Children as the 'New' African Witches

Abused by their Mothers and Female Guardians

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to all the child victims of abuse connected to the child witch phenomenon around the world.

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Glossary of Abbreviations

AFRUCA	Africans Unite Against Child Abuse
ASH	Association for Secular Humanism
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BPS	British Psychological Society
CAR	Central African Republic
CCRM	Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement
CF	Case file
CNN	Cable News Network
CRARN	Child's Rights and Rehabilitation Network
CRIN	Child Rights International Network
CSEW	Crime Survey for England and Wales
CYPA	Children and Young Persons Act
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EFAC	Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion
LFGM	Liberty Foundation Gospel Ministries
NAPAC	National Association for People Abused in Childhood
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
ONS	Office for National Statistics
PIS	Participation Information Sheet
PTA	Parents-Teachers Association
SID	Sudden infant death
SIS	Sudden infant syndrome
UK	United Kingdom
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
US	United States
USA	United States of America
WHO	World Health Organisation
WHRIN	Witchcraft & Human Rights Information Network

Abstract

The thesis explored the phenomenon of the 'child witch', that is, children who are labelled as witches, abused and killed in contemporary Africa. The focus was on female carers as perpetrators. The study adopted the qualitative research paradigm. The aim was to gain insights into why the women believed that children under their care were witches, the factors contributing to the belief and why the women chose to abuse the children as the solution to the witchcraft problems. Primary and secondary data were adopted. Primary data were gathered via semi-structured interviews while secondary data were collected via reports by the media and relevant non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The interviews were conducted on eleven staff members of the Child Rights and Rehabilitation Network (CRARN) in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. Reports by two NGOs and eight media organisations on the contemporary African child witches were analysed. These secondary reports were drawn on to gain insights into the patterns of the abuses by women in other parts of Africa since the interviews were conducted in Nigeria only. These reports concur with the claims by the interviewees.

The data were analysed by means of thematic analysis. This study found that a number of factors were responsible for the belief in child witches held by the women and the abuses committed by the women. These factors were presented and discussed under five principal themes, which are, movies, religion, ignorance, adversity and inconvenience. The theme 'movies' explored how home movies depicting children as witches were produced and used as a powerful evangelical tool by the leaders of the African revivalist neo-Pentecostal churches to convince parents that children are witches and wreak havoc in families and communities. The theme 'religion' explored how commercialisation and proliferation of religious houses in the continent of Africa promote child witch hunt due to an over-emphasis on witches as the root cause of misfortunes in families by the leaders of the revivalist neo-Pentecostal and syncretic churches, including African traditional priests. The theme 'ignorance' explored how poor knowledge of medical and psychological conditions as well as aberrant behaviours and giftedness in children pave way for the labelling and abuse. The theme 'adversity' discussed how misfortunes in the family, such as serious illnesses and deaths are attributed to children as witches, who are consequently abused. The theme 'inconvenience' explored how women who consider children as sources of inconvenience or discomfort exploited this new belief to abuse the unwanted children. Recommendations were made for further studies considering the limitations of this current study as well as how to effectively address this social problem.

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1. Witchcraft in contemporary Africa

The term 'witchcraft' though universal, may be understood differently across different histories and cultures. The notion of witchcraft in contemporary Africa has gone beyond the African tradition to incorporate a 'reinvented tradition' (Cimpric, 2010, p.1). The beliefs, rumours and practices related to witchcraft and occult as well as the dynamism of the notions and images associated with them in modern Africa are subject to 'reformulations and re-creations' (Geschiere, 1997, p.3). A good example of this can be drawn from Pype's (2017) observation that the Kinois (residents of Kinshasa) conceives witchcraft known as *kindoki* in the local dialect in different ways. They distinguish between the Western *kindoki* (e.g., airplanes and computers) and the native *kindoki* (induced by traditional votaries or witchdoctors). This notion of Western witchcraft can be argued to be non-existent among the natives who did not witness airplanes and computers.

Rio et al. (2017, p.5) define witchcraft as 'unconscious cannibalistic acts wherein a creature takes hold of a person and dictates that they should prey on and steal other people's vital substances'. There are two problems with this definition. Firstly, it presents witchcraft as an 'unconscious' act. Secondly, it views the act from the negative sense ('cannibalistic') only. The idea of good and bad witches was common in early modern Europe (Buckland, 2002; Goodare, 2016; Macfarlene, 1999; Rosen, 1991; Winsham, 2016). The good witches not only were spared but were also respected and valued for their blessing tongues (Rosen, 1991), finding lost items (Winsham, 2016), providing folk healings, fortune tales and appropriate advice when one felt bewitched (Macfarlene, 1999). This is also the case in contemporary Africa (e.g., Adinkrah, 2017; Diwan, 2004; Roxburgh, 2016) where good witches are believed to make their loved ones exceptionally intelligent and even helping them to secure visas for foreign trips (Adinkrah, 2017). It is not thought that these 'acts of kindness' would be possible if witchcraft is an 'unconscious' act as claimed by Rio et al. (2017).

Belief in witchcraft is endemic in contemporary African societies and among Africans from the poor and uneducated to the rich and well-educated (Adinkrah, 2017; Agazue, 2015; Fisiy and Geschiere 1990; Kiye, 2018). Often, it is difficult to distinguish between say an 'unlettered farmer and a medical physician' with respect to the belief in witchcraft and how powerful

witches are believed to be (Adinkrah, 2017, p.51). Witchcraft accusations in Africa were mostly suppressed by the colonialists during the colonial era, which means that accusers could not approach the court for justice (Fisiy and Geschiere, 1990; Hund, 2004; Luongo, 2006; Nyika, 2020).

However, since independence, there has been an increasing demand to reverse this trend by the natives of the affected countries (e.g., see Colson, 2000; Fisiy and Geschiere, 1990; Luongo, 2006; Nyika, 2020). Some countries have successfully heeded this request by officially recognising witchcraft in their judicial systems thereby legitimising public accusations (e.g., see Diwan, 2004; Hund, 2004; Kiye, 2018) while others have ignored the citizens' demand for this, contributing to vigilantism in many of such countries (Hund, 2004; Luongo, 2006; Mesaki, 2009; Roxburgh, 2016). These laws will be discussed in Chapter Two.

1.2. The African child witches

Traditionally, children were not usually associated with witchcraft practices in African societies (La Fontaine, 2009). However, this has changed in more recent times. Known cases are at least 100 years old (Covington, 2015). The earliest child witches in the continent were confined to a couple of clans or tribes, such as the Bangwa (Cameroon) in the 1950s (Brain, 1970), the Maka (Cameroon) in the 1960s (Fisiy and Geschiere 1990), the Sudanese Azande (Central African Republic, CAR) in the 1970s (Evans-Pritchard, 1976) and few others. In addition to being confined to specific clans or tribes, the existence of some of them was also short-lived. Then in the 1990s, a 'new' type of child witch emerged in the continent (Save the Children, 2005; Tweneboah, 2020; van der Meer, 2013) who are viewed by people as dangerous as adult witches and capable of causing misfortunes to their families and communities (Agazue, 2015; Agazue and Gavin, 2014; Cimpric, 2010; Cookey, 2019; van der Meer, 2013).

The emergence of the new child witches has led to an increasing hunt of children as witches in different parts of Africa. For example, the social affairs minister, Bernard Ndjunga of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) estimated that while the streets of Kinshasa had up to 50,000 homeless children, more were held as child witches in churches by pastors conducting exorcisms on them (Keeble, 2010). The accused child witches in Malawi are estimated to run into several hundred every year (van der Meer, 2013). In Nigeria, this is also a serious social problem (e.g., Agazue, 2015; 2020; Cookey, 2019; Ekpenyong and Udisi, 2016), particularly in Akwa Ibom and Cross River states where up to 15,000 children were estimated to have been

branded witches in 2008 (BBC News, n.d.). Hundreds of children continue to appear on the streets every year since then to date as abandoned child witches whilst others are murdered. Child witchcraft is equally a serious social problem in Ghana (e.g., Adinkrah, 2011; Quansah, 2012; Tweneboah, 2020) like in other African countries. Agyapong (2020) observed that the Gnani witch camp had 616 children compared to only 105 men and 313 women, which prompted him to conclude that children are more targeted than adults in the current Ghanaian witch hunt. It is important to note that the Gnani witch camp was only one of the six witch camps existent in Ghana as of 2019 (Ibid.). This means there could be more child witches elsewhere. Other countries where this social problem exists include Angola, Burkina Faso, Benin, Chad, Gabon, Tanzania, South Africa, Mali, Uganda and CAR (e.g., see Bussien et al., 2011). It is possible that it might have spread to more countries lately.

Forces of globalisation have meant that the phenomenon of child witch in contemporary Africa and the consequent maltreatment and murder of children are also witnessed outside the African continent, particularly in the UK (e.g., Agazue, 2015; Keeble, 2010; La Fontaine, 2016) where African revivalist Pentecostal and syncretic churches known as a driving factor for this problem (Agyapong, 2020; Agazue and Gavin, 2014; Cimpric, 2010; Geschiere, 2020; Mildnerová, 2016; Nyika, 2020; Quansah, 2012; Priest et al., 2020; van der Meer, 2013) currently proliferate (Agazue, 2015). The leaders of Pentecostal and syncretic churches are among the key players in this act (Adinkrah, 2011; Agazue, 2015; Cimpric, 2010). In reality, the child witch hunt constitutes a serious act of religious fraud committed by some of these religious leaders who capitalise on their adherents' fear of witches to make money (Agazue, 2015).

The child witches are often treated inhumanely. Interviews of 88 adults in Malawi regarding their views on how to treat child witches found that most of the respondents recommended different types of treatments, which included beatings and execution (van der Meer, 2013). Reports from other African countries consistently show that the child witches are normally abandoned, maimed, tortured or killed (Adinkrah, 2011; Agazue, 2015; Agazue and Gavin, 2014; Cimpric, 2010; Cookey, 2019; Ekpenyong and Udisi, 2016). Acid baths, poisoning, slaughtering, drowning, live burial and live burning are commonplace (Ekpenyong and Udisi, 2016).

While many children are murdered following the witchcraft-related accusations, others survive and for those who survive, particularly the abandoned ones, their childhoods are remarkably different from those of their peers. They are very likely to face stigmatisation and

discrimination for life (Cimpric, 2010). Many live on the street as a result (Agazue, 2015; Cookey, 2019; Ekpenyong and Udisi, 2016; van der Meer, 2013). Accusations promote prostitution as stigmatised girls may resort to survival sex (van der Meer, 2013). The accused children are also vulnerable to alcohol and drug abuse, physical and sexual violence, sexual exploitation and sexually-transmitted infections (Cimpric, 2010).

Collectively, these abuses violate the rights of the children in different ways. According to the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in its Declaration of the Rights of the Child in 1959, children have the right to protection, healthcare, education, shelter and good nutrition. These same rights are also emphasised in the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1989. It is to be noted that several African countries have signed/ratified this treaty. Ghana was the first country in the world to ratify it in 1990 (Twum-Danso Imoh, 2013). South Africa ratified it in 1995 as its first international treaty (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, n.d.). Nigeria domesticated the provisions of the CRC by promulgating the Nigerian Child Rights Act 2003 (Aransiola et al., 2009). Despite these developments, the violations of children's rights remain endemic in the African continent.

1.3. Significance of the study

The seriousness of this social problem, the heightened level of suffering it causes to the child victims, including death as well as the psychological and legal consequences on the part of the perpetrators, call for more research to be able to find better solutions to it. While there are laws regulating witchcraft-related issues in some African countries (e.g., Diwan, 2004; Hund, 2004; Kiye, 2018) as detailed in Chapter Two, these laws are already problematic as they seem ill-equipped to solve the witchcraft problems in the continent (Hund, 2004; Luongo, 2006; Mesaki, 2009; Roxburgh, 2016).

Children are minors who are supposed to be protected by their parents or guardians of which women are most often their primary carers (Barone, 2016). Unfortunately, there is almost no hope for the vulnerable children when their supposed protectors have turned their abusers. Existing academic reports on child witches in contemporary Africa (e.g., Adinkrah, 2011; Agazue, 2015; Agazue and Gavin, 2014; Cookey, 2019; Ekpenyong and Udisi, 2016) have also documented women's involvements in the form of homicide and abuses of the child witches. However, none of these reports focus on women, rather they indicate the roles of religious, familial or sociocultural factors contributing to the abuses of which women were a part. This gap in literature poses a problem in finding solutions on how to prevent this problem. This

calls for a study that can explore women as child abusers in relation to the belief in witchcraft, which the current study aims to do.

The current study aims to uncover any factors and psychological processes, which aid workers who have worked with these women consider as contributory to these crimes. Qualitative approaches will be employed to explore this phenomenon. Data will be collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data will provide original insights into the factors and processes around these crimes based on the views of the aid workers while secondary data will serve as a source of triangulation to capture the patterns in other African societies.

By understanding the relevant factors and psychological processes involved in these crimes, an adequate framework can be developed on how to address the problem based on research evidence. This can go a long way to save the children from abuse. It will also save the women from psychological problems and other related problems, including incarceration and its consequences. This research report will serve as an important guide for professionals in this area, such as the police, social workers, clinical psychologists, criminal psychologists and possibly more on how to identify the perpetrators and victims of these crimes as well as how to manage any related cases. As this social problem has gone global, practitioners in other parts of the world, particularly in the UK where some of the aforementioned practitioners already struggle to deal with this problem (e.g., Keeble, 2010), will benefit from the findings.

1.4. Aims of the research

1. To explore the perceptions by aid workers that women believe that children under their care could be witches.
2. To explore varying factors perceived by aid workers to promote beliefs that children could be witches.
3. To explore aid workers perceptions about why women resort to abuses as 'solutions' to the child witch problem.
4. To draw on reports by NGOs and media to establish the reasons women label and abuse children deemed to be witches.

1.5. Boundaries of the research

The witch hunt of children, the abuse and murder of the victims in contemporary Africa are perpetrated by both men and women (e.g., see Adinkrah, 2011; Agazue, 2015; Cimpric, 2010). However, the religious aspect of this new cultural practice contributed to the choice of women

as the sole focus of this study. Religion is specified under the 1.2 subheading above as one of the main drivers of these crimes. Previous observations have shown that Christianity is the major religion that promotes this new type of witch hunt that focuses on children (Agazue, 2015; van der Meer, 2013). Women make up the majority of the contemporary African Christians (Mwaura, 1995; Robert, 2013). Just as men prefer to spend their leisure time meeting other men in bars, Christian women choose churches as their meeting venues (Mildnerová, 2016).

The 'missionary interest in the vulnerable women attracted the attention of the victims', that is, African women (Mwaura, 1995, p.411). The vulnerability of these women refers to the general problems faced by African women due to the African patriarchal structures (Ibid.). The vulnerability, however, changes from time to time. Currently, such vulnerability include pressures put on women by their families to find a husband on time (Agazue, 2015), to conceive (Essien, 2010) and to produce a male child (Agazue, 2015). In African societies, women who remain unmarried after their twenties are 'pitied and blamed' (e.g., see Ntoimo and Isiugo-Abanihe, 2013, p.1). Although these problems are not necessarily women's fault, they are most often blamed for them.

Whilst these women widely embrace Christianity for the purposes of escaping problems emanating from patriarchy, evidence suggests that they are heavily exploited by the pastors of the African revivalist and syncretic churches who guarantee them miracles to enable them to escape these problems (e.g., Agazue, 2015; 2016; Essien, 2010). It is to be acknowledged, however, that although Christianity is widespread in the continent of Africa due to its colonial history being connected to Christianity, which has been widely embraced by Africans (Eze, 2008), the indigenous African churches are still in existence and contribute to these problems too. Women have equally been identified as representing the 'most common group of traditional healer's clients' in some areas (Mildnerová, 2016, p.26). Thus, these women will also be targeted. The current researcher decided to focus on women (female carers) for the said reasons. The plan is to find out from aid workers who have worked with these women and also through documentary analysis whether the women are also exploited by these religious leaders to believe that the children under their care are witches or they come up with the suspicions on their own.

1.6. Structure of the thesis

This thesis is divided into ten chapters. Chapter One has introduced the phenomenon of child witches in contemporary Africa, the factors contributing to this belief, the treatment of the child witches and how such treatments violate several laws and conventions. The aims and significance of the study as well as the boundaries of the research have all been presented in this chapter. In Chapter Two, the laws on witchcraft-related issues in contemporary Africa will be explored. The link between religion and witch hunt will be discussed and witch hunt as a way of seeking scapegoats for misfortunes will also be detailed. Chapter Three is concerned with child abuse. Child abuse will be defined. Laws on child abuse will be discussed. Problems associated with the definitions and laws due to cultural relativism will be highlighted. The prevalence of child abuse and general factors promoting child abuse, will be critically discussed.

In Chapter Four, the research design, paradigm, methodology and all the methods (data collection and analysis) adopted in this current thesis will be discussed and the justifications for them will be provided. The limitations of these methods will be also be highlighted. The researcher's position will also be reflected on. Chapter Five is the first chapter to present the findings from this current study. Data on how indigenous movies promote child witch hunt and the factors facilitating this, will be analysed and discussed. Chapter Six is concerned with findings on how religion promotes child witch hunt through commercialisation and proliferation of religious houses, religious leaders' over-emphasis on witches as the root cause of many fortunes and the role of absolute trust, which their adherents have on them as perceived by aid workers and supported by reports by NGOs and media.

In Chapter Seven, the data on how ignorance of medical and psychological conditions in children encourage child witch labelling by women as perceived by aid workers and supported by the aforementioned secondary data, will be analysed and discussed. This chapter is also concerned with findings on the demonisation of children due to the presence of aberrant, stubborn and destructive behaviours. Chapter Eight will show how 'adversity' plays a part in motivating child witch hunt. This term refers to how unpleasant events (illness and death) experienced by parents or members of the community raise suspicions that certain children could be responsible for such events through witchcraft as perceived by aid workers and supported by secondary data.

Chapter Nine will demonstrate how aid workers perceive inconveniences experienced by women as contributing to the child witch hunt, which are also supported by the secondary data. These inconveniences include the idea that a stepchild is a threat to his/her stepmother's comfort and family wealth. This chapter will discuss perceived inconveniences such as broken homes and inability to attract suitable partners. Broken homes (resulting from divorces, serious illnesses, wars and deaths) are deemed to produce orphans who are labelled as witches by their poor relatives taking care of them, or due to their relatives' agenda to claim properties belonging to the orphan's parent. Spinsters, divorcees and widows are deemed to label children and abuse them in order to make themselves more attractive to potential suitors who usually avoid potential wives with children.

Chapter Ten is the last chapter in this thesis, therefore, all the findings presented and discussed in chapters five to nine will be summed up therein. The new contributions made by the current thesis will be shown. The limitations of this current research will be highlighted. Recommendations will be made on how to conduct future studies to extend the current findings. Further, recommendations will also be made on how to stop labelling of children as witches and the consequent abuses.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

This chapter is concerned with the issue of witchcraft in its historical and cross-cultural contexts. It starts with a discussion on religion and witch hunting. This is important due to the contributions of religious organisations to the current African child witch hunt as demonstrated in Chapter One. The second subheading is about witch hunting as scapegoating. This part is relevant because it provides the conceptual frameworks on the common motivations of the witch hunt, which will be used to explain the current findings. The focus is solely on children as victims while the perpetrators are adults. Finally, the laws on witchcraft in contemporary Africa will be discussed as this provides background information on the political and legal aspects of witchcraft in contemporary Africa.

2.1. Religion and witch hunt

Religion and witch hunt are linked in a number of ways. With Christianity as an example, the bible is filled with passages making references to witchcraft, particularly how deadly witches are. For example, the phrase 'thou shalt not suffer a witch to live' (Exodus, 22:18) can be found in the bible. This biblical verse was repeatedly used by the Puritans to justify witch hunt in British America in the seventeenth century (Rosen, 2017) and in early modern Europe (Goodare, 2016). This verse is presently used in the contemporary African witch hunt (Adu-Gyamfi, 2016), including the child witch hunt (Cookey, 2019).

The involvement of religious organisations in a witch hunt or at least recognition of the presence of witches is another important link between religion and witchcraft. The European Christian community linked witches to the devil and his agents who were against God and his agents (Levack, 2006). Throughout Europe, witches were linked to the devil, evil or forces considered as diabolical (Bailey, 2006; Burns, 2003; Levack, 1987; Roper, 2000; Walinski-Kiehl, 1996). They were seen as apostate rebels against God and conspirators bent on destroying the moral order (Levack, 2006). Thus, intolerance of lifestyles or behaviours considered as ungodly and immoral fuelled witch hunt in early modern Europe (Levack, 2006).

Austria went alongside the Catholic Reformation in the late 1600s to stamp out witches believed to be worshipping the devil (Burns, 2003). Although Burns has linked the witch hunt in Austria to the Catholic Reformation in the area, Macfarlane (1970) has suggested that no obvious correlations existed between the distribution of persecutions and the Roman Catholic

strongholds or Puritan centres. Burns (2003) himself also acknowledges that church leaders did not always hunt their opponents.

The European witches were seen as members of organised groups affiliated to diabolical forces plotting to destroy the Christian community and its civilisation (Bailey, 2006). There was intolerance of Jews after they were deemed as social non-conformists by the majority Christian society in the medieval Europe (Trevor-Roper, 1969). Heretics were also persecuted as witches (Briggs, 2002; Oster, 2004). The first trials by the Catholic Inquisition were motivated to stamp out heretical behaviours linked to witchcraft practices (Oster, 2004). The fear of witches as apostate rebels and conspirators against God was a significant factor in spreading fear of witches and creating hatred for them (Levack, 1987).

The involvement of religious organisations in the early European witch hunt was so serious that Briggs (2002) has suggested that massacres perpetrated by the French Catholics and also Protestants to a lesser extent during the late 1500s might have led to more deaths connected to witch trials in the entire Europe. Sermons by witch-hunting preachers were mainly the triggers in early modern Europe (Levack, 1987). Information about demonic witches reached the general public via sermons in addition to popular prints and execution statements (Goodare, 2016). Sermons in particular prepared the minds of parishioners for hunts (Levack, 1987).

The contemporary African witch hunt is also deeply connected to religious organisations in the continent. Many academic reports (e.g., Agyapong, 2020; Agazue and Gavin, 2014; Cimpric, 2010; Geschiere, 2020; Mildnerová, 2016; Nyika, 2020; Onyinah, 2002; Quansah, 2012; Priest et al., 2020; van der Meer, 2013) on this subject suggest that Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, including syncretic churches, are the major driving forces in reviving the belief in witchcraft and promoting witch hunt in the continent deliberately and inadvertently in some cases. These churches are mostly founded in Africa (Agazue, 2015; Mildnerová, 2016).

2.2. Witch hunt as scapegoating

There is a strong link between the attempt to find answers to strange, unfortunate or explainable events and witch hunt in societies where the belief in witchcraft exists. Such events range from serious sicknesses to death, infertility, accidents, crop failures, extreme weather conditions and more (Adinkrah, 2017; Brain, 1970; Macfarlane, 1970; Richter et al., 2017; Rosen, 2017). Some authorities in medieval Europe ‘related almost every injury to a witch’ (Macfarlane, 1970, p.88). This was similarly the case in British America in the seventeenth century where

illnesses, misfortunes and even deviance were foremost attributed to witchcraft (Rosen, 2017). Many people were hunted as witches due to sudden sicknesses and deaths of other people in early modern Europe. Gwen ferch Ellis was tried and sentenced to death by hanging in Wales in 1594 following the death of a young man, Lewis ap John suspected to have been killed by Ellis (Winsham, 2016). Ruth Osborne, an old English mother was killed by a mob in Hertfordshire in 1751 following a suspicion that she was responsible for mysterious illnesses that befell a farmer and his cows (Reynoldson and Taylor, 1998). Elizabeth Jackson was indicted and sentenced to prison in London in 1602 in connection to an illness suffered by a 14-year-old Mary Glover (Burns, 2003). Cases were too numerous to be described here.

Evans-Pritchard (1976) was able to establish a strong connection between misfortunes and scapegoating among the Azande (Central African Republic) people following his lengthy anthropological fieldwork. He found that the people resorted to witchcraft as a way to explain unexplainable events and misfortunes in general. This remains the pattern in Africa to date. The contributions of misfortunes in the contemporary witch hunt in Ghana are detailed by Richter et al. (2017) and Adinkrah (2017).

Brain's (1970) account of the Bangwa people (Cameroon) shows that witches were hunted after catastrophes struck. He observed that witchcraft was drawn on by the Bangwa people to explain almost all their problems, from epidemics of meningitis to yaws, rising infertility and crop failures. Similar findings have been reported by Miguel (2005) about Tanzania in more recent times. Agazue (2015) details dozens of cases of scapegoating of both adults and children who were ostracised, tortured or murdered in Nigeria and other parts of Africa within the past couple of years.

The victims of the misfortunes or those concerned about them usually seek scapegoats among their enemies (Evans-Pritchard, 1976). Witchcraft among the Tonga (Zambia) is associated with revenge, inheritance, malice and appropriation of energy (Colson, 2000). Brain (1970) linked accusations in Bangwa (Cameroon) to jealousy and enmity as well as competition and disharmony among certain groups. Most of van der Meer's (2013) Malawian participants attributed witch hunt in the country to jealousy, conflict and power struggles existing within or between families, including those within the community. Jealousy is also identified by Ashforth (2015) about Malawi. Petty jealousy and family or social conflicts also motivated witch hunts in early modern Europe (Nguyen-Finn, 2018).

2.3. Witchcraft and the law in contemporary Africa

As previously stated in Chapter One, the extant belief in witchcraft in contemporary Africa has led to the citizens' demand for the judicial recognition of witchcraft. Cameroon (Penal Code of 1967) and Tanzania (Witchcraft Act of 2002) are among the African countries where the act of witchcraft is punishable by the law. The Cameroon's Penal Code of 1967 not only is explicit on the 'act of witchcraft' but also specifies other related practices (magic and divination) as punishable offences under section 251 of the Penal Code. Presently, the Cameroonian magistrates who believe in the existence of witches and consider the practice as a crime, acknowledge that this crime cannot be proven empirically (Hund, 2004). Thus, the magistrates rely on confessions to prove guilt (Ibid.). However, questions have been raised about the coercive ways in which such confessions are extracted from the suspects (Ibid.).

