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Perception Of Witchcraft Practice In Oredo Local Government Area Of Edo State, Nigeria

Nwatu, Uche Louisa
Department of Social Work, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Ebue, Malachy Okechukwu
Department of Social Work, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Iwuagwu, Anthony Obinna
Department of Social Work, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Ene, Jacinta Chibuzor
Department of Social Work, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Odo, Casmir Obinna
Department of Social Work, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

ABSTRACT

Africa has long standing history of complex phenomenal as they relate to belief system, especially in the existence and powers of witches which pervades every segment of the society. This study is designed to ascertain the perception of witchcraft practice in Oredo Local Government Area of Edo state, Nigeria. The study used a cluster/multi stage random sample of 30 residents of Oredo Local Government Area whom were interviewed using FGDs and in-depth interviews to elicit information on the perception and practice of witchcraft in Edo state, Nigeria. Data generated were content analyzed and the result shows that majority of the respondent were of the opinion that witchcraft is widely practiced in Edo state and it has negative implications to victims. They emphasized its human right implications, noting that it could result in total violation of rights. Results further show that witchcraft accusation is gender biased as women (elderly) are mostly the victims of witchcraft accusation against their male counterparts, thereby raising concerns on gender based discrimination as well as human right violation respectively. It becomes highly imperative that social workers and other human rights professionals should raise awareness on the existence of these problems and carryout necessary advocacy, influencing the government to enact and enforce stronger laws and strategies to address all aspects of this issue.

Keywords: Witchcraft, Perception, Edo state, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Witchcraft is defined as the activities of witches and wizards carried out by "the use of magical powers, especially evil ones[1]. In the same vein, a witch according to the Witchcraft and Human

Rights Information Network is "an evil person who has the ability to bring about all manner of harm"[28]. Witchcraft have long been a staple of anthropological and historical studies, it has only recently become the subject of contemporary legal and public policy analysis. Africa has long standing history of complex phenomenal as they relate to belief system, especially in the existence and powers of witches which pervades every segment of the society[7]. Such beliefs have commonly resulted in persecution, social rejection, discrimination and violence toward those who are believed to be or who identify themselves as witches[15]. Similarly, sorcery and witchcraft beliefs and practices today generate a wide range of development-related problems in many parts of the world. The most visible of these are violent exorcisms, banishment, torture, and killing inflicted upon those accused of practicing sorcery and witchcraft in many parts of the global South, particularly India, Nepal, South Africa, Tanzania, Angola, Nigeria, Indonesia and the Congo and even China [11, 23]. In many African societies, women are more likely accused of witchcraft than their male counterparts. It is not surprising therefore that all over Africa, thousands of elderly women accused of witchcraft have been burned, buried alive, hacked to pieces and tortured to death[6]. There are thousands of the cases of people being accused of witchcraft and sorcery globally, most times with fatal consequences.

Due to the immense poverty and apparent hopeless situation of ordinary working people in Nigeria many of the old superstitions still survive today. Underlying this belief in witchcraft practice in Nigeria is the idea that Human soul could exist independent of the material body and Nigerians lived close to Mother Nature and saw the natural environment as something controlled by spiritual forces [12]. Similarly, a professor of anthropology at the University of Arizona (UA) in his book called Shamans, Priests and Witches: A Cross-Cultural Study of Magico-Religious Practitioners stated that "all Nigerian ethnic groups have traditional beliefs in witchcraft" At night this soul quits the body and assumes the form of a creature to carry out evil acts against others. Witches were said to possess super human powers that they use to perpetrate evil. Some believe that a witch could harm anybody including her family members and this especially makes them highly hated because they are said to kill their own children, drink human blood and bring ruin and ill health on their friends and families[7]. That is to say, in contrast to normal human beings witches conceive and cause the most horrible misfortune on their families and communities. They were viewed as the embodiment of everything that is evil and they were said to practice their wicked art only in the dead of night[7]. Deaths, natural disasters, and epidemics were all blamed on witches. In the rural areas, traditional healers or soothsayers are often consulted by those who have suffered loss, misfortune, illness, or death in the family, to point out whom in the family or community has been "bewitching" them[10]. In most beliefs a witch was said to confess her "crimes" before she died or went mad. Often, mob attacks are instantly applied by the mob with onlookers witnessing a perceived infringement of social mores instigating the process of violence as a remedy of the perceived wrong. According to Igwe "this unlawful violence is triggered by a few actors who serve as the accuser, judge and executor[12].

