



## Psychological Impact Of Kidnapping On Social Reintegration And Academic Pursuits Of Female Undergraduates In Zamfara State

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### **Keywords:**

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### **Abstract**

*Kidnapping and banditry have become pervasive in northern Nigeria, severely disrupting the lives of vulnerable communities including students in both pre-tertiary and tertiary institutions, particularly Zamfara State. However, research on their psychological impact on female undergraduate students is lacking. To fill this gap, this study investigated the psychological impact of kidnapping on female undergraduate students in Zamfara State, focusing on their social reintegration and academic pursuits. The study adopted a qualitative research design. Seven female undergraduates of Federal University Gusau who had recently been released after prolonged captivity participated in the study. A combination of purposive and snowball sampling techniques was used to select participants based on availability, willingness, and ability to provide detailed accounts. Data was collected through structured interviews. Thematic analysis revealed profound psychological trauma, including symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression. Social reintegration challenges found in the study include stigmatization and alienation, while academic difficulties involve concentration, memory issues, and decreased motivation. The study recommends implementing comprehensive psychological support programs within educational institutions located in high-risk locations like Zamfara State, including professional counseling and peer support groups, to address the long-term psychological effects and facilitate better social and academic reintegration of the victims.*

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<b>Abstrak</b>	
<b>Kata kunci:</b> pencapaian akademis; mahasiswa; dampak psikologis penculikan; reintegrasi sosial	<p>Penculikan dan bandit telah menjadi hal yang merajalela di wilayah Nigeria utara, sangat mengganggu kehidupan komunitas rentan termasuk siswa di institusi pra-perguruan tinggi dan perguruan tinggi, terutama di Negara Bagian Zamfara. Meskipun begitu, penelitian tentang dampak psikologisnya terhadap mahasiswa masih kurang. Untuk mengisi kekurangan ini, studi ini menyelidiki dampak psikologis penculikan pada mahasiswa di Zamfara dengan fokus pada reintegrasi sosial dan pencapaian akademis mereka. Penelitian ini mengadopsi desain penelitian kualitatif. Tujuh mahasiswa Universitas Federal Gusau yang baru saja dibebaskan setelah penahanan berkepanjangan berpartisipasi dalam penelitian ini. Kombinasi teknik <i>sampling purposive</i> dan <i>snowball</i> digunakan untuk memilih peserta berdasarkan ketersediaan, kesediaan, dan kemampuan mereka untuk memberikan cerita yang mendetail. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara terstruktur. Analisis tematik mengungkapkan trauma psikologis yang mendalam, termasuk gejala gangguan stres pascatrauma (PTSD), kecemasan, dan depresi. Tantangan reintegrasi sosial yang ditemukan dalam studi ini meliputi stigma dan alienasi, sementara kesulitan akademis melibatkan masalah konsentrasi, memori, dan motivasi yang menurun. Studi ini merekomendasikan implementasi programme dukungan psikologis yang komprehensif di institusi pendidikan yang terletak di lokasi berisiko tinggi seperti Zamfara, termasuk konseling profesional dan kelompok dukungan sebaya, untuk mengatasi efek psikologis jangka panjang dan memfasilitasi reintegrasi sosial dan akademis yang lebih baik bagi para korban.</p>

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## INTRODUCTION

### *Background Of The Study*

Nigeria is facing significant security challenges, particularly in the northern regions, where kidnapping and banditry have become rampant. Criminal activities

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have devastating impacts on individuals and communities, disrupting social order and economic activities (Jacob, Okwelogu, Enyinnaya, & Mohammed, 2021; Owagbemi & Olaseinde, 2021; Yunusa et al., 2022). Female undergraduate students, who are among the vulnerable populations, often face the brunt of these attacks. According to the *Global Terrorism Index (2019)*, Nigeria has among the highest rates of terrorism and related criminal activities, with kidnapping being a prominent threat. This phenomenon has significant implications for the psychological well-being, social integration, and academic pursuits of the affected community.

The frequency and severity of kidnapping incidents have increased in recent years, posing a major threat to the safety and well-being of citizens, particularly young women pursuing higher education. Studies have shown that victims of kidnapping experience profound psychological trauma, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Lawal, Audu, & Isma'il, 2018; Lawal, Isma'il, & Audu, 2018; Yakasai, Ayinla, & Yakasai, 2022), anxiety (Ronke & Benjamin, 2024), and depression (Tanimu, 2023; Umar, Aliyu, & Hamza, 2022). These psychological conditions can have long-lasting impacts, not only on the victims' mental health but also on their social relationships and academic performance.

The social reintegration of kidnapping victims is often complex and challenging. Victims may experience stigmatization and social isolation, making it difficult for them to rejoin their communities and continue education (Ayuba, Maduagwu, & Abdullahi, 2022; Chukwuzuluoke, Nnamdi, Ogechukwu, & Obikeze, 2021; Usman, 2024). The fear and trauma associated with their experiences can lead to social avoidance and a sense of alienation. Moreover, the disruption of their education can have significant academic consequences, as victims may struggle to catch up with their studies and maintain their academic performance (Amechiokeke-Ezeanyanwu, Ugwuogo, & Ukamaka, 2024).

