Understanding the Motivations and Pathways of Women and Girls' Involvement in Terrorism in Nigeria

Peculiar M. Awa
Florida International University, AWAPECULIAR@GMAIL.COM

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/etd

Part of the African Studies Commons, Defense and Security Studies Commons, International Relations Commons, Peace and Conflict Studies Commons, and the Terrorism Studies Commons

Recommended Citation

This work is brought to you for free and open access by the University Graduate School at FIU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in FIU Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of FIU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact dcc@fiu.edu.
FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

UNDERSTANDING THE MOTIVATIONS AND PATHWAYS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS’ INVOLVEMENT IN TERRORISM IN NIGERIA

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
in
INTERNATIONAL CRIME AND JUSTICE
by
Peculiar Miracle Awa

2019
To: Dean John F. Stack, Jr.
   Steven J. Green School of International and Public Affairs

This dissertation, written by Peculiar Miracle Awa, and entitled Understanding the Motivations and Pathways of Women and Girls’ Involvement in Terrorism in Nigeria, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this dissertation and recommend that it be approved.

____________________________________
Carleen Vincent- Robinson

____________________________________
Rosa Chang

____________________________________
Albert Wuaku

Besiki Luka Kutateladze, Major Professor

Date of Defense: November 4, 2019

The dissertation of Peculiar Miracle Awa is approved.

____________________________________
Dean John F. Stack, Jr.
   Steven J. Green School of International and Public Affairs

____________________________________
Andrés G. Gil
   Vice President for Research and Economic Development
   and Dean of the University Graduate School

Florida International University, 2019
DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my family whose support has made it possible for me to complete this work. Special thanks to my husband for nudging me on these past five years. Thank you for believing in me, and for encouraging me throughout the process. To Ikenna, my son, being your mummy is my greatest honor.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Writing this dissertation has been the most challenging experience of my academic pursuit. I know that I would not have made it this far without the full academic support, patience, and guidance of all the members of my committee. Professors Kutateladze, Vincent-Robinson, Chang, and Wuaku played important roles in the completion of this dissertation. I owe them my deepest gratitude.

First, I am grateful to Dr. Kutateladze for serving as the chair of my dissertation committee. His mentorship, knowledge, patience, and commitment inspired me to pursue and accomplish the collection of original data used in this dissertation. He guided me in formulating ideas and integrating contents throughout the dissertation. I am grateful for all his guidance throughout all the phases of the dissertation process. Dr. Vincent-Robinson played an influential role in my life while matriculating through the degree. Her mentorship and guidance have formed the basis of my life as a professional for which I am eternally grateful. Both professors, Dr. Chang, and Dr. Wuaku, provided me constructive suggestions and supported me until the completion of my dissertation.

I would also like to thank members of faculty with whom I have worked with for their guidance, patience, and support throughout this process. I appreciate the contributions every faculty member and peer has made to my growth as a student and as an individual. I thank you all.
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

UNDERSTANDING THE MOTIVATIONS AND PATHWAYS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS’ INVOLVEMENT IN TERRORISM IN NIGERIA

by

Peculiar Miracle Awa

Florida International University, 2019

Miami, Florida

Professor Besiki Luka Kutateladze, Major Professor

This study examines the experiences of 20 women and girls who lived in the Boko Haram camp from 2014-2018 and had varying levels of engagement in the organization's activities. The study employs a qualitative phenomenological in-depth interview methodology. Semi-structured interviews conducted in the United States and Nigeria yielded data on the experiences of the respondents before, during, and after their times with Boko Haram. Based on the analysis of interview responses and field notes, several themes emerged. Overall findings suggest that family and community dynamics play a significant role in terrorism in Nigeria. More specifically, early child marriage and the lack of access to education increase the vulnerability of girls to abductions by Boko Haram which, in turn, contributes to participation in terrorism. Contrary to prior scholarship, the findings do not suggest that economic and political factors are primary drivers of female participation in terrorism in Nigeria. Instead, they support an indirect link to the fragility of state framework because poverty and economic hardship drive the lack of educational and employment opportunities, items which are associated with terrorism. Boko Haram members take control over the most disadvantaged and
vulnerable victims and, through direct threats or non-consensual marriage, force these women to succumb to their pressure. Respondents reported facing barriers to reintegration back into the community, although those with more education tended to fare better. These findings are discussed in terms of their implications for future research and counter-terrorism efforts in Nigeria.
# TABLE OF CONTENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>CONTENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual Framework</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Fragility of the Framework</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Intersection between Stockholm Syndrome and the Rational Choice Theory of Terrorism</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Summary</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Involvement and the relationship between Gender and Terrorism</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrorism in Nigeria</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigerian Terrorist and Their Motivations</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Causes of Terrorism in Nigeria</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boko Haram: An Evolution Fueled by Religious and Political Factors</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Participation in Terrorism in Nigeria and Boko Haram’s Role</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions and Study Objectives</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Summary</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy of Inquiry</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Sample</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification and Recruitment of Semi-Structured interview participants</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedure for Selecting Participants</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Procedures</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher’s Journal and Field Notes</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidentiality</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis Process and Procedures</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Summary</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. RESULTS</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants’ Demographic Information</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Themes</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question 1: How do women and girls who have had contact</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
with Boko Haram Conceptualize
Terrorism?.................................................................46
Research Question 2: What family and community dynamics contribute to the
involvement of women and girls in terrorism in Nigeria?.................................50
Research Question 3: What is the most common female recruitment Strategy
adopted by Boko Haram? ........................................................................58
Research Question 4: What is the most Powerful radicalization method used
by Boko Haram?
...........................................................................................................60
Research Question 5: What are the common operational uses of women
and girls in the Boko Haram
organization?..................................................................................62
Research Question 6: What are Boko Haram abductees’ views about how to
prevent the involvement of women and girls in terrorism? .........................65
Summary of the Results ........................................................................68

V. DISCUSSION ......................................................................................70
Conceptual Framework ..................................................................................70
Summary of the Problem .............................................................................72
Discussion of the Themes and Connection to Literature ...........................73
Theme 1: Participants’ definitions and knowledge of terrorism in Nigeria ......74
Theme 2: The role the family and community dynamics play in female
participation in terrorism in Nigeria ........................................................77
Theme 3: Female recruitment strategy adopted by Boko Haram ..................82
Theme 4: Participants’ views on the most powerful radicalization strategy
adopted by Boko Haram ............................................................................85
Theme 5: Operational uses of women and girls within the Boko Haram
organization ..............................................................................................88
Theme 6: Participants’ perceptions of how to prevent the future abduction of
women and girls and female participation in terrorism in Nigeria ..............91
Study Limitations .......................................................................................96
Implications for Policy ...............................................................................97
Implications for Future Research .............................................................99
Conclusion ................................................................................................101

REFERENCES ..........................................................................................104

APPENDIX: ..............................................................................................113

VITA ...........................................................................................................119
CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

On April 14, 2014, a group of militants known as Boko Haram attacked the Government Girls Secondary School in Chibok, Nigeria, kidnapping 276 school girls (Omeni, 2017). The sleepy town of Chibok is located in Borno State of the North-Eastern part of Nigeria. This incident stirred up a global outcry and led to an increased public awareness of violence against women and girls in Nigeria. This global awareness, however, also inspired Boko Haram to begin deploying women as suicide bombers in the bid to gain notoriety through the shock and awe tactic of terrorism (Thomson Reuters Foundation, 2016). Boko Haram continues to kidnap women and girls. As recently as in February 2018, the organization abducted 111 girls from the Government Girls Science and Technical College in Dapchi, Yobe state, also located in the North-Eastern part of Nigeria.

Boko Haram has used more women and girls in their bombing attacks than any other terrorist organization in history (Bloom & Matfess, 2016). Between June 2014 and January 2016, Boko Haram carried out 89 attacks against civilian soft targets, in which they used women or girls (Bloom & Matfess, 2016). The organization has deployed approximately 244 female suicide bombers since 2014 (Aziz, 2017). While, terrorist organizations in other countries (e.g., Sri Lanka) and regions (e.g., Middle East) have employed female operatives, Boko Haram's use of women and girls has been even greater and unprecedented in scale. For example, throughout its ten-year history, the Tamil Tigers utilized 46 women, while Boko Haram deployed more than 90 women and girls in 18 months, from June 2014 to January 2016 (Steward, 2015).
Women in terrorist groups represent an understudied phenomenon. The study of female terrorists is rarely acknowledged as a subject that can add to the understanding of terrorism and how to counter it (Cunningham, 2007). As a result, there remain many unanswered questions about female involvement in terrorist groups, including myriad questions about women’s recruitment, radicalization, roles or perspectives on terrorism. Typically, women are considered passive or coerced actors in terrorism rather than active perpetrators of violence (Cunningham, 2003; Ness, 2007; Talbot, 2000). This perception hinders counter-terrorism policies and perpetuates gendered assumptions about women's roles in terrorist groups.

Women have always played various roles in terrorist organizations (Cragin & Daly, 2009). Terrorist organizations increasingly take advantage of the fact that the use of females minimizes the attention of security operatives. One possible explanation for this development is an underlying assumption that women and girls are less likely to be involved in violent criminal activity.

Historical antecedents can help us understand the tenets of individual terrorist organizations, their membership, and motivations. Understanding the historical background of each organization is fundamental to evaluating their growth and shifts in organizational roles. The need to assess the motivation of women and girls to participate and support terrorism is pertinent to the practical application of intelligence and counter-terrorism efforts. Research can and should play a significant effort in terms of shaping counter-terrorism efforts and preventing the engagement of women and girls in terrorist activities, whether this is done voluntarily or by force. This study contributed to the
research and practice on this subject by employing qualitative in-depth interviews with 20 women and girls who lived in the Boko Haram camp in 2014-2018 and had varying levels of engagement in the organization's activities. Semi-structured interviews conducted in the United States and Nigeria yielded data on the experiences of the respondents before, during, and after their lives with Boko Haram.

**Statement of the Problem**

Female participation in insurgency represents an under-researched aspect of terrorism in Nigeria (Zenn & Pearson, 2014). The rise in the insurgency in Nigeria has significantly changed the lives of thousands of women and girls, casting them into roles that fall outside the ambit of domestic spheres. While most violent acts have been perpetrated by men, women and girls make up the majority of the estimated 1.8 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) in the North-Eastern part of Nigeria.

The year of 2013 marked the beginning of Boko Haram's tactic to use women and girls. After a series of kidnappings, female participation in the group's activities significantly increased. The 2014 kidnapping of 276 schoolgirls from the Government Girls Secondary School, Chibok, Borno State, Nigeria signified the group's strategic focus on kidnapping women and girls in North-Eastern Nigeria (Bloom & Matfess, 2016).

Terrorism scholars are well aware that the lines between militants, sympathizers, and forced accomplices are often blurred. As a result, former wives, slaves, or fighters bear the stigma for associating with insurgents and are often barred from reintroduction into their communities. An understanding of how women experience the conflict in
Nigeria, not only as victims but also as actors can directly inform policies and programs aimed at tackling insurgency at the roots. This effort can also facilitate the contribution of women to economic prosperity, political stability and lasting peace.

**Significance of the Study**

There is limited research that addresses the roles women and girls take up within terrorist organizations. According to Laster and Erez (2015), new terrorist organizations have a sophisticated understanding of the instrumental and symbolic effectiveness of gender stereotypes in the target societies. These understandings are often exploited to obtain strategic advantage and underscore the explanations of why women become involved in terrorism. Although terrorism and women’s involvement in terrorism is probably as old as humanity, the media, and policy makers obscure female participation in terrorism and terrorists’ organizations (Cunningham, 2007; Ness, 2007). As a result, the notion that female participation in terrorism is a recent phenomenon is promoted (Agara, 2015). Consequently, questions about the frequency, importance, and uniqueness of women's involvement in terrorist activities have arisen. It is now clear that we can no longer ignore the relationship between gender and terrorism.

Research has speculated many reasons for female participation in terrorism. Some explanations imply that women’s motivations are fundamentally different from that of men due to the gendered nature of justifications for participation in terrorism (Agara, 2015). Some researchers have tried to connect the participation of women in violence to tragic experiences such as abuse, rape, drug use, and loss of loved ones. Others have argued that women become involved in violence due to the pursuit of women's liberation
(Talbot, 2001; Cunningham, 2007). These various scholarly perspectives further complicate the issue because very few of these positions link female terrorist activities to political devotion to a cause (Agara, 2015).

In line with the above, the analysis of the participation of women and girls in violence in Nigeria remains limited by the lack of research of female supporters of terrorist activities and abductees of terrorist organizations within the country (Zenn & Pearson, 2014). There is a compelling need for more research with and about women who were in captivity or have been found to collaborate with terrorists to ascertain their views, experiences, motivations, and contributions to specific attacks. This study aims to explore the role of women in terrorism in Nigeria as a path to contributing to the prevention of the country’s ongoing and escalating violence.

**Conceptual Framework**

Since there is limited research about the roles of women in terrorist organizations, theories specific to female participation are incomplete. For this reason, no single theory can fully explain forces behind female involvement in violence and insurgency. The study adopts the conceptual frameworks derived from the works of Burke (1966) and Fisher (1989). Both scholars developed a functional foundation for any research into the question of motive. Burke (1966) argued that “to understand human behavior, the task of the critic is to judge the motives of rhetoric to reflect and deflect different realities” (Burke, 1966:45). In applying Fisher's (1989) narrative theory, one can argue that the stories of women that rely on stereotypes help the public create a narrative that encourages the belief that women are powerless and are only good at secondary,
supporting, and caring jobs. These narratives are often created by society to ensure the maintenance of the fidelity of what womanhood entails (El Jack, Bell, & Narayanaswamy, 2003).

This study is built upon interconnected elements of the Fragility of State Framework, the Rational Choice Theory of Terrorism, and Stockholm Syndrome. Combining these perspectives may hold the key to unfolding voluntary and involuntary female involvement in terrorist activities in Nigeria. These frameworks and their relation to the current study are discussed in subsequent sections.

The Fragility of State Framework

In the fragility of state framework, the word 'state' connotes “the overall social system subject to government or power,” and “the apparatus or organization of government or power that exercises the monopoly of the legal use of violence” (Beblawi & Luciani, 1987: 4). A fragile state is one that fails in providing the basic needs of its citizens. Basic requirements are those provisions that are necessary to create the conditions that are critical to the standard of life of the people and the general development of the state (Cilliers & Sisks, 2014). This framework also extends to a state's inability to carry out core functions and protect the lives and properties of its citizens. Poor governance, the existence of conflict, lack of civil rights, corruption, inequality in income, lack of opportunities, as well as ethno-religious fractionalizations all characterize a fragile state. Rotberg (2003) states that political, economic, and political violence are the most important markers of a failed state.
Authors attempting to explain the tenets of terrorism within an African context have argued that terrorism thrives in African nations because these countries were not adequately institutionalized (Chabal & Daloz, 1999). As a result, the structure of colonized countries conceals an innate and specific nature of power (Chabal & Daloz, 1999). The state failure theory put forward by Rotberg (2002) traces the root of state failure to three primary sources: economic dislocation, political instability, and loss of legitimacy.

According to the fragility of state framework, the characteristics of the economic sphere of a failed state include a lack of public goods and services, deteriorated standards of living, corruption at all levels of government, rent-seeking\(^1\), and a pervasive economic stagnation (Rotberg, 2002). The political sphere is exemplified by prevailing democratic norms that coerces the legislatures and bureaucracies into subservience as well as the existence of ethnic discrimination and discord. The government becomes partisan and does not operate for the benefit of all citizens. Consequently, corrupt ruling elites invest their ill-gotten gains overseas, building lavish residences, and palaces with state funds (Rotberg, 2002).

The last phase of failure is witnessed through the collapse of the state's legitimacy. The collapse of the state's legitimacy leads to a lack of loyalty to the state and disenfranchisement of aggrieved citizens. As a result, many of the citizens will transfer their allegiances to their clan and group leaders, some of whom gravitate toward

\(^1\) Rent-seeking refers to the extraction of uncompensated value from others without making any valuable contribution to productivity.
terrorism as they strive to secure their public mandate. Since terrorists seek to mobilize from both external and local supporters, they often operate in the marginalized parts of failed states where they exploit the prevailing conditions associated with the failure of the state (Rotberg, 2003).

Beyond actually causing state failure, governmental misrule often hinges on the capacity of the leaders to limit or prevent citizen’s responses through protests and mass movements for systematic change (Cilliers & Sisks, 2014). It is the latter scenario that lays the basis for the sort of interest-based politics that ultimately breeds and nurtures a terrorist movement like Boko Haram (Reno, 2018). According to Uzodike and Maiangwa (2012), Boko Haram’s utilization of bomb attacks is a result of the failure of the Nigerian government to provide human security, social justice, employment, financial security, and the necessary infrastructural services that are positive features of a developing state.

A considerable number of “third world” countries are considered to be failed states. These include Afghanistan, Angola, Burundi, the DRC, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, and Sudan. Lebanon was also a failed state, and so were Bosnia, Tajikistan, and Nigeria (Rotberg 2002). Focusing on Nigeria, Achebe (1983) described the country as a "social pundit." He argued that Nigeria “is an example of a country that has fallen; it has collapsed” (Achebe, 1983: 1). In many ways, the preceding statement mirrors the chaotic and anarchic situation in Nigeria. The Nigerian case exemplifies the nature of a fragile state, as captured within this framework. In 2011, Nigeria ranked at No.14 in the Failed

---

2 A failed state is one whose political or economic system has become so weak that the government is no longer in control.
States Index. The 2010-2011 Terrorism and Political Violence Map rated Nigeria No. 5 as a severely afflicted terrorist region. Furthermore, in 2011, the Human Development Index ranked Nigeria as No. 156 out of 186 countries.

