



Banditry and Kidnapping in North-West Nigeria: A Phenomenological Approach

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ABSTRACT

Banditry and kidnapping have become major security issues in Northwest Nigeria, causing social instability, economic loss, and a great deal of human suffering. Despite the seriousness of the situation, little is known about the actual experiences of those impacted by these phenomena. This study uses a phenomenological approach to investigate the experiences of people who have been impacted by kidnapping and banditry in Northwest Nigeria, either directly or indirectly. Ten (10) participants were interviewed in-depth for the study, which reveals the intricate and varied nature of kidnapping and banditry, as well as the social, political, and economic elements that influence these occurrences. The study's conclusions have significant policy and practice ramifications, emphasizing the need for an all-encompassing strategy that tackles the underlying causes of kidnapping and banditry, aids victims and their families, and encourages community involvement.

Keywords: Banditry, kidnapping, northwest, Nigeria, phenomenological, approach

Introduction

The persistent scourge of banditry and kidnapping has ravaged Nigerian communities, causing immense human suffering, economic loss, and erosion of public trust in the government's ability to protect its citizens. Despite efforts to address these menaces, they continue to flourish, with staggering human costs, including loss of lives, displacement of communities, and economic devastation. For instance, between 2018 and 2020, 4,900 deaths were recorded due to banditry activities. Also, between January 6 and 8, 2022, 200 people were killed in several villages in Zamfara State and 10,000 people displaced (cited in Ojo, Oyewole & Aina, 2023). According to Mohammed Abubakar Committee, in Zamfara State between June 2011 and May 2019, 25,050 children were orphaned, 4,983 women were widowed and more than 190,000 people were displaced because of armed banditry (Human Rights Writers Association of Nigeria, 2020).

On 7th April 2023, in a village called Wanzami in Zamfara State, no fewer than 80 people who went to the bush to pick firewood were kidnapped by gunmen (Musawa, 2023). The economic toll is equally devastating, with the National Bureau of Statistics (2024) report revealed that Nigerians paid N2.2trn as ransom to kidnapers between May 2023 and April 2024 and the North-West has the highest (N1.2trn) of the total amount. Moreover, the North-West also accounted for 14,402, 254 of the total sum of 51,887,032 of crime incidences, the highest recorded at the household level in the six geopolitical zones of the country (NBS, 2024).

The literature on banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria is extensive, but there is a dearth of studies that apply a phenomenological approach to understanding the lived experiences of individuals, relations, and communities affected by these crimes. This study aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by exploring the lived experiences of victims and families affected by banditry and kidnapping. By adopting a phenomenological approach, this research seeks to uncover the underlying social, cultural, and economic factors that fuel these crimes, as well as their consequences. The study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of victims and families affected by banditry and kidnapping?
2. What are the causes of banditry and kidnapping?
3. What role can individuals, community leaders, and government play in combating banditry and kidnapping?

By examining the lived experiences of those affected by banditry and kidnapping, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of these complex issues and inform strategies for addressing them.

Review of Related Literature and Theoretical Framework

Banditry

As Abdullahi (2019) maintained that banditry has become one of the worst forms of domestic insurgencies affecting West African sub-region. Akinyetun and Bakare (2022), argued that banditry can be made clear by understanding who a bandit is. For Olapeju and Peter (2021), a bandit is one who commits the crime of armed robbery, killing and destruction of properties, particularly, of herders, merchants and business owner. Similarly, Orjinmo (2021) defines bandit as a loose term referring to armed robbers, kidnapers, armed militia, cattle rustlers and Fulani herdsman whose motivation is pecuniary.

It is imperative at this juncture to define the concept banditry. According to Okoli and Okpaleke (2014), banditry refers to the incidences of armed robbery or allied violent crimes, such as kidnapping, cattle rustling, and village or market raids. It involves the use of force, or threat to that effect, to intimidate a person or a group of persons in order to rob, rape or kill. Kokli (2019) cited in Igbini (2022) defines banditry as an “armed violence driven principally by the criminal intent to steal and plunder. It is motivated by the quest for economic accumulation and the victims are individuals and communities with material valuables” (p. 54).

Similarly, Collins (2000) cited in Ladan and Matawalli, (2020), sees banditry as an “act of robbery and violence in areas where the rule of law has broken down”. It consists of the organization of armed bands for the purpose of attacking state or social institutions on enterprises or individual persons” (p.439). By the same token, Saminas (2013) cited in Okolie and Ugwu (2019) defines banditry as “a crime that has been precipitated and sustained by the prevailing socio-existential environment in the rural sector characterized by a high proclivity to criminal indulgence.”(205-206). For Nigeria Watch (2011), banditry is the prevalence or occurrence of armed robbery or violence crime. According to Shalangwa (2013), armed banditry refers to the practice of raiding and attacking victims by members of an armed group, whether or not premeditated, using weapons of offence or defense, especially in semi-organised groups for the purpose of overpowering the victim and obtaining loot or achieving some political goals.

Banditry refers to the actual or threatened use of arms (any instrument of force/coercion/violence) to dispossess people of their material belongings (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019). Banditry is a crime activity carried out by a certain group of people with little or no identity which mostly involves threat and use of violence. The crimes range from extortion, robbery, kidnapping and murder (Okafor & Onoja, 2021).

From the foregoing, banditry is a collection of illicit activities that include armed robbery, cattle rustling, killing, kidnapping, maiming and raiding in order to acquire material wealth.

Kidnapping

Kidnapping as rightly observed by Olaniyan (2017) has become a major crime, national malaise and source of shame in Nigeria. Similarly, Ogbuehi (2018), contended that kidnapping has become a way of life in the country due to its spate of occurrence. It is important at this point to define the concept kidnapping.

There is consensus among scholars as to the definition of kidnapping. For instance, Goldberg (2000) defines kidnapping as a criminal act involving seizure, confinement, abduction, subjection, forcefulness, acts of threats, acts of terror and servitude. Dode (2007) defines kidnapping as a process of forcefully abducting a person or group of persons perceived to be the reasons behind the injustice suffered by another group. By the same token, Garner (2009) defines kidnapping as a crime of unlawful seizing and taking a person away by force or detaining a person against his or her will with the intent of carrying that person away at a later period. In a like manner, Abraham (2010), sees kidnapping as an act of seizing, taking away and keeping a person in custody either by force or fraud in order to collect a ransom in return or settle some scores of disagreement among people is known as kidnapping. Davidson (2010), sees kidnapping as group of criminals armed with guns and cell phones apprehend unsuspecting victims and drag their victim into a secluded spot and begin to make phone calls to whomever and demand for a ransom. For Ordu (2015), kidnapping is a false imprisonment of an individual against his or her will by another individual in violation of the individual’s fundamental human rights.

