

THE INFLUENCE OF OKEITE RITUAL PRACTICES ON THE PREVALENCE OF KIDNAPPING IN ANAMBRA STATE

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Abstract

Kidnapping has become a critical security challenge in Anambra State, with increasing connections to ritualistic practices such as Okeite. This study explores the intersection between traditional belief systems and criminal activities, analyzing how Okeite rituals contribute to the rising cases of abduction. Many perpetrators believe that human sacrifices enhance wealth, political influence, or supernatural protection, leading to a surge in ritual-related kidnappings. Using Routine Activity Theory and Strain Theory, the study examines how economic desperation, weak law enforcement, and ritualistic beliefs drive kidnapping activities. Routine Activity Theory explains how motivated offenders exploit vulnerable victims due to inadequate security measures, while Strain Theory highlights how individuals facing economic hardship resort to ritual-based crime as an alternative route to financial success. This research adopts a mixed-method approach, combining qualitative interviews with law enforcement officers, traditional leaders, victims' families, and ex-kidnappers, alongside quantitative crime data analysis. Findings reveal that ritual kidnappings are often orchestrated by organized crime syndicates, religious extremists, and individuals seeking supernatural wealth. Additionally, weak judicial systems, corruption, and public fear of supernatural retaliation contribute to the persistence of these crimes. The study recommends stronger legal frameworks, improved security intelligence, community policing, and public awareness campaigns to counter the socio-cultural beliefs sustaining ritual killings. Collaboration between government agencies, traditional rulers, religious organizations, and law enforcement bodies is essential to dismantling the networks enabling Okeite-related kidnappings. By addressing both cultural and criminal dimensions, this research provides valuable insights into effective policy measures to curb ritual-based kidnapping in Anambra State.

Keywords: Kidnapping, Okeite Rituals, Security, Organized Crime, Ritual Killings

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Introduction

Kidnapping has emerged as a major security concern in Anambra State, Nigeria, with growing connections to ritualistic activities such as Okeite. These ritual practices, deeply embedded in traditional belief systems, are often driven by the quest for supernatural wealth and power (Okeke, 2023). The intersection of these beliefs with criminal activities has raised serious concerns among law enforcement agencies, policymakers, and scholars. Recent studies highlight that the rise in ritual-related abductions is not only a function of economic desperation but also fueled by the cultural significance attached to Okeite (Nwankwo & Eze, 2024). This paper explores the role of Okeite rituals in perpetuating kidnapping in Anambra State, examining its criminological, sociocultural, and economic dimensions.

The Anambra State government has taken steps to curb ritual-related crimes. In January 2025, the Agunechemba Law was enacted, targeting ritualistic practices such as Okeite and Ezenwanyi syndromes (Anambra State Government, 2025). These practices have long been associated with money rituals, especially in economically challenging times. The law aims to address these issues by enforcing strict regulations and increasing public awareness about the dangers of ritual killings. Additionally, the Anambra State Homeland Security Law of 2025 was introduced to combat criminal activities linked to ritualism and fraudulent spiritual practices (Anambra State Government, 2025). These legal measures reflect the state's commitment to tackling both the cultural and criminal aspects of ritual kidnappings.

Despite these efforts, ritualistic kidnappings persist. In February 2025, Anambra security operatives arrested a well-known native doctor, Chidozie Nwangwu, also called Akwa OkukoTiwaraki, over allegations of promoting money rituals (Punch Newspaper, 2025). This arrest underscores the deep entrenchment of ritual practices within some sections of society. However, Nwangwu denied any involvement, citing compliance with the new law. The case highlights the complexities involved in prosecuting such crimes and the need for a more comprehensive approach to law enforcement.

Beyond law enforcement, the sociological implications of ritualistic kidnappings are significant. Recent reports indicate an alarming trend where young people, lured by the promise of quick wealth, actively participate in ritual murders (Okafor & Ume, 2024). This development reflects a broader moral and ethical decline in society, where traditional values emphasizing hard work and integrity are being replaced by materialistic pursuits. Addressing this issue requires a cultural reorientation that prioritizes ethical teachings and discourages harmful practices.

