

2019 CYBER TRENDS • FEMINISM VS ISLAM IN THE WEST • FBI'S NEW PISTOL

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# The Counter Terrorist

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KIDNAPPING DEFINED



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A photograph of a narrow, cobblestone street at night. The street is illuminated by streetlights, creating a high-contrast scene with deep shadows and bright highlights. On the left, there are old buildings with visible windows and doors. On the right, several cars are parked along the curb. In the distance, a person is walking away from the camera. The overall atmosphere is mysterious and somber.

by **Orlando Wilson**

# KIDNAPPING DEFINED





There are five primary reasons for kidnapping, and the mindsets of criminals vary greatly from area to area and culture to culture. As a result, there is no single profile that fits all kidnapers and all kidnapping situations tend to be unique.

**T**he major kidnapping threat to most people in developed countries is being caught up in a small-scale crime that's gone wrong (or a fight that's gone bad), like a bank robbery that turns into a hostage situation or a workplace hostage situation caused by the actions of a disgruntled or mentally ill employee. In emerging markets, targeted and express kidnappings for financial gain or favors are a main threat. The mindsets of criminals

vary greatly from area to area and culture to culture. As a result, there is no single profile that fits all kidnapers and all kidnapping situations tend to be unique. I tell my clients that their primary concern if they are kidnapped or held hostage is staying alive in order to be released or to escape.

#### KIDNAPPING FOR FINANCIAL GAIN

These days, you do not need to be a high roller to be kidnapped or involved

in a hostage situation—it can happen to anyone. If you are an international traveler, you need to be especially aware of the threat of kidnapping, even if you're not going to one of the world's kidnapping hotspots, like Haiti, Mexico, Venezuela, Afghanistan, Somalia, Iraq, Nigeria, Colombia, or the Philippines. The fact that you are a foreigner can make you a target, especially in poor countries where your watch, your jewelry, and the contents of your luggage will match or far exceed the average monthly earnings of most citizens.

It is very difficult to get accurate figures about kidnapping rates because a lot of incidents are not reported to the authorities or media; also, governments that are keen to attract tourists and investors try to keep official crime rates favorable. You should research and do a threat assessment for all locations that you will be visiting in order to identify the main threat. If you identify a kidnapping threat, look for patterns in the way the kidnappers operate and work out procedures that will help you avoid the threat.

When we talk about kidnapping, most people immediately think of kidnapping for ransom, which is a very lucrative business in some countries. If someone is kidnapped for ransom or favors, you need to remember that the person is a valuable commodity to be bargained for and they will be kept alive as long as the kidnappers believe they are of value. The negotiation in this type of kidnapping is a business negotiation; you are buying back an asset.

There are cases in which people are kidnapped for favors rather than money. For example, a son or

daughter of an influential person may be kidnapped and released only after the parent has done the kidnapper a favor. The media has termed this type of incident "Tiger Kidnapping."

In Colombia in 2003, the Marxist terrorist group known as the ELN kidnapped a young lady from the town of Cocorna. The ransom demand was for her father to kill one of the ELN's enemies. He refused, and a few days later the girl's body was found dumped on the side of a road with a gunshot wound to the head. From a negotiation standpoint, situations like this are extremely difficult to deal with because the terms are very rigid.

If the kidnappers are professionals, there is a good chance that a hostage will be released when the ransom demands are met. For the kidnappers, it would be bad business practice not to do this because it would deter families from making payments to secure the release of future hostages. On the other side of the coin, if ransom demands are not met, it is good business practice to execute a hostage as a means of encouraging future payments. The professionalism of kidnappers varies greatly from highly skilled individuals to Neanderthals; all kidnappers, however, are capable of extreme violence. There is never a guarantee that a victim will be released when a ransom is paid.

Express kidnapping is a crime that has boomed over the past decade, with incidents taking place globally from Caracas to Vladivostok. Express kidnapping can be classified as a more comprehensive version of mugging or street robbery. There have been cases in London where victims have

been snatched from the street and held captive for several days until their bank accounts were emptied via ATMs, online money transfers, checks, or other financial instruments.

