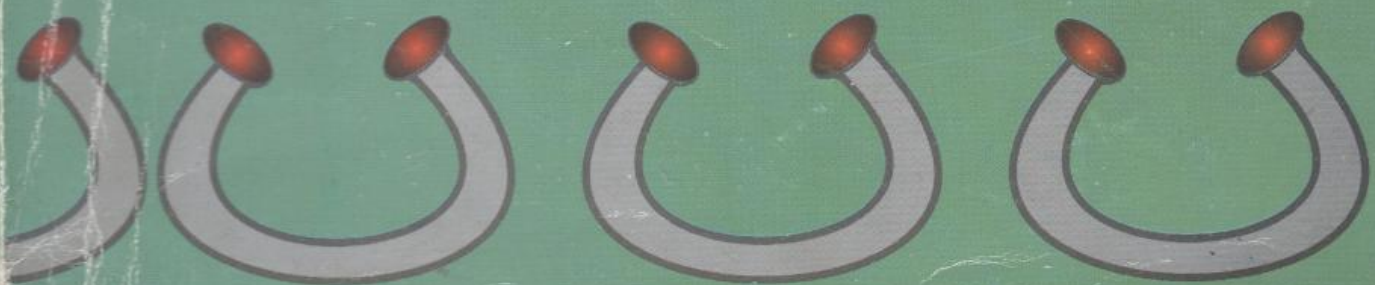


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CHILD-WITCH PHENOMENON IN AKWA IBOM STATE: SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS CONSIDERATIONS

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ABSTRACT

This research work observes that although the government of Akwa Ibom State has taken appropriate statutory and legal steps at prohibiting child witchcraft accusations, the phenomenon is not abating. It has permeated all the fabrics of our society so much that the existing child-right law on the subject does not seem potent enough to deter key perpetrators from engaging in witchcraft accusations that often leads to extreme abuse of the children. Information gathered for this research paper through related body of literature and survey reveal that the persistence of witchcraft phenomenon is deeply rooted in the worldview of the people and heightened not just by poverty, ignorance, illiteracy but by religious profiteering of self-acclaimed *religious persons* with the *mission* of eradicating the society of witches. The attendant abuse, deprivations, maltreatment, sufferings and pains our children are subjected to, either to compel confession or exorcize the spirit of witchcraft, can only be imagined than expressed in words. The efforts of the government, NGOs, faith-based organizations and other well-meaning individuals in stopping child witch accusations and abuses are often jeopardized by the *religious persons* because they are very important figures in the lives of their numerous followers who see them as vicars of God on earth. This paper recommends stringent monitoring team among other things be put in place to save the vulnerable children of the State from the clutches of the modern witch-doctors. The introduction of the psychology of the power of positive thinking as a course into the school curriculum at all levels of education in Akwa Ibom State may gradually replace in the minds of the people the fear and concentrations on the activities of witches.

INTRODUCTION

The belief in witchcraft is common in most cultures of the world. But in most African societies, this belief has deep sociological consequences. In Akwa Ibom State, the field situation for this research work, the belief in witchcraft is so wide spread that it cannot be safely ignored. This belief is deeply rooted in the world-view of the people irrespective of the educational standards and international exposure. This may have compelled Ukpong (2003:18) to observed that

...In Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria, the fear of witches and wizards appears to be the beginning of wisdom as most murders are committed in its name...

In the last few decades, child witch phenomenon has become very popular in Akwa Ibom State. Children are alleged to be possessors of witchcraft spirit mostly by being initiated by older witches. The children who are witches are believed to be capable of causing untold sufferings on their parents and relatives. The belief in witchcraft has immense sociological and psychological consequences on the accused. Children identified and branded as witches are often thrown out of their homes, sometimes lynched, badly maimed and disfigured or permanently ostracized from the community. Abati (2009) rightly observed that

it is sad that at the time when other nations are sending their children to schools, offering them welfare support and equipping them for the future, Nigeria is labeling its own children as witches and wizards and dehumanizing them.