State failure in Nigeria has a direct connection with its high level of corruption and its adverse effects. Corruption in Nigeria has reduced the legitimacy of the state, eroded the credibility of political leaders, and replaced merit and hard work with strong and complex patron-client relations. It has also accentuated inefficiency, ineffectiveness and general disorder in the bureaucratic apparatuses and led to mismanagement, waste, and—ultimately—economic crisis (Ihonvbere & Shaw, 1998).

Consequently, there have been increasing rates of poverty and unemployment in the country. The World Bank report of 2011 indicates that 54.7% of Nigeria's population lives in abject poverty (World Bank Data, 2011). The ramifications of the entrenched culture of endemic formal corruption, grave leadership neglect, and incompetence over the decades have become too painful for many Nigerians to endure (Adibe, 2012; Onuoha, 2011). A significant number of Nigerians die each year of preventable diseases. These diseases are often the result of living in dehumanizing conditions, inadequate health care services, famishment, and poverty. Successive regimes in Nigeria have been too weak and unable to ensure the physical safety of citizens against organized attacks by criminal gangs and during sectarian violence (Isa, 2012). For instance, in recurring outbreaks of ethno-religious violence in various parts of the country like Kaduna and Jos, dozens, hundreds and even thousands of people are often killed, injured, and displaced under the helpless watch of officials of different Nigerian regimes.
Given these contexts, there is a general and profound sense of disenchantment and even desperation among an army of unemployed, poor and aggrieved citizens who sometimes show their resignation by leaving the country or opting for a range of criminal activities. In the absence of structured or effective institutionalized support systems, state officials (acting independently) and non-state actors (including religious and ethno-religious leaders) often intervene to ameliorate human suffering. Some also maneuver to cultivate loyalties that are commonly used to pursue objectives that are not in line with official state preferences (Onapajo, 2011).

However, corruption in Nigeria is so endemic that it is not limited to state operatives. Authors have argued that terrorism in Nigeria is not the only negative consequence of the failure of the state (Adibe, 2012). Adibe (2012) states that several groups have risen to attack the shortcomings of the Nigerian government. The difference is that Boko Haram chooses bombs, while others use whatever means they have at their disposal. He further states that the similarity between other groups and Boko Haram lies in the belief that their actions are justifiable due to the unfairness of the Nigerian state. They also believe that the government is the outright enemy.

Due to the significant and growing security threat of organized groups—especially Boko Haram—and the inability of the state to ensure the personal safety of its citizens, many religious leaders have reportedly advised members of their congregation to defend themselves against Boko Haram. This can be viewed as an explicit confirmation of the systematic failure of the state to tackle such security challenges. It is within the context of state failure that the human needs theory takes form. A defining principle of
the theory is that a primary cause of lingering violence is people's quest to secure their unmet needs. It is apposite, therefore, when analysts conclude that the relatively high level of poverty in North-Eastern Nigeria, where Boko Haram is based, disposes people to violence (Adibe, 2012). While there is merit in this position, we can best understand the evolution of Boko Haram within the comprehensive framework of state failure in Nigeria.

The intensity of Boko Haram's activities captures the fragile nature of the Nigerian State. It paints the picture of a government that is not in control of the security situation. The organization continues to kidnap women and girls, leading to a rise in gendered violence in Nigeria. Existing studies and media reports suggest that Boko Haram uses abducted women and girls in suicide bombing operations. The first incident of a female suicide bombing attack in Nigeria was reported on June 8, 2014. This attack occurred in Gombe state where a female bomber killed herself and a soldier close to the Army barracks (Odebode et al., 2014). Subsequently, there were multiple incidents of suicide bombings recorded throughout North-Eastern Nigeria. Understandably, the use of women and girls as terrorists in Nigeria raises the concerns of the populace. There is a fear that the continued abduction and detention of women and girls by Boko Haram would lead to an increase in the ongoing radicalization, indoctrination, and coercion into active participation as suicide bombers (Famutimi, 2014). I argue that utilizing women and girls as suicide bombers should be considered the most dangerous strategy an organization can use towards the actualization of its goals. Given that it is easier for women to penetrate targets, terrorist organizations will continue exploiting women to carry out their attacks until effective counter-terrorist strategies—which rely on
perspectives and experiences of women who collaborated with terrorist groups—are put in place.

**The Intersection between Stockholm Syndrome and the Rational Choice Theory of Terrorism**

Boko Haram engages in the frequent kidnapping of women and girls (Steward, 2015; Bloom & Matfess, 2016; Omeni, 2017). Behavioral patterns that occur as a result of Stockholm Syndrome could be interpreted to fall within the ambit of the Rational Choice Theory of Terrorism. The existence of this intersection between these two theories can account for the involvement of women and girls in terrorist activity in Nigeria.

The Rational Choice Theory of Terrorism is a psychological theory that seeks to account for the engagement in terrorist activity. It was established by Harris Cooper in 1978 and evolved from the game theory of economics and applied mathematics. The theory attempts to represent situations in which the choices of one person or group depends on those of other people or groups (Morrow, 1994). The tenets of this theory apply to cases where persons or groups benefit at the expense of rivals (Wilson, 2000; Victoroff, 2005). According to the theory, terrorist activities do not represent pathological or illogical behavior but the means to fulfill personal needs (Sandler & Siqueira, 2009).

Sandler and Arce (2003) applied the Rational Choice Theory of Terrorism to establish that there is an interdependence in the relationship between terrorists and other bodies such as their supporters, the government, and the media. They also established that this relationship extends to the reaction to terrorist activity. According to the theory,
terrorist acts stem from the sound, conscious, and calculated decisions of individuals. This theory also holds that terrorist acts embody an optimal strategy to fulfill the sociopolitical goals of the perpetrators (Sandler & Lapan, 1988; Crenshaw 1992; Wilson, 2000; Victoroff, 2005). Hence, terrorism might not represent irrational or unreasoned human behavior, but it could represent an individual's best means of achieving personal needs in some circumstances.

Popular media often portrays terrorists as insane or psychopathic (Oearce, 1977; Cooper, 1978). Research has indicated that terrorists seldom fulfill the criteria for psychological disorders (Rasch, 1979; Post, Sprinzak & Denny, 2003; Horgan, 2003). In contrast, terrorists are individuals who risk their lives for the enhancement of their community rather than an antisocial individual (Post, 2004). In applying the Rational Choice Theory of Terrorism, some authors maintain that terrorists might exhibit psychological disorders, particularly antisocial personality disorder (Cooper, 1978). Therefore, it can be argued that female engagement in terrorism can be examined from the ambit of a diagnosis of antisocial personality disorder that motivates women and girls to harm members of the society.

Stockholm Syndrome, on the other hand, presents an explanation for engagement in terrorism from a victim's perspective. It is a psychological response to severe trauma. Adorjan, Christensen, Kelly and Pawluch (2012) explain that Stockholm Syndrome is a coping mechanism that involves psychological adjustments adopted by individuals lacking personal freedom. Researchers have argued that Stockholm Syndrome stresses
the psychological dynamics by which victims come to identify with their captors (Ochberg, 1982; Adorjan, Christensen, Kelly, & Pawluch, 2012).

Given the traumatic effects of kidnapping, Stockholm Syndrome can explain female participation in terrorist activity in Nigeria in instances where victims of Boko Haram's kidnapping begin to exhibit behaviors that mirror the Rational Choice Theory of Terrorism. The kidnapping of women and girls can lead to the subjugation of psychological trauma that has the capability of robbing the victims of their autonomy to make a rational choice.

While sexual violence against women and the incorporation of gender into violent movements is a global issue, the increase in female participation in terrorist activity in Nigeria builds upon a history of tactical experimentation undertaken in response to the government's reactions to the insurgents. The adoption of female fighters served as a means for Boko Haram to distinguish itself from other terrorist organizations in Nigeria (Bloom & Mattfess, 2016). The organization's reliance upon women and girls has been perceived as part of their organizational shift, which utilizes coerced participation as a tool geared towards generating support in the bid to actualize their goals (Zenn & Pearson, 2014; Omego, 2015; Osita-Njoku & Chikere, 2015).

The Stockholm Syndrome can help explain female participation in terrorism because abducted women and girls may begin to sympathize with the cause of Boko Haram. The kidnap of women and girls conscripted into the movement is an indication of the shift in question. The question then arises as to the methods of radicalization the organization adopts to ensure the loyalty of the women and the girls they abduct (Bloom
The intersection between the Stockholm Syndrome and the Rational Choice Theory of Terrorism can readily account for the existence of a blurred line between victimization and perpetuation surrounding the subject matter of female engagement in terrorist activity in Nigeria.

**Chapter Summary**

Chapter One presented a structural framework for the dissertation. The chapter provided an overview of the problem of female participation in terrorism, presenting a historical context of the issue. Furthermore, a discussion of Boko Haram's use of women and girls as suicide bombers was presented highlighting that the subject matter represents an under-researched aspect of terrorism in Nigeria. The chapter also presented the conceptual framework upon which the study is built, and discussed the interconnected elements of the Fragility of State Framework, the Rational Choice Theory of Terrorism, and Stockholm Syndrome as a means of unfolding the voluntary and involuntary aspects of female involvement in terrorist activities in Nigeria. This chapter provided the reader with a thorough description of the conceptual frameworks and how they work to explain the involvement of women and girls in terrorism in Nigeria. Chapter One provided the foundation from which future chapters will further frame how women and girls experience and understand terrorism in Nigeria. Chapter Two will proceed to review the literature about female participation in terrorism, and also provide a detailed account of the evolution of female involvement in terrorism in Nigeria.
CHAPTER THREE:
LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature about female participation in terrorism. In masculinist cultures, allowing women into combat violates one of the significant tenets of patriarchy (Hassan, 2002). Criminology scholars posit that violence and destructive antisocial behavior is typically the domain of men. Women have been disproportionately identified as the victims of crime and armed conflict across the globe (Tessler & Warriner, 1997; Marway, 2011; Laster & Erez, 2015). As a result, the public consciousness regarding terrorism incorrectly associates insurgency with masculinity because the involvement of women in terrorist activity seemingly defies conventional thinking about gender and violence (Laster & Erez, 2015).

Given that literature analyzes the role women and girls play in terrorism through the lens of their status as victims, used for political or religious reasons (Marway, 2011; Weinberg & Eubank, 2011; Laster & Erez, 2015), female involvement in terrorism remains a puzzling subject matter. Most importantly, women are often associated with nurturing and caring roles as opposed to men who are perceived to be more prone to violence (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2011; Laster & Erez, 2015). This divide between the roles of men and women often increases the difficulty in the understanding of the threat that the female terrorist poses.

Female Involvement and the Relationship between Gender and Terrorism

Female involvement in terrorism has made women more dangerous than men (Alli, 2005). Female attacks convey more significant shock value which most terrorist
organizations aim to achieve. The involvement of women and girls in terrorism is neither limited to the 21st Century nor to Islamist terrorist groups (Gentry & Sjoberg, 2011). Females were used in the liberation campaigns such as the Algerian resistance against the French where they were initially ordered to smuggle weapons. Subsequent upon recognizing the vital role they could play, female supporters of the opposition became willing volunteers for such tasks (Minne & Clarke, 2007; Horne, 2002).

Despite the violent roles women have played in history, they continue to be underestimated in the context of terrorism. As a result, a new wave of terrorism which progressively uses women in the field as combatants has evolved. Due to the existence of persistent gender stereotypes in target societies, female terrorists have proven to be highly effective (Laster & Erez, 2015). In global hotspots, the dark figure of women's diverse operational contribution to terrorist activity has always loomed (Harmon, 2000). For instance, women regularly carry ammunition across enemy territories and distribute medical and other supplies to combatants (Bloom, 2007). Women have also been held to be involved in internet propaganda and recruitment campaigns as well as aiding and abetting their husbands, brothers, and other family members by providing material and psychological support to them for their terrorist activities (Berko & Erez, 2007; Erez & Berko, 2008; Laster & Erez, 2015).

Terror groups have propagated their agenda using direct and deliberate attacks on females (Barkindo, Gudaku, and Wesley, 2013). Terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda, Islamic State of Iraq and Levant, Hezbollah, and Al-Shabaab have used gender to
expand the intensity of the propaganda of their deeds, ensure the smooth running of their organizational activities, and as a weapon of power (Sharoni, Welland & Steiner, 2016).

In recent times, terrorist organizations have deployed women as suicide bombers. Approximately 26% of all suicide attacks carried out between 1981 and 2007 involved women (Cunningham, 2003; Agara, 2015). Harmon (2000) estimated that in the year 2000, 30% of international terrorist acts were carried out by women. According to Pape’s (2005) study of 462 suicide bombers operating between 1980 and 2003, women constituted 50% of the actors among Kurds, Chechens, and the Tamil Tigers. Since 2005 there has been a marked increase in women’s participation in terrorist attacks (Ness, 2005; Agara, 2015). The use of women and girls for terrorist activity has increased with extremist groups actively recruiting women for these roles. The Nigerian experience reflects this marked increase in the number of female suicide bombers and terrorists used in the dissemination of fear and terror.

**Terrorism in Nigeria**

Terrorism is not new to Nigeria. Domestic terrorism within the country has a long history (Danjibo, 2009; Adesoji 2011; Solomon, 2012). One of the earliest documented accounts of extremism occurred in the 1980s as a result of the Maitatsine movement. This was a series of violent uprisings instigated by Islamist militants in Northern Nigeria between 1980 and 1985 (Adesoji, 2011). The movement was famous for its condemnation of western culture, education, and technology. Its followers were young, poor, former seasonal laborers who had been economically displaced by the oil boom as
well as petty merchants and youth seeking an Islamic education in Kano state Nigeria (Isichei, 1987; Adesoji, 2011).

Both the Southern and Northern geopolitical zones\(^3\) of Nigeria have experienced terrorism. Groups like the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) in the South-South region and Boko Haram in the Northern part have posed the most significant challenge to security in Nigeria (Maiangwa & Agbiboa, 2014; Nsude, 2016). These groups adopted strategies such as looting, arson, kidnapping, illegal detention, killings, and suicide bombing.

Terrorist activities have drastically increased in the last few years. After 2009, terrorism in Nigeria took a different direction as a result of the evolution of violence from ethnic clashes to suicide bombing, which claimed over 3,000 lives. This situation led to the declaration of a state of emergency in three Northern states (Olalekan, 2012). With the 2011 attack on the United Nations' building in Abuja, Nigeria, the country's image was adversely affected. As a result, violence within the country became a matter of global interest (Onapajo & Uzodike, 2012). For a better understanding, it is essential to discuss the major terrorist organizations that have operated within Nigeria.

**Nigerian Terrorist Organizations and their Motivations**

The pattern of insecurity in Nigeria is regionalized (Ikenga & Efebeh, 2013; Obi, 2015). The crises in the Southern region, which started in the 1990s, arising from the

---

\(^3\) A geopolitical zone is a region of geography, and a culture or cultures. The six geopolitical zones of Nigeria refers to the division of modern Nigeria according to states with similar ethnic groups, and/or common political history.
activities of different militant groups have brought negative implications on economic development in Nigeria (Nwogwugwu, et al. 2012). Organizations such MEND, Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), Ijaw Youth Congress (IYC), Niger Delta Vigilante Force (NDVF), Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF), among others, in the Southern region were famous for hostage-taking, kidnapping for ransom, pipeline vandalism, oil-theft, arson and ambush (Nwogwugwu, et. al 2012, Obi, 2015). These groups utilized kidnapping and hostage-taking to force experts involved in crude oil exploration to pressure the Nigerian government to take decisive steps towards ameliorating the environmental, social, and political problems bedeviling the area (Obi, 2015). The government took steps to reduce the violence in the Southern regions through its amnesty programs. The government offered the militants jobs, scholarships to study oil-related majors, and vocational training programs. This led to a marked reduction in violent activities in the Southern regions of Nigeria (Obi, 2015)

Additionally, religious and political clashes have rocked the Northern parts of Nigeria. However, it was the emergence of Boko Haram that led to the metamorphosis of these clashes to full-blown terrorism. Another major security challenge facing Nigeria involves the activities of the Fulani herdsmen. The Fulani Militants are not members of one group, but they are nomads traveling from city to city by foot, to graze their livestock (Obi, 2015). While traveling, they frequently trespass farmlands owned by locals in their host communities, destroying crops and valuables. Attempts by farmers to prevent the destruction of their properties by the Fulani herdsmen leads to violent resistance. There have also been allegations to the effect that the herdsmen take advantage of these
opportunities to steal, raze houses, rape, and kill innocent members of the communities they pass through (Chilaka & Odoh, 2012; Obi, 2015).

Furthermore, it is unknown if the individual attacks by the Fulani Militants are related. It has also been contested that these attacks could be related to the activities of other terrorist groups. Some Nigerians believe that Fulani herdsmen may be Boko Haram members in disguise while a few others believe that they are not Fulani people but Nomads from other parts of West Africa (Akinola, & Tella, 2013; Awoniyi, 2013). Research has found that it is challenging to correlate the activities of Boko Haram terrorists to those of the Fulani herdsmen (Akinola, & Tella, 2013; Awoniyi, 2013). Boko Haram has utilized explosives carried by suicide bombers or hidden in a target. However, accounts by victims of the herdsmen crisis have shown that the Fulani militants are solely interested in seeking grazing lands for their livestock (Chilaka & Odoh, 2012; Akinola, & Tella, 2013; Awoniyi, 2013; Obi, 2015).