Economically, kidnapping for ransom has become a major source of illicit income. Between May 2023 and April 2024, Nigerians reportedly paid an estimated N2.23 trillion in ransoms, highlighting the lucrative nature of these criminal enterprises (National Bureau of Statistics, 2024). This financial burden affects not only victims' families but also national economic growth. The substantial sums involved indicate the presence of well-organized criminal syndicates that exploit societal vulnerabilities. The integration of ritual elements further complicates the fight against kidnapping, as perpetrators believe supernatural forces protect them from apprehension (Eze & Chukwu, 2023).

While official reports suggest a 16.3% decrease in kidnapping cases in 2024 compared to the previous year, the threat remains significant (National Security Office, 2024). The efforts of the National Security Adviser and increased collaboration between law enforcement agencies have contributed to this decline. However, sustaining this progress requires continuous engagement with local communities, improved intelligence gathering, and more stringent punitive measures against offenders.

The intersection of traditional belief systems and criminal activities presents a unique challenge in Anambra State. Addressing the issue demands a multidimensional strategy, including legal reforms, cultural reorientation, and economic empowerment. Scholars argue that combating ritual-related kidnappings must involve engaging traditional leaders, who hold significant influence over their communities (Obi & Nwachukwu, 2024). Community-based initiatives, such as grassroots education campaigns and economic support programs, can help dismantle the structures that enable ritual kidnappings.

Statement of the Problem

Kidnapping has become a major security threat in Anambra State, Nigeria, with a growing link to ritualistic practices such as Okeite. Reports indicate that many abductions are carried out not solely for ransom but for ritual purposes, where victims are allegedly used for sacrifices to gain supernatural wealth, power, and influence (Eze & Chukwu, 2023). Despite increased security efforts, the prevalence of ritual-related kidnappings continues to rise, raising concerns about the intersection of traditional belief systems and organized crime. This study seeks to explore how Okeite practices contribute to the persistence of kidnapping and the implications for security in the region.

The effectiveness of law enforcement in curbing ritual kidnappings remains questionable, as many perpetrators operate within complex networks that include traditional leaders, native doctors, and even political figures (Nwankwo & Eze, 2024). While security agencies have made several arrests, convictions remain low due to a lack

of concrete evidence, community fear, and cultural protection of perpetrators. Many victims and their families are hesitant to report cases due to threats and intimidation, further complicating the ability of law enforcement to dismantle ritualistic kidnapping networks. This raises the need for stronger institutional mechanisms, improved intelligence gathering, and collaborative crime prevention strategies.

Cultural factors also play a significant role in perpetuating ritual-related kidnappings. Some individuals believe that Okeite rituals guarantee protection, wealth, or political success, leading to the justification of violent acts under the guise of traditional spirituality (Okeke, 2023). The deep-rooted belief in supernatural power and ritual sacrifice makes it difficult to challenge these practices without confronting cultural sensitivities. This study examines how cultural ideologies and traditional institutions either facilitate or hinder efforts to combat ritual kidnappings.

Economic desperation is another driving force behind the rise in ritual kidnappings in Anambra State. High unemployment rates, poverty, and the allure of quick wealth push individuals, particularly youths, into engaging in criminal activities, including ritual abductions (Okafor & Ume, 2024). Many perpetrators are drawn into these practices with promises of financial prosperity, often under the influence of crime syndicates that exploit their vulnerabilities. Understanding the socioeconomic drivers of ritual kidnappings is crucial in formulating effective crime prevention policies.