The paper therefore aims at examining and identifying causes of children being branded as witches; assessing the social and religious implications of children being stigmatized and ostracized as witches; suggesting possible ways that the phenomenon of stigmatization, maltreatment and abuse of children as witches could be stopped; suggesting ways for the proper implementation of the 2008 Child Rights Law. This paper will be beneficial to parents, churches, government, the society, academia and the global public as it will enlighten the people on the phenomenal problem of child-witches in Akwa Ibom. It will also serve as a reference material for future research and academic discussion on the concept of child-witch phenomenon. Before proceeding, it is pertinent to examine the child-witch phenomenon in the context of biblical and extra biblical views on the concept of witches.

1. Biblical concept of witches

Several texts in the bible clearly show instances of the belief in witchcraft.

(a) Exodus 22:18:

In Exodus 22:18, the statement 'thou shalt not suffer a witch to live', falls within the social and religious regulations in ancient Israel. This law indicates that the knowledge and practice of witchcraft, magic and divination was common in ancient Israel as was in most ancient communities at that time. It is a major reference in the Old Testament prohibition of witchcraft which was against the true worship of Yahweh.

In the *Jerome's Biblical Commentary*, this text has been explained by Brown 2007:54 as follows:

The preponderance of such laws in the biblical codes seems attributable to the special role of Yahweh as sole God and hence authoritative law giver. Belief in one God means that the aid of spirits is not to be invoked. Concern with the problem elsewhere (Deut 18:10; Jer. 27:9 and other passages) shows that the problem was real in Israel. A prohibition found also in Lev. 18:22; 20:15 -16; Deut. 27:2 Violators of the first commandment are to be proscribed (not utterly destroyed) i.e. set apart from the community.

About Exodus 22:18, Essien (2008:66) explains

'This ancient Israelites' law is to be understood in its proper perspective. According to *Jerome's Bible Commentary*, this text is not to be used as a yardstick for gruesome murder. Offenders could be put away from the society, ostracized and banished. It is not to be interpreted literally and suspected witches arbitrarily killed as we currently experience in South East Nigeria. This is an ancient Israelite law which is not even enforced in modern Israel today. This Exodus text does not say how the witches are to be known and sorted out. It leaves room for present day self-styled prophets to take laws into their hands and eliminate people without reason or for the subjective being a witch. The literally interpretation of this Biblical text: Exo. 22:18. is still the major cause of so many deaths of adults, and stigmatization, rejection and abandoning of children who are believed to be witches today in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria'.

To this end, if this ancient Israelite law is not enforced in modern Israel today one wonders why the present day self styled religious leaders now use it as a yardstick for killing innocent children today. Some even make use of the word 'witchcraft' according to King James Version of the Bible as in 2 Chron. 33:16 without understanding the meaning of the word. This is so because in some versions of the Bible the word means sorcery. Sorcery and witchcraft are two different things. However it is not proper for people to use the literal meaning of the scripture as the yardstick for labeling, accusing, maltreating and killing innocent children as witches and wizards.

Unwene (2000) confirms the biblical view of the existence of witches and wizards, according to him. 'The Scripture is aware of the prevalence of witches and the practice of witchcraft (Deut. 18:10-12; Exo 7-10; Lev. 19:31).

(b) I Sam 28:1ff;

In I Sam 28, it is clearly stated that Saul went to the witch of Endor to consult when he was in crises. The reaction of the witch of Endor shows that witchcraft was prohibited in ancient Israel. The scripture knows of the existence of witches and the practice of witchcraft was common.

(c) II Chron. 33:16:

In II Chron. 33:16 we are told of the apostate king Manasseh as follows:

And he caused his children to pass through the fire in the valley of Hinnom: also he observed times and used enchantments, and used witchcraft, and dealt with a familiar spirit, and with wizards: he wrought much evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger.

(d.) In the New Testament it is recorded in Gal. 5:19-21 that people who practice witchcraft shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

In all these, the issue of child-witch phenomenon is not recorded in the bible.