From the foregoing definitions, kidnapping is a criminal activity involving the abduction of a person with his /her consent or against his /her will and confine to a place in order to demand for ransom.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a philosophical approach that focuses on understanding human experiences and perceptions. Despite its complexity and various interpretations, phenomenology can be defined as an attempt to describe lived experiences without making previous assumptions about the objective reality of those experiences. For Teherani, Martimianakis, Stenfors-Hayes, Wadhwa and Varpio, (2015), phenomenology is as an approach to research that seeks to describe the essence of a phenomenon by exploring it from the perspective of those who have experienced it. In a like manner, Agama and Onuoha (2021) sees phenomenology as:

The philosophical study of the structures of experience and consciousness and also an attempt to capture experience in process as lived, through descriptive analysis. It studies how things appear to consciousness, and not how they are in themselves, even if it is known that the given contains more than or is different from what is presented. (p.3).

Idris and Umaru, (2024) in their study examined banditry, forced migration and humanitarian crises in Zamfara State and data were collected through interviews. Forty-five participants were purposely selected and among them were victims, academics on peace and security studies, civil society (CSOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), officials of National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), security agencies and

traditional rulers. The paper identified unemployment, poverty, illiteracy, diseases, crimes, stigmatisation and psychological trauma as consequences of force migration and suggests the intensification of the fight against rural banditry to ensure the security of the migrants who are willing to return to their ancestral homes and the protection of the rights of the forced migrants.

Muhammad, Abdulmalik, and Jobe (2023), in their study examined the psychological effects of kidnapping and banditry on teaching and learning in tertiary institutions in North-West region of Nigeria. The study employed descriptive research design and the study's population consists of students of higher institutions of learning in the North-West who were victims of the phenomenon. Purposive sampling technique was employed to select the victims of the menace across the three study areas namely: Kaduna, Katsina and Zamfara. Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficient (PPMC) and independent sample t-test were used to analyse data obtained from the field and the findings revealed that kidnapping and banditry have psychological effects on the students of higher learning as it affects student's academic performance, causes lack of sleep to the victims, creates frequent fear on the victims, results in Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, among others. Moreover, the study showed no significant difference on the impact of kidnapping and banditry on male and female students of higher institutions in North-West Nigeria and recommends that government should be up to its responsibilities in order to eliminate the effects of kidnapping and banditry on the students.

Okwuwada (2023), in his paper titled "The modern day Consequences, Causes, and Nature of Kidnapping, Terrorism, Banditry, and violent crime in Nigeria: A comprehensive analysis" contended that uncontrolled influx of fire arms, unemployment, poverty, lack of equal economic opportunity for all, government neglect of certain region in the distribution of national wealth, among others, accounted for the rising crime rate in the country. The paper suggests sensitisation of local officials and traditional rulers on strategy of addressing violent groups in their communities, government should be proactive in addressing security matters and should also pursue programmes that would lead to the economic development of the country.

Similarly, Yusufu and Ilevbare (2021) study sheds light on the pressing issue of armed banditry in Katsina State, Nigeria. By employing both primary and secondary data sources, including a structured questionnaire administered to 400 respondents, the researchers uncovered key factors contributing to the persistence of armed banditry in the state namely poverty and unemployment, proliferation of arms, etc. The papers suggests among others, creating employment opportunities, alleviating rural poverty, etc.

By the same token, Gongs, Famave, Maxwell, and Annagu (2021) investigated the factors influencing kidnapping in Shendam Local Government Area of Plateau State, Nigeria. Their study was grounded in structural choice theory and employed a cross-sectional quantitative research survey design. Using clustered random sampling, the researchers administered 400 questionnaires to residents in Shendam, with 374 retrieved for analysis and hypothesis testing. The data, analyzed using SPSS version 21, revealed that unemployment was a significant factor influencing kidnapping. The results also showed that travelers, wealthy individuals, and rural dwellers were common victims of kidnapping. The study recommends creating employment opportunities and empowering youths to address the issue of kidnapping.

In a like manner, Nahuche's 2021 study sheds light on the devastating effects of banditry in northwestern Nigeria, particularly in Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto, and Zamfara. By employing a mixed-method approach and collecting data through questionnaires and interviews, the study revealed that banditry is a social evil that has led to injury, loss of lives and properties, rape, and other heinous crimes. The paper attributed banditry to influx of arms and ammunitions, inadequate security measures and unemployment and recommends establishment of state police, modernization of security equipment and training of vigilante groups.

Yakasai, Ayinla, and Yakasai (2022) conducted a study titled "Psychological Impact of Kidnapping on Mental Health and Well-being of Abductees: A Study of Abducted School Children in Kaduna State." The study employed interviews as a data collection method, with a sample of 32 participants, 27 of whom consented to participate. The results revealed that kidnapped children were subjected to unhealthy living conditions, terrorization, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) during their captivity. Furthermore, victims lacked effective coping mechanisms, taking on responsibility for their own psychological well-being. The study recommends providing psychosocial support services to victims and making these services available to schools that have experienced similar incidents.

In a like manner, Mohammed and Rao (2020), in their work titled "Politics, Banditry Operation and its Implication in Zamfara State of Nigeria", the paper discussed the politics underlying bandits operation and its social implication in the state. The study employed a qualitative approach and interview (FGD) was used to collect data. 192 sample sizes was spread randomly in order to give equal chance to respondents. The study revealed that politics played an important role in bandits operation and this caused loss of lives and dehumanisation of the people of the state. The study recommends among others, adherence to the rule of law, replacement of corrupt leaders, good governance, etc.

Ibrahim and Ahmad (2020) in their study "The Causes of Kidnapping and its Implications on Nigeria", explored national security and socio-economic impact of the menace on the people. It is anchored on functionalism and used Qualitative Document Analysis (QDA).

It revealed that the failure of government to address the root causes of the phenomenon such as unemployment, hard-drug influence and quick-money syndrome, etc., accounted for the menace. To address this heinous crime, the paper suggests among others, job creation, synergy among security agencies, public awareness programme.