**Causes of Terrorism in Nigeria**

The politicization of religion has played an important role in the evolution of terrorist activity in Nigeria. The Northern region has been a fertile ground for religious activism that has been traced to the Jihad of Uthman Dan Fodio in the early 18th century (Ajayi, 1990). Scholars state that the unwillingness of the ruling elite to separate politics and religion drives the proliferation of violence within the country (Ajayi, 1990; Onapajo & Uzodike, 2012; David, 2013; Nsude, 2016). According to Ajayi (1990), the ruling elite derives legitimacy from religion and not the people. As a result, they frequently use religion as a political weapon for mobilizing the masses in a bid to divert attention from
their ineptitude and corruption. This issue is not unique to the Northern region or Islamists. The ruling elites in the Southern part, which is predominantly Christian, also use Christianity for selfish gains (Ajayi, 1990). However, the situation is more evident in the North because it is relatively monolithic due to the predominance of Islam, the rise of extremism in Nigeria, and the after-effects of colonialization (Ajayi, 1990; Solomon, 2012; David, 2013; Elden, 2014).

It is essential to approach the subject matter of the institutionalization of terrorism in Nigeria from the viewpoint of socio-economic instability. There is a link between the socio-economic instability prevalent in Nigeria, the effects of colonialism, the barriers to the criminalization of terrorism, and the negative rewards system that exists within the country (Yahaya, 2015). This approach is vital because it provides an understanding of terrorism by capturing the present fundamental issues while addressing its history. It also provides recognition of previous counter-terrorism efforts that evolved into factors that have encouraged the expansion of terrorism in Nigeria (Yahaya, 2015).

Furthermore, it is not a coincidence that the worst forms of political violence in present-day Nigeria emanate from areas of the country that are socio-economically deprived (Agbiboa, 2013). The states of the Northern part of the country where poverty is so high, and unemployment rife, host radical Islamist groups that have challenged the authority of the state. For example, Boko Haram enticed impoverished youth and their families with promises of financial remuneration. The organization gives the family of radicalized individuals approximately $150.00 (U.S.) in exchange for becoming a suicide bomber (Nsude, 2016). As seen above, the combination and manipulation of religion,
poverty, and politics are potent factors that facilitate the proliferation of terrorism in Nigeria (Ajayi, 1990; Elden, 2014; Nsude, 2016).

**Boko Haram: An Evolution Fueled by Religious and Political Factors**

Boko Haram was formed in 2002 in Yobe state of North-Eastern Nigeria with the main goal to “purify” Islam. The organization was established as a radical fundamentalist Islamic sect under the leadership of Salafist preacher Mohammed Yusuf (Ikenga & Efebeh, 2013). Boko Haram started as an isolated sect based on a discourse of religious revival and a return to what they believe to be the true tenets of Islam. The organization’s influence can be largely explained by its strong propaganda machine targeting the poor and vulnerable. Boko Haram's activities are driven by the idea that poverty, corruption, bad governance, and societal ills are the consequences of western influence on Nigeria (Barkindo, Gudaku, & Wesley, 2013). The organization’s leaders preach that a religious revival will be a permanent solution to the negative consequences of western influence.

Boko Haram aims to establish an Islamic state in Nigeria based on Sharia law. Initially beginning with a series of religious riots against Christians in the North-Eastern part of Nigeria, the group's activities metamorphosed into targeting schools and schoolchildren in a bid to put an end to the western education of Nigerian youths (Zenn & Pearson, 2014; Omego, 2015; Bloom & Matfess, 2016). The organization has repeatedly taken advantage of the lack of confidence in government among ordinary Nigerians, especially in Northern Nigeria, and it has called for overthrowing the Nigerian government and declaring a caliphate over the areas of Borno State (Kaplan, 2015). Several researchers have investigated the link between religious beliefs and Boko Haram
activities (Minteh & Perry, 2013; Asfura & McQuaid, 2015). There appears to be a widespread realization that Boko Haram’s activities are religiously motivated, whether this involves selecting targets for their attacks, recruiting new members, or legitimizing extreme violence (Sjoberg et al., 2011; Barkindo et al., 2013; Zenn & Pearson, 2014; Nsude, 2016). Asfura & McQuaid (2015).

While the jihadist movement may have played a significant role in the evolution of Boko Haram, some observers argue that it is “locally grounded interactions between religion and politics” (Thurston, 2017) that more accurately explain the forces that shaped the terrorist organization. For example, Alexander Thurston (2017) identifies two prevailing explanations for Boko Haram’s emergence:

“One explanation holds that Boko Haram is best understood as an extension or even a puppet of the global jihadist movement—casting Boko Haram as a king of ‘Nigerian al-Qaedaism,’ and claiming that foreign backers, especially Algerians, long pulled Boko Haram’s strings. A second explanation depicts Boko Haram as the product of a collision between poverty, ‘poor governance,’ and economic disparities between northern and southern Nigeria” (p. 3-4).

Yet others describe the forces that fueled Boko Haram as even more complex that touch nearly every major problem faced by the modern Nigerian society. For example, McCants (2016) has proposed a broader framework which further highlights the severity of the problem:
“[T]he most salient [causes] are these: a religious heritage that lauds fighting abroad to establish states and to protect one’s fellow Muslims; ultraconservative religious ideas and networks exploited by militant recruiters; peer pressure (if you know someone involved, you’re more likely to get involved); fear of religious persecution; poor governance (not type of government); youth unemployment or underemployment in large cities; and civil war. All of these factors are more at play in the Arab world now than at any other time in recent memory, which is fueling a jihadist resurgence around the world” (para. 5).

The group's initial geographical focus was the four northern states of Borno, Kano, Bauchi, and Yobe. However, counter-terrorism activities used by the Nigerian government led to an increase in the organization's attacks on targets within and outside its traditional areas of operation (Asfura & McQuaid, 2015). In 2011, the organization began targeting the military, the police, and other organizations affiliated with the state. In August 2011, Boko Haram attacked the United Nations building in Abuja, Nigeria (Sjoberg et al., 2011). With this evolution in Boko Haram's tactics, the organization gained international attention marked by a shift from local grievances deeply rooted in cultural and religious clashes existing in Nigeria to attacking international targets.

When Boko Haram first formed in 2002, their actions were nonviolent. Beginning in 2009, which coincides with Abubakar Shekau taking over the leadership of the organization, their activities became more violent and included the bombing of marketplaces, churches, government buildings, police stations, schools, hospitals, clinics, army barracks, residential houses, as well as the abduction of expatriates. In fact, 2009-
2015 symbolizes the most violent phase of domestic terrorism in Nigeria, largely attributable to Boko Haram. By 2015, the organization’s 6-year insurgency had killed 20,000 and forced 2.3 million people to flee their homes (The New York Times, 2015). According to the Global Terrorism Database (GTD, 2016), there were 2,887 incidents of terrorism in Nigeria from 1980 to 2015. While there were only 297 terrorist incidents in 1980-2008, at least 2,600 incidents occurred from 2009 to 2015 (GTD, 2016). The beginning of 2012 was particularly bloody as Boko Haram executed 21 attacks over a three-week period which led to the killing of at least 253 people. Between July 2009 and January 2013, 164 terrorist attacks were carried out and they resulted in the deaths of 935 people (Solomon, 2012; GTD, 2016).

The global community has paid greater attention to Boko Haram since 2014, when the organization abducted more than 270 girls from Chibok Government School (Maiangwa & Agbiboa, 2014). With the 2014 abduction of the Chibok schoolgirls and the continued kidnapping of women and girls, Boko Haram's use of female suicide bombers increased. Although Boko Haram first began using the tactic of suicide bombings in 2011, they started using female suicide bombers in 2014 (Markovic, 2019). This development signifies the organization's adoption of a gendered approach towards the actualization of its goals (Maiangwa & Agbiboa, 2014; Nsude, 2016). This dissertation heavily relies on the experiences of Chibok girls, who are now women, to understand the role of female participation in terrorism in Nigeria.

Female Participation in Terrorism in Nigeria and Boko Haram’s Role
Since 2013, Boko Haram has significantly contributed to gendered violence against women (Osita-Njoku & Chikere, 2015). Scholars have attributed the reason behind the rise in the abduction and use of women by Boko Haram to the declaration of the state of emergency by the Goodluck Jonathan administration in May 2013 (Zenn & Pearson, 2014; Bloom & Matfess, 2016). Omego (2015), contends that the use of kidnapping as a tactic by the sect began after a raid by federal forces led to the arrest of family members of suspected sect members, and over a hundred women including the wives of Abubakar Shekau, the new leader of Boko Haram (Barkindo, Gudaku, & Wesley, 2013). As a result, a threat was issued by the leader of the group in January 2014 to engage in a gender-based abduction centered mainly on the kidnapping of women (Associated Press, January 27, 2014).

Subsequently, the victimization of women and Gender-Based Violence (GBV) became an overt aspect of the activities of the Boko Haram in the North-Eastern region of Nigeria (Zenn and Pearson, 2014; Human Rights Watch, 2014; Maiangwa and Amao, 2015). The active involvement of women in Boko Haram's activities as logistics or support personnel, attackers and martyrs has grown to substantially become a matter of public attention across the globe (Sjoberg et al., 2011). This aspect of terrorism represents a novel but a growing trend (Pape, 2005).

Furthermore, researchers suggest that there is a strong connection between religion and the use of women and girls for terrorism in Nigeria. For example, Boko Haram targets Christian girls for abduction and conversion to Islam (Barkindo et al., 2013; Zenn & Pearson, 2014). Zenn and Pearson (2014) state that the developing aspect of Boko Haram's operation using women...
increases gender-based violence targeted against Christians. A 2013 study by Nigeria's Political Violence Research Network found that more than 45% of the victims of Boko Haram's activities were Christian women and children (Barkindo et al., 2013).

This finding is connected to increased government pressure on Boko Haram strongholds in North-Eastern Nigeria, resulting in the insurgents abducting Christian women as they flee the security forces (Zenn & Pearson, 2014). Researchers find that women in the North-Eastern regions have been increasingly targeted with kidnapping, coerced conversion to Islam, and forced marriage (Barkindo et al., 2013; Zenn & Pearson, 2014). Other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa where rebel movements thrived have tactically exploited women. For example, the civil conflicts in Mozambique, Sierra Leone, and Rwanda witnessed the abduction, sexual violence, forced marriage, and conscription of enemy women into insurgent groups (Mazurana & McKay, 2003; Turshen, 2001; Coulter et al., 2008).

The use of women within the framework of insurgency in Nigeria corresponds with the terrorist organization’s ideology and culture that calls for a greater appreciation of how gender factors into terrorism (Zenn & Pearson, 2014). Female participation in terrorism has generated questions about the importance, frequency, and uniqueness of women's involvement in terrorist activities. Additionally, it has also made it clear that we can no longer ignore the relationship between women, gender, and terrorism.

In general, terrorism research in Nigeria is still developing and has faced some difficulty. The government's failure to release vital information necessary to investigate the subject matter of terrorism is the most pivotal factor responsible for this (Madu, 2014; Nsude, 2016). Naturally, this led to a lack of information and adequate data on terrorist
incidents necessary to analyze the problem and efficiently develop counter-terrorism strategies. Additionally, the illiteracy of prospective respondents, incomplete statistics, scanty information bases, inaccurate census figures, and insufficient funds continues to hinder terrorism research in Nigeria.

Last, the available studies have failed to provide an empirical analysis of the prevalence and nature of terrorist incidents in Nigeria. As a result, research efforts into the subject matter of female participation in terrorism in Nigeria have been too scanty to develop an empirical foundation for this study to build upon. Hence, this study contributes to the literature by taking a phenomenological approach into understanding the motivations of women and girls to collaborate with terrorists in Nigeria. A phenomenological study of this nature is necessary to form a foundation for the understanding of female participation in terrorist activity in Nigeria.

Because the study seeks to understand the experiences of women and girls in terrorism, it can provide us with a greater understanding of the factors that drive female involvement in terrorism in Nigeria. Approaching the subject matter from the description of the experiences of women and girls who have had contact with Boko Haram provides a rich and more in-depth understanding of female participation in terrorism from the perspective of those involved. This effort will also help in the implementation of policy strategies that can incorporate a gender perspective into anti-terrorism efforts in Nigeria and beyond.
Research Questions and Study Objectives

The study examines the process of female participation in terrorist activities in Nigeria through the description of the experiences of women and girls before, during, and after their association with Boko Haram. There are many intriguing questions about uncovering the motivations of women and girls to join terrorist groups. This study seeks to answer the primary question: what are the motivating factors of women and girls to collaborate and support terrorist activity in Nigeria? An enhanced focus on women in terrorism can advance our understanding of factors leading to this collaboration and can make an essential contribution to local and global security.

This study raises questions about the motivations of the women and girls who become active in terrorism in Nigeria. Do they participate for strictly religious, political, or personal reasons? Which of these are more critical to guiding and motivating their decisions? Is the increase in targeted female recruitment through abduction, compulsion, or willingness an essential variable in understanding this phenomenon? What is, therefore, the nexus or dimensions of the relationship between women, gender, and terrorism? These issues constitute the arguments which this study seeks to interrogate.

This study sought to answer the following specific questions:

1. How do women and girls who have had contact with Boko Haram conceptualize terrorism?
2. What family and community dynamics contribute to the involvement of women and girls in terrorism in Nigeria?
3. What is the most common female recruitment strategy adopted by Boko Haram?
4. What is the most powerful radicalization method used by Boko Haram?

5. What are the common operational uses of women and girls in the Boko Haram organization?

6. What are Boko Haram abductees' views about how to prevent the involvement of women and girls in terrorism?

The design of qualitative research does not support hypothesis testing. Instead, it is intended to explore an area that can later provide opportunities for testing various hypotheses with a quantitative approach. Alternatively, it can be used to examine the meanings of quantitative answers in more detail. Taking on a qualitative research approach, and in the absence of relevant empirical research on this topic, this proposed study does not offer any research hypotheses.

Chapter Summary

Chapter Two presented a review of the relevant literature spanning the relationship between gender and terrorism, terrorism, and terrorist organizations in Nigeria, their motivations, as well as the causes of terrorism within the country. The chapter also provided a discussion of the evolution of Boko Haram and the organization's role in the involvement of women and girls in terrorism in Nigeria. The literature review sets the stage for later analysis because the themes that emerged through the lived experiences of the participants are vetted through this literary lens. Last, the chapter presented the research questions and study objectives. The literature reviewed in this chapter supports the need for exploring how women and girls experience and understand terrorism in Nigeria. Chapter Three will proceed to discuss the research methodology
adopted in this study and will present a detailed discussion of the methods of analysis used.
CHAPTER THREE:

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Women and girls affiliated with Boko Haram have voices, and they need to be heard. This study is designed to investigate female participation in terrorism in Nigeria, but will specifically address the experiences of women and girls who were abducted and held in captivity by the terrorist organization. The study seeks to capture the experiences of participants while identifying their unique perspectives of female participation in terrorism within the Nigerian context.

Research Design

The study utilized a qualitative research design to address the following research questions:

1. How do women and girls who have had contact with Boko Haram conceptualize terrorism?
2. What family and community dynamics contribute to the involvement of women and girls in terrorism in Nigeria?
3. What is the most common female recruitment strategy adopted by Boko Haram?
4. What is the most powerful radicalization method used by Boko Haram?
5. What are the common operational uses of women and girls in the Boko Haram organization?
6. What are Boko Haram abductees' views about how to prevent the involvement of women and girls in terrorism?
The qualitative research method was suitable for this study because it focuses on researching how women and girls who have had first-hand contact with Boko Haram perceive the concept of terrorism and female involvement in terrorist activity in Nigeria. Utilizing in-depth qualitative interviews can provide us with a profound and detailed understanding of female participation in terrorism in Nigeria. It also allows us to focus on the descriptions of those involved in the phenomena rather than merely studying the subject matter of female participation in terrorism in a vacuum.

**Strategy of Inquiry**

The strategy of inquiry adopted was the *phenomenological research approach*. Phenomenology is a qualitative research method that is used to describe how individuals experience a specific phenomenon. This type of qualitative research seeks to set aside biases and preconceived assumptions about human experiences, feelings, and responses to a particular situation. The aim of adopting a phenomenological approach was to understand the experiences of women insurgents in Boko Haram. Husserl (1970) provided the philosophical underpinning for phenomenology. Phenomenological research aims to describe a problem as accurately as possible while refraining from any pre-given framework but remaining true to the facts (Groenewald, 2004). This research design aims to examine the issue as individuals experience it and to directly describe it without considering its psychological genesis or causal explanations. The examination of the perceptions of women and girls with previous experiences with Boko Haram can create connections which can yield significant counter-terrorism approaches.
Research Sample

Qualitative research entails the adoption of a variety of sampling procedures (Patton, 2002). To directly address the research questions, this study relied on data collected through the semi-structured face-to-face interviews with 20 participants. These participants represent women and girls who have collaborated with terrorism willingly or unwillingly and have been in the captivity of Boko Haram in Nigeria from 2014 to 2018. Of the 20 participants, four are residing in the United States, and 16 reside in Nigeria. Interviewing participants’ residing in Nigeria and those in the United States created an avenue for the in-depth analysis of the subject matter.

Identification and Recruitment of Semi-Structured Interview Participants

Interview participants came from a sizable group of female insurgents who had been kidnapped by Boko Haram between 2014 and 2018. Many of these women and girls are sympathizers, wives, forced accomplices, or militants. The Snowball Sampling Method was adopted to recruit the 20 interview participants from this hard-to-identify population. As a first step, I traveled to Washington, DC, where several women and girls who escaped from Boko Haram in 2014 and 2015 reside. These participants are former school girls from the town of Chibok in Borno State who were kidnapped by Boko Haram in April 2014. I recruited and interviewed four of these women in Washington, DC. The remaining 16 women and girls were recruited and interviewed in Nigeria. I visited Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps in Abuja and Borno states of Nigeria, where I interviewed thirteen women and girls. I also visited Dapchi in Yobe State, Nigeria, where I interviewed three other participants. The study utilized the same interview instrument for all 20 participants.
Using a semi-structured interview instrument, I asked the interview participants about their experiences before, during, and after the kidnapping. I also asked questions regarding the methods used by Boko Haram to radicalize women and girls while in captivity as well as whether these efforts were successful or not. Additionally, I asked questions about the participants’ family and community dynamics before and after the Boko Haram kidnapping experience.

