

KIDNAPPING AND ABDUCTION

Minimizing the Threat and Lessons in Survival



Brian John Heard



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1

Introduction

ABDUCTION OR KIDNAPPING, THE LEGAL DEFINITION

Originally, *kidnapping* was defined as the illegal capturing of a person with the intention of transporting him or her for slavery, and there was little differentiation between abduction and kidnapping. In the nineteenth century, the requirement for intercountry transport was eliminated.

Nowadays, *abduction* is legally defined as the process of capturing someone by force or fraud. Kidnapping also involves illegally detaining another person, but it does not have to involve fraud.

Kidnapping usually involves detaining another person with the intent to illegally detain him or her for ransom. Using the individual as a hostage for financial or some other reason is typically also involved. There are, however, several different characteristics separating abduction and kidnapping.

INTENT

Intent is not usually revealed in the case of abduction. For example, a sexual predator taking a child from school to molest him or her would be classified not as an abduction but rather as a kidnapping. However, the taking of a child for no reason is considered to be abduction. Abduction can be differentiated from kidnapping in that the public is made aware of the kidnapper's intentions, whereas those of the abductor are not certain. A kidnapper will always state the reason for the capture, whether it be for

ransom or some other reason. An abductor will often not state his^{*} reason until after the victim has been found, regardless of whether the victim is dead or alive.

THE MONEY FACTOR

The abductor usually keeps the location and reason for the capture secret and typically will not involve the media. The kidnapper, on the other hand, will seek the media's influence to assist in obtaining his demands.

The abductor is generally seeking some gratification, whether this be through torture, murder, or something purely sexual, deviant, or otherwise, and is generally not seeking monetary or other rewards. The kidnapper, however, is interested only in some system of reward, whether this be monetary, the release of prisoners, or simply the dissemination of his or her political aims, and will, generally, keep the victim captive until the demands have been met.

Conversely, the abductor's reward is the act itself, and he will have no interest in anything other than that. Once the act of self-gratification has been satisfied, whatever that may be, the abduction is at an end.

VARYING LAWS

In some countries, legislation regarding abduction and kidnapping makes a distinction between the two. Kidnapping is, however, generally considered to involve the taking of a minor or adult by force, whereas abduction is viewed as being independent of age. In some countries, the legislation requires an element of deception to be involved before the crime can be classified as abduction.¹

When considering kidnapping, most people initially think of those cases that have attracted considerable media coverage. Two such cases are the Lindbergh baby and the Patty Hearst kidnapping. It is also considered that kidnapping happens only to those with a high profile or who are very wealthy.

The majority of kidnappings go unreported, and as a result many consider kidnappings to be of minor importance. It is, however, far more

^{*} For the sake of brevity and reader comprehension the masculine pronoun will be used when referring to the abductor/kidnapper.

prevalent than most suspect, with between 20,000 and 30,000 reported kidnappings each year.² Having said that, estimates are that up to 80 per cent of such crimes go unreported, and the actual number of cases is certainly very much higher.

Kidnapping poses a serious risk for multinational companies, non-governmental organizations, and the news media. Recognizing this risk, many large international corporations have developed strategies and policies to cover the security and safety of their staff and independent contractors. The recent availability of kidnap insurance, albeit at high cost, can cover the costs involved in kidnappings, as well as the employment of security consultants to respond to a kidnap situation. These insurance policies can also be structured to cover the costs involved in paying a ransom to have their staff released unharmed.

Kidnapping remains a relatively rare crime, but kidnappers are always evolving their strategies. This results in an ever-expanding requirement for multinationals to constantly review their knowledge and plans to thwart kidnappers.

At present there are six main types of kidnap cases, any of which can overlap:³

1. Express kidnapping
2. Tiger kidnapping
3. Political kidnapping
4. Kidnapping for ransom
5. Virtual kidnapping
6. Bride kidnapping

In *express kidnapping*, the victim is usually seized for not more than a couple of hours. This gives the kidnapper sufficient time to take the victim to an ATM (see Figure 1.1). The victim will then be forced to withdraw cash until the card's limit is reached. As this type of crime eliminates the necessity for prolonged surveillance, it is of lower risk to the kidnapper. It also tends to be more spontaneous, involving less planning and preparation than other types of kidnapping. Although this type of kidnapping can occur anywhere, it is most commonly encountered in Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, and Brazil. It was also very common in Argentina following the political and economic crisis of 2001, but as of late it has become less so.

In some parts of South America, express kidnappings are also known as the *millionaire tour* or *millionaire walk*. In these cases, a taxi driver temporarily kidnaps an innocent passenger. The taxi then makes an unscheduled



Figure 1.1 In express kidnapping, the victim will be taken to an ATM and forced to withdraw cash.

stop to pick up an armed criminal who then forces the passenger to a variety of ATMs, withdrawing cash as before. The victim can then be further humiliated by being taken to his or her own house for the purposes of being further deprived of any items of value. Eventually, he or she will be drugged, often with scopolamine or ketamine, and abandoned in some remote location.

The second type of kidnapping is generally called *tiger kidnapping*. It is a type of kidnapping that was very commonly used by the Irish Republican Army and other terrorist organizations during the troubles in Northern Ireland. This type of kidnapping first involves the abduction of a close relation of the targeted individual. The targeted individual is then forced to carry out some illegal act in order to secure the release of his or her relation, who is usually a spouse, parent, or child. Normally, the illegal act would involve planting a bomb, undermining security barriers, opening a bank vault, or committing some other type of crime.