Olofin (2020), in his study entitled "The Socio-Economic Cost of Kidnapping in Southwest, Nigeria." examines causes of kidnapping, its socio-economic cost and differences in the perception of its social and economic cost. Four hundred and fifty (450) adults from 15 Local Government Areas in 3 States of Southwest, Nigeria constituted the sample and multistage sampling technique was employed. Data were collected through questionnaire and the results showed that sexual harassment of female victims, reduction in quality of social relationship, fear of rendering public assistance and fear of association with strangers formed the social costs while ransom paid to kidnapers, capital flight of investors and high budget on security constituted the economic

cost. Besides, the perception of the socio-economic cost of kidnapping in Southwest, Nigeria was location biased. It suggests others that government should be firm and fair in its resolution and implementation of decisions to curb kidnapping.

Oketa (2018), in his study titled “Socio-Economic Implication of Kidnapping and Hostage Taking in Southern Nigeria”, posited that kidnapping and hostage taking has become omnipresent in Nigeria and attributed its prevalence in the Eastern part of the country to security breach which the perpetrators capitalised on to perpetuate their heinous crime. He attributed the menace to unemployment, poverty, leadership failure, corruption among security agencies. The study is anchored on functionalist theory and suggests the review of the current strategy of addressing the menace, employment creation, etc.

By the same token, Umar (n.d) in his work entitled “Threats of rural banditry on human and food security in Niger state, Nigeria” employed mixed research approach. Questionnaire and in-depth interview were used as instruments for data collection and the study was anchored on routine activity theory. A sample of 90 respondents were drawn from three most affected local government areas in the state. The findings showed that mining activities, kidnapping for ransom and collection of farmlands were the major causes of banditry while the effects include loss of lives and properties, and psychological depression and farmlands. The study suggests provision of sophisticated arms and ammunition to the security forces in order for them to control the menace.

In as much as these studies offer a valuable understanding of the banditry and kidnapping in the region but failed to look at the lived experiences of the victims who have to contend with psychological problem such as trauma because of the loss of their loved ones, raping and loss of their properties. This study provides an update analysis of the state of banditry and kidnapping in the region from the perspective of the victims and families using a phenomenological approach.

Theoretical Framework

This section of the study examines the theories that serve as guiding post for this study. Scholars of Sociology, Criminology and Security Studies have employed different theories to analyse banditry and kidnapping and some of these theories include: Queer Ladder Theory (QLT), Frustration Aggression Theory, Natural State, Rational Choice, Routine Activity, Strain and State Fragility Theories. For the purpose of this study, the researchers employed the Rational Choice and State Fragility Theories.

Rational Choice Theory

The rational choice theory contended that man is a reasoning being who weights the means and ends as well as the cost and benefits of his actions before taking decisions (Cornish and Clarke, 1986). According to the theory, crime is a purposive behaviour designed to meet the offender’s needs for money, status, and excitement, and that meeting these needs involves the making of decisions and choices (Clarke, 1997). The rational choice theory is characterised by the following assumptions:

- I. The human being is a rational actor
- II. Rationality involves ends/means calculation
- III. People (Freely) choose behaviour, both conforming and deviant, based on their rational calculations
- IV. The central element of calculation involves a cost-benefit analysis; pleasure versus pain or hedonistic calculus
- V. Choice with all other conditions equal, will be directed towards the maximization of individual pleasure.
- VI. Choice can be controlled through the perception and understanding of the potential pain or punishment that will follow an act judged to be a violation of the social goal, the social contract. The state is responsible for maintaining order and preserving the common good through a system of Laws.
- VII. The swiftness, severity, and certainty of punishment are the key elements in understanding a law’s ability to control human behaviour. (Okoye, Joe-Akunne, & Chine, 2016)

This theory is of utmost important to this study because of its assumptions. The upsurge in banditry and kidnapping is the failure of the state justice system to provide a strong and effective punishment regime that would serve as deterrence to criminals.

The policies suggested by the theory entails increasing the punishment for crimes so that pain outweighs the gain and thereby preventing future crime. Nevertheless, this theory has been criticised on the grounds that it is psychological and individualistic. It is psychological because it discusses the actions of the actors starting from their mental states, and individualistic because it is applied to the behaviour of individuals, thereby ignoring social groups and institutions (Krstić & Pavlović, 2020a; Krstić, 2022). Moreover, the models built on the assumption of the existence of rational actors that maximize personal utility, failed to capture some of the more important aspects of human behaviour.

State Fragility Theory

The term ‘fragile states’ has assumed a protuberant position in the development discourse since the 1990s. Prior to this period, concepts like ‘state failure’ and state collapse were used within the field of international relations to describe dysfunctional states.

In a like manner, Uzoechina (2008) attributed the renewed interest in dysfunctional states since the 9/11 attacks by academic, think-tanks, development agencies, government departments and policy makers to better understanding of the phenomenon and in order to come up with appropriate policies or programmes to address it.

However, the change in the perspective of human and global security as well as the link between conflict and development led academics and international organisations to use the term 'fragile state' (Ferreira, 2015). What then is state fragility?

There is no consensus among scholars, policy makers, governmental and non-governmental organisations as to the definition of state fragility nor is there an agreement as to the list of fragile states. In the words of Danish Institute for International Studies (2008), "there is no authoritative definition of state fragility, nor is there an agreed list of fragile states." (p.4).

Similarly, Ferreira (2015), observed that the several actors that applied the concept were faced with the problems of definition and measurement of the concept. Grimma, Lemay-Hébert and Olivier (2014) admonished that the concept (fragile state) should be used with caution, because it has emotional, financial and political implications. It is important at this juncture to define fragile state.

According to the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID), fragile states are "those where the government cannot or will not deliver core functions to the majority of its people, including the poor". Similarly, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2007), sees fragile states as those that "lack structures, political will and/or capacity to provide the basic functions needed for poverty reduction, development and to safeguard the security and human rights of their populations." By the same token, US Agency for International Development (USAID) (2005), defines fragile states as those "unable or unwilling to adequately assure the provision of security and basic services to significant portions of their populations and where the legitimacy of the government is in question" (p.1).

The fragile states are characterised by such factors as failure of institutions, loss of physical control of territories or loss of monopoly on the legitimate use of force, inability to provide reasonable public services, economic inequality, inability to interact with other states as a full member of the international community, erosion of legitimate authority to make collective decisions and inability to suppress intrastate violence (Elagin, 2021).

