

Disclosure of Child Abuse Linked to a Belief in Witchcraft or Spiritual Possession

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What I will cover...

1. Talk a little about my research aims
2. Discuss what we know about the disclosure of CSA
3. Provide data extracts relative to disclosure of CA linked to WorSP
4. Highlight where the circumstances specific to CA linked to WorSP present further constraints
5. Finish with some current thoughts

My Research...

Research Question:

What is Child Abuse (CA) specifically linked to beliefs in Witchcraft or Spirit Possession (WorSP) relative to children in the UK context, and how can potential harm and/or abuse be identified and prevented?

Sub-Questions:

What happens in the abusive context, to and surrounding the child?

How to practitioners understand, interpret and respond in cases where this is of concern?

Disclosure of Child Abuse (CA)...

When disclosure happens:

- In many cases this doesn't happen until many years after events
- Most often to Mother or close peer
- Hindered due to inability to recognise abuse

Barriers to disclosure relevant minority communities

Kazarian & Kazarian (1998)

- Language Barriers, Immigration Concerns
- Lack of Knowledge regarding community support systems
- Cultural insensitivity in mainstream programs
- Collectivist values less likely to disclose for fear of shame or insult



Inability to recognize and delayed disclosure

“I think this is my father’s biggest mistake. Because I was having incapacity benefit and I was going through depression and, you know, there were times where I would self-harm or I would like sleepwalk and scream and shout and I don’t know, I have night terrors. So then he decided that it was okay for me to go for counselling. But I think it was his biggest mistake. Because that’s when I thought okay, you know, when I started having counselling, seeing, you know, therapists and that’s when I thought no this isn’t right. And I started speaking out.”

Familial distance and lack of awareness

“...he said do you know what kindoki is? I said yeah... the he said you have it. I was like okay? (pause) And in that moment I was like fuck! (pause) I went quiet, it was like fuck you know how when something really bad happen... your whole body just like shatters and all cold. I was like fuck! I remember leaving the church and I was so awkward, all my auntie and the children they were going and I was just like behind them and I was like fuck! Its like, what do you do? What do, you do now? (pause) What do I, do now?... And then after that everything just got worse and... they didn't want me around, wanted nothing to do with me. So I was just on my own really... I was hanging around. I was, going to school, but on a weekend I didn't want to be home I started running away... They are your own family members and they want nothing to do with me. So what do I do? I had nobody. I was just so alone! I was just stuck.”

What is different about cases involving CA linked to WorSP?...

Open discussions about belief in relation to child

“It would also be in conversation, like, her talking to um, other people. In the church, on the phone. I remember one time she was talking to her friend on the phone about me... I was just listening to what she was saying about me and it was like ‘boy! This is bad!’. What happened was her friend had a kid, he had the kindoki as well, so what happened is they sent that kid back to Congo. I don’t even know what ever happened to that kid.”

“I was in the park and three of my friends came to me and said ‘hey, XXX, did you kill your own mum?... Your auntie told us, she just start saying you killed your own mum, you eat people too’ I was like, wow! I went to, I think it was like a football pitch, and I was just walking up and down”

Personal response

E.g. 1 *“I suppose a lot of cultural things present a barrier to us because they’re unknown, they’re different. They’re ‘other’. A bit like, particularly these kind of things. If you were to plot a diagram of how close this is in terms of western, say my western culture, it’s probably pretty far away from my norm. And so when it’s something like that then there’s a kind of, there’s a kind of fear response or ‘other’ response.”*

E.g. 2 *“I felt um (pause) you see **witchcraft wasn’t the first thing that came to mind.** Um and spirit possession. It was (pause) I just remember this young person who was very odd and pretty scary. Pretty scary in a kind of in a, in a um (pause) in a spooky sense. Yeah. Pretty scary in a spooky sense. And what I mean by that is there was something so unusual and odd about this person was that they had a rationality about them but it was like their intention was in a different, their whole force and intention, was somewhere different.”*

Cultural Competency

“I’ll be honest I kind of, my first experience of it was quite naïve. You know. I qualified in 96 and I went on a course in 2006, ... with AFRUCA and that kind of reopened the door for me of what it really is with witchcraft. Prior to that I think I just picked up kind of, um, general scraps from media. Like Victoria Climbié, you know, or for example I had a case of... of an African family where there was, um, you know, rituals. But I didn’t understand. I just thought the rituals were, you know, excuse my ignorance, was “cultural”. You know, i.e. children were kind of had paintings, face paintings and wear certain costumes and didn’t understand that. And then looking back on my career, um, I thought you know, there’s part of me that’s a bit sad as in I didn’t acknowledge and recognise certain things that were happening and I sort of, more being politically correct, saw it more as a cultural and not understanding the harm actually happening”

Reductive approach to investigations: What not why...

“...the police officer over the phone just told me, um, “this witchcraft thing, don’t believe it! Its crap! And Carbon Monoxide don’t believe it, its crap! Tell me more about the sexual abuse.” So, they just wanted to know physically, well not physically but, intellectually more about the sexual abuse. Than the reasons of why it happened.”

Current thoughts...

Unique to WorSP?

- International element – Muslim cult America, India rituals, discussions with Congolese priests, Pakistan – Leeds case
- Community around the child complicit in the abuse
- Statutory agency probs with understanding or belief
- Recognition of abuse problematic for both survivor and practitioner / recipient of disclosure

Receipt of the disclosure / recognising 'signs'

- Fear
- Misinterpretation
- Unwillingness to believe possibly due to lack of knowledge and or understanding
- Prosecution concerns

Thank you for your time

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