
INFLUENCE OF KIDNAPPING ON PSYCHO-SOCIAL WELL-BEING OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN NORTH CENTRAL NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELLING

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated influence of kidnapping on psycho-social well-being of University students in North Central Nigeria: implications for counselling. Two research questions were answered and two hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance for the study. The study adopted survey research design. The population comprised one hundred and fifty thousand, forty-one (150041) undergraduates of eight Federal Universities in North Central Nigeria. Taro-Yamene's formula was used to sample four hundred (400) undergraduates.

A multi-stage sampling procedure which involved purposive, proportionate stratified sampling technique and ballot simple random sampling technique were used in the study. A questionnaire structured by the researchers titled "Influence of kidnapping on Psycho-Social Well-Being of University Students" (IKPSWBUS) was used for data collection. The reliability of the instrument was ascertained through a trial-test on thirty undergraduates. An instrument reliability coefficient of 0.81 was obtained using Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient in determining the internal consistency of the items. Descriptive statistics involving mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while the inferential statistic of chi-square (χ^2) goodness of fit was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The study found that kidnapping has significant influence on psychological well-being of university students in North Central Nigeria; and kidnapping has significant influence on social well-being of university students in North Central Nigeria. The

study concluded that kidnapping influence the psycho-social well-being of university students in North Central Nigeria. Based on findings, it was recommended among others that counsellors should adopt the use of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), establish peer group network or programme, and create awareness of campus resources for the students to improve psycho-social well-being of university students in North Central Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

One of the problems confronting the contemporary society including university environments is the issue of kidnapping. Kidnapping is a form of violent crime cum organized crime commonly identified with the illegal seizure of persons against their will for several criminal reasons (Chidi, 2014). Eze and Nnaji (2021) defined kidnapping as the unlawful and forcible seizure of a person without his or her consent. It can be seen as a common law offence and the key part is that, it is unwanted act on the part of the victim. It is a restriction of someone else liberty which violates the provision of freedom of movement as enshrined in the constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria, where every other law takes its cue from (Muhammad, Abudulmalik & Jobe, 2023). The spectrum of kidnapping on the campuses of tertiary institutions in Nigeria has grown to an alarming rate and levels; it has remained a permanent issue in national discourse. Unfortunately, this has adversely affected the academic, mental health and social life of both staff and students on campus. According to Yusuf and Afolabi (2020) kidnapping is a profound violation of personal security, leaving lasting scars that can be difficult to heal. Adewuyi and Isiaka (2021) observed that 79.8% of the national totals of kidnappings were recorded in the three Northern geopolitical zones including North Central. The rise in kidnapping in North Central Nigeria has emerged as a social crisis, significantly impacting lives and well-being of citizens including university students in the region. Yusuf and Afolabi (2020) maintained that the reasons for forceful or fraudulent abduction of an individual or a group of individuals are ranging from economic, political, and religious to [struggle for] self-determination. This implies that while political and economic factors can instigate kidnapping, the economic reason is the most common predisposing factor of the phenomenon.

This alarming phenomenon, often driven by various socio-economic and political factors, has not only instilled a pervasive sense of fear and feeling of insecurity but has also led to plethora of psychological and social challenges for affected individuals. University students, who are at critical developmental stage; are particularly vulnerable to the mental and emotional repercussions of such traumatic experiences as well as social integrations and