As the above characteristics of fragile states theory has shown, the structural gap exhibited by the theory can be explained in terms of authority, legitimacy and capacity. This approach is known as the functionalist or ALC approach (Elagin, 2021). Authority refers to the states abilities to enforce binding rules and regulations, provide core public goods, and create an enabling environment for the people to engage in meaningful employment, exercise force on their territories. Majority of States in developing countries have failed to protect lives and properties of their people and do not have total control of their territories.

Legitimacy means the extent to which a government commands public support for its actions. Put differently, it implies inability to form a responsive and accountable government that is capable of managing public support. In Nigeria and other third world countries, this is lacking. While capacity is the ability of states to mobilise and manage resources for productive ends and good service delivery. The experience of most states, Nigeria inclusive on this issue is that they have failed to provide basic public goods and infrastructures to their people

The state fragility theory has come under fire on the grounds that it has limited analytical utility. This is because it is applied in widely divergent and problematic ways. Secondly, it serves as a ground for international intervention (Call 2011; Nay 2014).

Nevertheless, the concept has analytical and practical values. Firstly, formal institutions of states are based on European model and leaders of post-colonial states did not object to it (Alesina & Spolaore 2003). Secondly, modern state is globally recognized as a political unit (Eriksen 2011). Thus, states that failed to discharge their functions are classified as fragile.

Methodology

The Study Area

The North-West geopolitical zone of Nigeria, which is the epic-centre of banditry and kidnapping is one of the six geopolitical zones in the country and it comprises seven states namely Jigawa, Kano, Katsina, Kaduna, Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara. It covers an area of 216,065 sq. km which represents 25.75 per cent of the country's total land mass and its population is estimated to be 33 million (based on figures from 2006 census). The major ethnic groups of the zone are Hausa and Fulani and the region is rich in solid materials including gold. Despite its economic potential, the region has the highest poverty rate in the country, millions of the people lack access to basic health care and clean water and also has the highest number of out-of-school children in the country (ICG, 2020). The study is restricted to three states in the region which happen to be the epic centres of banditry and kidnapping and these are: Kaduna, Katsina and Zamfara States. The map below shows the composition of the states that make up of the zone.



Figure 1

Fig. 1. Map of North-western Nigeria
(Source; Google images)

Research Design

The study adopted a qualitative research approach and used phenomenological and cross-sectional designs. Creswell (1998, p.15) contended that "qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach in which the researcher attempts to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Bogdan and Biklen, (1992) noted that qualitative data are by nature, descriptive and composed of words or pictures rather than numbers, as is the case in quantitative research. Van-Manen's (1990) hermeneutical phenomenological approach was adopted for the study because it is well suited to studying lived experience. Moreover, it leaps deeper into the personal experiences of victims, relations and community and how they subjectively interpreted their experiences.

These designs provide an in-depth insights into the experiences and perceptions of individuals and relations affected by banditry and kidnapping.

Participant and Sampling Method:

Purposive and Snowball sampling techniques were employed in the study. Purposive sampling refers to judgmental sampling that involves the conscious selection by the researcher of certain participants to include in the study (Burns & Grove 1998). Similarly, Nikolopoulou (2023), sees purposive sampling as a method wherein researchers select participants based on a strictly predetermined criteria set. Participants for the study were selected based on their experiences and expertise related to the phenomena under investigation (banditry and kidnapping) and having experienced it within the last three years. Due to the sensitive nature of the study, snowball sampling technique was utilised. According to Groenewald (2017), snowball sampling technique is where a sample is expanded by asking and getting participants from others to be interviewed. By the same token, Basa, Gonzales, Malibong and Merza, (2024) define snowball sampling technique as involves finding and recruiting participants through referrals from existing or initial participants ten participants took part in the study and were all informed about the study, and participated voluntarily.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collected in this study were from in-depth interviews. A semi-structured interview format was employed to collect data from victims, families, and community members in some selected local government areas in the three states. It was a face-to-face interview and was conducted in a secluded areas outside the participants' homes and was meant to gather their personal accounts and experiences. The duration of each interview ranging from 20 minutes to 40 minutes and transcriptions of the recorded interview were produced after the interviews. The interview sessions lasted for over a period of one to two months. The size of the sample was determined by the principle of saturation that Morse (1994) and Streubert and Carpenter (1999) describe as the point at which data-collection themes are repeated. Ten of such interviews were conducted and the researchers stopped when saturation point was reached.

2. **Content Analysis:** Another method of data collection employed in this study was secondary source which includes internet materials, media reports, policy documents, and existing literature to provide context and background information.

Bracketing

The researchers applied bracketing to avoid bias or preconceptions of the phenomena. It commenced from developing the objectives until the data were analyse and findings revealed. As Creswell (2017) rightly noted, researchers' perceptions and judgments must be set aside, and rely only on the participants' indicators of meaning, knowledge, truth, and experiences in attaining bracketing (epoche). Thus, the bracketing by the researchers started before data collection by listing all their personal biases, existing knowledge, and experiences of the phenomena.

Data Analysis:

The interviews data were analysed using thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes and a software known as NVivo (version 15) was utilised in the analysis of the data collected for the study. Also, narrative analysis was employed and this involves the personal stories and experiences of the victims or their relations in order to gain deeper insights. In the analysing of the data collected from the interviews, the study employed Braun and Clarke (2006), six step data analysis namely: familiarisation with data, generation of codes, combining codes into themes, reviewing themes, determine significance of themes and reporting findings. The table below shows the phases of thematic analysis as laid down by Braun and Clarke.

Table 1.

Phases of Thematic Analysis

Phase	Description of the Process
1. Familiarising yourself with your data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking in the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells; generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, the final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Source: Braun and Clarke (2006) pp. 77-101.

After transcribing the data verbatim, the data management and analysis were done with the use of Nvivo software 15 version. As already indicated or stated above, the researcher employed the use of thematic analysis of data. The researcher read and re-read the data to be familiar with the contents, making a preliminary observation about the data. Then went ahead to identify the themes and also code them. In other words, after conducting the data analysis of different transcripts, themes and sub-themes emerged that were later connected to the research questions. As the iterative process continued, some adjustments were made along the line and the interviewee's responses were grouped together based on the themes and the relevant quotes or statements of the interviewees were used to buttress the issues discussed and these were supported by relevant works in the literature. The table below shows a connection between the research questions and the emerging themes and sub-themes.

