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# Psychological Distress amongst Relatives of Kidnapped Victims in Uyo, A Community in Niger Delta Region, Nigeria

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## Abstract

There is a growing concern about the increasing incidence of kidnapping in Nigeria. However, data of its impacts on victims and family members are scarce. This study assesses the psychological wellbeing of victims in Uyo, a community in Niger Delta Region, Nigeria, to monitor their life changes. Between January 2009 and 2011, a purposive sample of 37 relatives of kidnapped victims, who accompanied the victims to the Psychiatric clinic of the University of Uyo Teaching Hospital, were screened for psychological indices four weeks after the incidence, using Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), World Health Organization Well-Being Index (WHO-5) and Clinician Administered Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Scale (CAPS). Twenty four (64.9%) relatives were males and 13 (35.1%) females. The mean age for males was 55  $\pm$  5.7 years and females 43.1 $\pm$ 3.1. The mean score for entire sample for males on WHO-5 Well-Being Index was 11.5 $\pm$ 3.21 and 9.7 $\pm$ 1.3 for females (p=0.023); on RSE Scale, 7.89 $\pm$ 2.12 for males and 8.3 $\pm$ 2.01 for females (p=0.001); and on the CAPS, 44.3 $\pm$ 1.33 for males and 41.5 $\pm$ 3.01 females (p=0.619); 5 (13.5%) females and 1 (2.7%) met the criteria for post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The total severity scores for the females were 83 and 71 for the males. An inference from this study is that relatives of kidnapped victims are prone to developing psychological distress as well. Therefore, they must always be included in the management plan of the victims.

Keywords: Kidnapped Victims; Psychological Distress; Niger Delta, Nigeria.

# Introduction

Kidnapping for ransom has now become a major threat to human existence'. This social malady has found its way into Nigeria, and has assumed a dangerous proportion. The mode operandi involves abduction and subjection of people to agonies, and sometimes death. The trend is changing because before now, kidnapping was used as an agitation or expression of anger by weak societies against major super powers or authorities for perceived injustice<sup>2</sup>. However, in recent times criminals have turned it into an easy and more lucrative means of livelihood<sup>3,4</sup>. This is done not just for political reason but material gains. More often, people are subjected to torture and forced to part with their belongings. Those without means are made to face untimely death. In many African countries, kidnapping is viewed as a social consequence arising from political instability and This is reported to have wider corruption. implications for individuals, families and communities<sup>5</sup>. The situation is made worse by the antiquated judiciary structure and corrupt practices in many countries. Thus, the culprits are allowed to walk freely on the streets. Although, studies on kidnapping are scarce in developing countries, anecdotal reports from general surveys and observations have associated serious physical injuries, loss of morale and psychological morbidity<sup>4,6,7</sup>. One major concern has been the impact on the self-esteem and subjective well-being of the victims.

Self-esteem is a personal worth or worthiness and reflects one's overall emotional evaluation of his or her own worth 8.9. On the other hand, subjective wellbeing refers to how an individual experience the quality of his or her life and this include both emotional reactions and cognitive judgments10. Selfesteem and subjective well-being are interrelated and could be compromised adversely in three specific areas in severe traumatic conditions including kidnapping". This may be in frequent and intense positive affective states, the relative absence of anxiety/depression and global life satisfaction12. Given their relationships to the quality of life and positive health outcome, both have direct impact on the psychological well-being of the individuals<sup>13</sup>. This is because subjective well-being is an affective and cognitive evaluation of an individual's life, in terms of judgments of overall life satisfaction and experience of pleasant and unpleasant emotions 14,15. This may include how good an individual feels, as well as how well expectations are met and how desirable those expectations are deemed to be 16. Evidence suggests that both self-esteem and subjective well-being may be seriously affected, leading to the development of a more devastating psychological distress, unpleasant feelings or emotions that impact on the level of functioning in people subjected to the agony of kidnapping.

