

# PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF BOKO HARAM ABDUCTION ON PARENTS OF CHIBOK GIRLS, BORNO STATE

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## ABSTRACT

*The abduction of the Girls by Boko Haram has several impacts on the parents. The study therefore examines psychological impact of abduction of Chibok Girls on the parents in Chibok Community of Borno State. The population comprised of 276 parents of the abducted, 100 parents in the community and three counselors. The total population of the study is 376. Taro Yamane's formula was used to select 200 respondents but 180 retrieved for analysis while all the counselors were selected. This was a survey research and data was collected using questionnaire and interview. Data was analyzed descriptively using tables, percentages, frequencies and plates. The study discovered that the parents of the abducted Chibok Girls do not blamed themselves over the incidence of the abduction but blaming the government over weak security and poor response when they incident occurred. The parents were not affected by the incidence in the form of loss of sexual appetite to produce more children and their eating habits not affected. The study equally showed that majority of the parents are not in the state of despair as to what the future brings and do not feel lonely as a result of the abduction. The study concludes that the abduction of the girls have not psychologically affected the majority of the parents however, the few that were psychologically unbalanced have been restored as a result psycho-social intervention by the counselors attached to them by the government and Non-Governmental organization. The study found out that the abduction of the Girls has distorted the pattern of the sleep of the parents of the girls. The study recommends among others that the government should open a dialogue channel in Chibok Community in order to heal wounds.*

**Keywords:** *Abduction, Boko Haram, Chibok, Girls, Parents, Psychology*

## Introduction

Abduction is varied and a developing phenomenon, but it is most common in countries with high levels of crime and corruption, poorly resourced or trained police personnel, a weak judiciary, and/or a history of

political or social instability and conflict. This phenomenon of abduction has found expression in Nigeria. Nigeria was ranked as the 6<sup>th</sup> of the top 10 Kidnap Rated Countries in the world, coming after Mexico, Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela and Philippines (Clayton, 2004) but by 2012, she has emerged as the 4<sup>th</sup> of the Top Ten Kidnap for Ransom nations in the world.

Since 2009 when Boko Haram initially started its insurgency and the aftermath of the killing of Mohammed Yusuf the leader of the sect, the activities of the sect have continued unabated despite the effort of the government to curtail the heinous crime of the sect, over 10,000 people have been killed by Boko Haram (Premium Times, 2015). Most of the operations of the sect are concentrated in the North-East of Nigeria. The sect has used kidnapping and raping of women as a weapon of war. The rural dwellers are the most victims of the sect atrocities and the implications of the sect insurgency fall on the ordinary Nigerians.

Kidnapping has become one of the most dangerous and traumatic threats to any person living in the comfort and safety of a secure region. Each kidnapping incident clearly tears at the hearts of families, companies and individuals, and has a significant impact on society in general. The impact of such trauma and the capacity of individuals and companies to adapt, manage and cope with such devastating events are crucial if the risks of long-term effects are to be mitigated. Of significant note also is the emotional effect of such on the individual and families if the incident is unresolved in the long term. This greatly disrupts the family routine, social interaction and the employment capabilities of some families (Akhigbe and Koleoso, 2013). This study presents the psychological impact of kidnapping on the parents of the kidnapped-for-ransom victim in Chibok in Borno State of Nigeria. Psychological assessment shows that the victim and parents suffer both physical and psychological harm as a result of the negative experiences. The evaluation of psychological harm suffered by the parents is important for planning treatment and giving recommendations to prevent revictimisation and avoiding the making of new victims (Temmerman, 2001).

Chibok Government Girls school was established as a secondary school in 2004. The school is mainly for girls. However, as a result of Boko Haram attack and failure of boys to continue schooling in the hinterlands, in 2013, the school was allowed to admit boys who are only day students while the girls are on boarding. On April 14, 2014, 276 girls were kidnapped by the Boko Haram sect from the government secondary school. The first

escape happened that very night. As the truck full of frightened schoolgirls sped deeper into Boko Haram territory, two sisters whose names have not been released, clasped hands and jumped off together. Other girls followed suit on that night as one of the trucks conveying them broke down. Between April 14 and April 15, 2014, other girls escaped their captors. In total, it is accepted generally that 57 girls escaped over those first few months after the kidnap. On May 17, 2016, Amina Ali Darsha Nkeki was found by members of a vigilante group at the edge of a Boko Haram stronghold after fleeing during an attack on the militants' camp. She had a four-month-old girl with her, and a man she said was her husband. After Amina Ali's freedom, the Boko Haram sect released videos twice to taunt the Nigerian government and to show that they still had the girls in their custody. On October 13, 2016, 21 of the Chibok girls were released.

