

## **Kidnapping in Nigerian Society: A Sociological Impact**

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### **Abstract**

The issue of kidnapping is a global social problem but has become more prevalent in Nigeria. Kidnapping is quickly turning out to be a more profitable option to other crimes like armed-robbery. Kidnapping as a social problem has spread across the country like bushfire and it is mainly for ransom from kidnapped victims. Foreigners are no longer the only ones that are targeted; virtually every Nigerian is now a threat to the menace of kidnapping. Nigeria is ranked behind Mexico, Columbia, Philippines, Brazil, and Venezuela, as a country with significant abduction issues. Kidnapping is such a serious crime that it has affected a lot of families in the country. Kidnapping is arguably not recent in the region; however, the latest money-making ransom seeking tactic has come to be a major societal issue for Nigerian leaders and citizens. It is on this note the study examine a sociological impact of kidnapping in Nigeria. The study adopted the structural functionalism theory in explaining issues of kidnapping in Nigeria. Secondary sources of data collection such as books, academic journals, internet sources and newspapers were employed in the study in gathering data. Data were analysed using thematic narratives. The findings from the study revealed that kidnapping undermine the socio-economic, political, psychological, and religious security as well as the safety of persons in Nigeria. The study therefore, recommends that government should launch public campaign about the dangers of kidnapping and the inclusion of the less fortunate in poverty alleviation initiatives. This will help to alleviate economic hardship. Also, ransom payments made to kidnapers should be discouraged. This is expected to have a significant impact on preventing kidnapping in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Kidnapping, Social Problem, Socio-Economic Impacts, Sociological Impact, Nigeria.

## **Introduction**

The issue of kidnapping is a global social problem but has become more prevalent in Nigeria. It's quickly turning out to be an option to armed-robbery. Kidnapping is such a serious crime that it has infected a lot of families in the country (Yusuf & Abdullahi, 2020: 512). The existing aspect of abduction became disturbing when rebels in the Niger Delta kidnapped several oil workers in February 2006, allegedly to attract international consideration to the desperate condition in the country's rich oil region of the Niger Delta. The targets were mostly non-nationals (Inyang & Ubong, 2013: 532). Kidnapping as a social problem has spread across the country like bushfire and it is mainly for ransom from kidnapped victims. Foreigners are no longer the only ones that are targeted; virtually every Nigerian is under threat. Though, it's now clear that the Ex-Governor of Anambra State Dr. Chris Ngige, was abducted on July 10<sup>th</sup> 2003 by members of his own party who were opposed to him. Kidnapping is, however, arguably not recent in the region; however, the latest money-making ransom seeking tactic has come to be a major societal issue for Nigerian leaders and citizens (Inyang & Ubong, 2013: 532).

Nigeria is ranked behind Mexico, Columbia, Philippines, Brazil, and Venezuela, as a country with significant abduction issues (Ujumadu, 2008; Ekpe, 2009) cited in Inyang & Ubong (2013:531). According to Ekpe (2009) cited in Inyang & Ubong (2013:531) Nigeria reported 512 cases of kidnapping in 2009, with 30 people found dead in kidnappers' dens, compared to 353 cases in 2008. Similarly, Abraham (2010) stated that between 2006 and 2009, Nigeria's former Inspector General of Police (IGP) Mike MbamaOkoro espoused that hostage takers and kidnappers received ransom of \$15 million, roughly 100 million naira. Kidnapping is a crime in Nigeria that is punishable by statute. Anyone found in the act is likely to serve a sentence of ten years in jail. Some states such as Enugu, Akwa Ibom, Ebonyi, Rivers, Anambra, Imo, and Abia, have enacted a

bill titled “Prohibition of Hostage Taking and Related Offenses Rule,” which punishes criminals with the death penalty. Meanwhile, bills calling for the death penalty for abduction are facing further consideration by the National Assembly (Yusuf & Abdullahi, 2020:512). In 2020, Abuja recorded 22 cases of kidnapping; Kastina& Kaduna recorded 19 while Niger recorded 18. While the cases of kidnapping monthly shows that January had the highest figures numbering 248 followed 130 in July while in March 121 cases of kidnapping were recorded. In total 808 Nigerians were kidnapped in different parts of Nigeria between January and July 2020 (Mustapha, 2020). Also, Amnesty International noted that between July 3<sup>rd</sup> and August 5<sup>th</sup> over 160 persons were kidnapped in Kaduna and Plateau state including 121 school children of Bethel Baptist church High school (Premium Times, 2021).