In Nigeria, there is overwhelming evidence that there is increasing number of kidnapping. Although initially this was used as a weapon in Niger Delta region to draw attention to perceived

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marginalisation, environmental degradation and injustice. The region is now witnessing increasing violence, insecurity and other antisocial activities. Kidnapping is now becoming pervasive and is viewed as financially lucrative enterprise executed by sophisticated criminal with little risk of prosecution. The spectre has caused so much apprehension among the populace, as victims are killed even after parting with their life-savings. The environment of unemployment and poverty has shifted focus from very wealthy individuals and large ransoms to poor victims. This has resulted in many people fleeing and abandoning their jobs/businesses, thus imposing significant burden on social life with serious implications on the economy. The perception that kidnappers could still make more in the business than committing burglaries or armed robberies may be responsible for increasing number of people involved. It is important to take cognizance of the psychological well-being of the people living under these adverse conditions. No data is currently available in Nigeria on the socioeconomic and health implications for the people. Therefore, the aim of this study was to assess the experience of pleasant and unpleasant emotion in relatives of kidnapped victims in Niger Delta Region of Nigeria, with a view to prempt the development of psychological distress.

# Materials and Methods Location of the study

The study was carried out at the University of Uyo Teaching Hospital, situated at the outskirts of Uyo, a community in Niger Delta Region Nigeria. Uyo is a capital city of Akwa Ibom State, one of the major oil producing states in Niger Delta Region, Nigeria. It has a population of 3.9 million people and occupies the south-eastern corner of Nigeria and lies between latitudes 4' 33" North of Equator and longitudes 7' 25" and 8' 25" East. It is bounded on the north by Cross River, Imo and Abia states and on the south by Atlantic Ocean; on the south-west by Rivers State. The hospital is a 350-bedded tertiary care facility and also offers secondary care services to patients from neighbouring states.

# Data collection

Between January 2009 and January 2011, a total of thirty seven relatives of kidnapped victims, who accompanied their relations to Psychiatric clinic of the University of Uyo Teaching hospital were assessed for psychological indices, four weeks after the ordeal, using World Health Organization (WHO-5) Well-Being Index<sup>1</sup>, Rosenberg Self-Esteem (RSES) Scale<sup>18</sup> and the Clinician Administered Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (CAPS) Scale<sup>19,20</sup>. Victims who gave their consent and were up to four weeks and above, from the day of the incident were recruited into the study. The participants completed the three questionnaires. The WHO-5 is an instrument,

designed to measure feelings of well-being or ill-being as experienced by an individual or a group of individuals in various day to day life concerns. It consists of 5-items, which elicit positive effects, whether one feels happy, in good spirit or calm and relaxed, active and vigorous, feeling fresh and rested and daily life being filled with things that interest an individual: Responses were in Likert version: 5= of all of the time, 4=most of the time, 3= more than half of the time, 2=less than half of the time, 1=some of the time and 0=at no time. Scoring was from 0-5 in a reverse order. The raw score is calculated by totaling the figures of the five answers. The raw score ranges from 0 to 25, 0 representing worst and 25 best possible quality of life. To obtain a percentage score ranging from 0 to 100, the raw score is multiplied by 4. A percentage score of 0 represents worst experience. The second instrument is the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, which was designed to measure an individual's worth, good qualities, positive attitude, respect and satisfaction or failure, lack of pride and useless. This instrument is considered reliable and valid qualitative tool for self-esteem assessment21. It has been translated and adapted to various languages. The scale is extensively used in cross-cultural studies in up to 53 different nations22. RSES is a ten-item Likert Scale with items answered on a four-point scale-from strongly agree=3, agree=2, disagree=1 to strongly disagree=0. Items 2, 5, 6, 8, 9 were reversely scored as strongly agree=0, agree=1, disagree=2 and strongly disagree=3. Self-esteem is the sum total of the scores for 10-item. The higher the scores, the higher the selfesteem. The CAPS instrument yields continuous measures of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptom severity for individual symptoms, symptoms cluster and the entire syndromes<sup>23,24</sup>. The PTSD symptoms are rated on two separate dimensions of symptom severity: frequency and intensity. A PTSD diagnosis is derived by first dichotomizing the items, and then following the DSM-IV algorithm for PTSD (one reexperiencing symptom, three avoidance and numbing symptoms and two hyperarousal symptoms). Frequency  $\geq 1/Intensity \geq 2$  (F1/I2). The frequency and intensity of each PTSD symptom are rated on separate 5-point scales ranging from 0-4. A PTSD symptom is considered present when an item is rated with a frequency of 1 (once a month) or higher and intensity of 2 (moderate) or higher. A total severity score of 65 is identified as optimal for predicting PTSD21. This instrument (CAPS) has been used in several studies and has been found to have a high validity25,26,27,28. Prior to the collection of the data, the three instruments were pretested in a pilot study by interviewing 25 relatives of road traffic (RTA) victims admitted at the Accident and Emergency unit of the University of Uyo Teaching Hospital. This was done to acquire experience and determine their applicability in our environment. Demographic data were also collected. This study passed through the Ethical and Research Committee of the hospital for approval.

