

BANDITRY AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN NIGER STATE (2020-2023)

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Abstract

The issue of Banditry has been a major security issue with far reaching social, political and economic implications in Nigeria. The extant literature, in exploring the impact of the activities of Banditry and its impact on the Nigerian people focus on loss of lives and properties while a few have dared to examine the gender sensitive issue of sexual violence, none of these existing studies have looked into Niger State which has also been a haven for bandits. This paper intends to fill this gap by examining the issue of Banditry and sexual violence in Niger State. Adopting a qualitative method, some selected affected persons were interviewed including other relevant stakeholders such as religious and traditional leaders as well as security and government officials. The study relied on the routine activity theory to explain why and how Banditry prey on women to commit sexual violence. The study finds out that women in Niger State just like their counterparts in other Banditry ravaged states in the North West region have been victims of sexual violence. The study recommends better security measures, increased community engagement, more presence of international organizations and psychosocial support for women and girls in affected areas.

Keywords: Banditry, Sexual Violence, Niger State, Security, Women

Introduction

Sexual violence remains a pervasive global issue, affecting millions of women annually, with its most alarming cases concentrated in regions grappling with insecurity (Campbell & Soeken, 2000). The repercussions of sexual violence extend beyond physical harm, significantly impacting victims' mental health. Often associated with the use of force, coercion, or threats of weapons, sexual violence has been wielded as a weapon of war in various conflicts worldwide, documented in nations such as Algeria, Bosnia Herzegovina, Liberia, Rwanda, Central Africa, Sierra Leone, Southern Sudan, Mali, Nigeria, Libya, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria (Amnesty International, 2011). Recognizing the gravity of this issue, international declarations, including the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, the African Charter, and the Nigerian Constitution, aim to safeguard human rights from such infringements (Usman & Abubakar, 2017).

However, the menace of armed banditry in contemporary Nigeria introduces a complex challenge to preventive measures, often hindering law enforcement efforts. The bandits' strategic approach, characterized by one-time raids and a 'slash and burn' appropriation tactic, poses unique obstacles to the implementation of effective preventive measures. The far-reaching impact of armed banditry has become an unfortunate reality for many Nigerians, particularly those residing in or traveling through border communities. The multifaceted nature of this phenomenon includes highway ambushes, attacks on transit points, village sackings, and large-scale cattle theft, resulting in significant losses encompassing financial, material, and, most tragically, human resources. The evolving nature of armed banditry in

Nigeria, transitioning from traditional to modern forms, necessitates a focused examination of its distinct dimensions and relative importance. Against this backdrop, this paper aims to scrutinize the activities of armed banditry, with a specific emphasis on its intersection with sexual violence, shedding light on a critical aspect of this multifaceted challenge.

Statement of Problem

The escalating trend of mass kidnappings and brutal raids on vulnerable villages by bandits has evolved into a severe humanitarian crisis, marked by a disturbing pattern of violence. In September 2021, bandits imposed a hefty levy of twenty million naira on five villages, compelling them to pay to avoid imminent attacks. The grim reality is that government inadequacies have left rural communities at the mercy of these bandits, resulting in profound consequences. From January to June 2020 alone, at least 1,126 villagers lost their lives due to the bandits' ruthless tactics. In January 2022, Zamfara state witnessed one of the region's worst atrocities as bandits brutally killed at least 200 villagers, underscoring the urgent need for effective intervention.

Amid these staggering numbers and violent attacks, a critical aspect often overlooked is the disproportionate impact on women and children, a concern that has not received adequate attention in policy responses. Despite the increasing frequency of attacks targeting vulnerable women and children, with a dire impact on children's right to education, policy measures have fallen short of addressing the specific challenges faced by these groups. The failure to bring perpetrators to justice exacerbates feelings of impunity and poses a serious threat to food security in rural areas. A report by Amnesty International has highlighted these challenges, bringing attention to the urgent need for comprehensive and targeted interventions. The humanitarian crisis takes a particularly heavy toll on women and girls in the region, with a surge in sexual violence where women are frequently subjected to rape, kidnapping, or commodification by families forced to exchange their daughters for protection. For instance, in Shiroro Local Government Area of Niger State, at least 30 women and girls were indiscriminately raped across five communities, illustrating the pervasive nature of these heinous acts. Similar incidents occurred in Tsafe Local Government Area of Zamfara State, where communities refusing to pay a N3 million levy faced brutal acts of sexual violence. Beyond the immediate physical and psychological trauma, the humanitarian toll extends to the livelihoods of women, as markets and farms are frequently raided, exacerbating the challenges faced by these communities.

