# Accusations of spirit possession and witchcraft: Exploring the experiences and outcomes for accused and non-accused children within the family

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## DECLARATION

**I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.**

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Thesis submitted for the Doctor of Philosophy in Social Work

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# Summary

Witchcraft and spirit possession (WSP) accusations against children received nationwide attention following the tragic death of Victoria Climbie in 2000.Thereafter, other children have suffered similar fates or experienced significant harm. Many accused children have non-accused siblings who lived with them at the time of the accusation. However, previous research focuses little on their experiences. A starting point for this study was the expectation that the witnessing of accusations and the associated actions and outcomes, would present risk of harm to non-accused siblings too. This research investigates, for the first time, the experiences of non-accused children, alongside the accused.

This mixed methods study uses ecological system theory as the substantive framework to support a critical realist approach to exploring its questions and to interpreting findings. It also draws on Mary Douglas' concepts of purity and danger to illuminate key elements of the ecology of WSP. This allows the analysis to reach beyond the lived experiences actual happenings that participants describe, toward understanding the fundamental (including causal) mechanisms that shape and explain them. Findings from the study contextualise the abuse and surrounding relationships, and also illustrate the resultant impact the accusations had on the children's life experiences thereafter. They also shed light on shortcomings in the sphere of professional recognition and response.

Survey data, to explore and analyse patterns of referral and professional response, was gathered through a Freedom of Information request to children's social care services, police forces in England and from a police force data recording system. This was complemented by in-

depth interviews with 22 participants. The non-accused and accused were interviewed using an adapted version of the Biographical Interpretive Narrative Method. Those with family members, professionals, community and faith leaders took a semi-structured approach. Quantitative data was analysed descriptively and qualitative data was analysed thematically.

The project's key findings demonstrated that there are multiple and diverse understandings of WSP, and these are formed by religious and non-religious beliefs, culture and ethnicity. Both non-accused and accused children experienced abuse before the accusation, and the severity of abuse increased after the accusation. Accusations and abuse often took place in socio-economically challenging circumstances, coupled with highly enmeshed hierarchical relationships between the family, faith and other connected communities. Faith leaders in particular, wielded considerable power over family practices. Strikingly, accusations and abuse commonly took place within plain sight of many people within extended families and communities - a finding which challenges established assumptions that such abuse is hidden – and they created deep feelings of being "othered". Non-accused siblings were subjected to a range of abusive "purification" practices to protect them and others from the accused. However, their experiences of the accusation and its impact on them was not recognised by the accused or by others.

It was not possible to distinguish the impact of just the accusations from the impact of prior and surrounding abuse. However, it was clear that their cumulative effects were significantly harmful both for the accused and the non-accused; in particular, their relationships with parents, step-parents and peers were significantly affected.

Cultural, religious and ethnic considerations along with the sense of being different, also impacted on the accused and non-accused's perceptions of and interactions with professionals. Interviews with professionals raised concerns about the influence of their own values and beliefs on their practice and exposed how professional responses were sometimes unhelpful in managing cases appropriately. A key consideration for professionals is the need to be mindful of the experiences of non-accused siblings and not just the accused during their case analyses and when implementing child protection strategies.

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I am grateful to my Collaborative partner, Gary Foxcroft, who provided part funding and a platform that allowed me to reach beyond the conventional realm. I am privileged to be able to count Emeritus Professor Jean La Fontaine as a friend. You started the journey with me and provided much needed encouragement and support. I have no words to express how grateful I am for this. To my friends, thank you for understanding my absences and for your support.

Lastly, I would like to thank the participants who shared more than their life experiences with me. Our respective journeys through life intersected for a reason and a purpose, and you have impacted every aspect of my life.

*Great is Thy faithfulness and thank You for piloting me*

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## Acronyms

| | |
|---|---|
| **AFRUCA** | Africans Unite Against Child Abuse |
| **APPG** | All Party Parliamentary Group |
| **BBC** | British Broadcasting Corporation |
| **BNIM** | Biographical Narrative Interpretive Method |
| **CALFB** | Child Abuse Linked to Faith or Belief |
| **CiN** | Child in Need |
| **CSC** | Children's Social Care |