interactions. In recent years, reports of kidnapping incidents targeting students have become increasingly frequent, creating an environment of anxiety and distress that hinders academic performance, social relationships, and overall psychological health. For example, evidences abound, that on the 10th of October 2023, four students from University of Nsukka were kidnapped from prulate hostel (Reported by Scholars at Risks). In May 2024, gunmen abducted several students from the Confluence University of Science and Technology Kogi where two of the students were killed. Similarly, in November 2021, Federal University of Lokoja was forced to close down their hostels due to security threats (YouTube news central), it was on news broadcast in Nigeria). At University of Jos both staff and students have at various times been affected by threats posed by kidnapping. (The issue of University of Jos' students that were kidnapped during cult initiations by bandits). Information was received from Joseph Sarwuan Tarka University, Makurdi Benue state that on 25/2/2025 at about 8.30pm; three (3) female students were kidnapped within the school premises by unknown gunmen (Premium Times, February 25, 2025; Sahara Reporters). Several students are kidnapped along the road when travelling to or from school. The repercussions extend beyond immediate trauma; they influence students' academic engagement, social interactions, and future aspirations, thereby shaping their overall life trajectory.

Pervasive threat of kidnapping, do not only jeopardize the physical safety of individuals but also instills a sense of fear and apprehension within the academic community. This atmosphere of insecurity hampers the pursuit of education and undermines the fundamental right of university students to access quality learning opportunities. The consequences of kidnapping often manifest in socio-economic and psychological repercussions. Families of victims are often burdened with exorbitant ransom demands to secure the release of their loved ones, leading to financial strain and hardship. Moreover, the trauma experienced by victims and their families can have lasting effects on mental well-being, academic performance, social relationships, and overall quality of life as a result of traumatic and painful experiences. The problem of kidnapping may also create increased atmosphere of fear of being kidnapped and restriction of movement. It should also not be undermined as with respect to kidnapping; that somatic symptoms, anxiety and insomnia, social dysfunction and severe or clinical depression may be a critical determinant of how University students in kidnapping prone areas may respond to environmental stimuli in terms of kidnapping.

Psycho-social well-being generally underscores the close connection between psychological aspects of our experiences (for example, our thoughts, emotions and behaviour) and wider social experiences (for example, relationships, tradition and culture)

(<https://www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/content/product>). In view of Kumar (2020) psycho-social well-being is a multidimensional construct consisting of psychological, social, and subjective components which influence the overall functionality of individuals in achieving their true potentials as members of the society. It incorporates the physical, economic, social, mental, emotional, cultural, and spiritual determinants of health. An individual's state of mental functioning should lead to living a productive life; creating and maintaining fulfilling relationships with those around him/her; as well as the ability to cope with adverse events and to adapt to change (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky in Stowen 2017; Satcher in Stowen 2017). Positive psycho-social well-being allows individuals to effectively cope with stress, maintain positive relationships, and lead to fulfilling lives. Poor psycho-social well-being among university students have been associated with poor quality of life, poor sleep quality (Oh, Kim, Na, Cho & Chu, 2019) and decreased cognitive ability leading to poor academic performance (Fraizier, Gabriel, Merians & lust, 2019). Moksness and Espnes (2013) argued that psycho-social well-being is essential for students to thrive academically, socially, and personally during their time at university. When students are in good psycho-social health, they are more likely to have a positive outlook on life, experience higher levels of happiness and satisfaction, and have overall academic success. Continued Education (2023) enumerated how poor psycho-social well-being can lead to a variety of negative outcomes, such as

1. Emotional problems: People with poor psycho-social well-being may experience symptoms of anxiety, depression, or other mood disorders.
2. Social problems: Poor psycho-social well-being can also affect a person's ability to form and maintain healthy relationships with others, leading to social isolation or conflict.

The psychological effects of kidnapping could be highly overwhelming considering the emotional trauma the victims suffer in the hands of their abductors. Eze and Nnaji (2021) maintained that kidnapping leaves a profound impact, causing lasting psychological trauma for victims and their families. Survivors often face post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, depression, and intense fear, making it difficult concentrating and return to normal life. Many struggles with sleep disruptions like insomnia and recurring nightmares, and live in a heightened state of alertness, unable to feel safe even in familiar places (Ogbonna & Obasi, 2023). Similarly, Abadinsky (2022) asserted that many victims experience anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) following their ordeal. The fear of being kidnapped can also create a pervasive sense of insecurity within communities, leading to long-term mental health issues. Some students (victims) often experience symptoms of