In examining the existing scholarly debates surrounding banditry in Nigeria, various scholars have contributed diverse perspectives on the root causes and potential solutions. Akin (2020) asserts that the underlying issues of banditry are deeply rooted in socio-economic disparities. According to his argument, addressing these disparities through targeted development interventions is crucial for achieving long-term solutions. This perspective highlights the need for comprehensive socio-economic reforms to alleviate the conditions that contribute to the emergence of banditry. On a different note, Abdullahi (2019) emphasizes the breakdown of law and order as the fundamental issue driving banditry. In his view, a robust security response is essential to effectively tackle the menace. This argument underscores the importance of addressing the security vacuum and enhancing law enforcement capabilities to curb the activities of bandits. Okon (2021) adds another dimension to the debate by highlighting the role of governance failures and corruption in perpetuating banditry. According to his perspective, systemic issues in governance must be addressed to eliminate the structural vulnerabilities that allow banditry to thrive. This argument points to the need for comprehensive governance reforms and anti-corruption

measures. In another stance, Zara (2022) argues that socio-economic interventions alone may not suffice in addressing banditry. Instead, a comprehensive approach that combines security measures with community engagement is deemed essential. This perspective recognizes the complexity of the issue and advocates for a multifaceted strategy that integrates both security and community-based initiatives.

However, a significant gap in the existing scholarly discourse is the lack of attention to the specific impact of banditry on sexual violence in Niger State. While scholars have provided valuable insights into the root causes and general consequences of banditry, there is a notable absence of focused analysis on the intersection of banditry and sexual violence in the context of Niger State. This gap is particularly concerning given the reported incidents of sexual violence in the region, indicating a need for targeted research and interventions that address this specific aspect of the crisis. As such, this research seeks to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by shedding light on the often-overlooked impact of banditry on sexual violence in Niger State, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities surrounding this pressing issue.

Literature Review

Banditry, although not a new phenomenon globally, has evolved over time, taking on sophisticated and distinct dimensions with detrimental effects in various parts of the world. Defined as an act of robbery, conspiracy, and violence contrary to the rule of law (Isah 2019), banditry involves the organization of armed bands targeting states, local governments, communities, social institutions, enterprises, and individuals (Mohammed et al. 2021). Historical records show instances of banditry operations in European nations like Italy, Spain, Greece, and Turkey since the 17th century, as well as in Asian countries such as Iran, the Philippines, and India (Aisha 2020; Mohammed 2019). The African continent, particularly Nigeria, has not escaped this scourge, experiencing an upsurge that affects various aspects of life, including villages, community market squares, places of worship, farms, and educational institutions.

Remarkably, Northern Nigeria, specifically the North Western States, finds itself disproportionately affected by the ravages of banditry. Olaniyan and Yahaya underscored banditry as a major internal security concern in Nigeria, particularly in the northern region, with the five states of the northwestern region—Katsina, Kaduna, Zamfara, Kebbi, and Sokoto—bearing the brunt of the menace. The growing body of literature on the phenomenon highlights its devastating consequences, extending beyond socio-economic dimensions to pose a potential threat to the regional integration of Northern Nigeria (Aisha 2020). This concern is supported by Saleh (2015), Jumare, and Surma (2015), who suggest that bandits from neighboring West African countries, such as Niger Republic and Mali, may have been invited to carry out large-scale attacks in countries like Nigeria. The impact of these activities includes loss of lives and properties, destruction of farmlands, displacement of rural farming communities, maiming, land grabbing, state deficits, food and human insecurity, economic and environmental insecurity, and heightened government spending (Yusuf 2021). Consequences such as rape, kidnapping for ransom, organized attacks on villages, homes, and communities, looting, and cattle rustling further compound the challenges faced by affected regions (IOM 2020; Katsina 2020).