2. Extra Biblical and African notion of witchcraft

The African continent is said to be the stronghold of witchcraft. Parrinder (1982: 91) observed that witchcraft is believed in throughout Africa. Basically, as Mair (1973:43) observes, it is the belief that some people, chiefly women (now children), have the power of changing themselves into other forms, when they prey on the bodies and souls of their enemies or even their relatives.

For the Azande of Sudan the basis of witchcraft is what they call '**Mangu**' (witchcraft substance). '**Mangu**' is believed to be inherited from one's parents. A witch attacks by dispatching the spirit of his **Mangu** to capture and eventually devour parts of the spirit of the victim's flesh. For the Azande, according to Offiong (1991: 78) failure of crops, protracted illness, barrenness etc, any misfortune at all could be blamed on witchcraft.

The Tiv of Nigeria is another African society which is observed by the presence and activities of witches in their communities. According to Gehman (2001:49), the beliefs about witchcraft centre around a vital and mysterious power or force called '**Tsar**' which exists in men that can be employed for either strengthening life and causing prosperity or for the destruction or weakening of life. For the Lovedu of Transvaal, witchcraft '**Uloji**' according to Ekanem (2006:57) is always due to the conscious, evil practices of man and is directed at a person he has reason to hate. The night witch, they believe, has in-born powers to do what is physically impossible to ordinary men. Belief in witchcraft is reflected in the Lovedu notion that almost all misfortunes that befall man are all caused by the hatred and envy of others in men's heart. For the Akan of Ghana, the word for witch is '**obayifo**'; meaning, a person who is the abode of an evil entity, the **obayi**. The distinguishing feature of killing or harming by witchcraft is that it is wrought solely by the silent invisible projection of influence from the 'witch'. Every **obayi** is held to have a name. A witch cannot be freed from her **Obayi** until she has disclosed its name. A few people, it is held, are born witches. The **oobayi** comes from the mother into the pregnant womb. Mair (1973:38) said that such congenital witches are the worst kind and little can be done to cure them.

In most African societies witches are first described as morose, unsociable people; people who eat alone so that they need not share their food, but who can be dangerous if others do not share their food with them; arrogant people who pass by others without greeting them; people who are readily offended. A person who gazes fixedly at others is often thought to be a witch and trying to convey an injury in the look. They are supposed to have red eyes.

They do not show adequate sorrow at the death of a relative or somebody from within the community. For Middleton (1967: 79), witches and wizards are believed to be mean looking, meanly dressed and socially disruptive people whose behaviours deviate from cultural and community norms.

Besides, the witch is believed to be born with mystical power within them. They do not use rites or spells and operate without medicines or material things. Witches are said to have the ability to do extra-ordinary things because of their own nature. A witch performs her evil work because of her very nature. She has a desire for human flesh that can never be satisfied. This makes her a threat to everyone. No one as Mair (1973: 39) observed, is safe from her hunger for human flesh.

Moreso, witches are believed to cause sickness by 'eating' the vital organs of their victims, like the heart, the kidney, liver, intestine and so on. When eventually the victim vomits blood, then death is imminent. It is also believed that witches and wizards can 'capture', 'detain', or 'trap', the souls of victims for as long as they wish and later kill them. They can also 'eat' up the human foetus in the womb and render their victims infertile or 'lock-up' the womb to make women barren. They are said to cause difficult, prolonged and painful labour to pregnant women at childbirth. Infact, witches are believed to be able to activate any type of diseases and inflict them on their victims. Such diseases include cancer, tuberculosis, AIDS, typhoid fever, malaria or any type of ailments that can be suffered by human beings.

Witches and wizards are believed to control the earth, the seas and under the seas as well as ethercal realms. Therefore they can cause plane crash and boat accidents. An attack on one victim is thought to bring death to the innocent in cases of plane crash, road and sea accidents. Witches are also blamed for fire accidents or, indeed anything that cause harm, misfortune or death Debrunner (1961:1923).