Edo State was formerly known as the 'City of Blood'. It would have been apt for it to also be known as the 'Land of Witches and Wizards'[19]. The Edo people believed in the concept of witchcraft. Witches were wise and powerful human beings who possessed inherent supernatural powers[3]. [7]Edo witches consisted of any human being who had the ability to detach his or her life force from the physical body to capture or kill the life essence of another. The people of Edo usually attribute many origins of strange diseases, sudden deaths, accidents, childlessness, impotence, and other misfortunes to witchcraft[3]. The identity of a witch in Edo state was not gender specific, a witch could

be female or male in gender, but women were more common. It is believed in Edo that a witch possessed a great life force called orhion (power of transformation) is a witch's life force that took on the form of a bird or animal and they are able to travel undetected by transforming their life force into an animal form. A witch usually transformed at nighttime to accomplish a malevolent deed and some of the animals that a witch could transform herself into were owls, cats and dogs [3]. The leader of the witches was called Obason and a host of other widely held views about witchcraft practice among the people of Edo State.

Witchcraft from the foregoing is rooted in primitive society. Fear and ignorance played powerful roles in its growth and development. It is difficult to calculate the total number of witches, as they typically practice alone or in small, autonomous groups, and there is no central organization[7]. The American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS) estimates that there are 307,000 Wiccan, Druid, and Pagan adults in the United States[10]. Some demographic information on Witches has been collected by anthropologists and sociologists, who have paid considerable attention to this subculture. Sorcery and witchcraft are today one of the most pressing and significant threats to physical and spiritual security[2]. From what have been written so far and the available literature on witchcraft, it could be deduced that Nigerians actually believed in the existence of witchcraft[14].

Social workers has become increasingly aware of the importance of Christianity and religion in the lives of their clients[5,27] Although some literature examines the role of spirituality in social work, there is almost no professional literature on the concept of witchcraft practice within the field of social work practice in Nigeria and Social workers has paid little or no attention on the role of spirituality and religion in their practice especially in respect to sorcery and witchcraft practice in Nigeria.

Also, the topic under review also has human right implication, in the light of this, the revised definition of social work, states at its concluding part that "the principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work"[13]. However, social work can be considered "a human rights profession". People accused of witchcraft suffer a wide range of human right violations, these violations have been described by Igwe as a weapon of power and a mechanism for the oppression of the victims especially females who are in weak socio cultural positions in patriarchal societies[12].