Unlike Cameroon and Tanzania, many African countries have laws suppressing witchcraft. Some of these countries inherited these laws from their colonial powers while others have laws entirely enacted by them. Among those countries are South Africa (Suppression of Witchcraft Act of 1957), Zimbabwe (Witchcraft Suppression Act of 1890), Kenya (Witchcraft Ordinance of 1925; Witchcraft Act of 1981) and Malawi (Witchcraft Act of 1911). This list, however, is not exhaustive. Most of these laws have been amended but continue to suppress witchcraft accusations to date. It is worth stating that Cameroon and some of the African countries that currently have pro-witchcraft laws also used to have anti-witchcraft laws during the colonial era before they successfully repealed them.

There have been calls in most of the name countries with anti-witchcraft laws to review these laws, taking into account the common belief. In Malawi, for example, recurrent witchcraft cases and stories constantly featuring in the media have forced the Malawi Law Commission to initiate a process to review the Witchcraft Act of 1911 (see Nyika, 2020).

Nigeria has an anti-witchcraft law as part of its Criminal Code and Penal Code. Both section 216 of the Penal Code 1960 and section 210 of the Criminal Code 2004, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria are explicit on witchcraft accusations in exact wordings that anyone who 'accuses or threatens to accuse any person with being a witch or with having the power of witchcraft' is guilty of a misdemeanour and liable to imprisonment for two years.

Pro-witchcraft laws can be argued to make it difficult to convince people that their fellow human beings are not witches due to the judicial acknowledgement of the supposedly

'imaginary' offences and the efforts to achieve justice for the accusers. This particular issue was also raised in 2009 by a human rights group about the Tanzania's Witchcraft Act of 2002 who argued that this Act reinforces and legitimises the belief in witchcraft (Mesaki, 2009). Anti-witchcraft laws may seem necessary to discourage the labelling of human beings as witches for cases whose nature is simply imaginary. Unfortunately, the recurrent accusations in countries where these anti-witchcraft laws operate, such as South Africa (Hund, 2004), Malawi (Nyika, 2020), Nigeria (Agazue, 2015) and others indicate that the intended effect of the anti-witchcraft laws is never achieved. Worst of all, the difficulties in resolving witchcraft cases promote vigilantism (e.g., Hund, 2004; Luongo, 2006; Mesaki, 2009; Roxburgh, 2016).

2.4. Conclusion

This chapter has discussed general issues relating to witchcraft across histories and cultures. It has demonstrated how witchcraft and religion are connected, such as the presence of anti-witchcraft texts in the bible and the role of Christian communities in the witch hunt. This chapter has detailed how a witch hunt is an act of scapegoating for those believed to be responsible for misfortunes or mysterious events. The different laws of witchcraft in African countries have been discussed. Some of the countries recognise witchcraft in their judicial systems empowering those who consider themselves victims of witchcraft to approach the court with their grievances. Other countries have laws suppressing witchcraft, making their cases inadmissible in courts. However, both the anti- and pro-witchcraft laws are problematic. Anti-witchcraft laws promote vigilantism (Mesaki, 2009; Roxburgh, 2016). In countries where pro-witchcraft laws exist, the rule of material evidence in court means that evidence is always unavailable and although the court may rely on confessions, such confessions could be obtained inhumanly (Hund, 2004).

Chapter Three

Literature Review

This chapter is concerned with child abuse. This is relevant because child abuse constitutes the major act, which this thesis is concerned with. The chapter will start by defining child abuse. The UK child abuse law, Children and Young Persons Act (1933) will be drawn on to define child abuse within the UK context. The prevalence of child abuse around the world will be demonstrated using data by the World Health Organisation (WHO). The UK will also be used as a jurisdictional example using data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS). Factors known to promote child abuse, such as step-parenting, illegitimacy and single parenting will be critically discussed. These factors are worth discussing in this thesis because they offer conceptual explanations for the current findings.

3.1. Child Abuse: Definitions, laws and prevalence

Child abuse is a difficult term to define because of different sociocultural practices around the world (Al-Shail et al., 2012). Within the notion of cultural relativism, all the religious, ethical and political beliefs are truths related to the individual's cultural identity or those of his/her society (Reichert, 2015). Cultural relativism creates confusion in matters of human rights because of the view that all cultures are equal while universal views are secondary as far as cultural norms are concerned (Ibid.). Thus, varying definitions of child abuse reflect differences in cultural beliefs and values (Al-Shail et al., 2012).

A report by the United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2017) shows that child marriage is common in South Asia with 1 in 5 girls or 17 percent of girls getting married before their fifteenth birthday. Such underage marriage in Western Europe as a comparative sub-continent could lead to strong condemnations and prosecutions. It is also important to note that some of the South Asian countries where these marriages are conducted have laws against child marriage but a combination of factors, particularly cultural acceptance could mean that these marriages are overlooked by authorities.

The age of the child is also important when deciding whether child abuse has occurred or not. For example, a toddler requires more supervision than an adolescent (Al-Shail et al., 2012) and child abuse case may not be opened against a parent or a carer when an adolescent is hit by a vehicle after leaving the house on his or her own considering the age while reverse could be

the case if this happened to a toddler. In the UK (England and Wales), the Children and Young Persons Act (CYPA, 1933) stands as an important legal framework for determining child abuse. Section 1 of this Act is concerned with child cruelty:

> If any person who has attained the age of sixteen years and any child or young person under that age, wilfully assaults, ill-treats, neglects, abandons, or exposes him, or causes or procures him to be assaulted, ill-treated, neglected, abandoned, or exposed, in a manner likely to cause him unnecessary suffering or injury to health (whether the suffering or injury is of a physical or a psychological nature), that person shall be guilty of an offence.

This Act also covers other issues and also specifies ages, such as not to allow a child under the age of 16 in brothels, not to allow a child below the age of 16 to engage in begging or soliciting for alms, not to give liquor to a child under the age of 5, not to sell tobacco to a child under the age of 18 and other situations capable of endangering the life of the child.

Whilst some of the actions or inactions described above under the CYPA constitute child abuse universally, some of them do not amount to child abuse in certain cultures. Even among the universal ones, stipulated ages may vary as well as what constitutes neglect or ill-treatment. In some cultures, corporal punishment of children is allowed while this is an offence in other cultures (Al-Shail et al., 2012). Corporal punishment may qualify as an 'assault' under the CYPA but this may not be the case in Nigeria. This is an example of cultural relativism.

Children may be abused by their family members, friends or other people they know, voluntary workers who come into contact with them and also strangers in rare occasions (Diriwari, 2016). Abuse may also happen online (Ibid.). Child abuse is a hidden crime. It is hidden by both the abuser and even the victim. The ONS (2020) found that about 1 in 7 adults who called the helpline for the National Association for People Abused in Childhood (NAPAC) had not disclosed their abuse to anyone before. This means that even their carers had no idea that they were being abused, supporting the idea that this is a hidden crime.

Child abuse is common around the world. The WHO (2020) estimates that up to 1 billion children between the ages of 2 and 17 have experienced abuses in the form of sexual, physical or emotional abuse or neglect around the world a year prior to the report. The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) estimated that 1 in 5 adults between the ages of 18 and 74 had an experience of child abuse, at least in one of its forms or domestic abuse or violence before

they turned 16 years (ONS, 2020). Up to 49,570 children in England and another 4,810 in Wales were placed at their local authorities due to being at risk of abuse or neglect or for having experienced either or both of these (Ibid.).

It is expected that statistics on child abuse may vary from one society to another considering perception of what constitutes or does not constitute child abuse in these societies, the prevalence of factors contributing to child abuse or its lack as well as the level of enforcement of relevant laws. Further, there are factors that may increase the risk of abuse for some children compared to others and such factors may include step-parenting, single parenting or broken homes and the idea of illegitimacy in societies where this constitutes social problem. These factors are discussed below.

3.1.1. Step-parenting

Step-parenting is linked to child abuse for several reasons. For example, stepparents may show less care and concern towards their stepchildren unlike the way biological parents treat their biological children (Weekes-Shackelford and Shackelford, 2004) and less care in the form of 'neglect' or emotional abuse automatically constitutes child abuse. Compared to biological children, stepchildren face a greater risk of homicide by their stepparents (Gavin and Porter, 2015; Weekes-Shackelford and Shackelford, 2004). Harris et al.'s (2007, p.85) analysis of 378 cases of children killed by parents found that filicides by stepparents 'were disproportionately common' and usually followed ongoing abuse and violent death.

Wilson et al. (1980) found that child abuse and neglect cases were minimal in households with two natural parents. In a National Youth Survey involving 1,725 selected from 1044 households, Fagan (2005) found that physical abuse victims were overrepresented in families without two biological parents. Killings by stepparents were found to be much higher than those committed by biological parents (West, 2007). An analysis of filicide data involving children aged 5 and below who accounted for 42 percent of 8,691 filicide victims committed in the United States from 1976 to 1994 found that stepparents were responsible for 51.2 per million children per annum compared to genetic parents who were responsible for only 15.6 children per million children per annum (Weekes-Shackelford and Shackelford, 2004).

It is suggested that stepparents show fewer concerns towards their stepchildren because the stepparents do not reap the emotional benefits of spending their resources on children not

genetically related to them (Weekes-Shackelford and Shackelford, 2004). This can be explained by the evolutionary theories of resource competition, which suggest that non-biologically-related offspring, including stepchildren, may be removed to prevent competition with biological children (Daly and Wilson, 1988).

However, Harris et al. (2007) found that infants had the highest risk of death by their genetic mothers. Flynn et al.'s (2013) population study of filicide and filicide-suicide cases in England and Wales (1997-2006) found that 80 percent (237) of the perpetrators killed a biological child. Similarly, in previous cases in England and Wales (1995/96-2000/01), 296 children were murdered by biological parents compared to 56 murdered by stepparents (Yarwood, 2004). McKee's (2006) report (based on data by the US Bureau of Justice Statistics released in 1997) shows that 61 percent of children aged under 5 were murdered by their biological parents. The report equally shows that more abuses against children were perpetrated by biological parents. In Canada, 32 children were murdered by their biological parents in 2001 compared to only 5 murdered by stepparents (Yarwood, 2004).

Mariano et al.'s (2014) data, which was collected from the United States' law enforcement agencies involving a total of 94,146 cases that occurred from 1976 to 2007 suggests that the risk of filicide is not higher in stepparents compared to biological parents. Mariano et al. (2014) acknowledge that this finding is inconsistent with the existing ones and have suggested that this inconsistency might have been caused by non-representative or biased samples or due to less number of years stepchildren spend with stepparents compared to biological children.

Resnick's (1969) classic study can offer some insights into why mothers kill their children. Resnick had earlier categorised filicide into five based on the perpetrators' motivations. This has been more recently updated by Resnick (2016), which is the version used in this current thesis. The five categories are altruistic filicide, acutely psychotic filicide, unwanted child filicide, child maltreatment filicide and spouse revenge filicide. Altruistic filicide is committed 'out of love' as opposed to hate or anger (Resnick, 2016, p.S205). It is usually associated with suicide as the parent might feel that they would not want their child to be 'motherless' in what the parent considers a 'cruel world' (Ibid., p.S205). It is also done with the aim of saving the child from suffering, such as the case of a seriously-ill child. Acutely psychotic filicide is committed by a parent experiencing 'command hallucinations', delirium or epilepsy (Ibid., p.S205). Unwanted child filicide occurs when a parent feels that the child is not needed, such as when the child is seen as a hindrance. Child maltreatment filicide is usually a by-product of

'overzealous application of discipline' with no deliberate attempt to kill the child (Ibid., p.S205). Spouse revenge filicide is committed by a parent with an intention to punish an intimate partner.

3.1.2. Single parenting

There is a link between single parenting and child abuse. Before discussing such a link, it is worth stating that neonaticidal cases are not considered in this discussion. Neonaticide is defined as 'the murder of a newborn within the first 24 hours of life' (Gavin and Porter, 2015, p.103). It is also known as 'failed abortion' (Schwartz and Isser, 2000) because it is often committed to conceal pregnancy (West, 2007) by mothers who are unprepared for the child's birth (Pitt and Bale, 1995; West, 2007) and with no interest in parenting (Gavin and Porter, 2015) or care of the child (Pitt and Bale, 1995). There is hardly time for parenting before neonaticide, thus, neonaticide is beyond the scope of this discussion.

A review by Friedman and Resnick (2007) shows that maternal filicide was often committed by unmarried mothers and also married ones who had primary responsibility for their children yet with disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds. Similarly, a review by Koenen and Thompson (2008) also shows that single mothers were 4.3 more likely than their married counterparts to commit filicide.

In 2001, a total of 231 sudden infant deaths (SIDs) were recorded in England and Wales of which the rate was 0.2 per 1000 live births among babies of married couples compared to 0.71 (more than 3 times higher) for unmarried couples and 1.28 (6 times higher than the rate for married couples) for single mothers (Yarwood, 2004). Although SIDs are not necessarily homicides, covert homicides are suspected in about 1 in 10 of such deaths (Ibid.).

The consequences of socioeconomic stress in child abuse and child homicide (West, 2007) have been previously discussed and these consequences can be argued to be double in the case of single parenting. McKee and Egan's (2013) report suggests that financial difficulties among other factors associated with single parenting might have contributed to the suicides and filicides committed by single mothers in their study. Single parenting is linked to other risk factors (alcohol abuse, drug abuse, mental illness, low income, unstable housing) contributing to child maltreatment and more serious interventions by child protection agencies (Laslett, 2013).

3.1.3. Illegitimacy

Across histories and cultures, childbearing outside marriage comes with a sort of stigma for the mothers (Agazue, 2016; Barone, 2016), including the children who might be seen as 'illegitimate' (Oberman, 2004; Fuchs, 1982). There were laws in the nineteenth century England to deter 'bastardy' by unwed mothers, although there were also those who opposed such laws, describing them as unfair and inhumane (Davison, 1982). One of such laws is described below:

> As defined by common law, the illegitimate child was *fillius mullius* or 'nobody's child': not entitled to a family name, having no legal next of kin, and debarred from inheriting as a member of a family (Taylor, 2017, p.103; italics in the original).

This law and its rules remained throughout the nineteenth century until it was finally abolished by the Legitimacy Act 1926 (Taylor, 2017). This law was modelled on the ancient Roman law that recognised only children born within wedlock as belonging to the husband of their mother (Ibid.). The situation in North America with respect to illegitimacy was similar at the time (e.g., see Maldonado, 2011; Murray, 2011). Some of the saliences of illegitimacy as a legal entity in the US began to be lost following a series of Supreme Court decisions witnessed in the 1960s and 1970s (Murray, 2011). However, dozens of states in the US currently have child abandonment laws often known as Safe Surrender or Safe Haven laws, which allow the transfer of an unwanted child to authorities without any negative consequences.

Mayeri (2015) observed that marital status still matters in the United States despite the social transformations that have taken place since the past half a century. Maldonado (2011) also describes how the majority of Americans view non-marital births as constituting a significant social problem in the country. In nineteenth century France, authorities accused unmarried mothers with illegitimate children of committing sin, vice, debauchery, premarital sex, moral turpitude and lack of planning for the future (Fuchs, 1982). Most of these women chose to abandon their babies by making use of state-supported foundling homes. However, stigma was not thought to be the only factor in this practice, rather as documented by Fuchs (1982), minimal aid received by families with children, absence of day-care and other difficulties encouraged the abandonment.

Although attitudes towards unmarried mothers with the so-called illegitimate children have been changing in many societies, they persist in certain societies. In many African societies, childbearing outside marriage remains a contentious issue (e.g., Agazue, 2016; Burman and Preston-Whyte, 1992; Delaunay, 2011). This, however, is also changing in many African societies. More than two decades ago, Burman and Preston-Whyte (1992) described the issue of illegitimacy in South Africa as contentious. According to their statistics, more than 40 percent of children in South Africa were born by unmarried people. They also suggested that the figure could reach up to 70 percent in certain communities. They noted that despite the fact that a high proportion of children were born to unmarried people, policy still lagged behind with respect to access to welfare facilities by those children and their parents.

Although Burman and Preston-Whyte (1992) presented such high figures about South Africa, this does not necessarily mean that other African countries would have such a high proportion of children born by unmarried women. Childbearing outside marriage in the African continent has more to do with premarital sex or sexual promiscuity by unmarried girls and young women, including rape victims who have no deliberate plans to become single mothers.

Long before Burman and Preston-Whyte's (1992) publication, the reliability of the illegitimate ratios on this issue from African countries had been questioned by the United Nations (e.g., see Hartley, 1975). In line with the view of the current researcher that Burman and Preston-Whyte's (1992) illegitimacy data based on cases in South Africa could differ from data in other African countries, an earlier report by Hartley (1975) based on data from the United Nations' Demographic Yearbook shows that African nations were divided into three different groups in terms of illegitimacy ratios with one group having only 4-7 percent of illegitimate children and another having 30-40 percent while the third group had between 0.7 and 1.5 percent. While the current researcher was unable to access any current data on this, it is still possible that illegitimacy ratios among African countries still differ to date even if the rates have changed.

Having a child considered 'illegitimate' has been identified as one of the reasons parents kill their children (Esteves, 2014; Lancy, 2015; Malherbe, 2007; Oberman, 2004; Pitt and Bale, 1995; West, 2007). It promotes abandonment (Delaunay, 2011; Fuchs, 1982), abortion and infanticide (Malherbe, 2007). This is probably due to the stigma and discrimination attached to it (e.g., Delaunay, 2011; Esteves, 2014; Maldonado, 2011; Storrow, 2012). Academic literature consistently suggests that illegitimacy promotes child abuse and filicides by mothers (e.g., see Bale, 1995; Esteves, 2014; Lancy, 2015; Oberman, 2004; Pitt and Malherbe, 2007;

West, 2007). This is presently the case in Africa where young mothers whose conceptions are considered as illegitimate and other mothers whose situations qualify as adulterous, abandon or kill their children due to the stigma and social rejection attached to their statuses (Delaunay, 2011). The reasons illegitimacy promotes child abuse and homicide are well explained by Esteves (2014):

> The strengthening of morality in the sexuality field verified in modern times, which has resulted in strong condemnation of adultery and disapproval of sex outside the marriage, contributed to the growth of the numbers of infanticide, abortion and child abandonment crimes. The women induced by unfulfilled marriage promises or involved in adulterous relationships, victims of assault or rape, sought to eliminate the mark of their dishonor. The purity and modesty were adjectives that society imposed on women, especially to the unmarried girl who was interested in getting a convenient marriage. It is therefore not surprising that the largest number of infanticide was practiced by single women, as a way to safeguard their good name (Esteves, 2014, p.205).

3.4. Conclusion

Child abuse is a social problem that is prevalent around the world. The definitions of this offence as well as the laws regulating it differ markedly from one society to another due to differing cultural practices around the world. Likewise, types of abuses are geographically distributed based on cultural practices that promote certain types of abuses and vice versa. Among the factors known to promote child abuse around the world are step-parenting, single parenting and illegitimacy. This chapter has demonstrated that children reared by the mothers falling under these categories have greater chances of abuse than their counterparts whose mothers do not fit any of these.

Chapter Four

Research Methods

This chapter explores the research design and methods adopted in this current study. It starts with a discussion on the qualitative research paradigm and the rationale for adopting it in this study due to the exploratory nature of the study. The interpretivist approach is discussed as well as the benefits it offers the researcher, that is, the need to fashion out meaning of the phenomenon through interaction with individuals who are believed to understand the events as well as analysis of linguistic documents containing the accounts of relevant incidents. Similarly, hermeneutics was adopted as a suitable tool for understanding and interpreting the social problems in relation to the historical and sociocultural contexts where they occur. This chapter discusses how primary data for the study was collected from aid workers in the form of interviews and case files whilst secondary data was gathered from publications by NGOs and media. The justifications for the combined sources of data is provided. Access to the participants is also discussed. All the ethical issues involved in this study as well as how they were managed are discussed. Thematic analysis is described and the rationale for its use is provided. This chapter also discusses how communicative validity was checked. Finally, the researcher reflected on his position and explains how he managed to safeguard the data against any potential biases.

4.1. Qualitative research

The qualitative paradigm is considered indispensable when there is a need to understand the complexities of human behaviour that requires answers to 'why' and 'how' questions (Lakshman et al., 2000). This paradigm enables a researcher to gain in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of interest, particularly a phenomenon that is not yet well understood (Morse and Field, 1996). For these reasons, the qualitative approach was adopted in this current study. The phenomenon of investigation in this current research (i.e., the labelling of children as witches and the associated abuses) is a relatively new field that continues to generate many questions that demand linguistic data capable of answering questions relating to how they evolved and persist in the affected places.

Answers to 'why' women target the children under their care for abuse and 'how' they believe in the first place that the children are witches, were difficult to come by. It was not known 'why' these women thought that abusing the children under their care would alleviate their fear

of witches and the threats purportedly posed by the witches. The qualitative research method is reputed for its exploratory power, therefore, was considered as a suitable method to find suitable answers to these questions through aid workers' perceptions and the accounts of events documented by the NGOs and media personnel. Thus, the qualitative paradigm was chosen due to the emphasis it lays on meanings (Willig, 2013; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005).

While academic reports already exist on the child witch phenomenon in contemporary Africa, no attempt had been made to explore how different factors integrate together to promote the abuses connected to this belief. Thus, this current study aimed to do this. Written or spoken language is the primary means of collecting data for qualitative research (Polkinghorne, 2005). Thus, the current study adopted semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis (see 4.4.1. and 4.4.2., respectively), which are all linguistic data involving spoken and written language, further justifying the choice for the adoption of qualitative research

While the qualitative research method has an exploratory power and other benefits, it also has a number of limitations. Its interpretative nature (Atieno, 2009) can create the danger of misinterpretation. A researcher can slip into the participants' narratives from the former's viewpoint when the researcher seems unaware of the actual standpoints being taken by the participant (Sutton and Austin, 2015). The current researcher, however, made good effort to interpret accurately what his participants said, including reaching out to them for clarifications where their narratives seemed unclear (see 4.7.). He did these to guard against any potential interpretation biases.

4.2. Interpretivism

A number of approaches exist in the social sciences, which could be employed to understand human behaviours. One of such approaches is 'interpretivism'. Interpretivism stands as the direct opposite of positivism (Ryan, 2018; Tomlinson, 2010). Whilst positivism draws on the procedures of the natural sciences in studying the social world, interpretivism considers differences that characterise societies and cultures (Tomlinson, 2010). As a result, interpretivism values subjectivity (Ryan, 2018). Subjectivity itself is methodologically connected to the qualitative research paradigm (Gray, 2013; Ryan, 2018; Williams, 2000). In fact, the terms interpretivism and qualitative research are used interchangeably by some scholars (Williams, 2000). This particular social science approach places the question of understanding and interpretation at the centre of a research investigation (Tomlinson, 2010). In interpretivism, actions are placed in its context for one to be able to understand their meaning

to the social actors themselves (Ibid.). For these reasons, interpretivism was chosen in this current research.

In interpretivism, what constitutes truth and knowledge are deemed subjective and situated within a particular culture and history based on people's experiences and how those experiences are understood by the people in question (Ryan, 2018). This is normally done through 'prolonged, complex processes of social interaction involving history, language, and action' (Schwandt, 1998, p.222). Since the current study was about human actions (i.e., child abuse) explored via interviews and other linguistic sources of data, the researcher considered the interpretivist perspective as suitable. The incidences of women abusing children under their care as a result of their belief in witchcraft are not given but subject to events in the society. For example, religious affiliation, which is one of the causal factors in these incidents, does not exist outside sociocultural contexts. These are also subject to change over time (e.g., Aragon, 2000). These events emerged at a particular time in history in the affected cultures, thus, an approach (interpretivism) capable of fashioning out meaning out of these events was needed.

In interpretivism, researchers are not entirely separate from their own beliefs and values (Ryan, 2018). Interpretivism was necessary in this current thesis due to the emphasis on how the social world is subject to interpretations and understanding of a phenomenon by those involved in this process, such as an investigator and his/her participant (Ormston et al., 2013). The current study involved interviews as its major source of data and this meant that the researcher interacted with the participants face to face throughout the fieldwork. It was a case of the researcher and his participants having a conversation in order to be able to come up with answers to the social problem being investigated.

4.2.1. Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics has its origins from the works of a German philosopher, Martin Heidegger (Laverty, 2003). The origin of hermeneutics is traced to the interpretation of documented texts, such as holy scriptures (Strenger, 2001). Hermeneutics deals with different forms of both verbal and non-verbal communication, such as interviews, conversations, research reports, court decisions, legislative bills, organisational culture, ceremonial events and so on, which are generally termed 'text' in the language of hermeneutics (Balfour and Mesaros, 1994). The positivist claim to researcher objectivity is rejected by hermeneutics (Ibid.). This should not come as a surprise considering that hermeneutics is a branch of interpretivism, which

contradicts positivism (e.g., Ryan, 2018; Tomlinson, 2010). Hermeneutics was adopted in this current study, firstly, due to the nature of data used, which was suitable as hermeneutical 'texts'. The data came from different sources all of which constituted hermeneutical texts. Secondly, hermeneutics was considered as a good fit due to the phenomenon of interest. Hermeneutics recognises the fact that human cognition is limited and that historical and social conditions may influence the quest to understand a certain phenomenon, hence, providing a framework to integrate these factors with the objects of study (Balfour and Mesaros, 1994).

The history or background of a person 'includes what a culture gives a person from birth and is handed down, presenting ways of understanding the world' (Laverty, 2003, p.24). Within the hermeneutic approach, understanding and interpretation of an event must be situated to these sociocultural contexts (Balfour and Mesaros, 1994). The child witch phenomenon is not given, rather evolved following certain changes in the sociocultural beliefs of the natives of the affected regions. Hermeneutics is not concerned with the 'smaller linguistic units' of texts, rather it focuses on the 'holistic meaning of texts' (Magee, 2011, p.35). Thus, hermeneutics was a promising tool to understand and interpret this social problem. The focus was not about understanding the linguistic units of the interviews provided by aid workers and the texts from the case files, NGOs and media (see 4.4.1 and 4.4.2), rather to situate the events in the particular history and cultures of the people involved. It required that the researcher would take into account the cultures of the people in relation to how children were viewed and treated in line with the natives' beliefs about witches and children's positions within this phenomenon.