The kidnapping of the Chibok girls has brought social, economic as well as health consequences to the community. This impact is most felt by the parents and relatives of the abductees who have received only little or no attention with respect to their psychological wellbeing. With reports of deaths and several undocumented morbidity among these relatives, this will continue to get worst as most of the abducted girls are yet to regain their freedom.

Although several humanitarian activities have provided succor to the affected community and especially the parents of the abductees, this is usually in form of financial and material needs. The social, economic and psychological impact of kidnapping a loved one is enormous and studies have shown that relatives of kidnapped persons, whether released or not, also suffer distress. However, the psychological impact of the abduction on parents or guardians of the abductees has not been documented. This study therefore examines the psychological impact of abduction of Chibok Girls on the parents in Chibok Community of Borno State.

### **Psychological Impact of Abduction**

Abduction is a growing global epidemic with no realistic solution. It therefore has attracted the attention of different fields of study. Sociologists, social psychologists, clinical psychologists, social workers, philosophers and economists have begun to research into not only the causes and consequences of kidnapping, but other useful correlates of the concept. Within the realm of psychology therefore it is also important that the significant psychological and psychiatric correlates of abduction among

victims and even among loved ones are found out. Abduction is one of the most psychologically damaging crimes of all. Victims typically take many years to heal from the psychological wounds inflicted upon them, and some never completely recover. Kidnappings cause deep emotional and mental scars that leave victims to battle through issues of trust, independence, love, sex, respect, and a litany of others (Abamara and Dike, 2018).

In general terms, the psychological impact of being taken hostage and on the parents or community is similar to that of being exposed to other trauma, including terrorist incidents and disasters for adults and children (Petersen, 2008). Typical adult reactions include: Cognitive: impaired memory and concentration; confusion and disorientation; intrusive thoughts ('flashbacks') and memories; denial (i.e. that the event has happened); hypervigilance and hyperarousal (a state of feeling too aroused, with a profound fear of another incident); Emotional: shock and numbness; fear and anxiety (but panic is not common); (Pynoos, Sorenson, and Steinberg, 1993) helplessness and hopelessness; dissociation (feeling numb and 'switched off' emotionally); anger (at anybody – perpetrators, themselves and the authorities); anhedonia (loss of pleasure in doing that which was previously pleasurable); depression (a reaction to loss); guilt (e.g. at having survived if others died, and for being taken hostage); (3) Social: withdrawal; irritability; avoidance (of reminders of the event). Denial (i.e. a complete or partial failure to acknowledge what has really happened) has often been maligned as a response to extreme stress, but it has survival value (at least in the short term) by allowing the individual a delayed period during which he/she has time to adjust to a painful reality. For example, some hostages in the Moscow theatre siege initially believed that the appearance of the heavily armed Chechnyan rebels was part of the military musical performance (Kagee and Del, 2003).

Two extreme reactions have also been noted on the sufferers namely, 'frozen fright' and 'psychological infantilism' (Kagee and Del, 2003). The former refers to a paralysis of the normal emotional reactivity of the individual, and the latter reaction is characterized by regressed behaviour such as clinging and excessive dependence on the captors.

Extended periods of captivity may also lead to 'learned helplessness' on the parents in which individuals come to believe that no matter what they do to improve their circumstances, nothing is effective. This is reminiscent of the automaton-like state reported by concentration

camp victims ('walking corpses'). Genuine psychopathology on the parent has also been noted (Nwogu, 2008).

A follow-up study of ransom victims in Sardinia found that about 50% suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and about 30% experienced major depression (Umeagbasi, 2010). The International Classification of Mental and Behavioural Disorders (ICD-2010) also recognizes the 'Enduring personality change after a catastrophic experience' as a possible chronic outcome after a hostage incident on the hostage and the parents. This condition is characterized by a hostile or mistrustful attitude; social withdrawal and estrangement; feelings of emptiness or hopelessness; a chronic feeling of being 'on edge' as if constantly threatened. For the diagnosis to be made the symptoms must have endured for at least two years.

The severe and sustained impact on parents of the abducted children is demonstrated by several abductions, including that of the parents involved in the Chowchilla incident in San Francisco confirmed, after that incident (in which 26 children and their driver were abducted and held in a vehicle underground) all the parents displayed signs of PTSD, and some symptoms worsened over time (for instance, shame, pessimism and 'death dreams') (Clayton, 2005)

Denial, 'frozen fright', 'psychological infantilism and 'learned helplessness' are not age specific. Parents may also display: refusal to allow children to go back to school or loss of interest in studies, dependent and regressed behaviour, preoccupation with the event, playing at being the 'rescuer', stubborn and oppositional behaviour, and risk-taking. The impact can be particularly serious if the children have been detained over an extended period and if the incident entailed a breach of trust (Ralph, 2008).