post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), such as flashbacks, nightmares, intrusive thoughts, severe anxiety, and avoidance behaviours as they struggle to cope with the terror and helplessness they felt during captivity (Ike & Onyekachi, 2019). These symptoms can persist long after release, impacting the victim's ability to return and cope with daily life. The fear and isolation experienced during captivity often lead to depression and feelings of hopelessness, which make it difficult for victims to trust others or feel safe again. The social implication of kidnapping as opined by Awopetu and Olabimitan, (2024) is more than what one could think of. Victims may experience social withdrawal, difficulty trusting others, and feelings of isolation due to the trauma of their experiences.

On this premise, the focus of this study therefore is to examine kidnapping and the influence it may have on psycho-social well-being of university students with the understanding for employing effective strategies for psychological support and social interventions. It is against this background that it becomes alluring to investigate influence of kidnapping on psycho-social well-being of university students in North Central Nigeria: implications for counselling.

Statement of the Problem

In recent years up till presently, the prevalence of kidnapping incidents in Nigeria particularly in North Central region has escalated, raising grave concerns regarding the safety and security of individuals, including University students. This alarming trend not only threatens the physical safety of these young adults but also poses significant psychological and social challenges that can adversely affect their overall well-being. Undergraduates, who are in a critical developmental stage characterized by academic pursuit, social interaction, and identity formation, may experience heightened levels of anxiety, fear, and trauma due to the pervasive threat of kidnapping. The fear of abduction has become constant source of anxiety for students, both those residing within the campuses; off-campuses or travelling between home and school. In some cases, students or their peers may have been directly affected by kidnapping incidents, leading to trauma, post-traumatic stress symptoms, and pervasive sense of insecurity. This climate of fear can significantly impair students' concentration, motivation, and overall mental health. Despite the urgency of this issue, there remains a paucity of empirical research examining the specific psycho-social impacts of kidnapping on University students in North Central Nigeria. The potential consequences of such traumatic experiences may include post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, social withdrawal, diminished academic performance, and impaired interpersonal relationships, thereby

influencing their capacity to engage fully in the academic environment and societal interactions. It is against this background that the researcher sets out to examine the influence kidnapping may have on psycho-social well-being university students in North Central Nigeria and implications for counselling.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate influence of kidnapping on psycho-social well-being of university students in North Central Nigeria and implications for counselling. The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. Examine the extent to which kidnapping influence psychological well-being of university students in North Central Nigeria.
2. Determine the extent to which kidnapping influence social well-being of university students in North Central Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following questions were raised to guide the study:

- i. To what extent does kidnapping influences psychological well-being of university students in North Central Nigeria?
- ii. To what extent does kidnapping influences social well-being of university students in North Central Nigeria?

1.5 Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated for the study and were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

- i. Kidnapping has no significant influence on psychological well-being of university students in North Central Nigeria.
- ii. Kidnapping has no significant influence on social well-being of university students in North Central Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted survey research design and was carried out in North Central Nigeria. The population consisted (150,041) undergraduates of Federal Universities in North Central Nigeria. Four hundred (400) undergraduates were sampled from the population using Taro-Yamen's formula. A multi-stage sampling procedure which incorporated purposive sampling technique, proportionate stratified random sampling technique, and ballot simple random

sampling technique were used in the study. Questionnaire structured by the researchers titled “Influence of kidnapping on Psycho-Social Well-Being of University Students” (IKPSWBUS) was used for data collection. It contained eleven (11) items which was divided into two clusters. Cluster “A” contains (6) items designed to elicit information on the extent to which kidnapping influences psychological well-being of university students. Cluster “B” contains (5) items meant to elicit information on the extent to which kidnapping influences psychological well-being of university students. The rating scales were as follows: Very High Extent (VHE) = 4, High Extent (HE) = 3, Low Extent (LE) = 2 and Very Low Extent (VLE) = 1. Two experts validated the instrument. An overall instrument reliability coefficient of 0.81 was obtained using Cronbach’s Alpha reliability coefficient in determining the internal consistency of the items. Descriptive statistics involving mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while the inferential statistics of chi-square (χ^2) goodness of fit was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: To what extent does kidnapping influences psychological well-being of university students in North Central Nigeria?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation (SD) of Extent to which Kidnapping Influences Psychological Well-Being of University Students in North Central Nigeria. (N= 400)