Tiger kidnappings are, since the cessation of the troubles in Northern Ireland, rare and tend to be carried out by someone remote from the criminal or terrorist organization. The predatory stalking that is required for this type of kidnapping gives the name of tiger kidnapping to this type of crime.

While the term *tiger kidnapping* was not in general use until the 1980s, the first recorded crime that can be described as such occurred in 1972.

After the 1980s, the crime became more widespread, and it became accepted as a type of kidnapping. The actual number of tiger kidnappings is very difficult to ascertain, as technically two crimes are committed, each of which can be used to generate a crime statistic. An added difficulty in compiling statistics for this type of kidnapping is that few are reported to police.⁴ Tiger kidnappings are still quite widespread, but they are encountered more frequently in the United Kingdom, Ireland, and Belgium.

The third type of kidnapping is called *political kidnapping*. Political kidnapping does not usually involve holding the hostage for ransom but rather is utilized in an attempt to force a specific government to carry out the kidnappers' demands. These demands could include the release of prisoners, the withdrawal of troops, or even a change in governmental policy. Generally the kidnappers do not expect their demands to be met but rather envisage the garnering of press coverage for their cause and the release of political statements. The Taliban, Al-Qaeda, and other radical terrorist and jihadist groups use political kidnapping as a way of furthering their cause through the media (see Figure 1.2). Once media interest in the kidnapping has been fully exploited or the ransom has been paid, the victim is invariably executed. To extract the last iota of media interest from the kidnapping, the terrorist and jihadist groups involved generally video their victim's execution for release to Al Jazeera or via some other Internet-based forum.



Figure 1.2 Hostage taking is an all too common terrorist tactic. (Photograph from Malcolm Nance, *Terrorist Recognition Handbook*, 3rd ed., CRC Press, 2014.)

Kidnapping for ransom is the fourth and most well-known type of kidnapping. This is a simple kidnapping scenario where the victim is abducted and a monetary demand is made for his or her release. Among crime statistics in general, it is not a common crime, but there are parts of the world where it is a real and constant threat. Although it is a simple exchange of victim for money crime, it does require considerably more planning and input of manpower than other types of kidnapping. There is also considerably more risk for the kidnapper, from being identified by the victim to the large number of opportunities for things to go wrong at all stages of the operation.

Virtual kidnapping is the fifth type of kidnapping, and it is more of a scam than that which is normally considered to be a kidnapping.⁵ This type of kidnapping requires some research by the kidnappers, but only in respect of determining when the victim will be unreachable, for example, in a mobile phone dead area. The kidnappers will then contact the victim's family, demanding a small, but instant, ransom for his or her release. The victim is, of course, unaware that anything has happened and eventually returns home to discover that the family has paid a ransom for his or her "release." As the victim will probably be out of communication for only a short time, there is a need for speed, and as a result the ransoms demanded are nearly always very small.

A variation on this theme involves a call to the victim under the pretense that his or her mobile phone provider has a technical problem that requires the mobile phone to be turned off for a couple of hours. This achieves the same aim as waiting for the victim's phone to be out of signal coverage but is slightly easier to engineer.

As with express kidnappings, virtual kidnappings are most commonly encountered in Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, and Brazil, although they can occur virtually anywhere.

Bride kidnapping, the last type of discernable kidnapping, does not really come within the purview of this book but is included for the sake of completion. Bride kidnapping is also known as *marriage by abduction* or *marriage by capture*. In this type of kidnapping, the victim is abducted, often by force, by a man who wishes to marry her.⁶ Bride kidnapping is mainly restricted to the Caucasus region, Central Asia, the Romani in Europe, and certain areas of Africa. It is also prevalent among the Hmong tribes in China, Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand and the Tzeltal in Mexico.

Although some consider the practice to be a valid method of obtaining a bride, in most countries it is considered to be a sex crime. In Pakistan and India where arranged marriages are considered to be acceptable,

there is a fine dividing line between bride kidnapping and a sex crime. Depending on the exact circumstances of the kidnapping, it may also be seen as falling somewhere between forced marriage and arranged marriage as practiced in India and Pakistan. Even in those countries where bride kidnapping is considered to be a crime, judicial enforcement often remains lax. Particularly noticeable in this respect are countries such as Turkey, Bulgaria, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, and Chechnya.

While these examples give clear-cut examples of each type of kidnapping, there are those that cross over from one type to another. Terrorist and jihadist groups, for example, often conduct kidnappings for ransom to raise funds to further their political and religious aims. The revenue so obtained can be utilized to purchase weapons and generally fund their terrorist operations. The Taliban, for example, has done this quite extensively to easily raise large sums of money by ransoming victims.

Although kidnapping occurs throughout the world, the type and frequency of its incidence vary not only from country to country but also within certain countries. Afghanistan, Mexico, Brazil, Venezuela, Nigeria, Somalia, Chechnya, Iraq, Sudan, and Pakistan suffer to a great extent, as do many countries considered to be far more stable. For example, the United Kingdom, the United States, Hong Kong, Russia, and China, which one would not expect to have problems as far as this type of crime is concerned, do have their own kidnapping problems.

ENDNOTES

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6. Frederic P. Miller, Agnes F. Vandome, and John McBrewster, *Bride Kidnapping* (Alphascript Publishing, 2010).