As yet there is no clear delineation of all factors which conduce to an adverse outcome following being taken hostage. However, there is evidence that woman (especially younger women), more than men, are at risk of such an outcome, as are those of low educational level, and those whose children are exposed to an extended period of captivity.

### **Stress Response Theory**

The stress response theory by Horowitz (1976, 1986) shows the relationship between traumatic event and human sanity. The key idea of this theory is that a traumatic event affects cognition of an individual and, depending on how such individual handles all the various thoughts within

him, will determine if the individual would be diagnosed as having PTSD or not. According to Horowitz, failure to process the trauma information leads to persistent post-traumatic reactions as the information remains in active memory and continues to intrude into consciousness in the form of intrusions, flashbacks, and nightmares. For instance, in the case of Chibok girls kidnapped by the Boko Haram sect, as at the time of the kidnap, these children would have diverse thought running through their minds and if not guided they might be at psychiatric risks. This explains why Machel (1996) recommends speedy measures to promote the psychological recovery of violated children as regards violence. With WHO (in press) emphasizing the economic and social burden caused by PTSD and how this could be significantly reduced if PTSD symptoms are identified earlier and appropriate cognitive and behavioural intervention provided.

Any traumatic event influences an individual's total wellbeing (school children and their parents) as their inability to match thoughts and memories of trauma would result in nightmares and if not timely managed, can lead to a psychiatric case. Kidnapping has both long-term and short-term effects on individuals, families, society, and the state at large, as it is one of the most psychologically damaging crimes of all. Victims of kidnap often take many years to heal from the psychological wound inflicted upon them while others never completely recover. Kidnappings cause deep emotional and mental scars that leave victims to battle through issues of trust, independence, love, sex, respect, and a litany of others.

Drawing from the stress response theory, individual's reaction to traumatic events involve the following: cognition (intrusion thoughts; impaired memory; denial; flashbacks and confusion), emotional (shock and numbness; fear and anxiety; helplessness, anger at anybody (perpetrators, themselves and the authorities); depression and anhedonia (loss of pleasure in what was initially pleasurable) and social withdrawal (isolation, irritability and denial).

This theory when applied to the case of the psychological impact of the abduction on the parents of the girls suggests that the abduction is meant to cause imbalance to the parents. The theory suggests that parents were to experience intrusions, flashback and nightmares. The parents will battle through issues of trust, independence, love, sex, and respect. This theory guided the analysis of the data collected by the study.

### **Methodology**

This was a survey research. Data were collected from primary source using questionnaire and interview. The population of the study comprises of parents of the abducted girls, parents in Chibok Community and Counselors and handlers of the Parents in Chibok. The study population is 276 parents of the abducted and 100 parents in the community. The total population of the study is 376. The population of the Counselors and handlers of the Parents is 10. The sample size of the study is 200; 96 Parents of abducted girls (Released) of the abducted girls, 66 Parents of abducted girls (Still in captivity), and 38 parents from the host community. This was obtained through Taro Yamanes formular. Proportionate and convenient sampling technique was used to select the sample. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze data collected for this study. Data generated were analyzed using the SPSS version 20.0. Data was presented using frequency distribution tables with relevant descriptive statistics like percentages, mean and standard deviation. The Statistical significance is set at  $p < 0.05$  for all tests.

### **Data Presentation and Discussion of Results**

This section presents data collected from 96 Parents of abducted girls (Released) of the abducted girls, 66 Parents of abducted girls (Still in captivity), and 38 parents from the host community totaling 200. A total of two hundred(200) questionnaires were distributed and one hundred and eighty (180) were retrieved as valid and used for data analysis. The data is presented below.

#### **Abduction and Adequate Rest**

The researcher sought to know from the respondents the rate at which they sleep by asking the question, how often do you sleep after the abduction of the girls?

**Table 1: Abduction and Adequate Rest**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Sometimes	68	37.8	37.8	37.8
Always	43	23.9	23.9	61.7
Not at all	69	38.4	38.4	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

Source: Field Survey, 2018

Table 1 shows that 68(37.8%), 43(23.9%) and 69(38.4%) of the respondents indicated sometimes, always and not at all as the rate at which they sleep after the abduction of the Chibok girls. Analyses of the table showed that majority of the respondents who are parents have had their sleep affected by the incidence of Boko haram abduction of their girls.

#### **Prior to Abduction and Adequacy of Sleep**

The researcher sought to know from the respondents how often they sleep before the abduction of the girls?

