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Child Witchcraft Confession: Parental Reaction And Implication For Social Work Practice.

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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to investigate the reactions of parents to child witchcraft confession in Akwa Ibom State Nigeria. A qualitative study design using in-depth interviews was adopted. Thirty (30) in-depth interviews were held among parent's which elicited information concerning child witchcraft confession. The qualitative data generated were content analyzed and the results indicated that majority of the parents are not ready to condone their children who confessed to witchcraft activities. The findings show that even in this 21st century, children who have a link with witchcraft activities are in jeopardy. The study therefore recommends some agenda for social work practitioners on the issue of witchcraft and child development.

Keywords: Child, Parents reaction, Perceived, Social work, Nigeria, Witchcraft.

INTRODUCTION

Despite globalization, diversity still abound, in form of believes, ideologies, practices and religion among others, thus, the perception of witchcraft varies across cultures and countries. The concept of witchcraft denotes the supernatural interference in the natural community lifestyle and behaviour with a strong root in community belief system (Jayeola-Omoyeni, Oyetade & Omoyeni,

2015). Beliefs such as witchcraft only existed in the past, it is existing among us today and can be used for good just as it is used for bad continue to prevail in our society. For instance, some belief that it is just a made-up crime that has no real existence (Pritchard, 1937). The way of life of Africans who blow the issue of witchcraft out of proportion according to Pritchard has a greater tendency of evoking misfortune due to errors, ineptitude, languor and poor methodological approaches to daily routines, yet, they tend to attribute such backwardness to witchcraft. For instance, if a person drowns in a stream due to swimming inability, absence of a pool guard or poor analysis of the swimming conditions by the victim (Essia, 2012), a person is electrocuted due to carelessness, or there is an inferno that consumes a family due to poor storage of fuel or gas, or business failure due to poor plan and uncalculated risk taking, it is often the witch that gets blamed. This perception has now deified witches, giving it a hyperbolized social and economic relevance. On the contrary, the westerners largely believe that witchcraft was a medieval phenomenon which is currently being portrayed in the artistic scenery and only attributed the reemergence of witchcraft cases to migrant populations from African countries and others (Abungu, 1995; Alston, 2009; Bussien et al., 2011). According to Ogenbo (2006) and Washington (2006), technological and industrial advancement has been able to sink the belief of witchcraft in the developed world where they were a massive witch-hunt and horrific murders of victims in the 17th century.

In Africa, witchcraft is strongly rooted in our culture and largely equated with evil; the mere mention of it instill fear, hate and the insatiable desire to ostracize the accused victims (Nyabwari & Kagema, 2014). There are notions that people can become a witch through inheritance (common among the Ga people of Ghana), picked or bought from specialized people, through edibles or adopted from other communities (Adegbola, 1983; Nyabwari & Kagema, 2014). In Nigeria, the crusade on witchcraft accusation has been largely inspired by the deliverance ministries of Christianity especially in the face of rising false prophets (Dein, 2009; van Eck Duymaer van Twist, 2009). According to AFRUCA (2009) and Schnoebelen (2009), the belief in witchcraft is not necessarily problematic unless it leads to accusation that ignites persecution and other forms of abuse, which may be in the form of battery, rejection by parents, banishment etc. Unfortunately, women, the aged and children have increasingly been caught up in the crossfire of witch-hunt and persecution.

The violence and abuse of children accused of witchcraft (Bussien et al., 2011) and those who confesses to witchcraft activities has attracted international attention in recent times. People have failed to recognize the fact that accusing a child of witchcraft or acting negatively on his confession to the accusation without careful assessment of the situation is as good as violating his/her developmental rights and overall wellbeing. As dependents, children have little or no control over the way they think, they must thus depend on the guidance of their parents or caregivers to make decisions for them. Children from when they were born are empty slate as described in Paulo Friere's 'Bank model', thus they learn from the parents, families and peers, and whenever they are in the wrong, it is expected that measures should be taken to correct and not destroy them. In other words, whenever they are involved in the witchcraft conundrum, it is expected that parents will access all options to help their children return back to normal situation where they can grow and develop peacefully with their peers, sadly, that is not the case today. It is no doubt that the society will thrive once children who are considered the future generation can develop and grow in a secure, positive relationships with parents and caregivers. However, the rising cases of street

children, child hooliganism, child terrorism across the world is testament of the fact that the warmth, care and protection obtained in the family setting is rapidly slipping into oblivion.