| | |
|---|---|
| **DRC** | Democratic Republic of Congo |
| **DfE** | Department for Education |
| **DfES** | Department for Education and Skills |
| **ECHR** | European Convention on Human Rights |
| **ECM** | Every Child Matters |
| **ESRC** | Economic and Social Research Council |
| **FGM** | Female Genital Mutilation |
| **FoI** | Freedom of Information |
| **IICSA** | Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse |
| **LADO** | Local Authority Designated Officer |
| **LSCB** | Local Safeguarding Children Board |
| **LSCP** | Local Safeguarding Children Partnership |
| **NWG** | National Working Group |
| **OHCHR** | Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights |
| **SCR** | Serious Case Review |
| **SHEIOT** | Situation Happening Event Incident Occurrence-Time |
| **SQUIN** | Single Question aimed at Inducing Narrative |
| **WSP** | Witchcraft and Spirit Possession |
| **UK** | United Kingdom |
| **UN** | United Nations |
| **UNCRC** | United Nations Convention on the rights of the child |
| **UNHRC** | United Nations Human Rights Commission |
| **UNGA** | United Nations General Assembly |
| **WHRIN** | Witchcraft and Human Rights Information Network |

# Tables and Figures

# Chapter 1

# Introduction

I begin Chapter one of the thesis by defining what WSP is and provide an overview of the different terminology in use. This is followed by the rationale for the study including my personal experience of working on cases where children have been accused of being a witch or possessed by evil spirits. The study was conducted with a collaborative partner, so a brief overview of the organisation I worked with is provided. Chapter One ends with an outline of the research questions and an overview of the structure of the thesis.

## 1.1 Definition and terminology

In the UK, the term 'child abuse linked to faith or belief' (CALFB) is an umbrella term used to denote practices that include, but are not limited to witchcraft, spirit possession, evil eye[1], Dakini (refers to demons in Hinduism) and muti-murders where body parts are used in rituals (DfE, 2012). The study focuses on beliefs that children can be witches or spirit possessed. There are contexts in which spirit possession and witchcraft are seen as positives, similar to the Christian belief in possession by the Holy Spirit (Briggs et al., 2011) and Wiccans' claim to use

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[1] [1] The intentional or unintentional harm caused by a person who develops jealous feelings towards someone and/or possessions of this person. The person causes this harm through eye or gaze.

their abilities to do good (Stobart, 2006). However, opposing beliefs that witches are evil and the bodies of the spirit possessed are occupied by evil spirits also prevail (Barker, 2009; La Fontaine, 2009). This study focuses on the latter, the pathological aspects of beliefs that children can be witches or spirit possessed (this is explained below).

WSP is understood differently due to religious, cultural and social differences from society to society. The polysemous nature of these concepts presents challenges in defining them, so there are no universally accepted definitions for WSP. Determining what is considered pathological or harmful may also cause problems (La Fontaine, 2009). As Hund (2004) noted, the varying definitions for witchcraft have presented a lexical challenge resulting from academic researchers lumping together all sorts of magical beliefs and practices and referring to all of them as witchcraft. I provide an operational definition to be used in this study to prevent lexical confusion and methodological issues.

Stobart (2006) defined a child witch as 'a child who is able to use evil forces to harm others and spirit possession as 'an evil force that has entered a child and is controlling him or her'. Witches may consciously or unconsciously use witchcraft to harm others, or may shapeshift to animal-form and be invisible (Evans-Pritchard, 1937). The body of the spirit possessed is considered vessels occupied by an evil spirit. Whilst these are distinct beliefs, within some African contexts the beliefs merge, as children believed to be possessed are also considered capable of witchcraft (Barker, 2009).

## 1.2 Rationale for the study and my experience

Beliefs in witches and spirit possession have existed before the advent of written records and occur across Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Europe, Australasia and North and South America (Foxcroft, 2014; Briggs et al., 2011; Schnoebelen, 2009). Historically, the accused have primarily been women and older people (Cimpric, 2010) and whilst this trend continues in some countries, men are also accused (Forsyth & Eves, 2015). Accusing children of witchcraft is a modern phenomenon that began to receive international attention in the 1990s in the Democratic Republic of Congo (Molina, 2006) (see section 2.6 for a fuller discussion). Within the

child protection landscape, WSP accusations against children are a relatively new phenomenon as such cases have only surfaced over the past two decades (Simon et al., 2011).

The issue first came to public consciousness in the United Kingdom (UK) following the murder of an Ivorian eight-year-old girl named Victoria Climbié in 2000 by her great-aunt Marie-Therese Kouao and her boyfriend Carl Manning. Both believed Victoria to be possessed by an evil spirit. Victoria's remains the most high-profiled case of a child murdered due to witchcraft beliefs. Two years following Victoria's death, I began working as a child protection social worker in Haringey Council. After four years of frontline practice, I was seconded to a London Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) one-year funded project aimed at bringing about a system change in how seven local authorities responded to such cases. Thereafter, I worked in a similar role for another local authority for nine years. The work involved safeguarding children at risk due to beliefs that they were possessed or had been labelled a witch by significant others. My work further entailed engaging communities to recognise this issue as a potential child protection concern.