Table 2:

Themes and Sub-themes generated from the research questions

	Research Questions	Themes	Sub-themes
1	What are the lived experiences of victims and families affected by banditry and kidnapping?	Experience of Banditry and Kidnapping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal Experience with banditry and kidnapping, • Feeling during and after experience • Thoughts and reactions after the incident and Meaning of banditry
2	What are the perceived causes and of banditry and kidnapping?	Causes of banditry and Kidnapping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic • Unemployment • Bad Governance • Political • Corruption

3	What role can individuals, community leaders, and government play in combating banditry and kidnapping?	Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greed • Peer Group Influence • Poverty • Addressing the core causes • Equip Security Agencies • Self Defense • Collective Effort • Compensation for Security Personnel • Cooperation by the people • Dialogue • Military Operation • No Rhetoric • Participation of All • Sensitization Workshop • Understanding the need of the Community
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Source: Fieldwork work, 2024

As the above table reveals, four broad themes and sub-themes emerged from the data transcribed and coded. The paragraphs that followed address these themes in details.

Theme 1: Experiences of Banditry and Kidnapping



After conducting the data analysis among the different transcripts, the researchers developed different codes that contributed to the emergence of the theme 'Experiences of Banditry and Kidnapping'.

Personal Experience: Personal experience with banditry and kidnapping was one of the most highlighted experiences of banditry and kidnapping. This experience involves personal account of the victims and their relations on banditry and kidnapping. Commenting on his experience Imam, a businessman noted that:

I was kidnapped on my way to Zamfara state and spent 62 days with my abductors. I was released when ransom of 20 million was paid by my family (A. Imam, personal communication, October 10, 2024).

Similarly, Tanimu, a senior public servant divulged that he was maltreated by his abductors. In his words:

I was beaten throughout my stay with them. We were kept in a place that wasn't habitable and foods were irregular. My immediate family and friends as well as well-wishers were able to raise the 15 million naira they demanded for. (B. Tanimu, personal communication, September 24, 2024).

In a like manner, Murtala, a businessman narrated his experience of banditry and kidnapping and the ransom paid. In his words:

I'm a victim myself. On 20th July 2023 was a day, I will never forget in my life. On that fateful day, my younger brother, two others and I were on our way to my farm when were accosted by some men fully armed and ordered me to alight from the car. I was bungled into a car and the car zoom off (A. Murtala, personal communication, December 17, 2024).

By the same token, Usman, a public servant narrated that he was kidnapped and his abductors demanded for ten million which was later reduced to five million. In his words:

I was kidnapped in Sokoto on my way back home. The kidnappers demanded for ten million naira as ransom but we did not have such huge amount of money. After series of negotiations, the money was reduced to five million. (B. Usman, personal communication, October 5, 2024).

Meanwhile, Nura, a senior civil servant narrated the experience of his close relations. In his words: "A close family was kidnapped while on a mission to gather information for his organisation. The kidnappers demanded ransom, and despite payment, he was killed." (B. Nura, personal communication, October 5, 2024).

Feeling during and After the Experience: Majority of those interviewed expressed the views that they were afraid, dejected and hopeless. In the words of Imam: "I felt hopeless, dejected, and depressed." (A. Imam, personal communication, October, 10, 2024).

Meanwhile, Akinola, a senior civil servant noted that: "When I got the news that my in-law was kidnapped, I was afraid to tell his daughter, who happens to be my wife of the development. I was completely lost." (M. Akinola, personal communication, September, 20, 2024).

Commenting on the same subject, Bature, a top public servant noted that:

It was tough and horrific and my uncle was able to return home after payment of substantial amount of money. Everybody was afraid of what would happen to him and his immediate family wept almost daily. His children continue to ask when their father would return home to them. (A. Bature, personal communication, September 17, 2024).

Similarly, Maikudi, a senior civil servant expressed the view that they were scared and frown at the government inability to address the security situation. Besides, the family was directionless and felt they lost their loved one. In his very words: "It was scary and I felt government was not doing enough to control the insecurity situation. Our family was directionless because we thought, we had lost him." (J. Maikudi, Personal Communication, September 15, 2024).

By the same token, Mary, a civil servant felt bad and did not know what to do. In her words: "I felt bad and I didn't know what to do" (M. John, personal communication, October 13, 2024).

Thoughts and reactions after the incident:

Quite a number of those interviewed, expressed their views on the sub-theme. Maikudi noted that they thought they would never see their loved one again. In his words:

The fear that we didn't know whether he was still breathing or dead, whether we would ever see him again or what he was going through created fear and anxiety in all of us to think of ways of rescuing him. (J. Maikudi, personal communication, September 15, 2024).

In a like manner, Murtala divulged that:

It was horrible experience and at first, I thought I could escape from my abductors but after close examination of the fortify forest, I change my decision. It then dawn on me that government was not discharging its primary responsibility to its citizens (A. Murtala, personal communication, December 17, 2024).

Banditry: On banditry many of those interviewed were of the opinion that it involved forceful taking away of victims against their wishes and in return for economic gain. For others, it is an attempt to destroy the economics of the North and also its people. Below are some of the views of the participants.

For Imam, "banditry is abduction a person for material benefits. For instance, when I was kidnapped, the kidnappers demanded for ransom and even threaten my people that if they don't pay, they would kill me." (A. Imam, personal communication, October, 10, 2024).

Similarly, Mary, a top public servant perceived banditry as social vices which involved the abduction of individuals against their will. In her very words: *They are social vices that involve the abduction of individuals against their own will and in return for ransom (M. John, personal communication, October 13, 2024).*

In a like manner, Murtala noted that “banditry is a violence act against defenseless people perpetuated by a group of people who are armed to the teeth for economic motive.” (A. Murtala, personal communication, December 17, 2024).