S/No	Items	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	Remark
1	I have experienced increased feelings of anxiety since the occurrence of kidnapping in my university community	400	3.43	.67	HE
2	My academic task has been affected because of the fear of being kidnapped on campus	400	3.46	.61	HE
3	I have trouble concentrating on my studies due to concerns about my safety in my university	400	3.58	.53	VHE
4	Kidnapping causes lack of sleep for me in my university campus	400	3.54	.58	VHE
5	News of kidnapping traumatizes me in my university campus	400	3.57	.58	VHE
6	Kidnapping beclouds my mind for optimal productivity in the university environment.	400	3.56	.56	VHE
	Cluster Mean		3.52	.58	VHE

N = Number of Respondents, $\bar{X}$ = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation, VHE = Very High Extent

The result in table 1 shows that kidnapping influences psychological well-being of University students in North Central Nigeria; with cluster mean of 3.52 and Standard Deviation (SD) of .58; which the cluster mean value was up to the anchor point of 3.50 and 4.00. The individual

items also indicated that high mean responses were obtained from 24-29 items; with the Mean ($\bar{x}$) values of 3.43, 3.46, 3.46, 3.58, 3.54, 3.57 and 3.56 with Standard Deviation (SD) of .67, .61, .53, .58, .58 and .56 respectively. The mean values were up to 3.50 and above which was interpreted as very high extent. This implies that kidnapping has very high influence on psychological well-being of University students in North Central Nigeria.

Research Question 2: To what extent does kidnapping influences social well-being of university students in North Central Nigeria?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation (SD) of Extent to which Kidnapping Influences Social Well-Being of University Students in North Central Nigeria. (N= 400)

S/No	Items	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	Remark
7	I have been cautious of strangers since the kidnapping incidence in my university environment	400	3.46	.60	HE
8	The kidnapping incidence has made me to avoid certain areas on campus for safety	400	3.49	.69	HE
9	The kidnapping incidence has affected my involvement in extracurricular activities such as group discussion among others on campus	400	3.65	.56	VHE
10	I feel isolated or disconnected from university community due to fear of kidnapping	400	3.54	.60	VHE
11	The kidnapping incidence has made me to seek companionship with only intimate friends and family members	400	3.34	.74	HE
	Cluster Mean		3.49	.63	HE

N = Number of Respondents, $\bar{X}$ = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation, HE= High Extent

The result in Table 2 reveals that kidnapping has influence on social well-being of University students in North Central Nigeria; with cluster mean of 3.49 and Standard Deviation (SD) of .63 which the cluster mean value was up to the anchor point of 2.50 and 3.49. The individual items indicated that high mean responses were obtained from items 30-34; with the Mean ($\bar{x}$) values of 3.46, 3.49, 3.65, 3.54 and 3.34 and, Standard Deviation (SD) of .60, .69, .56, .60 and .74 respectively. All the mean values were up to 2.50 and above which was interpreted as high extent. This implies that kidnapping highly influence the social well-being of University students in North Central Nigeria.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Kidnapping has no significant influence on psychological well-being of university students in North Central Nigeria.

Table 3: Chi-square Analysis of Influence of Kidnapping on the Psychological Well-Being of University Students in North Central Nigeria.