With the increasing refusal of parents and family to actively perform their roles as protectors, children have increasingly become vulnerable and easy target for witchcraft accusation by the revered traditional chief priest, pastor, aunties, uncles etc., who have been found to be the main accusers in Dr Congo, Nigeria and Angola (Cahn, 2006; García, 2013). In Nigeria, there is a popular notion that it takes a witch to know a witch since it cannot be proven scientifically (Cimpric, 2010; Oyeleke, 2011), yet Nigerians are easily cajoled by hearsay and prophecy. Even the appearance of certain reoccurring sicknesses and diseases like red-eye, leukemia, jaundice, epilepsy, disability, challenging behaviours like somnambulism, bed wetting or persistent nightmares or even mydriasis which a child has no control over could easily be interpreted as witchcraft (Martin, 2005; Cahn, 2006; Ezeamalu, 2010; Fakoya, 2010; García, 2013; Onuzulike, 2013). Without mercy or compassion most often than not, the accused child is rejected by family and society, isolated, harmed and killed. Most end up on the streets, starved, malnourished and exposed to different forms of trafficking, suffer from physical and mental health problems and trauma due to the abuses they have experienced (AFRUCA, 2009). Also, the mere association with persons who have been accused of witchcraft practices, automatically makes that child or the individual a witch (Riedel, 2012). We are hypothesizing that if parents will vehemently oppose any accusation child witchcraft or confession and become aware of the natural causes of most diseases and situational coincidences labelled as witchcraft, then their proper development will be guaranteed. This study focuses on the parent's reaction to child witchcraft confession.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

While there is abundance of well searched literatures on child witchcraft accusation (Martin, 2005; Cimpric, 2010; Bussien et al., 2011; Eriksson, 2012; Essia, 2012; Riedel, 2012; Secker, 2012; Hanson & Ruggiero, 2013; Onuzulike, 2013; Church, 2018; Rismann, 2018) and few on witchcraft confession (Jackson, 1975; Morales, 2003; Badstuebner, 2008), there seem to be a dearth of study that assesses the reaction of parents to child witchcraft accusation and confession, its effect on child development as well as the need for professional intervention to help enlighten parents on the fragility of the child in relation to witchcraft accusation and confession. People ought to understand that beyond witchcraft accusation is the concept of confession. For instance, most of the times, children are maltreated, killed, maimed or banished because they did confess to the crime of witchcraft labeled against them. According to Nthamburi (1991) one of the most intriguing aspects of the belief in witchcraft is witch confession (the claim that witches and wizards sometimes openly admit having indulged in occult activities). The problem is an individual's confession of involvement in witchcraft is more likely to be shrouded with subjectivity since there is still no scientifically proven method of diagnosing witchcraft. When an adult confesses that s/he is a witch, it can be understood because s/he can determine what is right or wrong. Sometimes such confession may be made under duress or because the accused just want to stop the victimization even if it ends their life (Jayeola-Omoyeni, Oyetade & Omoyeni, 2015), it however becomes quite disturbing when a child is accused and he confesses to being a witch.

Those who are supposed to provide protection for these children are often in a haste to use such confession against them without stopping for once to think about the innocence of a child. A parent whose child has confessed to witchcraft activities, should ask questions like, what if my child is only

imagining or saying things heard from people's discussion? What if s/he is saying things dreamt about (Riedel, 2012), read in a book or watched in a movie? Do we now hate our children so much that rather than protecting them we persecute them? Besides, witchcraft confession is often perceived to be therapeutic but in Nigeria it has become a suicide mission or dead sentence (Mbula, 1975). It is worth noting that accusing a person of witchcraft without proof violates the fundamental human rights of the accused including right to life, liberty, security, prohibition against torture among others (Mgbako, 2011). In the developed world the violence that victims of witchcraft accusation are often subjected to have reduced due to the callousness of the acts and the fact that these victims may be innocent as a result investigations are much more rigorous and evidence based.