Nigerian citizens and non-Nationals are terrified of being the succeeding prey, because abductors have no piety on their victims as long as their goals are met. Kidnappers have targeted the rich and high-earners in recent years, and they only release their captives after a ransom is paid. People in their eighties and nineties, as well as girls aged two to five, have been reportedly kidnapped (Samuel, 2019). The kidnapping incident has harmed Nigeria's international profile. Also, it has hampered the country's efforts to establish sustainable industry for tourism, as tourists are constantly cautioned not to visit Nigeria by their governments. For fear of being abducted, many would-be buyers have kept away (Ihe, 2018). Just recently, the American government warns citizens not to travel to Yobe, Borno, and northern Adamawa states as a result of kidnapping and terrorism. In Gombe, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Plateau and Zamfara states kidnapping is also prevalent as well as Rivers, Bayelsa, Akwa Ibom, Delta and Cross River states except Port Harcourt have continued to record cases of kidnapping (Olufemi, 2021).

According to Okoli & Agada, (2014); Imhonopi&Urim, (2016); Ihe, (2018); Samuel, (2019); Ibrahim & Ahmad, (2020); Olufemi, (2021), the cases of kidnapping are happening all the time, and it's costing a lot of money. The nation,

security forces, and all other stakeholders are all at risk. As a result, the current research focuses on the phenomenon's socioeconomic effect. Due to the country's instability, Nigeria's senate president has called for the country's defence system to be reformed and restructured (Umoru, 2019). The Senate President, Ahmed Lawan cautioned that the country's current instability was undermining socioeconomic operations and scaring away investors, causing Nigeria's growth to stall. As a result, he called for a coordinated commitment at all levels of government to address the problem (Olaniyi, 2020). It's on this note this study seeks to examine the impacts of kidnapping on the Nigerian society. This is important because, despite efforts to curb kidnapping it has continued to be a social problem, and it has been on the rise in recent years.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Kidnapping just like other concepts is difficult to conceptualise because it varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction and from state to state. The word “kidnapping” dates back to the 17th century in the United Kingdom, when rich families' children were “kidnapped” (Tzanelli, 2006; Ibrahim & Mukhtar, 2007). As a result, it is a criminally motivated conduct that is not completely alien to society. According to Inyang & Ubong (2013:532) it is the “wrongful arrest, capture, and removal of a citizen contrary to his or her will. It is an offense, and the most important aspect is that it is an unwelcome act on the victim's part. It's a restraint on someone else's liberties that goes against the federal constitution's guarantee of freedom of movement. Due to this, Siegel (2002) views it as a severe crime. Kidnapping may be described as the abduction of a person or a group of individuals with the aim of achieving a specific goal (Ngwama, 2014:136). Similarly, Fage & Alabi, (2017) sees kidnapping as the “use of coercion to capture human beings as captives in order to accomplish a certain goal. Furthermore, it can be described as the act of forcibly capturing and detaining a person as a result of an unwelcome act on the victim's part.” Onyido (2019: 145) also noted that Kidnapping is described as the “act of capturing, removing, and

holding a person in custody by force or fraud. It does, however, involve the kidnapping and seizure of an individual in order to obtain a ransom or resolve a score of disagreements between individuals.” Yusuf & Abdullahi (2020:514) kidnapping has been described as the most serious form of robbery. It is an orchestrated and systemic robbery, according to them, that is less lethal than armed robbery but more lucrative. Despite the fact that it is illegal, the profit motive has encouraged those who engage in it to continue.