4.3. Sampling

Purposive sampling was adopted in this current study. In purposive sampling, the researcher targets a certain network (Barratt et al., 2015) based on the purpose of the study and the researcher's belief that they have the 'largest potential' for providing insights into the phenomenon of interest (Palys, 2008, p.698). Thus, a group of professionals believed by the researcher to possess adequate knowledge of the subject were sampled. A total of 11 staff members of the Child's Right and Rehabilitation Network (CRARN) were interviewed one after another on a face-to-face basis. The staff members consisted of 6 men and 5 women. CRARN is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) situated in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. The organisation manages a shelter where children abandoned due to witchcraft suspicions are taken care of. Some of the children in their shelter, however, are not abandoned children but those taken away from their parents or guardians following suspicion or upon receiving

information that the safety of the children was in danger. In addition to providing accommodation to the children, CRARN also feed them, clothe them and take care of them in other capacities, such as offering psychological and medical supports when and if needed. They also reach out to the parents or guardians of the children to establish the reasons for the abuse.

The CRARN team were chosen as the participants in this research due to the researcher's awareness of their high level of involvement in this issue. The researcher knows about how they frequently monitor the child witch-related incidents and often interact with both the offenders and their victims. They interview all the children they have been in contact with. They also try to reach out to the children's parents or guardians to interview them either on their own or with the police. They are usually present during forensic interviews of the offenders, court sessions and other related events. Due to this high level of involvement, the researcher presumed that these professionals possess adequate knowledge of these incidents and would have a lot of insights to offer if interviewed.

4.4. Data collection

Researchers have a choice of using primary or secondary data for their study (Salkind, 2010). However, both types of data can be used in the same study if a combination of both is considered advantageous, which was the case in this current research. Primary data are usually collected first-hand to meet the researcher's specific research purpose (Hox and Boeije, 2005; Salkind, 2010), which was also the case in this current research, which required the construction of interview questions that inquired directly into the causes of child abuse. Although primary data has the above advantages, it has some limitations too. It has been suggested that it can be influenced by the researcher, such as when questions are framed in a certain way in order to receive the desired response (Billingham, 2018). The current researcher avoided such bias by framing the interview questions (see Appendix 1) in an open-ended format.

Secondary data, on the other hand, are data analysed by an individual or a team who did not take part in the collection of the original data (Church, 2001). A researcher will normally determine an appropriate source of secondary data considering the nature and aims of the study. Secondary data come with numerous benefits. It can enable the researcher to reach the 'unreachable' and to present vital information left behind by such a group of persons (Billingham, 2018). This was the case in this current study that required analysis of cases

witnessed and reported by different groups about perpetrators and victims of child abuse in other parts of Africa where the researcher was unable to travel. Secondary data also has its own limitations. In cases involving mistakes or exaggeration of events, the researcher using such secondary data risks repeating them thereby producing findings that do not reflect reality. It is not known if this was the case in this current study considering that it utilised data from the media, which may be subject to exaggeration sometimes.

4.4.1. Primary data

The primary data used in the current study were gathered from two sources: (i) interviews and (ii) case files. A semi-structured interview was conducted on CRARN staff members. In a semi-structured interview, questions are predetermined and phrased in a way to enable responses that tap into a particular topic area (Longhurst, 2016). The interview questions (see Appendix 1) used in this current research were phrased in the like manner. They were designed to gain understanding from the participants on 'why' the women taking care of children label them witches and abuse them as a result. They were structured to get the participants talking about the possible factors that promote the belief itself, 'why' the women opt for abuse as solutions and whether the women made the decision on their own or were influenced by significant others.

A total of 16 case files were analysed. The case files were collected from the CRARN office with the permission of the CRARN director. The case files appeared in the form of official forms with sections containing personal details (name, age, address and school) of the child victims, the perpetrators of the offences, and spaces where the nature of the offences and motives (if known), should be detailed. The details in the files were usually documented by any senior staff members who were in charge of any particular incidents. The case files were analysed as a way of collaborating the oral accounts provided by the participants.

Although the case files came from the same source as the interviews, they were still considered important for triangulation because as already stated, they were documented by only the senior staff members of CRARN while the interviews were conducted on both the few senior staff members and several junior members. Whilst the researcher was presented with dozens of case files, he carefully selected only those involving women as perpetrators in line with the boundaries of the research. However, in some cases, both parents (father and mother) or carers with mixed genders, were involved. In such cases, the researcher focused on the roles played by the woman in the case when such roles were identifiable.

4.4.2. Secondary data

The secondary data used in this thesis were obtained from two sources: (i) reports by NGOs and (ii) media. These reports were used to collaborate accounts from the primary data as well as extrapolating the incidents to other parts of Africa where the researcher could not travel to. Reports from two NGOs were analysed and these are Human Rights Watch and Save the Children. Both reports are based on witchcraft accusations in the DRC, which included issues at homes, churches and in the communities. The reports were based on primary research fieldwork that involved interactions with the child victims of witchcraft accusations, their parents, church personnel, law enforcement agencies and government officials. Since these reports were limited to only two countries, media reports were also used to extrapolate incidents to other countries. A total of eight media articles were analysed. The articles were selected from the following media organisations: BBC, Chicago Tribune, Huff Post, Leadership, Providentia, The Guardian, The New York Time, and Vanguard.

The researcher searched Google for the news articles. He used a combination of keywords related to child witches, namely; child witch, child witchcraft, possessed child, child deliverance, child witch attacked, child witch tortured and child witch killed. This search yielded over fifteen million results. The researcher clicked on about fifty news articles and carefully selected the aforementioned articles based on his personal judgement of their credibility in addition to the reputation of the named media organisations. Like the case files, the researcher focused his attention on the media items on the activities of women in the abuses. However, there were occasions where the activities of men were also considered, such as when background details were needed to understand particular incidents or developments. An example of this could be the role of religious organisations managed by male pastors in the abuses.

4.5. Ethical considerations

Ethical research ensures that the rights and feelings of research participants are respected and that participants are not deceived for research purposes (Randall and Rouncefield, 2010). Confidentiality (Bryman, 2004) and anonymity (Ciambrone, 2004) also constitute the ethical issues that must be addressed by a researcher. The researcher ensured that the above ethical issues, which are equally stipulated by the British Psychological Society (BPS, 2014) in its Code of Human Research Ethics were maintained throughout the fieldwork and the writing-up

process. By adhering to the ethical guidelines set out by the BPS (2014), those set out by the University of Huddersfield were also fulfilled. It was made known to the participants that their names would not be revealed in the thesis or any publications connected to this research. They were asked to provide pseudonyms of their choice for the said purpose. While two participants were able to do this, the rest asked the researcher to assign them with any names of his choice. This was done by the researcher.

The BPS (2014) lays emphasis on minimising risks by researchers. It defines risks as 'the potential physical or psychological harm, discomfort or stress to human participants that a research project may generate' (Ibid., 2014, p.13). The study did not involve deception; the participants were well informed of the aims of the study and the reasons for selecting them. This information can be found in the 'Participation Information Sheet' (PIS) (see Appendix 2).

The study did not involve any physical harms. However, psychological harms were considered as a possibility due to the nature of the study requiring a recall of past experiences, involving abuses, which could be distressing. It is possible to feel upset while recalling unpleasant past experiences (e.g. Grey et al., 2009) because of heightened arousal connected to memory retrieval (Vieweg et al., 2006). Thus, the researcher obtained permission from a psychological organisation (see 4.6 for details) to offer psychological support to the participants, should any of them required this. Other measures taken during the interviews due to the sensitive nature of the subject are discussed under 4.6 below.

The researcher ensured that nobody had access to the participants' details. He accomplished this by carrying with him a locking filing briefcase where his Dictaphone, consent forms and case files were secured. He also used a laptop secured with a password to prevent unauthorised access to the participants' details. Certain details, such as the participants' names and their locations were replaced with codes and separate storage matching these details were used.

4.6. Research Permissions

Three different permissions were sought by the researcher before commencing this study. The first permission was sought from the founder of CRARN to allow the researcher access to CRARN staff members. This permission was granted in the form of a letter that was emailed to the researcher. Aftercare of the participants was the reason for the second permission. To address this, the researcher contacted Amaudo Nigeria and requested help provide aftercare services to any participants that might require such services during or after the fieldwork. This

was also granted in the form of a letter that was emailed to the researcher, which also included the contact details (contact name, office address and phone number) of the organisation. These were later provided to the participants.

The third permission, 'informed consent' was gained from the research participants. The BPS (2014) advises that researchers must ensure that research participants consent freely to a study after being provided with adequate information relating to the research. This due process was adequately followed by the current researcher. Once identified as a suitable participant, each of the participants was given the PIS (see Appendix 2) that detailed all they needed to know about the research.

After indicating interest to participate in the study having gone through the PIS, each of them was given the consent form (see Appendix 3) to sign before the interview commenced. Upon the completion of the consent form, the interview began. The interview took place in one of the office rooms at the CRARN Centre. The researcher took extra measures considering the sensitive nature of the subject; he stressed to the participants the importance of requesting a temporary suspension of the interview should they feel stressed due to the nature of the incidents being described. This also fulfilled the BPS's (2014) guidelines on minimising psychological distress and anxiety during research. The researcher was vigilant to look for any visible signs of stress or emotional breakdown in the participants throughout the interview. Interestingly, all the participants narrated their experiences excitedly. This might be connected to the passion these participants have in creating awareness of this social problem as active NGO staff members. The participants were debriefed after the interview and entertained with a light refreshment.

4.7. Communicative validation

Several steps were taken by the researcher to ensure the validity of the final accounts provided in this thesis. Since it is assumed that reality in the qualitative research paradigm is socially constructed and cannot exist independently of the participants' perception (Creswell and Miller, 2000), the researcher ensured to get the participants involved in validating their accounts. One of the suggested methods is 'communicative validation' which is also known as respondent validation or member checking (Flick, 2014). Within this method, the researcher is expected to get the participants or the actors in the study involved a little further (that is, after the fieldwork) in order for them to ensure that what the researcher reported are true accounts of their statements (Ibid).

As part of communicative validation, the researcher contacted four of the participants after transcription. Some terms seemed unclear to the researcher because they were native terms or names of towns or cities, which the researcher was not familiar with while others seemed confusing because pronouns were used, making it different to understand the actual nouns they referred to. Most of the transcriptions were done in Akwa Ibom (the location of the fieldwork) and this made it easier for the researcher to meet the participants at the CRARN office for the validation. Three participants were met for this purpose. The researcher pronounced these terms to the participant who then wrote them down for the researcher, using the correct spellings. For the pronouns, he read the transcripts in part to enable the participants to grasp them and to say whether they referred to victims or perpetrators.

4.8. Data analysis

Analysis of current data was done by means of thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is defined as 'a method for identifying and analysing patterns in qualitative data' (Clarke and Braun, 2013, p.120). In a thematic analysis, the data set is searched for co-occurring patterns of meaning or issues that are of interest to the researcher (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It reveals crucial themes in the data at different levels (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Thematic analysis is not attached to any particular theoretical frameworks like other analytic methods, such as conversation analysis, narrative analysis, discourse analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) or interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Javadi and Zerea, 2016). It is also not wedded to any particular epistemological approaches, but compatible with a variety of them, such as the constructionist, contextualist or essentialist paradigms (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In other words, thematic analysis enjoys what Braun and Clarke (2006) term 'theoretical freedom'.

Thematic analysis was adopted in this current thesis for a variety of reasons. This analytic approach is particularly useful for analysing qualitative datasets (Nowell et al., 2017) from multiple sources (Clarke and Braun, 2013). It is useful for analysing different types of data – from one-on-one interviews to focus group interviews and secondary data collected from different sources (Clarke and Braun, 2013). The current thesis drew on different sources of data (interviews, case files, reports by NGOs and media), therefore, required a flexible method capable of doing 'justice' to all the data from multiple sources.

Thematic analysis requires what is known as 'coding' (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Sutton and Austin, 2015). This refers to 'the identification of topics, issues, similarities, and differences that are revealed through the participants' narratives and interpreted by the researcher' (Sutton

and Austin, 2015, p.228). The researcher needs to go through the dataset repeatedly in order to be able to produce the coded extracts of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Coding can be done by hand notes on the transcript or with software (Sutton and Austin, 2015; Javadi and Zerea, 2016). Notes can also be made on the margins of papers with different colours or placing/pasting cards on them.

The suggested coding process above was followed in the current analysis. The researcher started by searching the data for patterns after transcription. The Microsoft Office's 'track changes' tool was used to search and identify codes in the data. He first searched for co-occurring responses or meanings and then highlighted them and used the 'comment' tool to give the highlighted passages names that suggested the meanings in the data broadly. These names appeared on the right-hand margin of the document. However, the researcher was able to identify some patterns towards the end of the transcripts that did not fit the initially-classified ones and then had to create a space for these newly-identified patterns.

Theming is another important process of thematic analysis. Theming is defined as 'the drawing together of codes from one or more transcripts to present the findings of qualitative research in a coherent and meaningful way' (Sutton and Austin, 2015, p.229). This process begins after collating and coding have been completed, leaving the researcher with a variety of codes identified from the data (Nowell et al., 2017).

As noted by Javadi and Zerea (2016), the overlap is not uncommon in themes initially developed by the analyst. They suggest merging such overlapping themes. This was the case in the current thesis; the researcher was able to identify a number of themes that seemed similar after going through the themes at the initial stage and he was able to prevent repetitions by merging those themes together. He split the classified patterns in the data into two-level themes (i) principal themes; (ii) and subordinate themes widely referred to as 'subtheme' in the analysis chapters. The principal themes capture broader meanings in the data while the subordinate themes present these meanings at a more descriptive level. The principal themes stand as the headings of all the chapters (chapters 5-9) involving data analysis and discussion.

4.9. Reflexivity

Reflexivity involves reflecting on 'the social processes that impinge upon and influence data' requiring that the researcher reflects on them critically with respect to their effects on the data (Brewer, 2000, p.127). Among the factors known to affect research data are the sensitivity of

the phenomenon being studied, the location of the fieldwork, and the power imbalance existing between the researcher and his/her research participants (Ibid.). Brewer (2000) then suggests that researchers reflect on their data critically considering the above factors. The current researcher took a critical attitude towards his data in line with this suggestion.

The issue of power balance seemed more complex in this type of fieldwork considering the multiple 'statuses', which the researcher believed that he had and what these could mean in his native country of Nigeria. Firstly, he constantly had it in mind that he lives in the UK – a particular status, which average Nigerians consider a privilege. Secondly, by presenting himself as a researcher, he was likely to be seen as someone in a position of authority, thus, in the know. These two combinations would have an enormous influence on the research data, if not well guarded. For example, the participants could be liable to impression management, saying what they thought the researcher might want to hear thereby avoiding certain events they might consider too barbaric to disclose to the researcher. Similarly, they might withhold certain information in order to save the researcher from supposed traumas as they might think that the researcher was not used to such harrowing tales.

With these potential biases, the researcher ensured to limit their potential effects on his data. Days before the interviews, the researcher visited the CRARN office and tried to have informal conversations with as many staff members as possible, speaking to them in the local dialect (Pidgin English). Initially, the researcher identified a power imbalance in the form of being over-respected by the participants who would often use the word 'sir' or 'oga' (an informal title used to address a person considered as a superior) each time they addressed him. He also discovered that they were in the habit of bowing their heads whilst shaking hands with him, which is a sign of respect.

Although he could not stop the participants from doing the above, his attempt to relate to them very informally, including the use of jokes to get them laughing seemed to have worked as he noticed a big change in how the participants related to him between his first visit and follow-up visits. This forms part of rapport building suggested for field researchers to facilitate immersion (Emerson et al., 1995) required to gain 'insight into the behaviors, values, emotions, and mental states' of the group being studied (Krane and Baird, 2005, p.87). The researcher deliberately chose to dress casually, putting on shorts, polo-shirts and sandals throughout his visits in order not to appear like a certain middleclass professional, which he thought would have made the participants over-vigilant. With these tactics, the current researcher believed

that he effectively reduced the power imbalance and allowed the participants to speak to him freely and to tell him all they knew as they would normally tell a friend.

Oakley (2003) had earlier stressed the need for interviewers to stay neutral to participants' responses by pretending as if they do not have any opinions on the subject being discussed in order to allow the research participants to narrate freely all they know about the subject. Having already designed the interview questions in a non-leading format, the researcher also ensured never to use any prompts likely to suggest his opinions or beliefs on the matter. During the interviews, the researcher was fond of nodding his head or saying 'okay' as a way of indicating to the participants that he heard and understood what they said, but he was careful never to say anything or use body language in ways likely to suggest to the participants that he felt excited with their expressions. This was to prevent the participants from exaggerating their experiences in order to please or entertain the researcher. By staying neutral to their narratives, the researcher believed that he maintained a decorum at a level necessary to allow the participants to describe the events as they observed them, rather than to please the researcher.

4.10. Conclusion

This chapter has detailed the research design and methods adopted in this current study. It has justified the adoption of the qualitative research paradigm and the interpretivist approach adopted in this thesis on the basis that they enabled the researcher to explore the events in depth and to situate them to the historical and sociocultural contexts of the regions where they occur. The primary and secondary sources of data used in this study have been described and their benefits and challenges also highlighted. This chapter has detailed how ethical issues were addressed as well as how access to the participants and data were managed. The validation method of data and the researcher's position have been reflected on.

Chapter Five

Findings

5.1. Movies

The term 'movies' stands as the first principal theme representing the findings from the current data. This theme was developed due to the participants' words on how indigenous movies produced in Nigeria depicting children as witches contribute to the spread of the belief that children could be witches as perceived by aid workers. Different movies were named by the participants but a particular movie titled *End of the Wicked* was presented as the major one. This movie has been previously described by Agazue (2015) as an evangelical tool produced and marketed by a powerful Nigerian female evangelist, Helen Ukpabio who is globally renowned for promoting child witch hunt in Africa and beyond. Her adherents are referred to this movie to get an idea of the modus operandi of child witches (Ibid.). Coincidentally, many research participants presented this movie as one of the major factors that contribute to the child witch hunt in the area. Their accounts were analysed under two subthemes in this chapter

5.1.1. Movies promote witch hunt

The participants emphasised that home movies are very vital in the persecution of children as witches. The *End of the Wicked* movie was emphasised by different participants as being responsible for introducing the idea that children could be witches like adults who used to be the only suspects in the area:

> Number one, there is a popular movie called *End of the Wicked*. Let me say, for example, during the ancient time, adults were being accused of witches and wizards but it was on adults in this our particular state in Akwa Ibom. ... So it was in 1990s that the whole thing changed and why it changed was that there was a popular movie out in the market. It is *End of the Wicked*. By then, before people didn't talk anything about a child witch at all. So when that movie came out, it was one of the most powerful movies by then from Helen Ukpabio. Then everybody in the society wants to watch that movie (Atanong).

The last sentence of Atanong's descriptions above suggests that this movie is very popular in the region even though it is not believable that 'everybody' wanted to watch the movie as he

claimed. He further explained that the producer is an influential preacher whose movie is also in line with her evangelical work:

> Helen Ukpabio was the leader of the Liberty Church by then and she was a prophetess by then [she still holds these positions presently] and this film was coming from the Liberty Gospel Ministry, so everybody was too keen to watch and she has been delivering people after that movie [i.e., conducting exorcisms] (Atanong).

Gloria believed that the movie impacts on both families and the society at large:

> Influence by one of the Nigerian outstanding witchcraft movie *End of the Wicked.* It has influence on the socioeconomic life of the family and society at large by Helen Ukpabio (Gloria).

However, Atanong acknowledged that *End of the Wicked* movie is only one of the several movies in the market. He also pointed out how prophets and prophetesses refer to those materials to encourage child witch hunt:

> Not even that *End of the Wicked* movie alone. There are tons of homemade videos in Akwa Ibom and others, very, very popular films that portray very bad image of children. They almost promote this belief in witchcraft. Some of them are even stronger than the *End of the Wicked*. You see them portraying children in different ways, showing children's behaviours, how they can attack their parents, all this and that, how they're agents of Satan. The worst of it all is movie called *School Children* like that. You see if you watch some of these movies, very, very barbaric and the worst of it all, some of the local music, these prophets they will point out these things and tell you 'don't allow the witch to live' (Atanong).

The use of the phrase in parenthesis above, which is found in Exodus (22:18) has a long history in witch hunt connected to Christendom. It was commonly used to justify witch hunt in early modern Europe (Goodare, 2016), British America (Rosen, 2017) and contemporary Africa (Adu-Gyamfi, 2016). The role of this biblical verse in the current child witch hunt has also been identified. Cookey (2019) found that it is widely used by men and women who manage exorcistic churches.

Reuben's words below seem to suggest that witchcraft superstition had existed in the region like Atanong previously stated (*during the ancient time, adults were being accused*) but the *End of the Wicked* movie revives it and also suggests to the natives that children could be witches too:

> So that [movie] really helped to bring up and really strengthen the people's belief in witchcraft. I know it's a usual belief that was there, but shortly after that movie really came up, the issue of children being into witchcraft was so much in emphasis (Reuben).

Christy also agreed that the *End of the Wicked* movie introduced this social problem in the area around the same time previously identified by Atanong:

> These actually started early 1999 to 2000 when most of the mothers were misled and also watch most film which was labelling the children as the witch. ... (Christy).

Using the Chinese 'Kung Fu' film which was popular in the region during the 1980s as a case illustration, Anthony laid emphasis on the *End of the Wicked* movie as *the root cause* of the abuse of children in the area:

> *End of the Wicked* film, that film actually contributed to, in short, it was the root cause for these things. During that early 80s when we watched karat [Kung Fu] film and doing that kind of things, almost the whole place, it was just like we're all just doing karat like ordinary thing. ... I just give you an example of how the thing gained ground. So just what the film [*End of the Wicked* movie] become here (Anthony).

Reuben provided a similar account on how the *End of the Wicked* movie introduced this problem and how community members would always discuss children's status as witches and the nature of havoc they could wreak in the society after watching this movie:

> ... you know most of the home movies that we watch show a lot of witchcraft issues and people really believe them. ... There's a particular film *End of the Wicked*, all those films, I think, what we really observed in 1999, 2000 when this child witch started to come up. We know that that film was a household name in all the households in this part of the world. That film, it's very popular then, everybody is talking about children being witch, that would be taking their parents to the

> witchcraft world and torturing their parents and all that kind of thing and that was what the film depicted (Reuben).

The participants' accounts of the emergence of the *End of the Wicked* movie match the date previously reported about other African countries such as the DRC (Save the Children, 2005) and Malawi (van der Meer, 2013) where empirical investigations traced it to the 1990s. The current research, therefore, validates this date with respect to Nigeria. These reports consistently suggest that the child witch phenomenon in its current conceptualisation is new unlike the historical view of witchcraft in the continent.

The role of movies in spreading the belief in witchcraft in contemporary Africa has been previously documented and connected to Pentecostal and Charismatic movements in the continent (Agazue, 2015; Geschiere, 2020). Many Nigerian movies are produced by Pentecostal churches (Siebers, 2008; Ukah, 2003) and their main theme is usually how good and evil forces fight each other. The movies often present the Christian God as the source of every good, while the traditional African gods and their agents are direct opposite (Agazue, 2015). This is similar to how Christianity presented the Christian God was 'the only true god' while denigrating deities as fallacious in early modern Europe (1450–1750) (Zwissler, 2018a).

Videos emerging from Ghana since the 1980s, which are now complemented by the popular Nigerian Nollywood movies 'puts the fight against witchcraft center stage' (Geschiere, 2020). The 'weird transformations' of the witches, their nightly meetings and 'gruesome attacks' are depicted in these videos in a scary fashion (Geschiere, 2020). This is the case with the *End of the Wicked* movie but with a focus on children. In these movies, all mischievous spirits are linked to the traditional gods, while pastors and evangelists are presented as having the full mandate to invoke the power of the Christian God to destroy all the works of the traditional gods and their agents (Agazue, 2015). This is also the case with many Ghanaian movies (Siebers, 2008). The reasons the natives who viewed these movies might take them as true depictions of the evil acts purportedly committed by witches will be explained under the next subtheme.

5.1.2. Fiction treated as real

Participants narrated their observations regarding how the series of movies on child witches, were taken as real events by viewers who fail to take into account that these are based on the imaginations of movie actors/actresses:

> People in the village, they believe, when they watch it, they believe that it is true, not knowing that it is acting (Beatrice).
>
> ... they believe like that movie, just a movie ... it is not a documentary, it was a movie just to showcase but our people don't take it that way, they take it as it is real, that's the biggest effect it has in the society (Atanong).
>
> ... somebody could watch a movie and will just pick it as it's something that has really happened. You see somebody changing to cat and they say ah, it's a witch. ... There's no way you can convince somebody that a child cannot do this ... you can hardly convince somebody (Reuben).
>
> ... because people don't see these things as fiction, they just see it as real act. People see it as these things are real, forgetting it's just acting and these people [i.e., movie producers] are just making their money (Anthony).

The influences of the media in this social problem can be partly explained by media theories. Media is identified as one of the apparatuses that create and spread ideologies as well as transforming them in modern societies (Jones, 2011). Media is important in keeping the general public informed of any developments in the society, particularly in the areas where the masses usually do not come in direct contact with those events (Happer and Philo, 2013). Television, for example, enables the sharing of many messages and images across histories and its influence in this respect has continued to increase for decades and the delivery system too has also diversified (e.g., cassette, satellite and cable) over the decades (Gerbner et al., 1986). There are more recent delivery systems which Gerbner et al. (1986) did not acknowledge probably because they did not exist or that they were not popular during the time of their publication and these are video compact disc, digital video disc (also called digital versatile disc), digital multimedia container files, YouTube and other internet sources. It is also worth mentioning the electronic devices through which some of these media formats are viewed, such as smart televisions, laptops, tablets and smartphones.

Gerbner et al. (1986, p.18) liken television to religion in the sense that both play similar social functions in a continually repetitive fashion, creating myths, relationships, ideologies, facts and many more 'which serve to define the world and legitimize the social order'. This observation has been more recently validated by Jones (2011). This is partly the case with the child witch problems. It is the 'myth' that children are spiritually possessed and capable of harming others

that is spread by home movies watched by the natives on televisions and other devices that legitimise the abuse of children. The influence of the media in these incidents might not be so surprising considering the evidence that the media influence its audience in negative ways as much as it influences them in positive ways (Happer and Philo, 2013).

Whilst discussing the negative influences of media, Happer and Philo (2013) are explicit about how the media fails to provide sufficient information or construct information in a way that could lead to misinformation on a particular issue. Such misinformation might have played a role in the child witch-related incidents when the movie producers who are also pastors expecting incomes from their movies carefully construct the actions in their movies in ways they expect their audience to accept them alongside their sermons on witchcraft.

Mildnerová (2016) observed how the mass media in general (press, radio and television) play a vital role in contemporary witch hunt in Lusaka (Zambia) where drammatised witchcraft cases spread so quickly and generate public discussions and fear of the witches. This stands as one of the ways in which the media creates ideologies and myths about witchcraft in contemporary Africa.