People accused of witchcraft suffer significant and wide ranging violations of their human rights. violation of rights which range from the right to be free from violence, abuse and neglect, the right to life, the right to be free from torture, the right to non-discrimination, the right to respect the views of the people accused of witchcraft, the rights to food and shelter to the right to protection[9]. Other infringements on their fundamental human rights include abuses, abandonment, and neglect, beatings, banishment into the evil forest or on the streets and murder[12], thereby resulting to a lot of physical and psychological damages. It is however evident that the issues associated with witchcraft practice has serious human right implications, meanwhile the study of the perception of witchcraft practice in Edo state has scanty literature in that regard and it has not been properly addressed by social workers. Thus, this study will fill such academic gap by examining the perception and practice of witchcraft in Edo State, Nigeria and its implication for social work practice. This paper therefore sought to address the following specific objectives; (1) to explore the perception of witchcraft practice in Edo state, Nigeria (2) to find out the effect of witchcraft practice in Edo State (3) to explore suggestions on the problem (4) to discuss the implications of findings.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theory is a particular kind of explanation or statement that seeks to explain or predict a particular aspect of life[22]. Therefore, the study was anchored by the disaster theory and the Azande theory of Evans-Pritchard. Coming to the Azande theory, the anthropologist E. E. Evans-Pritchard preferred a detailed ethnographical study of a tribe and their religion to form a theory about the tribe's religion/practices over untestable speculation over such origins by e.g. Müller, Tylor, and Durkheim, and what he termed 'armchair anthropologist' The anthropologist Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard did an extensive ethnographic studies among the Azande and Nuer peoples who were considered "primitive" by society and earlier scholars, this long-term field work was done to study the people's culture and religion[8]. Evans-Pritchard saw these people as different, but not primitive. He argued that the religion of the Azande (witchcraft and oracles) cannot be understood without the social context and its social function. Witchcraft and oracles played a great role in solving disputes among the Azande. Mair observed that Evans-Pritchard's study of the Azande remains "the first serious examination to be made of such a belief as a social factor, and it remains one of the most detailed"[16]. The Azande, more than any other people on record, ascribe more events to witchcraft by interpreting any misfortune – big or small – to the handiwork of a witch[16]. Among the Azande people, misfortunes do not happen by chance even when such mishaps can easily be explained by some natural occurrence. Evans-Pritchard narrated an interesting incident of the collapse of granary whose legs were destroyed by termites and the Azande interpretation of the incident The Azande's faith in witchcraft and oracles was quite logical and consistent once some fundamental tenets were accepted[8].

The Disaster Theory: As actual misfortunes struck (plague, famine, war, storm), people blamed supernatural forces and found scapegoats in witches but many persecutions were done during times of relative peace and plenty. Further, many such troubles were not new to early modern Europe, but have been endemic throughout history. Thus, why were "witches" to blame, and not other common scapegoats (Jews, Sodomites, deviants, foreigners) or other supernatural forces (such as demons without the aid of human witches)?

METHODOLOGY

Study Population

Oredo is a local government area in Edo state with administrative headquarters in Benin City which is also the capital of Edo State. Oredo local government area falls within the southern senatorial zone of Edo State otherwise known as Edo South Senatorial District alongside Orhionmwon, Ovia North-East, Ovia South-West, Egor, Uhunmwode and Ikpoba Okha local government areas. The study was carried out in Oredo L.G.A, Edo State of Nigeria and respondents who were between the ages of 20-75 years who were chosen from some selected sampling sites which includes communities like Oko, Iriri, Ogba, Oba market and environs in the area. Edo State is one of the 36 States in Nigeria located in the south-south geopolitical zone of the country with Benin City as its capital. Oredo local government area is one of the three LGAs in Benin City metropolis comprising the total population of 374,515 and 12 wards[17]**.** It is also the administrative headquarters of Benin City, Edo state. Despite its political significance, the city is poorly industrialized and has limited opportunities for meaningful income-earning activities. Consequently, the state has one of the highest rates of unemployment among youths even in the midst of high school enrolment rate[20]. The above choice of population sufficed for the purpose of this study because the 12 wards in the Oredo local government area are the interplay of the very urban, the semi-urban and the rural dwellers.

These mixtures therefore engendered and ensured a comprehensive and balance data from adult respondents of varied socio demographic backgrounds.

DESIGN AND SAMPLING

A multi stage sampling procedure which entails successive selection of community clusters, groups, streets, villages, housing units and respondents was employed. At the first stage, the streets in Oredo LGA were clustered into 12 wards; hence the sampling frame equals 136 streets in Oredo LGA[25]. This cluster choice was to help the researcher get varied demographic data that will be used to analyze the respondents' views on the subject of study. Secondly, a simple random sampling technique through simple balloting was applied to choose 3 wards and 5 streets from each of the 3 selected wards out of 12 in Oredo LGA, Benin City, Edo State. Purposive sampling was used next by the researchers to directly choose from the three wards, those who not only indicated willingness, but were also eligible to participate on account of their age and sex. These participants were invited to the FGDs at specific locations. Each of the 3 FGD sessions consisted of 7 participants summating to 21 participants. Lastly, the snowball technique was adopted in identifying 9 IDI respondents from wards that did not feature in the FGD study. This was used because of the information-rich subject undergoing research and the need for proper referral to information-rich persons, regarding the research subject.