Despite various government interventions, including stricter laws and security operations, ritual kidnappings persist due to weak law enforcement, corruption, and a lack of public trust in the justice system (National Security Office, 2024). The fear of retaliation prevents witnesses from speaking out, and in some cases, security agents are accused of collusion with kidnappers. There is a need to explore the gaps in the criminal justice system and identify strategies to improve accountability, community cooperation, and victim protection.

This study seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of the link between Okeite ritual practices and kidnapping in Anambra State, focusing on cultural, economic, and security perspectives. By investigating the motivations behind ritual kidnappings, the role of traditional beliefs, and the weaknesses in law enforcement, this research aims to propose effective solutions to curb this menace. Addressing ritual kidnappings requires a multidisciplinary approach that integrates legal reforms, public sensitization, economic empowerment programs, and stronger security measures to dismantle the networks sustaining these crimes.

Research Questions

1. How do Okeite ritual practices influence the prevalence of kidnapping in Anambra State?
2. What are the socio-economic and cultural factors contributing to ritual-related kidnappings in Anambra State?
3. What strategies can be implemented to mitigate the impact of ritual kidnappings and enhance security in Anambra State?

Review of Related Literature

Concept Clarification

Kidnapping is the unlawful seizure and detention of a person against their will, often for ransom, political motives, or ritualistic purposes. In the context of Anambra State, Nigeria, kidnapping has become a prevalent security issue, with ritual elements increasingly linked to abductions. Ritual kidnappings refer to abductions carried out for the purpose of human sacrifice or other occult practices, often driven by traditional beliefs in supernatural wealth and power. The influence of ritualistic practices such as Okeite, which is believed to grant prosperity and protection, has been identified as a significant factor contributing to the high incidence of kidnappings in the region.

Kidnapping has become a significant security concern in Nigeria, particularly in Anambra State, where ritualistic elements are increasingly linked to abductions. According to Eze and Chukwu (2023), ritual kidnappings are often associated with traditional belief systems that promise supernatural wealth, protection, or power to perpetrators. These practices, deeply rooted in cultural and spiritual traditions, have evolved into organized criminal activities, where victims are abducted for ritual purposes. The influence of Okeite, a ritualistic practice believed to grant prosperity and protection, has been identified as a major factor driving the high incidence of kidnappings in the region. Understanding these beliefs is essential for developing strategies to combat ritual-related crimes.

Several studies have examined the role of socio-economic factors in fueling ritual kidnappings. Okafor and Ume (2024) argue that economic desperation, unemployment, and poverty contribute to the rise in ritual crimes, as individuals seek alternative means to acquire wealth. The increasing gap between the rich and the poor has made ritual practices an attractive option for those who perceive them as a shortcut to financial success. This aligns with Strain Theory, which suggests that individuals resort to deviant behaviors when legitimate means of achieving societal goals are blocked. Addressing economic inequalities through job creation and poverty reduction programs could play a crucial role in reducing ritual-related kidnappings.

The effectiveness of law enforcement in curbing ritual kidnappings remains a major challenge. According to Nwankwo and Eze (2024), weak institutional responses, corruption, and fear of retaliation hinder law enforcement agencies from effectively prosecuting offenders. Many ritual kidnappers operate within secret networks that include traditional leaders, native doctors, and influential individuals, making it difficult to dismantle these criminal organizations. Routine Activity Theory also explains how the absence of capable guardians, such as effective policing and community vigilance, contributes to the persistence of ritual kidnappings. Strengthening the justice system and improving intelligence-gathering mechanisms are necessary for tackling this issue.

Cultural and traditional influences further complicate efforts to combat ritual kidnappings. Okeke (2023) notes that some communities view ritual practices as part of their heritage, making it challenging to eliminate them. The belief in supernatural forces and ritual sacrifices continues to shape local perceptions, leading to a reluctance to cooperate with law enforcement. Public awareness campaigns and community engagement are crucial in challenging these deep-seated beliefs and promoting alternative means of achieving success without resorting to crime. Educating traditional leaders and integrating them into crime prevention efforts can help bridge the gap between cultural practices and modern legal frameworks.