Given the increasing prevalence of kidnapping and banditry in Nigeria (e.g. Dami, 2021; Isma'il, & Abdullahi, 2023; Ismaila, Ibrahim, & Mohammed, 2022; Kanu et al., 2024; Muhammad, Abdulmalik, & Jobe, 2023; Yohana, Joel, Ahmad, & Saudia, 2023), there is a pressing need to understand the specific challenges faced by female

undergraduate students who have been victims of these crimes. While previous research predominantly focused on the economic and security dimensions of these issues, there is a lack of comprehensive studies exploring the personal and academic impacts on victims. This study aimed to fill this gap by investigating the psychological effects, social reintegration experiences, academic challenges, and intervention needs of female undergraduate students who have been victims of kidnapping and banditry in Nigeria, with a particular focus on Zamfara State, a high-risk area.

### *Literature Review*

Kidnapping and banditry have become endemic in Nigeria, particularly in the northern regions. They pose significant threats to the security and socio-economic stability of the nation (Verjee & Kwaja, 2021). Kidnapping for ransom, often targeting vulnerable populations such as women, children, and students, has been a lucrative enterprise for bandits (Adamu, Rashidu, & Andil, 2022; Isma'il, & Abdullahi, 2023; Olulowo, Babawale, & Anani, 2021; Omuya, 2023). According to the *Global Terrorism Index (2019)*, Nigeria has a high number of kidnapping cases, with a notable increase in incidents over the past decade. Factors like marginalization (Mustapha, 2021), poverty (Toluh, 2021), unemployment (Olulowo, Babawale, & Anani, 2021; Osimen & Daudu, 2022), and the proliferation of arms (Kums & Kwede, 2023; Rosenje et al., 2022; Ruwah, Faruk, & Tambuwal, 2023) have contributed to the prevalence of such crimes. The northern regions, especially states like Kaduna, Zamfara, and Katsina, have been hit the hardest (Adamu, Rashidu, & Andil, 2022; Alokun & Atafu, 2022; Kums & Kwede, 2023; Okanezi & Ogeh, 2023). Reports indicate that thousands have been abducted, with many held in captivity for extended periods (Human Rights Watch, 2020). The impact extends beyond immediate victims – affecting families, communities, and the socio-economic landscape – creating an atmosphere of fear and insecurity and disrupting daily life and economic activities (International Crisis Group, 2021; Owagbemi & Olaseinde, 2021; Verjee & Kwaja, 2021).

The psychological impact on victims is profound and multifaceted. Victims often experience severe mental health issues, including PTSD, anxiety, and depression. Studies have shown that kidnapping leads to long-term psychological distress,

persisting even after release (Afu, Oguche, Sammani, & Baba, 2023; Ronke & Benjamin, 2024; Tanimu, 2023; Umar, Aliyu, & Hamza, 2022; Yakasai, Ayinla, & Yakasai, 2022). Yakasai, Ayinla, & Yakasai (2022) studied PTSD among Nigerian kidnapping victims, noting that abduction and the uncertainty of release significantly contribute to PTSD symptoms, e.g., flashbacks, nightmares, severe anxiety, and uncontrollable thoughts. Exposure to physical violence, threats, and abuse during captivity exacerbates the psychological impact (Amnesty International, 2020; Umar, Aliyu, & Hamza, 2022).

Stigmatization is a major barrier to reintegration, with communities viewing victims with either suspicion or pity, making it difficult to return to previous social roles. The psychological toll on female victims can be particularly severe due to gender-based violence (Abdulyakeen & Mumuni, 2024). Female kidnapping victims often face sexual violence, adding another layer of trauma (Umar, Aliyu, & Hamza, 2022). This affects their mental health, sense of identity, and self-worth. The stigma associated with sexual violence further isolates victims, making it difficult for them to seek help and support (Onyemelukwe, 2020).

The trauma caused by their experience, coupled with stigma, can lead to social isolation and alienation (Akpan, 2019). Victims find the social reintegration process challenging. The fear of judgment and rejection prevents victims from seeking crucial social support. Stigmatization is a major barrier to reintegration, with communities viewing victims with suspicion or pity, making it difficult to return to previous social roles. Female victims face additional stigma related to gender-based violence during captivity (Abdulyakeen & Mumuni, 2024; Ede et al., 2021). The fear of judgment and rejection prevents victims from seeking crucial social support.