A classic example of express kidnapping involved a businessman visiting a Central American country. When he arrived at the airport, he went to the taxi rank and got a taxi to take him to his hotel. About 10 minutes into the trip, the taxi pulled over and in jumped two men with guns. The victim was handcuffed, threatened, and robbed. He was then driven to numerous ATMs and forced to withdraw money until he reached the withdrawal limits on his bank cards. As he was being driven around, one of the kidnappers was making phone calls to try to sell him to other groups; luckily for the businessman, no one wanted to buy him. The criminals had his passport and took his picture with a cell phone. They told him that if he reported anything to the police, they would find out because they worked with the police—and then they would come to kill him. The man went to his embassy, where they told him that he was lucky because everything he lost could be replaced. They also told him not to report the incident to the police.

Chances are that the fact this man was a foreigner saved him from being sold into a ransom situation. The kidnappers in this case were not sophisticated criminals and did not have the skills and resources to handle a high-profile kidnapping. Criminals don't want attention, and kidnapping foreigners usually brings attention from the international media and the embassy of the victim's home country; this means embarrassment for the

government and pressure on local law enforcement to do something.

Express kidnappings are safer and more convenient for criminals, and the criminals do not need to be highly skilled and well connected to pull them off. In a typical kidnapping, the criminals usually go to a wealthy area and look for a suitable target—someone who looks like they have some money—and then snatch them. Once the kidnappers have a victim, that person is robbed, taken to ATMs, sexually assaulted, and otherwise victimized. If the victim has a cell phone, the criminals may use it to contact the victim's family for a ransom. The amounts requested in express kidnappings tend to be low, and this is where locals make better targets than visitors. In Venezuela, for example, it is easier and quicker for a resident businessman in Caracas to get and deliver a US\$30,000 ransom to kidnappers than it is for the family of a kidnapped student who lives in Helsinki.

The main problem with express kidnappings is that the kidnappers are generally not high-end criminals. This means they tend to be more violent and more unpredictable than groups that target high profile victims for large ransoms. As with any kidnapping, paying the ransom in an express kidnapping is no guarantee that the victim will be released, especially if the victim can identify the criminals or has been sexually assaulted. Sexual assaults in these situations are not just targeted at females; I recently heard of a home invasion of a middle-class home in Haiti in which the criminals raped the wife in front of the husband and

then raped the husband in front of the wife.

I have seen courses offered in which people are put through a fake kidnapping and interrogation, and in which no one gets a real kick or a slap. This does not come close to military training, let alone a real kidnapping. I think the only people who would want to go through a realistic kidnapping experience or be interrogated are people who enjoy BDSM (bondage, dominance, sadism, and masochism) sexual practices, and I am always very wary if someone asks

"Chances are that the fact this man was a foreigner saved him from being sold into a ransom situation."



*Photo by: Pixabay*



to be interrogated.

So, kidnapping for financial gain is a very complicated issue. The golden rule is this: Don't get kidnapped!! Plan, prepare, avoid, avoid, and avoid . . . and don't get kidnapped!!

## VIRTUAL KIDNAPPING

Virtual kidnapping is a tactic that criminals are using throughout South

America. It involves contacting the families of people whose cell phones they have just stolen or people who they know are in places where cell phones are usually turned off, like cinemas. The criminals claim to have kidnapped the owner of the cell phone or the person in the cinema. They demand a ransom of a few thousand dollars, which the family must pay within a couple of hours.

Consider how you would react if you received a phone call from someone claiming to have kidnapped a close family member and telling you to drop off two thousand dollars at a certain location in two hours or your loved one will be killed. You want to contact your family member, but they don't have or are not answering their cell phone. What would you do?

In the U.S. or Western Europe, you



might call the police, but you might not want to call the police in a third world country. Besides that, what are the police going to do in two hours? So, you have to decide—are you going to pay two thousand dollars or are you going to allow a family member to be killed?