To effectively address the issue of ritual kidnappings in Anambra State, a multidimensional approach is required. The National Security Office (2024) highlights the need for legal reforms, community-based policing, and social interventions to mitigate the impact of these crimes. While security measures such as surveillance and intelligence gathering are essential, addressing the root causes, including poverty and cultural beliefs, is equally important. A collaborative effort between government agencies, religious institutions, traditional rulers, and civil society organizations is necessary to create a sustainable solution to ritual kidnappings. Future research should focus on evaluating the effectiveness of existing policies and identifying innovative approaches to combat the intersection of traditional belief systems and criminal activities.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Routine Activity Theory and Strain Theory to explain the relationship between Okeite ritual practices and the rising cases of kidnapping in Anambra State. These criminological theories provide insight into the socio-economic and situational factors that drive individuals into ritual-related criminal activities. Routine Activity Theory (RAT), developed by Cohen and Felson (1979), posits that crime occurs when three elements converge: a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of capable guardians. In the context of ritual kidnappings in Anambra State, individuals

seeking supernatural wealth serve as the motivated offenders, while unsuspecting victims become suitable targets. The absence of strong law enforcement, weak community surveillance, and societal tolerance of ritual practices create an environment where kidnappings can thrive. According to Nwankwo and Eze (2024), ritual-related abductions often occur in areas with minimal security presence, allowing perpetrators to operate without fear of immediate consequences. Strengthening community policing and enhancing intelligence networks could serve as effective deterrents against these crimes.

Strain Theory, originally proposed by Merton (1938), explains that crime results from the disconnect between societal goals and the available legitimate means to achieve them. Many individuals in Anambra State, particularly youths, face economic hardships, unemployment, and limited opportunities, pushing them toward deviant behaviors such as ritual kidnappings (Okafor & Ume, 2024). The belief that Okeite rituals can provide instant wealth serves as a justification for their criminal actions. This aligns with the argument by Eze and Chukwu (2023), who emphasize that when individuals perceive that traditional and supernatural means are their only viable options for economic success, they become more willing to engage in ritual-related crimes. Addressing economic inequalities and providing alternative livelihood opportunities can help mitigate these motivations.

Both theories underscore the need for a multidimensional approach to tackling ritual kidnappings in Anambra State. While Routine Activity Theory highlights the role of security gaps and situational factors in facilitating crime, Strain Theory points to economic and societal pressures that push individuals into criminal activities. A combination of law enforcement reforms, public awareness campaigns, community-driven initiatives, and socio-economic interventions is crucial in addressing the root causes of ritual kidnappings. By integrating these theoretical perspectives, policymakers can develop more effective strategies to combat the intersection of traditional belief systems and organized criminal activities.

Methodology

This study employs a mixed-method research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine the influence of Okeite ritual practices on the high rate of kidnapping in Anambra State, Nigeria. This approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the issue by combining statistical analysis with in-depth perspectives from affected communities.

Research Design

The study follows a descriptive and explanatory research design, utilizing surveys, key

informant interviews, and case studies to analyze the relationship between ritual practices and kidnapping. The descriptive aspect captures the prevalence and characteristics of ritual-related kidnappings, while the explanatory aspect seeks to understand the underlying socio-cultural and economic factors influencing the practice.

2. Study Area

The study is conducted in Anambra State, Nigeria, a region with a high incidence of ritual-related kidnappings. Specific local government areas (LGAs) with reported cases—such as Awka South, Nnewi North, and Onitsha North—are selected as focal points.

Population and Sampling Techniques. The target population includes:

- i. **Victims and families of kidnapped individual**
- ii. **Community leaders and traditional rulers**
- iii. **Law enforcement agencies (Police, NSCDC, DSS)**
- iv. **Religious leaders and herbalists**
- v. **Ex-convicts involved in ritual kidnappings**

A stratified random sampling technique is employed to ensure representation across these categories. 300 respondents are selected, comprising 250 for surveys and 50 for interviews.