The lack of effective support systems exacerbates difficulty in social reintegration. Many victims do not receive the necessary psychological and social support, leading to prolonged isolation and distress, hindering their ability to rebuild their lives (Olumide & Adebayo, 2020). For female undergraduate students, captivity results in significant interruptions to their studies, causing them to fall behind and miss important academic milestones (Ayuba, Maduagwu, & Abdullahi, 2022; Offor, Chukwuemeka, & Nwaru, 2023; Umar, 2022). After release, these students must catch

up on missed work while dealing with psychological trauma (Omuya, 2023). Concentration difficulties, memory problems, and reduced motivation are common issues affecting academic performance (Idowu & Eze, 2024). The pressure to keep up with peers and the fear of falling behind also increase stress and anxiety.

Academic challenges are compounded by the lack of support services. Many universities lack the resources to provide psychological counseling and academic support to students who have experienced traumatic events. This lack of support impedes academic recovery and contributes to feelings of hopelessness and despair (Akpan, 2019). Interventions and support systems for kidnapping and banditry victims in Nigeria vary in their effectiveness. Government initiatives, NGOs, and community-based programs play roles in providing support (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Government-led interventions often focus on security and financial compensation but are insufficient in addressing psychological and social needs.

NGOs and community-based organizations have been more proactive in addressing victims' psychological and social needs. Organizations like Amnesty International and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) provide trauma counseling, support groups, and advocacy services (Amnesty International, 2020). These organizations bridge gaps in government interventions, offering holistic support, including mental health care, social reintegration programs, and educational support. Establishing trauma counseling centers in affected regions has been proven effective too. These centers offer specialized psychological support, helping victims cope with trauma and facilitating reintegration. Studies show that professional counseling services significantly improve victims' psychological well-being and enhance reintegration (Afu, Oguiche, Sammani, & Baba, 2023; Onyemelukwe, 2020; Tanimu, 2023; Umar, Aliyu, & Hamza, 2022).

According to Ogunode, Ayeni, & Olorundare (2024), educational institutions also play a critical role in supporting victims. Based on the study, universities can implement policies and programs for academic and mental health support. Access to academic advisors, tutoring services, and flexible study schedules help students catch up on missed work and reduce academic stress. On-campus counseling centers can



offer psychological support to students in need (Olumide & Adebayo, 2020). Despite these efforts, significant challenges remain in ensuring comprehensive support for kidnapping and banditry victims. Limited resources, inadequate funding, and stigma associated with seeking psychological help are major barriers to effective intervention. Moreover, ongoing security challenges in Nigeria complicate the implementation and sustainability of support programs (International Crisis Group, 2021).

### ***Research Gap***

Despite the growing prevalence of kidnapping and banditry in Nigeria, particularly targeting female undergraduate students, there is a significant gap in research addressing the personal and academic impacts on these victims. Existing studies predominantly focused on the economic and security aspects of these issues, largely neglecting the profound psychological trauma, social reintegration challenges, and academic disruptions faced by affected students. There were also few studies exploring the experiences of female undergraduates who had been victims of kidnapping and banditry.

### ***Novelty Of The Research***

The novelty of this study lies in its exploration of the multifaceted impacts of kidnapping and banditry on female undergraduate students in Nigeria. By exploring psychological, social, and academic dimensions, this research provides insights to describe support mechanisms and intervention strategies tailored to these victims. Moreover, focusing on Federal University Gusau located in Zamfara, a high-risk state, the study provides a critical case study, stressing the urgent need for interventions in similarly affected states. This exploration and specific geographical focus distinguish the study from its predecessors, emphasizing its contribution to existing knowledge.

### ***Rationale Of The Study***

Understanding the personal and academic impacts of kidnapping and banditry on female undergraduate students is crucial for developing effective support mechanisms to aid their recovery and academic continuity. This study addressed a significant research gap by exploring the psychological effects, social reintegration experiences, and academic challenges faced by these victims. The findings will

contribute to the development of interventions and support services that mitigate the negative impacts of kidnapping and banditry on female undergraduate students in Nigeria. By focusing on Zamfara State, the study aimed to provide insights into the specific needs of victims in high-risk areas, thereby informing policy and practice at both institutional and governmental levels.

Table 1.

Student Kidnapping Incidents At Federal University Gusau (FUGUS), Zamfara State

Source: Authors (2024)

Year	Description	Source
2023	Two female students were abducted by armed bandits from an off-campus hostel in Sabon Gida community close to FUGUS main campus on April 2, 2023.	(Premium Times, 2023)
2023	Bandits kidnapped five students on June 16, 2023, leading to student protests and road blockades.	(ICIR, 2023)
2023	Suspected armed bandits abducted no fewer than 25 students (predominantly female students) from the Sabon Gida community near the FUGUS campus on September 22, 2023. Shortly, security forces rescued six of the abductees (all females). Twenty-three were later released on April 15, 2024, after seven months in captivity.	(Angbulu et al., 2023; Premium Times, 2024)
2023	On Saturday, October 14, 2023, some students were reportedly kidnapped from an off-campus hostel in Sabon Garin Damba in Gusau, a few kilometers from the university's main campus. Security forces rescued four students during a gunfight with the armed bandits.	(ICIR, 2023)

Table 1 describes several kidnapping incidents at the Federal University Gusau, Zamfara State. Such incidents stress the need for research into the impacts of these traumatic events especially on female students.