As this is a newly recognised phenomenon, little is known about it by safeguarding professionals. They also know precious little about the outcomes for these children in terms of the impact on their emotional wellbeing, academic achievement, and sense of identity following an accusation. Little is also known of the impact on their familial and social relationships and how they go on to function as adults. My experience of the Nusayba Bharuchi case, the details of which are in the public domain (Coleman, 2010) raised more questions. These mainly focused on the impact of an accusation on other children in the home who were not accused. Nusayba Bharuchi was a four-year-old girl, murdered by her mother who believed her to be possessed by an evil spirit (Coleman, 2010). Although this case failed to meet the threshold for a serious case review (SCR) (now called a safeguarding practice review) (see 2.7.1), (HM Government, 2018), the LSCB decided to review the circumstances of this child's death. The review found the child's teenage sibling discovered her disemboweled body and the impact of this was traumatising for her and for the two other siblings who had not witnessed the aftermath of the incident. It also revealed that family members, including the eldest two

siblings were aware of their mother's belief that her daughter was possessed and that enquiries were made to seek a faith leader's advice.

I was again moved to understand the phenomenon from the perspective of the non-accused sibling when another child 15-year-old, Kristy Bamu, was murdered nine days following Nusayba's death. Kristy's case, which received widespread UK media attention, involved him being murdered by his eldest sister and her partner, who believed him to be a witch because of his bedwetting (Pull, 2013). Kristy was brutally tortured, and his four other siblings aged 11, 13, 20 and 22 years were forced to participate. As Community Partnership Adviser, I attended a meeting convened by different child protection agencies to discuss this case. I concluded that agencies' and practitioners' knowledge-gaps presented challenges in responding to the needs of these children.

These two cases prompted me to reflect on other cases that were either within my direct professional experience or were cases my colleagues had worked on. I reviewed cases I had been involved in and cases in the media where SCRs have been undertaken. These included the case of Khyra Ishaq, murdered in 2008 by her mother and stepfather and Child B, abused by her aunt and two other adults in 2004 (further discussed in 2.7.2). I reviewed these cases looking particularly for information about non-accused siblings, but there was very little. This lack of information raised questions about the experiences of non-accused siblings. These included their involvement in making accusations, witnessing the abuse of the accused child, suffering harm themselves, surviving the death of their accused sibling, removal into the care system with their accused sibling and secondary trauma (the emotional stress experienced by a person helping someone experiencing trauma see (Figley, 1995). This exposed the need for a reappraisal of the focus to include both the accused and non-accused sibling and to explore how both groups are impacted by an accusation.

## 1.3 Collaborative partner

In 2012, I was approached by Gary Foxcroft, Executive Director of Witchcraft and Human Rights Information Network (WHRIN) to join the organisation as a freelance trainer/consultant. In

2008, Mr Foxcroft presented a Bafta and International Emmy award-winning documentary on the experiences of children accused of being a witch (Lancaster University, 2013). The following year, he delivered a presentation to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on the topic. By doing so, he became one of the first individuals to shed light on the issue of witchcraft accusations against children (Foxcroft, 2009).

Working for WHRIN opened up new opportunities to work with organisations across the UK. This national exposure augmented my knowledge and experience of the issue, as I began to develop a broader understanding of the experiences of those accused and their non-accused siblings. WHRIN's track record, expertise, network of experts and international connections made it a suitable partner for collaborative work. The organisation also shared my interest in exploring the experiences of both groups of children and agreed to support an application to the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) PhD for a Collaborative Studentship in 2014, which was successful.

## 1.4 Research Questions

There is a dearth of research on accusations against children (Simon et al., 2012) and even less on the non-accused siblings, with the result that there are significant gaps in knowledge. I have used my experience as a social worker and trainer, along with my in-depth reading of the literature to formulate the research questions. The research initially focused on understanding the experiences of the non-accused and I had planned to primarily interview this group. I formulated the research questions with this focus in mind. However, due to several challenges (see 3.2), I changed the research questions to include a focus on the experiences of both accused and non-accused and changed the methodological approach. The study's focus is now on exploring the experiences of both accused and non-accused siblings from multiple perspectives. The subsidiary questions aim to develop a broader understanding of the phenomenon and show how accusations unfold in the lives of the accused and non-accused. They focus on what is known about the characteristics of both the accused and non-accused,

how the WSP are understood by all involved, the impact of accusation and how professionals respond to concerns.