Cookey (2019, p.4) recently found that the *End of the Wicked* movie and other home videos 'are believed to be true realities of what is going on in many homes in Nigeria'. The home movies, particularly Ukpabio's movie 'have created a lot of speculations that have resulted in unprecedented suspicion of children, especially those taken for servants or house boys and girls' (Ibid., p.4). It might seem surprising that many adults would treat fiction as real events. A possible explanation for the behaviours of these adults is based on the observation that these particular movies are not presented to the public in the same way other movies on supernatural events are presented. The reactions to these fictions can be attributed to 'who' present them and 'how' they are presented. The *End of the Wicked* movie is an evangelical tool used by pastors and evangelists to visually demonstrate to their ardent followers how child witches operate between the physical world and the occultic world (see Agazue, 2015; Cookey, 2019).

Movie characters are fictional (Moss, 2009; Warren and Thomas, 2010), which should ordinarily be taken as sources of entertainment. Witches, demons and vampires are designed to create horror, including killing people for purposes of entertainment (Moss, 2009). However, movies also show events with 'stark realism', such as anti-war groups aiming to make a statement against the war (Rapf, 2000, p.81). While this is noted, the *End of the Wicked, School Children* and other homemade movies taken as representing reality surrounding the

child witches are clearly not so considering that none of the producers have been to witchcraft world to be able to observe what takes place therein. Therefore, they have no empirical evidence to represent the reality in such invisible world.

The images presented by the *End of the Wicked* movie are reinforced with sermons (Agazue, 2015). Atanong's observation that Helen Ukpabio not only produced the *End of the Wicked* movie but went about *delivering people after that movie* is supported by Agazue's (2015) observation that Ukpabio's movie closely aligns with her evangelical messages in real life. For example, Ukpabio's prayer points in one of the crusades she scheduled abroad in 2012 as published by the Humanist International (2012), was *12 days of battling with the spirit for freedom.* The following question was included in the poster designed to attract potential adherents:

> Are you in bondage—Having Bad dreams—Under witchcraft attack or oppression—possessed by mermaid spirit or other evil spirits—Untimely deaths in family—Barren and in frequent miscarriages—under health torture—Lack of promotion with slow progress—Unsuccessful life with disappointment—Financial impotency with difficulties—Facing victimization and lack of promotion—Stagnated life with failures—Chronic and incurable diseases? (Humanist International, 2012; hyphens in the original).

Another event was also scheduled for November 11 to November 17, 2013 by Ukpabio, titled *Ember Months Special Edition 2013 – Witches on the run* published on Twitter on November 11, 2013 (@libertygospel1) where she also asked similar questions:

> Is your family sold out to witches? Are you oppressed or tormented by the witches? Are you a victim/prey/slave/servant in witchcraft coven? Are you a witch or wizard?

Then, Ukpabio gave her potential clients an assurance as follows: *There is a special deliverance for the possessed and the oppressed*. One needs to consider the impacts of these claims and assurances on the general public in a deeply religious country (Nigeria) termed the 'modern Israel' (e.g., Mustapha, 2016) where multiple religious houses can be found within a few hundred yards to each other in many urban towns and cities (Agazue, 2015; Mustapha, 2016). The followers of certain churches, mostly the Pentecostal ones regard their pastors as

communicating with God directly, therefore, unable to discern the claims made by these pastors (Agazue, 2015; 2016).

In addition to the belief that pastors communicate with God, the authoritative positions of these religious leaders would normally make it easy for their obedient adherents to take their words seriously. In his study of witchcraft accusations in Malawi, van Der Meer (2013, p.132) identified the 'sense of power' possessed by the accuser as a source of the successful accusation. Although van Der Meer (2013) does not link this power to religious leaders, this psychological factor seems relevant to understanding how religious leaders are successful in influencing people that child witches exist as well as understanding why parents often brought their children to the religious leaders for confirmation following initial suspicions.

Jones (2011) observed how the media entertains its audiences by exacerbating 'religion of polarity', which reflects back to them in the form of separation, idolisation, hatred and killing. This idea can be used to explain the child witch phenomenon both on the part of the perpetrators and the victims. The religious leaders who use the home movies to support their evangelism are often 'idolised' by their adherents and this could be why the latter hardly question the claims and instructions by the former. The contents of their movies as well as the sermons used to emphasise the acclaimed realities of the movie scenes contribute to parents or members of the community 'separating' themselves from the children identified as witches. Consequently, 'hatred' and 'killing' follow.

While Anthony believed that actors and actresses are *just making their money* with the movies, certain movies not only generate money but serve as divine inspiration by powerful evangelists whom the natives see as doing the work of God. The problems caused by the homemade movies in households extend to schools when teachers started changing their behaviours towards their pupils due to these movies. In Nigeria, the flogging of pupils by teachers (disciplinary measure) is commonplace (e.g., see Nakpodia, 2012; Nwosu et al., 2017). Reuben observed that following the release of the *End of the Wicked* movie, school teachers became afraid to discipline children in this way due to fear that the witches among them might retaliate spiritually:

> It's [*End of the Wicked* movie] depicting children, what children can do ... at certain time in point we did suspect that even in some schools, some teachers were even afraid of beating up some children that if they go and beat a child and that the child is a witch, he can discipline you in the witchcraft world (Reuben).

The fear of child witches is a serious source of panic not limited to teachers. It is this fear that often forces parents to seek the perceived 'spiritual powers' of religious leaders before they could deal with their children once suspected of being a witch as will be demonstrated in the next chapters. It can be argued that teachers have neither sufficient right nor time to take pupils to religious leaders to safeguard themselves against the perceived spiritual retaliation. Thus, they might have felt that they could easily avoid this problem by not flogging the children in the first place.

Nigerian children attend schools with packed lunches from home and happily share them with their school friends. However, the belief that some of these children are witches led to teachers banning children from attending school with such packed lunches. As narrated by Atanong, the belief that children are witches is widely embraced by school authorities and discussed even in Parents-Teachers Association' (PTA) meetings where new rules were stipulated:

> Even they warn them [children's parents] like last month, they say when your children are coming to school, or even announced it in a PTA meeting nobody should allow the child to come with biscuits to school or water or anything. You see the effect of that [movie] still happens now (Atanong).

Atanong also described a case of *two school children from this area who were stopped from going to school by the village people after they were accused* for fear of initiating other pupils. Part of the issues connected to the abuse of a Nigerian boy whose case is presented in case file 14 (CF14) was a prophecy by a pastor that the boy was initiated into a witch cult by his school friend. Similarly, the Human Rights Watch (2006, p.50) reported that children accused of witchcraft in the DRC *may be pulled out of school*. However, it is not clear from the report whether these children were being pulled out for fear of initiating other pupils or as part of the punishment for being witches.

5.2. Conclusion

Home movies depicting children as witches contribute to the spread of the belief in child witches in Nigeria according to the aid workers. The movies come in different brands but the viewers take the moving images in them as true depictions of occultic events and their manifestations in real-life. The movies serve as a diagnostic tool for parents and carers who may raise an alarm about witchcraft possession after observing a child behaving in manners depicted in the movies. However, these movies do not act in isolation. They are used as

evangelical tools by pastors and evangelists as will be demonstrated in the next chapter, thus, the consumers of these movies fail to treat them like fiction as one would expect. Further, the idea that children could be witches is in line with the traditional lore on witchcraft in Africa (Riedel, 2012). It seems, therefore, that these movies and the preachers depicting children as witches simply reinforce what the people have often considered as a reality in their societies but with children as a new target.

Chapter Six

Findings

6.1. Religion

This chapter is concerned with how religion contributes to the labelling of children as witches and the abuses associated with it as perceived by aid workers and supported by the reports by NGOs and media. As noted in the previous chapter, religion is connected to the movies in the sense that the movies are evangelical tools used by pastors. Religion as the theme in this current chapter refers to the involvement of religious organisations and those representing them (e.g., pastors and spiritualists). These religious organisations are mostly Pentecostal and Spiritualist churches and in some cases, traditional African religions.

It is to be noted here that the traditional African religions are currently not too widespread in the affected areas due to the introduction of Christianity by European missionaries during the colonial era (Eze, 2008), including the introduction of Islam in many parts of Africa. In the same way, in which Christianity successfully 'remade local world-views' when it was established in early modern Europe (1450–1750) and convinced the natives to accept the Christian God as the only true God (Zwissler, 2018a), it has successfully done so in many parts of Africa. Thus, the indigenous African religions have less influence on the denunciation of children as witches as they do no longer attract many worshippers as they used to do in the past. Islam is not known to contribute to the child witch phenomenon. However, African Muslims, just like Christians, continue to believe in witchcraft and live in fear of witches (Adinkrah, 2017; Agazue, 2015).

Further, the Pentecostal and Spiritualist churches promoting this problem are only a selected few. Spiritualist churches are usually syncretic due to the ways in which they combine Christian practices with those of traditional African religions (Eze, 2008). Syncretism is commonplace in the DRC and has been found to be active in the abuses of children in the region (Human Rights Watch, 2006). The data on the roles played by these religious organisations are analysed under the subthemes below.

6.1.1. Commercialisation and proliferation of religious houses

The proliferation of religious houses in the regions where children are hunted as witches are exacerbated by competition among the leaders of religious organisations to earn money by

identifying children as witches and marketing exorcisms as the ultimate solution. Atanong talked about increasing number of churches in Akwa Ibom State (Nigeria) and how the competition they face in winning adherents promote this social problem:

> Like when I went to Ikot Abasi last two months, I saw a particular street, they were over eight churches but only two living homes in Ikot Abasi there. Look at the rate now ... and these churches, they're competing in one form or another and they have their different motives of making wealth, some by exorcising, some by telling the fortunes, some by looking at you and trying to prophesy what is your problem. So they have different diverse ways. ... (Atanong).

Edward observed that both men and women are active in this *business* in religion:

> Both men and women, they do it ... All these churches, every corner of the town, somebody will open a place where they do their business [managing church], they confuse people, that's the problem and many people are affected (Edward).

Reuben believed that prophets exploit women with their frequent sermons on witchcraft, which also prepare the minds of the women for the labelling of their children:

> Children are normally stigmatised as a result of false prophets from local churches who usually bring them and name them witches in front of their parents with the hope of extorting some money from their parents. They keep telling the parents to bring some resources for ritual purpose. They claim to use these resources to be making rituals in order to exorcise witches from the children (Reuben).

When asked about his views on the part played by religious organisations in the child witch branding, Reuben ranked them as the *greatest* contributors due to the money they earn from prophecies and exorcisms:

> Those [religious organisations] are the greatest, ... it's a commercial business, you sit down you look for people that have come with problems. When they say okay this child is a witch, ... if it's your child, they will say okay but they can solve the problem of witchcraft, they can remove witchcraft. Then they start to do their fetish practices on the child (Reuben).

However, Reuben acknowledged that this is not the case with all the churches. He observed that different church denominations exist in the region but labelling of children is done by the poorly-regulated ones:

> We don't have much Catholic churches here, churches we have here are mainly Qua Iboe Church. ... We have Apostolic Church, but most of the single churches that you see here are ministries or evangelicals and those kind of thing. Those are the ones that are owned by one individual. Those are the kind of churches that are very pronounced in the witchcraft issues (Reuben).

This was supported by Atanong who explained that even the Catholic churches that exist in the area no longer attract worshippers since they are not concerned with detecting witches and conducting exorcisms:

> Churches like Catholic, you'll hardly see people there. According to our culture here, they say that the church does not have power to detect witch, so you don't normally see people there. Then you see churches that have olive oils like that and cast demons, you'll see the huge numbers of people will be going there with cars and they will sleep over. ... (Reuben).

Atanong's observation that the natives of Akwa Ibom are no longer attracted to mainstream churches with the Catholic church in the area as his point of reference, can be explained by Onyinah's (2012) work in Ghana. Onyinah found that the majority of Pentecostal churches engage in exorcistic services because neglecting to do so would lead to loss of members to the many competitors who offer such services. He also found that the competition for this type of services lead to an increase in the proliferation of churches in Ghana, which also supports the findings of this current thesis that incomes from exorcisms are partly a driving factor for the current child witch hunt. However, it is to be acknowledged that the study by Onyinah is not focused on child witches but witches in general as well as other superstitious issues of concern, which Ghanaians consider exorcisms as a solution. His observations are more recently validated by Roxburgh (2016) who similarly found that witchcraft subjects are used by Ghanaian pastors to create fear and attract members as a result. He also observed that some of these adherents are excessively abused as witches. A similar observation has equally been reported about the DRC by Priest et al. (2020, p.5): 'In such a competitive religious market, churches whose leaders claim the knowledge and power needed for identifying and dealing with witches hold a special attraction for many'.

Whilst Catholic church uses the same bible containing the 'thou shalt not suffer a witch to live' (Exodus, 22:18) injunction, which is widely used by witch-hunting churches to justify abuses and murder, the leaders of Catholic church do not point at human beings as witches and are not known to engage in the witch hunt in contemporary Africa (Agazue, 2015). The leaders of the Catholic church, however, acknowledge the existence of witches as part of God's creation, but often condemn violence against the accused (Roxburgh, 2016). Agazue (2015) observed that this is generally the case with mainstream Christianity in contemporary Africa.

However, Agazue (2015) also observed that in some parts of Africa, some members of the Catholic church are becoming influenced by certain modi operandi of revivalist churches. He found that some associations within the Catholic church, particularly the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement (CCRM), claim to have the spiritual powers to identify witches and sorcerers in the community and offer exorcisms to those patronising them. This has equally been observed in the DRC more recently with respect to child witchcraft (see Priest et al., 2020). Agazue (2015) similarly reported how some members of the Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion (EFAC) within the Anglican church also behave in the like manner. He, however, cautions that the modi operandi of both the CCRM and the EFAC cannot be generalised as these are generally decided upon by the leaders of any particular parishes where they operate. He observed that the members of these organisations are sometimes frustrated by the parish priests of some particular churches who do not agree with their modi operandi, which had led to some of them establishing their own churches (often Pentecostalism) where they enjoy full freedom with their practices.

Reuben was of the view that making money was the major motivator for labelling children witches by pastors and spiritualists, particularly female pastors that are usually known as prophetesses, as reflected in his response when the current researcher probed him after he mentioned female pastors: *Do you think such women [pastors] can label their own kids?* He answered:

> It's not possible for them to label their own kids. You see some of those things, they're doing it to make money (Reuben).

However, there is evidence that some of these religious leaders also label their own children, further indicating that other factors might play a role. For example, a Nigerian prophetess, Bose Oluwole set her own daughter (9-year-old) ablaze after dousing her in kerosene in her attempt to exorcise her of witchcraft spirit (Vanguard, 2014). It is difficult, however, to

establish from the report whether this act was motivated by a genuine belief in witchcraft or other factors, such as mental illness.

Atanong talked about a pastor who could *see that a person is possessed by a witchcraft or even another person's child but he would tell you that you would carry him to another place for deliverance*, further suggesting that it is not all about money since those pastors are unlikely to benefit financially from such referrals. Atanong recalled the cases of parents whose children were denounced by pastors who referred them to other pastors regarded as *so powerful:*

> Some of the parents ... come back and say 'where can I deliver this child?'. They [pastors] can say there's a place in Ikot Ekpene, that man is so powerful. That's what they say – 'that man is so powerful!' Even one of our neighbour there, his child was delivered and the prophet collected over two hundred thousand Naira (Atanong).

Atanong explained in greater details the reasons for such referrals by pastors of small churches who do not feel confident that they are spiritually equipped for more serious 'jobs':

> ... a small church may even stigmatise a child of being witch. They believe that the church does not have the power to deliver the child, that witchcraft issue is very big, then will even mention that there's another person that's specialised in removing witchcraft then you carry the child to that particular place ... and they'll charge you three hundred thousand Naira or four hundred thousand Naira. Not even the church that stigmatised will charge for deliverance. In most cases, the people will direct you to certain spiritual homes somewhere that are so expert in delivering witchcraft (Atanong).

It is not clear, however, whether or not the pastors who claim that they could not exorcise after detection, would gain financially from the pastors who they refer the children's parents to. It is not known whether or not this is a kind of division of tasks and specialisation whereby some particular pastors focus on the purported detection while others specialise in exorcism. The participants in this current study might be unaware of such dealings and such information could come from the pastors or those close to them who were not interviewed in this current study. Further study is recommended to investigate this area.

However, the above pattern by Nigerian pastors has been recently documented by Nyika (2020) about Malawi. He describes the case of Apostle Nellie Chigamba who is popular for exorcising

child witches in the country. Nyika describes how this female cleric narrated the case of thirty child witches brought to her by their mothers for exorcisms at a certain period of time (Ibid.). Apostle Nellie reportedly admitted that exorcisms do not always work for two reasons 'either because the person is not willing or they have met formidable Satanic power at which point they recommend other more gifted ministers to the person' (Ibid., p.352). This suggests that this practice is not limited to Nigerian pastors. Nevertheless, this does not underplay the fact that this could be a division of tasks as previously suggested.

Media reports on this problem in different parts of Africa have consistently shown that proliferating religious houses and pastors' greed play a significant role in this social problem. BBC News (2010) reported how a witch-hunting Nigerian pastor was then arrested after demanding more than US$250 for each exorcism. A mother was reportedly charged US$270 by her prophet who denounced her 8-year-old daughter, Margaret Eyakang as a witch and exorcised her in Nigeria (Huff Post, 2009). Another woman who tried to saw off the top of her daughter's skull following her denunciation by a pastor was charged US$60 for exorcism (Huff Post, 2009).

In 2009, 13 Pentecostal churches and about 100 pastors of such churches were named in case files of a particular review involving child witch accusations in Nigeria (Huff Post, 2009). A similar report was also published about Angola where 11 fundamentalist churches 'were shut down because of reports of child exploitation' (The New York Times, 2007). Human Rights Watch (2006) counted approximately 2,000 churches performing exorcism ceremonies in Mbuji-Mayi (the DRC) alone with a greater number of churches doing the same in Kinshasa (the DRC). According to Save the Children's (2005, p.28) report: 'We have not come across a single church in which exorcisms and/or healing for witchcraft is free'.

Human Rights Watch (2006) observed that although money was not charged for some of the exorcism ceremonies, pastors encouraged parents to offer gifts or donations to their churches in exchange for exorcisms. Save the Children's (2005) report shows how exorcism became for the pastors 'a profit-making frenzy organised in response to parents' concerns' in the DRC (Ibid., p.28). The report also shows that hostage-taking of children by pastors when their parents were unable to pay for exorcism, was commonplace (Ibid.). After 11 fundamentalist churches were shut down due to maltreatment of children in Angola, committees were formed by villages to protect children and shortly after, authorities reported that 'the number of

children who are abused or living on the streets dropped drastically' (The New York Times, 2007).

6.1.2. Paying heed to prophecies

The aid workers who participated in the current study believed that the women who committed the offences discussed in this thesis were influenced by prophecies from pastors and other influential religious figures. This observation was also supported by many reports by NGOs and media. Reuben, for instance, observed that revivalist pastors are fond of targeting children and then convincing the children's parents that the children are possessed by the witchcraft spirit:

> ... you know when they go to these churches, you may be prophesied that this child is not normal he's possessed and not normal. ... You see like one thing, like personally, you will look at churches around here, the message that comes from the church is always brainwashing people towards something of that nature (Reuben).

Gloria talked about how women are influenced by pastors during religious events when children are linked to misfortunes in the family:

> Factors that promote such assault in connection with the belief in witchcraft are false prophecy by the prophets, prophetesses or soothsayers about a particular child. For instance, a prophet announcing a child of being a witch in his tarry [vigil] night meeting or counselling room and that she is responsible for the death of her father and every other misfortune in the family (Gloria).

Reuben delved into how frequent participation in religious activities and the adverse socioeconomic conditions of the church members make it easy for the adherents to be influenced by the pastors:

> In the churches, because people do believe in church more than any other thing ... coupled with the poor situation, everything is that people really are involved in going to church and these churches they're going, which kind of message do they have? The message still based on witchcraft, the message does not tell the person any alternative way the person can try to make ends to meet. The message is the aspect of what is blocking you and how to open a way that the witchcraft will die

> and this. ... That is the typical message people are having. So it is one of the greatest contributor to the belief (Reuben).

The idea that *people do believe in church more than any other thing* can be understood in line with the proliferation of churches on the streets of Africa (Smith, 2007; Agazue, 2015; 2016; Mustapha, 2016). These churches proliferate because they are being patronised by the likes of these women. It is also connected to the powerful positions occupied by these religious leaders in society (Adinkrah, 2017; Agazue, 2015; 2016). Their adherents often believe that they hear from God and often treat their words as a message from God (Agazue, 2015; 2016). Pastors carefully select biblical verses that enable them to achieve their commercial objectives (Abioje, 2004). There are biblical injunctions on prophecies and prophets, such as 'believe in God and his prophets in order to succeed' (2 Chronicles, 20:20). Such passages are exploited by pastors to designate themselves as prophets and convince their adherents that it is the former's duty to instruct while the latter is obliged to obey (Agazue, 2015; 2016). The psychology of the adherents is manipulated (Magbadelo, 2004) and they hardly ask questions as this could mean doubting the prophet or not having faith in the word of God (Agazue, 2015). This explains how influential pastors are in controlling the lives of these participants that they could obey their words to the point of committing the abuses described in this thesis.

Prophecies and soothsaying are normally linked to a myriad of problems faced by the women who end up being duped by these pastors:

> Most of the women are being influenced by fake pastors and prophets who claim to prophesy that a particular situation in your family is caused by your child and when they are back from church, they will send such child to the street (Christy).

> Most of these things come from pastors, all these prophecies. They don't even know what happened to a child. They talk on their own and say send those children away. So it's a problem. Both men and women, they do it, they're the causes. ... they confuse people ... many people are affected (Edwards).

Edwards' observation that women are equally as active as men in the child witch hunt led the current researcher asking other participants questions relating to the role of women in these activities as religious leaders as follows: *What can you tell me about female pastors in terms of being common or not in these incidents?* The rest of the participants affirmed that female pastors play as much part as male pastors:

> Yes, yes! Women do it! They're the people, they're the people! Prophet is man, prophetess is a woman. All these prophetesses, that is their work, that is their work! So they do it. They prophesy! (Beatrice).

> Like the one now that Helen Ukpabio ... the woman evangelist. They're a lot, even they're not managing, they will help the spiritual aspect of that particular church which, with prophecies and all those things. So a lot of churches you see that the women are leading the whole thing, whether evangelical or spiritual aspect. ... They spread the prayer banner and all those kinds of things. Women are really majority of the people that make them up (Reuben).

> Forty five per cent of the churches here, women are the main leaders of it. Even if the man is the pastor, their wife is the next. If you meet the main pastor [a man], eventually you will see the wife of the pastor too. It's just the same thing. The prophetesses too do prophesy all these things. ... (Anthony).

While it is understood that Anthony did not conduct any survey to come up with the forty percent rate he mentioned other than his personal observations, such estimate is helpful to understand the extent of women's involvement in these activities.

Although this thesis is concerned with women as the religious adherents who may be influenced by their religious leaders due to the former's vulnerable position, the decision to gain insights into the involvement of female pastors or other women giving religious orders is deemed important. It indicates a historical shift that is noteworthy with respect to both religion and witch hunt. For example, members of the legal and ecclesiastical authorities who were men took part in the early modern European witch hunt assaulting and killing both men and women as witches (Briggs, 2002; Burns, 2003; Oster, 2004). Cases of witch-obsessed priests triggering witch hunts in early modern Europe were commonplace and these were all men (Burns, 2003; Levack, 1987; Trevor-Roper, 1969). In instances where women took part in the witch hunt, their roles were mainly in the form of gossips (Bever, 2008; Burns, 2003; Kartzow, 2009; Sharpe, 1991) and testimonies in courts (Burns, 2003). The current findings show that the situation has changed.

Presently, women have joined men as religious leaders in detecting witches and offering exorcisms or giving orders or suggestions to their adherents on how to deal with witchcraft issues in contemporary Africa. The case of Apostle Helen Ukpabio as a powerful international

figure from Nigeria has been previously described. Apostle Nellie Chigamba is similarly popular in Malawi and known to attract the attention of dozens of mothers who bring their children to her for exorcisms (e.g., see Nyika, 2020). The likes of Maman Gina can be found in DRC. This is a 'prophetess' who founded the Assemblée d'Israël- Ministère de Combat Contre la Sorcellerie and claims that the Holy Spirit has inspired her to embark on witch detection and exorcism of children and that she had delivered thousands of children they denounced as witches (Save the Children, 2005). Sivi Munzemba of Angola is infamous for her method of shaving the heads of abused children, isolating them from the society for weeks and inserting a 'poultice of plants' into the children's anuses (The New York Times, 2007). Pastors' wives are also instrumental in these religious activities as they work hard to support what can be regarded as their husbands' family business (Agazue, 2015), that is, individually-own churches concerned with witch hunt in the continent of Africa.

The findings about the role of women in this social problem is intriguing because it shows that the idea of using religious authority to exploit vulnerable women due to the issues faced by the latter as a result of the African patriarchal structures discussed in Chapter One is no longer limited to men. The accounts above suggest that women similarly use their religious authority to exploit their fellow women who respect them as being in the position of trust. This current position of women as religious leaders can be argued to be a reflection of the changes in the society resulting from feminist social movements. Critical feminists rejected the distinct roles assigned to public and private spheres and paved a way for women to demonstrate their skills in public spheres (e.g., Adler, 1975; Bartky, 1990; Canning, 2006; Goodal, 2005; Wood, 2013). Likewise, Christian women have also become present in public spheres, presently doing what was reserved for Christian men in the past.

Apart from the female pastors, almost all the participants in this current study were consistent in stating that resorting to religion to stigmatise and abuse children is more commonly done by women than men as reflected in their own words below:

> So the same instance, all those spiritualists ... it is normally engineered by the women, the women were the first who will carry these children to prophets, the husband may not even know about the church. ... (Atanong).

However, it is important to note here that although religious leaders are instrumental in these incidents, they do not always initiate them. Examples from the interviews below show that some women who had already suspected their children of being witches due to the prevailing

culture, deliberately took them to their religious leaders for confirmation. Atanong described two different cases involving mothers who had already determined that their children were witches and took them to pastors for confirmation or 'legitimisation' to convince them to abuse the children:

> ... like the case of James [real name changed], the mother took her to a church ... So when the mother came back and explained to the father that the father should use every means to eliminate James, the father uses petrol and pour on James and light up fire on James (Atanong).