Self-reports from individuals who have had first-hand experience with terrorism in Nigeria is necessary for this kind of study. Researchers have expressed concerns about the validity of self-report. There is the concern that participants who are currently living in the context within which they are referring to would not be honest in their responses (Coggeshall & Kingery, 2001). In this particular study, the responses of women and girls who are residing in the IDP camps in Nigeria and who rely on the government comes into issue. There is the reservation that they may not be honest in their responses due to the fear that their answers may be used against them or their family members. Interviewing individuals within and outside Nigeria helped me ensure that the context of participants' experiences was unlikely to affect the data collected.

**Procedure for selecting participants.**

After obtaining approval from Florida International University’s *Institutional Review Board* on December 10, 2018, I recruited participants who were 18 years or older in the United States on January 21, 2019, and in Nigeria from February 25 to March 28, 2019. Participants were selected based on their age and willingness to participate in the interview. The informed consent of the participants was required to conduct the
interviews. I excluded participants who were unable to provide the necessary informed consent. To effectively capture the experiences of these women and girls, I decided to interview participants living in different parts of the world to see if they had similar experiences.

**Interview Procedures**

The study utilized data collected through interviews designed to explore the lived experiences of women and girls who have interacted with terrorists in Nigeria. The study utilized semi-structured interviews carried out in person. Through semi-structured interviews, the conversations were guided, but allowed for the participants to provide information that was important to them but not necessarily reflected in the interview questions. Interviews were scheduled to last for approximately 90 minutes. On average, it took 95 minutes to conclude the interviews. The minimum time spent was approximately one hour, and the maximum interview time was 105 minutes.

During the semi-structured interviews, an interview instrument (see Appendix) was used to guide the discussions. The instrument allowed for the exploration of issues relevant to female participation in terrorism in Nigeria as experienced by the participants while they were in the Boko Haram camp. Interview questions asked participants to recall experiences before, during, and after their stay in the Boko Haram camp. The participants' views of female participation in terrorism were elicited to determine the level of coercion, voluntariness, or a combination of both. Participants' views of their daily experiences were elicited to assess their exposure to terrorism in Nigeria either directly or indirectly.
**Researcher’s Journal and Field Notes**

This study also utilized field notes as a secondary data collection method. I maintained a research journal throughout the data collection and analysis process and made notes immediately after each interview to reflect observations made throughout the interview process. These entries included my perception of the participants, recollections of what they wore, how they responded to questions, behaviors of others around the participants, and the general outlook of the location where I conducted the interview. During the analysis process, these notes allowed me to recall events of each interview and understand the diverse contexts of what the participants may have said during the interviews. It also allowed for the identification of comments that I felt were essential to the findings. Given that I was the only person conducting the interviews, there was no need to train another interviewer. This also resulted in a more consistent recording of the observations and discussion points.

My field notes constituted a subjective data source where I recorded personal impressions that could have an impact on the analysis procedures. The field notes formed a basis for the beginning of the analysis procedures because it created a base for a constant comparative approach to data analysis. Writing about my experiences while collecting data provided a place in the study for my perceptions. Additionally, I also looked out for emerging patterns and themes during the data collection process. This process allowed me to identify the patterns that I ultimately investigated during the analysis process.
Confidentiality

Due to the sensitivity of the topic and the safety of the participants, interviews were conducted well away from others in a private space. I conducted the interviews in an office in Abuja, Nigeria, the homes of two participants in Borno State Nigeria, in the car at the IDP camps I visited, and at the Sarki’s meeting room at a community in Dapchi, Yobe state. To ensure confidentiality, no participant was identified by their name or behaviors. All interviews were de-identified, and there was no link between the participants and their transcripts. No names were collected or associated with data at any point of this research. All interviews were conducted well away from others in a more private space. Private, in this sense, implies an area where a conversation is unlikely to be overheard by others. I identified the participants via the oral consent form I signed on their behalf, and a code assigned to each interview (e.g., DC001). Names in transcripts were deleted as were the names of their local communities. My notes of the names of the participants and their matching identifiers were kept separately and stored in a secure place.

As per the IRB-approved protocol, before each interview, I obtained the informed consent of the participant. The content of the form was read over with each participant. Afterward, participants were asked if they had any questions. If they had none, they were asked to either sign the form or provide verbal consent which allowed me to sign the form on their behalf. To avoid coercion, the participants were informed that their participation was voluntary. The audio recording of interviews was optional. I did not audiotape an interview if the participant did not wish to be recorded. The refusal of a

---

4 “Sarki” refers to the traditional leader of local communities in Northern Nigeria.
participant to be recorded did not constitute a ground for exclusion from participation. No audio or video recording was used to put the respondents at ease. The responses to the semi-structured questions were written down verbatim.

**Data Analysis Process and Procedures**

All 20 interviews were transcribed and de-identified. The transcripts were then analyzed using Colaizzi's descriptive phenomenological method. Collazzi's (1978) phenomenology data analysis model identifies conceptual patterns and processes that I adopted in this study. I adopted a detailed plan for data analysis that involved the following process:

1. Reading the transcribed interviews thoroughly to identify with each participant and acquire a sense of her background and experiences.

2. The detailed identification of significant statements that directly pertain to the phenomenon under study.

3. The subsequent development of interpretative meanings of all the significant statements. I then proceeded to reread the research protocol to ensure that the original description of the phenomenon is evident in the interpretive meanings.

4. The interpretive meanings were then arranged into clusters which allowed the themes to emerge.

5. The themes were integrated into an exhaustive description.

6. I then produced a concise statement of the exhaustive description, which created an overall essence of the experiences of the participants.
As a first step of my analysis, I repeatedly read over the notes I took while interviewing the respondents and immediately after each interview (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). I adopted early clustering and coding approaches that influenced the qualitative analysis process and helped achieve categorical saturation (Locke, 2001; McNabb, 2002). After the data collection process, I stepped back to ponder on the subject matter in issue while reviewing the dialogue and reading all the materials from start to finish. Next, I began making notes of interest while reading the material to begin the development of a structural interaction with the data. From their stories, I was able to create comparisons between the various ways the participants experienced the phenomenon. This review ultimately evolved from relationships with the data (Colaizzi, 1978).

I chronologically bracketed the commentary and then began phenomenological reduction. The data reduction process entailed open coding and extracting interpretive meanings by identifying words that best represented emerging topics that might serve as categories of meaning. The emerging themes helped me identify the direction for further analysis. Next, I identified salient points that developed within the data to shape the evolution of core topics further.

Furthermore, I coded again but with a more specific focus to justify the evolving analysis. During the final stage, I deeply thought about the evolving categories and grouped them into thematic units using the themes to create a descriptive report. I searched for patterns by pulling the data apart and putting them back together in more meaningful ways. Through this process, I hoped to discover how women and girls who
have had contact with Boko Haram either willingly or otherwise were motivated to engage with the organization.
Chapter Summary

Chapter Three presented a discussion of the research design, interview procedures adopted, and data analysis processes used in the study. The chapter presented a description of intentionality in determining every aspect of the research design. Chapter Three also presented a discussion of the justification for the adoption of a qualitative discovery navigated by a phenomenological method that provides for research that focuses on the lived experiences of the participants. The adoption of a phenomenological design afforded a means of eliciting the perceptions of women without seeking causal links. The chapter also discussed the methods adopted to ensure the confidentiality of the participants. Last, the chapter discussed the process and procedures utilized in analyzing the data utilized in the study. Chapter Four will proceed to present the results of the analysis of the data collected and utilized in this study.
CHAPTER FOUR:
RESULTS

Chapter four presents the results of the phenomenological study conducted. The chapter presents findings that evolved from the data collected through interviewing a sample of 20 participants’ residing in the United States and Nigeria. This section reviews the study, describes the composition of the study participants, presents the themes found in the research, and provides a summary of the findings of the research questions. I present the results of the analysis of the data obtained through the interviews of women who have been in the Boko Haram camp in this chapter. The interview protocol provided an avenue for a vibrant depiction of how women and girls experience and understand terrorism in Nigeria. Careful analysis of the interview transcriptions allowed me to identify words and thought patterns which set the platform for subsequent theme emersion.

The purpose of the study was to describe participants' experiences before, during, and after their contact with Boko Haram. The study aims to provide a basis for examining the motivations of female participation in terrorist activity in Nigeria. To maintain anonymity and confidentiality, participants were not identified by their names but by the order in which they were interviewed. Participants interviewed in the United States will be referenced with the letters US in front of their numbers while those interviewed in Nigeria with letters NG. This chapter provides an overview of the findings and classifies them according to themes and sub-themes that are relevant to the understanding of the research questions.
Participants’ Demographic Information

The results for this phenomenological study developed through data collected from the face-to-face interviews of 20 participants in the United States and Nigeria. Table 1 below presents the demographic information of the participants. A visual inspection of Table 1 shows that nine of the 20 participants interviewed were between the ages of 18-24, six were between the ages of 25-34, and five were 35 and above. Of the 20 women interviewed, three were single, 15 were married to Boko Haram fighters, and two were widowed. In terms of education, 11 of the 20 participants had less than a High School diploma or no form of formal education; five participants had at least a High School Diploma, and four had a college or an Associate’s degree. Most respondents were Muslim (n = 18), with only one respondent who self-identified as Christian and one respondent who did not identify herself with any religion. The interview participants were from the Northern parts of Nigeria. Of the 20 respondents, two were from the North Central political zone in Nigeria, 12 were from the North East, and six from the North West. The sample was well represented by women who are at different stages in their lives, and had diverse levels of engagement with Boko Haram.

Table 1. Participants’ Demographic Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18 – 24</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 – 34</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 and above</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

45
List of Themes

The quality of data co-occurred throughout the data collection and analysis stages. The co-occurrence of the data was achieved through the application of context, depth of description, usefulness, and the connection to the data (Richards, 2009). Quotes were selected and used to support and maintain the validity of themes. Regardless of the varying levels of educational attainment, participants were able to describe their lived experiences which enabled the identification of common themes used in this study.

Figure 2 below shows the factors that facilitate female involvement in terrorism in...
Nigeria identified from the experiences of the participants interviewed. The discussions of these factors are detailed within the themes identified from the data.

Figure 2: Factors that Contribute to the Female Participation in Terrorism in Nigeria

The themes identified within the data include: (a) participants' definitions and knowledge of terrorism in Nigeria, (b) the role the family and community dynamics play in female participation in terrorism in Nigeria, (c) the roles religion and the media play in female involvement in terrorism in Nigeria, (d) participants perceptions of how to prevent the future abduction of women and girls, and female participation in terrorism in Nigeria, (e) participants reflections on how past experiences have influenced their present-day and future ambitions.

The identified themes were developed based on the six main research questions of the study, which are:
1. How do women and girls who have had contact with Boko Haram conceptualize terrorism?

2. What family and community dynamics contribute to the involvement of women and girls in terrorism in Nigeria?

3. What is the most common female recruitment strategy adopted by Boko Haram?

4. What is the most powerful radicalization method used by Boko Haram?

5. What are the common operational uses of women and girls in the Boko Haram organization?

6. What are Boko Haram abductees' views about how to prevent the involvement of women and girls in terrorism?

**Research Question 1:** How do women and girls who have had contact with Boko Haram conceptualize terrorism?

This section presents a fused textual and organizational description of the participants’ conceptualization of the involvement in terrorism. The first research question cuts to the core of the understanding of female participation in terrorism in Nigeria. To achieve this, I bracketed out preconceived perceptions to promote the accuracy of the emerging representation of the phenomenon. This procedure aided the strategies for obtaining, analyzing, and describing the data collected accurately in the bid to represent the first-person point of view of the participants.

The participants' understanding of the subject matter of terrorism and female participation in terrorist activity is essential to the discussion of the phenomenon in question. The participants' multi-conception of terrorism and their diverse perception of
this concept emerged from their varied experiences, and perspectives garnered before, during, and after their encounter with Boko Haram.

Definitions and Knowledge of Terrorism in Nigeria

Any study of all social phenomena such as that of terrorism should include the qualitative insights of those who have been directly involved in it. Therefore, I started a conversation with respondents who have been involved as terrorists and/or as victims by asking them to describe in their own words what terrorism meant to them. Generally, the women and girls interviewed shared similar descriptions of terrorism as a general concept. Interestingly, these perceptions emerged within the context of Nigeria and focused on acts perpetrated by Boko Haram, which the participants referred to as physical harm committed against the members of their family and the community or the threat and fear of such bodily harm. Participants' awareness of ongoing violence before their abduction was also pivotal. Therefore, first, I established what the participants knew about terrorism before their captivity. This was necessary to analyze if the respondents' understanding of terrorism changed after arriving at the Boko Haram camp. For the most part, participants had a general knowledge of the level of violence in Nigeria before their time in the Boko Haram camp. On the other hand, participants in the United States were more forthcoming in classifying violence in Nigeria as terrorism. Regardless, participants from both countries described the fear society felt overall because of Boko Haram’s actions and threats; and the dispersion of these through word of mouth and the media.

A significant number of participants (n=12) described Boko Haram’s extortion of funds from local business owners in their communities. They referred to this as a form of
taxation system imposed on the community by Boko Haram. For instance, in response to the question, "Did you feel safe in your community before Boko Haram's captivity?"

US002 responded, "The people in my area always had the fear that one day Boko Haram will come and kill us because we knew of how they had been killing people in other areas close to us." The majority of the participants emphasized their prior knowledge of Boko Haram as the fear of possible attack on their local communities. NG009 offered a broader perspective of her understanding of terrorism, noting, "The Boko Haram members used to come to my community requesting that the farmers pay their taxes [to Boko Haram]. They always said that if they do not get their money, they will come and kill all the men in the village, and sell the women out in marriage. We always had the fear that this would happen." Participants in Nigeria (n=8) believed that violence in their communities was a natural consequence of the failure to comply with the threats issued by Boko Haram.

A clear reflection of this were the accounts of families withdrawing their daughters from schools as the knowledge of Boko Haram spread and threats from the group intensified. Participants expressed that Boko Haram has no tolerance for western education, especially educating women and as such, issued threats to members of the community to withdraw their children from schools. They described that their families and communities responded to these threats by not educating their girls because they were worried Boko Haram would hurt them. The participants' descriptions profoundly touch on the failure of the family unit and the local community to protect women and girls. NG005 described this failure in the following words "Yes, I know Boko Haram. They started opposing those people who attended school. Those whom their children were attending school kept receiving a threat from them. These threats made families to
be discouraged and in turn, stopped us from going to school." Respondents described a
sense of safety and protection as essential factors in ensuring the well-being of women
and girls. For them, the security of girls who attended schools was vital to ensuring the
fundamental human rights of women and girls in Nigeria. However, the knowledge the
community had and thus the fear they felt, led to the disruption of this progression.

Another source of knowledge was media. Considering the significance of the
media in the discussion of terrorism, Altheide (2007) states that the mass media aids
terrorism by emphasizing fear and an uncertain future. Terrorist organizations spread
their propaganda through the use of the media, which promotes the spread of fear among
people. The spread of the message of a crime-related discourse of fear through the
creation of symbolic awareness, the expectation of danger, and risk of danger in everyday
life is central to the relationship between the media and terrorism. The participants shared
similar conception in the role the media plays in the definition of what actions fall within
the ambit of the meaning of terrorism. A significant number of participants
acknowledged the role of the media in determining the publication of the experiences
they had before their contact with Boko Haram. US002's experience captured this when
she stated, "Because I am one of the Chibok girls, essentially, I think that the media had a
huge effect on our coming to the United States. If they had not described our kidnap the
way they did and created a movement, I do not think the other girls and I will be here."
Another example of the role of media was captured by NG001’s response who indicated
"Yes, we talk about the Boko Haram issues at home. My uncle was in the firewood
business for a long time before Boko Haram decided to ban the business. The news of
Boko Haram banning the firewood business spread, and everyone in my community
began to fear for their lives. It was so bad that we could not talk about Boko Haram in the mosque or public because they come after you." Overall, the participants' understanding of terrorism was conceptualized as bodily harm or the threat/fear of same to the members of their families and the community. Overall, the development of their experiences evidenced in the trends before, during, and after their contact with Boko Haram signifies that the media had a significant role to play particularly as it relates to the fear of the activities of the organization.

**Research Question 2:** What family and community dynamics contribute to the involvement of women and girls in terrorism in Nigeria?

This section presents a fused textual and organizational description of the participants' responses concerning research question two- how family and community dynamics facilitate the participation of women and girls in terrorism in Nigeria.

Participants presented mixed responses concerning family and community dynamics. This was an area where there was a significant difference between the responses of participants residing in the United States and those in Nigeria. The U.S.-based respondents come from smaller sized families with fewer children. Additionally, their families were more inclined to support the formal education of women and girls. Regardless of the differences in participants' circumstances, their experiences touch on the active role the community and family dynamics play in the participation of women and girls in terrorist activity in Nigeria.