The researchers all had a uniform FGD and IDI guides which helped for standardization. The Research Ethics Review Board had earlier moderated the instrument so as not to instigate negative emotional reactions from participants on account of the subject matter under discussion. FGDs and IDI were conducted in pidgin and English languages depending on the language proficiency of participants. Participants verbally consented to the audio-recording of their responses after they had been assured of confidentiality and anonymity.

DATA ANALYSIS

Audio-taped responses were later transcribed into English. 3 of the researchers then read through the transcripts and established themes that were used for the analysis in line with the demands of this study. Analytical themes were developed from the transcripts as guided by the literature reviewed.

RESULTS OF FINDINGS

The data present realities of witchcraft practice in Edo State, Nigeria. The first theme detailed respondent's knowledge of the existence and practice of witchcraft. Secondly, their perceived views on the rationale behind people's engagement in witchcraft stating both the positive and negative side of it. The third theme presented the effects of witchcraft practice on the perpetrators while the fourth focused on some suggestions lastly, the respondents views on solutions was x-rayed. Generally, their knowledge on these themes was largely influenced by experiences they have had, witnessed, or heard about.

KNOWLEDGE AND AWARENESS OF WITCHCRAFT PRACTICE

In terms of participant's knowledge of the existence and practice of witchcraft, all of them indicated that they had knowledge of the phenomenon and that witchcraft is widely practice in Oredo LGA. According to them the practice is not new and does not sound strange to them. However, only the response of a 35 year old youth leader and a 22 year old young lady was sampled. They opined thus:

> *In this our community, witchcraft is something that happens all the time, every day you must hear or see people complaining of how they were attacked in the night. Some people will wake up in the morning with scratches all over their bodies and some people also complain of terrible nightmare and how they fought with these witches in their dreams. All these things are what this evil people that call themselves witches do (we call them "Oro" here), these people do a lot of other evil things to wicked people. Yes this witches and wizards because even men and women do it, prefer to carry out their activities in the night when people are sleeping, they turn into different animals to attack people. We still have afternoon witches and "na that type dey worse pass"* **(IDI, youth leader, 35 years old)**.
>
> *Judging from what I have heard and also seen in this community, I can say that some of our people are witches and wizards. Ok now, Witchcraft has to do with all the wicked activities of evil people who have spiritual or unseen powers and they use it to cause harm on innocent people because of wickedness or jealousy. These evil people's spirit can go out especially in the night to attack people and suck their blood, some of them turn to rats, cats or bats to cause all manner of harm to people without any pity on their victims* **(FGD, 22 years old female)**.

VIEWS/PERCEPTION ON WITCHCRAFT PRACTICE

During the cause of the interview, it was discovered by the researchers that the respondents still shared both negative and positive views of witchcraft, while most of them totally condemned witches and their activities as being destructive, born out of jealousy, very many of the respondents equally expressed their own views from the positive side stating that some of their activities can be protective and be used to prosper their families and avert impending doom or problem.

NEGATIVE VIEWS

Data from this study revealed that majority of the participants saw the practice of witchcraft from a negative light. A lot of women who saw the negativity of witchcraft practice were guided by their moral values. Some others opined that the evil intents of these witches are quite enormous. Below are their responses:

> *…personally, witchcraft activities in this community is very common, this practice has put the entire community in fear of the unknown, witches around here cause a whole lot of havoc on innocent people all because they possess magical powers. These people, I mean the witches threaten their victims that they will show them pepper, I have personally seen a woman who threatened her neighbor that her daughter in-law who is pregnant can never give her a grandchild, so this woman used her witchcraft to change the unborn baby and when the pregnancy was due for delivery, this poor young woman gave birth to a "half human half animal". You cannot say that this is a child or an animal. These people do a lot of evil in our community, there are so many cases of their activities but I cannot mention all of them here.* **(IDI with a 39 years old Male)**.