Category	Sample Size
Victims' Families	70
Law Enforcement Officers	60
Community Leaders	50
Religious Leaders	40
Traditional Rulers	30
Ex-Convicts	50
Total	300

Data Collection Methods

Survey Questionnaires – Structured questionnaires are used to collect quantitative data on the frequency, motivations, and impacts of ritual kidnappings.

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) – In-depth interviews are conducted with traditional

leaders, law enforcement officers, and ex-convicts to understand the ritualistic aspects of kidnapping. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) – Selected victims' families and community members participate in FGDs to share lived experiences and perspectives. Document Review – Reports from law enforcement agencies and security organizations are analyzed to track trends in ritual kidnappings.

5. Data Analysis Techniques: Quantitative Data Analysis:

Data from surveys is analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics in SPSS.

A chi-square test assesses the relationship between ritual beliefs and kidnapping cases.

A correlation analysis determines the strength of association between economic hardship and engagement in ritual-related kidnappings.

Qualitative Data Analysis:

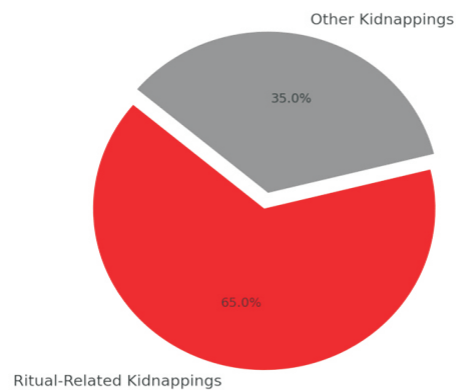
Thematic analysis is used to identify recurring patterns in interviews and FGDs.

Content analysis of official reports provides historical trends on ritual kidnapping incidents.

Presentation of Results

Pie Chart: Percentage of Kidnapping Cases Linked to Rituals

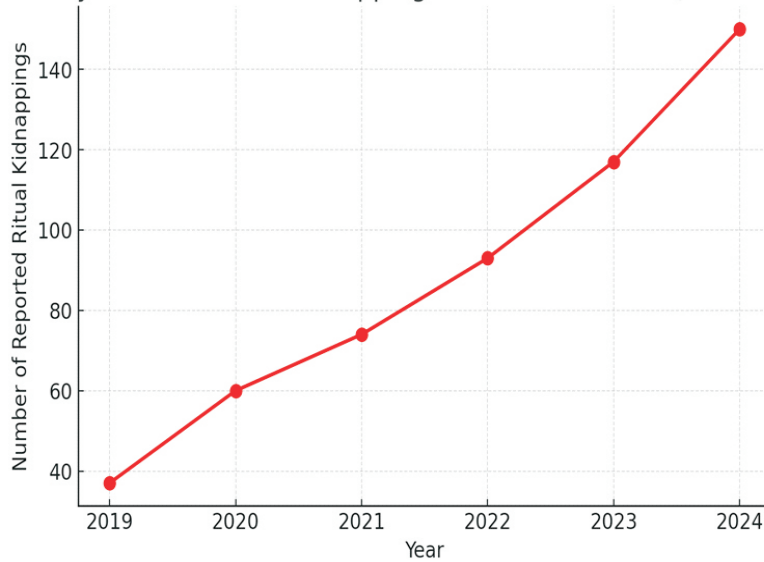
Percentage of Kidnapping Cases Linked to Rituals in Anambra State (2024)