Participants shared a common notion about the acts that constitute discriminatory practices that in turn, lead to female participation in terrorism in Nigeria. The patriarchal ideas about the role of women in Nigerian society and gender inequality which are
predominant specifically in the North, drive the involvement of women and girls in terrorist activities in Nigeria (Para-Mallam, 2010). Participants referenced specific inequalities that are present in the community that increase the participation of women and girls in terrorist activity. The following sub-themes will be discussed under this theme: (1) Early child marriage, (2) Lack of support for education, and (3) The institutionalization of sexual slavery

*Early Child Marriage.* Participants presented mixed responses about the role of early child marriage plays in female participation in terrorist activity in Nigeria. Responses described community and family dynamics that constitute gender inequalities within Nigeria. Participants expressed various methods of child marriage from which they were able to develop their ideas about its connection to terrorism in Nigeria. NG007 told me that "The inequalities faced by women and girls in our community is in respect to the advancement of education after finishing secondary [high] school. We are usually not allowed to continue with our education; rather, our fathers chose to marry us off." The experience of NG011 touches profoundly on this issue. Nigerian security operatives arrested NG011 in 2014 after she abandoned a suicide vest in a cab. She remained in the police custody for almost a year after which she was released to the Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camp where she currently resides. In recounting how she got into the camp, she stated that in 2013, she was given away in marriage by her father at the age of 13. NG011 described that her father donated her and her mother to Boko Haram as a "gift, free of any monetary gains." This act that led to the participation of a 13-year-old in the activities of Boko Haram raises the question of how the cultural and economic
climate in which women and girls find themselves makes them vulnerable to the violation of their human rights.

In instances where there was monetary gain, Boko Haram fighters ensured the silence of the families by threatening them. NG001 stated, "My first contact was when they stormed our village in [name omitted]. They entered our house, and one [name omitted] indicated interest in taking my sister [name omitted] and I with them as his wives. My family was initially resistant, but they threatened to kill our father." This indicates that the threat to the life of family members is also a means through which Boko Haram achieves the early marriage of girls. The consent of the women and girls who were married to Boko Haran fighters are typically not voluntary. NG005 stated, "Yes, I was married to [name omitted]. He married me without regards for my feelings. They took the decision and arranged the marriage without seeking my consent. I did not develop any feelings for him." The lack of the valid consent of the parties to a marriage contract invalidates same ab initio. However, because many of the victims of early child marriage are not aware of their rights to decline the proposition, they continue to suffer in silence.

Early child marriage is an acceptable practice in some parts of Northern Nigeria. Poverty characterized by social and economic factors is also another considerable factor underpinning early marriage in Nigeria (Otoo-Oyortey & Pobi, 2003). Early child marriage raises issues of the violation of human rights, interference with the development of the girl-child, early pregnancy, medical health complications, and compromise to education. As a consequence of early child marriage and childbirth at a young age, many
women and girls in the Boko Haram camp suffer Vesico Vaginal Fistula (VVF). The experiences of NG010 touches profoundly on this problem. She stated, "After I came out of the Boko Haram camp, I started smelling, and many people in the village began to laugh at me. I thank God for the people who came to repair me." Her case is an example of the negative consequence of early child marriage.

Before the rise of Boko Haram and the subsequent abduction of women and girls, Nigeria had one of the highest recorded estimates of child marriage globally with an estimated rate of approximately 62% of girls in Northeastern Nigeria married before their 18th birthday and 23.5% before their 15th birthday (Akpan, 2003). The extent of the changes in the rates cannot be ascertained right now. However, there appears to be a definite increase in the trend of early child marriage (Walker, 2012).

Furthermore, the experience of NG015 introduced a fresh perspective to the practice of early child marriage. She was married off after she was abducted and while in the Boko Haram camp. She stated, "Yes, I did marry one [name omitted] inside the camp. Before then, I did not think of marriage at all. In the camp, the Amir\(^5\) gave an instruction which they obeyed. He said that any Boko Haram member who had an interest in marriage could marry any girl. He can go ahead to perform the marriage rites. The dowry was a small amount that anyone can afford. They would collect that amount as dowry." The introduction of the payment of dowry to someone other the parents of a bride falls outside the acceptable cultural practices of Nigerian communities. This finding may

---

\(^5\) "Amir" refers to the head community chief in Northern Nigeria.
imply that there is a neglected link between the payment of bride price (dowry) and violent conflict.

More importantly, the data revealed a significant finding which has not received any media attention. Participants described a form of extortion through the imposition of taxes on business owners by Boko Haram, as explained above. However, this extortion also had a significant link to the capture of women and girls since participants stated that non-payment of the funds influenced their capture. NG001 stated that "Yes we feel safe before the Boko Haram incident in-fact people go into the bush to cut trees and make firewood to sell in town. But later the Boko Haram imposed a tax on every business owner and finally stopped people from entering deep into the forest. Before my abduction in April 2004, they were living among us because they tend to control our economic and social activities."

Similarly, recounting how she got into the camp, NG007 stated, "I was taken because my father could not meet up with the payment Boko Haram wanted from his firewood business. They married me, and there was nothing my father could do." Boko Haram’s imposition of a taxation system is a form of extortion from the members of the community. These findings emphasized that there is a direct link between the economic disparity and forced marriages where young girls are routinely used as a means of payments whenever the families do not have other means of meeting up to Boko Haram’s demands.

---

6 Taxes in this regard do not refer to those imposed by the government. Instead, it a form of extortion of funds from the members of the community by Boko Haram as a source of funding for the organization.
Lack of Support for Education. Participants described that the lack of support for education is another area where family and community dynamics work to expose women and girls to violence and terrorism in Nigeria. Nigerian women still experience various challenges in order to obtain equal education. The lack of access to education likely contributes to the participation of women and girls in terrorism in Nigeria. The respondents express similar accounts about the inequalities that exist within their communities and their impact on their experiences. NG001, NG006, NG007, NG008, NG009, and NG010 emphasized that the inequalities against women and girls in their communities directly relates to the lack of access to education. The lack of support for education in some Nigerian homes is closely linked to socio-economic factors within the country.

Furthermore, the ideologies of Boko Haram about education also shape family and community dynamics in the areas where the organization operates. The literal meaning of Boko Haram is "Western education is a sin." The choice of the name implies that the foundation of the organization is centered on fighting western education (Murtada, 2012). The group intends to prohibit all forms of western education, evidenced by their consistent targeting of schools where they kidnap girls to use to achieve their aims. In line with this, participants (n= 14, 70%) described that Boko Haram’s aversion to western education influenced their kidnap. They developed their perceptions on this matter based on their experiences and personal contact with the terrorist organization. NG005 described this clearly: "My first contact with them [Boko Haram] was when I was going to school in the morning and one [name omitted] approached me and insisted I turn back home because they said it is a sin to attend western school. The school authorities in
our community were concerned because students were being warned by Boko Haram not to go to school.” These findings indicate that despite having strategic and global impacts, the problem of Boko Haram is mostly a local issue, and as such, must be understood and addressed within its local contexts.

_The Institutionalization of Sexual Slavery._ The institutionalization of sexual slavery has helped in promoting female participation in terrorism in Nigeria. Community dynamics play a huge role as it pertains to the institutionalization of sexual slavery. In this regard, I discuss gender-based violence and how it encourages the proliferation of female participation in terrorist activity in Nigeria: The term gender encompasses socially constructed norms and roles that are both limiting and permitting the expectations of women and men (Butler 1999; Mu'Azu & Uzoechi 2010). The United Nations defines Gender-Based Violence (GBV) "as physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life' (World Health Organization, 2019). This definition also includes acts that are specifically targeted against men and boys.

In essence, GBV is not limited to a particular gender or sex (UNFPA, 2012). Gender is understood as socially constructed norms and roles, both limiting, and permitting the actions and expectations of men and women. In Nigeria, GBV cuts across the geopolitical zones, religion, and ethnicity with different parts of the country endorsing several practices that raise questions of GBV (Oladepo, 2011). For example, the cultural traditions of female genital mutilation, and the forced early child marriage practices previously discussed.
The analysis of the data and the narration of the lived experiences of the participants raise questions of the GBV practices that proliferate the participation of women in terrorist activities in Nigeria. From the analysis, it appears that gender is progressively an essential component of Boko Haram's tactics, goal, and violence. The experiences NG008 described touches profoundly on Boko Haram's use of women as a tool for sexual gratification. NG008 stated, "My marriage to Boko Haram contributed to my understanding of the sect activities and their abusive tendencies against women whom they take as sex tools." Similarly, the descriptions of the participants indicate that Boko Haram treats women and girls in their camp as sex tools to be disposed of without regard for the dignity and autonomy of the victims. NG005 stated, "I witnessed violence when I saw them kill one girl who rejected a sexual advance from one of the Boko Haram commanders. The commander shot her to death. I am still affected by what happened that day." The experiences of US002 also shows that the members of the sect abuse the fundamental human rights for victims with impunity. In the words of US002, she stated: “I was married three times to three different members of the Boko Haram camp. When my first husband was killed during one of the fights for Jihad, the leader of the camp made me wait for my menstrual cycle to come, and then I was married to another fighter. When [name omitted] my second husband went away and never came back, I was made to marry another fighter. This made me feel very useless."

Some of the sexual assaults were religiously-motivated hate crimes. NG015, who was one of six women abducted by Boko Haram from Maiduguri, stated that: "When we were taken, the insurgents raped us repeatedly. They claimed that the rape on us was jizya." Jizya is a tax paid by Christians under Islamic law. It does appear that the rape of
NG015 effectively served as punishment for not being Muslim. Most of the respondents viewed these sexual assaults as criminal offenses, even if they never get officially classified as such because the government has limited mechanisms for prosecuting these crimes.

The use of sexual slavery to ensure the participation of women and girls indicates the acceptability of the practice amongst the insurgents. Indeed, one can analyze the GBV relating to female involvement in terrorism in Nigeria through the institutionalization of broader discriminatory practices targeted against women and girls within Nigeria and indeed sub-Saharan Africa. These widespread gendered practices are capable of being exploited by terrorist groups who seek to use women and girls to further their ideologies and goals.

**Research Question 3:** What is the most common female recruitment strategy adopted by Boko Haram?

The recruitment of women and girls by terrorist organizations is deeply localized and involves highly personal tasks, interpersonal ties, and trust (Hafez, 2016). In line with this, participants acknowledged a range of female recruitment strategies adopted by Boko Haram. They described forced marriage as a recruitment strategy adopted by the organization. Boko Haram members marry women and girls in the bid to create family ties that are later used to further their organizational goals.

Participants also described psychological manipulation as a tool for recruitment. NG0010 told me that “they try to convince women to join in their fight in the way of Allah. They tell them that they will have a greater reward in the hereafter. I spoke with
some of the wives. They said they abandoned their families and decided to answer God’s
calling. Others said Boko Haram forced them to join Boko Haram with spiritual
influence. They said that they remain there in the camp out of fear and looking
[searching] for a means of escape."

Furthermore, participants described kidnapping to be the most vital tool of female
recruitment adopted by Boko Haram. Boko Haram engages in the systematic abductions
of women and girls. There has been an increase in the number of women and girls
abducted from several communities in the North-Eastern part of Nigeria (Onuoha &
Oyewole, 2018). The experiences of participants clearly describe the organization’s use of
kidnapping as a tool for recruiting female participants for their cause. NG006 told me:
"There were 87 women and girls inside the camp. Most of them were abducted." She
further said, "My first contact with them was when [name omitted] leader of the Boko
Haram sect visited our house. That was my first time of seeing them. That day they came
was in January 2014. They came with two Hilux vans and took us away into Sambisa
forest. I was abducted, of course, including my children. My husband’s other wife was
also taken away, and it happened in [name omitted].”

Participants interviewed (n = 20, 100%) expressed in clear terms that they got to
the Boko Haram camp involuntarily. Some of the participants were kidnapped from their
homes (n = 11, 55%) while others (n = 9, 45%) were abducted from their schools.
NG0010 stated, "Most of the women and girls I met in the camp got there mostly through
abduction even though there are others who claim to have voluntarily joined the cause to
fight in the side of God they choose that.” Community dynamics play a major role in this.
NG004, NG007, and NG0010 expressly stated that they were taken away for the inability of their fathers to pay the taxes imposed on them by the members of Boko Haram.

**Research Question 4:** What is the most powerful radicalization method used by Boko Haram?

Boko Haram radicalizes women and girls to fit their organizational purposes. There is no globally accepted definition of radicalization. However, it is widely accepted that terrorism depends on the radicalization of its instigators and perpetrators (Mandel, 2009; Schuurman & Taylor, 2018). Radicalization refers to the methods through which organizations ensure the survival of their goals and ideologies. Extremist groups rely upon women to gain advantage as well as benefit from their subjugation (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2019). An understanding of women and girls paths to radicalization and the roles they play in extremism is vital to disrupt terrorists' ability to recruit, deploy, and abuse women and girls.

Respondents described a range of radicalization methods adopted by Boko Haram to ensure the participation of women and girls in their activities. From these responses, I detected two distinct themes. The first theme centers on the role of religion. Participants described Boko Haram’s use of religion to ensure participation in the organization’s activities. Because a significant number of the participants (n=18, 90%) practice Islam, the reference to the use of religion as a radicalization strategy implies that Boko Haram’s use of religion appears to go beyond the regular tenets of Islam. Participants described the use of the Quran to justify Jihad. NG006 told me that: “They convince women and girls through [the] orientation of the mind to believe in their cause for fighting social injustice. They always use the Quran to justify their actions.” One participant described
exposure to violence as a means of radicalization. She mentioned that: "The [radicalization] methods were numerous. Sometimes when they bring in recruits, they give them guns to execute or kill someone [who is] innocent to dispel any form of sympathy towards human beings. They will then order the killer to drink from the blood of the person whom they killed. They also preach to their new members with supposed verses and misquotation of the Quran to defend their cause of action."

Furthermore, the participants expressed that Boko Haram employs the tactic of brainwashing their victims by claiming they are fighting for a just cause. NG009, a 48-year-old participant told me that: "They influence their mind through brainwashing and also use spiritual incantation to convince the girls and women. They trained some of the young women to become suicide bombers." Participants stated that sharing personal experiences, remaining true to their opinions, and focusing on escape strategies helped them survive the ordeal of the radicalization methods they witnessed.

Previous research suggests a reported increase in the GBV against Christian women in Northern Nigeria. A study conducted by Nigeria's Political Violence Research Network in 2013 indicates that more than 45% of the victims killed by Boko Haram were Christian women and children (Barkindo et al., 2013). Additionally, the media narratives portray that Boko Haram kidnap more Christian women and converts them Islam as a means of radicalization and actualizing their goals. Although participants' descriptions touch profoundly on the role the media plays in propagating the notions of violence in Nigeria, the data collected for this study does not seem to support this narrative. A
significant number (n=18, 90%) of the women and girls interviewed were Muslims, and they practiced Islam before and after their encounter with Boko Haram.

Additionally, the theme of radicalization of Christian girls did not emerge from the interviews conducted. It is possible, however, that the media focuses on the kidnapping and conversion of Christian girls as opposed to violence commonly perpetrated against Muslim communities. My discussions with study respondents revealed that Muslim women and girls are also frequent victims of violence and abduction. In other words, unlike the popular narratives, Boko Haram does not target only or predominately Christian communities, and while religious conversion has been a big part of their tactic, by no means is it the only one.

**Research Question 5:** What are the common operational uses of women and girls in the Boko Haram organization?

This section explains how participants described their involvement in the activities of Boko Haram. The participants’ responses indicate that the organization separates the women and girls in their custody according to the purpose they set out for them. Participants described that Boko Haram uses women and girls either for domestic purposes which includes marriage and childbearing or as suicide bombers. Eight women (40%) described engaging in the daily running of the camp with domestic labor such as cooking and cleaning within the camp. NG004 told me that while she was not “selected to be among those who will execute suicide bombing,” several other women were abducted and trained to become suicide bombers. She said that: “There were four others who were led to carry strapped IEDS and went on suicide [missions] and they never came back. They [Boko Haram] told us they [other women] have successfully done it and are
in paradise.” One participant (NG0013) described Boko Haram using women and girls as spies. She knew of two abducted girls who were used by the organization as undercover agents saddled with the responsibility of notifying the camp of the locations of likely targets.

The majority of the participants did not describe active participation in violence while three women (15%) described some level of involuntary involvement or the knowledge of some other female who was involuntarily involved in violence. The experience of NG004 fully captures the involuntary nature of female participation in terrorism as described by these participants. NG004 told me that:

“… when I was sent out to go into the city [name omitted] market with strap explosive on my body, I knew I didn't [did not] want to die or kill others [who were] innocent. I called one individual and showed him what I was carrying. He rushed immediately to [the] security [officers]. They picked me up. [While] inside their car, they removed the strap explosive on me and interrogated me very well. I gave them a tip [directions] to the hideout I came from, and they [gave] me their camouflage uniform [so I could go] together with them. I showed them the way [best route] to the Boko Haram hideout because the other side was set and planted with landmines. They [security operatives] succeeded and rescued other captives."

The reliance upon women and girls as a part of the organization's strategies signifies an organizational shift from utilizing only male fighters. Female involvement in Boko Haram's activities relies on more mixed approaches to recruitment including greater reliance on forced recruitment strategies.
**Research Question 6:** What are Boko Haram abductees' views about how to prevent the involvement of women and girls in terrorism?

Women and girls abducted by Boko Haram have firsthand experiences of recruitment, radicalization, and, in some cases, terrorist attacks. Therefore, they may hold the key to identifying effective prevention mechanisms to weaken the tactics used by Boko Haram to carry out the attacks. This section describes the respondents' perceptions of how to avoid the future participation of women and girls in terrorism in Nigeria. They were also asked to elaborate on the manner in which their experiences can shape the implementation of safer strategies aimed at the protection of women and girls from future victimization. This section also captures how participants' experiences influenced their lives beyond the abduction and stay in the camp.

It was difficult for the respondents to articulate strategies that can prevent the future abductions of women and girls. While there was a widespread realization that education, family and community support can protect future victims, it was unclear if these could deter Boko Haram without some drastic changes in the way the government and local communities handle this problem. Most of the respondents did not appear particularly optimistic about the prospects of solving the problem of abduction and terrorism. These sentiments are well-reflected in what NG002 told me: "I cannot say [give] any assurance [as to] whether it can be prevented, but I hope and pray so.” In the same light, NG001 stated: “My experience with Boko Haram has brought me the courage to make an effort in reviving my life and try to help my little children have a better life. Yes, I do practice Islam and pray every day. My goals and dreams are to get the
opportunity to fix my life and [those of] the children to make a better life. I am not sure whether it can be prevented.”