**Table 2: Prior to Abduction and Adequacy of Sleep**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Sometimes	17	9.4	9.4	9.4
Always	146	81.2	81.2	89.4
Not at all	17	9.4	9.4	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

Source: Field Survey, 2018

Table 2 shows that 17 (9.4%), 146(81.2%) and 17(9.4%) of the respondents pointed out sometimes, always and not at all as the degree of sleep before the abduction of the girls. Analysis of the result pointed out that majority of the parents has quality sleep before the abduction of the Chibok girls.

#### **Abduction and Weak Energy**

The study enquired to know from the respondents whether there is a feeling of weakness in energy and cannot work fast.

**Table 3: Abduction and Weak Energy**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not at all	83	46.1	46.1	46.1
A little bit	40	22.2	22.2	68.3
Quite a bit	43	23.9	23.9	92.2
Extremely	14	7.8	7.8	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

Source: Field Survey, 2018



Table 3 shows that the majority of the respondents do not have weakness in terms of lacking energy that warrant them not to be able to work fast and as scheduled. This is shown by 83(46.1%) response rate of not at all.

### **Abduction and Self Blame**

The researcher sought to know from the respondents whether they blamed themselves for what happened to their children.

**Table 4: Blaming yourself for things**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not at all	52	28.9	28.9	28.9
A little bit	59	32.8	32.8	61.7
Quite a bit	63	35.0	35.0	96.7
Extremely	6	3.4	3.4	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

Source: Field Survey, 2018

Table 4 shows that 52(28.9%), 59(32.8%), 63(35%) and 6(3.4%) indicated not at all, a little bit, quite a bit and extremely as a rate of blame over the abduction of the Chibok School girls. Inference from the data showed majority of the parents do not blame themselves over the incidence of the abduction but blaming the government over weak security and poor response when the incident occurred.

### **Abduction and Lost of Sexual Appetite**

The researcher enquired to know from the respondents whether loss of sexual appetite has occurred in order to forestall procreation of more children as a result of the abduction of the girls by Chibok Girls.

**Table 5: Loss of sexual pleasure or interest**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not at all	45	25.0	25.0	25.0
A little bit	77	42.8	42.8	67.8
Quite a bit	53	29.4	29.4	97.2
Extremely	5	2.8	2.8	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

Source: Field Survey, 2018

Tables 5 showed that majority of the respondents were not affected by the incidence in the form of loss of sexual appetite to produce more children. This is shown by the response rate of 45(25%) as not at all, 77(42.8%) as a little bit, 53(29.4%) as quite a bit and 5(2.8%) as extremely

#### **Abduction and Poor Appetite**

The study enquired to know from the respondents whether abduction had caused poor eating habit to them.

**Table 6: Poor appetite**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not at all	41	22.8	22.8	22.8
A little bit	47	26.1	26.1	48.9
Quite a bit	71	39.4	39.4	88.3
Extremely	21	11.7	11.7	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

Source: Field Survey, 2018

Table 6 shows that 41(22.8%), 47(26.1%), 71(39.4%) and 21(11.7%) indicated not at all, a little bit, quite a bit and extremely respectively as the degree of loss of appetite to food. Inference from the table showed that abduction of the girls has not affected the eating habits of the parents.

#### **Abduction and Feeling of Hopelessness**

The researcher sought to know from the respondents whether the parents are having feeling of hopelessness for the children as a result of the abduction of the Chibok girls.

**Table 7: Feeling hopeless about the future**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not at all	99	55.0	55.0	55.0
A little bit	24	13.3	13.3	68.3
Quite a bit	32	17.8	17.8	86.1
Extremely	25	13.9	13.9	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

Source: Field Survey, 2018

Table 7 showed that 99(55%) of the respondents indicated not at all as a feeling of hopelessness about the future. Others indicated a little bit 24(13.3%), quite a bit 32(17.8%) and extremely 25(13.9%). Inference from the table showed that majority of the respondents is not in the state of despair as to what the future brings.

### **Abduction and feeling of Loneliness**

The researcher sought to know from the respondents whether the parents as a result of abduction have the feeling of left alone in the rescue of the girls that were abducted.

**Table8: Feeling lonely**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not at all	106	58.9	58.9	58.9
A little bit	25	13.9	13.9	72.8
Quite a bit	28	15.6	15.6	88.3
Extremely	21	13.9	13.9	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

Source: Field Survey, 2018

Table 8 shows that 106(58.9%), 25(13.9%), 28 (15.6%) and 21(11.7%) indicated not at all, a little bit, quite a bit and extremely respectively as their response rate as to feeling of loneliness over the abduction of the Chibok girls. Analyses of the table showed that majority of the parents do not feel lonely.