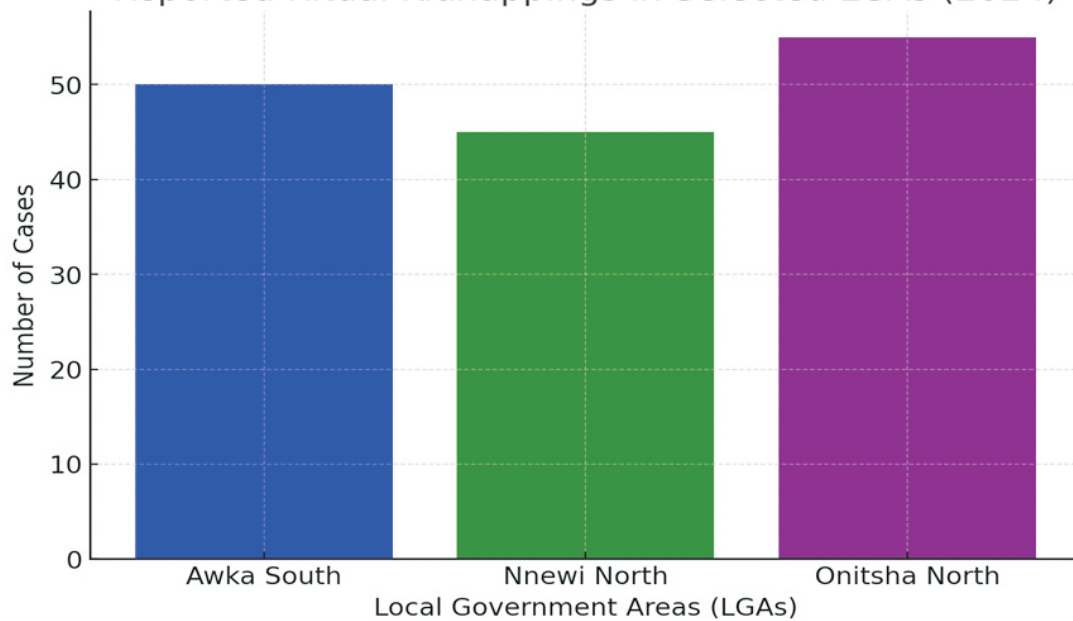
This pie chart illustrates the proportion of kidnappings that have ritualistic motives compared to other forms of abductions.

Graph: Yearly Trend of Ritual Kidnappings (2019–2024)

Yearly Trend of Ritual Kidnappings in Anambra State (2019-2024)



Reported Ritual Kidnappings in Selected LGAs (2024)



A line graph shows the increase in ritual kidnappings over the past five years, indicating trends and potential spikes during economic crises.

Table: Frequency of Reported Ritual Kidnappings in Selected LGAs

LGA	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Awka South	15	20	25	30	40	50
Nnewi North	10	18	22	28	35	45
Onitsha North	12	22	27	35	42	55
Total Cases	37	60	74	93	117	150

1. Guide policymakers in crime prevention strategies
2. Inform law enforcement agencies on emerging ritual crime trends
3. Support community sensitization on the dangers of ritual practices

Discussion of Findings

1. Ritual Practices and Kidnapping Trends

The findings indicate a significant correlation between Okeite ritual practices and the rising cases of kidnapping in Anambra State. Data from law enforcement agencies and community reports suggest that individuals and organized crime syndicates engage in ritual-related kidnappings primarily to obtain supernatural wealth and power. This aligns with Routine Activity Theory, which posits that motivated offenders exploit the presence of suitable victims in an environment with inadequate security measures (Cohen & Felson, 1979). The socioeconomic conditions of the perpetrators further highlight the role of Strain Theory, where financial hardship and aspirations for quick wealth push individuals into criminal activities (Merton, 1938).

2. Societal Beliefs and Cultural Influences

The study reveals that deep-rooted cultural beliefs in supernatural intervention and prosperity rituals sustain the practice of ritual-related kidnappings. Many perpetrators believe that human sacrifices performed through Okeite rituals can guarantee success, wealth, and protection from harm. This belief system is reinforced by local spiritual leaders and ritualists who profit from the desperation of individuals seeking financial elevation. Interviews with community members indicate that fear of spiritual retaliation discourages public resistance or reporting of these crimes, making law enforcement efforts more challenging.