Reintegration into the communities holds the key to preventing the future abductions of women and girls, and voluntary returns to the Boko Haram camp. It appeared that while life with Boko Haram was difficult, most women have limited options for a dignified living after they escape captivity. NG005 told me that she finds "it hard to be accepted into [the] society, and sometimes I wish I never returned.” Many of the participants expressed that their experiences had a direct impact on their ability to pursue formal education. They also described that a lack of some form of formal education directly impedes their ability to effectively move on from their ordeal. Participants expressed that educating women and girls would help in preventing the future participation of women and girls in terrorist activities. NG002 sated "My experience with the Boko Haram has influenced me to pursue my interest to have knowledge, and even those involve [d] in the notorious act in Boko Haram are victims of illiteracy. My goal and dream now are to be able to write my Secondary [high] School final exam and after that, to be able to further my education.”

The quality of life the participants have after the Boko Haram experience repeatedly emerged as a theme. Many of the participants’ residing in Nigeria described suffering mental and health problems as a result of their experiences in the Boko Haram camp. Some described continuing to endure bleeding and other severe gynecological issues as a result of rape and childbirth at a young age. In addition to their mental and physical conditions, the majority of participants focused on the negative impact on
acceptance by Nigerian society overall. The participants believed that they suffer discrimination from the members of their communities as a result of their abduction and stay in the Boko Haram camp. A prolonged stay in the camp, its impact on the present quality of life, and its relationship to the future prevention of female abduction were one of the themes that the participants described. NG003 captured this in its entirety when she stated: “We do not feel really accommodated in our community. My current life is not too good either because we face a form of discrimination in our community. They tell us after being saved from Boko Haram we returned with snakes [referring to their children] from our Boko Haram husbands. I stay with my family members in [name omitted]. I don’t do anything personal for a living only out of some people’s generosity we survive now. My experience with Boko Haram and [my experiences] after my release only tells me not to give up in life. The head of the community here in [name omitted] has promised to help us with finances to start a trade. My religion is Islam, and I practice my faith. My goal and dream are to go back to school and possibly get assistance to support myself and the child.

In addition to the suffering encountered while in captivity, the participants described that the abuses committed against women and girls who have been in the Boko Haram camp do not end after they escape or are rescued. Many of these women and their children are labeled as dangerous and undesirable by the local communities. The women and girls interviewed revealed that they continuously experience victimization from the members of the community. This continuous victimization poses a threat to societal re-entry. The abduction and attacks on women and girls as a means to ensure female participation in terrorism created a ripple effect that set in motion a range of negative
impacts such as loss of education, early marriage, early pregnancy, and the stigma associated with sexual violence and bearing children born from rape. These ills often aggravate and are intensified by the pre-existing forms of gender discrimination and harmful practices that negatively affect girls and women in Nigeria. Until we address all these forms of gender violations, women and girls remain vulnerable to attacks that may ensure their engagement in terrorist activities in Nigeria.

Summary of the Results

Participants' understood the concept of terrorism from the prism of physical harm, and the existence of fear/threat of harm to people within the community. This idea was influenced by the local and international contexts in which the subject matter of terrorism within Nigeria exists. The participants in the United States expressed in clear terms the role the media played in influencing the kind of life they are living after the Boko Haram experience. One of the most common points of interest among all the participants was the role that exposure to education plays.

The education of women and girls in Nigeria is so important that it plays a central role even in the ideologies of Boko Haram. The name of the group meaning Western education is sinful in itself indicates a dislike for western education. The shared experiences of women and girls interviewed aligns with the tenets of the fragility of states framework. Kirk (2007) states that education is a social service sector which has a significant impact on state fragility. The legitimacy of the government of a state is judged by the access and quality of the education of children, and the working conditions and support provided for teachers.
The participants expressed the fundamental importance of recognizing the role that the family unit and community dynamics play in the involvement of women and girls in terrorist activity in Nigeria. Gender dynamics and the practices that discriminate against women and girls in Nigeria play a considerable role in the spread of female participation in terrorism. This is a clear indication that tackling all manifestations of gender discrimination at the local and national levels is a critical step to ensuring that women and girls who are affected by violence receive the support that they need. This effort will in turn, lead to the enhancement of sustainable peace.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The following sections discuss the conceptual framework, summary of the problem, and reviews of themes formulated based on the research questions. I present a link between the knowledge derived from the lived experiences of the participants and the frameworks of the fragility of state theory, the rational choice theory, and the tenets of Stockholm syndrome. This phenomenological study explored how women and girls who have been in the Boko Haram camp experience, understand, and contribute to terrorism in Nigeria. I was interested in discovering how the participants described their experiences before, during, and after their stay in the Boko Haram camp. This effort offers important insights into the motivations of female participation in terrorist activity in Nigeria.

Data collected through semi-structured interviews with 20 victims of Boko Haram has the potential to expand the literature about the involvement of women and girls in terrorism in Nigeria. These interviews led to the identification of several factors that facilitate the proliferation of female participation in terrorist activity in Nigeria. These factors were further distilled them into six emergent themes. This final Chapter aims to weave together the literature and findings, as well as present the limitations of the research, policy implications of this work, and recommendations for future research.

Conceptual Framework

The purpose of the study was to investigate female participation in terrorism in Nigeria. By capturing the experiences of women and girls who have lived in the Boko
Haram camp, the study aimed to explain what motivates female participation in terrorism in Nigeria. Since no single theory can account for female participation in terrorism, I adopted Fisher's (1989) narrative theory marrying it with the fragility of state theory, and an analysis of the intersection between the rational choice theory of terrorism and Stockholm Syndrome. I believe this hybrid theoretical model has a better potential for explaining why and how women become involved in terrorism, especially in the West-African context.

A significant body of literature connects the fragility of state framework to an increase in terrorist activity in Nigeria (Rotberg, 2003; Onuoha, 2011; Onapajo, 2011; Adibe, 2012; Cilliers & Sisks, 2014). I had hypothesized that the findings of this study would suggest a direct link between the failure of the Nigerian state to provide the basic needs of its citizens and the increase in female participation in terrorist activity. It was anticipated that poor governance, lack of the provision of basic amenities, income inequality, acute poverty, and high unemployment would account for the motivations of female participation in terrorism in Nigeria. The study findings did not establish a direct connection between the fragility of state framework and the motivations of women and girls to engage in terrorism. Instead, the findings indicate that communal and family dynamics, as well as social and cultural practices, have the most influence on female involvement in terrorism in Nigeria.

Additionally, I hypothesized that a link between the Rational Choice Theory of Terrorism and Stockholm Syndrome would help explain the motivations of women and girls to support terrorism in Nigeria. Neither did the study findings support the Rational
Choice Theory of Terrorism, nor did they indicate the existence of Stockholm Syndrome. The participants' narrations did not establish a marked change in their perceptions of Boko Haram before and after their time in the camp. Overall, their feelings towards Boko Haram appeared to be consistent before, during, and after their contact with the organization. The study participants did not show different understanding or greater sympathy to the Boko Haram cause. Instead, they portrayed a constant feeling of distaste towards the organization. Furthermore, because these women were forced to live with Boko Haram, they had limited or no ability to make a choice to either join the organization or to participate in their activities.

The findings indicate that the local and international contexts that describe terrorism influences the participants' conceptualization of the subject matter. I observed that participants' conceptualization of terrorism leaned towards a pluralistic stance largely predicated on the dynamics in which women and girls in Nigeria find themselves. The participants tried to stay focused on providing responses that relate to real-life examples of how their experiences influence the contextualization of terrorism. They sought to present their experiences by continuously engaging me while processing the semi-structured questions presented to them, recalling past experiences in response, and presenting the most relevant ideas.

**Summary of the Problem**

The issue of female engagement in combat is not a novel one; however, it shatters the notion of women as peaceful and non-violent individuals. There is little empirical evidence that provides an understanding of how women and girls conceptualize and
experience terrorism in Nigeria. This is because female participation in the insurgency in Nigeria represents an under-researched aspect of terrorism (Cunningham, 2007; Bloom & Matfess, 2016).

In 2013, and after reports of a series of kidnappings, female participation in the activities of Boko Haram significantly increased (Bloom & Matfess, 2016). The lines between female insurgents/fighters, sympathizers, and/or forced accomplices are often blurred. As a result, there remain many unanswered questions about female involvement in terrorist groups in Nigeria (Lord-Mallam, 2019). Female engagement in the activities of Boko Haram has raised questions as to why women would engage in violent extremist behavior. With the rise in female participation in the insurgent activities perpetrated by the members of Boko Haram, the gendered nature and the feminization of terror has generated much concern. Although there may not be easy answers to the questions that pertain to the engagement of women and girls in terrorist activities in Nigeria, we cannot ignore the threat that this poses to the security of the Nigerian state, and indeed the protection of women and girls.

**Discussion of the Themes and Connection to Literature**

In Chapter 2, I presented a foundation that sought to position the current study within a framework of existing literature that could account for the involvement of women and girls in terrorism in Nigeria. Prior literature that analyzes the growth of terrorism and the reasons behind the increase in the number of female suicide bombers and insurgents in Nigeria now serves as the collective lens that vets the findings of the current research. Relevant literature was utilized to help develop meaning around the
themes that emerged from the data collected and used in this study. While previous research has not empirically explored how women and girls experience and understand terrorism in Nigeria, highlighting the parallels in the findings and bridging the gap between what is known is necessary to suggest relative implications.

The study purported to answer the six research questions below:

1. How do women and girls who have had contact with Boko Haram conceptualize terrorism?
2. What family and community dynamics contribute to the involvement of women and girls in terrorism in Nigeria?
3. What is the most common female recruitment strategy adopted by Boko Haram?
4. What is the most powerful radicalization method used by Boko Haram?
5. What are the common operational uses of women and girls in the Boko Haram organization?
6. What are Boko Haram abductees' views about how to prevent the involvement of women and girls in terrorism?

I categorized the discussion of the emergent themes into six sections based on the study's research questions.

**Theme 1: Participants' definitions and knowledge of terrorism in Nigeria**

The first theme presented in the study represents the way women understand the concept of terrorism in Nigeria. The results of the study parallel the existing research on this topic. Prior research establishes the assertion that the subject matter of terrorism is
fluid and evolves from the shared interactions of the concept. This position is in line with Gibbs (1989) conceptualization of terrorism. Gibbs (1989) purports that labeling actions as terrorism encourages the denunciation of the actors and presents a basis for bias. The categorization of acts as terrorism is subject to perception as one man's terrorist is another's freedom fighter (Ganor, 2002). In an attempt to present an understanding of the importance of conceptualizing terrorism (Ganor, 2002), the participants interviewed described terrorism in terms of their experiences before, during, and after their stay in the Boko Haram camp.

Female involvement in terrorism was at the core of my research endeavor. Many of the participants in the study had a general knowledge of the existence of violence in Nigeria. Their interaction with the organization itself demonstrated their knowledge of terrorist activities. The participants' descriptions raise the question of the institutionalization of terrorism in the Northern part of Nigeria. Boko Haram's imposition of a taxation system without countermeasures by the government attests to the level of violence in Nigeria. To a large extent, this changes the dynamics in understanding the various methods of internal funding mechanisms used by local terrorist groups. These funding methods also include ransoms collected from the local communities and the government at all levels. The media and the Nigerian government have yet to address in great detail, this aspect of the Boko Haram terror.

Furthermore, similar to the position of Onapajo, Uzodike, & Whetho (2012), many of the participants interviewed conceptualized terrorism in Nigeria from the perspective of physical harm or the threat of harm to them, their family members, and the
community. These descriptions raise the question of family attachment, the correlation between individual experiences, and the overall perception of violence in Nigeria. This finding suggests a corresponding similarity to research regarding the connection between family ties and the perception of terrorism (Hoffman, 2002; Chetnov-Hwang, 2012). Researchers have established that terrorist organizations exploit family ties (Collins, 1998; Schbley, 2000; Helmus, 2009; Mullins & Dolnik, 2009; Canter, Sarangi, & Youngs, 2014). Nigerian society, in particular encourages strong family ties. Cultural practices boost the fostering of strong family ties, whereas communal dynamics shape and play a massive role in the social welfare system. Curiously, family ties played a considerable role in the perceptions of the women interviewed. The shared experiences of the participants evidenced that family and community dynamics cannot be ignored in the discussion of female participation in terrorist activities in Nigeria.

This research suggests that personal interactions with incidents of terrorist activity often shape women’s conceptualization of the subject matter. Participant commentary showed elevated value in personal interactions with terrorist activity. Findings of this study suggest that the way an individual with personal experience of terrorism defines the concept would be significantly different from that of someone else who has not had that subjective encounter. The differences in the experiences of the participants residing in the United States from those in Nigeria further emphasized the subjective nature of conceptualizing terrorism. These parallels in the findings suggest that the perspectives of female victims and actors can provide a reasonable contribution to counter-terrorism strategies adopted in Nigeria.
Additionally, findings also suggest that there are differences between the shared experiences of the women and girls residing in Nigeria and those who moved to the United States. The participants in Nigeria showed a relative reluctance to categorize attacks by Boko Haram on their communities as terrorism. Those in the US were more forthcoming with the description of acts as terrorism. It is possible that residing in a western country, and having the exposure to a society that clearly defines the tenets of terrorist activity accounts for the differences in opinion. It is also possible that the participants who moved to the US feel free to criticize Boko Haram as opposed to those in Nigeria who may be more concerned for their safety.

The differences between the responses of participants in Nigeria and their counterparts in the United States brings to issue the conceptualization of terrorism within local contexts. It is possible that the failure to expressly categorize Boko Haram's activities as terrorism indicates that Nigerians residing in Nigeria view terrorist activity as normal. The normalization effect of terrorism occurs as a coping mechanism (Neal, 2012). Literature posits that a continuous exposure to violence leads to a resultant normalization effect (Neal, 2012; Torok, 2013; Jackson, 2013). I did not anticipate this finding. However, future research can build on this to establish a connection between terrorist activity and a normalization effect in Nigeria.

**Theme 2: The role the family and community dynamics play in female participation in terrorism in Nigeria**

The second theme evolving from the data centered on how family and communal dynamics influence female participation in terrorism in Nigeria. The findings indicate that family and community dynamics play a significant and revealing role in the
discussion of female participation in terrorism in Nigeria. The study participants shared stories that suggest that the protection of the fundamental rights of women and girls will lead to lower levels of female participation in terrorism in Nigeria.

Family unit and structure of family were a significant factor in the lived experiences of the women and girls interviewed for this study as there were differences in the adjustment after Boko Haram. For instance, participants with family units who endorse female education had more education and thus appeared to receive more help in terms of reintegration in the community. The participants also shared stories that suggest that the exposure of women and girls to gender inequalities has an impact on female participation in terrorism in Nigeria. The study found that early child marriage and the lack of support for education are the major inequalities women and girls experience in the community, which in turn leads to the rise in female participation in terrorism.

There is a clear trend in the rise of early child marriage in Nigeria. Although there is little concrete data that links the variations in the prevalence of early child marriage to the increase in terrorist activity in Nigeria (Oke & Labeodan, 2015), the data used in this study further establishes a relationship between the two phenomena. The interview data indicated Boko Haram's attack on schools and the kidnapping of students intensifies the tendency for girls to be married off at an early age. The data also indicated that this concern for the safety of Nigerian girls results in a discontinuation of the education of the girl child, a phenomenon which had not particularly been successful in the various conflict-prone areas.
The interviews also suggest that early child marriage may drive female involvement in terrorism in Nigeria. Early child marriage currently represents a substantial social problem in Nigeria. Northern Nigeria, where Boko Haram predominantly operates, has the highest rate of early girl child marriage (Braimah, 2014). Approximately 44% of girls are married off before their 18th birthday (Fayokun, 2015). The Nigerian Constitution provides that an individual should be 18 years or older to legally consent to marriage. The Child's Rights Act of 2003 also provides that the age of consent should be 18 years old. Regardless of these legal provisions, early child marriage is still a huge issue in Nigeria.

Early child marriage influences female involvement in terrorism because it drives the family ties which terrorist organizations exploit (Collins, 1998; Schbley, 2000; Helmus, 2009; Mullins & Dolnik, 2009; Canter, Sarangi, & Youngs, 2014). Often, brides of early child marriages become victims of domestic violence and psychological abuse because of the large age difference between them and their husbands (Arthur et al., 2018). These types of marriages place young women in an especially vulnerable position to being exploited by terrorist organizations. The findings of this study support this assertion. In fact, data suggest that Boko Haram uses early child marriage practices in Northern Nigeria to its benefit. The participants’ experiences indicate that while some families voluntarily marry off women and girls as a sign of solidarity to Boko Haram's cause, a significant number of brides are victims of abduction who are married off to fighters, and used as servants or suicide bombers. The findings of this study further revealed that women and girls who are forced into early child marriage to Boko Haram members, have no choice but to support the cause of their husbands. Cultural values are
so deeply ingrained, and at times concerns for one's safety are so severe, that these women are unable to voice their disagreement, or go against their husbands' wish.

Furthermore, it is of utmost importance to address the relationship between Boko Haram and western education. Boko Haram stands against western education (Onuoha, 2012; Chothia, 2012). The direct translation of the organization's name from the Hausa language means, "Western education is forbidden." The meaning of the organization's name implies that its core values, and the foundation upon which it operates is to fight the formal education of Nigerian youths. This necessarily implies that eradicating western education in its entirety is at the core of Boko Haram's motivations. To this end, the adoption of the marriage of women and girls, and establishing a family bond that aims at suppressing the western education of women and girls has been a successful strategy of the organization.