Kidnapping in the Niger-delta region, for example, were aimed at foreigners from European, American, and Asian countries in order to raise concern about the region's economic and environmental conditions (Ani & Nweke, 2014). Kidnapping, on the other hand, might be planned. Activists for political independence, such as Colombia's FARC rebel party. Kidnapping may also be motivated by terroristic motive, as shown by the kidnapping of the Nobel Peace Prize laureate. Boko Haram supporters abducted schoolgirls in Chibok town on April 14, 2014 (Ani & Nweke, 2014). Scholars have pointed out that, regardless of the kidnapers' motives, the terror effects on their hostages must be considered. Furthermore, these kidnappings, which were originally intended to raise awareness of the environmental effects of oil production on the area among the Nigerian government and the rest of the world, were quickly repurposed for financial gains (Ani & Nweke, 2014). According to a former Nigerian Inspector General of Police, an unprecedented \$100 million in ransom was paid to kidnapers between 2006 and 2009, indicating a worrying increase in the country's kidnapping rate (Ene, 2018). As a result, the degree of deterioration present in today's society is highlighted, as is the effect it has on every sector of society, especially on the sociological impacts.

### **Reasons for Kidnapping in Nigeria**

Various factors are responsible reasons why kidnapping ensue in Nigeria. Ene (2018: 165) linked the reason why kidnapping exist in Nigeria to the “increase of

weapons due to political sponsorship of criminals whom they discarded after election.” Today's abduction scenario is reminiscent of the early 1980s scourge of armed robbery, when most of the youths who served during the civil war in Nigeria were liquidated and returned to their families with no compensation. However, when the places of learning which they left after were ruined and there were no work to keep them occupied, many turned to armed robbery, and as ex-soldiers, they were equipped with firearms and had learned how to use them during the war (Samuel, 2019). The tale is almost identical today, with politicians employing the majority of unemployed youngsters as electoral thugs and then discarding them after election. As a result, armed youngsters who were used as thus by politicians and abandoned by their bosses after winning elections are now abducting peaceful citizens of those they campaigned with during the elections (Ene, 2018). Analogously, just as the oil boom in the 1970s massively increased the rate of armed robbery in the region, the enormous empowerment of political office holders and their cronies has driven those who are far removed from these lucrative government contracts to resort to abduction in order to get a piece of the “national cake” (Samuel, 2019).

Furthermore, Inyang (2009) cited in Inyang & Ubong (2013:532) saw unemployment of youths in Nigeria as one of the major causes of kidnapping in the country. He presented the condition of unemployment in Nigeria using the well-known adage that “an idle man is the devil's workshop.” He said that there are a large number of able-bodied men and women wandering the streets of Nigeria looking for work that does not exist (Inyang & Ubong, 2013). Furthermore, a graduate who is unable to find work is physically deprived of other options for survival. In such circumstances, a young person can develop a pessimistic attitude toward society and blame his failure on it. Any of the causative factors of abduction have been described as “moral decadence” and the “quest to get rich soon” syndrome (Inyang & Ubong, 2020). In his assertion that no one in Nigeria asks questions about how people make their money. According

to Inyang (2013) cited in Ibrahim & Ahmad (2020:4), “a poor person today might turn up tomorrow with a high-end car, and no one will doubt the sudden source of wealth rather such a person is celebrated.” Furthermore, people who contribute money to help their communities prosper are awarded with chieftaincy titles, which gives Nigerian youths the wrong image and leads to abduction. Kidnappers also use the inconsistency between economic openness and responsibility in the running of regular government relations, as well as the tendency to amass resources among public office holders at various levels of government (Inyang, 2009). They say that if government employees knowingly rob the government's coffers without hesitation, they will take the rule into their own hands by kidnapping people for ransom. When you remember that traders, foreigners, and other affluent citizens who are well removed from the government's purse have also become victims of these corrupt practices, the point seems insignificant (Inyang, 2009).

Kidnapping is exacerbated in Nigeria by excessive use and sale of hard drugs (Okoli, 2008). Okoli also shows how Abia State's trade and thriving entrepreneurs contributed greatly to the Nigerian economy. Furthermore, the state has emerged as an infamous drug trafficking and consumption hotspot in eastern part of Nigeria. Drugs are readily available not only in Abia State, but also in the five neighbouring states of Imo, Akwa Ibom, Rivers, Cross River, and Bayelsa. As a result, violent offences such as rape and armed robbery have increased in the states. Cocaine and heroin trafficking has been widespread, with arrests and seizures being reported in almost all of the state's local government areas. Every day, new drug-sale joints pop up, where illegal acts are organized, refined, and carried out. They went on to say that certain streets in Aba, such as York and Park, have become no-go zones for law-abiding citizens because unscrupulous criminals have made them into ghettos and havens for their hard drug operations. In the Uyo metropolis, a related discovery was made along Etuk

and Nkemba Streets (Okoli, 2008; Inyang & Ubong, 2013; Ibrahim & Ahmad, 2020).