> One woman, she took her child to the church ... so she took the child [after pastor's legitimisation] to the bridge outside and throw her to the sea. ... (Atanong).

Some particular women were identified as not only suspecting their children and taking them to churches, rather they also suggest to the pastors what the children's actual experiences are:

> These mothers take their children to church and start telling prophets like our family is not growing, my business is coming down and not booming as before and these children are not behaving the way I brought them up. Somehow, and the prophet now will now act based on what you've put in his mouth (Christy).

Atanong described how pastors themselves torture the children once the child's parent or guardian answers 'yes' to questions asked by the pastor:

> So when they get to the churches, they [prophets] will say, you have a problem in your family, this child is a witch. Some pastor will also torture the children in many ways, even chain them. ... (Atanong).

The above interview accounts are consistent with documentation in 13 of the children's case files (CF). In all these case files, all the children involved were abused following prophecies that the children were witches or confirmation of parent's suspicions. However, each particular case differed from others. A 13-year-old boy was labelled a witch by a pastor who put him in chains and starved him in the church (CF1). This was also similar to the case of a 9-year-old boy described in CF2. However, the latter and his sister whom the pastor also claimed to have been initiated into witchcraft were locked up at home and starved for a month in the name of fasting. Another boy (age missing in case file) whose stepmother took to a pastor for a witch

label was consequently abandoned to the street once the boy was confirmed as a witch by the pastor (CF3).

An 11-year-old girl was denounced a witch by a pastor after her aunt and grandmother took her to a church following their suspicion (CF4). Another girl was abandoned by her parents after their pastor confirmed her as a witch and warned the parents never to have anything to do with her (CF5). A boy (age unspecified) was labelled as a witch by a pastor and follow-up events led to the boy and his cousin (considered as his accomplice in witchcraft practices) being abandoned to the street (CF6).

A 15-year-old girl was banished after a family pastor confirmed her parents' suspicion that she was a witch (CF9). This case was similar to that of another girl (age unspecified) (CF10). The latter, however, had her right hand set ablaze by her mother before being thrown out of the house. A 12-year-old girl was labelled a witch by a prophetess who claimed that the girl was the cause of diabetes developed by her aunt (CF8). This case was complex and involved two different prophetesses from two unconnected churches. After the first prophetess that assigned the label, she felt that the girl was spiritually stronger than her, therefore, she referred the girl's parents to another prophetess she considered strong enough to offer exorcism. The second prophetess, however, also felt that she was not spiritually strong enough to resolve the problem and ordered the girl's parents to kill the girl, leading to a big nail being knocked into the girl's head in addition to being administered with a poison.

Two orphans involving a boy (aged 8) and a girl (age unspecified) were denounced as witches by a pastor after their aunt took them to the pastor leading to the aunt abandoning them to their grandmother who mobilised a mob to humiliate and beat them (CF12). Another girl (age unspecified) was tortured and abandoned to the street by her mother following a prophecy from the family's pastor (CF13). A boy (age unspecified) was similarly tortured and banished by his stepmother following a prophecy from the family's pastor (CF14). This was also the case with a girl (age unspecified) who not only was labelled a witch by the family's pastor following parents' suspicions but the pastor also beat the girl and threatened to kill her.

Although all the case files show that paying heed to pastors' words often regarded by the followers as 'prophecies' contributed to the abuses of the children, it is important to state that some of the labelling and consequent abuses had already started before pastors' involvements. Up to seven of the cases (see case files 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 14, 15) were initiated by parents whose concerns were reinforced by pastors who 'confirmed' to them that their children were witches.

In CF3, the stepmother involved was suggestive to the pastor, which supports Christy's words that *prophet … act based on what you've put in his mouth*. The stepmother in CF3 sounded as if she was already prepared to eliminate the child but simply seeking legitimisation from the pastor. This was also very similar to CF14 case. These two particular cases suggest that there could be more to these abuses than the belief that the children were witches. It could be that women who were determined to eliminate children might be taking advantage of the belief itself and pastors' legitimisation to actualise their plans.

In early modern Europe, witchcraft and magic became fashionable at the cultural level that the individuals exploiting them might not believe in them, yet used them to achieve their objectives (Briggs, 2002), such as the targeting of women out of fear of gynecocracy (Honegger, 1979; Levack, 1987; Zwissler, 2018b), morally-bankrupt persons (Levack, 2006), heretics (Briggs, 2002) and the social non-conformists (Briggs, 2002; Burns, 2003; Bailey, 2006; Trevor-Roper, 1969). In the like manner, contemporary African religious leaders use their influence to enable women to exploit the belief in witchcraft to eliminate unwanted children. With the ubiquity of churches in Africa and the increasing sermons on child witches and the havoc they purportedly wreak, abuse of the accused is legitimised.

Media reports on incidents around Africa also support the above interview accounts and documented accounts in case files. A10-year-old Nigerian Mary Sudnad was fed with poisonous fruits and boiling water poured on her head by her mother, following the girl's denunciation by a pastor (The Guardian, 2007). The mother of a 7-year-old Nigerian girl named Magrose attempted to bury her alive following a prophecy by a pastor that the girl was a witch (Guardian, 2007). Similarly, a 12-year-old Nigerian boy named Udo was beaten and abandoned by his mother following a similar prophecy in Nigeria (Ibid.).

In August 2014, a 30-year-old Nigerian prophetess, Patience Amos Johnson attempted to kill an 11-year-old boy by setting him ablaze as part of an exorcism (Leadership, 2014). The boy's father and stepmother were involved in this plot. In May 2014, a Nigerian prophetess, Bose Oluwole set her 9-year-old daughter on fire after dousing her in kerosene in Lagos (Nigeria) as she tried to deliver her from witchcraft spirit. During a forensic interview, Oluwole offered the following explanation regarding her act:

> I was only obeying God's instruction. I had a vision while praying that my daughter is from the witchcraft world. When I prayed to God over it, I received an instruction

> through the Holy Spirit to burn my daughter's body in order to deliver her from the evil society (Vanguard, 2014).

Religious houses similarly play a role in child abuse in the DRC as reported by both NGOs and media. According to Save the Children's (2005) report, a mother visited a prophet to find out why her daughter living in Europe experienced a miscarriage and on meeting the pastor, she was prophesied to that a girl in the house was a witch. Another mother who visited her pastor seeking explanations regarding the deteriorating behaviour of her child had her child labelled by the pastor who admitted the child for an exorcism in his church (Ibid.).

As observed by Kevani Kanda (a reporter for the BBC who was labelled a witch as a child), services designed to detect child witches and to exorcise them 'were being held in hundreds of churches across Kinshasa' (the DRC) (BBC News, 2013). From the BBC video connected to this event, one could see dozens of children lined up by pastors from where they singled out particular children to be labelled witches (Ibid.). When Kevani asked one of the pastors 'Why have you specifically picked out these children out of all the children that lined up?' The pastor answered:

> These two children have bad works inside them. The Holy Spirit has revealed to him [the officiating pastor] that these kids have been possessed by witchcraft (BBC News, 2013).

When prompted by Kevani, the pastor clarified as follows:

> Others, they haven't eaten yet, but others like this one [referring to a girl singled out], she ate her mother. The spirit is like the wind, it is not something you can see (BBC News, 2013).

A similar report was equally presented by Angus Crawford for the BBC News (2012). Just like Kavani, Angus also travelled to the DRC and visited pastors' chapels to observe the situation. According to Angus:

> Pastor Tsimba let me in and showed me three children who he had diagnosed as having Kindoki [witchcraft].
>
> The youngest was probably six, the oldest no more than 12. They had been in the church for days, deprived of food and forced to work. Their parents were paying for the privilege.

(BBC News, 2012).

Two female members of the Namiyango Assemblies of God in Blantyre (Malawi) burned 2 children to death as part of an exorcism after a week-long prayer and fasting (Providentia, 2008). Kevani Kanda reported cases of murders of children in the DRC following witchcraft accusations (BBC News, 2013). Sivi Munzemba, a powerful female religious leader described her healing method as involving the insertion of 'poultice of plants' into the children's anuses, 'shaving their heads and sequestering them for two weeks in her house' (New York Times, 2007).

6.2. Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that religion, which had contributed to witch hunt in many parts of the world across histories (Bailey, 2006; Burns, 2003; Levack, 1987; 2006; Macfarlane, 1970; Roper, 2000; Walinski-Kiehl, 1996) is also a major factor in the current witch hunt of children in Africa. Witch-obsessed preachers create spiritual panics that contribute to humiliations and abuses. The current thesis validates previous reports with children as the targets. The role of sermons by these African pastors are in line with similar roles played by sermons by witch-obsessed priests in the witch hunt in early modern Europe (e.g., Burns, 2003; Goodare, 2016; Levack, 1987; Burns, 2003) as they enabled villagers to learn about demonic witches (Levack, 1987) and prepared the minds of the parishioners for hunts (Goodare, 2016). However, the data in this chapter also suggests that the victims are not always targeted due to the genuine belief in the existence of witchcraft, rather the belief itself is exploited by another group of women who wanted to eliminate the children. These women were able to achieve this goal with the help of religious leaders whom the people trust as capable of identifying witches and offering solutions to the problems of witchcraft. This will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter Nine.

Chapter Seven

Findings

7.1. Ignorance

This chapter is concerned with how 'ignorance' is perceived by aid workers as contributing to the labelling of children as witches and the abuses connected to this. The aid workers' perceptions about this are widely supported by reports by NGOs and media analysed under this chapter. The multiple accounts suggest that ignorance of psychological and medical conditions by female carers lead to the seeking of prophecies from religious leaders when children display certain psychological or medical symptoms. As previously demonstrated, not all the cases of stigmatisation and persecution are initiated by religious leaders, rather some carers are fond of approaching religious leaders for confirmation after suspecting a child. Mostly, the role of religious leaders under this theme is to confirm the women's suspicions already triggered by the presence of a psychological disorder, medical condition or a display of stubbornness, aberrant or destructive behaviour by the child. Occasionally, a child might not be taken to a religious leader at all, such as cases involving children talking in their sleep following nightmares, which the women are said to interpret as a self-confession for being a witch. In such cases, further confirmations are usually not needed from a religious leader. The data on these will be analysed under the two subthemes below.

7.1.1. Poor knowledge of medical and psychological conditions

The aid workers observed that poor knowledge of psychological disorders or medical conditions raise suspicions that usually trigger the abuse of the children suspected of being witches. Their perceptions were supported by the reports by NGOs and media. Atanong provided a very long narrative to the researcher regarding the role of worm infection in the labelling. The summary of the narrative is that parents and guardians find it difficult to understand how a child could excrete a living organism (i.e., worms). Based on a series of cases brought to the CRARN Centre, Atanong explained that parents immediately took actions (e.g., taking the child to a church, torturing the child or abandoning the child) once they noticed the worm being excreted. In fact, the CRARN team according to Atanong, started stocking deworming tablets, which they used to treat children known to have been infected and after that, the parents felt happy to reunite with their children:

> We even give them deworming tablet so the child will go and even expel worm and they [parents] will even come back and tell us that it's not easy, everything was out, that the whole witch was out. We've done that to over ten children, they're living happily now with their parents. They started to broadcast the whole thing they've not seen that type of organisation, they have power to cast out witches (Atanong).

Gloria observed that such poor knowledge leads to the women suspecting children and taking them to prophets for confirmation:

> In some cases, female maltreated and even murdered their children because of ignorance and misinformation. Most women are not aware of scientific and psychological explanation and solutions to problems, as such when misinformed by prophet or soothsayer or other persons, they act unwisely (Gloria).

Atanong, for example, listed several disorders that are commonplace in some of the children they come in contact with, which their parents or guardians usually link to witchcraft:

> Another instance that also causes them women to also perform that is when those children are passing through like autism, major problem ... psychological development ... sometime mental health or things like that they develop some certain type of, maybe during birth, one of the deformity, they say that it is the handwork of devil. So what they will do outright, they would just abandon that child to the street to die. ... The other reason also is stubborn children, there are children who are very stubborn. They steal. So because of these behaviours, many of their parents believe they possess the power of witchcraft. It is the causes of witchcraft that causes them to behave abnormally, to be stubborn, to cause crisis like that (Atanong).

Responses from two participants below suggest that nightmares and what could be regarded as posttraumatic stress disorders experienced by bereaved children could raise an alarm to their parents or guardians and in such cases, prophecy or soothsaying might not be relevant:

> Probably at a certain point in time, the process of the trauma which may be a child of eight years who lost the father, after people have given a lot of series of stories about the father's death, the child can wake up one day and start talking issues based on what he has been hearing and all that kind of thing. They say haa that child has

> confessed that he saw the grandfather, he's a witch. ... That one they don't really need to go to the church. ... (Reuben).
>
> If a child does something extraordinary, they will suspect that such child is a witch. Example, if a child is stubborn, or screams at night, the parent will take such child to the church for counselling and they will end up labelling them as witches. ... that child would be sleeping maybe turning himself to one side or the other, maybe talking, the parents would think maybe that child is a witch, that is why he is doing that. ... what they know is that maybe the child is possessed of a witchcraft spirit or so. They believe it when they see a child behaving like that at night, they will say hey this child is not normal, the child must have been initiated (Unifor).

Media accounts also support the above observations. Kevani Kanda, for example, stated that she was branded a witch at the age of 6 by a family member who brought her to the UK from the DRC due to her bed-wetting and sleepwalking behaviours (The Guardian, 2014). According to Kanda: *I walked from my room and I knocked the door and they said come in* but immediately she entered, she was told: *You're a witch, you've come to eat me and my child* (The Guardian, 2014). She was severely abused for about five years as a result of the suspicion that she was possessed by the witchcraft spirit (Ibid.).

The cases of ignorance above are consistent with historical events in a witch hunt. Witchcraft accusations are a means to explain developments or occurrences, which people could not find credible explanations for (de Blécourt and Davies, 2004; Bleek, 1976; Evans-Pritchard, 1976). The Malleus Maleficarum (Hammer of Witches) document linked mental illness and delusion to witchcraft in early modern Europe (Nguyen-Finn, 2018). Strange behaviours of old and poor people contributed to the witchcraft mentality in early modern Europe (Barry, 2018). Presence of dementia created fear of old women both in early modern Europe (Burstein, 1949; Levack, 1987; Rowlands, 2001) and in contemporary Africa (Mkhonto and Hanssen, 2017). The current data support these historical events with the major difference being the 'age' of the current victims.

The link between ignorance of psychological and medical conditions and child witchcraft is neither new nor started in Africa. The Salem witch trials in 1962, for example, were about two girls (Betty Paris and Abigail Williams) who were having fits and were eventually linked to the devil due to their perceived strange behaviours as their fits got worse (Martin, 2005). The news of two more girls who also behaved strangely in Salem a month after the above episodes

also caused more serious panic (Ibid.). These girls behaved 'strangely' due to medical conditions, which members of their communities were unable to explain, thus, they were labelled and maltreated. The current study validates these historical events, showing that demonology is still used as an explanation for behaviours already explained scientifically in contemporary time by those who are still behind scientific explanations to such issues.

It is of note that some of the exemplary behaviours provided above by the current participants (e.g., 'screams at night') are diagnostic signs provided by religious leaders, such as Helen Ukpabio on how to identify children whom she claims are witches (see Agazue, 2015). This shows a connection between ignorance and religion (followership). Some of the signs are those depicted in home movies, which child carers draw on to determine that a certain child who behaves likewise is a witch (Agazue, 2015; Cookey, 2019). This again, shows how ignorance, religion and movies integrate to motivate abuses.

Reuben talked about how socially unacceptable behaviours observed in children by their mothers and female carers contribute to the labelling and abuses:

> Whenever they take them down to that place, you know a child that is, maybe who didn't live with you, who don't have your real background might bring up certain character, from that character, they say they should investigate and there's no way you'll go to a particular pastor or prophet and the child will not be labelled witch (Reuben).

It is common for children from poor families to work as maids or household servants for the more affluent ones in Nigeria (Agazue, 2015; Tambo, 2014). Further, trafficking of children from remote towns to big cities in the country for the said purpose is also commonplace (Ogwezzy, 2012). Thus, those children are commonly abused as 'outsiders' (Agazue, 2015) in addition to the fact that the families they live with might not understand how their adverse backgrounds or experiences might have shaped their supposedly abnormal behaviours. Cookey (2019) has observed that the contents of the home movies, particularly the *End of the Wicked,* are usually used by the families whom these maids and servants live with to identify them as witches.

Save the Children's (2005) report details how a series of behaviours, disorders and physical appearances were presented as a proof of children's witch status by both religious leaders and

members of the community in the DRC. The physical signs of witchcraft possession in the area include the following:

> Strange appearance, illhealth, thinness, too small for their age, pot-bellied stomach or a malnourished look, scabies on their head, dirtiness, red lips or eyes, deafness, ugliness, young body but old face, epilepsy (Save the Children, 2005, p.12).

Save the Children (2005) also reported the following as typical behaviours of child witches in the DRC based on the descriptions provided to them by religious leaders and members of the community:

> Steal, never look people in the eyes, transform themselves or their toys, do not sleep at night or sleep badly, eat a lot, practise sexual abandon, do not hear or do not listen to what is being said to them, have epileptic fits, wet the bed, defecate in their clothes, talk to themselves, sleepwalk, collect rubbish, wander, don't study, go out even when they are ill (Save the Children, 2005, p.12).

Some of the behaviours above from the secondary data about the DRC, mostly based on descriptions by religious leaders, are also in line with those presented by religious leaders in Nigeria (Agazue, 2015). These behaviours also feature in the home movies previously described (see Agazue, 2015; Cookey, 2019).

7.1.2. Misperception of difficult and destructive behaviours

Aberrant and stubborn behaviours, including dirty habits, are among the behaviours that raise suspicion of witchcraft possession. A participant described how laying a curse on parents could raise suspicions:

> Some of them may even sit and curse their parents. Some of them, the mother will beat them and he will say okay if you beat me again you will see what I will do you. The mother believes that for the child to say 'you will see what I will do you' is not physical. So the mother now will be afraid of the child (Atanong).

Among the behaviours that prompted witchcraft suspicions in early modern Europe were 'angry speeches' and 'formal curses' because they were thought to be efficacious during the era (Sharpe, 1991, p.186). Cases of those prosecuted or killed due to their angry speeches or the curses they laid on others are detailed in Chapter Two and they included Ruth Osborne (Reynoldson and Taylor, 1998), Mary Glover (Burns, 2003) and Gwen ferch Ellis (Winsham,

2016). The current findings suggest that these behaviours are still believed to be efficacious once associated with witches.

The display of stubborn behaviours by children is another cause of suspicion by parents as described below:

> ... this [suspicion] maybe as a result of strange behaviours of a child at home, that is, stubbornness, don't actually obey the family members especially the mother and he or she will be taken to places to find out what had happened to the child (Christy).

Christy referred to the case of destructive behaviour of certain boy to illustrate how such behaviour cause panics in parents who could not find any explanations other than those related to witchcraft:

> ... ehm Daniel [real name changed], that small boy they brought misbehaved ... like he would be using scissors to cut mattress in the home. He destroyed some things like that, that people believe that a normal child cannot behave this way without possessing some spirits in him. ... This one I'm talking about put a fire in the house, just lit matches in a mattress and there was a fire in the house and they said this boy must not be a normal person (Christy).

Some of the characteristics and behaviours described above by the current participants have been previously reported by Save the Children (2005) about child witches in the DRC, based on the descriptions provided to them by religious leaders and members of the community. Such observable characters believed to signal the presence of witchcraft include the following:

> Aggressive, untidy, disobedient, sad, mentally retarded, impolite, full of hatred, mysterious, disrespectful, quicktempered, unruly, liar, hypocrite, too nice, too wise, provocative, too open, courageous, jealous, too fearful, stubborn, incomprehensible, solitary, too clever, weak, naughty, violent, fearless, quiet, rude, mad, curious, incredulous, selfish, insensitive, lazy, inattentive, ruthless, wants to be superior, doesn't like visitors, creative and full of initiative, ungrateful (Save the Children, 2005, p.12).

A nursery schoolboy (age unspecified) was tortured and wounded with a machete before being sent to the street due to his dirty behaviour (CF7). This case, however, appeared like one of the cases motivated by inconvenience but a certain behaviour (i.e., dirtiness in this case)

believed by pastors to be a sign of witch possession was identified to convince the pastor to assign a witch label.

Some of the aforementioned behaviours were also identified in early modern Europe as what contributed to the witch hunt in the region and era. For example, those behaving in an unfriendly manner, 'unneighourly way' (Peters, 2002, p.234) and those whose neighbours felt unhappy with (Briggs, 2002), were identified as witches. These behaviours often triggered accusations by neighbours (Peters, 2002). Tweneboah (2020, p.89) is explicit that child witchcraft accusations in contemporary Africa 'have the function of scapegoating' because of its connection to tensions resulting from changes in children's attitudes and behaviours, which are against societal norms and expectations in the traditional African societies. The current findings support this. Parents who struggle to manage the difficult behaviours of their children exploit the extant belief to get relief.

Gloria explained that exhibiting the above behaviours is a gateway to torture with the intention to extract a confession, particularly in rural communities:

> Most rural areas in some part of Akwa Ibom State believed that any individual behaving abnormally should be tortured to attract confession. ... (Gloria).

Gloria also observed that once confessed or labelled by a religious leader, the child is likely to face death from community members:

> ... and when confessed or labelled as witch by prophets or juju priests should be tortured to death and sometimes quote the bible portion that says 'suffer not the witch to live' (Gloria).

The consequences of this biblical verse 'thou shalt not suffer a witch to live' (Exodus 22:18) have been previously discussed. It promoted witch hunt in both in early modern Europe (Goodare, 2016) and British America (Rosen, 2017) and also influence the current child witch hunt in Africa (Adu-Gyamfi, 2016; Cookey, 2019). The validity of this phrase in the current African witch hunt is connected to the deep level of religiosity in the continent. It is suggested that 'the criminal potential of witchcraft was completely dependent upon a belief in the spirit-world which had to be shared by victim' (Jackson, 1995, p.68). Thus, it is only in a society where demonic possession is accepted as a fact that one could be successfully accused (Ibid.). Witches were blamed for changing the weather in Renaissance Europe because the culture of the people made that belief and the persecution possible (Oster, 2004). In the like manner, the

deep sense of religiosity in contemporary African societies explains why this biblical phrase (Exodus 22:18) is a valid witch-hunting tool in the continent when people no longer take it seriously in Europe and North America.

7.2. Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how children with psychological and medical conditions (e.g., autism, epilepsy, posttraumatic stress disorders, sleepwalking, worm infection, etc.) are labelled as witches and abused due to ignorance of the causes of these conditions. The current data supports reports of previous events, such as how poor knowledge of similar conditions contributed to the witch hunt in Europe (Goodare, 2016) and British America (Rosen, 2017). However, the contemporary African hunt is different in the sense that many children are targeted unlike the historical events that focused on adults and extended to children only when the hunts got out of hand (Burns, 2003; Levack, 1987; Walinski-Kiehl, 1996) or when the hunters wanted to exterminate an entire family due to the belief that witchcraft practice is hereditary (Burns, 2003). The reference to demonology to explain psychological and medical conditions in children in this era can be argued to be a reflection of the poor level of education or lack of it entirely amongst adults who take care of these children in addition to the influences of religious leaders in their lives.

Chapter Eight

Findings

8.1. Adversity

The current chapter is concerned with how 'adversity' play a part in the labelling of children as witches and the abuse of those children. The aid workers narrated how adversity, that is, a myriad of unpleasant events experienced by parents or members of the community raise suspicions that a certain child could responsible for such events. These observations were also supported by the reports by NGOs and media under this theme. The typical problems faced by families or communities include serious ill-health and death. The presence of any of these problems in a family may trigger suspicions that there might be a witch (a child) punishing family members. This is connected to the previous themes in the sense that these suspicions have their root in the child witchcraft panic created by home 'movies' marketed by the agents of 'religion', which are accepted by their adherents due to 'ignorance'. The contributions of adversity to this problem are discussed under the subthemes below.

8.1.1. Serious illness in the family

Serious illnesses in families or communities are attributed to child witches as the natives could not come up with any credible explanations on how they find themselves in such unpleasant situations.

> There are some of these stupid mothers who say okay, you're now my problem maybe she has ill-health problems. ... You know people here, ... they don't go to hospital, they don't patronise these hospitals, rather they believe in witchcraft (Anthony).

Atanong observed that since the release of the *End of the Wicked* movie, some parents refuse to visit healthcare professionals when they fall ill as they already believe that a child around them is the cause of the condition. Thus, they would ask the child suggestive questions:

> Because of that [*End of the Wicked* movie] ... when people who normally have waist pain, they call their children and ask: 'Do you have dreams in the night?' and if they say 'yes', they ask: 'What do you do in the dream?' and he would say 'I fly aeroplane, I go this place. ...' When they explain things like that, then the parents

> don't take it anymore kindly. They will carry him now to the church, any spiritual church nearby. ... (Atanong).

These comments suggest that the movies somewhat promoted ignorance in the sense that parents deliberately refuse to seek scientific explanations for their problems as they feel that the movies had explained it all. This can also be said about sermons from pastors on how misfortunes are caused by witches. Children would be interrogated and sometimes beaten in order to extract a confession.

> ... those who have eye problem like blind people, they will call all the children in their home to explain and say 'tell me the truth' and when the children say they don't know anything, they will lay them, beat them severely wounded and they will like to confess whatever even it was an ordinary dream, they will just take it there (Atanong).

Documentations in two case files support the words of the above respondents. For example, a 12-year-old girl was suspected by her family members and was banished from the community after her aunt developed diabetes (CF8). Two orphans (male and female) were severely beaten and threatened with death by members of their community after a series of illnesses and deaths in the community were linked to them (CF12).

Reports have also shown that exorcism-marketing pastors have been exploiting the prevalent HIV/AIDS in the DRC to denounce more children. An example was provided below by the Human Rights Watch (2006) based on an interview with Pastor Kabuni Wa Lesa:

> Child sorcerers have the power to transmit any disease, including AIDS, to their family members. AIDS is a mysterious disease that is used as a weapon by those who practice witchcraft (Human Rights Watch, 2006, pp.56-57).

Reports about Angola are similar. A 13-year-old schoolgirl, Helena was severely tortured by her mother and elder sister after being accused of bewitching her two nieces:

> Last month Helena was accused by her parents of sickening two of her nieces with evil spells. In retaliation, the bewildered girl says, one of her small hands was burned on a red-hot stove. Her meagre possessions, including her clothes, were torched. She was choked. And finally, to destroy her reputation in the community,

she was beaten in front of a large crowd. Her mother and elder sisters administered these punishments (Chicago Tribune, 2004).