3. Types of witches

In various African societies many types of witches are identified. They are:

(a.) Flying and Transforming Witches

These are believed to metamorphose themselves into animals or birds at night and stealthily enter the houses of their sleeping neighbours to rob them of money and goods, take sexual advantage of sleeping women; and so on. Animals associated with witches turning themselves into are toad, snake, lizard, bat, owl, cobras and so on. The witch deceives people before leaving her home, her personality soul leaves the body (as a snake leaves its slough), she turns herself upside down, and flies through the air, emitting light from eyes, nose, mouth, ears and armpits. Some walk on spider's webs or sometimes even ride on animals or men and finally settle on the tree of their meeting place.

(b) Night and Everyday Witches

Just as the night witch epitomizes all kinds of unthinkable evils it is believed that the everyday witch is the image of what one would not wish one's neighbours to be. They are only explicitly distinguished by the nightmare witch prowling at night. But both flout rules of social order respect for life and property and sexual behaviour.

In Akwa Ibom State, according to Titi Udo, two kinds of witchcraft can be identified namely '**obubit**' (black) and '**afia**' (white) witchcrafts. The former type is said to cause one to commit destructive and diabolical acts like killing one's victim, causing diseases, stealing people's monies and eating their crops. Every evil is attributed to those who practise black witchcraft. On the other hand, white witchcraft is believed to be harmless, though members are truly witches and wizards; but they do not kill or harm people. Instead they use the art to do good for themselves and for others. It is said that they attend witchcraft meetings but do not practise ceremonial cannibalism like their black counterparts. The initiates, it is said, when asked to produce their children would pour maggots on the children in the spirit realm and make them inedible to their fellow witches and wizards thereby sparing their children's lives.

4. Suspicion, Accusation, Detection and Trial of Witches in African Societies

Different methods of suspicion, accusation, detection and maltreatment of witches both adults and children are used in different African societies. In most cases dreams are used as the means of interpretation of witchcraft attacks and suspicion. If one sees another person in a dream pursuing, fighting, quarreling, oppressing or looking at him with an evil eye, such a person is immediately suspected to be a witch who is trying to bewitch people.

When there is brooding anger and quarreling whereby one said to the other, "you will see me" or pronounced a curse on the other, then if the person became sick, the other is suspected to be a witch. Also, when one misfortune befell someone, a witchdoctor, who is a priest and diviner, will be consulted. He will perform divination after which he will accuse a suspected witch.

Nowadays, there appear from time to time groups of new witch-hunters, often young men who use mixture of old and new methods to hunt out witches. Such groups as in Tiv, Nigeria '*hoyos*'; in Nupe, Nigeria '*Naako Gbaya*'; in Malawi and Zambia "*Bamucapi*"; in Ashanti, Ghana '*Fwemson*'; in Ibibio, Akwa Ibom '*Nka Ukpotio*' led by one self-styled witch hunter, Edem Edet Akpan also known as Akpan Ekwong in (1978-1979). So Ibibio, Akwa Ibom State, such group is called *Nka Ukpotio*. In 1978 through 1979, this group was led by the self-styled witch-hunter, Edem Edet Akpan alias Akpan Ekrong.

Trials take different dimensions as ordeal 'the suspect is made to drink a certain prepared concoction'; 'smelling out of witches'; 'x-rayed in mirror'; use of divination/charm objects, and nowadays witches are mostly identified by religious leaders, prophets, pastors, evangelists and prayer houses and churches.

The accused is tortured and forced to confess, clubbed to death, burnt alive and so on; all in the name of up-rooting witchcraft from their societies. Suspicion, accusation, detection and trials of witches were in the past directed against adults but these are now directed against vulnerable children at an alarming rate in Africa and Nigeria in general and Akwa Ibom State in particular. No wonder Mbiti (1987:171) says, "Sometimes people create imaginary ideas about witches and innocent women (now children) are often suspected of, and even persecuted for, being witches".