### **Kidnapping in Nigeria: An Overview**

Human kidnapping is not a new phenomenon; this heinous crime has a variety of motivations that can be broadly defined as religious, political, and economic. Kidnapping is not a recent issue in Nigeria; it is one of the country's most serious problems. Although, the country also faces problem of corruption, unemployment and low rates of children in school (Ibrahim & Ahmad, 2020). Kidnapping was a significant issue in developing countries prior to slavery, during the days of the slave trade, because of the economic advantages, ceremonial benefits for dominance, and the burial of monarchs. Kidnapping became a significant source of income for feudal rulers and traders after the slave trade was abolished, but it is still practiced for rituals and wealth (Omonijo, et al, 2019).

Political kidnapping was implemented shortly after independence and later became prevalent among militants in the Niger Delta region, who used to attack expatriates, mainly Americans and Britons, in order to seek the world's indulgence for the region's high level of poverty, considering its mineral wealth (Bulwark Intelligence, 2017) cited in Omonijo, et al., (2019:179). It was also fuelled by the citizens of the Niger Delta's environmental deprivation as a result of oil spills, gas drilling, and development. The plan was to hold the hostages for a few days and then release them after a news conference was held, which was normally televised on CNN and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) (Omonijo, et al., 2019). This brought some development into the region. Kidnapping, on the other hand, took on a new dimension in the Niger Delta after foreign oil firms started paying militias thousands of naira as ransom to secure the release of their workers, most of whom were expatriates, without much negotiation (Bulwark Intelligence, 2017) cited in Omonijo, et al., (2019:179). It was seen as a decent source of revenue and a feasible way of obtaining funds for

weapons and ammunition by the insurgents. The situation improved when the oil companies reconsidered immediate ransom payment, restructured and guaranteed proper protection for their expatriates, and the militias focused on high-profile Nigerians before the Federal Government implemented an amnesty policy which led the group to surrender their weapons. As at this time the business of kidnapping had already spread to the South East, South West and North West causing fear in the minds of citizens (Ene, 2018).

The Islamic group Boko Haram is another insurgent in Nigeria that is also involved in the business of kidnapping. Kidnappings by Boko Haram are carried out due to political and religious reasons. The kidnappings are political because some Nigerian politicians who are not pleased with a particular government uses the insurgents to destroy their administration (Okwuagbala, 2020). A veritable example was during the government of Goodluck Jonathan. Because of the group's extremist Islamic views, the kidnappings are also religious. Their name which means “Western education is forbidden,” which explains why they continue to threaten children in schools. Around 276 Chibok schoolgirls, aged 16 to 18, were abducted by this gang on the night of April 14, 2014. Chika Okpala, a prominent Christian musician in Nigeria, regretted the abduction of a friend in a song called “Ndi Nto” meaning “the kidnappers” (Okwuagbala, 2020). When asked why they did it, the perpetrators said they wanted money because they were unemployed. As a result of this the Anambra state government passed a new law that alters the penalties for abduction of people. The Former governor of the state, Peter Obi, announced that criminals would face the death penalty and that any property bought with ransom money, such as a house or vehicle, would be destroyed (Okwuagbala, 2020). The United States Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), stated that Nigeria witnessed a total number of 2,860 kidnapping in 2020, which increased from 1,386 in 2019. The CFR, further stressed that there may even be more cases of violent crimes in 2021 emanating from kidnapping (Sahara Reporters, 2021).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Emile Durkheim (1917), Robert K. Merton (1968), & Talcott Parsons (1979) are among the authors who contributed to the structural functionalism theory. The theory's basic premise is that society can be compared to a living organism made up of component parts that work together in harmonious relationship to ensure the system's survival. As a result, if any part fails to contribute its quota or does not foster conditions that allow value agreement among citizens, the result is often unstable outcomes that jeopardize society's well-being (Schaefer, 2002) cited in (Ene, 2018:164).