Data Analysis

The results of the study were analyzed using the Statistical Package for social sciences (SPSS 17.0). Sample means and percentages were calculated with which simple frequency tables were created. Mean scores and standard deviation from the mean were also calculated. The corresponding P-values were found to determine the level of statistical significance. The p-value of 0.05 was used to determine the level of statistical significance.

A total of 37 relatives of victims consisting of 24 (64.9%) males and 13 (35.1%) females were recruited into the study. Table 1 shows the sociodemographic characteristics of the participants. The age range was 30-68 with a mean age of  $55.9 \pm 5.7$ years for males and 43.1± 1.2 years for females. Majority of respondents consisting of 19 (51.4%) and 15 (25.6% females were married; 5 (13.5%) males and 2 (5.4%) females respectively were either separated or divorced; while only 3 (8.1%) males were single. Of the 26 male subjects 7 (18.9%) were politicians; 5 (13.5%) were businessmen and 2 civil servants. Many 9 (24.4%) of the female victims were civil servants, 3 (8.1%) were in business and only 1 (2.7%) was a politician.

Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Victims

Variables	Males (N=24) n (%)	Females (N=13) n (%)	Total (N=37) n (%)
Mean age	55.9±5.7	43.1±3.1	
Marital Status Unmarried Married Separated/Divorced	3 (8.1) 19 (51.4) 2 (13.5)	0 11 (29.7) 2 (5.4)	3 (8.1) 30 (81.1) 7 (18.9)
Educational Level Secondary Sch. & below Above Sec Sch	w 7 (18.9) 17 (45.9)	3 (8.1) 10 (27.0)	10 (27.0) 27 (73.0)
Occupation Unemployed Employed Business/politics	0 13 (35.1) 11 (29.7)	3 (8.1) 9 (24.3) 1 (2.7)	3 (8.1) 16 (43.2) 15 (32.4)

Table 2 demonstrates the mean scores of the respondents on the assessing instruments. The mean scores for entire sample for males on WHO-5 Well-Being Index was 11.5±3.21 and 9.7±1.3 for females (F-ratio=0.57; p=0.023); on Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale mean scores for males and females were 7.89±2.12 and 8.3±2.01 (F-ratio=1.01; p=0.001) respectively; while the mean scores on CAPS for males were 44.3±1.33 and females 51.5±3.01 (Fratio=0.63; p=0.619). The mean scores for entire sample on WHO-5 Well-Being Index were 11.5±3.21 and Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale 7.89±2.12 respectively. The overall mean score on the CAPS for males was and female.