A response from a 50 year old trader supported the claim when he said:

> *It is no longer a news that witches and wizards has brought bad name to the people of Edo state in general, if you go outside this state and hear what shame they have brought upon Edo people, in fact our people have been nicknamed witchcraft but if you come to Edo and see what these witches do to innocent people, you will find out that it is true in a way; that anyone associating witchcraft to Edo people is not totally wrong. In our community you see these people in their full wickedness inflicting harm on people, you can imagine that my cousin was rendered impotent by his friend simply out of jealousy, he said that my cousin married the girl he was eyeing, these people can bring bad luck to your marriage or business, they turn to different types of animals to cause accidents and even cause miscarriage to pregnant women. I think I have to stop here because I will take the whole time if you allow me, witchcraft have seriously done more harm than good to us.* **(FGD participant).**

POSITIVE VIEWS

Although majority of the participants had negative views towards witchcraft practice in the community, some others however saw it in a positive light. A lot of women who saw the positivity of witchcraft practice were guided by their personal values and opinions. Some others affirmed that amidst all the negativities and adverse implications associated with witchcraft, that there are still some few things that is good about the practice. Below are their responses:

A 30 year old participant during one of the FGDs had a positive view of witchcraft practice. He linked his response to the reasons why people engage in it. According to him:

> *…this witchcraft can turn out to be positive depending on how people are using it, since these witches and wizards possesses magical powers to even foresee the future, they use it to see impending danger or any calamity that may befall an individual or their community in the nearest future and then mobilize people on what to do to be able stop such from happening. I could remember back then in school when my course mate missed two of his papers because his father stopped him from travelling to school because he possesses magical powers and saw that if his son goes back to school, armed robbers will attack him in his lodge and shoot him. This my classmate who told us the story upon returning to school why he missed the two examination and further revealed that armed robber truly invaded their lodge though in his absence and shot two of his lodge mates.*

In addition to this, some other young students also saw the phenomenon in a positive light and even renamed the act. They opined that people use witchcraft to better their lives and that of their families, they do this by using their magical powers to protect their children and make their different businesses to flourish. In the words of one of those students:

> *…yes I know that witchcraft is a very bad thing but all witchcraft is not for bad, ''some people dey use witchcraft dey better their family'' because some of their children used to travel abroad and they use their powers to do medicine for their children so that they will be getting favour from oyibo people and to also make their children's business to progress more than others* **(FGD with students, 25 years old Male).**

Similarly, a very young man of 18 years corroborated what the other participant said. According to him he that he sees witchcraft from the positive side although he still acknowledged that people use it to perpetrate all forms of wickedness. Furthermore, information elicited from him revealed thus:

> *Ok, for me witchcraft in this community is not only used to perpetrate evil, just as some people bring misfortune upon innocent ones through witchcraft some people also use it to bring fortune to people, they also use their powers to tell people of the evil that is about to befall them as well as how to take precautions. They also use it to help all these yahoo yahoo boys by giving them powers they use to control their clients and to enable them make cool cash. So this witchcraft can turn out to be positive depending on how people are using it.* **(FGD, 18 years old participant).**

EFFECTS OF WITCHCRAFT PRACTICE

Witchcraft and its practice has numerous effects on the individual (the supposed witches and their victims), the community and the nation at large. The respondents enumerated the effects/implications of this phenomenon thus coming from the angle of false accusation of innocent people as witches, the discrimination, stigmatization as well as social exclusions meted out to both the so called witches and their family members, the disintegration it causes in the community and the nation at large as well as its human right implications. Below is the response of one of the respondents opined that disintegration and disunity is one of the effects of witchcraft practice in Oredo LGA of Edo state:

> *To me, this whole thing about witchcraft practice has a heinous implications on our community and this affects the nation at large. Seriously people no longer take responsibility for their actions in this country thereby attributing every of their misfortune to the supposed witches or the so called "village people", I can boldly say that this whole witchcraft phenomenon is actually blown out of proportion and this affects our community adversely in the sense that it brings about disintegration between community and even family members. In fact this does not in any way contribute to the progress of the community, it does not contribute to national unity since there is no peace among community members and it hinders oneness among members of the community. This witchcraft brouhaha has really caused this community a lot, it has left perpetual enmity and malice among family members, friends and in the community at large.* **(FGD, female aged 28 years).**

In addition, some other respondents are of the view that wrong accusation of innocent people is another awful effect associated with witchcraft practice which has resulted in dehumanizing treatments, stigma, discrimination as well as other forms of inhuman treatment thereby making special emphasis on aged or elderly people and the deterioration it brings on their successful ageing. Ascertaining the veracity of this finding is a narrative of a young woman in an IDI session. She said:

> *One thing that gives me special concern about this whole witchcraft thing is that there is no proof, let me say scientific proof of witchcraft practice or that can be used to confirm that a particular person is actually a witch, except through ordinary speculation or when the so called men of God point accusing fingers on our loved ones to be responsible for our hardships and problems and most times when you look at it very well you find out that certain persons accused may be innocent. However when such things happens, the supposed witches are punished, in some cases they are paraded round the village naked and sometimes totally banished from the village. Again I have*

> *seen cases in this community where such persons are severely tortured and burnt to ashes without clear evidence that he/she is guilty as charged. Another big blow is that such persons are excommunicated which is discrimination, they won't be allowed to associate with others in the community and this also affects their family members. I know of a woman in my village who is confirmed to be a witch, this woman has five cute daughters who are seriously ripe for marriage but suitors kept running away from these girls because of the witchcraft spot on the mother, obviously people keep telling them (suitors) that their mother is Oro (a witch) and nobody will like to become a son in-law to a witch, what am trying to say is that both the families of these witches are totally condemned and somewhat avoided by other members of the community which is very bad.* **[Female FGD participant, 29 years old]**

Another respondent corroborated this when he said:

> *Seriously witchcraft has done enough harm to this community, it has led to untimely death of elderly men and women who are wrongly accused of practicing witchcraft. I have seen cases where some persons attributed the backwardness in their businesses to his poor grandfather in the village. I can recall a case where a man came home and dragged his poor blind father to the village square to disgrace him accusing him of being responsible for his wife's miscarriage, when people asked him whether he was sure of what he is saying, he said that it was his pastor that told him and he is sure that his pastor cannot lie because god revealed it to his pastor. He equally confessed that his pastor said that it is his father's wickedness that kept him in his condition (blindness). You can imagine this kind of thing, this man in question has abandoned his blind father in the village and the poor blind man was only surviving through help from neighbors and their kinsmen who used to bring food for the man* **[FGD, 26 years old Male]**.

The above response aligns with one of the deductions that was advanced by another study[14], that "these religions promoted the existence of witchcraft as their leaders created tensions and fears about it in the peoples' minds". Moreover, the respondent still went further to point out that accusation of aged people as witches is increasing by the day, he pointed out that such act deteriorate their health and becomes a cog in the wheel of healthy and successful aging seeing that such people are abandoned by their children to die without good health care, food and other necessities required for a graceful aging. On another note, other respondents stated the health implications associated with the practice of witchcraft, they opined that one of the punishment for this witches is that they are not buried at death rather custom demands that such persons are either thrown into the river or into the bush. Having said this, their remains are allowed to decay around the vicinity thereby contaminating the atmosphere and then causing a lot of health hazard to the members of such community.