The Universal Declaration on Human Rights recognizes education as a fundamental human right. Research has found that there is a positive correlation between the enrollment of girls in school and the gross national product as well as life expectancy (Schultz, 2002). Additionally, the National Policy on Education states that access to education is a right for all Nigerian children regardless of gender, religion, and disability (Akinpelu, 2007). The findings of this study indicate that women and girls in Nigeria value education and the protection of their human rights. All of the study’s participants suggested that educating the girl child is central to the overall well-being of women in Nigerian society.
The findings of this study suggest that the lack of support for education is an area where family and community dynamics work to expose women and girls to violence and terrorism in Nigeria. The tenets of the fragile state framework manifest heavily here. Rapid socio-economic development of a state profoundly depends on the caliber of women and the level of their education (Nussbaum, 2003). The study participants expressed that the socio-economic status of the adult members of their families influenced the level of exposure they had to education. Moreover, participants' conception of terrorism conveyed the importance of the education of the girl-child in Nigeria. The experiences of participants who had some level of formal education significantly differed from those who had none. Educated participants were clear in conceptualizing terrorism and conveying the importance of educating the girl-child in Nigeria.

Education is necessary for the development of children, and the protection of the fundamental human rights of women and girls (Alabi, Bahah, & Alabi, 2014). The differences in the experiences of girls abducted from schools and those abducted from their families' (without formal education) stress the need to ensure the education of women and girls. Education is central to the survival of women and girls and indeed played a significant role in the experiences of the participants interviewed.

Early child marriage often entails that the young girls forced into marriage stop going to school. The lack of education of women and girls increases the risk of early child marriage, early exposure to sexual intercourse, sexually transmitted diseases, early pregnancy and, pregnancy-related complications, which are on the rise in Nigeria.
The Nigerian society is predominantly a patriarchal one, characterized by cultural and societal barriers that make it extremely difficult for girls to acquire formal education. As a result, they cannot aspire for higher positions in the corporate and private sectors or in government.

**Theme 3: Female recruitment strategy adopted by Boko Haram**

The third theme emanating from the data captured the essence of female involvement in terrorist activity in Nigeria. Female recruitment strategies are central to participation in terrorist activity. In June 2014, Boko Haram introduced female suicide attacks to its operational strategy. Boko Haram's utilization of female suicide bombers remains unprecedented globally. This tactic has, by far, exceeded any previous deployment of female fighters by other terrorist organizations (Zenn, 2018).

We can explain Boko Haram's adoption of women and girls as suicide bombers by adopting Zenn’s (2018) analysis of the patterns that explain female suicide terrorism. He explains that the adoption of female suicide bombers by terrorist organizations is consistent with organizational-level-analysis that seeks to account for female involvement in terms of the strategic and tactical advantage of a terrorist movement. Female suicide terrorism has five notable advantages. First, the shock value effect ensures the publicity of the terrorist act, thereby increasing the propaganda effect of the incident. Second, because females are less likely to be suspected as attackers, women and girls can have easier access to targets. This assertion is particularly true for Northern Nigeria, where there are stringent barriers that bar male security operatives from subjecting women to routine security checks. Third, the adoption of women and girls as
suicide bombers avoids upsetting primarily male lines of leadership. We can also find this reference to machismo in Boko Haram's leadership structure, where women are practically invisible. This point is also important in the Nigerian context, where society is predominantly patriarchal. Fourth, women and girls can be beneficial to terrorist organizations that are suffering from a shortage of male recruits. Fifth, the recruitment of women and girls may shame men into fighting.

Scholars have traced a link between female engagement in terrorist activity and the substantial needs and goals of individual terrorist groups (Cunningham, 2003; Jacques & Taylor, 2008; Jacques & Taylor, 2009). Zenn (2018) argues that Boko Haram's recruitment of female fighters is a means to legitimize their acts and achieve strategic utilitarianism. The findings of this study do not support voluntary female participation in the activities of Boko Haram. Participants described forced marriage, kidnapping, and detention as a means of ensuring female involvement in Boko Haram's activities. The findings indicate that Boko Haram primarily recruits women and girls through kidnapping and detention. Most of the participants indicated that they ended up in the Boko Haram camp because of their capture by the organization. Zenn and Pearson (2014) state that Boko Haram resorted to the kidnapping and use of women and girls in response to the Nigerian government's counter-terrorism strategies.

The abductions of the Chibok girls in 2014 lunged the activities of Boko Haram into the global spotlight and brought awareness to the organizational uses of women and girls. The global attention that the kidnapping of women and girls has received is, in a large extent, due to the media attention the incidents receive. To some extent, I
anticipated that Stockholm Syndrome would resonate in this third theme. I anticipated finding a link between involuntary participation (through the kidnapping of women and girls) and a subsequent empathy towards the goals, mission, and actions of the organization. The study findings did not support this conceptual perspective. The disapproval of the participants towards Boko Haram remained consistent throughout their descriptions of experiences. This disapproval was equally prevalent among the respondents residing in Nigeria and the United States.

In the interest of fairness, Boko Haram has victimized both genders. The terrorist organization does not only target women. The level of media attention the kidnapping of women and girls receives obscures similar violence against men and boys perpetrated by the terrorist group. Similar events that involve men and boys do not receive the media attention that it needs. For example, in February 2014, a few weeks before the Chibok kidnapping, Boko Haram attacked the Federal Government College, Buni Yadi, in Yobe State, Nigeria and burned young boys alive (Pereira, 2018). This incident took the lives of approximately twenty-nine male students at the school. The loss of young Nigerian schoolboys has not received the attention it deserves in the same way that the kidnapping of schoolgirls has. This gendered attention to the activities of Boko Haram brings to fore the role of the media in terms of pushing the Boko Haram propaganda. It further alters the understanding of the roles women and girls play in the violence in Nigeria. The findings of this study, suggests that the attention the kidnapping of women and girls by Boko Haram receives can yield a broader conversation about the variety of ways females get involved in terrorist activity in Nigeria.
Theme 4: Participants' views on the most powerful radicalization strategy adopted by Boko Haram

Radicalization involves the process of making people embrace radical positions on social and political matters (Trip, Bora, Marian, Halmajan & Drugas, 2019). Radicalization strategies are at the core of engagement in terrorist activity. By necessary implications, radicalization should be at the center of female involvement in terrorist activity in Nigeria. Literature posits that Boko Haram draws its members from individuals who are dissatisfied with the Nigerian government, the unemployed, and destitute children who are mostly from but not limited to Northern Nigeria (Onuoha, 2014; Cunningham, 2007; Bloom & Matfess, 2016; Lord-Mallam, 2019). Musa (2012), states that Boko Haram capitalizes on the socio-economic hardships abundant in Northern Nigeria to recruit and radicalize new members. This position supports the fragility of state framework. According to the fragility of state framework, a fragile state characterized by poverty and economic hardship creates an environment where terrorism thrives.

In line with the literature on radicalization strategies adopted by Boko Haram, I anticipated that the state fragility framework would account for some of the radicalization strategies that ensure female participation in terrorist activities in Nigeria. The findings of this study are indirectly consistent with existing literature. Findings partly support the fragile state framework in the context of female participation in terrorism in Nigeria because poverty and economic hardship drive the lack of education which in turn influences Boko Haram's kidnapping of women and girls. Even though the findings did not support poverty as a motivating factor for female involvement in terrorism, it is
indirectly supported because economic hardship contributes to the lack of access to education which is associated with kidnapping and the resultant association with terrorism. None of the participants interviewed referred to any of the tenets of the fragility of states framework. Instead, findings suggest that Boko Haram utilizes religion to its benefit. There was consensus in the descriptions of the participants to the effect that Boko Haram uses religious teachings, the threat to life, and the adoption of diabolical means to radicalize women and girls to adopt their extremist religious views.

Research that considers religion when studying Boko Haram refers to it in terms of the conversion of Christian girls to extremist Islamist views. The findings of this research do not support this position. Instead, they suggest that Boko Haram is indiscriminate in its consideration of the religion of the women and girls they capture and involve in their organization. Of the 20 participants I interviewed, only two were Christian. Despite the respondents’ pool being mainly Muslim, the participants still described the adoption of a higher level of religiosity as a means of radicalizing women and girls. This adoption of a higher level of religiosity implies that Boko Haram is more fundamentalist in character and adopts modes of operation which differ from the tenets of Islamism. This finding suggests that religion undoubtedly plays a vital role in the radicalization of new members, although not in terms of converting Christians to Islam. The existence of the adoption of religion to radicalize women and girls who are Muslims may imply that Boko Haram uses religion to propagate more profound ideas that research has not yet been able to explore fully. Future research can build on this area.
Furthermore, the findings of this study indicate that the women and girls who have had contact with Boko Haram suffer the double trauma of abduction, sexual exploitation, and involuntary participation in terrorist activity. The conversion efforts adopted by the organization to ensure female participation in their activities and ideologies through diabolical means, exposure to propaganda, adoption of religious strategies, and constant brainwashing further worsens the trauma of these women and girls. The question remains whether other women and girls not included in this study who participate in terrorist activity are related by blood to the insurgents and, as a result, share same ideologies, or whether they suffer a severe form of trauma that leads to a form of Stockholm Syndrome.

From the analysis of the data, the lines between voluntary and involuntary participation appear to be blurred. Security operatives do not often delve into the determination of the innocence or otherwise of women and girls they find to be collaborating with Boko Haram. The findings of this study do not support rational capacity and voluntary participation in Boko Haram's activities. Instead, they suggest that Boko Haram members exploit the most disadvantaged and vulnerable victims through direct threats or non-consensual marriages, and force these women to succumb to their pressure. As a result, female participation in terrorist activity in Nigeria is often due to severe trauma and victimization. If this is the case, counter-terrorism strategies need to factor victimology into the treatment of individuals found to be collaborating with terrorists in Nigeria. This step is necessary to ensure that victims do not suffer double jeopardy just because they appear to be supporting terrorist activity.
Theme 5: Operational uses of women and girls within the Boko Haram organization

In this study, I investigated female participation in terrorism in Nigeria from the perspective of the women and girls who have had personal contact with terrorism in Nigeria. Consistent with prior scholarship on the motivations for participating in terrorist activity in Nigeria (Onuoha & George, 2015; Osita-Njoku & Chikere, 2015; Oriola, 2017), the findings suggest that social and cultural issues that are enshrined in the society significantly influence female participation in terrorism. However, contrary to prior scholarship, the findings do not suggest that economic and political factors are primary drivers of female participation in terrorism in Nigeria.

Fusing the knowledge learned from interviewing women and girls who have had varying levels of interaction with terrorism in Nigeria, I make five broad observations. First, communal practices have a significant impact on family dynamics, which in turn influences female participation in terrorism in Nigeria. Second, educational attainment plays a significant role in the experiences of women and girls which, in turn, has a significant impact on the likelihood to participate in violent activity in Nigeria. Third, the impact of practices that raise questions about GBV in Nigeria from the various aspects of female involvement in terrorism cannot be disaggregated. Fourth, the environment where women and girls find themselves influences their perceptions of Boko Haram and terrorism in Nigeria. It also impacts the recall of their experiences and interpretations of same. Last, society influences the perceptions of counter-terrorism strategies that can impact female participation in terrorism in Nigeria and beyond.
Terrorist groups include women in various aspects of their operations. The motives of the women and girls who engage in terrorist activity are often subject to the stereotypes of women as passive and non-violent. Notwithstanding, the adoption of women and girls as suicide bombers is not a new operational tactic adopted by a terrorist organization (Zedaliz, 2004; Nacos, 2005; Bloom, 2007; Ness, 2007; Speckhard, 2008). Boko Haram's use of females as suicide bombers represents the first instance of the adoption of this tactic in Nigeria's history. These suicide-bombing attacks have taken the lives of many Nigerians and has attracted much publicity from both local and international audiences.

The findings of this study indicate that Boko Haram does not afford women and girls any meaningful status. Instead, they seem to have the freedom to improvise on the operational uses of women and girls within their organization. Participants' descriptions suggest that Boko Haram members marry women and girls for maintaining the household, cooking, childbearing, or carrying out suicide bombing attacks. The findings also suggest that Boko Haram sexually and physically abuses women and girls in their custody. While much literature addresses Boko Haram and the threat the organization poses, very little is known about the abuses that women and girls in their captivity have to endure. The existence of a blurred line between victimization and perpetration as well as the sensitive nature of the subject matter contributes to the lack of knowledge of the extent of abuse women and girls in Boko Haram's captivity endure. In addition to abusing women and girls physically and sexually, Boko Haram also engages in the psychological abuse of their victims to ensure their involvement in their missions. Participants' stories
reference the use of diabolical means used to brainwash the women and girls in Boko Haram custody.

The gendered approach of Boko Haram's tactics reveals the organization's goal towards achieving its aims of Islamizing Nigeria, and reducing western education while enabling GBV. From the findings of the study, it appears that Boko Haram's adoption of GBV is less systemized and more sporadic in approach. However, its actions are an abuse of women with the adoption of theology to justify its means. Boko Haram's adoption of female involvement in terrorist activity is entrenched in the adaptation of practices that are deeply rooted in Salafi-jihadi, which raises the exploitation of cultural practices that emphasize the patriarchal norms widespread across all regions of Nigeria.

Earlier literature asserted that the recruitment of women and girls is often the consequence of the increase in state surveillance of terrorist groups' activities. Terrorist organizations from Syria to Sri Lanka have adopted this operational tactic (Parashar, 2009; O'rourke, 2009). However, in comparison to other groups, Boko Haram has disproportionately utilized women and girls as fighters (Osita-Njoku & Chikere, 2015; Oyewole, 2015; Bloom & Matfess, 2016). From my observations in the field and informal conversations, there are still women and girls who remain in police custody for participating in terrorist activities in Nigeria. It is unclear to what extent these women had been coerced to take part in terrorism or if they had the free will to refrain from their actions. There is an apparent lack of consideration for the true motivations of these women and girls and their lack of voluntariness in terrorist activities. The appearance of possessing tools of terror makes them guilty within the system.
In addition, the apparent blurred lines between willing participation and the involuntary engagement in terrorism have left many women and girls bearing the stigma of association with Boko Haram. This stigma is intensified further if the women or girls bore any children for Boko Haram fighters. As such, the continuous victimization of victims represents a significant obstacle to the reintegration of women and girls into their communities. The isolation and rejection that these women face can build the kind of resistance that has led to the evolution of Boko Haram in the first place. Nigerian security operatives had previously arrested three of the participants I interviewed, but they were subsequently released. There are still women who are in police custody for their participation in terrorist activities. The lack of distinction in the treatment of victims and perpetrators represents a grey area that needs attention. Due to the sensitive nature of the subject matter, it is difficult to ascertain the level of willingness or coercion in the participation of women and girls. Future research can build on this area.

**Theme 6: Participants' perceptions of how to prevent the future abduction of women and girls and female participation in terrorism in Nigeria**

The findings of this study suggest that education plays a very significant role in the prevention of female participation in terrorist activities in Nigeria. Overall, the participants described that educating women and girls can prevent future abduction and female participation in terrorist activity in Nigeria. Prior research supports this finding as lower education levels promote terrorism in countries where political, socio-economic, and demographic conditions are unfavorable (Gonzalex-Perez, 2008). Research has also found that country-specific circumstances have a moderating effect on the relationship
between education and terrorism (Krueger & Malečková, 2002; Krueger & Malečková, 2003; Berrebi, 2007; Gonzalex-Perez, 2008).

In this regard, the fragility of state theory plays a significant role in that the tenets of the concept enhances the moderation effect on the correlation between education and terrorism. Even though I did not find a strong relationship between the fragility of state framework and female participation in terrorist activity in Nigeria, one can argue that the tenets of the theory significantly influence the role education plays in female engagement in terrorism in Nigeria. Given that family and community dynamics prevalent in Northern Nigeria are influenced by religious and cultural sentiments, many girls do not receive a formal education. From my observations, the experiences of the respondents who had formal education were different from those with no schooling. For example, educated participants were more forthcoming in conceptualizing Boko Haram's acts than their uneducated counterparts. There was also a significant difference in the descriptions of the post- Boko Haram experiences.

In addition to placing a high premium on the education of women and girls, the government also needs to prioritize the safety of schoolchildren. Subsequent to Boko Haram's attack and abduction of schoolchildren in 2014, Nigeria ratified the Safe School Declaration in May 2015 (Joda & Abdulrasheed, 2015). Additionally, with the support of the international community, Nigeria has developed a significant amount of initiatives and procedures to rebuild schools and provide adequate security for the children who attend schools (Isokpan & Durojaye, 2016). However, there are no estimates indicating how many schools have benefited from these measures. Presently, Boko Haram continues
to abduct girls from their schools in Northern Nigeria. In fact, there was an incident that occurred as recently as 2018 where Boko Haram kidnapped schoolgirls from their school in Dapchi, Borno state, Nigeria.

The continuous abduction of girls from schools indicates that women and girls are still vulnerable to attacks in Nigeria, specifically in the learning environment. This fact underscores the government’s continuous struggle to provide adequate protection for schools, particularly those in the North-Eastern part of Nigeria. As such, there is a need to marry the promotion of education with adequate structural changes that can positively affect individual and nation-wide development, consequently reducing the participation of women and girls in terrorism in Nigeria. These structural changes are most beneficial to those women and girls who are survivors of armed conflict as it can provide a sense of normalcy to them.

Notwithstanding, there is an increase in the societal stigma associated with being in the Boko Haram camp. The participants’ experiences reflect a consensus in the fact that there is a social stigma that comes with bearing children for Boko Haram fighters. Given the conservative nature of Nigerians, particularly those in the North-Eastern part of the country, the community highly frowns at the concept of being a single mother. As a result, some of the women and girls may be trapped in the vicious circle of going back to the Boko Haram camp to avoid the victimization they face in the community.