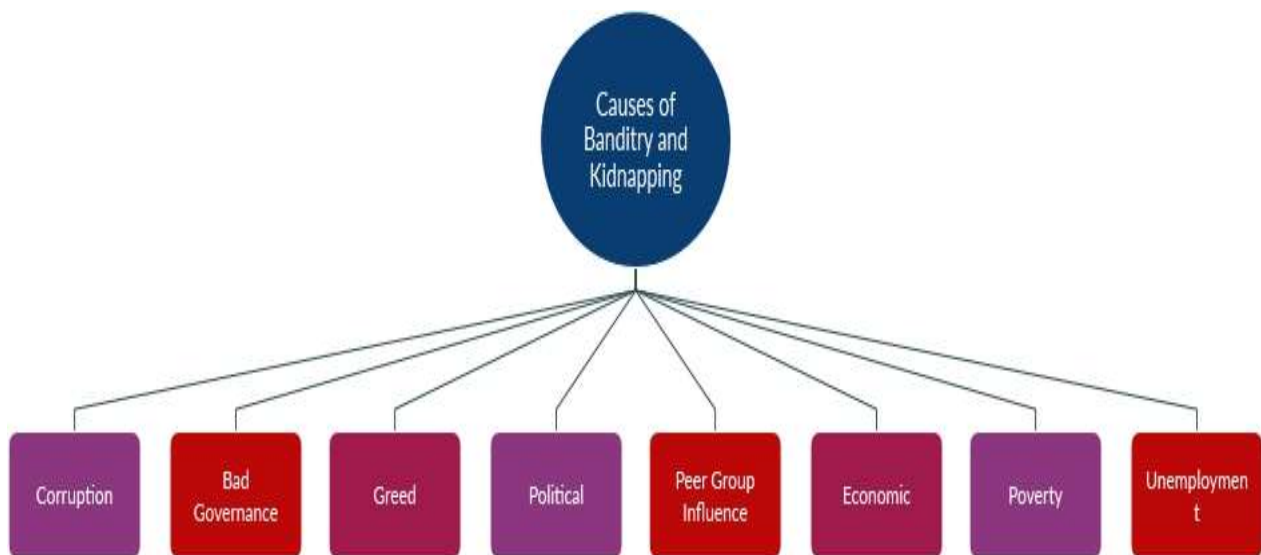
A contrary view was expressed by Jarma, a commercial farmer who maintained that banditry and kidnapping were an attempt to reduce northern population and their developments. In his very words:

What I understand by banditry is an attempt to destroy the region. The population is much and as such they came up with this menace in order to reduce the population of the region and also make them to be poor. Where banditry takes place, the people of such places are in disarray as economic activities would ceased due to fear of being attacked. (A. Jarma, personal communication, September, 15, 2024).

These views expressed by the participants are consistent with the extant literature and are also supported by the underpinning theories guiding this study. As the foregoing views expressed by the participants have shown, there are fears and anxiety among the participants on the subject and this found support in quite number of existing literature. According to Yakasai, Ayinla and Yakasai (2022) and Muhammad, Abdulmalik, and Jobe (2023) noted that banditry created fear on the victims and results in Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Similarly, Idris and Umar (2024), contended that banditry results in psychological trauma.

Theme 2: Causes of banditry and Kidnapping

A number of factors have been advanced as causes and motivation of banditry and kidnapping. Majority of the participants in this study attributed banditry and kidnapping to unemployment, corruption, poverty, greed, political, economic, peer group influence and poor/bad governance. Here are some of the views expressed by the participants.



Corruption: Majority of the participants in this study attributed banditry and kidnapping to corruption. Funds meant for the prosecutions of banditry and kidnapping as well as terrorism were diverted by those saddled with the responsibilities of prosecuting the war on terrorism and banditry. One of the participants named Akinola maintained that funds meant for the prosecution of terrorism in the Northeast were diverted and mismanaged. In his words:

Corruption has become rampant in this country. There is no where you don't meet this monster. It has eaten deep into the structure of our society. We are all witnessing to the 'Dasukigate' incident where funds meant to prosecute insurgency in the Northeast were diverted and mismanaged. (M. Akinola, personal communication, September, 20, 2024).

Commenting on the same subject, Mary noted the complicity of security officials' involvement in banditry and kidnapping. In her very words: *Some security personnel are involved in banditry as they kidnapped and collect ransom from their victims.* (M. John, personal communication, October 13, 2024).

Bad Governance: Some of the participants attributed banditry and kidnapping to bad governance. This implies the inability of the government to deliver on its electoral promises and provisions of basic amenities to the people. According to Imam, “*the inability of successive administrations to deliver on their electoral promises such as protection of life and property, provision of employment and social amenities accounted for banditry and kidnapping.*” (A. Imam, personal communication, October 10, 2024).

Similarly, Bature maintained that government failure to provide social amenities and places for the herdsmen to graze their livestock are responsible for the social menace. In his words:

The bandits complain of failure of government to provide them with social amenities, places to graze their flock and also the criminal justice system which deny them justice in their cause to get justice for the destruction of their livestock. (A. Bature, personal communication, September 15, 2024).

The views expressed by the participants is supported by the literature. Abdulyakeen (2020) and Osanubi (2021), maintained that the incapability of leadership to provide good governance accounted for the state of insecurity in the country. Similarly, Atubi (2022), Abdullahi and Mukhtar (2022) and Wobodo and Nheeme (2022) contended that the existence of large ungoverned spaces coupled with poverty, unemployment, failed leadership and availability and proliferation of small and light are the major factor fuelling banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria

Greed: Greed among people has been identified as a factor responsible for banditry and kidnapping. In the words of Mary: *“Our people are not contend with what they have and because of this, they would go to any length in order to get what they want”* (M. John, personal communication, October 13, 2024).

This finding is supported by the extant literature. Torkwembe (2020), argued that some people are unsatisfied with what they have and wish they could have more and more. She noted that a wicked businessman could kidnap his business rival for a large ransom in order to become richer. Similarly, Gadzama, Saddiq, Oduehie, and Dariya (2018), attributed poverty, greed, corruptions and poor security as causes of banditry and kidnapping.

Political: Some of the participants advanced the view that political struggle among the elites for power accounted for banditry and kidnapping.

Imam divulged that *“elites employ banditry and kidnapping as tool to obtain political power. They point to the failure of the ruling party to stamp-out banditry and corruption and ride on that to power”* (A. Imam, personal communication, October 10, 2024).

Similarly, Usman noted that: *“It is politics and banditry and kidnapping have been politicised. Everybody is involve, government and the people are all involved.”* (B. Usman, personal communication, October 5, 2024).

The above views were supported by the literature. Torkwembe (2020), maintained that corrupt politicians may arrange for the kidnapping of their opponents. They do this to force the opponents to make concession or change their views or stands on a given issue

This finding supports the extant literature. Okoli and Ugwu (2019), were of the view that economic and political interest were the driving forces for banditry. They noted that the former was motivated by material accumulation and the latter by the quest to rob, assault or to liquidate a person or a group of persons based on political or ideological considerations. Similarly, Mohammed and Rao (2020), contended that politics is a major driver of banditry, leading to devastating consequences such as loss of lives and dehumanization of the people.