### *Purposes/Research Questions Of The Study*

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate the multifaceted impacts of kidnapping and banditry on female undergraduate students in Zamfara State, Nigeria, with a particular focus on victims attending Federal University Gusau. The research aimed to: 1) explore the psychological effects experienced by these students, 2) examine their perceptions of social reintegration into university life, 3) investigate the academic challenges they face post-abduction, and 4) identify their perceived intervention needs.

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Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions: 1) What are the psychological effects of kidnapping and banditry on female undergraduates in Zamfara State? 2) How do these students perceive their social reintegration into university life at Federal University Gusau? 3) What academic challenges do they encounter after experiencing such traumatic events? and 4) What are the intervention needs they identify as crucial for their recovery and academic success?

## **METHOD**

### ***Research Design***

This study employed a qualitative research design since the qualitative method allows for an in-depth exploration of participants' lived experiences, perceptions, and meanings attached to their traumatic experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). Specifically, the study utilized the descriptive phenomenology method. This approach focuses on describing the common experiences of the participants to understand the essence of the phenomenon.

### ***Sampling Technique And Research Sample***

The target population of the study was female undergraduate students at Federal University Gusau who had been victims of kidnapping and banditry in Zamfara State. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic and the need for a detailed understanding of the victims' experiences, a purposive sampling technique was employed. Participants were selected based on their availability, willingness to participate, and their ability to provide detailed accounts of their experiences. Purposive sampling was complemented by snowball sampling to reach a broader range of participants. First participants were identified and then asked to refer other individuals who had similar experiences, facilitating the identification of additional respondents. This resulted in a total of seven participants.

### ***Instrument Of Measurement***

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to explore participants' experiences in-depth while maintaining the flexibility to probe into specific aspects that arise during the interview (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The interviews were guided by a set of open-ended interview

guides designed to explore the psychological effects, social reintegration experiences, and academic challenges faced by the participants. Examples of interview questions included were "Can you describe your emotional state during and after the kidnapping?", "How has the incident affected your mental health?", "What challenges have you faced in resuming social life?", "How has the kidnapping impacted your academic performance?", and "What support have you received from your university?". The interviews were conducted face-to-face and via video conferencing, depending on the participants' preferences and availability. Each interview lasted approximately 45-60 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' consent.

#### ***Data Analysis Technique***

The study employed both thematic analysis and Moustakas' (1994) descriptive phenomenological method. Thematic analysis involved familiarization with the data, coding, theme development, and theme refinement (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Moustakas' method included epoché (bracketing biases), phenomenological reduction (identifying core essences), imaginative variation (exploring different perspectives), and synthesis of meanings and essences.

#### ***Data Validation Technique***

The study employed member checking as a data validation method (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016; Doyle, 2007). The preliminary interpretations and findings were shared with the participants to verify the accuracy and relevance of the data collected. Participants were invited to review excerpts from their interviews and provide feedback on whether these excerpts accurately reflected their experiences. Their comments and corrections were incorporated into the final analysis to ensure that the interpretations were aligned with participants' perspectives and enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the study findings.

#### ***Ethical Approval***

This study adhered to ethical guidelines to ensure the protection and well-being of the participants. All participants provided informed consent before participating in the study. They were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, with their identities being protected through assignment of codes (INF1, INF2, INF3...INF7) in reporting.

Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Research Results

Table 2.  
Demographic Of Research Informants

Code	Age	Level	Course of Study	Times Kidnapped	Duration in Captivity	Present Status
INF1	20	200	B.Sc. Public Admin.	Once	207 days	TU
INF2	22	300	B.Sc. (Ed) Biology	Once	207 days	TU
INF3	18	100	B.Sc. (Ed) Physics	Once	207 days	TU
INF4	21	100	B.Sc. Microbiology	Once	207 days	TU
INF5	20	200	B.Sc. Chemistry	Once	207 days	TU
INF6	23	Gr	B.Sc. (Ed) Economics	Once	207 days	Gr
INF7	21	300	B.Sc. Microbiology	Once	207 days	TU

TU = Transferred to another university; Gr = Graduated

As shown in Table 2, the participants of this study were female undergraduates from Federal University Gusau, aged 18 to 23 at the time of study. All were kidnapped once on September 22, 2023, and held for 207 days. Their academic levels ranged from first-year to graduates, studying courses like public administration, biology education, physics education, microbiology, chemistry, and economics education. Except for one graduate, all had transferred to other universities.

### Thematic Analysis On Psychological Effects Of Participants

Based on the interviews and focus groups conducted in respect to research question one, the psychological effects of kidnapping and banditry on female undergraduates were profound and varied. Participants reported experiencing intense anxiety, recurring nightmares, and symptoms consistent with PTSD.