Table 2: Demonstrating the scores of the victims on both scales

Males Mean (SD)	Female Mean (SD	F-Ratio	P-value
11.5±3.21 7 9+2 21	9.7±1.3 8.3±2.01	0.57 1.01	0.023* 0.001*
44.3±1.33	41.5±3.01	0.63	0.619
	Mean (SD) 11.5±3.21 7.9±2.21	Mean (SD) Mean (SD)  11.5±3.21 9.7±1.3 7.9±2.21 8.3±2.01	Mean (SD)     Mean (SD)*       11.5±3.21     9.7±1.3     0.57       7.9±2.21     8.3±2.01     1.01

<sup>\*</sup> Statistically significant

On the distribution of the scores on sub-items on the CAPS. Table 3 shows the scores of the respondents on dichotomizing the symptoms. A total of 3 (7.0%) males and 9 (20.9%) females scored high in reexpeiencee and hyperarousal symptoms; but only 1 (2.7%) males and 5 (13.5%) females met the criteria for PTSD of 1 reexperience, 3 Avoidance/numbing and 2 hyperarousal symptoms, using the DSM-IV algorithm, thus using suggestive of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The total severity score for males was 71; while that for females was 83.

# Discussion

Although, kidnapping is one of the emerging social ills confronting many communities all over the world, the impacts on the relatives of victims have often been ignored. 7.29 This may have also contributed to the scarcity of data in many countries. The focus in the past has always been on the nations rather than on individuals affected. This why many countries undoubtedly usually view kidnapping as a threat to national sovereignty.30 However, inspite of the lack and comparable data from previous studies, the present study is the first in Nigeria that seeks to highlight the plight of relatives of kidnapped victims. Although many of our participants were males, predictably the main reason for their relatives' ordeal was financial ransom. This is supported in this study by the social class of the people behind the victims (social class 1-111). However, it is important to emphasize that given the climate of time, and with the wealthy getting wiser and more insulated; more people who do not have resources to protect themselves are also being affected.

Several reasons have been advanced for the increasing incidence of kidnapping in Nigeria. Judging from the average age of the kidnappers who are sometimes in their early thirties, one may not be wrong to attribute kidnapping in Nigeria to moral decadence. Standards of life have been lowered and false models are being promoted for youths to emulate. The prevailing Nigerian culture, in which people of questionable means of livelihood are honoured and traditional titles conferred on exconvicts, is bound to breed criminals of various cadres with weak moral strength. This is seen in many communities and including churches. One major factor that may also be responsible for this social phenomenon is parental unemployment. In many families, there is difficulty in catering and enforcing discipline. With the emerging trend of life style in Nigeria, where poor parents are giving away their well-educated daughters in marriage to well known criminals, there is always a strong force to belong to a false social class. Therefore, kidnapping is being regarded among youths as a cut and easy way to wealth. This is made worse by the corrupt judiciary system and weak social structures. The environment of corruption has made political leadership a vocation for school drop-outs, and those who cannot publicly mention schools attended and their sources of income. There is therefore low standard of living and morals among youths, and their focus is only on materialism. The greed arising from the quest for materialism therefore acts as a force dragging them into various crimes, such as armed robberies, prostitution, child/drug trafficking and kidnapping. The type of house one lives in, the type of car one owns, and donations made at public ceremonies/launchings become parameters and evidence of being able to pay ramsom\*.

Although the literature assessing the impact of kidnapping on individuals are scarce in developing countries, it is important to emphasize that men and women who are related to the victims have greater risk of developing psychological symptoms. This is reflected in this study by the scores of the participants on the WHO-5 Well-Being Index and Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scales respectively. Taken together, the findings show low scores suggestive of significant impairment in the psychological well-being of the respondents. These findings have addressed a number of key issues. One major concern is the threat of these

symptoms on the overall wellbeing of the participants. This is because the psychological distress could manifest in several ways including acute stress, anxiety and/or depression<sup>30</sup>. These conditions are known to be associated with functional disability, loss of daily hours and low productivity. Although it was not possible to determine the pre- psychological symptoms in the subjects in this study, it may not be unreasonable to argue that the low scores recorded in this study may be as a result of the effects of the kidnapping. It is also possible that kidnapping could be a risk factor for poor psychological distress in the participants.

Our study has wider national and international implications. This is because kidnapping is not a vendetta; one does not need to commit any offence before being a target. Recent events in Niger Delta region of Nigeria seem to suggest that kidnapping has become widespread and new breeds of smalltime kidnappers are emerging. Everyone is viewed as having a kidnapped value, and once one is perceived as being capable of paying or having friends and associates who can contribute, such a person is a target. The new groups throw their nets wider, nabbing victims from even lower social class and asking for smaller ransoms. These are the people that would usually remain adamant in their demands and attempt to negotiate a peaceful settlement is often regarded as refusal, and may result in other reprisals including death. The implication on social, economic and health are enormous.