The scientific breakthrough and industrialization in Europe and America have ensured that the belief in witchcraft and magic has collapsed but that is not the case in Nigeria. Extant human and child right laws view children as victims of witchcraft accusation but in Africa, the perpetrator is the villain and if the villain is a child, such a child is no longer considered as a child. As a result, without mercy the child is excommunicate at the very least from his home and becomes so helpless and hopeless because their innocence has been deprived. This paper argues that parental reaction to child witchcraft confession has a striking impact in making or marring child development in several ways, physically, emotionally among others. Research have shown that children who feel the warmth and support of their parents are more likely to be responsible citizens but where there are rejected by their parents, they are broken in the soul and they become vulnerable to social vices (Rintoul et al., 1998). This study is hence guided by the following questions.

1. What is the parent's view of child witchcraft?
2. Why do they think so?
3. What is the reaction of parents to their children's confession of witchcraft?
4. What can the social worker do to stem the tide?

SCAPEGOAT THEORY

Humans always believe in someone or something, whether deities, Gods and witchcraft due to the perceived desire to differentiate between right and wrong and the need to behave or act in acceptable manners. When such desire is thwarted, people begin to look for whom to blame. Also, in the quest for survival when people begin to encounter difficulties, rather than trying to look for solutions to the problem, they begin to attribute blame. In other to better understand parent's reaction to children who confesses to witchcraft activities, the scapegoat theory was adopted. Sir James George Frazier (1854–1941) is regarded as one of the greatest contributors to scapegoat theory. The idea behind the scapegoat theory which is deeply rooted in biblical scriptures is that an individual or groups is treated poorly or held liable for problems they did not cause (Jensen, 2007). When peoples' means of livelihood, health among others encounter setbacks or when they are faced with crisis, the scapegoat is blamed. The issue of witch hunt against women in Ghana has been explained using this theory (Aadinkrah, 2004). When applied to this study, the theory holds that the child who confesses is made a scapegoat by parents who coincidentally may be going through difficulty at that point in time or parents who just want to be exonerated from the accusation. This study is carried out with the hope that social workers can understand the current scenario in order to spur an effective intervention plan that will help enlighten the parents on the need to defend their children who are victims of witchcraft accusation.

Materials and methods

The study was conducted in Ibiono Ibom local government area of Akwa Ibom state. Ibiono Ibom is predominated by civil servants, farmers, traders and craftsmen. They are of the Ibibio stock and speak Ibibio language. Culturally they are involved in activities such as Akata, Ebre, Ekpe, Ukwa and Obon among others. The population of Ibiono Ibom as drawn from the 2006 national census computation is 188,605 people, with 96,106 males and 92,499 females. (National Population Commission [NPC], 2010). Ibiono Ibom is one of the LGAs in Akwa Ibom State whose belief in witchcraft practices is deeply ingrained in the culture of the people having had its own fair share of witchcraft accusations and murders (Udeagha, Udofia & Jacob, 2013; Ekpimah, 2016). Deaths often in this area and Akwa Ibom in general are attributed to supernatural causes (Essia, 2012). This is one of the areas with high cases of witchcraft accusation.

Sampling

Ibiono Ibom consists of six districts namely Ibiono I, Ibiono (Southern), Ibiono II, Ibiono III (Central), Ibiono III and Ikpanya district. Quota sampling was used to allocate 5 participants to each clan. Through the simple random sampling by hand drawing method, 5 villages where picked from each of the clans, from which one participant were selected using the availability sampling technique. The criterion for inclusion in the study was that the participant must have a child who is less than 18 years. Overall, 30 parents (15 males and 15 females) were used for the study.

Data collection

Thirty interview sessions were held and conducted in the shops, restaurants, houses and offices as chosen by the participants. In this research, the first ethical issue that was encountered is that of informed consent. Thus, the consent of each participant was obtained through a comprehensive consent form, before the commencement of the research in order to safeguard their rights to make free and informed decisions (Corrigan, 2003). Their informed consent was voluntary, competent and comprehending as Haggerty (2004) advocates. Secondly, some participants wished to be anonymous. Hence, a pseudonym was allotted to them, as researchers are expected to protect the identity of their participants. Also, the importance of maintaining anonymity (confidentiality) of participants was included in the consent form. Hence, identifiable information about participants obtained from this study cannot be disclosed to a third party without the permission of the participants.

The interview sessions were conducted between August-September 2019. Based on their permission, the discussions were recorded with a recording device, while a note-taker took notes. The research assistant was given one day training on how to conduct interview with parents. The interview sessions were conducted in English and Ibibio. The research instrument was collectively developed by the researchers and pretested in Uyo Local Government Area to ensure its reliability. It was translated into Ibibio language and back to English language to ensure that the questions had appropriate meanings as intended.