For example, one participant (INF1) described:

*"Since the incident, I can't sleep well at night. I keep having nightmares and wake up sweating. I am constantly on edge, even during the day." (PTSD, Flashbacks)*

Another participant (INF2) shared her struggle with depression:

*"I feel so low all the time. I don't want to talk to anyone or leave my room. It's like there's a dark cloud over me that won't go away."* (Depression, Isolation)

Participant INF3 highlighted the ongoing anxiety and hypervigilance she experiences:

*"Every time I hear a loud noise, my heart starts racing, and I feel like I can't breathe."* (Anxiety, Hypervigilance)

Participant INF4 expressed feelings of guilt and self-blame:

*"I keep thinking if only I had done something differently, maybe it wouldn't have happened. It's hard to shake off that feeling of guilt."* (Guilt, Self-blame)

Participant INF6 mentioned flashbacks to the event:

*"Sometimes, out of nowhere, I feel like I'm back there. It's like I'm reliving everything all over again."* (Flashbacks, PTSD)

Female undergraduates who experienced kidnapping faced momentous psychological challenges, including intense anxiety, recurring nightmares, depression, and PTSD symptoms. The intense anxiety and hypervigilance could be due to the constant fear of re-experiencing the trauma; while recurring nightmares and flashbacks might be triggered by unresolved traumatic memories. Depression and isolation likely stemmed from the overwhelming helplessness and disconnection from their previous sense of normalcy. Guilt and self-blame are common in trauma survivors as they grapple with making sense of why the event happened and whether they could have prevented it. These psychological effects indicated inherent trauma that disrupted their ability to function normally in daily life and academics.

### ***Thematic Analysis On Perceptions Of Social Reintegration***

Participants expressed several challenges in social reintegration into university life.

One participant (INF5) noted:

*"People look at me differently now. They treat me like I'm broken or something. It makes it hard to feel like I belong here."* (Stigmatization, Isolation).

More so, she expressed a desire to transfer to a safer university environment:

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*"I am seriously considering transferring to another university that is safer. I don't feel secure here anymore."* (Safety Concerns, University Transfer)

Another participant (INF6) highlighted the lack of understanding from faculty and staff:

*"Some professors don't understand what I've been through. They expect me to keep up with my studies as if nothing happened, but it's really hard."* (Lack of Support, Stress)

Participant INF7 shared her experience with social isolation:

*"I used to have a lot of friends, but now I don't really talk to anyone. I feel so alone."* (Social Isolation, Loneliness).

She also expressed her consideration for transferring:

*"I'm thinking about transferring to a university where people don't know my story. It might be easier for me there."* (Social Isolation, University Transfer)

Participant INF3 emphasized the impact of social reintegration on her mental health:

*"I can't trust anyone anymore. I feel like I'm constantly being judged."* (Trust Issues, Alienation)

Participant INF1 discussed the impact of stigma on her self-esteem:

*"It's like everyone sees me as damaged goods. It really affects how I see myself."* (Self-Esteem, Stigmatization)

Participant INF2 highlighted the lack of social activities:

*"I don't get invited to things anymore. People seem to think I won't want to join, but I do."* (Social Exclusion, Loneliness)

Participant INF4 described the challenge of reconnecting with friends:

*"My friends don't understand what I've been through. It's hard to relate to them now."* (Relationships, Misunderstanding)

The findings social challenges faced by female undergraduates who experienced kidnapping and banditry. Participants reported feelings of isolation and stigmatization, which hindered their ability to form and maintain social relationships. These feelings likely stemmed from peers treating them differently, viewing them as

broken, which exacerbated their sense of not belonging. The lack of understanding from faculty and staff added to their stress, as academic expectations did not accommodate their traumatic experiences. Some participants considered transferring to other universities for a safer and more understanding environment. The social isolation also manifested in declining social activities and strained relationships, as friends might not fully grasp their traumatic experiences, leading to heightened sense of loneliness and alienation. This social disconnection and perceived judgment contributed to low self-esteem thereby complicating social reintegration into university life.

### ***Thematic Analysis On Academic Challenges Faced By Participants***

The academic challenges faced by participants were multifaceted. Many reported difficulties with concentration and memory, which adversely affected their academic performance.

One participant (INF1) shared:

*"...So, I don't I can't concentrate in class. My mind keeps drifting back to what happened. It's hard to focus on my studies."* (Concentration, Memory)

Participant INF3 remarked on the lack of institutional support:

*"I've asked for help, but it feels like the university doesn't really know how to support students like me..."* (Institutional Support, Frustration)

Participant INF5 discussed the challenge of catching up on missed work:

*"...I'm so far behind now. I don't know if I'll ever catch up..."* (Academic Overload, Stress)

Participant INF6 highlighted the struggle with memory retention:

*"Since I was released, whenever I read my books, it appears to me as if nothing seems to stick. It's like my brain is foggy..."* (Memory Retention, Cognitive Function)

Participant INF7 emphasized the lack of motivation:

*"...before the incident, I used to love studying, but now I just can't find the energy or interest."* (Motivation, Interest)

These cognitive disruptions likely resulted from trauma, as the mind frequently reverts to the traumatic events, making focusing on studies difficult. The lack of



institutional support added to their frustration, with universities not adequately addressing their unique needs. Catching up on missed work presents another layer of stress, exacerbated by the trauma's cognitive effects, e.g., memory retention issues. Motivation to study had also diminished, with the psychological burden of their experiences overshadowing their previous academic interest. These combined factors created a challenging academic environment, necessitating support and accommodations to help these students recover and succeed.