5. Child-witch phenomenon in Akwa Ibom State

A lot has been written on the phenomenon of child-witch saga in Akwa Ibom State. Nwanze (2010:62-63) noted that "above 15,000 children are roaming the streets or living in the bush, having been driven from their homes by their parents and guardians, who accused them of witchcraft". Likewise, Itauma (2008) says, "Everyday, five or six children are branded as witches", in Akwa Ibom. Meaning that about 115 in a month and 1,380 a year! This is merely estimated. The number now is too many. Although it was not possible to garner all the statistical records, yet the number of children rescued and taken care of at government shelters, by NGOs and other orphanages are but a tip of the iceberg. There exist many more children who are not yet rescued and several homes not yet brought to notice.

It is important to note here that the belief in child-witches is not limited to the Ibibio of Akwa Ibom State; rather this belief pervades the psyche of millions of other Nigerians and indeed Africans. Foxcroft (2010:487)

On the vulnerability of people accused as witches Nwanze (2010:63) writes, "Daily, children, poor children, vulnerable and weak, without voice are accused of witchcraft and tortured". Jeyifo (2010:54) collaborates this view when he says:

it is always the poor, vulnerable and marginalized social groups and individuals that are branded as witches and either killed or physically or psychologically brutalized.

The rich and powerful are rarely accused or lynched as witches or wizards.

Considering the causes of witchcraft accusation, Nwanze (2010:482) asserts that belief in witchcraft is the newest of ignorance of superstition, for according to him, witchcraft has no basis in reality.

Essien (2008:66) is of the view that, the most serious problem in the 'suffer not the witch to live episode' lie in the many independent churches and nativistic religious movements in Akwa Ibom State having become centres of diagnosing witches. These categories of religious leaders and adherents do not hesitate to quote Exodus 22: 18 to support their stance on witches detection and elimination. The untold social problems these bring to the people are too awful for words.

Commenting on the stigmatized children, Foxcroft in Nwanze (2010:133) decried the role of churches in the fate of these children tortured and killed as witches and wizards saying, "child stigmatization and the resultant abandonment, torture and killing of such children is initiated and propagated by churches in order to make money, pure and simple. There are a number of churches in Akwa Ibom State and they are making vast amount of money on the back of wide-spread suffering and gross violation of children's rights".

This of course amounts to deviation from the ministry God has given to churches. Hence, such churches and pastors are to blame.

6. Causes of child-witch in Akwa Ibom State

i. Traditional Worldview

Witchcraft is rooted in primitive society. The belief in it is as old as man, ere the Bible was written. Such media as oral tradition, books, films, documentaries and confessions of converts to the service of God, served as propagators. People not only believed in the existence of witches but also in child-witches. Even the very intellectuals and Christians believe that a spirit can inhabit a child to wreck havoc.

ii. Means of Vengeance

An enemy can accuse someone of being a witch as a means of achieving revenge. Once the ambient audience subscribes to such accusation as valid, they can eliminate the accused without a second thought. Once this is done the accuser returns home happily, feeling that the accusation has helped him to put an end to his eyesore.

iii. Nollywood

On the role played by Nollywood films, Jeyifo says,

Indeed, the whole phenomenon of 'witchcraft' about which Nollywood is so prolific is unambiguously tied to economic and social conditions of dire poverty and extreme levels and forms of insecurity for the vast majority of the nation population.

In the same direction, Akpan cites Nollywood as the cause of child-witch belief and says, "The advent of some Nollywood films portraying children as agents of witchcraft is frightening and dangerous for our children". Combining the role of home-video producer cum preacher woman as the origin of the escalating number of children accused as witches and wizards, Itauma says, "the home-video (film) portrayed children as possessing witchcraft spell. The film showed how children are initiated into witchcraft world, and as devils agents who destroy families, kill parents, run down the economy of the society, and even destroy churches. Since then, children who are taken as house-boys and house-girls are suspected, taken to either pastors or evangelists for a kind of test or probation to know whether they are witches or wizards.