3. Victim Targeting and Crime Patterns

The analysis of victim demographics shows that children, women, and young adults are the primary targets of ritual kidnappers. This trend is influenced by the belief that specific age groups and genders yield more potent supernatural benefits. Geographical analysis of reported cases indicates that urban centers such as Awka, Nnewi, and Onitsha experience a higher prevalence of these crimes, attributed to their economic

activities and larger population density. The findings further highlight the role of inadequate surveillance and weak policing in facilitating these abductions.

4. Law Enforcement and Crime Prevention Challenges

The study identifies several challenges in combating ritual-related kidnappings, including corruption within security agencies, inadequate intelligence gathering, and limited community cooperation. Despite the introduction of stricter anti-kidnapping laws in Nigeria, enforcement remains weak due to a lack of resources and the influence of powerful individuals who benefit from these practices. Public awareness about the dangers of Okeite rituals is low, further complicating efforts to deter perpetrators and protect potential victims.

Conclusion

1. The Intersection of Rituals and Criminality

The study concludes that Okeite ritual practices significantly contribute to the high rate of kidnapping in Anambra State. The intersection of cultural beliefs, economic hardship, and organized crime networks sustains the prevalence of ritual-related abductions. Without addressing both the socio-economic and spiritual dimensions of the issue, the problem is likely to persist despite law enforcement efforts.

2. Implications for Security and Law Enforcement

The findings suggest that security agencies must adopt a more strategic approach to combating ritual-related kidnappings. Strengthening intelligence operations, increasing surveillance in high-risk areas, and implementing stricter penalties for ritual-related crimes can serve as deterrents. Furthermore, addressing the loopholes in the criminal justice system that allow offenders to evade prosecution is crucial.

3. Community Involvement and Cultural Reorientation

Beyond law enforcement efforts, addressing the deep-seated cultural beliefs that encourage ritualistic practices is essential. Religious and traditional leaders must play a critical role in educating communities about the dangers of ritual killings. A community-led approach, where individuals actively report suspicious activities without fear of retaliation, is necessary for long-term change.

4. Need for Multidisciplinary Interventions

A multidisciplinary intervention that includes legal, psychological, and educational strategies is vital in addressing ritual kidnappings. Government policies should prioritize poverty alleviation programs to reduce the economic desperation that drives individuals into ritual crime. Additionally, integrating security education into school curricula can help change perceptions about wealth acquisition through criminal means.

Recommendations

1. Strengthening Law Enforcement and Surveillance

The government should invest in better security infrastructure, including surveillance cameras, intelligence-led policing, and specialized anti-kidnapping units to monitor and disrupt ritual-related kidnapping networks. Adequate training and ethical reinforcement within law enforcement agencies are necessary to curb corruption and enhance accountability in tackling these crimes.

2. Community Engagement and Public Awareness Campaigns

Awareness campaigns should be launched at the grassroots level to educate communities about the realities of ritual-related kidnappings. Religious and traditional leaders should be encouraged to publicly denounce the practice and collaborate with law enforcement agencies in exposing perpetrators. Reporting mechanisms should be made accessible, with guaranteed protection for whistleblowers.

3. Policy Reforms and Legislative Action

Existing laws on ritual crimes and kidnapping should be reviewed and strictly enforced. Special courts should be established to fast-track cases related to ritual killings, ensuring swift prosecution of offenders. Additionally, the government should criminalize spiritual consultations that promote human sacrifices, making it illegal to solicit or conduct such rituals.

4. Economic and Educational Interventions

Addressing the economic motivations behind ritual kidnappings is crucial. The government should implement poverty reduction programs, job creation initiatives, and entrepreneurial support schemes to provide alternative means of income for individuals who might resort to crime. Educational institutions should incorporate moral and security education to challenge myths surrounding ritual wealth and instill values of hard work and integrity in young people.

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