Conceptualizing Sexual Violence

According to John (1998), sexual violence encompasses any non-consensual sexual activity, involving coercion or force against the partner. This includes instances where victims are compelled or forced into sexual acts without their consent or engage in sexual relations with individuals unable to resist due to factors such as age, illness, disability, or the influence of drugs or substances. The spectrum of sexual violence spans forced kissing, fondling of breasts and genitals, attempted rape, exposure to pornography, child sexual assault, sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, forced abortion, and rape.

The World Health Organization (2001) describes rape as a heinous crime, presenting a worrisome epidemic in contemporary Nigeria. Rape involves forcing someone to engage in sexual activity through violence, constituting an act of sexual violence that includes intercourse without consent or against one's will. Perpetrators employ threats, force, duress, torture, and coercion for sexual gratification, engaging in unlawful sexual behaviors such as fondling breasts and bodies or genital organs to derive pleasure. Rape is not only an aggressive act against women, especially during wars, but it is also perpetrated against slave girls, inmates, and marginalized groups lacking power or status. Perpetrators often use rape as a means of humiliating their victims, involving penetration—virginal, oral, or anal—using force, threat, lack of consent, or the victim's inability to provide consent due to age, intoxication, or mental status (Achunike et al., 2014). The World Health Organization (1995) defines rape as physically forced or coerced penetration, even if slight, of the vulva or anus, utilizing the penis, other body parts, or an object.

In Nigerian law, Section 375 of the Criminal Code (applicable to Southern Nigeria) defines rape as any person having unlawful carnal knowledge of a woman or girl without her consent, or with her consent obtained by force, threats, intimidation, fear of harm, false representation, or impersonation of her husband, constituting an offense termed rape. In Northern Nigeria, Section 282 of the Penal Code further delineates rape, covering instances against the will, without consent, or with consent obtained through fear, threat, or deception, including cases involving underage victims or those of unsound mind. However, sexual intercourse by a man with his own wife is not considered rape if she has reached puberty. International humanitarian laws and conventions, such as the 1949 Geneva Conventions, the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria, and the Rome Statute, all condemn sexual violence as a violation of human rights and a grave breach of international law. Sexual violence, including rape, is classified as torture and prosecuted under grave breaches' provisions. The Rome Statute of 1998 specifically designates rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, or any other form of sexual violence as a serious violation and a grave breach of the Geneva Conventions. The 1999 Constitution of Nigeria, under Section 34, guarantees the right to the dignity of the human person and prohibits torture or inhuman or degrading treatment.

While various legislations criminalize sexual violence in Nigeria, the punishment for rape varies across states, with life imprisonment being a common maximum penalty. The legal framework reflects the recognition of the severity of sexual violence and the commitment to ensuring justice for the victims.

Empirical Review

In the examination of banditry in Nigeria, Akin (2020) adopts a sociological approach, employing qualitative research methods such as interviews and ethnographic studies to delve into the socio-economic disparities underlying banditry. Akin's theoretical framework draws on social inequality theories, asserting that addressing these disparities through targeted development interventions is crucial for long-term solutions. His findings emphasize the urgent need for comprehensive socio-economic reforms. Abdullahi (2019) takes a security studies perspective, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative

methods to analyze the breakdown of law and order as a fundamental driver of banditry. Employing crime theories and security studies literature, Abdullahi contends that a robust security response is essential for effective counteraction. His findings highlight the imperative of enhancing law enforcement capabilities and addressing the security vacuum. Okon (2021) adopts a political science lens, utilizing qualitative case studies and content analysis to explore governance failures and corruption as contributors to banditry. Grounded in political science theories, Okon's research contends that systemic issues in governance must be confronted to eliminate structural vulnerabilities. The findings underscore the necessity for comprehensive governance reforms and anti-corruption measures.