	OBSERVED Values	EXPECTED Values	N	X ² -Values	Df	A	Asymp. Sig.	Remark
VHE	243	100.00	400	391.30	3		0.05	.000
HE	141	100.00						
LE	14	100.00						
VLE	2	100.00						

N = Sample size, *df* = degree of freedom, *A* = Level of significance, *Asymp. Sig.* = *P*-value

Table 3 shows the result of chi-square (X^2) analysis with SPSS with the outcome value of 391.30 with degree of freedom (*df*) of 3 at 0.05 level of significance out of 400 respondents (*N* = 400). The Asymp sig. (*P*) value of 0.000 was obtained. Since *P*-value of 0.000 is less than 0.05 level of significance ($P < 0.05$), thus, the null hypothesis (H_0) which states that kidnapping has no significant influence on psychological well-being of university students in North Central Nigeria is rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) is accepted. This implies that, kidnapping has significant influence on psychological well-being of University students in North Central Nigeria.

Hypothesis 2: Kidnapping has no significant influence on social well-being of university students in North Central Nigeria.

Table 4: Chi-square Analysis of Influence of Kidnapping on Social Well-Being of University Students in North Central Nigeria.

	OBSERVED Values	EXPECTED Values	N	X ² -Values	Df	A	Asymp. Sig.	Remark
VHE	230	100.00	400	382.66	3		0.05	.000
HE	159	100.00						
LE	9	100.00						
VLE	2	100.00						

N = Sample size, *df* = degree of freedom, *A* = Level of significance, *Asymp. Sig.* = *P*-value

Table 4 shows the result of chi-square (X^2) analysis with SPSS with the outcome value of 382.66 with degree of freedom (*df*) of 3 at 0.05 level of significance out of 400 respondents (*N* = 400). The Asymp sig. (*P*) value of 0.000 was obtained. Since *P*-value of 0.000 is less than 0.05 level of significance ($P < 0.05$), then, the null hypothesis (H_0) which states that kidnapping has no significant influence on social well-being of University students in North Central Nigeria is rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) is accepted. This implies that,

kidnapping has significant influence on social well-being of University students in North Central Nigeria.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The finding of this study revealed that kidnapping significantly influence psychological well-being of university students in North Central Nigeria. This study found that some students have increased feeling of anxiety with occurrence of kidnapping in their University community; some students' academic tasks have been affected because of fear of being kidnapped on campus; some students have trouble concentrating on their studies due to concern about their safety; kidnapping has caused lack of sleep for some students; news of kidnapping traumatize some students; and kidnapping beclouds some students' mind for optimal productivity in the University environment. This is in agreement with study of Gwadabe (2018) who conducted a study on the psycho-social impact of kidnapping on university students in Nigeria and found that kidnapping had a significant negative impact on the mental health of University students, leading to symptoms of anxiety, depression and post- traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The finding of this study also supports that of Yakasai, Ayila and Yakasai (2022) who investigated psychological impact of kidnapping on mental health and well-being of abductees: a study of abducted school children in Kaduna state, Nigeria; and found that most of the kidnapped victims had negative feelings with some level of insomnia, anxiety disorders, feeling fainting and shortness of breath. There were also indications of depression and post- traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among the survivors of kidnapping. It was further found that victims of kidnapping were constantly in fear, thinking there might be a repeat of their previous ordeal; which suggested that they are constantly vigilant, suffering from panic attack and/or attention deficit. The findings finally showed that an effective coping mechanism does not exist, allowing victims to take responsibility for their psychological well-being. The finding of this study is also similar to a study conducted by Muhammed Abudulmalik and Jobe (2023) which investigated the psychological effects of kidnapping and banditry on teaching and learning in tertiary institutions in North West region of Nigeria. Kidnapping was found to create frequent fear on the victims, causes lack of sleep on the victims, affects student's academic performance, causes post-traumatic stress disorders among victims and traumatizes the victims. Finally, in respect to research question two, and related tested hypothesis two; it was revealed that kidnapping has significant influence on social well-being of university students in North Central Nigeria. The finding revealed that some students have been cautious of strangers since the kidnapping incidence in their