Over the years kidnapping has been shrouded in secrecy, as victims are often not forthcoming, with regards to the provision of full accounts of their ordeal'. Though not explain, our study revealed that many of the females were sexually assaulted and manhandled. This is worrisome, in view of the emerging consequences of sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS. One major concern would be the extent of damage to the psyche of the Moreover, the fact that victims and relatives. kidnappers could go to any length to achieve their aims portends serious danger, as many of them are usually under the influence of alcohol and other potent-habit forming substances to ease their activities. The social and health implications indeed may be so profound that the rights and lives of the victims could be constantly breached or even wasted. This could expose the entire families to unprecedented socioeconomic hardship and distress. It is possible the low self-esteem and subjective well-being of the victims have also contributed to the participant's psychological distress.

The findings of this study revealed that 12% of the female participants developed symptoms suggestive of post-traumatic stress disorder. Although, the rate found in this study may be at variance with findings reported from similar studies in other

traumatic events, 6. 27, 31 the rate recorded here seems to suggest that post-trauma stress disorder could also be a major health hazard in relatives of kidnapped victims. This is very significant for two major reasons: One is that judging from the preponderance of males in this study, this level of psychological symptoms is high and frightening. Two, for the fact that the participants here are not the direct victims, it means that there is need to always give urgent and greater attention to the families of kidnapped victims. However, it is important to emphasize that these symptoms are not limited to the females alone. This study shows that about 2% of the male participants also experienced symptoms suggestive of post-traumatic stress disorder. Several reasons may have contributed to the differences in the rates of post-traumatic stress disorder in this study and those reported in previous studies. The nature and severity of the traumatic events, study population and methodology, as well as the settings may have been the major factors responsible for the variation in the rate. However, inspite of the differences, the fact remains that kidnapping has serious implications as a social menace and is capable of predisposing people to various health hazards. One major concern would be the quality of life of the relatives of kidnapped victims, which could be adversely affected as well. Therefore, efforts must be made always to include the relatives of kidnapped victims in the treatment plan to prevent the development of associated health hazards.

This study is without major limitations. The results of this study cannot be generalized for several reasons. There is lack of data from previous studies to compare the findings. The sample size was small and the method used in recruiting the participants cannot be taken as a representation of the entire population. It is a hospital based-study. Finally, being a self-report study, responses may be unreliable and disclosure of authentic information not guaranteed.

In conclusion, the findings of this study have shown that kidnapping has now become a festering menace with agonizing dimension in Nigeria. The spectre has caused so much apprehension among the populace, as victims are killed even after parting with their life-savings. Despite the enactment of laws against kidnapping in many States in Nigeria and perceived vigilance of the security agents, the rising incidence seems to suggest that the modus operandi of the offenders has become increasingly more sophisticated. Therefore, there is need for improvement in intelligence mechanism. Adequate security network must be put in place to include the involvement of traditional and community leaders to improve the surveillance of their domains. This in concert with community cooperation will help in fishing out people with criminal tendencies. This, apart from reducing the incidence of kidnapping, will also check other criminal activities and social vices. There is also the need to equip and improve our judiciary system to meet the increasing demand and menace of criminal activities in our environment. Furthermore, the various security agencies must be structurally organized and reposition to function adequately. They must be equipped to empower them to properly investigate cases and also deal with possible collusion between the security agents and the criminals. Those caught and found guilty must be made to face the laws so as to act as a deterrent to others. With all these done, the general public will be saved from the agonies leading to psychological distress and its associated health hazards.

Finally, there is need to improve our healthcare facilities and services to meet the health needs of the victims and their relatives.

This study points to a number of issues that are worthy of further researches. The psychosocial profile and personality characteristics of kidnappers need to be investigated.

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