Zara (2022) employs an interdisciplinary approach, combining elements of sociology and security studies. Her methodology includes qualitative interviews and community engagement strategies to investigate the complexities of banditry. Drawing on community development theories, Zara posits that a multifaceted strategy integrating security measures with community engagement is vital. Her findings emphasize the nature of the issue and advocate for holistic interventions.

While these scholars offer valuable insights into the broader causes and consequences of banditry, there is a noticeable dearth of research specifically addressing the impact of banditry on sexual violence in Niger State. This research seeks to fill this gap by employing a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative interviews, content analysis, and community-based participatory research to comprehensively examine the intersection of banditry and sexual violence in the specific context of Niger State.

Theoretical Framework

Routine Activity Theory, developed by Lawrence E. Cohen and Marcus Felson in 1979, posits that crime occurs when three elements converge: a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of a capable guardian. The theory suggests that changes in routine activities create opportunities for crime commission. Applying this theory to the issue of armed banditry and sexual violence against women in Niger State, Nigeria, helps shed light on the dynamics at play.

Basic Assumptions of Routine Activity Theory:

1. Crimes are opportunistic and depend on the convergence of certain elements.
2. Changes in routine activities and lifestyle contribute to crime patterns.
3. The focus is on the immediate environment and situational factors.

Applying Routine Activity Theory to the issue of armed banditry and sexual violence against women in Niger State reveals a compelling explanation for the dynamics at play. The theory, developed by Cohen and Felson in 1979, posits that crime occurs when motivated offenders encounter suitable targets in the absence of capable guardians. In the context of Niger State, armed banditry disrupts routine activities, creating an environment where motivated offenders—armed bandits—exploit the vulnerabilities of suitable targets, primarily women in displaced communities. The breakdown of security mechanisms and the upheaval caused by armed conflicts contribute to the absence of capable guardians, leaving women without adequate protection.

Research Methodology

The research was carried out in the villages situated within the Lapai local government area of Niger State. The study population comprised displaced women, religious and traditional leaders, security agents, and personnel from the Ministries of Women Affairs and Humanitarian Affairs. Utilizing a qualitative approach for data collection, the study employed in-depth interviews (IDIs) as the primary source of information. The sampling technique employed was purposive, resulting in a sample size of twenty (20) participants selected for the study. Both English and Hausa languages were employed during interactions with the participants, with data collected in Hausa subsequently translated into English for analysis. Thematic transcription of the collected data was performed in alignment with the study's objectives.

Armed Banditry and Sexual Violence in Nigeria State.

Summary of Interview Responses

A Displaced woman.	My family and I have experienced the detrimental impact of armed banditry. As a result, we faced displacement, loss of property, and the tragic loss of my husband, who was the main provider for our family. The bandits targeted women, subjecting them and young girls to sexual violence, leading to a prevalence of rape in our communities. Due to the escalating danger, we had to relocate to Gusau for safety. Unfortunately, prior to our displacement, many victims, including those in captivity, did not receive adequate medical attention. Now, in the state capital, we are struggling to survive without any support, placing us in a dire situation.
A Displaced woman.	Women have been profoundly impacted by armed banditry, facing displacement, hunger, malnutrition, and inadequate shelter with challenging living conditions. The most distressing aspect of this crisis is the prevalent sexual violence against women. During bandit attacks on our communities, they not only loot our food supplies but also subject women to rape before departing. In rural areas of Niger state, women have become targets for the bandits' sexual satisfaction. Many victims, although subjected to such atrocities, are reluctant to share their stories due to the shame associated with the experience. The consequences of armed banditry are overwhelmingly negative, and we continue to suffer from its aftermath.