I used critical realism as a methodological approach to ground the research. The ontological and epistemological underpinnings allow for an exploration of experiences, events, mechanisms generating events and what is possible to be known about those events (Bhaskar, 1998). I have therefore framed the research questions using a critical realist lens.

**Main Question**

What are the experiences and outcomes of witchcraft and spirit possession for accused and non-accused children, and how effective are professional responses?

**Subsidiary Questions**

What do we know about accusations of witchcraft and spirit possession- nature, scale and incidence?

What are the contexts in which these accusations arise?

How are accusations of spirit possession and witchcraft understood?

What happens when an accusation occurs and how is it experienced?

What are the medium and long-term impacts of an accusation?

How are children oriented towards responding to professionals?

How effectively do professionals respond to the non-accused sibling and accused?

## 1.5 Thesis structure

Chapter Two reviews the literature and contexts for the study. It begins with an explanation of the literature review methodology used. This is followed by an explanation of the theoretical framework guiding the study. Uri Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) is the main framework used to explicate the complex ecological landscape present where accusations occur. Anthropologist Mary Douglas' Purity and Danger (Douglas, 1966) is used to allow for a fuller interpretation and explanation of the phenomenon and experiences of the accused and non-accused.  This is then followed by contextual

overviews of the religious and ethnic composition of England and Wales; the law and policy framework; the scale of accusations against children; and professional knowledge and experience; succeeded by a focus on the experiences of the accused and non-accused siblings.

In Chapter Three, I present the methodological approach, beginning with a discussion of the epistemological and ontological underpinnings of the study. I then provide an outline of the original research design and the challenges that led to its change. The study uses a mixed methods approach to data collection, which involves a quantitative survey and in-depth qualitative interviews. I present in detail the data collection methods, along with the methods of data analysis. In the final two sections, I discuss my positionality and ethical considerations.

Chapters Four, Five and Six focus on the research findings. Chapter four focuses on the findings from the quantitative data, and primarily discusses the nature, scale and prevalence of accusations. It also presents the characteristics of the accused and non-accused sibling, factors influencing an accusation, outcomes for both groups, information on accusers and their responses to accusations and professional responses. Later sections explore further insights from the quantitative data analysis and conclusions that may be inferred.

Chapters Five and Six discuss the findings from qualitative interviews. In Chapter six, following a focus on how WSP are understood, I discuss what happens when an accusation occurs and the contexts within which accusations unfold. In Chapter seven, the findings that focus on the medium to long-term impacts are presented, how children respond to professionals and how professionals respond to accusations.

Chapter seven focuses on synthesising the findings in the light of the broader literature and theory and how well they address the research questions.

In the final chapter of the thesis, I take the opportunity to highlight the study's contribution to knowledge and make several key suggestions, focused on developing a broader understanding of the experiences and outcomes of WSP for the accused and non-accused siblings, and how to improve safeguarding arrangements and support. A discussion of the challenges and limitations of the study precedes suggestions for further research. The chapter ends with personal reflections, an outline of my dissemination plans and concluding reflections.

# Chapter 2

# Literature Review

## 2.1 Introduction to the review

In this chapter I discuss and appraise the existing research and theoretical literature. I also explore the legal aspects, policy and social contexts that inform my approach to formulating my research questions. These are determined by impact caused by experiences and responses to WSP accusations from the perspectives of both the accused and non-accused. I am guided by Charmaz's (2006) argument that a literature review should identify favoured arguments, evidence that should be accepted and rejected and how those decisions should be made. I will explain points where the literature converges with and diverges from my study. This will include areas where there are significant gaps in knowledge, how this study responds to this lack and how it is positioned within the wider body of knowledge. Both the study as a whole and the literature review are guided by two theoretical frameworks, which are explained in this chapter.