As used to understand the socioeconomic dilemma of kidnapping and its impacts in Nigeria, functionalism will simply indict the economy as either inefficient or not working optimally in order to achieve the desired result. The economic system's incapacity may also be seen as a secondary consequence of a main breakdown, such as the inability of the political system to generate the required production for the economy to work properly. Corroborating this Samuel (2019), Ibrahim & Ahmad (2020) criminals have recognized the lucrative act of kidnapping as a corporation, and it has become enticing due to its lucrative outcomes. The end product of such chaotic conditions, whether primary or secondary, is commonly felt by the masses in the form of widespread suffering, insecurity, misery, and marginalization, with attendant effects such as kidnapping for ransom or financial gain. Kidnapping has been described as a practical measure used by lawmakers to combat their rivals in some parts of Nigeria (Samuel, 2019). The money raised as ransom is used to destabilize rivals and compel them to withdraw from electoral race. The kidnapping of expatriates in the Niger Delta also drew the attention of the government and foreign organizations to the region's economic plight. This has been seen as part of President Goodluck Jonathan's post-amnesty policy, which began in 2012, to

preserve stability and unity in the country and Nigeria as a whole, in order to ensure the free flow of socioeconomic activities (Charles, Ikoh, Iyamba, & Charles 2005).

### **Research Methodology**

The study employs the qualitative method and depends on secondary sources of data to investigate issues of kidnapping and its sociological impact on the Nigerian society. Specifically, the study draws data from existing literature such as media reports, newspapers, books chapters, books, academic journals, and the use of internet sources. These data are analysed with the use of thematic analysis, to structure the arrangement of the data retrieved by following the objectives of the study.

### **The Impacts of Kidnapping in Nigeria**

The study found out that there exists economic and sociological impacts of kidnapping in the Nigerian society. According to studies, the economy is the backbone of national growth, but manpower plays a critical role in any emerging economy. However, before manpower can perform to their full potential, their wellbeing must be ensured. As a result, safety may be considered the most important pillar of national growth (Famoye, 2015:183).

All development machinery can work efficiently to produce desired outcomes only in a safe environment. It is impossible to overstate the detrimental impact of kidnapping on manpower that produces goods and services for domestic use and export (Ene, 2018: 167). It has frequently resulted in the closing of businesses, the majority of which are oil and gas firms. In addition, the industry and other allied sectors are the mainstay of the national economy, as no other sector produces foreign exchange and local revenue for Nigeria. Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) could plummet as a result of this growth (Ene, 2018). Furthermore, the negative impact could stifle the growth of industrialization, especially tourism, which has the potential to provide job opportunities for the

unemployed as well as a significant resource for the nation's socioeconomic development (Omonijo, et al., 2020). As cases of kidnapping in Nigeria have continued to draw international interest, foreign governments have issued repeated warnings to their citizens not to travel to Nigeria for fear of being kidnapped (Ekpe, 2009) cited in Omonijo, et al., (2019:181). If the current trend persists, potential development partners will be turned away, leaving Nigeria without development partnerships and prospects. It could also stymie the majority of foreign investments and resources flowing into Nigeria for national growth (Omonijo, et al., 2019).

The detrimental economic impact of abduction on government and individual defence expenditures and agencies should not be overlooked. According to Ibrahim & Ahmad (2020:5), in just two years, Lagos state invested three billion naira on security. With this amount expended in a single state, one can only guess the collective impact across the entire federation since the beginning of kidnapping threat in Nigeria. On a personal basis, a significant amount of capital that should have been spent in lucrative projects has been redirected to ransom by kidnapped victims in order to reclaim their liberty. Between 2006 and 2009, fifteen billion naira was paid as ransom to kidnappers, according to (Kyrian, 2009). The money may not be available due to the high degree of poverty in Nigeria, but since the victims cherished their rights, the possibility of them selling their valuables to raise ransom or borrowing from various sources to set themselves free cannot be ruled out (Kyrian, 2009). According to Oloyede (2020) "Nigerians paid 18.34 million dollars to kidnappers to secure the freedom of loved ones between 2011 and April 2020." While in Southern Kaduna alone in 2020 4 billion naira was paid to kidnappers who kidnapped school children leading to the closure of schools and churches in the region (The Sun, 2021). Kidnappings have been more common in recent years, which could negate this submission in states where travel is prohibited from dusk to dawn. Bikers,

cabbies, and bus drivers that normally work during this time span can be adversely affected (Ibrahim & Ahmad, 2020).