The situations described above can be explained by the scapegoating theory of witchcraft (Evans-Pritchard, 1976) discussed in Chapter Two. Sicknesses motivated witch hunt in early modern Europe (e.g., Burns, 2003; de Blécourt and Davies, 2004; Douglas, 1970; Macfarlane, 1970; Winsham, 2016) as well as Africa in the past decades (Brain, 1970; Evans-Pritchard, 1976) and in the contemporary times (Adinkrah, 2015; Agazue, 2015; Ally, 2009; Miguel, 2005) as the afflicted and/or their loved ones hunted for those they believed to be bewitching them. Some authorities in medieval Europe 'related almost every injury to a witch' (Macfarlane, 1970, p.88).

However, with the current level of medical advancement in this era, it cannot be claimed that these women do not understand the causes of sicknesses, which had no scientific explanations in the medieval era. Atanong was explicit on how the *End of the Wicked* movie motivates the problem *when people who normally have waist pain* would *call their children* to ask pertinent questions before taking them to *any spiritual church nearby.* Therefore, it seems that the movie and sermons on witchcraft deviate their attention from medical explanations and treatments.

8.1.2. Death in the family

Just like sickness, death in a family also raise suspicion that a certain child in the family might be punishing the family through witchcraft. Atanong illustrated below with case examples, how families and community members could team up to accuse a child following a death in the family, and would then abuse the child as a result:

> There is a case in this our centre here [CRARN Centre], these two children Rebecca and Charles [real names changed] ... since their mother died, they lived there with their grandmother in the village, their maternal grandmother. Somebody died within the family again, so the children were accused that they were involved in killing the person. They were also accused of being involved in their mother's death. So the family now after meeting in a community hall, so they picked the boy and dumped back to their parents' side [i.e., an orphan living at his grandmother's family was sent back to his parent's house after being accused]. The whole community now saw this and said ah they have taken another witch from another community to this one. So there's no way, either we kill the child or take him out

> of this community. So we [CRARN staff members] have no other choice than to rush in to save these two children and they're here now (Atanong).

Atanong explained that the idea that children kill family members is so commonplace that many families have developed the habit of suspecting children and asking them questions when someone dies in such families:

> ... following the death of any person in the family ... family members always conduct interviews with children. They will call children to interview them. Why do this person die? Have you seen them in the dream or have you gone to witchcraft world? By interviewing those children, some of them will say they saw when so, so or so person was tied with a rope in the witchcraft world. So by then those children will be brought to the family or community to mention other people in the community that they have seen in the witchcraft world. Such case has happened in this village, Ikot Afaha some few years ago with those children mentioning many people and they were brought to the village hall and they were interviewed, tied, beaten and some were even killed in neighbouring communities because of confession of children (Atanong).

Unifor's account, however, suggests that a death in the family does not always trigger accusations automatically, rather certain characters displayed by certain children could make them witch suspects, leading to them being interrogated following a death in the family:

> This is due to superstition. You know as we grow up with our families and mothers, children tend to exhibit certain characters, which their mothers or their guardians does not understand and based on these characters, perhaps somebody died and they just attribute to the fact that this child is a witch and that the dead person was caused by this child. If they end up labelling this child a witch, they will have no place again to accommodate this child in the family (Unifor).

Anthony attributed this belief to religious affiliation by the women and the frequent sermons on witchcraft by pastors who influence the women attending their churches, who end up looking for witches among their children following a death in the family:

> Pastors are also the cause because the reason is that when the parents go to church and the pastor keeps preaching about witchcraft, child witchcraft and so on, that the children are being possessed by witchcraft spirit and when the women came back

> from the church, they will now accuse the children for the death or anything in the community. ... (Anthony).

The above account is supported by other sources of data used in this thesis. A case file (CF11) documents the case of a child (age and sex unspecified) who was beaten and abandoned following her grandmother's death as the child was accused of causing the death through witchcraft. A 12-year-old Angolan boy, Saldanha David Gomes lived with his aunt who later started suspecting him following the death of her 3-year-old daughter (The New York Times, 2007). Saldanha was consequently starved by his aunt who also bound his hands and feet every evening as a punishment for killing her daughter. Similarly, the stepmother of a 6-year-old boy, Afonso Garc-Ma linked the death of his biological mother to the little boy and maltreated him as a result. In the DRC, a 12-year-old girl, Mabondeli was accused of being a witch by her aunt following the death of the girl's parents from a car crash: 'Because you have killed my sister you are a witch' (The Guardian, 2013).

The findings above are also explained by the scapegoating theory of witchcraft (Evans-Pritchard, 1976). Across histories and cultures, people were hunted as witches for unexplainable deaths. Cases of individuals convicted or killed in early modern Europe after being suspected of causing illnesses or deaths were numerous. Some examples are Gwen ferch Ellis who was tried and sentenced to death in Wales in 1594 following the death of Lewis ap John (Winsham, 2016); Ruth Osborne, who was killed by a mob in Hertfordshire in 1751 after a farmer and his cow fell ill mysteriously (Reynoldson and Taylor, 1998); and Elizabeth Jackson who was sentenced to prison in London in 1602 after Mary Glover fell ill (Burns, 2003). The current child witch hunt joins these historical cases motivated by misfortunes.

The scapegoating theory particularly explains the plights of children in countries ravaged by wars, such as the DRC and Angola where wars have produced many orphans, that is, children whose parents died as a result of wars. This is a case of witch hunt induced by social instability and socioeconomic problems, which has a long history and identified in the European witch hunt (e.g., Briggs, 2002). These orphans often live with their relatives who might not understand or accept that the deaths have scientific explanations, rather they seek explanations from religious leaders who draw on witchcraft demonology to explain them.

8.2. Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how adversity motivates child witch hunt as well as abuse. The scapegoating can be understood in the broader context of the ongoing socioeconomic problems faced by parents who struggle to make ends meet, particularly relatives taking care of orphans. Additionally, problems caused by family poverty and more importantly, wars in some of the affected areas also manifest in the form of this hunt. The wars make it difficult for parents to take care of their biological children adequately. Their economic problems become compounded when their relatives die or become seriously ill as a result of the war, leaving behind orphans who should be taken care of by the relatives of the deceased. As movies depicting children as witches spread in these communities in addition to pastors who convince families and members of the community that children are witches as depicted in movies, the women taking care of these children discover a loophole to reduce the childrearing burden. It is also possible that some of them may genuinely believe that the children are witches causing their problems.

Chapter Nine

Findings

9.1. Inconvenience

Aid workers' accounts, including the documented cases by NGOs and media consistently suggest that women deliberately label children witches in order to eliminate them for being financial burdens or a threat to happiness, freedom, wealth and inheritance. These are regarded as 'inconvenience' in this chapter. Among the women identified as doing this are stepmothers who might not actually believe that a stepchild is a witch but use the witch label as a socially acceptable way of removing the child from the family. Another set of women in this category are spinsters, divorcees and widows seeking husbands who believe that a potential husband might reject them for having a child. There are also prostitutes who could be said to have had children by mistake, therefore, trying to eliminate them to escape the responsibilities of childrearing. The last group consist of mothers who struggle with socioeconomic burdens of childrearing, thus, may seek explanations from pastors, which lead to their children being identified as witches.

9.1.1. Threat to inheritance

Children are stigmatised as witches because of their carers' fears that such children could partake in family inheritance. Orphans are also eliminated in order for the carer to acquire properties belonging to the child's parents. Stepmothers are repeatedly linked to this act:

> ... some stepmothers maltreated or in most cases stigmatised or even murdered their stepsons so that their sons will be the only heir of their fathers' wealth. ... you know that in this our area, the first son normally takes the father's property. So when the woman begets one or two sons, what the woman will do to secure place for his own sons is to want the child to be stigmatised, that is, the stepsons. She will take those stepsons to counselling [i.e., pastor's session] and come back to tell the husband that all the misfortune in the family, she has finally found out that prophet said that it was these children that live with us. So in that case, if the husband is not much enlightened, he would join in stigmatising these children (Gloria).

> The newly married wife doesn't want her own child to be in competition with another child of the man she is married. What do I mean by this? Supposing a man

> had a child and the man wanted to marry another woman and the new woman coming into the house know this man has a child, what the newly married wife will do is to devise a means to send these children out because she doesn't want her own children to be in competition with the child the man has already. ... she will devise a means. It's either she says the child has stolen my money and I cannot stay with this kind of a child in this house and it's either the man will find where to keep these children. All this is a game to make sure that ... her child is not in competition with any other person. If she has her own child, every property of the man she has married newly, will automatically be channelled to her own children. ... (Edward).

> If the man happens to get any male child, that child will inherit properties. So if the mother or if the woman, the mother of that child does not live or stay within that matrimony, then he now marries the second wife, certainly that gap will be there. It is time for her to easily look for the easiest way to get rid of the child (Anthony).

The emphasis on 'sons' above might suggest that the stepmothers target only sons. This emphasis led the researcher to probe one of the participants (Beatrice) with the following question: *So if that's the case [i.e., the culture of first son inheriting family wealth] then, maybe if the kid is a girl, maybe there won't be much problem?* Below is her response:

> Hahaha [laugh], it's also a problem ... they sometimes think that if this female child remains in this family, there's something called first daughter. There is a position where we fix a female, first female daughter. So she may want that very female to go out also for her own child to take her own position. ... They fight for that position in the family (Beatrice).

Save the Children's (2005, p.22) report had earlier identified 'material aspects' of witchcraft-related accusations made against children by family members in the DRC. The organisation found that orphans could be deliberately accused of witchcraft for the purposes of dispossessing the child of his/her parents' inheritance. Similarly, Human Rights Watch (2006, p.58) referred to an observation made by an official in the Division of Social Affairs in Kinshasa to describe how orphans whose parents died of AIDS were victims of witchcraft-related persecutions by their extended family members who were determined to acquire properties belonging to the orphans' parents. The report detailed with case examples how uncles and/or aunts divided or sold properties belonging to several orphans after their parents' death and instead of caring for these orphans, these relatives were in a haste to label those children as witches.

Beatrice explained below that since the belief in child witch is endemic, stepmothers do not necessarily seek the endorsement of a religious leader, rather they might try to convince their stepchild's father after labelling the child:

> Even a stepmother also, not even taking that child to a prophet or a prophetess, they, you know, they really say that child is a witch just for the sake that the father should send that child away from that family so that her own children will inherit the father's property just like that. Not even a prophecy, not even a prophetess saying that. From their [stepmothers] heart, they really do it ... so that the father will send that child away from the family for her own children to inherit the property (Beatrice).

Anthony referred to the case of a stepmother whose case was handled by CRARN to explain how stepmothers attempt to capitalise on certain bad behaviours in some children as evidence of their witch status:

> The mother is now married to another man. ... So in that case, the present wife [stepmother] is the main cause of the issue because this boy is somehow stubborn she now branded him, said he's possessed by a witchcraft spirit. ... Up to two or three years now, they have not seen that child within the family and other people in that family, they have not seen that boy. We now reported it to the police. … (Anthony).

Unifor was of the view that more serious issues in the family, such as delay in conception can be capitalised on by a stepmother to put pressure on her husband to make sure that her stepchild is removed from the family:

> ... there are situations whereby a man went and married a new wife and the new wife does not conceive on time. ... The man already has child and the woman in the house will now accuse the child of the man says 'I would have conceived but your children are witches' and finally stigmatise those children and this would end up either the man will choose to marry the wife and abandon the children or the man will go for his children and the marriage will become trouble (Unifor).

The above findings can be explained by the evolutionary psychological theory, which holds that stepparents are not keen to expend their resources on children not related to them biologically (Daly and Wilson, 1988; Mariano et al., 2014; Weekes-Shackelford and

Shackelford, 2004). The research participants emphasised 'inheritance' as the stepmothers' anticipated economic benefits if they could eliminate their stepchildren. Thus, it can be argued that these women are determined to safeguard the interests of their biological children by removing potential sources of competition for them. It is to be noted that other women, such as the children's aunts or the wives of the children's uncles also attempted to eliminate their non-biological children for the same reasons. The participants also talked about 'purification' culture and how it became a gateway for stepmothers to easily eliminate existing children in the homes of their new husbands. The researcher asked Atanong about the meaning and significance of this culture and his answer is as follows:

> ... our culture believes that before you can go into a house to marry a man who has children, you must carry those children to a spiritual home to go and find out if they're pure so that they will not contaminate your own child (Atanong).

This culture is new. It emerged alongside the *End of the Wicked* movie and other forces promoting the belief in child witch. When Atanong was probed about the origin of this culture, he explained as follows:

> The main introduction of that thing was child witch ... so that is the main effect and that's why the effect come today. .... So any home now, a woman wants to go into a home in which there are children already there on the ground, they would like to carry those children for counselling [i.e., pastor's session]. ... they may even come back without the husband knowing, informing the husband that they've gone to that place, two of their children are not good, they're possessed based on what the spiritualist said. So from then, the woman will give the husband ultimatum, either you abandon these children before you marry me or with that witch, I can't stay in this home with these children so that they will not kill me or kill you. So the husband now has no other option than to take action against the children ... only to accept this woman (Atanong).

When the researcher asked Atanong *Why do the women do this?*, he stressed the 'inheritance' like other participants above:

> Why the woman is doing that is, one, to inherit. In our own culture here, the first sons normally inherit the fathers' property eventually when the father dies. So she will believe that when her own children will come now, they will not inherit

> anything. So they will do everything in a tricky way to eliminate the one [i.e., stepchild]. So that her child may come out direct (Atanong).

However, Reuben's words below suggest that it was not all about inheritance. His words indicate that some women might genuinely believe that a child in the family might be possessed and that people around the woman might also put pressure on her to go for 'purification' for the safety of the family:

> You see, if the woman, likewise a man, if a man marries a new wife, the new wife coming to that man's house still feels the child that was already there, probably is possessed. ... Likewise, if it comes into with its own children, so many people will say ah, let us try to investigate these children. Are they really okay? (Reuben).

This purification culture is similar to 'spiritual cleansing' by religious leaders previously reported by van der Meer (2013) as one of the methods of dealing with child witches suggested by most of his 88 participants in Malawi. This suggests that this cultural practice is not restricted to Nigeria. This can be described as an exorcism in advance to prevent a child from initiating other children in the family. The conflicting views of Atanong and Reuben suggest that the spiritual cleansing could be informed by an ulterior motive (inheritance) sometimes and genuine belief (avoiding contamination) in witchcraft in other times. For example, a woman motivated by inheritance might use purification as an excuse to send a child to a religious leader with the hope that the child would be assigned a witch label. On the other hand, a woman could be motivated by a genuine belief that a child could be a witch, therefore, wanting that child to be cleansed to avoid contaminating other children in the family.

9.1.2. Threat to comfort

The aid workers believe that children are assigned the witch label by their female carers as a leeway to eliminate them for threatening the happiness or comfort of the women they live with. This is also supported by all the secondary sources of data in this theme. Most of the perpetrators in this category are stepmothers. This is reflected in Christy's words that *most of the mothers doing these [abuses and murder] are not their [children's] actual [biological] mother*. Unifor described below how the endemic belief that children could be witches is exploited by stepmothers in order to eliminate stepchildren in their households:

> Stepmothers when married into a particular family with children not born by them will look for a way to send those children out and this can only be done by labelling them witches so that only her children will remain in the house (Unifor).

Edward is explicit that stepmothers do not believe that the children are witches, rather they simply use the witchcraft as a label to eliminate a stepchild that they do not want to take care of:

> When the mother of the child is dead and the man decided to take another wife, the new woman coming into the man's family being the stepmother of those children, will want to stigmatise those children calling them witch not because those children actually are witch but because she is not ready to fend and to take care of the bereaved child. The result is finally, label the child a witch and throw that child out of the house (Edward).

It is understandable that a stepmother may not always have the authority to eliminate the child considering the presence of the family breadwinner. Atanong's words below suggest that such stepmothers could still achieve their goals through instigation. Atanong referred to a particular case treated by CRARN to illustrate how such stepmothers could succeed with such an agenda:

> Like the case we had at a court. The case of a boy, the mother died [i.e. a child's mother], the boy is a nine-year-old. So when the father got another woman like a friend who normally come and stay with him [i.e., the man]. He [the boy] doesn't normally like the behaviour of the woman, how the woman behaves, all this and that and the child was complaining. ... So the woman had no other option than to find a way [i.e., using witchcraft label] the husband can send out the child or to eliminate the child so that they can stay together. The man took the child, ride it on bike right from Obot Akara which is very close to that Arochukwu side, that is, Abia state. It is a stone throw to Abia State, Umuahia area. Carried the guy from bike there until he come to reach Eket here and dumped the guy in front of Timber Market. ... You see now ... she [i.e., the woman who labelled the child] will be free now to live with the man as a new woman. The boy was roaming the street and the people here started complaining about another witch child patrolling the street and we came and rescued the child.

As some stepmothers use prophets or religious leaders to achieve their own agendas, they are also fond of suggesting words to these religious leaders in order to convince them that the stepchild is definitely a witch that needs to be treated as such:

> You see if a woman comes into a man's house, probably that man might have gotten maybe one or two issues [children] ... The new wife that is coming in might not really be very happy to stay comfortable with that, they'll look for a way to see that child is eliminated. When you see that developing hatred, very soon they probably take the child to the church, say look at this child, the pastor should look at this child, the prophet should look at this child, what is the child stand for. Then most of these pastors they find one thing or the other to say against the child. ... There are many cases, situations like that. ... (Reuben).

> ... the woman would be the first person to put words into the prophet's mouth. This child is behaving abnormal, in the night he cannot sleep, he told me that he or she flies an aeroplane at night, all this and that ... so man of God, I want you to really assess this child. ... finally he [prophet] would tell the woman that this child is possessed. Then by going back, even along the road, the woman would just dump the children or she would go home and just tell the husband 'if you continue with this kid I will not marry you again because I don't want to lose my life' (Atanong).

One can understand these women's decisions to obtain a label from pastors on the basis that their husbands or lovers might equally believe in child witch and trust the pastors as having all it takes to detect witchcraft. The idea that the 'criminal potential of witchcraft' is valid in a society where the victim or potential victim consider this possible (Jackson, 1995, p.68) can offer some understanding of the reasons regarding these women's success with the witch label. The idea is that if the husbands of these women who often heed their wives' request to eliminate a child do not believe that children could be witches, then they are very likely to challenge their wives when they claim that the children are witches irrespective of the sources of such label. Further, these women probably understand their husbands' trust on religious leaders, otherwise, they may not choose prophecy or soothsaying as a way of getting the man to act. Edward blamed prophets and pastors, noting that even though these children are brought by stepmothers who are suggestive, their fake prophecies are trusted by the women who act upon them:

> I want to attribute this child witchcraft to ungodly roles by the prophets and pastors because why I say so is that when the pastors will stay in the church and the stepmother will bring these children complaining how the child is behaving to the pastors and instead of the pastor to sit this child up to pray or to groom this child up in a godly manner, the pastor or the prophet will say 'oh I have just seen a vision what God has revealed to me that this child is a witch'. Actually, that is a fake prophecy and a fake vision and it ends up stigmatising the child and if the pastor will say so, it means the stepmother or whoever is the guardian will lose faith in the child and finally will throw the child out of the house (Edward).

Some of the children's case files also show the roles played by stepmothers in the abuses of children. There was a case of an adolescent boy (age unspecified) who lived with his father peacefully until the father got married (CF3). His father's wife (i.e., his stepmother) labelled him a witch and took him to a pastor to obtain a label. This label led to him being abused before being sent out of the house. This was also the case with a 13-year-old boy whose case is described in CF1. Firstly, his stepmother took him to a church and ensured that he was chained and starved in the church. He later escaped but on seeing him at home, the stepmother gave him a poisoned food that made him unconscious and while he was unconscious, he was moved to a bush where he was beaten and abandoned. A nursery schoolboy was labelled a witch by his stepmother who convinced the boy's biological father that the boy was truly a witch, leading to his father breaking his head with a machete (CF7).

The reports by NGOs about the DRC also suggest that stepmothers could use witchcraft-related accusations as a justification for abuse of their stepchildren. One example was provided by the Human Rights Watch (2006) following an investigation of a case involving an 11-year-old stepchild identified as Michael:

> Eleven-year-old Michael began living on the streets three years ago after he was forced from his home by his stepmother. Soon after he began living with his stepmother, she accused him of sorcery. He was forced to eat separately from the other children in the family and given smaller portions of food. He was not allowed to sit near his half siblings and slept in a corner of the kitchen by himself. Michael told us that his stepmother insisted that this was necessary so he wouldn't transmit the sorcery to his brothers and sisters. On several occasions he was beaten at night by his stepmother with the handle of a shovel on his hands and back so that he

> would confess to being 'possessed.' He was told to leave home unless he turned over the physical items he used in conducting sorcery (Human Rights Watch, 2006, p.50).

A similar account was also provided by the Human Rights Watch (2006) about a 14-year-old boy simply identified as Aubrey who was tormented by his brother's wife:

> Aubrey was twelve years old when he fled his home to escape abuse. After his parents died, he went to live with his older brother, his brother's wife, and their children. He told us that his sister-in-law accused him of being responsible for the death of their youngest son, who died soon after his birth. She began treating Aubrey badly, not giving him the same amount of food as her own children. If he complained, she would slap him or beat him with the handle of a broom. She insulted him, calling him a sorcerer and a murderer. After she had convinced his brother that Aubrey was responsible for the death of their baby boy, Aubrey fled the house and began his life on the streets (Human Rights Watch, 2006, pp.50-51).

In both Michael's and Aubrey's cases, it is difficult to establish the actual motives of the perpetrators. The accounts provided by the current participants above (i.e., purification culture) suggest that stepmothers in Nigeria also live in fear of child witches and might target children due to such fear, which is understandable considering the endemic culture. Irrespective of the accusers' reasons, it can be argued that Michael's and Aubrey's stepmothers were determined to remove the two boys from their homes for the former to regain their comfort or happiness.

These cases involving stepmothers can also be explained by the evolutionary psychological theories of resource control on how stepparents are not keen to expend their resources on children not related to them biologically (Daly and Wilson, 1988; Mariano et al., 2014; Weekes-Shackelford and Shackelford, 2004). The current data supports existing academic reports on abuses committed by stepmothers against their stepchildren. However, the current findings show that a belief system is exploited to commit these crimes more conveniently.

The exploitation of the belief in witchcraft for the pursuit of selfish goals has been previously documented. Both in early modern Europe (Nguyen-Finn, 2018) and contemporary Africa (Bleek, 1976; Brain, 1970; Spence, 2017; van Der Meer, 2013), witch hunt is motivated by personal interest, greed, envy, jealousy and enmity. The current findings validate these

documented observations. However, the previous studies were based on incidents involving adults accusing fellow adults while the current report is concerned with adults accusing children. The current study, therefore, shows that children could also be at the receiving end of adults' greed, envy, jealousy and enmity, which witchcraft is drawn on to resolve.

9.1.3. Single parenting and broken homes

Stigmatisation is also caused by issues relating to single parenting, divorce or broken homes. Children from such families are at high risk of labelling when taken care of by a member or members of their extended families who struggle financially. Christy explained how this occurs:

> During the process when the parents are separating, the wife doesn't need the husband again. The child there is in danger because either the child is with the mother and the mother will want to remarry and the husband [new husband] is going to is not sure of accepting this child. So the child at the end will be stigmatised or the child may go to the father, then another issue because when another woman come in, she will stigmatise the child (Christy).

Sometimes the woman could act under pressure from her new husband's family who might not want to take responsibility for the child's upbringing. Then the child's mother who is desperate to keep her marriage might act to please her husband:

> The moving to the man's house [by a single mother] ... all of them [i.e., family members of the new husband] will be against that child as a witch but the woman still feels that she should protect her marriage, the only thing she'll do is to see how she can, sometimes they'll take the child and dump with their mother, the grandmother (Reuben).

> That is part of the case with single parenthood. For example, there will be controversy between the husband and the wife. Now one party will choose to go along with the child or children, either the wife or the husband. Or maybe let me say the wife will go along with the children. ... the child will be staying with the mother at the maternal side [i.e., the child's grandmother]. Now when this child, maybe there will be crisis or somebody died within the family or a misfortune like that. They will say this child was among the children who killed the mother or the

> grandmother. The wife now will pick the children and abandon them to the husband's side (Atanong).

Another case was described by Reuben with a reference to a particular incident he witnessed in his local community:

> There's a particular place ... I can still remember that woman ... she was married to another man who was not the first husband that gave birth to these kids. She told me that actually since the house she was living is not comfortable in a compound where everybody was talking about 'why do you keep this boy?' ... So, at that point in time, she felt she cannot exactly maybe use knife or use any violent means to kill the boy. ... she took the boy to a very long distance ... then abandoned the boy and left which was even outside the state (Reuben).

To emphasise the role of broken homes in the labelling, abuses and murder, Anthony stated:

> ... we have not seen any particular case that the husband and wife are together and taking care of the children (Anthony).

Reuben offered a brief insight into this problem by suggesting that it was caused by the inability of extended family members to financially take care of children not related to them biologically:

> You know the extended family system is becoming eroded, it's almost eroded. Everybody is concentrating in their single, nuclear families, these are issues (Reuben).

Edward discussed the issue of poverty from the perspective of bereavement in the family and how this creates orphans whose relatives are unwilling to take care of:

> I will see child stigmatisation and witchcraft on another aspect of unwillingness to cater for a bereaved child. Why am I saying so? Take for example, a man has just died and leave his three children or four children and the uncle unwilling to take care of the brother's child at the end of the day, will say that child is a witch. ... (Edward).

The problems caused by the *extended family system* mentioned by Reuben above and supported by Edward will be discussed in depth under the 9.1.4 subtheme where the contributions of

family poverty to the child witch hunt, particularly among relatives taking care of war orphans in war-ravaged countries (e.g., the DRC and Angola), are discussed.