Another take on this tactic is being used by criminals in Latin American prisons. They make cold calls on cell

phones to people, and they claim to have kidnapped their wife, daughter, son, or other family member. The criminals request that the ransom be paid within an hour in the form of cell phone credits, which can be done over the phone or online with bank cards. Again, think about what you would do if you could not confirm whether your relative had been kidnapped. A lot of these criminals are in prison; they have nothing better to do than make calls. If they can get one or two people to pay each week, they are making a good living.

I understand that some insurance companies are now offering policies for virtual kidnapping, which sounds suspicious to me. Virtual kidnappings are scams, no different from telemarketers. If people are educated about the problem, they won't fall for the scam. But, if people are educated about the scam, they won't need insurance policies either. If a real kidnapping is suspected, it needs to be confirmed before any action is taken; we will discuss this later.

## KIDNAPPING FOR PUBLICITY


The groups or individuals who kidnap for publicity can be anything from animal rights or environmental protesters to hard-core terrorists. As you would expect, there is a big difference between dealing with Greenpeace and Al-Qaeda. If you are involved in a situation in which an environmental group protesting oil drilling in the Gulf of Mexico has taken over a local government building, there is a very good chance you will be released within a few

hours—once the media has turned up, the police have arrested the protestors, and their cause has been satisfactorily publicized. Violence is generally not the nature of their cause, and it would not do them any good; however, always remember that they are still very capable of it. On the other hand, if you're a westerner taken hostage by Islamic extremists, you'd better hope that security forces get to you quickly.

There are many examples of westerners being kidnapped and publicly executed, and you can count on these kidnappers being professional, focused, and prepared to kill and die for their cause. For example, consider the case of the Nord-Ost theater siege in Moscow, October 2002. All forty Chechen terrorists involved in the siege expected to die for their cause. The leaders of the group were all experienced combat veterans, and they were well prepared and well armed for the task. If you are caught up in this type of incident, you have big problems and you should constantly be looking for an opportunity to escape.

## CRIMES GONE WRONG

One of the most common causes of hostage situations in developed countries is crimes that have gone wrong and have turned into hostage situations. For example, this occurs when the police respond to a bank robbery in progress and get to the bank before the robbers escape. The robbers then hole up in the bank and try to negotiate for a car or other means of



*Photo by: Pixabay*





transportation so they can escape. They may also negotiate with the police for favorable terms of surrender.

It is unlikely in this type of situation that the hostage takers are trained professionals, but this does not make them any less dangerous. In fact, they may be more dangerous due to panic, lack of discipline, and the influence of any drugs they may have taken. These days you can expect criminals to be well armed and—if they are looking at lengthy prison sentences—be prepared to resort to extreme violence. In these situations, you must rely on the police to negotiate with the criminals but, as always, you should look for ways to safely escape when possible.

## MENTAL ILLNESS & DOMESTIC DISPUTES

People suffering from mental illnesses or who are involved in domestic disputes account for most hostage situations, especially in the U.S and western Europe. With mental illness, the most common situation tends to be that of a disgruntled or terminated employee returning to a business to confront a former boss and escalating the situation into a standoff with police. If a corporation suspects that a former employee is mentally unstable, it has a responsibility to take the necessary precautions to protect its staff members.

The causes of domestic disputes and crimes of passion are endless, and these situations can also develop into hostage situations. For example, an employee's ex-boyfriend may turn up at your office and threaten to shoot himself while everyone watches. If

*Photo by: Pixabay*



## KIDNAPPING FOR SEX TRAFFICKING

Incidents of female tourists being kidnapped, raped, and killed do happen, but those crimes are about sex and control; sex trafficking is about business.

them to illegal brothels, where the girls are usually drugged and forced to work as prostitutes.

If the families of these girls report them missing to their countries' law enforcement agencies, there is not much that can be done. The girls left home of their own freewill, they are young and may not want to call their families, and there is no evidence to launch an investigation. This scenario is much different from a tourist being snatched off the street to be used in the sex trade. Professional criminals are not stupid, and they do not want unnecessary attention from law enforcement—it's bad for business.

So, why take the risk to kidnap a tourist when you can promise a girl a job and she will turn up at your door? •

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