### ***Thematic Analysis On Identified Intervention Needs***

The interviews revealed several critical intervention needs to support the affected students adequately. Participants identified the need for psychological counseling, social support systems, and academic accommodations to help them cope with their trauma and reintegrate into university life.

Participant INF1 expressed the importance of counseling:

*"I really need someone to talk to who understands what I'm going through. Counseling would help a lot."* (Counseling Need, Support)

Participant INF5 highlighted the necessity of social support:

*"Having a support group where I can share my experiences with others who understand would make a big difference."* (Social Support, Understanding)

Participant INF7 emphasized the need for academic accommodations:

*"I need extra time for assignments and exams because sometimes I just can't keep up."* (Academic Support, Flexibility)

Participant INF4 pointed out the lack of institutional responsiveness:

*"The university should have programmes in place to support students like us. We need more understanding and help."* (Institutional Support, Guidance)

Participant INF2 discussed the importance of mental health services:

*"We need access to mental health professionals who can help us deal with our trauma."* (Mental Health Support, Services)

Participant INF3 highlighted the need for peer support programmes:

*"Having a peer support group would really help. Talking to others who have gone through similar experiences can be very comforting."* (Peer Support, Comfort)

These needs highlight the urgency for trauma-informed care, flexible academic policies, and robust social support mechanisms within educational institutions. An overview of psychological dynamics of the research participants is presented in Table 3.

Table 3.

Overview Of Participants’ Psychological Dynamics (Source: Authors, 2024)

Participant	Psychological Effects	Social Reintegration	Academic Challenges	Identified Intervention Needs
INF1	PTSD, Flashbacks, Anxiety, Recurring Nightmares	Stigmatization, Self-Esteem Issues	Concentration, Memory Issues	Counseling Need, Institutional Support
INF2	Depression, Isolation	Social Exclusion, Loneliness	Lack of Motivation	Access to Mental Health Services
INF3	Anxiety, Hypervigilance	Trust Issues, Alienation	Concentration, Memory Retention Issues	Peer Support Programs, Mental Health Services
INF4	Guilt, Self-Blame	Challenges Reconnecting with Friends	Lack of Institutional Support	More Understanding and Institutional Support Programs
INF5	PTSD, Depression	Stigmatization, Safety Concerns, Considering Transfer	Academic Overload, Stress	Support Groups, Extra Time for Assignments and Exams
INF6	Flashbacks, PTSD, Anxiety	Lack of Understanding from Faculty and Staff	Memory Retention, Cognitive Function Issues	Academic Accommodations, Flexible Academic Policies
INF7	Anxiety, Loneliness	Social Isolation, Considering Transfer	Lack of Motivation, Interest	Peer Support Programs, Flexible Academic Policies

## *Discussion*

The study revealed complex psychological impacts on female undergraduates following kidnapping and banditry experiences. The psychological impact of kidnapping on female undergraduates rooted in the various stages of the traumatic experience. Initial abduction triggers severe trauma, manifested by intense fear and disorientation. This is consistent with trauma theory (Herman, 2015), which posits that severe trauma disrupts the victim's sense of safety and control, leading to immediate cognitive and emotional distress. Prolonged captivity introduces ongoing threats and deprivation for the victims, exacerbating their psychological effects. This contributes to PTSD, anxiety, and depression among the victims, as detailed by complex trauma theory (Courtois & Ford, 2009).

This theory propounds how prolonged exposure to trauma contributes to pervasive psychological disturbances. The eventual release comes additional challenges, e.g., stigma, guilt, and persistent distress, complicating reintegration into normal life. Behaviorally, the victims often exhibited hypervigilance, avoidance, and social withdrawal, consistent with the findings of both theories. These responses reflect the pervasive and complex nature of trauma's impact on cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions, illustrating how various aspects of the kidnapping experience contribute to the complex psychological outcomes observed in this study.

The findings of this study aligns with previous studies, e.g., Lawal, Isma'il, & Audu (2018), Yakasai, Ayinla, & Yakasai (2022) and Brewin, Andrews, & Valentine (2000), which indicated anxiety, depression, and PTSD as common outcomes of trauma. Long-term psychological impacts of kidnapping were also reported by Olumide & Adebayo (2020) and Ede et al. (2021), indicating persistent effects on overall well-being and functioning. During captivity, participants experienced acute stress responses such as panic and disorientation, with chronic anxiety, depression, and PTSD symptoms persisting post-release, corroborating findings by Olumide and Adebayo (2020).