iv. Religious Profiteering

The most alarming and incredible reason for child-witch phenomenon in Akwa Ibom is that of the so-called religious leaders, pastors, prayer warriors; prophets and visioners whose ungodly and unsubstantiated pronouncements have made children enemies of the society. As stated earlier, 'the more children the pastor declares witches, the more famous he gets and the more money he can make'. The parents are asked for so much money that they have to pay in installments or perhaps sell their property.

v. **Illiteracy**

The role of illiteracy which has made many Akwa Ibomites paupers and misinformed has contributed to this quagmire. In 1692, there was a witchcraft inquisition in United States, in Salem Massachusetts, and a great number of lives were lost during that middle ages. But when Enlightenment came, education, science and technology drove away the unfounded fears and shadows of witchcraft. One cannot imagine how a person who is drunk and driving, and when he involved in an accident because of his blurred vision and mental judgment due to drunkenness, be attributed to witches.

vi. **Poverty and Ignorance**

Poverty and ignorance which give birth to superstition are what have made our people to still attribute deaths, natural disasters, illnesses, epidemics, misfortunes to the power of witches and wizards. And to make the matter worse to vent their anger on children through stigmatization, abuse and at times abandonment.

vii. **The Role of HIV/AIDS Pandemic**

The role of various diseases as HIV/AIDS which have left many of these children bereaved of their parents and rendered them orphans such that they become extra-burden to their close relatives during this hard times really contribute to child-witch saga. The failure to address the increasing incidence of HIV/AIDS and the belief that it is spread by witchcraft is significantly amplifying the primary causes of the crisis.

Viii. **Disintegration of Extended Family Structure**

Children in the absence of their biological mothers are often accused by their step mothers. Especially when this child is a male child, the step mother sees accusing him of witchcraft as a smart way of silencing him and getting rid of him from the family.

6. **Cases of Child Witches**

A woman at Ikot Oku Ubo village Ibesikpo Asutan brought her daughter to the researcher for prayers after a crusade (November, 2008). That she was accused of being a witch at where she was a house maid.

In January 2010, at Nung Udoe, Ibesikpo in the compound next to the researcher, two children, a boy (10) and a girl (11) were returned by their eldest sister, saying they are witches, after narrating misfortunes and evils they have done against her and her business.

In October, 2009 a couple brought their son (5) to the researcher for prayers. They said a child in their compound at Mbierebe, Ibesikpo Asutan LGA confessed of being a witch and that their son was inflicted with sickness but let them take the son to a man of God for prayers and the son will be healed.

On Thursday, 16th September, 2010 a woman returning from a prayer house close to the compound the researcher lives was weeping. She was called and asked what the problem was and she said her house-maid was alleged to be a witch in that prayer house.

Itauma estimates that about 5,000 children have been abandoned in this area since 1998 and says that many bodies have been bound and drowned in rivers and some children have been tied to trees and abandoned in forests. Many more are never found.

7. **Sociological Implication of Child-Witches**

Daily, children poor children, vulnerable and weak, without a voice are accused of witchcraft and tortured. If they manage to survive the ordeal, the effects last all their lives. Fear, aggression, rebellion and a disposition to violence become visible dominant character traits. It is not unlikely that some young men and women involved in violent crime were hardened by such painful experiences in their childhood. They may become the militants, armed robbers, rapists, fundamentalists, traffickers, murderers and so on. They may advocate total extermination of religion from social life; and prey on church ministers and pastors. Child-witch phenomenon is sowing a very bad seed for our society.

Besides, child witches and wizards phenomenon include stigma and discrimination which leave the children with feelings of rejection and abandonment and subsequent elimination of the potentialities for personal development and achievement in life.

To add to these, some of the children also experience severe trauma of fear, anxiety, insecurity, and shattered self-esteem. They are thrown into street life in some cases, and are being exposed to further exploitation and abuse while suffering possible lasting injury or disability as a result of terrible maltreatment meted on them.