## 2.2 Search strategy

Just over a decade ago, Simon et. al (2012) wrote that there was a dearth of academic literature on child abuse linked to accusations of WSP. The lack of literature is partly due to challenges with obtaining approval from the authorities to undertake research. Secker (2013) noted that researchers failed to understand the issue and charged governments and international bodies with failing to recognise how it features as a human rights issue. La Fontaine (2016) stated that the attitudes of London Local Government officials toward these issues and events, hampers research. This attitude is possibly due to an approach to social work practice that ignores the

centrality of religion and belief for some service users (Gilligan, 2009). Despite the number of cases reported in the media, the overall number referred to child protection agencies is proportionally small in comparison to other child protection concerns (Stobart, 2006). Another concern centres on WSP being a sensitive and taboo topic that engenders fear in those holding such beliefs. Community workers working to raise awareness of accusations, as a safeguarding concern in communities have experienced derision and death threats from their countryfolk (Briggs et al., 2011). For these reasons, broaching the topic with communities and identifying research participants are both problematic. In the decade following Simon et. al (2012), the situation largely remains the same, as there remains a lack in research on WSP.

This lack of UK research demanded that this review took a broad approach. This included looking at international scholarly research, reports from national and international organisations, practice-based literature, media articles, children's services serious case reviews, government policy and legislation. The inclusion of grey literature is necessary given the lack of available published research specific to accusations against children. Its inclusion in this study is justified because this material provides further evidence (Aveyard, 2018) and diverse views that extend beyond academia. Furthermore, the view of people from the communities where incidence of WSP is most prevalent have been significantly less represented within academia, making the inclusion of grey literature more than just necessary.

The systematic mapping of the research literature was guided by the research questions (see 1.4). I undertook a general search of databases concerning the disciplines of religion, sociology, anthropology, history, social work and psychology. The material sourced assisted me in developing insight into historical and current debates along with themes relevant to the research topic. Searching several databases allowed for casting a wider net, which ensured relevant studies drawn from different disciplines, both published and 'grey' (Gough et al., 2012).

The databases searched were Allied Social Science Index Abstract, InfoPsych, Medline, SCOPUS, Ethos and Social Care Online. Searches were also conducted using Google Scholar and the

websites of international human rights organisations such as the United Nations. These were helpful for understanding current human rights perspectives and debates, including contextual insights from different locales. Additionally, I searched the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children's online national case review repository to access case reviews undertaken in England that focused on WSP.

The first keywords used in the searches of the databases included words such as witchcraft, spirit possession, "spirit possession," "jinn possession", "belief" OR "religio*", "voodoo" OR "black magic" OR "demons". These searches provided literature generally focused on several aspects of WSP such as anthropological debates, development, mental health, disability, adult victims and the law. This provided the background I needed to enhance my understanding of WSP and contexts encompassing different disciplinary perspectives. I then narrowed the search to focus specifically on children and included some of the following keyword examples, "Victoria Climbie", "child witches", "religious abuse", "faith-based abuse", "social work AND religion", "jinn", "kindoki", "child abuse" AND "witchcraft", "child abuse" AND "spirit possession".

Concerning the inclusion criteria, I included literature in English and placed no restrictions on the year or location of publication. The exclusion of literature in other languages such as French and Portuguese limited insights into the research field. I also included only literature on WSP and excluded literature on Wicca, ritual abuse, satanic abuse and new age as they are distinctly different from WSP. Due to the dearth of literature focussing on accused children and their non-accused siblings, exclusion of the literature on methodological grounds did not occur.


## 2.3 Theoretical framework

Theoretically, this study draws on the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner 1979) as the main substantive framework, and also from Douglas' work, (1966) Purity and Danger.

### 2.3.1 Urie Bronfenbrenner- Ecological Systems Model

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems model illuminates our understanding of how human development is influenced by multiple environmental systems. The model explains how development takes place within a complexly layered environment, with each layer influencing and impacting childhood experiences. Children do not live in isolation. Their experiences include interactions and symbiotic relationships, which they encounter within different settings or layers. This reflects how they are directly and indirectly influenced by the culture and beliefs in each setting, and how they too influence their immediate circumstances. Bronfenbrenner underscores the importance of this bidirectional influence on each layer because it is at the core of what makes humans, human. He also argues that any other approach to understanding human development must be viewed as 'development-out-of-context' (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:21). Children have an 'ecological niche' which is influenced by contextual factors situated at multiple levels and are able to influence their 'ecological niche.' Bronfenbrenner also argues that individuals' lived experience and identity are driven by and influenced by their history, values, beliefs and by events.