Peer Group Influence: A participant named Mary attributed banditry and kidnapping to peer group influence. In her words:

It boils down to friends you keep. For instance, individuals that have cultists as friends would be influenced by them. As the saying goes, show me your friend and I would tell you who you are. A friend of bandits would be influenced to join banditry and kidnapping activities. (M. John, personal communication, October 13, 2024).

Economic: Another motivating factor for banditry and kidnapping is economic. Majority of the participants expressed this view.

Imam noted that *the primary motive is economic. From their looks, one would know because they look tattered.* (A. Imam, personal communication, October 10, 2024).

In a like manner, Bature maintained that:

The Fulani felt their herds are their source of living and by taking their source of living, then they have to find a way to get back what they have lost. Banditry and kidnapping offer an avenue for them to recoup their lost. (A. Bature, personal communication, September 15, 2024).

Poverty: Majority of the participants attributed banditry and kidnapping to poverty. They were of the views that the citizenry lack basic necessities of life such as food, shelter and clothes. Commenting on the subject, Murtala noted that:

The vast majority of our people are poor and don't have what to eat, drink and where to put their heads. Report has shown that this region of ours has the highest number of people living in abject poverty. (A. Murtala, personal communication, December 17, 2024).

The finding is supported by literature. According to Alao, Atere, and Alao (2015), poverty is an important factor contributing to banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria Alarmingly, Nigeria has surpassed India as the country with the largest number of people living in extreme poverty, with an estimated 87 million people, estimated to be living on less than \$1.90 a day (Adeolu, 2018).

Unemployment: This is another factor attributed to banditry and kidnapping by the vast majority of the participants who participated in the study. They were of the opinion that the teeming youths from our universities who graduated every year lack job to keep body and soul together and they became a willing tool in the hands of the bandits and kidnapers to be used to perpetrate banditry and kidnapping. Akinola asserted that: *“The teeming youth of this great country of ours have no job and as the saying goes an idle man is a devil workshop”* (M. Akinola, personal communication, September 20, 2024).

Similarly, Mary contended that: *“Upon examining the individuals involved in banditry and kidnapping, it becomes clear that unemployment is often a driving factor. With limited job opportunities available, some individuals turn to these vices as a means to earn a living.”* (M. John, personal communication, October 13, 2024).

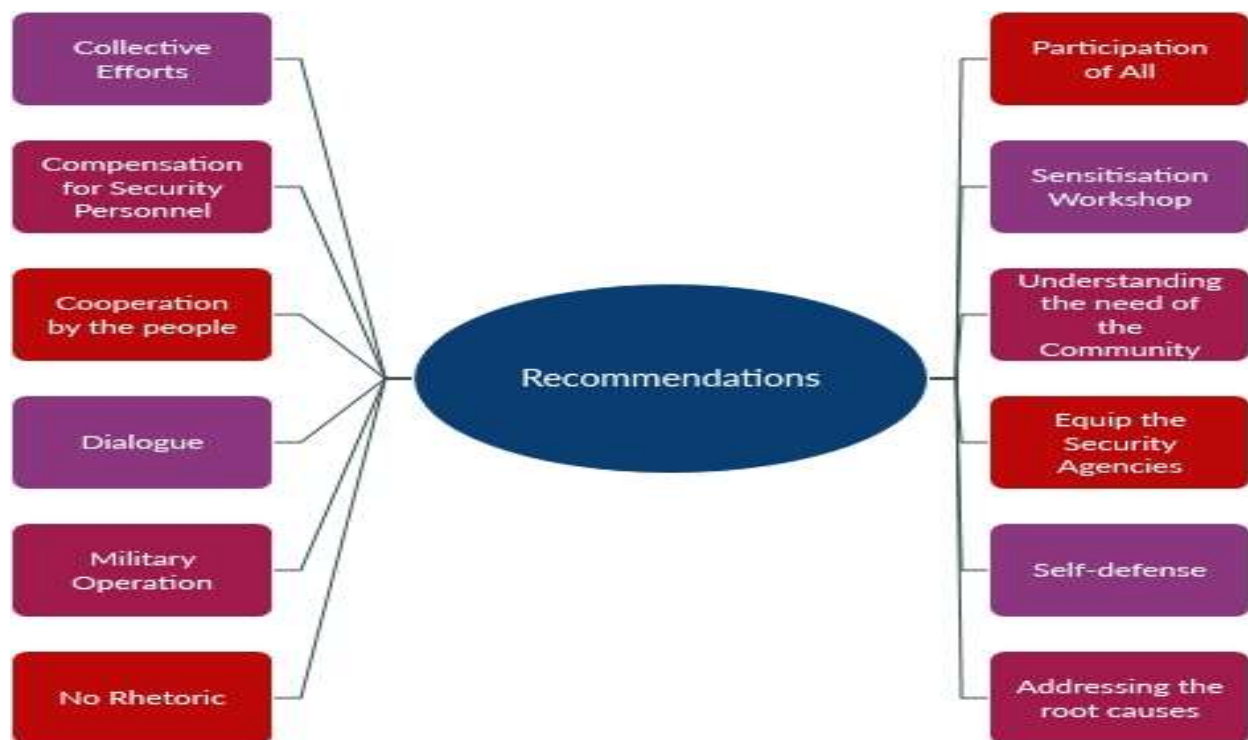
The views expressed by the participants are supported by the literature. Jumare and Surma (2015), Ibrahim and Ahmad (2020), Nahuche (2021), Yusufu and Ilevbare (2021) ascribed abject poverty and unemployment as being responsible for the increased in banditry and kidnapping. Torkwembe (2020) attributed banditry and kidnapping to loss of societal values, greed, poverty, politics and unemployment. He maintained that poverty can push one to

crime in order to make ends meet and further argued that lack of contentment can also push one to turn to crime in order to make more money. In a like manner, the Multinational Poverty Index Report (cited in Isah, Hajara, Mohammed, Rifaatu, Ahmad & Muhammad, 2024), indicated that most of the states in the region had high rate of abject poverty (45.0%).