A report by the Human Rights Watch (2006) supports the primary data on the contributions of broken homes and single parenting. The report refers to a case of a Catholic priest who provided shelter to street children in Kinshasa (the DRC) to show that of the 630 children surveyed by the priest, only 17 had both parents living. This report, however, did not make clear what it means to have 'both parents living', that is, whether the parents were simply alive or lived together. An empirical study of 92 children (62 boys and 31 girls) living on the Nigerian streets mostly due to witchcraft accusations, collaborates the above report and concludes that there 'were no children who lived with both parents' (Ekpenyong and Udisi, 2016, p.24). The study found that before these children ended up on the streets, 39 percent of them lived with either a stepfather or a stepmother, 23.9 percent were orphans living with relatives, 37 percent came from single-parent families out of whom 30 percent lived with single mothers and 6.5 percent lived with single fathers. This supports previous empirical findings that child abuse and neglect (Wison et al., 1980) and physical abuse (Fagan, 2005) cases were higher in households where one or both biological parents were absent.

The above problems can be better understood in the light of academic literature on witch hunt as well as child abuse. These cases qualify for child abuses and homicide motivated by socioeconomic stress (West, 2007) as discussed in Chapter Three. The socioeconomic stress heightens in war-ravaged countries due to economic stagnation caused by the wars and the orphans produced as a result. However, socioeconomic stresses are not restricted to these war-ravaged zones, rather they extend to other places. The current participants talked about how poverty, mostly caused by having many children contribute to abuses.

Problems facing single mothers, particularly financial stagnation (Barone, 2016; Mullins et al., 2011; Mulroy and Lane, 1992; Richards, 1989) detailed in Chapter Three, may partly explain the situations of the single mothers in this current study, which might have contributed to them abandoning or abusing their own children. The impacts of the newly-emerging patterns of parenting in Africa, that is, 'single parenting' and the strain it puts on parents, has been identified in the child witch problem (e.g., Cimpric, 2010; van der Meer, 2013), consequently endangering the child. Van der Meer's (2013, p.134) study in Malawi found that orphans were labelled witches because their upkeep was 'too much of a burden to the host family'. This is a

case of exploiting the endemic belief to relieve family burdens even by those who might not believe that the actual child is a witch.

9.1.4. Family poverty

Economic hardships of various kinds in the family encourage labelling and abuse. The hardships range from parents' or guardians' inability to feed many children to overcrowding in the house. Parents may suspect their children when the family fails to meet its economic targets and then take them to religious leaders for confirmation:

> These mothers take their children to church and start telling prophets like our family is not growing, my business is coming down and not booming as before and these children are not behaving the way I brought them up. Somehow, and the prophet now will now act based on what you've put in his mouth (Christy).

> He [pastor/spiritualist] remembered once you went to the market that you could not sell anything, and you said 'yes'. He remembered that things are hard with you people, and you said 'yes'. Then he says your child is possessed, he has taken the labour of your hands. ... he has taken it to a witchcraft world. So whatever you labour is in vain (Atanong).

> They [pastors/spiritualists] will look at the unemployment situation, probably if somebody got married, maybe, she has two or three children which he cannot cater for, after struggling ... she'll start going from one church to the other to see what is happening that she cannot get a job. ... These churches ... they're business centres, they will find one thing or the other to say: 'Okay, how many children do you have?' Or they look at the child ... the way he appears and all those things. They can accuse such a child (Reuben).

The participants also suggested that labelling and the consequent abuse are caused by overcrowding in the family and the struggle by a mother to feed many children:

> Children could be stigmatised based on poverty level of the family. You see in Africa, we have a set of people, mostly in Akwa Ibom state where I belong to, we have a set of people having children up to six, seven where the parent has no tangible source of livelihood and the means of feeding these children become difficult because most of the family are living below dollar level a day. Since the

> poverty level of the family is increasing, you will see at the end of the day, the mother, whoever the child is living with, will stigmatise the child and will say because the child is a witch, he has blocked the fortune and something tangible will not come into this family and they forget that too many children without tangible source of livelihood cause the poverty. They turn the brunt onto the children (Anthony).
>
> If a particular family has children more than what they can take care of, what they will do is to send those children to the street to ease them in the name of being witches and that they are the cause of them not having what to eat (Unifor).

Reuben described how the inability of families to take care of their children as well as a lack of support from extended families exacerbate the problem:

> We cannot rule out poverty, you see, look at poverty in different dimensions. You see, if somebody is very rich, he'll take care of his family and will still have no problem. Even if the brother's son or the sister's son is living with him, he'll still accommodate, but if somebody is struggling to survive and see another child who is not his own personal child. ... You know the extended family system is becoming eroded, it's almost eroded. Everybody is concentrating in their single, nuclear families, these are issues (Reuben).

Poverty was consistently described as a major factor by the participants who also referred to particular women whose cases were handled by CRARN to illustrate this:

> Most of the children we had before was as a result of poverty. ... There was this woman in this Eket ... the woman had nothing to the extent of bringing the children to dump in this market [Udua Nka Market where many abandoned children congregate and scavenge for food]. ... The husband had died. ... What to eat, they don't even have what to eat, you know most of them is poverty that lead them to label them. Most of them have too much many children and no income to take care of them (Christy).
>
> ... after some investigation of CRARN, when we meet the mother, the mother with all her ordeal, she doesn't have the money to feed the child. ... because of poverty, the hardship, they struggle, you see their burden. ... they will be going down depreciating, their physical health will be too down, they will still feel that maybe

> since they said that this child is a witch, maybe probably the child is the one that is responsible for the ... economic situation that she's facing. So because of that, they will find one way or the other to see how they can kill but most of them don't really have the heart. ... Some find one of those areas to see how they can go and dump the child. ... there are some mothers that maybe give poison to the child. ... (Reuben).

A case file also shows the role of family poverty in the abuse of a 15-year-old girl who was tortured and beaten by her mother who accused her of being a witch responsible for their lack of financial success (CF9). The mother believed that she had made so much effort that must have yielded economic success, therefore, could not find any explanations regarding the lack of success.

The above accounts are also supported by the report by the Human Rights Watch (2006) following an investigation into the abuse of street children in the DRC where it was found that accused children were orphans to relatives facing 'increasing economic difficulties themselves' (Ibid., p.48).

> It is rare that children who live with both biological parents are accused of sorcery. In interviews we conducted with accused children, every one of them had lost one or both parents and had been living with extended family members who were facing extremely difficult economic problems (Human Rights Watch, 2006, p.48).

Save the Children (2005) found that seeing a child as a burden following ill-health or death of its parents or primary caregiver contributed to the accusation as a way of escaping responsibility in the DRC:

> Most noticeable is the disappearance of collective support with regard to the child. The ability to mobilise the family network, enabling a child to move around the extended biological family, has suffered significant transformations in recent years; the child is now first and foremost a burden for the host family (Save the Children, 2005, p.23).

In Angola, for example, extended family members who were already in financial difficulties but at the same time taking care of orphans produced by the civil war were used to exploiting the witch label to eliminate such children:

> … this is part of the problem – poverty. Angola has been wracked by nearly 30 years of civil war. Many children have been orphaned, cared for by aunts, uncles, the extended family. But they can't afford to keep them (BBC News, 2005).

Answers to the situation in Angola are said to 'lie buried in the social wreckage of Angola's immensely degrading civil war' (Chicago Tribune, 2004). It is unacceptable for relatives to throw orphans away simply because they are too poor to care for them, but if a child is claimed to be possessed, then it would be socially acceptable to throw him away (BBC News, 2005). In the DRC, the assistant director of advocacy and communications at World Vision, Vianney Dong described witchcraft-related accusations as a getaway for impoverished families to abandon their children (The Guardian, 2013).

The contributions of the death of family breadwinners in the witch hunt of children in the DRC is explained by Save the Children (2005):

> With the death of an adult, a source of family income – however meagre – disappears. The extended family then faces a truly testing time as the weight of obligations towards orphans begins to be felt. This is a very sensitive moment for a family and it is at this point when the climate of generalised poverty really comes into play and explanations of all sorts are given as to the cause of the unexpected death of an adult (Save the Children, 2005, p.17).

The data above shows that family poverty motivates abuse by both biological mothers and other women taking care of children. Biological mothers are known to abuse and kill their own children in certain adverse circumstances (e.g., Flynn et al., 2013; Harris et al., 2007; Mariano et al., 2014; McKee, 2006; Porter and Gavin 2010). However, motives differ. Resnick's (2016) suggests five motives (altruistic filicide, acutely psychotic filicide, unwanted child filicide, child maltreatment filicide and spouse revenge filicide) for filicide, which also apply to biological mothers. Biological mothers are known to kill due to socioeconomic stress (West, 2007). It is also possible that the poor mothers may also target their sick children for the same reason. Poor child health (Harris et al., 2007) is another motivation for altruistic filicide. However, it is also possible that some poor mothers may simply decide that they no longer want their children (unwanted child filicide) without any sense of altruism. The genuine belief in witchcraft should not be ignored in these events, that is, the belief that the child is possessed

and was the cause of the family poverty, therefore, needed to be eliminated as a solution to the problem of poverty.

Abuses by stepmothers and other women taking care of their orphaned relatives would have different motivations. They can be explained by the evolutionary psychological theory (Daly and Wilson, 1988; Mariano et al., 2014; Weekes-Shackelford and Shackelford, 2004) in the sense that these women feel emotionally detached for the orphans for not being their biological children whilst trying to safeguard resources for their own children. A participant in this current study is explicit about emotional detachment when describing the motives of stepmothers in labelling their stepchildren witches:

> I see it as lack of love for the child she is coming to marry the father because if a man already has a child and a spinster or a widow coming to marry the man who has a child, the woman has to marry the child also, showing affection to the child. But if she don't have that love for that child, she will not be able to accommodate that child in the new found marriage. So when there is no love, I'm afraid, that child will either be stigmatised or perhaps abandoned (Edward).

This is a case of exploiting belief in witchcraft for an ulterior motive as witnessed in in early modern Europe (Nguyen-Finn, 2018) and contemporary Africa (Brain, 1970; Spence, 2017; van der Meer, 2013). With respect to children's relatives who abuse them, a number of other factors, including wars and coups d'état in Africa have been identified as producing orphans and the consequent burdens on their relatives who end up labelling the children as witches (Cimpric, 2010).

Although poverty is blamed for these incidents, Save the Children's (2005) report suggests that poverty is not the primary factor because accusations are more commonplace in urban areas than in rural areas. The report also shows that children have been accused by families with sufficient income. It refers to cases involving African parents in Europe to stress that poverty is not the primary factor because such families could not be described as poor. It further adds that witchcraft accusations 'involve significant expense for many families and the poorest simply cannot afford to pay the costs of exorcism' (Ibid., p.15).

Although the claims in Save the Children's (2005) report might be factual, the problem with is that the costs of exorcisms are placed above the fear of witches. It suggests that the high cost of exorcism could mean fewer accusations on the part of poor families without considering that

the costs of exorcisms vary greatly based on the religious leaders conducting them. As demonstrated in Chapter Six, some parents pay the exorcists in the form of trade by barter, such as the parent or his/her child working in the pastor's farm or church as a way of paying for the exorcism. Parents could also borrow money to pay for the exorcism (Agazue, 2015). Further, the current data also demonstrates that exorcisms are not always conducted, rather many families are fond of going to religious leaders to establish the status of a certain child and might eliminate the child once denounced without ever considering an exorcism as an option. This is particularly the case with parents who have ulterior motives, that is, those looking for the label to enable them to eliminate a child.

Spence (2017) explains the link between poverty and witchcraft on the basis that witchcraft accusations and their consequences more commonly take place in the remotest and poorest areas. Such acclaimed connection is open to debate considering the current data. Whilst no comparisons were made between poor and rich areas in relation to the number of accusations and abuses reported in this current thesis, it is difficult to agree with Spence (2017) considering that cases are reported in both cities and remote regions of the particular countries in large numbers. For example, the statistics presented in Chapter One show that there were tens of thousands of children living on the streets of Kinshasa (the DRC) due to witchcraft accusations (CRIN, 2006) and another estimated tens of thousands awaiting exorcisms in churches (Keeble, 2010) in Kinshasa. Kinshasa is the capital city of the DRC and although poor people can be found in cities too, such a capital city does not qualify as a poor or a remote area of a country.

If one considers the Kinshasa case as exceptional due to the country being ravaged by war, then cases in Nigeria where there was no recent war, could be a better comparison. There are no observable differences or significant variations in the number of incidents taking place in remote villages and those in the state capital of Akwa Ibom state (Uyo) and another oil-rich town (Eket) with the presence of multinational firms, such as Exxon Mobil and others. This is not to claim that the residents of these towns are wealthy simply because of their regional status, rather it is to explain that these towns do not qualify as poor or remote locations. Their residents appear to be more economically advantaged than the residents of other towns visited by the current researcher during his fieldwork.

Eket served as the researcher's main base throughout his fieldwork and despite the busy streets, beautiful houses and vehicles around the hotel where he lodged, children were being abandoned on these busy streets and torture and murder were widely reported. The popular Eket

commodity market called Udua Nka was where dozens of abandoned children congregate after the market in the evening to scavenge for food as observed by the current researcher during his fieldwork. A previous research by Ekpenyong and Udisi (2016) that drew on income poverty index (IPI) to assess the economic status of 92 children (62 boys and 31 girls) living on the streets of Akwa Ibom mainly due to witchcraft accusations could not establish the role of economic deprivation. The study found that whilst 23 percent of the children came from households classified as extremely poor based on the IPI and 30 percent from poor households, 28 percent and 16 percent came from borderline and non-poor households, respectively (Ibid.).

In Nigeria in general, the child witch phenomenon is almost non-existent in the poorest states of the country. Of all the 36 states of Nigeria, this social problem is witnessed mostly in two states (Akwa Ibom and Cross River). Incidents also occasionally occur in some of their neighbouring states. The poverty headcount rate of Akwa Ibom and Cross River are approximately 26 percent and 36 percent, respectively (below the national average) compared to Sokoto, Taraba and Jigawa, of which each of the states scores 87 percent, approximately, which is the highest of the national average based on the National Bureau of Statistics' (2020) classification. However, the child witch phenomenon is almost non-existent in these three poorest states of the country.

Sokoto and Jigawa are northern states predominated by Islam while Taraba is much closer to the south and also more pluralistic with respect to religious compositions compared to the former two states. If poverty is a primary factor in the child witch hunt, then one would expect it to be out of control in these states but it is almost non-existent in them. A possible explanation for this is that the witch-hunting churches and movies on child witches are hardly seen in these three states. Sokoto and Jigawa in particular are predominated by Islam.

However, Islam is only one factor in this. A state called Ebonyi is the next to the aforementioned three states with respect to the poverty headcount rate with its score of 79 percent, approximately (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). Interestingly, this state is a southern state predominated by Christianity and also shares a border with Cross River where the child witch problem exists, yet child witches are almost non-existent in Ebonyi. A possible explanation for this is that the particular brand of Pentecostalism (Christianity), such as the Liberty Gospel of Helen Ukpabio and similar denominations promoting the child witch hunt, hardly exist in Ebonyi. These comparisons are made to demonstrate how factors integrate to

cause this problem. Poverty does not cause this problem in the absence of movies and sermons on child witchcraft.

9.1.5. Obstacle to potential suitor

The aid workers believed that spinsters, divorcees and widows desperate to get married abuse their children with the hope of attracting suitors, whom these women believe would normally avoid them on noticing that they have a child. In this culture, men prefer to marry women who have no child while avoiding those with a child. Thus, these women are said to resort to labelling their children as a means to dispose them without repercussions.

> ... they [men] want to marry a new woman, unfortunately, this woman has children, maybe two children and this man now will not like this woman to come in with her children. Since these women are so desperate to marry, maybe she has been disappointed by someone somewhere because she has two issues. Now the man is very wealthy, she can only come in without a child. So, the woman now has two options, either to abandon this child or to look any other way to maybe to eliminate the life of this child (Atanong).

> Most females maltreated and stigmatised those children they had before getting married in order to please their fiancé or new husband who does not welcome those children into their homes. ... Eh, let's say they have a child or more before getting married ... they abandon it and claim to the person [potential husband] that she doesn't have a child before (Gloria).

A particular case treated by the CRARN staff was referred to by Atanong to illustrate why these women choose to keep their motherhood status secret in order to succeed in their dream for a new marriage:

> In the case of Affiong [real name changed], the mother, Catherine [real name changed]. ... So she gave birth to her daughter Affiong. So when she got married to a new husband who is a policeman. So she never inform this policeman that she has a child at home. She hide it from the husband. So Affiong was living with the grandparents. ... So finally, the community stigmatise her that she is a witch. So when Affiong was abandoned along the street she was roaming, she met with child workers. So during our interview, she mentioned her mother and I went and search

> for the mother and we invited the mother. So when the mother came, we threatened to arrest her and detained by the police, and we asked her to take Affiong home. She called me and confided to me that she had a husband and she had never mentioned to the husband that she had a child out of wedlock and that she has three children for the husband, and that if she inform the husband that she has a child at home and during that time the child has been stigmatised as a witch, the husband will send her away. So she had no other option, either to take Affiong to dump somewhere or even kill in order to protect her marriage. So Affiong was left and she was staying in an orphanage (Atanong).

Catherine's problem seemed to have been compounded by the fact that her child had been labelled a witch by community members. Initially, she did not want to tell her husband that she had a child in order to improve her chances of being accepted as a new wife who had no child. With the child already given a label by the members of the community, she feared that the worse would happen if she would choose to tell her husband about the situation lately. Thus, she could not be bothered to take the child along even as the child had become homeless.

Edward's account differs from others in the sense that he implies that the women would kill their children not to hide their motherhood status but to save the potential husbands from a *problem*, perhaps a burden:

> ... a widow or a divorcee who has a child and having leave the home of the first husband and intending to marry another husband, she is faced with two option. It's either to kill the child they had for another husband or abandon that child so that that child does not become a problem to the new husband she intended to go and marry (Edward).

Atanong explained that some of the women have many children due to having married multiple times or because they had born children to different men, which might exacerbate their problems:

> Some of the women normally have over eight children and the oldest maybe highest twelve years. So, you see series of children. They would just go to this husband and have two, they come and dump, go the other one. ... She married to her first husband and she had three children, she got married to the second one and she had two children, she got married to the third one and she had four children. If the

> woman now wants to leave them at home to get married to a new man now, the family will say 'no we don't want them here, they should not stay, send those children out'. You see now seven children would be roaming the streets (Atanong).

Gloria explained that in their desperation not to lose a potential husband, the women deliberately take their children to witch-hunting pastors and would suggest words to the pastors in order to obtain a witch label:

> ... the mother may look at the child as trying to be hindrance. Maybe some may do it intentionally, stigmatise on their own. Some may even take the child to the prophet and let the prophet tell them. ... When they say [i.e., tell the prophet] I wanted to get married and the person said that because of this child they will not marry me, then the prophet will now use that means to say this child is a witch. ... So, the next thing is to stigmatise the child (Gloria).

There is something notable about 'distance' when abandoning a child from the accounts provided by the participants below. Local governments and states where the mother is not from or does not reside, have been repeatedly mentioned as places of abandonment. An example is provided by Atanong below:

> Some will drop the child to another local government. Some will even carry the child to another local government and dump them automatically there and they explain to the new husband that they have no child. So by doing so, this man believe that he will start a new home with the lady. So the child will be roaming the street. ... (Atanong).

The children are not always asked to leave the house or chased away from home, rather they are sometimes taken away and abandoned somewhere faraway from the house. Lagos state was repeatedly mentioned about two different prostitutes discussed under the 9.1.5. Abia state and other places different from the women's states or towns of origins were mentioned by other participants. Forests were also mentioned. It is important to state that these forests are usually located faraway from residential areas. The reasons for taking these children to such far places, which the children are usually unfamiliar with, are not known and will require further research. It can be speculated here that the far distance could be a way of ensuring that the child does not trace his/her home or reconnect with his/her parents. Tracing home from those forests could be extremely difficult if not impossible for a child. However, the age of the child matters in

this. Further, there are other dangers in the forests, such as hunger and thirst, which could be enough to kill a child. Dangerous animals are not known to be common in the forests in Akwa Ibom but their presence could not be ruled out entirely.

Edward was of the view that the witch label makes things easier if nothing else works or if other plans seem difficult for a stepmother trying to remove a stepchild from her home:

> ... the woman coming to marry this man who already had a child and the wife is not in the house, this woman would also want to do one thing or the other to send the child out of the house so that the child the man has will not become a problem to her in her new found marriage. So if she discuss with the husband that she wants to send the child out of the house and the man doesn't want it, she will formulate one thing or the other and will say 'this your child, don't you know that this child is a witch?' and this will set problem between the man and the child (Edward).

Atanong described a serious case of double murder by a divorcee who hired a prophet to kill her two children with a concoction in order for her to be accepted as a wife by a potential husband she had just met:

> ... a case of Beta Etim [real name changed]. The woman divorced with her husband and she was preparing to get married to a new husband in Uyo. She took her two male children with her. So when she met the new husband she wants to marry. She was informed that she must carry the children for interview with the prophet. This story was made at the Commissioner of Inquiry on Witchcraft in Akwa Ibom State. So during the testimony of the husband and the wife. They mentioned that this child was very healthy, according to the child help [i.e., nanny]. They mentioned that this evening, the child was very, very healthy. They took them to church for deliverance. The prophet prepared concoction and gave to them. One of the child died after one hour and the second one died after one hour the first one died. So the two male children died. ... So this woman did this in order to eliminate these children in order to get married to the new husband. The husband testified. He was also at the court, high court in Uyo. ... (Atanong).

This particular case is different from others in the sense that other women tried to hide their motherhood status from their suitors but Mrs Etim did not hide hers and was already accepted by the new husband who knew that she had children. It seemed that the new husband wanted

the ‘purification’ ritual discussed under the 9.1.1 subheading as the new culture in Akwa Ibom for piece of mind. Unfortunately, the woman instructed the prophet to kill the children instead. This could be a case of insecurity, that is, she was not confident that the man would accept her with the children even after the purification, thus, she needed to eliminate the children entirely to be on a safer side.

The above findings are well explained by Resnick’s (2016) idea of ‘unwanted child filicide’. Resnick himself illustrates this with a woman seeking marriage as shown below:

> A dull 25-year-old widow was offered marriage only if she parted with her two children. After being refused placement by social agencies, she decided to dispose of them by use of a hatchet and gasoline for burning (Resnick, 2016, p.S205).

Resnick (2016), however, does not explain why the woman was asked to part with her two children. It could be a case of a potential husband avoiding the economic burden of childrearing and/or inconveniences attached to it. It could also be a case of avoiding responsibility for a non-biologically-related child in line with the evolutionary psychological theories (Daly and Wilson, 1988; Mariano et al., 2014; Weekes-Shackelford and Shackelford, 2004). Whichever was the case, this case illustrates how seeking marriage or relationship can produce ‘unwanted child filicide’, which is the case in this current study.

One can also make sense of the current data in the light of the stigma that comes with childbearing outside marriage (Agazue, 2016; Barone, 2016) as the children might be seen as ‘illegitimate’ (Oberman, 2004; Fuchs, 1982). Illegitimacy was a serious issue in Europe (e.g., Fuchs, 1982; Taylor, 2017) and North America (Maldonado, 2011; Murray, 2011) in the past to the extent that it changed the laws of some of the countries as discussed in Chapter Three. Although the stigma has lessened in contemporary time, it has not disappeared entirely, particularly in the US (e.g., Maldonado, 2011; Mayeri, 2015).

In contemporary African societies, illegitimacy has remained a problem for women (e.g., Agazue, 2016; Delaunay, 2011). The fear of social rejection contributes to infanticide and abandonment by single mothers and others whose cases may qualify as adultery (Delaunay, 2011). As the current data shows, family members of young women with children born outside marriage or at their parents’ homes were fond of telling these women to *take him [child] to the father* because such children are considered ‘illegitimate’. This problem is not restricted to the families of such teenagers, rather as the current data has demonstrated, having a child before

marriage or as a widow or a divorcee also makes it difficult to attract a husband, which also contributes to child abuse. Whilst there is a paucity of research on illegitimacy in Africa, the current study suggests that illegitimacy is a serious problem capable of causing child abuse. This current study, therefore, supports the existing ones (e.g., Esteves, 2014; Lancy, 2015; Malherbe, 2007; Pitt and Bale, 1995; Oberman, 2004; West, 2007) that consistently link illegitimacy to child homicide in different continents. The current study bridges the existing gap in contemporary Africa. However, it is important to acknowledge that not all the cases (e.g., those involving widows and divorcees) in this current study qualify as illegitimacy.

Although stigma attached to childbearing outside marriage could play a role in the child abuse cases as suggested by the current data, stigma itself might not have been a big problem for these women if they were able to carry their children along from infancy until when they realised that the child was an obstacle to attracting a suitor. Some of the potential suitors might have avoided the mothers after seeing their child as a burden, rather than labelling the mothers as illegitimate. Unifor's interview accounts also suggest this. These mothers might be aware of this and might have acted with the motive to remove such burden for the potential husband thereby increasing their chances of getting married. Women's age of marriage is subject to patriarchal control (Bhatasara et al., 2019) and in contemporary Africa, women are 'pitied and blamed' for remaining unmarried after their twenties and are usually assumed to be of bad character for being unable to attract suitors (Ntoimo and Isiugo-Abanihe, 2013, p.1). Therefore, it can be argued that the fear of these consequences also plays a role in these abuses.

9.1.6. Burden to prostituting mother

The freedom to engage in prostitution by women is identified as one of the motivations for labelling of children as witches and the consequent abuse. Gloria described how women who are in the process of joining prostitution also exploit the witch label to free themselves from the burden of childrearing:

> Some female maltreated, labelled their children as witches or wizards and even abandoned them to be free in order to join prostitution and other risky hobbies. They don't have the money, so they wanted to join prostitution. Leaving these children behind, others will stigmatise them [i.e., when they roam the street as stigmatised children already], although they can also stigmatise the children themselves and get rid of them so that they can join prostitution (Gloria).

Atanong illustrated the link between prostitution and child abuse with three different cases treated by the CRARN staff involving murders and attempted murders by three different prostitutes who felt that their children could not allow them enough freedom to engage in prostitution:

> ... like the case of Betty [real name changed] ... she took the child, lay the child on the fire, burn her and dumped her in the bush. So a man was returning from the US, when he went to the village, he saw the child when the child was crying in the bush, he removed the child and brought it here later. So why she's flexing round the village, she's a professional prostitute like that. ... The child was about let me say, three years or four years, very young. That's how she inflicted the injury, her main focus is to kill the child so that she could be. ... she gave birth to twins. ... So, leaving those children at home will be problem for her, those two died ... she threw them to the bush (Atanong).

> ... the case of a child that was rescued by the police in Urue Offong Oruko local government. The mother throw the child into the river and the child hung on the branch of a tree. So the child was later rescued by the police and we intervened to pick the child. The mother wanted to travel and she had no option than to stigmatise her and throw her into the river so that she can be free to do her prostitution (Atanong).