The study uses Bronfenbrenner's model which has five different system levels nested within each other (see Figure 1), which I now describe with specific reference to the belief in WSP. The most outer layer of the model is the chronosystem, which was a later addition to the Ecological System Model, representing time and history (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). The chronosystem accounts for changes occurring as time unfolds within an individual's environment and within themselves. This could include WSP accusations across generations within a family, or the impact of an accusation on the non-accused over time. The macro-system would include examination of the customs, ideologies, cultural beliefs, practices, laws and policies including those associated with the belief, economic policy and societal views on WSP All other systems are nested in the macro-system. The exosystem concerns social settings that do not directly include the child but influence the experiences occurring at the micro-settings they interact with. Examples of the exosystem may include the media, social work workforce, parents' religious connections, siblings' school and friendships and social services. It may also include the local policy on safeguarding related to WSP accusations. The mesosystem concerns settings that have direct interactions with each other and represent the interconnections that occur at

**Figure 1- Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model (Guy-Evans, 2020)**
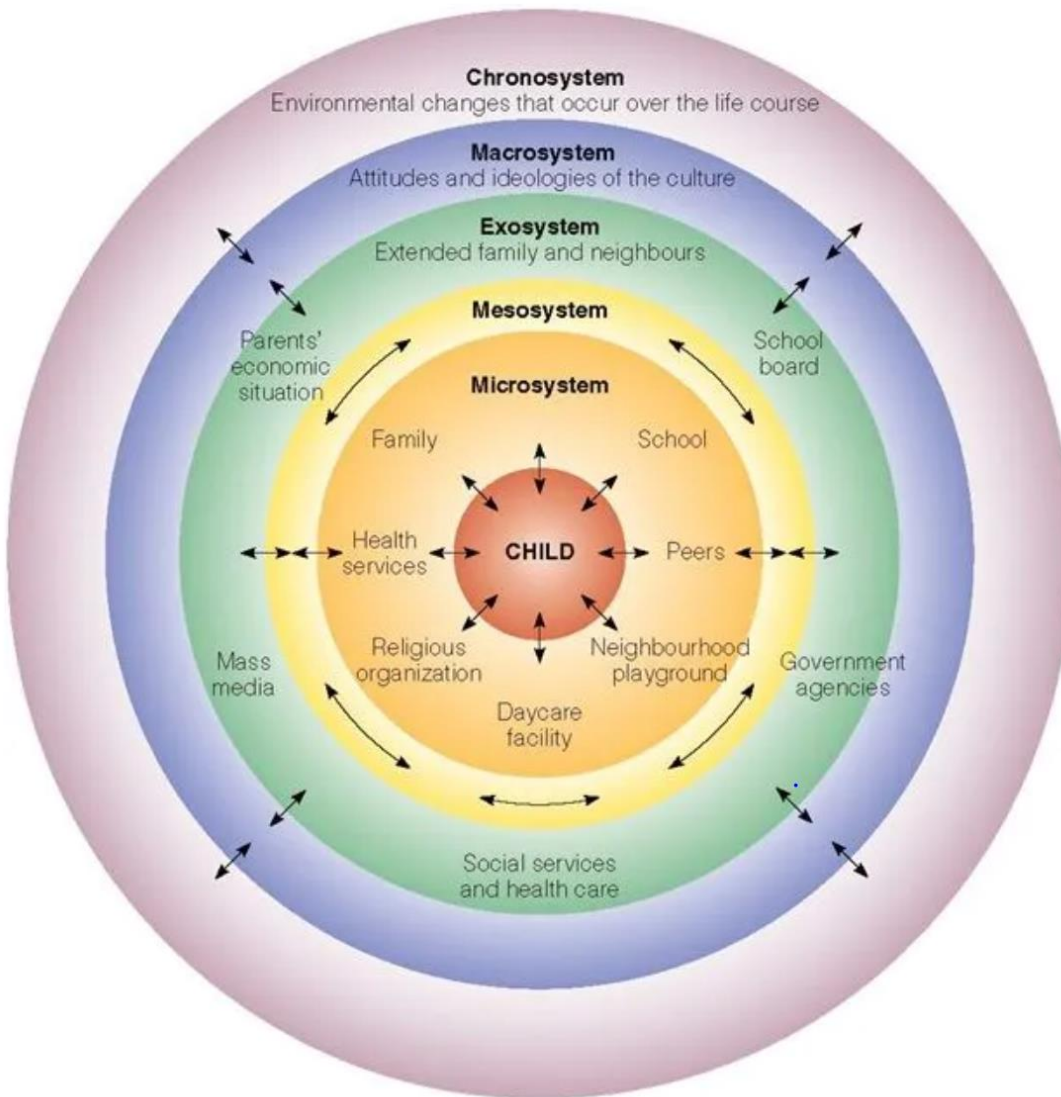
the microsystem level. The child's development is impacted by the continuous connections between the various microsystems. Interactions between microsystems such as family, faith organisations and schools are examples of the mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The microsystem comprises of the child's immediate environments such as their family, peers, school, faith community and neighbourhood, and the relationships within these environments. Within the microsystem, what happens to the non-accused or accused has an impact on how others respond to them. Lastly, nestled at the centre of all other levels is the individual level which includes the child's own characteristics. These include age, personality, disability, behaviour and gender. Individuals who engage in interpersonal relationships with children are affected by the child's characteristics and this inevitably has an impact on their development.