Data analysis

Data collected in Ibibio was translated to English language by an expert in the University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State. The translated data and data collected in English were transcribed. The transcribed data were compared to the recorded interview by the researchers, with the help of two other expert analysts to ensure that original meaning of what participants said was retained.

Observations and interactions were recorded in English language, using a notepad. They were much later put into themes representing the goals of the research that answered the following questions: 1) what is your view of child witchcraft? 2) What would you do if your child came to you and said I am a witch or admits to witchcraft accusation?

PRE-TEST

I (first author) conducted a pre-test in Uyo the capital of Akwa ibom to determine the current perception of the issue as well as the reliability of the instrument. Uyo was chosen because of its population heterogeneity and relative exposure to information. I found out that even though majority of the parents were willing to stand by their children they still believed that such a child who confesses to witchcraft needs to be taken for prayers or for deliverance somewhere. One respondent said "well the child is my child; I can't reject him. I will just take him to one church so that they can pray and deliver him". I probed further by asking him if he knows that witchcraft has not been scientifically proven and that there are some rare diseases or sicknesses which can make a child manifest symptoms of a supposed witchcraft, or a child might have a dream and see him/herself flying and actually thinks s/he is a witch. And he responded "I know all that, but my brother, don't be a fool, you see this street that we are staying, there are so many children I can tell you are witches and wizards". I was shocked at such finality in his statement. To cap it all, he said, "I won't throw my child away, but we will find a way to get rid of that witchcraft from his life". This response portrayed most of the responses we got from other respondents in the pretest.

Presentation of results and discussions

Respondent's where males and females aged 35-65 years. 70% had at least primary school certificate while the rest had no formal education. All the respondents had at least a child who is less than 18 years old. They were 70% Christians and 30% African traditionalist. 40% civil servants while the rest 60% were split between farmers, business and others. At least 80% of the respondents have had at least secondary education. The responses from parents are presented in themes. The first theme centers around the parents view of child witchcraft. The second investigates parent's reaction to child witchcraft confession.

Parents view of witchcraft and child witchcraft

I explained to the respondents that the concept of witchcraft is highly contested especially in Western nations where it is believed that witches do not exist, just imagination of the past, a mere fiction, coincidental occurrences or sheer carelessness. Some of the respondents even cushioned me and asked me to do away with the idea because just as the Westerners do not believe in witchcraft, they do not also believe in God. Thus, it was established that an overwhelming majority of the respondents believe in the existence of witchcraft with a negative view of the concept and hatred for those involved. For instance, a 63-year-old married participant named Ete John gave a comment that reflected majority of the views when he said:

> *What do these developed nation's even belief in? They just live their lives without having to believe in any supernatural forces that is why you see them suffering from one disaster to the other. If it is not hurricane, it is someone shooting people sporadically, you can name them. This people are so blind to the evil that is befalling them. I can tell you with so much conviction that there are witches everywhere; it is just that the frequency of black witchcraft practices that is used in destruction is more pronounced*

> *in Africa. A person who thinks that witches do not exist must be naive. I am telling you from experience* ***[Christian male, Ikot Osukpong]****.*

As the primary researcher, I went on to ask them what they really think about child witchcraft and they gave their opinions on child witchcraft. Many of the participants seem to loathe child witchcraft and where very much disgusted by it. To begin with, a 35-year-old married female, named Mrs Arit said:

> *When you see some children, you can tell the witches from the ones who are not. For example, some children are so stubborn and arrogant to the point that even if you beat them, they will still prove stubborn. I do not know what other explanation I can give beside the fact that the child is a witch* ***[Christian female, Ikot Adaha]****.*

Another 44-year-old separated participant named Mrs Effionganwan said:

> *There was a day I slept and had a very terrible dream where my neighbours child was attacking me and the next morning I saw scratches all around my face. I think my neighbours child is a witch. Do not think I just want to call her a witch. My neighbour is a very nice person but that child of his is something else. My other neighbour had similar experience and they were manifestation* ***[Christian female, Use Ikot-Amama]****.*

Also, a 37-year-old married participant (Mr Bassey) said:

> *I do believe some children are witches and can fly in the night. If you have my kind of eyes (being able to see dreams and visions), you will know what am talking about. Some of these innocent children you see during the day are causing havoc in the night. That's why I advise people to know the way they beat up or shout on children because you don't even know what's happening in the night, especially those that are not prayerful at night* ***[Christian male, Nkwa Ibiono]****.*
>
> *A 56-year-old married participant (Ete Ukpong) also gave a direct comment when he said: "Yes some children are witches and wizards. They can eat you up in the night. Why do you think some parents do not prosper, it is because their children are destroying their progress in the witchcraft world"* ***[Male African Traditionalist, Ikot Ukana]****.*

The believe in child witchcraft was reinforce by the experiences of others who have seen children who confess to witchcraft acts or those that experienced a rare sickness. For example, A 50-year-old widowed participant named Mma Atim said:

> *If you want me to tell you that some children are witches, then let me satisfy you. Two years ago, a boy confessed that he was a witch and that he was initiated by his maternal grandmother. He said he was responsible for the death of his two brothers who were always beating him. He also said he liked seeing his father suffer because he was always shouting on him so he decided to make him experience losses in his business and also gave him 'Akpabak' (a ringworm like disease that itches so much, the part of the skin affected often have a rough feel and curable only by spiritual means). This boy was 11 years old when he committed this crime, I do not know what eventually happened to him after his parents sent him out of the house and the villagers pursued him from the community* ***[Christian female, Ikot Essiet]****.*

Similarly, a 38-year-old married participant named Mr Offiong said:

> *There is one day in my junior year in secondary school, a boy just started shouting at about 12pm in the night and woke everybody in the dormitory. His eyes were just changing colors. One of the seniors tried to cushion him and this boy carried one Aluminum box (it's a popular somewhat heavy metallic box that houses children's clothes and other properties in Nigeria boarding school) and threw it at the senior. He carried the box as if it was a paper. We succeeded in restraining him, but the principal came and took him and that was the last we heard from him. Also, one of my classmate who was a cultist from his previous school, had a dream that his box was been burnt by his cult colleagues lo and behold in the morning we found his iron box burnt to ashes. If that's not witchcraft, then what is?* ***[Christian male, Ikot Ambang]****.*

Despite the deep belief in child witchcraft, they are some who still think it is a phenomenon that does not exist but rather are attitudes and behaviours in different situations where implicated as the witches and not innocent children. A 45-year-old married participant named Mr Patrick said:

> *Well I do not really believe too much in witchcraft, but from what I have seen and what people have said, there are some children that are witches. Beside that I do not really think anyone is a witch. People are wicked no doubt, and they can sheepishly and dubiously harm a person, that is what I call witchcraft. If you are asking me if children disappear and go and suck people's blood or scratch them as is widely portrayed in our movies, sorry I do not think so. That does not happen* ***[Christian male, Use Ikot Ekop]****.*

Parent's reaction to child witchcraft confession

I went ahead to ask them what their reaction will be like if one morning they wake up and their child come to them and say 'Daddy or Mummy' 'I am a witch' or the child was accused by some neighbours, friends, relatives, traditional chief priest, pastors among others and they admit being guilty of the accusation, what will they do? A 38-year-old married participant named Mr Udoeboi said:

> *I will just go and sell that child and take the money. I will not take him for any deliverance because I do not have thirty thousand naira or bitter kola to give any native doctor. As my child can go and chop winsh (be initiated to witchcraft), me too I will sell him and use the money for my business. I will not harbour a witch in my house* ***[Christian male, Ikpanaya]****.*

Mr Erikan, a 46-year-old married participant said:

> *Well I will just sit back and observe his behaviour from then on and if I perceive that truly this child is a witch, then that is just about it, my house will not contain us. It would have been better if he had killed me before I discovered he was a witch. He will have to leave my house* ***[Male African Traditionalist, Ikot Ada Idem]****.*

Mrs. Akpanmma a 42-year-old separated respondent said:

> *My child will really have to tell me why he will allow himself to be initiated. I am not a witch, his father is not either, why should my child be one. If that were to happen, I will kill the initiator and the initiated (she laughs). Even if I do not kill per se, that child will not stay in my house. S/he is given the free hand to go and live with their fellow witches* ***[Christian female, Ikpedip]****.*

Mrs. Ekpoetor a 44-year-old married participant said:

> *The hatred I have for anyone associated with witchcraft will make me hate my child who said s/he is a witch. For all this terrible atrocities witches have committed, I will not even care if that's my child or not, s/he will have to go down for it* ***[Christian female, Ikot Ukpong]****.*

Some of the respondent who have been involved in the punishment meted out on other children accused of witchcraft said that they will do the same to their children in other to justify their own actions. A 49-year-old participant named Mr Nsikak noted thus:

> *In as much as I have also participated in burning witches in this village and then one fine morning my child wakes up and tells me that he is a witch, ahh he is dead. I will kill him with my bare hands. And if he was accused and he accepts that he is a witch well I will kill him and burn him to ashes. Do you even know the kind of embarrassment such admission will subject me to? There is no way I will let such a child embarrass me and then live* ***[Male African Traditionalist, Oko Ita]****.*

Some of the respondent said that they will still love their children and make efforts to help them. But if the efforts prove abortive then there is no space for them to share under the same roof. A 37-year-old respondent named Ukwak Ebok said:

> *Once a witch always a witch. Once my child confesses to witchcraft or he is accused and he admits to it, then that is it. I will only try to get him cured, if unsuccessful, then I will send him out of my house. Do not get me wrong, I will still love my child but once beaten, twice shy. I have seen what these small devilish children can do. You do not expect me to keep them in my house. I will not make such a mistake* ***[Christian male, Osuk Ntan]****.*

Few of the respondent's comments were reflected in a more reasonable response. Although they believe children can be involved in the act, but they do not think it warrants throwing their own blood out of the house. Doctor Daniel a 57-year-old married participant who said:

> *This is a very sensitive matter that must be handled with care. I will not start calling my child a witch or whatever, I will have to consult people and hear their opinions. I will not throw my child simply because he said he is a witch. I must find a way to get rid of it only if he is truly a witch* ***[Christian male, Ikot Ebom]****.*

In support of the above, a 51-year-old married participant Mrs Inimfon said:

> *Well, I will have to take him to my pastor for deliverance. My pastor is a very strong man of God and I believe he can deliver my child from witchcraft. I will not reject my child when I know something can be done about it. It can happen to anyone; we cannot just go about rejecting these innocent children because they confessed to witchcraft activities. I do believe that every problem has a solution* ***[Christian female, Ikot Ubong Obio Eno]****.*

There were very few respondents who said that witchcraft does not exist and as such there is nothing to react about other than to provide protection and love for their children, noting further that it is only because a child is special that they are considered witches. A 48-year-old separated participant named Mr. Godwin said:

> *I don't believe in witchcraft, if my child tells me that s/he is a witch then that's good, it will make me feel better because, I will see him/her as somebody who has a very strong imaginative spirit. If s/he is accused and she admits to it, then that is when the accusers will know that I too am a witch. You think I will just let people harm or hurt my child? God forbid* ***[Christian male, Okobo Ibiono]****.*

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study examined parental reactions to child witchcraft confession and how it makes or mars the child's developmental outcome. It was found that an overwhelming majority of the respondents believe in the existence of witchcraft with many having a negative view of child witchcraft which they claim is rampant.

Majority of the parents believe that if their child confesses to witchcraft practices, then such a child will have to face the consequences. Some of the parents even went as far as saying that they will kill such a child or send them out of the house. This echoes the increasing weak bonds of affection between children and their families, as well as the believe that the child is violating the rules, norms and values of the family (Stobart, 2006). This study was conducted in the rural area with relative lack of exposure to the rapid changes in perception and beliefs around the world. Thus, the low socio-economic standards of the environment and their belief system, may have influenced respondent's perception of their reaction if their children where to become victims. This is in line with the study of Onuzulike (2013) where it was noted by the then governor of Akwa Ibom state during an interview with CNN that most of the issues of witchcraft occurred in the poor and rural areas. Contrary to this view, Offiong (1983) and Essien and Ben (2011) argued that poverty is not necessarily the problem, although it plays a role; rather issues such as poor governance, ignorance, poor health services, fake prophetic ministry, unemployment, commercialization of prayers and miracles for money and prosperity among others are all predisposing factors.