SUGGESTIONS/SOLUTIONS

Majority of the respondents mentioned that the reason why people got involved in the practice of witchcraft is because of wickedness, jealousy and age based discrimination. According to them if the noise about witchcraft practice and the accusation is curtailed, then most people will continue to take responsibility for their actions, find the root cause of their ailments and not attribute everything to the activities of witches. Below are some responses captured on suggestions for a better society devoid of disintegration/disunity and a high sense of insecurity posed by this witchcraft saga,

People in this part of the world really need orientation, they need to be sensitized to have a more civilized mindset particularly about this whole witchcraft issues. If such is done, people will start disabusing their minds on the fact that even though there are traces of these witchcraft activities among the community members, they will begin to understand that not every everything is witchcraft, at least they will unlearn some of the things they have been fed with that not all sicknesses, accidents , childlessness, failure in business and academics has a witchcraft undertone, that the earlier they look out for and address the root cause of their misfortunes the better for them ***[FGD with a women, 32 years old].***

Elder/child abuse is another known adverse effect of the supposed witchcraft practice, the earlier people begin to understand that accusing and maltreating our children and aged parents and hiding under the umbrella of witchcraft the better. Even though some people are misled into believing that these people are responsible for their problems and some do that without knowing the implication. People should still be enlightened on the human right implication of such and the government should be able to put in place policies and laws that will adequately punish any form of child/elder abuse and discrimination. This will help to curtail this witchcraft menace in our communities ***[IDI with women leader, 40 years old].***

DISCUSSION

This present study investigated the perception of witchcraft practice and in Edo State, Nigeria and as well pointed out its implication for social work practice. Findings revealed that the majority of the participants were of the opinion that witchcraft is not is not new in their community, they acknowledged that witchcraft has a whole lot of adverse implications on the general wellbeing of the community as well as on the country at large. Specifically, respondents pointed out its adverse effect on national unity as it integrates and propagates jealousy and malice among family as well as community members, also emphasized was witchcraft accusation which could be wrongly meted out to innocent people especially the aging population thereby subjecting them to all sorts of dehumanizing, stigmatization and other inhuman treatment and this of course has health and human right implications. On the contrary, financial prosperity, foreseeing and prevention of impending doom among other reasons were the views of the participants who perceive witchcraft positively. Given the surrounding circumstances of the study, findings reveal that this area remains practicable for social work and human right practitioners, whose concern includes enhancing human wellbeing, promoting social change; ensuring problem solving in human relationships, and protecting the interests of the vulnerable or those who may be at risk, who are culturally aware and sensitive, non- oppressive and who understand the complexities of working cross-culturally and takes the clients' culture/religious belief to be paramount.

Specifically, all participants affirmed to be knowledgeable of the subject matter "witchcraft" as the phenomena is not new in their community. Such view on knowledge of witchcraft practice is not unconnected to the findings of some studies[14], who deduced that every Nigerian believed in the existence of witches and witchcrafts in their areas. They were of the opinion that witchcraft had been part of the culture and beliefs of the people. Additionally, a study noted that belief in and practice of witchcraft is a common phenomenon in many parts of the world[18].

More so, participants had negative view on the practice of witchcraft, such negative perceptions are hinged on factors such as religion and superstition accompanied by such implications as human right, health as well as implications to national development, death, discrimination, stigmatization, subjection to torture, elder abuse, false accusations were also part of the negative views pointed out by participants. Corroborating this is the finding of other studies[10,7]

In addition, findings of this study further detailed positive perception of witchcraft practice as it has been able to help some families get financial prosperity and favor especially those of them that find themselves in foreign countries, also they pointed out that witchcraft also on the good side helps to avert impending doom or calamity thereby making people to take the necessary precautionary measures. This view coincides exactly with that of another study where people who hold the idea that "witchcraft is used to make rain, ripen the harvest, procure peace, protect family members from attack and ensure victory in battle"[7].

In addition, findings from this study points towards individual, communal and national effects of witchcraft. Most worrisome is its threat to national as well as communal unity, the health and human right effects on the "victims" and their families., some other threatening effect of this practice are the inhuman and degrading treatment meted out to the supposed witches; stigmatization, discrimination banishment, poor hygiene, physical and psychological torture and a host of others. Other studies are also in agreement with this finding[18,7].