> ... in the case of Martha [real name changed], a child from Esit Eket, the mother … took the child and set her ablaze in the fire and the child was rescued by members of the community. She accused that little child of about two years for being a witch. That she doesn't allow her to have luck to see other men. ... So that's why she wanted to kill the child (Atanong).

Two cases of abandonment were described by two participants. The first case involved a prostitute who lived in Lagos state (more than four hundred miles away from Akwa Ibom state) and abandoned her child there while returning to resettle in her native state of Akwa Ibom. The second case involved a prostitute who abandoned her child in her native state of Akwa Ibom while relocating to Lagos.

> I have a lady in my neighbourhood by name Theresa [real name changed]. This lady, from what we know, she has a kid. She abandoned her kid in Lagos while

> staying in Eket here doing prostitution. ... These women, they can do anything even kill their children in order for them to get that freedom to continue in the prostitution business (Anthony).

> Like in the case of ehm Andikan [real name changed], her mother was living in Lagos … she abandoned Andikan in the village. ... We tried to contact her and she said that she don't have any dealing with Andikan anymore and that if she comes back and see Andikan, ... she will have no option than to kill Andikan. That Andikan is a witch, that she does not even allow her to succeed in Lagos. So what was she doing in Lagos? She was doing prostitution in Lagos (Atanong).

Reuben offered some good insights into why the prostitutes are desperate to offer their children the witch label in order to abandon or kill them, explaining that these women not only need freedom but are also too poor that they do not want to take any chances since they feel like they do not have other means of livelihood.

> ... They want to be free. They want to have freedom. They don't want to be disturbed by their children. These women do not want to take responsibilities for their kids. In order to be free and to go about doing their prostitution, they in turn, kill their children in the name of being witches. You see those women, their children look like burdens. They feel like these kids are burdens and don't allow them to go and make their money. Because of economic level, because of poverty level, they use prostitution as a means of livelihood and keeping children will be some hindrance for some men that may want to check them up. So they decide to kill these kids to be free going about doing prostitution (Reuben).

Murders by prostitutes based on the current data can be understood on the basis that their childbearing was a matter of 'accident'. According to Gavin and Porter (2015), women can end up with a child or become a mother without wanting to be a parent. It was possible that these prostitutes did not want these children and were unable to prevent their conception due to unavailability or failure of contraception. The presence of a child would normally make it difficult for the prostitute to meet up with the demands of the profession and for a prostitute with no alternative source of income, the presence of a child could mean financial hardship. Therefore, it can be argued that the desire to earn a living by the prostitutes or saving the child from financial hardship might have motivated the abuses.

Although one cannot entirely rule out the consequences of the stigma attached to childbearing outside marriage (Agazue, 2016; Barone, 2016), it can be argued that the stigma attached to prostitution itself is stronger than that associated with having a child outside marriage. Therefore, a prostitute who persists in this profession despite the high level of stigma attached to it in deeply religious African societies is unlikely to kill her child due to stigma. This will benefit from future investigation.

9.2. Conclusion

This chapter has explored how inconveniences experienced by both biological mothers of children and other women in charge of children, contribute to the child witch hunt and abuse as perceived by aid workers interviewed in this study. The inconveniences appear in different forms, such as broken homes, single parenting, family poverty, seeking husband, prostitution and a threat to inheritance and discomfort. Children in broken homes, such as orphans being taken care of by their relatives are at risk of stigmatisation when they are seen as a threat to economic resources reserved for biological children (Daly and Wilson, 1988; Mariano et al., 2014; Weekes-Shackelford and Shackelford, 2004). Broken homes also lead to remarriage, which could mean that a child be brought up by a stepmother. This is also a risk factor for the aforementioned reason. Children of single mothers facing adverse socioeconomic stress are also at risk of abuse. Children of spinsters, widows and divorcees seeking husbands are particularly at risk of abuse as their mothers desperately try to present themselves as those without illegitimate children or without a 'burden' to potential husbands. The above factors suggest that fear of witchcraft is not the problem for these women, rather the endemic belief is exploited and religious leaders are used to acquiring a 'witch label' as a way of legitimising the child abuse.

Chapter Ten

Conclusion

10.1. Summary of findings

This thesis set out to explore why women believe that children under their care are witches, the several factors promoting this belief and the reasons for abusing such children. These factors were explored through the views of the aid workers, which were supplemented with reports by NGOs and media. The two latter sources covered incidents that occurred mostly in other African countries where the child witch phenomenon also exists. Intriguing findings emerged from all the sources of data. The thesis has demonstrated that several factors integrate to promote the women's belief that children are witches. These factors, which are presented as themes under separate chapters in this report are movies, religion, ignorance, adversity and inconvenience. Indigenous movies exert their impacts in the form of showing moving images of child witches attending witch covens at night, initiating fellow children and then returning to their families to harm their people. These movies become a factor because the supposed fiction is treated as a reality by the audience due to the fact that these movies are used by influential evangelists and pastors to demonstrate their teachings on witchcraft.

Religion as a theme has demonstrated how the activities of religious leaders who convince their followers that children are witches and wreak havoc in their communities, promote the child witch hunt and the consequent abuse as perceived by the aid workers and supported by the reports by NGOs and media. Pastors draw on biblical texts concerned with witchcraft (e.g., 'thou shalt not suffer a witch to live', Exodus, 22:18) to make their mission appear legitimate, necessary and sometimes, urgent. These religious leaders succeed due to their adherents' belief that they are spiritually strong, hear from God and have what it takes to save the bewitched from the destructive power of the witches.

Ignorance as a theme shows how the women are believed to associate several problems to witchcraft due to their lack of scientific knowledge as observed by the aid workers. This was also supported by the aforementioned sources of data. These problems include medical and psychological conditions, aberrant and stubborn behaviours and exceptional talents seen in children. These problems already have scientific explanations but the aid workers believe that these women prefer spiritual explanations presented by influential people (e.g., pastors) around them. This can be argued to be a reflection of the poor level of education, or lack of it entirely,

amongst these women. The data under this theme has shown that people, particularly children could still be labelled witches due to ignorance as was the case in the centuries past (e.g., Barry, 2018; Burstein, 1949; Levack, 1987; Nguyen-Finn, 2018; Rowlands, 2001) despite the increasing breakthroughs in medicine and psychology in modern time.

Under adversity, the contributions of the myriad of unpleasant events experienced by parents or members of the community to this social problem has been explored as perceived by aid workers and supported by the secondary sources of data in the thesis. The unpleasant events are sicknesses and deaths. They often raise suspicions that certain children could be responsible for such events. This is informed by the common belief about witches, across histories and cultures as capable of harming and killing people (e.g., Burns, 2003; Macfarlane, 1970; Reynoldson and Taylor, 1998; Winsham, 2016). Thus, the child witches are hunted and abused in order to prevent illnesses and deaths.

Inconvenience is a unique factor in this thesis in the sense that aid workers' accounts and some of the secondary data suggest that children are targeted by different groups of women (e.g., stepmothers, aunts, spinsters, divorcees, widows and prostitutes) not because these women believe that the children are witches, rather the extant belief itself is exploited by the women to eliminate unwanted children in order to advance their own agenda. Stepmothers and aunts have a similar agenda, which is to prevent the accused children from sharing resources with their own biological child. This follows existing patterns of child abuse by female carers, such as stepmothers' antagonism towards their stepchildren (e.g., Fagan, 2005; Gavin and Porter, 2015; Weekes-Shackelford and Shackelford, 2004; West, 2007; Wilson et al., 1980) with the main difference being that the belief in child witch allows the stepmothers in the current thesis to abuse these children with greater ease and endorsement by community members. Aunts, however, might have an additional agenda, which is to eliminate the orphan with the goal of possessing properties left behind by the orphan's parent. Spinsters, divorcees and widows commit their own abuse with the purpose of increasing their chances of attracting potential suitors who are known to avoid women with children. Prostitutes are motivated by the need to remove the burden of childrearing.

The current findings support previous research on some of the factors contributing to this social problem, particularly 'religion' and 'inconvenience' (e.g., Cimpric, 2010; van der Meer, 2013). However, the prior research (e.g., Cimpric, 2010; van der Meer, 2013) appears to present these as individual aberrations, rather than as a pattern of social behaviour. For example, war and

poverty (i.e., inconvenience) are often presented as motivating abuse by family members who are too poor to take care of orphaned relatives, therefore, witchcraft is drawn on to resolve the problem. Efforts were hardly made to explain how other factors (e.g., religion and movies) encourage these poor families to see witchcraft accusations as a leeway to eliminate such children. Thus, it is difficult to understand how poverty could effectively motivate child abuses in their severe forms. Poverty is not new to the African continent but the labelling and the consequent child abuse in connection to witchcraft belief, are a relatively new phenomenon.

Similarly, religion is often presented as a factor acting in isolation with pastors making money from exorcism with little attempt to identify how pastors' messages appeal to particular groups of women (e.g., mothers with sick, disabled and stubborn children; spinsters; prostitutes; carers of orphaned children, et cetera) who quickly respond to the pastors' appeal due to their particular vulnerabilities or pressing needs. The integration of multiple factors to promote labelling and abuse stand as one of the unique contributions made by this current study.

The integration of these multiple factors explain why this social problem concentrates in specific areas of the affected countries even though such areas are not among the poorest regions of such countries. In fact, accusations sometimes concentrate in major cities, such as the concentration of tens of thousands of cases in Kinshasa, the capital city of the DRC (CRIN, 2006; Keeble, 2010) and Akwa Ibom and Cross River states of Nigeria whose poverty headcount rates are much lower than those of the poorest states (Sokoto, Taraba and Jigawa) of Nigeria (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020) where this social problem is almost non-existent. This suggests that poverty in itself does not cause this problem in the absence of other factors, particularly religion. Thus, poverty exerts its influence when the leaders of the commercialised and proliferating religious houses target poor women whose poverty is attributed to witches, that is, the children under their care. People do not necessarily search for witches simply because they are poor or because they experience adverse life events in the absence of the belief that poverty or misfortunes could be caused by witches. This can also be said about the women who have sick and disabled children, including those whose children display aberrant and stubborn behaviours as well as exceptional talents.

The contemporary African pastors use both sermons and videos to spread messages about witches. Gossips and rumours spread witchcraft suspicions (Agazue, 2015; Bever, 2008; Bleek, 1976; Levack, 2006; Stewart and Strathern, 2004). Gossip 'makes what is private public' (Kartzow, 2009, p.39), 'reinforces norms' (Bleek, 1976, p.527) and escalates social

hostilities related to witchcraft (Kartzow, 2009). The home movies can be argued to be sources of gossips and rumours in airspaces – a globalisation trend that spreads gossips and rumours much faster and farther than one's neighbourhood. Movies do not seem too motivational to force women to abuse children but when the fictional characters are drawn on by preachers to emphasise how deadly the child witches could be to their families, the movies could become a powerful factor motivating child abuse.

Although movies are partly blamed for the witchcraft-related abuses as perceived by the aid workers and supported by the reports by NGOs and media on this social problem, it is to be acknowledged that witchcraft belief is still widespread in contemporary Africa. The idea that children could be witches is in line with the traditional lore on witchcraft in the continent (Reidel, 2012). This is understandable because the belief in witchcraft itself was not introduced by the movies. It seems, therefore, that these movies and the preachers depicting children as witches simply reinforce what the people have often considered as a reality in their societies but with children as a new target. As previously noted, the 'criminal potential of witchcraft' is connected to the extant belief in witchcraft in a particular society, making accusations successful in such society (Jackson, 1995, p.68). This explains the discriminate distribution of accusations in different countries. Children are accused mostly, if not only in communities where other factors (e.g., movies and religion) have successfully instituted the belief that such children are witches.

Although religious leaders are instrumental in this problem due to their influences, it is important to acknowledge that they do not always initiate them. The data is consistent that, due to the prevailing culture, women suspect their children of being witches and then take them to religious leaders for confirmation. Having acknowledged this, the role of the religious leaders is enormous considering that the belief in witchcraft, in general, is revived by these authority figures; including the introduction of the new idea that children are witches in its current conceptualisation. With the ubiquity of churches in Africa and the increasing sermons on child witches and the havoc they purportedly wreak in the selected regions and the abuse of the accused appear to be legitimised as genuine work of believers who adhere to biblical injunctions.

Part of the unique findings of the current data is that it complements the existing ones with respect to understanding when the belief in the child witch phenomenon emerged. Whilst the emergence of this social problem has been studied and documented in certain African

countries, such as the DRC (Save the Children, 2005) and Malawi (van der Meer, 2013) where it was traced to the 1990s, its emergence in Nigeria had been subject to speculation. The current data has bridged this gap through a first-hand account of several participants who live in Akwa Ibom where this problem is believed to have emerged in Nigeria. These participants unanimously agree that it emerged in their community in the 1990s at the same time when the *End of the Wicked* movie was introduced into the community. Bridging this gap about Nigeria is important considering the enormous cultural (Agazue, 2015; Onyenankeya et al., 2017), policy (Bakare and Read, 2019) and economic (Adegbola et al., 2018; Ogunnubi and Okeke-Uzodike, 2016; Woolfrey et al., 2019) influence wielded by Nigeria as the Africa's largest democracy (Ihonvbere and Shaw, 1998; Obiefuna-Oguejiofor, 2018) and a country with the largest population of Black people in the world (Salawu, 2010). Such enormous influence means that any solutions for this social problem from this research are likely to benefit other African nations.

This current data drew on secondary data for the purposes of comparing incidents in Nigeria with those in other parts of Africa. Overall, the secondary data from other parts of Africa support the primary data as they consistently show that the patterns were largely similar in other parts of Africa. Both the primary and secondary data demonstrate that religious leaders exploit their followers with this belief; orphans, stepchildren, sick and disabled children, stubborn children and those with exceptional talents are targeted; and that illnesses and deaths in families contribute to accusations. The role of illegitimacy, prostitution and the search for a husband are relatively new findings emerging from this current research which are not evidenced in secondary data. Therefore, further research may assist in shedding further light on these themes.

10.2. Limitations and Recommendations

Like other academic projects, the current study has its limitations. The researcher's inability to interview the real perpetrators of these crimes is considered as one of the major limitations of this study. Although the CRARN staff members are trusted by the researcher as understanding the perpetrators' motivations having been in close contact with both the perpetrators and their victims for decades, the perpetrators are better positioned to provide better insights into their motivations. The perpetrators would have made more intriguing revelations than the current participants. Therefore, future research is recommended to offer insights by interviewing the women who had committed these crimes.

Another limitation of this current study is based on the fact that primary data came from Nigeria only on a social problem that occurs in many parts of Africa. Although secondary data was used to gain insights into this phenomenon in other parts of Africa, the information provided by the secondary data was limited to the research aims of the researchers for the NGOs whose publications were analysed as well as the particular issues picked up by the media organisations whose reports were analysed. Thus, they could not provide in-depth accounts of this phenomenon as reflected in some of the chapters or themes, particularly Chapter Nine ('inconvenience') where issues relating to prostitution and the desire for marriage provided by CRARN staff members could not be collaborated by any of the secondary sources of data. Therefore, future research is also recommended to investigate how prostitution and women's desire for marriage contribute to this problem in other countries where it exists. Another important area of recommendation is 'religion' as it stands as the main key driver for this problem. While the belief that human beings could be witches is not necessarily religious as this belief is held by many non-religious persons too, this thesis has demonstrated that religious organisations are instrumental in spreading this belief and the crimes connected to it. It will be very difficult to close these religious organisations or teaching members to start believing that witches do not exist in contrary to what they have believed for so long. However, efforts can be made to convince them that witches, if at all exist, are not necessarily visible in human forms. Since they believe that witches wreak havoc spiritually, they should likewise confront or eliminate these threats spiritually without attacking anyone as a witch.

Regional conferences for religious leaders are recommended in the affected regions with the aim of having dialogues with the religious leaders of the particular religious organisations involved in this practice. These can be organised by children's charities in Africa. Whilst it will be difficult to convince some pastors that witches do not exist, their attention can be deviated from the 'thou shalt not suffer a witch to live' (Exodus, 22:18) injunction to the 'love your neighbour' (Mark, 13:31) injunction. They should also be directed to the aspects of the bible concerned with how Jesus loves children (e.g., Mark, 10: 13-16). Thus, it should be stressed that it is a double standard for a pastor to claim to be representing Jesus but at the same time promoting abuse of children loved dearly by Jesus.

Problems caused by home movies can also be resolved in a similar way as above. Since these movies serve as a powerful evangelical tool to the witch-hunting pastors and evangelists who emphasise on them to convince their followers that child witches exist, interested parties can

produce or sponsor the production of movies that can depict children as little angels and/or friends of Jesus. This can also be done with a movie that is actually like a documentary highlighting the impacts of labelling children as witches. The goal is to send out a message that children are not evils as depicted. It is to be acknowledged that the witch-hunting pastors are very unlikely to promote such movies. The target, therefore, should be other pastors who are against the child witch branding. Interested organisations, such as children's charities should reach out to these pastors (e.g., through conferences) and plead with them to use such movies as their evangelical tools to let members of the communities understand that children are a special blessing from God. The point is to get this new message across to the members of these same communities. This counter fiction is very likely to reverse their line of thoughts.

It is worth acknowledging here that pastors are not the only religious leaders involved in this, rather the leaders of traditional African religions are also involved. However, pastors are the most influential ones because of the current domination of Christianity in many parts of Africa and the demonisation of the traditional gods by the promoters of the Christian God (Agazue, 2015; Onyinah, 2002), particularly in the areas where this social problem exists. The pastors revive this belief with the home movies in the affected communities and henceforth, members of the communities seek out the particular religious leaders who represent them for solutions. The greater influence wielded by the pastors is the reason they should be predominantly targeted for the purposes of stopping this problem.

Outreach services should be established by children's charities. Agazue (2015) was able to witness at the CRARN Centre how dozens of parents emotionally reunited with the children they previously abused and abandoned as witches after CRARN staff members reached out to them and enlightened them. They were able to explain to these mothers why their children's conditions were not connected to witchcraft and these women accepted their explanations and took their children back. Some of the women vowed to stop attending witch-hunting churches and also discouraged their friends and relatives from doing so. This clearly suggests that many vulnerable parents and their children can be saved through enlightenment campaigns.

However, this type of outreach service is not expected to work for the women with ulterior motives (e.g., stepmothers, aunts, spinsters, divorcees, widows and prostitutes) since they might not believe that the children are witches in the first place. Witchcraft persecution in early modern Europe was 'an oppressive technique, serving selfish ends' (Briggs, 2002, p.344). Likewise, these women simply exploit the extant belief to make their actions acceptable by

community members. Unfortunately, not many members of the communities are aware of this, thus, they often support this practice. Outreach teams can be established to visit the particular communities where these incidents occur to enlighten members of the public on how the aforementioned women are likely to accuse children of witchcraft. Firstly, they need to identify families with children at risk of accusations (e.g., orphans) and to warn their carers that any witchcraft-related accusations must be thoroughly investigated and that the offender must be sanctioned by the law if found guilty.

Laws should be made to criminalise the labelling of a child as a witch in the countries involved. However, this can be a complicated and difficult process in societies where authorities themselves also believe in the existence of witches. Already, there are laws on witchcraft in some of the affected countries (e.g., Diwan, 2004; Hund, 2004; Kiye, 2018) but they have not addressed this problem adequately. Whether new laws are made or not, parents can be charged with child abuse based on existing laws. The current researcher observed how Nigerian police responded rapidly to many calls by CRARN staff members to rescue abused children and arrested the adults involved in the incidents, including pastors who influenced the adults in some cases. This suggests that the police have a keen interest in protecting children from abuse irrespective of their belief. Thus, children's charities can monitor both carers and pastors as done by CRARN and should contact the police when necessary.

Additionally, vigilantes or community volunteers can also be engaged. The details of how child abuse cases and abandonment linked to the belief in child witches drastically reduced in Angola after committees were set up by villagers to protect children from labelling by fundamentalist pastors (The New York Times, 2007). This is a clear indication that community members not only are willing to help but could also do so effectively. Children's charities can engage such community members in different communities. They can be easily recruited through village chiefs or traditional rulers. Only in embarking on such potential interventions can we hope to eliminate child witchcraft practices in the affected societies.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Interview Questions

1. Based on your experiences dealing with women who have maltreated or killed their children or other people around them because they believed that such individuals were possessed, what can you explain to me?

2. Can you think of any particular factors which promote such assaults in connection with the beliefs in witchcraft or spirit possession?

3. What can you tell me about these women in terms of being in full control of their actions or influenced by anybody or other people around them?

Appendix 2

Participation Information Sheet

(For CRARN Staff Members)

Research Title

The Criminogenic Implications of the Child Witch Phenomenon in Contemporary Africa:

A Connection with Female Pattern of Aggression and Murder

This leaflet tells you about this study, why the researcher is conducting the study and what you should expect as a participant

Invitation to participate

I am inviting you to participate in my research degree. Before you begin, it is important you have full knowledge of what this research is all about. This is why I have given you this leaflet which explains all you need to know about this research. Please feel free to read all the contents and possibly discuss it with someone or other people, if you wish to, before you make up your mind to participate. If there is any information unclear in this leaflet or if you wish to know about anything else which is not explained in this leaflet, please feel free to ask me.

British Psychological Society's (BPS) ethical guidelines

This research is carried out in accordance with the BPS's (2009) ethical guidelines for psychological research. I can provide you with a copy of these guidelines, should you wish to see them.

What is this study about?

I wish to explore the implications of some of the things which people believe in Africa as well as certain practices that accompany such beliefs. In order to do this, I will need to interview a couple of people on their beliefs and experiences. Beliefs in witchcraft and other spirit possessions have existed in Africa for long but there are recent events, even on-going ones

associated with such beliefs which I am trying to explore. Your duties as CRARN staff members meant that you should be familiar with the cases of women abandoning their children, including torturing and/or killing them – a development which is common around here and many other parts of Africa at present. You might have also witnessed, or at least heard of women who have attacked their mothers, husbands and other people around them, due to the belief that such persons were possessed. So I am interested in understanding why this has been happening.

I am trying to understand why people believe that their fellow human beings can be possessed by spirits of various kinds. I also wish to explore any factors which contribute to such beliefs and why particular individuals are singled out as those who are possessed by the witchcraft spirit or any perceived mischievous spirits. I do also wish to understand why people think that physically confronting or even killing the alleged witches or the possessed may solve the problem for them. So any experiences you might have had or any information you have regarding this would be highly appreciated, if you wish to let me know about them.

How will this study take place?

I will appreciate if you can tell me why you think that people are being accused or attacked based on these beliefs. If there are some particular factors which you have identified as contributing to the belief and any events that follow it, I will be happy to know about them. Based on your rich experiences, I will appreciate any ideas you may have regarding how future incidents can be prevented.

Should you find any experiences difficult to disclose, I will give you the option to take a break or even to discontinue, depending on what you feel is the best. Also, if I feel you might be experiencing any discomfort, I will check with you and ask you if you wish to discontinue the session. Psychologists claim that recalling certain experiences could sometimes make one feel uncomfortable. So, if you feel you would need help in terms of this, I have a card from a counselling organization where you can obtain psychotherapy should you require such help. I have been given the permission to hand their details out to enable you get in touch with them at any time in the future. Also, at the bottom of this information sheet are my personal contact details, should you feel like contacting me later. My supervisor's details are also below, should you have any concerns about me as a researcher.

Is this interview compulsory?

No. This interview will rely on your voluntary cooperation and that of other people that will take part. I will really appreciate your co-operation and will only be successful if you and other potential participants volunteer to reveal their experiences to me.

What rights do I have regarding this study?

You have a right not to participate, should you wish not to. You also have the right to withdraw at any time, should you wish to. You can also miss out any questions I ask you if you feel uncomfortable with them. Please feel free to let me know if this is the case. You also have the right to access your responses and/or to request that I remove your responses before the study is being reported or published.

Is this study confidential?

Yes. This study adheres to the UK Data Protection Act regarding safekeeping of data. I will record your voice with an audio-recorder with your permission, simply to enable me write out what you have told me without any mistakes. Are you happy for me to do this? Meanwhile, I will endeavour to protect your identity and this will be done by keeping secure all the data collected from you throughout this research period, that is, the consent form you will sign for me, as well as the audio-recording that contains your voice. After the study, the consent form will be securely transferred to the University of Huddersfield's locking filing cabinet and your recorded voice will be destroyed.

The study is solely for my PhD/research degree purposes which may also be published, the information you provide will be treated in the strictest confidence which means that nobody will be able to identify you as the source of this information. I will require you to choose any name you like which I can always mention when reporting your responses, so that people will not be able to identify you as the source of the information. Alternatively, I can generate a fictitious name myself, during the analysis, should you become unable to decide on a name to use. This will be done to ensure that you always remain anonymous in the research degree report and in any follow-up publications.

What if I wish to know the outcomes of the research or have other questions?

I will provide you with the research report as soon as it becomes available. Since I visit Nigeria every year, I will contact you during my next visit following the publication of this research and will then give you a copy of the published material, in a similar way I have handed you with

this ‘Information Sheet’. If you have any other questions, my contact details are printed below and you are free to contact me in future regarding your questions.

What next?

I will interview you regarding what you know about the belief described above and events which they generate. Please feel free to tell me all you know about them and all you think that contribute to them. In addition, any solutions which you can come up with, regarding how future events can be prevented, will be highly appreciated.

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Appendix 3

Consent Form

Title of Research Project: **The Criminogenic Implications of the Child Witch Phenomenon in Contemporary Africa:**

A Connection with Female Pattern of Aggression and Murder

It is important that you read, understand and sign the consent form. Your contribution to this research is entirely voluntary and you are not obliged in any way to participate, if you require any further details please contact your researcher.

I have been fully informed of the nature and aims of this research □

I consent to taking part in it □

I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time □
without giving any reason

I give permission for my words to be quoted (by use of pseudonym) □

I understand that the information collected will be kept in secure conditions □
for a period of five years at the University of Huddersfield

I understand that no person other than the researcher/s and facilitator/s will □
have access to the information provided.

I understand that my identity will be protected by the use of pseudonym in the □
report and that no written information that could lead to my being identified will
be included in any report.

If you are satisfied that you understand the information and are happy to take part in this project please put a tick in the box aligned to each sentence and print and sign below.

Signature of Participant:	Signature of Researcher:
_____	_____
Print:	Print:
_____	_____
Date:	Date:
_____	_____

(one copy to be retained by Participant / one copy to be retained by Researcher