Security Agent.	<p>Women bear the brunt of armed banditry, particularly as they are often the primary caregivers for children. The impact of armed banditry on women is unparalleled, and my own husband fell victim to a gunshot in 2020 during one of these attacks. The bandits not only target and attack our husbands but also subject women to sexual violence. Many of the women who have endured such assaults now suffer from various diseases, including the risk of contracting STDs and HIV/AIDS, given the uncertainty surrounding the health status of the perpetrators. Shockingly, even pregnant women in our community have become victims of bandit-inflicted sexual violence. The bandits show no discrimination, assaulting married women, teenage girls, pregnant women, and the elderly alike. As a result, numerous women have been compelled to leave their communities, becoming displaced due to the pervasive threat of sexual violence by the bandits.</p>
A displaced woman, Age, 33	<p>Women bear the severe brunt of armed banditry, consistently finding themselves in vulnerable positions. Many lose their husbands, leaving them with the responsibility of caring for their children. The bandits' attacks on communities pose a constant threat to the lives of women, who are often defenseless in the face of such aggression. Security agents are the sole source of support available to these women during bandit attacks. The atrocities committed by armed bandits against women are numerous and devastating—they face the grim reality of being killed, raped, molested, and losing their breadwinners. In response to the escalating danger, many women from the affected communities have sought refuge in Minna, the state capital, hoping for rescue and safety. Sexual violence against women has become alarmingly prevalent, with bandits indiscriminately raping anyone they encounter. Victims of rape come from various backgrounds, encompassing different statuses and age groups within the affected communities. Tragically, some women have even been held in captivity, enduring further sexual violence at the hands of the bandits.</p>

Security Agent	<p>The bandits employ terrorist tactics, including shooting, ambushes, and the use of poisonous weapons, specifically targeting the civilian population, with a focus on women. These armed groups have not only violated human rights but also committed egregious crimes within the affected communities. Their actions involve heinous acts such as rape and murder, impacting women, children, and displacing larger segments of the population. Typically, these bandits orchestrate mass attacks on villages, where they engage in brutal acts, including the humiliation of men in front of their families. The perpetrators go to extreme lengths, burning houses and shops, and subjecting girls and women to sexual violence. Additionally, they loot and carry away food supplies. The prevalence of rape in these attacks has escalated to a grave level, signifying the severity and urgency of the situation.</p>
Religious Leader,	<p>Numerous women find themselves in the harrowing situation of losing their husbands, thereby becoming widows, and their children left as orphans. This dire circumstance has compelled some of them to resort to street begging, while others are driven towards adultery and other societal vices that are traditionally condemned. The women who have relocated from their villages to Gusau due to the impact of armed banditry are now grappling with a profound sense of helplessness. Before their displacement, these women endured various atrocities at the hands of the bandits, with rape being one of the most severe crimes committed. In many affected communities, women were subjected to sexual violence, marking a disturbing trend. Despite the longstanding respect for women in armed conflicts within various religious groups, the bandits demonstrate a blatant disregard for such norms. They engage in indiscriminate acts of sexual violence against both women and teenage girls, resulting in numerous victims facing unintended pregnancies as a consequence of these heinous acts.</p>

Religious Leader	<p>Women suffer most with the act of armed bandits in Niger State. They are molested, harassed, and raped in their communities. Banditry has affected the lives of everyone, especially women. Many of the women lost their breadwinners, subjecting them to hardship; they have no food, shelter, or means to sustain their lives. The atrocities committed by the bandits against women are disheartening and pathetic. Listening to their narrations, one must cry and sympathize with them. Many of the women now become breadwinners because they lost their husbands. Rape and other sexual violence become serious in the affected villages. Most of the time, when bandits attack, they go with the intention of committing rape against women.</p>
Traditional Leader.	<p>Women, often accompanied by their little children, are observed in dire and distressing conditions, pleading for assistance to feed their families. A significant number of them have tragically lost their husbands and breadwinners to armed banditry. Witnessing their plight elicits deep sympathy, as many find themselves in a state of helplessness. The aftermath of armed banditry has plunged these women into a disastrous situation.</p> <p>Venturing through the streets, it becomes apparent that a substantial portion of those resorting to begging are women who were displaced from their villages and sought refuge in Gusau after being targeted by bandits. Prior to their displacement, these women suffered various crimes at the hands of the bandits, with rape emerging as a particularly grave and pervasive issue in communities attacked by these criminals. The gravity of the situation is exacerbated by the fact that many of the women who experienced sexual violence did not receive the necessary medical attention. This neglect poses a potential threat to their future health. Moreover, those grappling with psychological trauma resulting from the sexual violence have been overlooked and neglected in the communities where they now find themselves. The cumulative impact of these distressing experiences underscores the urgent need for comprehensive support and intervention for these vulnerable women.</p>