According to a report by Stop child witch accusations coalition (2017), the abuse and exploitation of children accused of witchcraft is alarming and when you consider the fact that the stigma that accompanies witchcraft accusation which is abusive in itself, you will feel sorry for the accused children. The report also noted that, the unfounded believe that witches power are in the stomach has subjected many of the accused or confessed children to severe torture such as beatings, burning, poisoning, being buried alive, or hot oil enemas. In most cases, these children are forced to confess by subjecting them to imprisonment and starvation. Once a child is accused, he carries the scar for the rest of his life. In many cases, the family are the once who reject this children and throw them out into the streets to survive on their own which is quite consistent with the findings of this study, in that parents are not willing to harbour any child associated with witchcraft. This crushes the image, dignity and identity of the child down to the very recesses of their soul and without long-term support/counseling, they may never recover.

Implications for social work practice

Unlike in Africa, the concept of witchcraft is now viewed as a normal phenomenon and increasingly regarded as a religion much in the same breath as Christianity, Islam among others in the western world. This has gotten to the point where social workers do negotiate child fostering among wiccan (witches) and pagan parents (Yardley, 2008), thus dwarfing the notion that witchcraft is evil. Social work in Nigeria is still very much at an infant stage because they are yet to have an independent identity let alone dealing with the inhumane acts of violence, psychological and emotional terror meted out on victims of witchcraft accusation. This does not spell doom for social work practice in Nigeria because this are changing times and the clamour for social work involvement in daily activities is incredible. It is quite commendable that at this very young stage social work in Nigeria is embracing the concept of religion and spirituality in its professional practice by respecting a client's religion without prejudice which has made the profession all encompassing (Donaldson, 2018; Uche & Uche, 2018). However, it is yet to provide an ideal answer to the issue of witchcraft especially in Africa where it is deeply rooted in its culture. The social work value of social justice has ensured that social workers object to discrimination based on religious affiliation or people being subjected to hate crimes especially for issues that cannot be proven scientifically or beyond reasonable doubt or any form of inhumanity regardless of crimes committed.

The accuracy of information surrounding witchcraft is still highly subjective and based on assumptions and hearsay lacking scientific verification. Notwithstanding, one cannot totally debunk the existence of witchcraft because there are still several discoveries that are made on a daily basis and as such we cannot deny the fact that the evil potency of witchcraft may be scientifically proven in the long-run. It is important that social workers be very sensitive and highly imaginative when dealing with the issue of witchcraft because of the high sensibility of the subject. But first, social workers have the duty to counter existing ideologies that paints victims of witchcraft accusation in an evil light deserving of death, maiming, banishment, etc.

The idea behind this paper is to investigate the reactions of parents to child witchcraft confession having in mind the vulnerability of the child and how the parent's reactions and actions can make or mar their development. We found out that parent's view of child witchcraft is largely tilted to the negative which means that even in the face of increasing globalization and modernization the ideological perception of witchcraft is yet to be countered in the study area, with a large number of respondent's not wanting to have a connection with those associated with it. On this point, social workers can through enlightenment campaigns, outreach programmes among others teach parents especially in the poor rural areas to strengthen their relationships with their children so as to enhance their communication patterns and to enhance their knowledge on the issue of witchcraft. Social workers can also enlighten parents on their role as providers of warmth and protector against internal and external aggression. From the findings, majority of the respondents will push the child who confesses to witchcraft activities out of the house. This shows that, majority of the parents do not understand their role as protectors. Thus, through seminars and workshops, social workers can teach parents about their primary role as providers and protectors by making them to understand that these children have no control over their involvement in witchcraft activities.

CONCLUSION

The paper which sort to investigate parental reaction to child witchcraft confession found that the fate of the children is in serious jeopardy if something is not done to counter the existing ideology. It is thus obvious that parents do not have an in-depth knowledge of their responsibility to their children and that is why there are ready to put them in harm's way. The study therefore recommends that social workers must teach parents especially those in the rural and poor areas (through enlightenment campaigns, outreach programmes, seminars and workshops) about their roles, responsibility and duty to the child, having in mind that the concept of witchcraft is highly contestable due to lack of scientific verification. This study was limited by lack of funds to reach out to more respondents, thus there could be a different view of witchcraft in other areas that are yet to be explored. The paper has been able to provide a current perspective of what children will face if they were to be accused of witchcraft thereby putting social workers a step ahead to rise and counter the existing ideology.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

This paper has no conflict of interest and all authors are ok with their position in the paper.

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