Therefore, immediate and sustained psychological support is vital, as no single coping mechanism is sufficient (Yakasai, Ayinla, & Yakasai, 2022). Trauma-focused

therapies like cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) and eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) are recommended by [Amnesty International \(2020\)](#). These therapies can resolve the cognitive, affective, and behavioral problems in kidnapping victims by targeting maladaptive thoughts and emotions, processing trauma, and promotes healthier coping strategies. For instance, CBT helps resolve cognitive impacts by challenging and changing distorted thought patterns that contribute to anxiety and depression, while EMDR targets distressing memories, alleviating emotional numbness and symptoms of PTSD through structured reprocessing techniques.

These therapies are effective because they provide targeted interventions that address specific trauma-related symptoms and promote healing across cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. Additionally, gender-sensitive counseling approaches provide safe spaces to address trauma-specific issues, such as sexual violence, self-esteem rebuilding, and emotional recovery ([Akpan, 2019](#); [Onyemelukwe, 2020](#)). Together, these therapies would address the full spectrum of trauma's impact, facilitating effective recovery and mental health improvement.

The findings of this study on social reintegration revealed substantial psychological dynamics among female undergraduates who experienced kidnapping and banditry, encompassing cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects. The sense of social isolation stems from initial abduction fears, prolonged captivity, particularly the threat of being killed if ransom was not provided and the subsequent stigmatization and perceived lack of empathy upon return. Cognitively, participants initially experienced confusion during the kidnapping, evolving into trust issues and hypervigilance post-incident. Consistence with this study's cognitive impacts, trauma theory ([Pynoos, Steinberg, & Wraith, 1996](#)) proposes that trauma disrupts cognitive processing, leading to intrusive thoughts and constant alertness.

Affectively, participants experienced intense emotions, such as fear, anxiety, and feelings of alienation that persisted after the event. This supports complex trauma theory ([Herman, 2015](#)), which posits that prolonged exposure to trauma leads to chronic emotional distress, as evidenced by the participants' ongoing emotional struggles. Behaviorally, the students isolated themselves from social life, withdrew

from activities, and developed desire to transfer to safer universities due to stigmatization and perceived lack of support. This supports social role theory (Biddle, 1986) and reintegration theory (Maruna & Lebel, 2003), which emphasize that social roles and support networks are fundamental for recovery, demonstrating how the compounded effects of trauma and societal responses can hinder reintegration.

These findings align with Boyraz et al. (2016), who emphasized the importance of trauma-informed practices and supportive environments for students who experienced traumatic events. The participants' description of their struggles with stigmatization and isolation revealed pervasive social barriers. This is consistent with findings of Akpan (2019) and Onyemelukwe (2020), who noted that societal attitudes and ineffective support systems hinder the reintegration of kidnapping victims. Trauma-informed care (TIC) is a suitable model for addressing these social reintegration impacts. This model is effective because it focuses on understanding and integrating the effects of trauma into therapeutic practices to reduce sense of isolation and stigmatization (Fallot & Harris, 2009; SAMHSA, 2014). TIC creates safe spaces that foster trust, empowerment, and resilience, helping victims manage societal pressures and negative attitudes. By validating the victims' experiences and providing supportive environments, TIC facilitates positive social interactions and helps people reclaim their roles in the community. This approach brings is in line with findings about the needs of victims facing societal rejection and alienation, as reported by Ede et al. (2021).

The academic disruptions, perceived decreased performance, and increased absenteeism reported by participants of this study are closely linked to specific aspects of the kidnapping experience. The initial abduction led to confusion and fear, which impaired cognitive functions, such as concentration and information retention. Trauma theory (Pynoos, Steinberg, & Wraith, 1996) suggests that trauma can disrupt cognitive processes, affecting academic performance. The prolonged captivity introduced ongoing stress and anxiety, contributing to emotional distress and a lack of motivation for academic pursuits, as supported by complex trauma theory (Herman, 2015), which posits that continuous trauma impacts emotional well-being.

Behaviorally, these effects manifested as increased absenteeism and disengagement from studies, reflecting the challenges identified in social role theory (Biddle, 1986) and reintegration theory (Maruna & Lebel, 2003), which explain that trauma and lack of support can hinder reintegration into academic roles. These findings are consistent with Okoye and Nwaka-Nwandu (2023), who reported that banditry and kidnapping have significant negative effects on educational activities. Similarly, Muhammad & Salihu (2023) found that banditry significantly impacts academic adjustment. The trauma experienced by the victims impaired cognitive functioning, making it difficult to keep up with academic demands.

Boyraz et al. (2016) also found that trauma negatively affects cognitive functions, such as concentration and memory, further creating adverse impact on academic performance. To address these challenges, trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy (TF-CBT) is a suitable model (Cohen, Mannarino, & Deblinger, 2006). TF-CBT specifically targets the cognitive and emotional effects of trauma by helping victims process and reframe traumatic memories, thereby improving concentration and memory (Cohen, Mannarino, & Deblinger, 2006). TF-CBT also reduces anxiety and enhances coping skills, mitigating stress and lack of motivation that affect academic performance.