8. Official Government Position on the issues of Child Witch Phenomenon

The government position is very clear on the Child Witch Phenomenon. The government is totally against the stigmatization of children as witches. To display her position on this, the government partners with NGOs who are striving to rescue, provide shelter as well as bring hope to the devastated children. The government, time unnumbered has donated lump sums of money to these NGOs. Not only that, the Governor has visited various children centres, to give them assurance of protection. The government also has passed the Child Right Law of Akwa Ibom State, 2008; and went ahead to set up Monitoring Teams to encourage the enforcement of such laws. The government in addition embarks on public awareness, social enlightenment and sensitization campaigns; all aimed towards bringing hope to every child within the territory of the state. To keep the children busy and foster a better future for the state, children are granted free and compulsory education.

9. The Way Forward

Akwa Ibom State government should constitute a Child Rights Implementation Committee (CRIC) to coordinate efforts to implement and monitor the implementation of the Child Rights Law. This committee should not be an arm-chair committee made up of just politicians, but representation from proactive organizations who are truly dedicated to the welfare of children. Also, the government should empower the Child Rights Implementation Committee to implement the child rights law; and begin to regulate the activities of churches and prayer houses, and those known to be violating the rights of children should be sanctioned. Government should advance high-powered investigation into every element of the issues involved and all allegations against persons involved in the stigmatization and labeling of children as witches, as well as prosecute all persons found culpable of this crime of child labeling.

The Nigerian Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) should ban all home videos that promote superstitious beliefs that lead to labeling of children as witches. Deploy social resources for the support, comfort and enjoyment of all categories of children all over the state. Television and radio stations should run jingles constantly, discouraging the stigmatization and abuse of children. The print media should dedicate space for running anti-child abuse messages, free, on daily basis.

The capacity of the police, social welfare, teachers and health professionals should be built to enable them respond effectively and in the best interest of the child. Specialized child protection units should be created within the police force. Support should be given to NGOs and CBIs that work in the area of child rights and care, to ensure best practices, proper coordination of efforts, effective monitoring and transparency.

Village heads and community leaders should mobilize their communities to ensure they do not perpetuate child right offences. Community leaders should collaborate with child based organizations and agencies to ensure the local communities are adequately sensitized. The age-long vital means of communication in the villages – town criers should be employed to create proper re-orientation of the peoples mind on this issue.

The Christian (CAN, PFN etc) should come together to ensure that the name of the great religion is not dragged in the mud by those who are out to make money through dubious means; bad eggs among its fold must be fetched out. Organizations should increase their efforts in the area of advocacy and sensitization as this is the key to lasting positive change. Prevention campaigns should be targeted at local communities and not at conference rooms and expensive hotels.

Hospital and medical workers should be trained or sensitized to act promptly and be responsive to cases of physical abuses on children labeled as witches. Heads of schools and teachers must take action to reduce or resist stigmatization of accused children. Organizations working in the area of child rights protection and advocacy need to collaborate and forge partnerships to strengthen current efforts.

Many are still illiterates, hence adult education should be promoted. The power of positive thinking should be introduced as a course into the educational curriculum of the school system in Akwa Ibom State. This will gradually replace the fear of witches in the minds of the people and give them free social and religious space to realize their potential in this technical age and this will certainly lead to the 'death of witchcraft belief in the society'.

10. Summary and Conclusion

The belief in witches and wizards, and treatment of those accused have ever been part of African cosmogony. But the brewing calamity occasioned by the recent stigmatization and abandonment of children is not only strong but alarming. This is very common in the Southern part of Nigeria especially in Akwa Ibom State. It is a social problem that all must rise and fight. The research observed that about ninety nine percent of the children labeled and stigmatized as witches are from families that are under-privileged.

Such children are subjected to every form of physical torture by parents and pastors, all in an attempt to compel them to confess. Some are confined to chain in spiritual healing homes. Some are abandoned to roam the streets falling prey to rapists, traffickers, ritualists and so on. All must heed the cries of these children calling for justice from both government and the general public: "please stop the pastors who hurt us", said Jerry quickly, touching the scars on his face. "I believe in God and God knows I am not a witch"

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