<p>Director, Women Affairs Ministry.</p>	<p>In Niger State, the detrimental impact of armed banditry on women is pronounced, with the prevailing insecurity significantly heightening their vulnerabilities. It is widely acknowledged that women bear the brunt of this phenomenon more than any other demographic. The escalation of sexual violence persists both in times of peace and during armed conflicts, as armed bandits exploit the prevailing insecurity to commit egregious crimes against women and teenage girls in affected villages. Recognizing the gravity of the situation, the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs in Niger State has been actively addressing cases of sexual violence against women. The ministry is acutely aware of the challenges faced by women in the state and is deeply concerned about their well-being. Collaboratively, the Ministries of Women Affairs and Humanitarian Affairs are diligently working to meet the needs of displaced women, striving to alleviate the hardships inflicted upon them by the current state of insecurity.</p>
<p>Director, Ministry of Humanitarian and Disaster Management</p>	<p>In any conflict, it is often women and children who bear the brunt of the consequences, given their inherent vulnerability to various forms of ill-treatment. The scourge of armed banditry has inflicted severe repercussions on numerous individuals in our state, particularly impacting women and children. Disturbing reports have been received, detailing incidents of displacement, killings, rape, and harassment against women. Many of the women and teenage girls who have been forcibly displaced have endured the traumatic experience of rape, abandonment, and being treated as mere objects of sexual satisfaction by the armed bandits. The brutality and threats faced by women and girls at the hands of these bandits within their villages are distressingly common. The deliberate use of sexual violence against women in the affected communities by armed bandits constitutes a clear violation of both International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Laws applicable to armed conflicts. The aftermath of such sexual violence leaves lasting psychological and physical consequences on the victims. The ministry is deeply concerned about this distressing situation, and the state government is actively providing assistance to the victims in their efforts to cope and recover.</p>

Health Care Professional	As a healthcare professional working in Niger State, I have witnessed the profound impact of armed banditry on women, specifically in relation to sexual violence. In the course of my work, I have encountered numerous cases where women, after being displaced by armed banditry, have experienced severe physical and psychological trauma due to sexual violence. For instance, a 28-year-old woman presented with symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and gynecological complications after being raped during an armed bandit attack on her village. Her struggle to access immediate medical care and counseling highlighted the urgent need for comprehensive support systems for victims of sexual violence in conflict-affected areas.
Health Care Professional	In my role as a healthcare professional in Niger State, I've observed the distressing aftermath of armed banditry on women, particularly concerning sexual violence. One notable case involved a 17-year-old girl who was subjected to sexual violence during a bandit attack on her community. She faced not only immediate physical injuries but also the risk of long-term health consequences, including sexually transmitted infections. The challenges in providing her with timely medical attention and the necessary psychosocial support highlighted the gaps in the existing healthcare infrastructure in conflict zones. Addressing these issues requires a collaborative effort to enhance medical services and mental health support for women affected by armed banditry in Niger State.