Apart from the economic impacts of kidnapping threat, its sociological impact cannot be ignored. Sociology's significance is based on social contact and relationships in society. Social contact can be beneficial or detrimental; the former can lead to a happy life, while the latter can lead to a life of dissatisfaction (Soyombo, 2009). The possibility of an abduction causing widespread mistrust cannot be ruled out. The way people communicate with one another will help to protect mankind's trust. Because kidnapping suspects often engage acquaintances, relatives, neighbours, co-workers, and house helpers to obtain relevant details that can be used to abduct victims, there could be a high degree of mistrust and strain in family relationships. Most people will wish to avoid communicating honestly and frankly with others, both inside and outside the family, in such a situation (Omonijo, et al., 2019). As a result, people may start withholding reasonable details that may benefit a fellow human being out of fear of being abducted. Apart from that, the practice of Africans extending traditional hospitality to foreigners, which has been passed down from generation to generation for many years, could abruptly devolve into alienation and animosity. Furthermore, acknowledging strangers' greetings will no longer be appropriate, and innocent people who are in desperate need of assistance, whether by a free ride or medical, psychological, or financial need, will be adversely affected (Soyombo, 2009).

Kidnapping may have a negative impact on people's social relationships and mobility. Wealthy people, in fact, may be less likely to see their parents, siblings, or friends. Funerals, naming rituals, marriages, and other vital ceremonies could be harmed as a result of this (Soyombo, 2009). Due to the threat of abduction, the unwarranted requirement for police escort to protect private individuals and their families has risen dramatically in Nigeria. This dramatic rise has resulted in a decrease in the number of available security men tasked with preventing the

spread of illegal activity across the world (Soyombo, 2009). Kidnappings have resulted in the deaths of the captives in some circumstances. It's difficult to quantify the negative impact on the bereaved (Omonijo, et al., 2019). In a case where the family's breadwinner is affected, it will leave a large vacuum in the family that would be impossible to fill for a long time.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The study was able to pinpoint the fundamental reasons why kidnapping persist in the Nigerian society; which are unemployment, corrupt leaders, get rich quick syndrome and the negative social consequences of youth unemployment and inequality. It is undeniable that horrific offences have had far-reaching social and psychological ramifications in Nigerian communities. As a result, the aim of this study's submission is to demonstrate that the government has played a significant role in stemming the tide of kidnappings, and to reposition constitutional power in flattening the curve of the threat of abduction by adapting and enforcing public awareness campaigns, a synergic solution between intelligence forces and neighbourhood police, effective sanctions, job creation and other steps. The federal and state governments will be able to overcome and eradicate the danger, as well as stem the tide of kidnapping in Nigeria. From the above issues the study recommends the following:

- i. Also, ransom payments made to kidnappers should be discouraged. This is expected to have a significant impact on preventing kidnapping in Nigeria.
- ii. It is also mandatory to enact legislation against any political/government official/public office holder who is considered to be directly or indirectly working with kidnappers. Such an individual should be barred from owning, contesting, or running for any government role. This would serve as a deterrent against anyone who may consider engaging in similar illegal activity.
- iii. The three branches of government, particularly the federal government, should launch a public awareness campaign about the dangers of kidnapping. Inclusion of the less fortunate in poverty alleviation initiatives, especially in rural

areas, will help to alleviate economic hardships, as well as the establishment of micro-industries in rural areas to motivate youths. This will divert young people's interest away from abduction.

- iv. According to the African Union Summit on Silencing Guns (2020), the rise and escalation in the light and small arms trade has impacted the protection of vulnerable community members such as teenagers, women, and the elderly, as well as infrastructure. Furthermore, through criminal influence and illegal smuggling, the unregulated flow of weapons promotes a system of violence and an insecure environment. Small and light guns have a lot of strength right when you pull the trigger. The criminals use this manipulative tool to handle kidnapers in order to force them to comply with their demands without opposition or delay. To contain illicit arms traffic, the government must control its open borders. Also, since local blacksmiths also manufacture guns that end up in the wrong hands or with offenders such as kidnapers and other criminals, they must be supervised and tracked in their production.

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