This interaction between the child and the different settings could help explain how these children experience their environment during and after an accusation and how others respond to them. Understanding how these multiple settings in varying contexts of stress levels influence behaviour is important to this study. Additionally, as WSP accusations occur within a cultural and social context, the multidetermined aspect cannot be overstated, and Bronfenbrenner's ecological model highlights this.

### 2.3.2 Mary Douglas- Purity and Danger

Douglas (1966) uses the concept of "dirt" as a framework for comparing societies, suggesting that this is the basis of what is common between traditional and modern religious and other belief systems. She posits that humans make sense of the world by ordering it into classifications, but that this ordering invariably results in anomalies. According to Douglas, anomalies give rise to "dirt" or in other words, disorder, because they disrupt our sense of order and can be both polluting and at the same time useful. The categorisation of what is "dirt" varies in different systems of belief because the process of defining it is influenced by

cultural values. Once it has been identified, reflection on "dirt" inevitably leads to a reflection on connections between order and disorder.

For Douglas, there are three different types of social dangers that can cause disorder. They include dangers that test the boundaries of the social system. For example, in the instance of war, when the internal codes of the system have been breached or when conventional gender roles or sexual behaviour is challenged (Douglas, 1966). These dangers are manifested in rituals of the body and understanding this, helps answer questions about why people engage in ritual behaviours. Douglas also explains that danger lies in transitional states as in the instance of developing from a foetus to a new-born. A transitional state is precarious because transition involves the person being in a state of uncertainty, of being neither in one state or the other and is perceived as a danger to others. For example, a person with a physical disability might be viewed as being in a liminal state because they are neither well nor unwell or a "full" human being which is viewed in some cultures as a sign that they are a witch or spirit possessed. This process of deciding what is danger ultimately involves the construction of "otherness", as it requires discriminating who is good or evil and that any aberration must be removed or cleansed.

Douglas highlights that there is a connection between danger and rituals and that the connection makes them two sides of the same coin. For her, danger and rituals possess qualities that make them familiar with each other because engaging in a ritual means acknowledgement of the power that lies in disorder. Once "dirt" has been identified, it must be neutralised through ritual or purification rites, which is a positive effort to organise the environment back to a state of equilibrium. Attempts to reinstate order through ritual is about externalising individual experience and is an attempt to 'force one into good citizenship' (Douglas, 1966:4). Any engagement in ritual is a recognition of the gravity of the situation.

Children accused of WSP are viewed as being "different" or impure and this presents a threat to their community. The non-accused, by virtue of their proximity to the accused in some situations, could be viewed as also presenting a threat of defilement and both are then considered to have no place in the social system and as such, are compartmentalised to a

liminal area. Douglas uses the terms marginal beings, in a marginal state to describe this situation. Douglas argues that the reaction to those in marginal states is universal. The purifying or what Douglas calls 'resetting the system', involves marginal rites, which are themselves a system of thought.  There is also tension concerning how to purify "dirt" because there is no universally accepted approach.

## 2.4 National context: religion and ethnicity

Beliefs in WSP exist amongst many ethnic groups. They are made up of those who are followers of a religion and agnostics (Cimpric, 2010; La Fontaine, 2012). WSP beliefs exist in the Abrahamic faiths of Christianity, Islam and Judaism (Barker, 2009; DfE, 2012) and others (Dien, 2009). References to them exist in many religious texts, including the Bible and Qu'ran (Barker, 2009; Foxcroft, 2014; Rassool, 2019). Given this link between the belief system, religion and ethnicity, understanding shifts in the religious and ethnic composition of the relevant population is important, as it provides information on the societal context within which accusations occur.  In the UK, most children accused are from Black communities, followed by South Asians with a Christian or Muslim background (La Fontaine, 2012; Stobart, 2009).

