing to criminal activities.

The private sector, particularly business owners, faces a similar challenge in protecting their enterprises. Despite the availability of private security services, the high cost of these measures, combined with the slow response times of law enforcement, leaves businesses vulnerable to

kidnapping and other criminal activities. The perceived ineffectiveness of law enforcement, particularly the lack of timely and coordinated responses to incidents, further erodes the trust that the business community has in the security infrastructure and makes private security a costly but insufficient alternative. The general public also experiences a deep sense of insecurity, as preventive strategies appear to be weak and poorly enforced. The lack of visible surveillance, particularly in rural and coastal areas, and the inability of law enforcement to adequately patrol these regions contribute to a heightened sense of fear and anxiety. This ongoing sense of insecurity perpetuates a cycle where residents feel unable to rely on the authorities for protection, leaving them vulnerable to kidnapping and other criminal activities. The legal system also plays a crucial role in the ineffectiveness of current strategies. While awareness programmes and public campaigns about kidnapping have had some positive effects, they are undermined by a weak judicial system that fails to hold perpetrators accountable. The lack of consistent legal enforcement and the inability of the justice system to secure convictions for kidnappers allows the crime to persist with little fear of consequence, thus rendering preventive efforts largely ineffective.

In terms of law enforcement, structural deficiencies such as low funding, poor intelligence-sharing, and corruption within security agencies create significant barriers to successfully addressing kidnapping. The lack of adequate resources, coupled with internal issues such as corruption, weakens the capacity of the police to respond to and prevent criminal activities. These systemic issues are compounded by a lack of inter-agency coordination and poor community engagement, which further diminishes the effectiveness of the strategies in place. Overall, the findings revealed that while some preventive strategies have been put in place, they are insufficient and fail to address the full scope of the problem. The general sentiment is one of frustration, as communities continue to grapple with the threat of kidnapping despite the existence of various preventive measures.

Conclusion

The study aimed to examine the causes and effects of kidnapping as well as the effectiveness of preventive strategies for kidnapping in coastal communities of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The analysis of kidnapping in the coastal communities of Akwa Ibom State highlights the complex and multifaceted nature of this crime, shaped by structural issues such as weak law enforcement, economic hardship, high unemployment, and systemic corruption. The findings revealed the profound social, economic, psychological, and governance-related impacts of kidnapping on these communities, with disruptions in social cohesion, economic decline, and weakened institutional trust being among the most significant consequences. It is evident that the existing preventive strategies, including community policing and awareness programmes, have been largely ineffective due to insufficient government support, inadequate resources, and the failure to address the root causes of crime. These limitations further contribute to the persistence of kidnapping and the erosion of security in the area.In conclusion, the persistent issue of kidnapping in the coastal communities of Akwa Ibom State demands urgent attention and a multi-dimensional approach that not only focuses on improving law enforcement but also addresses the socio-economic vulnerabilities that fuel criminal behaviour. Only through sustained efforts that integrate security, justice, and development can the cycle of insecurity and violence be broken, ultimately restoring peace and stability to the area.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations ensued:

1. To improve law enforcement effectiveness in the region, strengthen capabilities, provide modern surveillance technology, and address corruption. Improve the judicial system and address social structures that perpetuate criminal behaviour, particularly within the youth. Increase access to education, employment, and community-based support systems to prevent gangs and cultism.
2. To combat kidnapping in coastal communities of Akwa Ibom State, a community-driven security framework should be implemented, involving enhanced law enforcement, socio-economic development, and local engagement. This would strengthen law enforcement, foster a stronger relationship with communities, and empower local leaders and residents to ensure security.
3. To combat kidnapping, a comprehensive approach involving stronger institutional support, better government-community coordination, robust socio-economic interventions, and an effective legal system is needed.

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