University environment; kidnapping incidence has made some students to avoid certain areas on campus for their safety; the kidnapping incidence has affected some students' involvement in extracurricular activities such as group discussion among others on campus; some students feel isolated or disconnected from University community due to fear of kidnapping; and the kidnapping incidence has made some students to seek companionship with only intimate friends and family members. This revelation was similar to study of Gwadabe (2018) who conducted a study on the psycho-social impact of kidnapping on university students in Nigeria and high-lighted the social consequences of kidnapping including increased level of fear, mistrust, and social withdrawal among students who had experienced or witnessed kidnapping incidents.

The findings from this study revealed that students facing threats of kidnapping or have witnessed it in the University required counselling to address the underlying issues, such as anxiety and stress which leads to feeling of insecurity. These feelings of anxiety and stress impact on academic performances and the overall well-being of the individual. These students also witnessed security threats which can cause emotional trauma that requires professional support. Fear and avoidance were also noticed as students avoid some friends, reduce extra-curricular activities such as sports and group discussions, restrict their movements and feel isolated among others. This fear affects their social and academic lives. They also experience trust issues, because students become anxious about their safety, cautious of strangers, while seeking relationships only with intimate friends and family members.

IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELLING

In line with the findings, some counselling strategies are hereby suggested:

1. Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT): With this therapy students can be helped to identify negative thought patterns. It will also help them to promote coping skills and effectively manage stress. In addition, the counsellor can counsel. Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) are crucial in addressing the psycho-social problems associated with kidnapping; providing vital support to survivors as they work to rebuild their lives and regain a sense of control. CBT plays key roles in supporting survivors by helping them identify and restructure negative thought patterns, gradually reducing anxiety and lessening the impact of intrusive memories. In counselling, the counsellor should work collaboratively with clients to identify and challenge distorted thinking, manage anxiety, and develop healthier and effective coping strategies or approaches. According to Yusuf and Afolabi (2020) techniques such as

journaling and thought-stopping are often employed to facilitate this process. For victims of kidnapping, CBT can help them process traumatic experiences and reduce symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), heightened stress, anxiety, and fear. By focusing on present thoughts and behaviours, CBT empowers victims to regain control over their lives. Ultimately, CBT equips University students with lifelong skills to manage stress and improve their mental health which extends to social well-being.

2. Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR): This therapy helps victims of kidnapping in processing traumatic memories, allowing them to confront and integrate these memories without becoming overwhelmed, thereby facilitating more effective healing.

3. Safety Planning: The counselor can collaborate with the students to personalized safety plans; this will enhance their sense of control and security.

4. Campus Resources: Students should be informed about available campus resources such as security services, counselling centres and other support groups.

5. In addition to all these, the University also should be advised to take steps to ensure the safety of students. Such steps to be taken can include: Providing accessible services to ensure that students feel supported, and empowered to seek help. They should also implement security measures to reduce stress and anxiety, while promoting a safer learning environment.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher concluded that kidnapping has significant influence on psycho-social well-being of university students in North Central Nigeria. This study has provided evidence-based information about the extent to which kidnapping have its negative contributions to the psychological and social well-being of university students. It is therefore, imperative to employ some counselling interventions and strategies or approaches to address the declining mental health state and promote psychological well-being that invariably exacerbate social well-being among the University students. This is because security kidnapping leads to feeling of insecurity which impacts negatively on their mental and emotional health, social integrations or relationships with their peers and others including their overall academic functioning and developments.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Counselling intervention should focus on given students' orientation and sensitization on personal safety measures and crises response strategies including on how to report suspicious activities to improve their psychological and social well-being.

2. Universities' guidance counsellors should establish peer counselling programmes where the trained students can support their fellow students in navigating psychological stress and social challenges of kidnapping through shared experiences and provide emotional support to one another.

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