As regards efforts to combat the accompanying effects of the practice of witchcraft and to curtail wrong speculations about witchcraft, it was suggested in the study that both government and other human right professionals have roles to play in this, As a solution, it was suggested by participants that the government should put in place policies/laws that will regulate and if possible punish all forms of violence and human right violations resulting from witchcraft practice and its accusation just as the case may be. It was also suggested that other human right professionals should take it upon themselves to champion community education in order to enlighten community members on the implications of attributing everything in their life to witchcraft, these professionals should take adequate measures to disabuse peoples' minds from careless accusation of other persons especially children and elderly people as witches. Eboiyehi recommended that deliberate and concerted efforts should be made to educate and change the attitude of the Nigerian populace about their erroneous beliefs in witchcraft practices to address this social problem[7].

STUDY LIMITATIONS

Certain problems were encounter by the researchers in the course of this study, and they are likely to have affected the results of the study. The witchcraft generally is a very sensitive concept owing to the stigma associated with it, it is a concept that people think should not be mentioned. Having said this, it proved very difficult to elicit information from respondents who think that the researcher is insinuating that they are perpetrators of the practice by asking them certain questions despite all explanations to convince them that it is strictly for academic purpose. Some of them capitalized on the fact that Edo state has been generally labelled for witchcraft and they questioned my choice of Edo state, however they may have withheld some of the true responses they would have made owing to the sensitive nature of the concept. Again, reskts of this study may not be used to generalize in the situation in Nigeria as it was conducted with a Li ited number of persons in selected locality. Future studies should therefore investigate other areas.

CONCLUSION

Witchcraft in Nigeria is as old as humanity itself, it is a social reality in every human society. Someone is often accused of being responsible for someone else's misfortune of ill-health or economic down-turn through witchcraft. However, the worrisome aspect of this cultural practice is the situation that may lead to accusing innocent people of witchcraft and the dehumanizing treatment such vulnerable children and the elderly labeled as witches and wizards undergo in the hands of pastors and owners of spiritual homes. In the 21st century, it is irritating that some innocent citizens are still increasingly becoming victims of witchcraft accusation in Africa and Nigeria in particular. Currently, the various approaches employed in response to this worrisome aspect are grossly inadequate. Social workers and other helping professional must give in their best to ensure that the insecurity and uproar generated by this witchcraft speculations is greatly harmonized without attempting attack the peoples' belief system. There is urgent need therefore, for a more holistic strategy to eliminate this social problem.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made;
Since the whole essence of this study is not an attack on faith or belief system of the community; people are at liberty to believe and practice what they choose to. However, if these beliefs lead to the abuse or violation of peoples' fundamental rights then safeguarding procedures are required and belief system is no excuse for any form of human right violation. Therefore, the government and other non-governmental bodies (social workers) should take up the duty to raise awareness of the negative impacts of violence against persons accused of witchcraft and efforts should be made to educate and change the attitude of the Nigerian populace about their erroneous beliefs in witchcraft practices to address this social problem.

Policy formulation to discourage such activities as accusing and subjecting people to all forms of inhuman treatment all in the name witchcraft, also policies that will protect the victims of witchcraft accusation especially children and the elderly from all forms of discrimination and human right abuse.

Religious leaders should encourage the promotion of modern science rather than promoting the efficacy of witchcraft to threaten the existence of fellow Nigerians in the bid to become popular and rich in their mosques and churches. Nigerian religious leaders should stop creating fear and tensions of witches and witchcrafts in peoples` minds as well as using their "false" or selfish prophesy to create perpetual enmity and insecurity between loved ones and their families.
Finally, social workers involved in advocacy should fight for the right of those wrongly accused and punished with relevant legal backing, they should also influence the government to formulate human right protective legislation in order to reduce such social ill to the barest minimum.

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