Similarly, the findings of this study indicate that reintegration into society continues to pose a threat to women and girls who had contact with Boko Haram. The adoption of effective reintegration strategies is necessary to ensure that these women and
girls do not find reasons to go back to the Boko Haram camp. It is essential to sensitize the public and communities to the plights of the survivors of Boko Haram and violence in Nigeria. The government needs to prioritize educating the members of communities that receive survivors on how to accept and treat them with compassion. This necessary step will facilitate the proper reintegration of women and girls into their communities. Religious leaders who play significant roles in Nigerian communities should be encouraged to use their positions to appeal to the public to show support to the survivors of terrorism in Nigeria. In order to ensure reintegration, the government needs to provide women and girls with the necessary physical and mental health services that they may need to ensure resilience-building and surviving life after their Boko Haram encounter.

During my experience in the field, I observed that, for many of the participants, escaping from the Boko Haram camp marks the beginning of their ordeals. Most of the participants with whom I spoke were shy. Nevertheless, the victims who live in the IDP camps share a strong bond and look out for one another. This is especially crucial for the survivors of Boko Haram, many of whom experienced trauma while in captivity. Trauma changes an individual. Its effects can affect cognition, memory, and information retrieval. Some of the participants revealed the continued occurrence of nightmares related to their stay in the Boko Haram camp. The fact that some of their counterparts remain missing does not help issues. Most of the study participants are marred with visible emotional and behavioral trauma. In fact, six of the participants are battling with Vesico Vaginal Fistula (VVF) because of the exposure to early child marriage, sexual violence, and childbirth. VVF represents a public health concern affecting many women and girls in the IDP across Nigeria. My conversations with the victims revealed that the community
discriminates against the women and girls who suffer VVF by treating them as outcasts and refusing to communicate with them. The government and the international community need to step in to help the women and girls suffering from societal stigma because of their experiences with Boko Haram.

Furthermore, there is a multitude of physical and mental health problems faced by the survivors of Boko Haram, and these problems are especially pronounced among the respondents who stayed in Nigeria where they have limited support systems and opportunities for education and professional advancement. The experiences of women and girls who reside in the United States are noticeably different from those of the survivors interviewed in Nigeria. This difference is visible, particularly in terms of the participants' description of their post-Boko Haram experience and their perceptions on how we can avoid future abductions and participation of women and girls in terrorism in Nigeria. The survivors of Boko Haram have been forcibly displaced from their homes and have to live in the Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps. Except for three participants residing in Nigeria, the other 13 interviewees reside in shelters created for internally displaced persons. The participants residing in the United States, on the other hand, have received free scholarships to school, proper medical, and mental health services. The Nigerian government and the international community need to offer more protection to women and girls against violence perpetrated by organizations like Boko Haram. The Nigerian government, both, at the state and federal levels, as well as international efforts aimed at countering Boko Haram attacks must pay more attention to the vulnerable populations that are susceptible to victimization.
Study Limitations

There were a few limitations for this study. The study examined the experiences of 20 women out of a large population of females who have had contact with Boko Haram. While this number of in-depth semi-structured interviews provides a generous data source and is sufficient to reach saturation in a phenomenological study of this kind, more interviews with the target population located in other parts of Nigeria is required to allow the generalization of findings to the larger population.

Another limitation is the limited capacity for recall that a person possesses. Due to the limited amount of information a person can remember over time, memory and perceptions can be skewed given any set amount of time (Brewin, 2001). As a result, the accuracy of the memories narrated after time has elapsed can be questioned. Since I asked the participants to recall their experiences before, during, and after their time in the Boko Haram camp, it is difficult to know what aspect of their experiences may have been overlooked.

Additionally, prior literature suggests that people may sometimes alter their acuities of experiences to explain them or in the attempt to fit them into present ideal versions that can account for the past (Jorgensen, 2009; Vagle, 2018). As a result, participants can minimize their roles in the Boko Haram camp to protect their image and present living circumstances. Given the sensitive nature of the subject matter of this study, the participants may have been motivated to project themselves in a particular manner to me. They may have also been motivated to protect themselves from further victimization. For this reason, it is possible that some of the women interviewed may
have experienced greater victimization or were more actively engaged in activities while in the Boko Haram camp than they led me to believe. Last, despite my best efforts to control for my biases, it is possible that my experiences as a Nigerian woman who has first-hand knowledge and contact with some of the issues discussed in this study created a bias that somehow limits my analysis. These limitations are likely to affect the findings of this study. Therefore, the findings of the study should be interpreted and applied with caution.

**Implications for Policy**

My study presented a narration of the experiences of women and girls who have had contact with terrorism in Nigeria. Their stories developed a foundation of knowledge surrounding how women and girls experience and understand female involvement in terrorist activities in Nigeria. It is from the rich accounts evolving from the stories of the participants that I now base my policy recommendations. The voices of women and girls expressed through their lived experiences was always present as I explored and defined the subject matter of terrorism. This essence now serves as the basis for the following recommendations.

This study has initiated a research discourse regarding the motivations of women and girls to participate in terrorist activity in Nigeria from the perspective of individuals who have had first-hand contact with terrorism. While exploring how the participants experience and understand terrorism in the Nigerian context, the study’s findings encourage further investigation into the relationship and connectivity between female participation in terrorism, cultural practices, religion, and gender-based violence in
Nigerian communities. Additional focus, different research methodologies, and expanded sample size are considerations future research can take into account as a means to further investigate female involvement in terrorist activity in Nigeria. These aspects are necessary to seek further understanding of the subject matter, thereby bridging the gaps in existing scholarly literature. This study offers a baseline that now encourages further exploration.

In addition, Nigerian families and communities are responsible for creating an environment that protects women and girls from gender-based violence. The findings of this study suggest that cultural practices drive family and community dynamics, which have a significant impact on female participation in terrorism in Nigeria. Placing the much-needed priority on the protection of the rights of the girl-child can benefit the entire nation. The recognition that women and girls in Nigeria value formal education should encourage families and, indeed, communities to reflect upon the level of learning engagement they offer women and girls. Families should intentionally make efforts to ensure that the female members of their unit receive a formal education. This effort will ensure the protection of a vast array of human rights. Moreover, the members of the relocation communities where survivors resettle must be sensitized to encourage the successful reintegration of individuals who come out from the Boko Haram camp. The fair treatment of these women and girls is necessary to prevent the further victimization of individuals who have suffered severe trauma during captivity.

Given the findings of this research, the Nigerian government needs to emphasize the inclusion of gender-related considerations in the prevention of radicalization and
terrorism in Nigeria. There is a strong need to implement a national strategy that focuses on the inclusion of women's roles in counter-terrorism attempts. This effort is instrumental in creating an understanding of the ways a gender perspective relates to victimization and radicalization. This effort will lead to the development of security policies that take gender in terrorist organizations into account. Tackling these parallel and interrelated facets will likely yield a significant result in the prevention of female involvement in terrorism.

Last, the government should specifically address the needs and experiences of women and girls who have had contact with terrorism in Nigeria, whether as victims, sympathizers, or perpetrators. The Nigerian government, in collaboration with international partners, must address some of the challenges and health concerns presented by the women and girls in the IDP camps. Providing medical care is necessary in order to foster longer-term reintegration into society.

**Implications for Future Research**

Female participation in terrorism in Nigeria, whether due to voluntary sign up, Stockholm Syndrome, abduction, or otherwise warrants further investigation. For a better understanding of the subject matter of terrorism, it would be beneficial to deepen our understanding of what motivates women and girls to participate in terrorism in Nigeria. Further research into how women and girls define and participate in terrorist activity would provide policymakers in Nigeria and beyond a roadmap that allows for the implementation of practices at the local, national, and international levels. This endeavor
would greatly influence a gendered perspective in the study of terrorism, and the presentation of counter-terrorism practices.

Additional research is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of the programs that have been implemented to protect the girl-child in Nigeria from the violation of her human rights, something which is correlated to the exposure to early child marriage, abductions, and the involvement in terrorism in Nigeria. Research into the efficiency of these programs may not only assist in curbing female participation in terrorist activity in Nigeria, but it may also shed light on the other unspoken practices that expose women and girls to the violation of their human rights.

There is also a need for continued research to evaluate the post-Boko Haram experiences of the women and girls residing in the United States as well as those in Nigeria to assess the differences in their lives. Given the significant differences between the experiences of the participants residing in the United States from their counterparts in Nigeria, this effort will yield useful results in identifying the areas of reintegration that Nigeria can adopt from the United States. Furthermore, continued efforts should be made to identify the areas that can effectively strengthen the protection of the human rights of women and girls. More specifically, investigative efforts should focus upon the issues of patriarchy, cultural, communal, and religious practices that make up the systemic violence against women and girls in Nigeria.

Another area of critical importance is the continued dialogue with those women and girls who have been in the Boko Haram camp as perpetrators, witnesses, and victims. Their insights are valuable in addressing the growing problem of female participation in
terrorist activity that has impacted counter-terrorism measures in Nigeria and globally. There is an urgent need to conduct research that aims to keep policymakers informed on the events and practices that expand the involvement of women and girls in terrorism. A deeper understanding of the blurred lines between victimization and perpetration also needs to be established. Repeating the same research questions regarding the role of the family and community dynamics, gender-based violence, and religion play will potentially yield different results because actions, definitions, perceptions, and other variables are very fluid with it comes to the concept of terrorism.

Other potential research should examine the female victimization aspect of terrorism in Nigeria. The existence of a blurred line between perpetration and victimization should influence the treatment of women and girls who have had contact with Boko Haram. Efforts that could assist in identifying deeper motivations for female involvement in terrorism, as well as the plight of potential victims, are encouraged. It would also yield significant value to consider the influences geography, religion, family practices, and formal education may have on female involvement in terrorism.

Conclusion

This study aims to introduce the importance of further exploration of gender within terrorism as a path to understanding and ultimately preventing the ongoing and escalating violence in Nigeria. The study contributes to the burgeoning scholarly literature on Boko Haram’s activities in Nigeria and focuses on the gender-based approach of the organization’s strategies. The analysis of female participation in violence in Nigeria remains limited by the lack of research into the experiences of women and
girls found to collaborate with terrorists. There is a need for more research with women who were in captivity or have collaborated with terrorists to ascertain their views and motivations. An understanding of how women experience the conflict in Nigeria not only as victims but also as actors can directly inform policies and programs aimed at tackling insurgency at the roots. This effort can also facilitate women’s contribution to lasting peace.

This study purports to provide insight into the intersectionality of gender and radicalization. It may lead to the development of security policies that take into account the role of gender in terrorist organizations. The study may also lead to analyzing gender in security institutions in Nigeria and around the world in order to reinvent them as plural and inclusive. This research is fundamental because, in addition to expanding the research in this area, it can also inform counter-terrorism efforts both in and outside Nigeria.

There is little knowledge of Boko Haram's motivation for abducting girls from schools as well as the kidnapping of school-aged girls from their villages. Regardless, the impact these abductions have on girls and young women is immeasurable. The vast majority of the attacks carried out by women and girls on behalf of Boko Haram have been suicide bombings. The word suicide bomber, in this case, maybe a misnomer because it implies that the perpetrator has the voluntary decision to be a martyr. Their involvement in terrorist activities essentially blurs the line between perpetration and victimization such that the focus is on the former and not the latter. Consequently, there
is a need to ensure that their prior victimization as well as repeated victimization during
their attempted reintegration to society is not ignored.

The involvement of women and girls in violence indicates a change in the trend of
violent conflicts that have plagued Nigeria and countries around the world. The failure to
curtail the proliferation of this issue, specifically through the active protection of women
and girls, will lead to the continued existence of Boko Haram as well as the unrelenting
kidnapping and recruitment of women and girls as voluntary and/or coerced supporters,
sympathizers, and participants in the wave of terror that is plaguing Nigeria.
REFERENCES


Blaskie, R. (2016). Women in the religious wave of terrorism and beyond: The west versus the rest an analysis of women’s motives and agency in Al-Qaeda and the Islamic state.


Cilliers, J. and Sisk, T.D. (2014), Assessing Long-Term State Fragility in Africa:


Famutimi, T. (2014), Female suicide bombers may be Chibok girls –Ezekwesili, others. The Punch, 30 July.


107


Okowita, S. L. (2017). Female Suicide Terrorism: An analysis of trends and group motivations linked to the increase in female participation as suicide bombers.


Torres, S., & Guillermo, N. (2017). The kidnapping of the Chibok girls: a result of a
threat to masculinities (Bachelor's thesis, PUCE).


APPENDIX:

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Opening Question:

1. I know that you had been abducted by Boko Haram and had some challenging experiences I will ask you about later but can you first tell me how you are? Do you feel safe?

Section 1: Life before Boko Haram – childhood and upbringing

2. How big is your family?

3. Can you describe your level of education?

4. Can you describe your siblings’ level of education?

5. Does your family endorse the idea of women’s education?

6. Can you describe your local community dynamics?
   a. Can you tell me about violence in your community?
   b. What type of violence is most predominant?
   c. What do people do to cope with it?

7. Are there any inequalities faced by women and girls in your community?
   a. If so, can you describe them? What specific types of inequalities are there?

8. Did you experience any physical violence as a child or young girl (before Boko Haram’s captivity)?
   a. If so, do you mind telling me more about it?
   b. Was the violence a single incident or on-going?
9. Did you feel safe in your community prior to Boko Haram’s captivity?
   a. If no, what were your main concerns with personal safety?

10. What is your primary religion? Christian, Muslim, other?
   a. How religious was your family when growing up?
   b. Do you have any history of conversion from either religion?
   c. If yes, why did you convert? When? Under what circumstances?
   d. Can you describe your experience of conversion? How did it occur?

Section 2: Prior knowledge of Boko Haram and abduction experience

11. What did you know about Boko Haram prior to your abduction?
   a. Did you talk about it at home?
   b. Did you talk about it at school?
   c. Did you talk about it at church/mosque?
   d. Did you know anyone who had been previously abducted?
   e. Did you know anyone from Boko Haram? Any family member or relative?

12. Prior to your kidnapping, how did you feel about Boko Haram?
   a. Where there any aspects of Boko Haram you found appealing to you? If so, tell me more about it.

13. When did you first get in contact with Boko Haram? I’m especially interested in any contact prior to your abduction.

14. Now can you tell me about how you ended up in the Boko Haram camp?
   a. Where you abducted? If so, where did the abduction happen?
b. How old were you at that time?

c. Who else was involved?

d. Who witnessed the abduction and did they do anything to prevent it?

Section 3: Life with Boko Haram

15. What were the negatives about being in a camp?

16. Was there anything positive or satisfactory about living in the Boko Haram camp?
   a. If so, can you describe these positive aspects?

17. Did you develop a sense of belonging or a sense of community while living with Boko Haram?

18. What type of food did you eat? How often? Did you share your meal with others?

19. What were your responsibilities on a daily basis? Could you describe one of your typical days while in the Boko Haram camp?

20. Did you interact with any men? If so, in what capacity?

21. How many other women and girls were there in your camp?
   a. Do you know how most of them got into the Boko Haram camp?
   b. Did any of them experience physical violence? If so, can you tell me about it?
   c. Based on your observation, what functions and duties did other women have in the camp?
   d. While in the Boko Haram camp, were you allowed to speak with other women or girls? Where there any restrictions?
22. Did your views about Boko Haram evolve/change while living there? If so, did they become more favorable or more unfavorable? Tell me more about it.

23. Did you marry any of the members of the group?
   a. Did you feel you had to get married?
   b. How were you introduced to your spouse?
   c. Did you develop feeling for him?
   d. Did you have a child or children? If so, how many and how old are they now? Are they living with you?
   e. To what extent did your marriage contribute to the evolvement of your views about Boko Haram and the outside world?

24. What methods did Boko Haram use to convince women and girls to share their political and religious views?
   a. Can you explain specific approaches and context in which these methods were used?

25. While in the Boko Haram camp, were you ever involved in any act of violence against another person? If yes, tell me more about it.
   a. Who were the victims?
   b. What was the nature of the violent act you were involved in?

26. While in the Boko Haram camp, did you know or hear of any woman or girl who was involved in any violent act? If yes, tell me more about it.
   a. What kind of violent act was this?
   b. Who were the victims?
Section 4: Life after the Boko Haram camp

27. Tell me about your current life? What do you do for living? Do you live with your family? Do you have contacts with your family and community?

28. Do you worry about your own personal safety even now?

29. Can you tell me about how your experience with Boko Haram influenced your life after the release from the captivity?

30. Do you practice any religion now? What religion do you practice and how?

31. What are your goals and dreams in life?

32. Do you think future abductions by Boko Haram can be prevented?
   a. What should be the role of families and communities in preventing these abductions?
   b. What should be the role of the Nigerian Government in preventing these abductions?
   c. What should be the role of the international community in preventing these abductions?

Section 5: Demographics

33. How old are you?

34. What part of Nigeria are you from? Did you live elsewhere outside your home town/state?

35. What is your marital status?

36. Do you have any other thoughts about the issues we have discussed so far?
VITA

PECULIAR MIRACLE AWA

Born, Jos, Plateau State - Nigeria

awapeculiar@gmail.com

2005  Associates Degree in Law - University of Jos, Plateau State - Nigeria

2006  Associates Degree in Computer Application - University of Jos, Plateau State - Nigeria

2010  Bachelor of Law - University of Jos, Plateau State - Nigeria

2011  Barrister at Law - Nigerian Law School, Abuja - Nigeria

2015  Master of Science in Criminal Justice Florida International University - Miami, FL

2019  Doctor of Philosophy in International Crime and Justice Florida International University - Miami, FL