### **Abduction and Committing of Suicide**

The study enquired to know from the parents of the Chibok girls and some community members whether the parents of the girls as a result of the abduction have had the thought of committing suicide.

**Table9: Thought of committing suicide**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not at all	134	74.4	74.4	74.4
A little bit	16	8.9	8.9	83.3
Quite a bit	21	11.7	11.7	95.0
Extremely	9	5.0	5.0	100.0

<b>Total</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
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Source: Field Survey, 2018

Table 9 shows that majority of the respondents pointed out that they do not have the thought of committing suicide as a result of the abduction of the girls which is indicated by 134(74.4%) as not at all. The study also showed that 16(8.9%), 21(11.7%), and 9(5.0%) of the respondents indicated a little bit, quite a bit, and extremely respectively as thought of committing suicide as a result of the abduction of the girls.



**Plate 1: Parent of the Abducted Girls**

Plate 1 shows the picture of the parent and the researcher. The parent here said she want to commit suicide as a result of the abduction of her daughter by Boko Haram. The community members are always with her to avert such tendencies.

### **Abduction and Nightmares**

The study enquired to know from the respondents whether they suffer from recurring nightmares as a result of the abduction of the Chibok girls.

**Table 10: Abduction and Nightmares**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	43	23.9	23.9	23.9
No	137	76.2	76.2	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

Source: Field Survey, 2018

Table 10 shows that 43(23.9%) indicated that they had nightmares while 137(76.2%) did not experience any form of nightmare associated with the abduction. Inferences from the table indicated that abduction had not caused nightmares for the parents of the girls.

### **Abduction and Anomie**

The researcher sought to know from the respondents whether there is the feeling of detachment or withdrawal from the people as a result of the abduction of the girls.

**Table 11: Feeling detached or withdrawn from people**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not at all	118	65.6	65.6	65.6
A little bit	28	15.6	15.6	81.1
Moderately	5	2.8	2.8	83.9
Quite a bit	20	11.1	11.1	95.0
Extremely	9	5.0	5.0	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

Source: Field Survey, 2018

Table 11 showed that 118(65.6%), 28(15.6%), 5(2.8%), 20(11.1%) and 9(5%) indicated not at all, a little, moderately, quite a bit and extremely respectively as the response to the degree of the feeling of detachment or withdrawal from the people. Analyses of the table showed that majority of the respondents do not have any feeling of detachment as a result the abduction of the Chibok girls.

The study also found out that Boko haram abduction of the girls has affected the rate at which the parents sleep. The parents used to have quality sleep before the abduction of the Chibok girls. The parents do not blame themselves over the incidence of the abduction but the government over weak security and poor response when the incident occurred. The parents have not lost the appetite for sex and food which has not affected the eating habits of the parents. The counselor of the parents in an interview showed that before now, most of the parents were psychologically disturbed such that they loss the appetite to eat and could not sleep. But as a result of interventions and psycho-social support, these parents have been stabilized. This is supported by the work of Petersen(2008) that most people whose wards either killed or abducted are usually affected psychologically and this may be for a very long period of time.

Majority of the parents are not in the state of despair as to what the future brings and do not have the thought of committing suicide as a result of the abduction of the girls. The abduction had not caused nightmares for the parents of the girls and majority of the parents do not have any feeling of detachment as a result the abduction of the Chibok girls.

### **Conclusion**

Boko haram abduction of the girls has affected the rate at which the parents of the girls sleep. The parents used to have quality sleep before the abduction of the Chibok girls. The parents do not blame themselves over the incidence of the abduction but the government over weak security and poor response when the incident occurred. The parents have not lost the appetite for sex and food which has not affected the eating habits of the parents. Majority of the parents are not in the state of despair as to what the future brings and do not have the thought of committing suicide as a result of the abduction of the girls. The abduction had not caused nightmares for the parents of the girls and majority of the parents do not have any feeling of detachment as a result the abduction of the Chibok girls. The parents have not been psychologically thrown out of balanced by the abduction of their girls as a result of psycho-social therapy, which shows the strength of the Chibok people.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the conclusions, the following recommendations were drawn.

- i. The government has to formulate a policy that will create an avenue among the people in the community especially the parents for the provision of psychological palliatives.
- ii. The government should make sure that it improves the quality of life of Parents of the Chibok Girls physically and psychologically.
- iii. There should be mass mobilization by the stakeholders in the community to ensure that the people are assured of safety during social gatherings.
- iv. The government should open a dialogue channel in Chibok Community in order to heal wounds caused by the abduction.

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