Source: Field Work

From the responses above, it is clear that armed banditry in Niger State has caused profound and devastating consequences, particularly for women who have become primary targets of sexual violence. Through in-depth interviews with displaced individuals, security agents, religious and traditional leaders, as well as government officials, a distressing narrative emerges. Families have experienced displacement, property loss, and the tragic death of main providers due to bandit attacks. Women and young girls are specifically targeted, resulting in a prevalence of rape in affected communities. Displaced women, often lacking support, struggle to survive in the state capital, underscoring the disastrous conditions created by armed banditry. The impact on women extends to hunger, malnutrition, and poor living conditions. Bandits not only loot food supplies but subject women to sexual violence during attacks, making them symbols of satisfaction for the assailants. The psychological trauma inflicted by these crimes is evident, as many victims, shamed by their experiences, remain silent. In addition to displacing families, armed banditry leads to the loss of breadwinners, leaving women and children vulnerable. The assailants show no discrimination, assaulting women of all ages and statuses, including pregnant women. Security agents become the sole support for women during attacks, but the atrocities committed by armed bandits are

numerous and devastating. Women are killed, raped, molested, and lose their breadwinners. Many seek refuge in the state capital, facing prevalent sexual violence, including rape and captivity, with perpetrators showing no restraint. The tactics employed by armed bandits, such as shooting, ambushes, and the use of poisonous weapons, specifically target civilians, exacerbating the severity of their crimes. Women, especially those who lose their husbands, become widows and face increased vulnerability, leading some to resort to street begging or undesirable societal vices. Even health care professionals in Niger State highlight the dire consequences of armed banditry. They recount cases of women facing severe physical and psychological trauma due to sexual violence. Limited access to immediate medical care, counseling, and psychosocial support underscores the urgent need for comprehensive systems to assist victims in conflict-affected areas. With these responses, it is evident that armed banditry in Niger State disproportionately affects women through sexual violence. This paints a stark picture of the multifaceted challenges faced by women, emphasizing the urgent need for intervention, support systems, and improved infrastructure to address the aftermath of armed banditry in the region.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, this study has delved into the complex and distressing nexus between armed banditry and sexual violence against women in Niger State, Nigeria. The pervasive armed banditry in the region has disrupted routine activities, leaving women vulnerable to sexual violence. Routine Activity Theory, as proposed by Cohen and Felson (1979), serves as a relevant framework to understand how the breakdown of security and the upheaval caused by armed conflicts create an environment conducive to sexual violence. The impact is profound, encompassing physical, psychological, and socio-economic consequences for the victims. Importantly, the existing scholarly discourse on banditry in Nigeria has provided valuable insights into its root causes and general consequences. However, a critical gap exists, as there has been insufficient attention to the specific implications for women in the context of Niger State. This study fills that gap, shedding light on the often-overlooked dimensions of armed banditry, particularly its impact on sexual violence against women in Niger State. It found out that just like other states where banditry is rife, women in Niger state are victims of sexual violence perpetrated by these armed bandits and urgent steps need to be taken to curb banditry and also provide medical and psychological support for women who have been victims of these crimes to enable them proceed with their lives.

Recommendations:

Based on the insights derived from this research, several recommendations are proposed to address the pressing issue of armed banditry and sexual violence in Niger State:

1. **Strengthen Security Measures:** Efforts should be intensified to enhance security measures, ensuring that affected areas receive adequate protection to mitigate the occurrence of armed banditry and sexual violence.
2. **Community Engagement:** A multifaceted approach is crucial, combining security measures with community engagement. Empowering local communities and fostering collaboration between residents and law enforcement can contribute to a more comprehensive strategy.
3. **Socio-economic Interventions:** While acknowledging the socio-economic underpinnings of

banditry, targeted interventions to address economic disparities and development issues should be implemented. This may involve job creation, skill development programs, and initiatives to alleviate poverty.

4. **Gender-Sensitive Policies:** Policies and programs should be specifically designed to address the unique vulnerabilities of women in conflict zones, providing support, protection, and rehabilitation for survivors of sexual violence.
5. **Research and Data Collection:** Continued research efforts should be directed towards understanding the evolving dynamics of armed banditry and sexual violence, with a focus on the experiences of women in different conflict settings.
6. **International Collaboration:** Collaboration with international organizations and neighboring countries should be pursued to address cross-border banditry and strengthen regional efforts to combat the scourge. More international organizations supporting women who are victims of violence are needed to scale up interventionist programs in Niger state.

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