The major findings of the study are validated by rational choice theory which states that individuals engage in criminal behaviour, including banditry and kidnapping, after weighing the potential costs and benefits. (Clarke, 1997). As the findings indicate, bandits are motivated by economic or financial motives and they must weigh the consequences of their action in terms of punishment before deciding the option of embarking on the activities. Also, the failure of state justice system to provide a strong and effective punishment regime that would serve as deterrence to criminals support the findings of the study.

Also, the major findings of the study are supported by the state fragility theory. The theory posits that banditry and kidnapping are more likely to occur in countries with weak state institutions, corruption, and lack of governance. The Nigerian state is weak, with extensive corruption and inadequate governance. This has led to the rise of criminal groups, which engaged in banditry and kidnapping. The theory supports the findings on corruptions, bad governance and others factors that have been identified as the causes of banditry and kidnapping.

Theme 4: Recommendations



The figure above represents the sub-themes of the theme 'recommendation' which is the various suggestions made by the participants on how to address the menace of banditry and kidnapping. But for space, each of the item would not be discussed one by one where necessary some of them may be merged.

Collective Effort / Participation of all: The participants suggested the need for all hands to be on deck if banditry and kidnapping are to be addressed. As Imam rightly noted that: *"Security is everyone's business, and communities should take ownership of it. Where communities lack resources, the government should provide assistance."* (A. Imam, personal communication, October 10, 2024).

In a like manner, Maikudi suggested that: *"We should all come together to address the issue."* (J. Maikudi, personal communication, September 15, 2024).

Equally, Usman suggested that: *"All stakeholders (government, clergymen, traditional rulers and the citizen) should participate in the efforts to address the menace."* (B. Usman, personal communication, October 5, 2024).

Cooperation by the people: Majority of the participants suggested the need for the citizens to cooperate with the law enforcement agencies for them to combat the menace of banditry and kidnapping. Commenting on this, Murtala suggested that: *"The people should be watchful, monitor and report suspicious activities to the police."* (A. Murtala, personal communication, December 17, 2024).

Compensation for security personnel: Some of the participants suggested that the children of deceased security personnel should be awarded scholarship and those still in active service should be compensated through prompt payment of their allowances and other benefits. Commenting on the issue, Nura suggested that: *"Award scholarships to children of deceased security operatives and provide spouses of deceased operatives with start-up capital for businesses."* (B. Nura, personal communication, October 5, 2024).

Dialogue: It involves holding talks with the leaders of the banditry and kidnapping groups in order to put an end to their activities. One of the participants holds this view. Jarma noted that: *“Government should engage visible leaders of the bandit groups in talks, disarm them by collecting their arms and ammunition as well as forgive and reintegrate former bandits into their communities.”* (A. Jarma, personal communication, September 15, 2024).

Military operation: A participant that took part in the study suggested the continuing use of military option if dialogue fail. Jarma was of this view and he recommended that: *“The Air force should continue to conduct airstrikes against bandit camps and hideouts and the army should deploy their personnel to complement airstrikes and complete the operation.”* (A. Jarma, personal communication, September 15, 2024).

Addressing the root causes: Majority of the participants suggested that the root causes of banditry and kidnapping such as poverty, unemployment and corruption should be addressed. Corroborating this view point, Mary suggested that: *“Government at all levels should provide employment opportunities to reduce poverty and unemployment and should purge corrupt officials from government and security agencies.”* (M. John, personal communication, October 13, 2024).

Similarly, Akinola recommended that *“The governments should provide jobs, create an enabling environment for businesses, and address poverty and corruption.”* (M. Akinola, personal communication, September 20, 2024).

Also commenting, Maikudi suggested that: *“Governments should create programs and policies addressing poverty, unemployment, porous borders, and other related issues.”* (J. Maikudi, personal communication, September 15, 2024).

Self-defense: Some of the participants suggested that government should allow the affected communities to armed and defend themselves against bandits. Maikudi encouraged the people to remove fear from their minds and protect themselves. In his very words: *“We should remove fear from our minds and protect ourselves. Whenever they attack us, we should attack back.”* (J. Maikudi, personal communication, September 15, 2024).

Concurring with the position, Akinola suggested that the people of the affected areas should take measures to protect themselves, including acquiring arms and ammunition for defense. In his words: *“It is time the affected communities take necessary measures to defend themselves, including possession of firearms against these criminals. If they failed to rise up to the occasion, the bandits may eliminate them.”* (M. Akinola, personal communication, September 20, 2024).

Equip the security agencies: Majority of the participants suggested that the security operatives should be provided with modern equipment in order for them to discharge their duties effectively and efficiently. Commenting on this, Imam suggested that: *“Security agencies must be well equipped, motivated, and retrained to discharge their responsibilities efficiently.”* (A. Imam, personal communication, October 10, 2024). Similarly, Akinola called for provision of modern equipment and training for security operatives. In his words: *“Equip relevant security agencies with modern equipment, technology and resources to enhance their operational efficiency as well as training them on regular basis to improve their skills, knowledge and effectiveness.”*

In a like manner, Jarma suggested that: *“The government should equip and train security agencies to effectively discharge their duties.”*

These suggestions align with Umar's (n.d) recommendations, aiming to strengthen security and protect rural communities from banditry. He suggested that sophisticated detection equipment should be installed in rural areas to facilitate early detection of bandit arrival and settlement in forestlands. Also, provision of arms and ammunition to security operatives to effectively eliminate bandits.

Conclusion and Recommendation

In summary, this study used a phenomenological approach to investigate the lived experiences of people in Northwest Nigeria who have been impacted by kidnapping and banditry. The results show that the phenomenon is intricate and multidimensional, with strong roots in the region's social, political, and economic fabric. Banditry and kidnapping are not just illegal activities, the study has shown; they are also signs of more serious structural problems, such as inequality, poverty, and state weakness. These problems have produced an atmosphere that is conducive to banditry and kidnapping, as the participants narratives demonstrate. The study also uncovered the psychological and physical toll that kidnapping and banditry take on victims and their families. Moreover, the results show how these experiences have influenced the attitudes and actions of people and communities in the area. The study's implications are obvious. In order to tackle the issues of kidnapping and banditry in Northwest Nigeria, a comprehensive strategy that tackles their underlying causes must be implemented. Supporting and protecting victims and their families, enhancing governance, and investing in programs for economic development and poverty alleviation are all part of this. Finally, this study highlights the significance of comprehending people's lived experiences.

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