The intervention needs identified by participants, such as psychological counseling, social support, academic assistance, and enhanced safety, measures indicated the necessity of a multi-faceted approach to supporting kidnapping victims. Cognitively, participants required trauma-focused therapies to address issues such as concentration difficulties and intrusive memories. Affectively, they need counseling to manage anxiety, depression, and emotional numbness. Behaviorally, accommodating academic programs and supportive environments were essential to help them reintegrate into university life. These findings suggest a need for universities to implement comprehensive support systems, including academic accommodations and mental health services, to assist students affected by trauma. The participants called for more understanding and support from their universities, stressing the need for holistic approaches to student well-being. Furthermore, the identification of specific



intervention needs, such as psychological counseling, social support, and academic assistance for the victims, supports broader recommendations for trauma-informed educational practices.

The psychological impacts of kidnapping on female undergraduates and therapy/counseling models targeted to their cognitive, emotional, and behavioral needs for effective recovery and social reintegration are outlined in Table 4.

Table 4.

Therapy And Counseling Models Recommended For Participants (Source: Authors, 2024)

No	Psychological Impacts of Kidnapping	Therapy/Counseling Models and Techniques
1.	PTSD, Flashbacks, Anxiety, Recurring Nightmares	Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT): Addressing cognitive distortions and emotional distress through structured interventions (Cohen, Mannarino, & Deblinger, 2006).
2.	Depression, Isolation	Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT): Assistance in reframing negative thoughts and reducing depression and isolation by focusing on cognitive distortions (Resick, Monson, & Chard, 2016).
3.	Anxiety, Hypervigilance	Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR): Targeting distressing memories and reduces anxiety and hypervigilance through structured reprocessing (Shapiro, 2001).
4.	Guilt, Self-Blame	Trauma-Informed Care (TIC): Providing a supportive environment to address self-blame and guilt while promoting empowerment and recovery (Fallot & Harris, 2009).
5.	PTSD, Depression	Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT): Assistance in managing PTSD and depression by processing trauma and restructuring negative thought patterns (Cohen, Mannarino, & Deblinger, 2006).
6.	Flashbacks, PTSD, Anxiety	Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT) and EMDR: Combining cognitive restructuring with trauma memory processing to address flashbacks, PTSD, and anxiety (Cohen, Mannarino, & Deblinger, 2006; Shapiro, 2001).
7.	Anxiety, Loneliness	Peer Support Programs and Trauma-Informed Care (TIC): Offering community-based support and trauma-sensitive practices to alleviate anxiety and loneliness (SAMHSA, 2014; Fallot & Harris, 2009).

This research had some limitations. Data collected in this study were self-reported, which could pose biases. The study only provides a snapshot in time, lacking long-term impact analysis. In addition, the effectiveness of the recommended therapies has not been empirically tested in this specific context. Future research should address these limitations by incorporating longitudinal studies to assess long-term impacts, employing a larger and more diverse sample to enhance generalizability, and conducting empirical evaluations of therapy effectiveness within the specific context of the study.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

### ***Conclusions***

This study concluded that female undergraduate students in Zamfara State, Nigeria, who experienced kidnapping and banditry suffer enduring psychological effects, such as PTSD, anxiety, and depression, which significantly affected their daily lives. They faced challenges in social reintegration into university and community life, encountering stigma and difficulties, leading them to seek transfer to another university. Academically, they reported issues, e.g., concentration problems and reduced motivation, which hinder their academic progress. The study identified critical intervention needs like specialized counseling, social reintegration programs, and academic support, to facilitate their recovery and academic success. These findings stress the necessity for an inclusive support system based on the unique experiences of these students, which can address their psychological, social, and academic needs to improve their well-being and educational outcomes.

### ***Suggestions***

Policymakers and educational institutions such as Federal University Gusau, which is located in high-risk Zamfara State, should collaborate to develop integrated interventions that provide trauma counseling, social support, and academic assistance. Educational institutions should implement policies offering flexible learning options to accommodate trauma-affected students academically. Community education programs

are needed to reduce stigma and foster a supportive environment for social reintegration. Improved safety measures, such as reinforcing accommodations, campus security, and self-defense training, are important to ensure the safety and well-being of students. These measures should be implemented by educational institutions with support from relevant policymakers and government regulations.

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors of this article declare no conflict of interest.

### DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The authors did not receive any financial support during the preparation of the current study.

### AUTHORS CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

**Akilu Isma'il:** Data Curation; Formal Analysis; Funding Acquisition; Investigation; Methodology; Project Administration; Resources; Validation; Writing Original Draft; Writing, Review & Editing.

**Halimat Bashir Ibrahim:** Conceptualization; Investigation; Methodology; Project Administration; Resources; Validation; Writing Original Draft; Writing, Review & Editing; Conduction of interview

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