The last two censuses show that England and Wales are multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-faith societies. The 2011 Census reported that the White ethnic group is the majority at 48.2 million (86%). This represents a 5.3% decrease since 2001. The second and third largest ethnic groups are Indian and Pakistani with, 1.4 million (2.5%) and 1.1 million (2%) people, respectively. Other ethnic groups include Black African which account for 989,628 (1.8%); Black Caribbean 594,437 (1.1%); Chinese 393,141 (0.7%); Mixed 289,984 (0.5%) and Arab 230,600 (0.4%).

Whilst England and Wales remain predominantly Christian countries, 2011 Census data show a downward trajectory in members. The 2001 Census reported 77% of households as having a religion but by 2011 fell to 68%. The 2011 Census demonstrated that while the largest religious group was Christian, making up 59.3%, this was reduced from 71% in 2001. In 2011, 93% of

Christians in England and Wales identified themselves as White. This Census also revealed an increase in the number of people identifying as agnostic (25%). Other religious groups included Muslim 4.8% (increase of 1% on 2001 Census); Hindu 1.5%; Sikh 0.8%; Jewish 0.5% and Buddhist 0.4%.

This diverse mix of ethno-religious communities is the result of centuries of migration and settlement. This is set to decrease in the long term due to new immigration laws and policies implemented due to Brexit (Sumption and Kierans, 2021). However, recent evidence shows an upward trajectory, which projects an approximate growth in the UK population of 70 million currently to 75 million by 2043 (Cangiano, 2019). The population increase is also reflected in Office for National Statistics (ONS) data, which shows that in 2020, 29.3% of total live births in the UK were to women born outside the country with the most common place of origin for both mothers and fathers being Pakistan (ONS, 2021). The latest Annual Population Survey showed that whilst the Christian population experienced a decline, those practising other religions like Islam and Hinduism experienced an increase.

 While some academics highlight the benefits of the changing ethnic and faith landscape (Briggs & Whittaker, 2018), others focus on a sustained politicised narrative that portrays migrants as a threat (Cox & Geisen, 2014). Dein (2009) also emphasised how living in the UK for migrant groups is marked by new inequalities, which can act as a pinch point that deters progress and activates traditional beliefs. How these beliefs influence the behaviours of those who hold such beliefs and the manner in which such behaviour is interpreted by the indigenous community has implications for policy makers, professional responses, community cohesion and most importantly for measures put in place for the protection of children. This draws attention to how the culture, policies and laws can create tensions where there are competing views and perspectives that impact the microsystem.

Beliefs in WSP did not enter the UK upon the arrival of these groups because they already existed. From medieval times there is a well-recorded history of witchcraft allegations, stigmatisation and punishment, at times rising to persecution. For example, the 1612 Lancashire Witch Trials resulted in the hanging of 10 men and women (Foxcroft, 2009).

Accusations of witchcraft were primarily levelled against elderly women. Children were considered victims of witchcraft or conduits for passing on witchcraft knowledge (Hanson & Ruggiero, 2013). With strong Christian roots in England and Wales, belief in possession by evil spirits exist and the Church of England now regularly conducts exorcisms. Meg Hellier, Member of Parliament for the London Borough of Hackney, in a 2013 parliamentary debate on child protection, highlighted the risks presented to children accused of being possessed or a witch and referred to the Church of England's diocesan exorcist residency in her constituency (House of Commons, 12 September 2013).

## 2.5 Scale of accusations against children: International and national

There is no systematic recording of cases of accusations of WSP by international organisations, so the exact number of cases is unknown (Foxcroft, 2017). However, several researchers and organisations have attempted to document cases in certain countries and internationally. In an attempt to understand the scale of accusations of both children and adults, former United Nations Independent Expert on The Enjoyment of Human Rights for People with Albinism, Ikponwosa Ero, reported that the number of cases of accusations of witchcraft, spirit possession and other forms of similar harmful practices such as killings for the use of body parts in rituals is in the thousands and that it is on the rise (UNGA, 2021). More specifically, Ero and colleagues documented 20,000 cases of violations of human rights following an accusation between 2009 – 2019, across 60 countries. Whilst this data includes cases wider than WSP and adults, it is referred here to illustrate the spread and scale of the problem.

The scale of accusations against children worldwide is unknown. However, data from a few African states are available. Writing about the issue of child witches in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), De Boeck (2000) estimated over 20,000 children living on the streets were accused and removed from their homes. The international charity, Save the Children, worked in the DRC between 2003-2005 and reunited approximately 2000 children accused of being witches with their families who had accused them. In the West African nation of Nigeria, in the

south-eastern region, an estimated 10,000 to 15,000 children have been accused and some put to death (Foxcroft 2014). West of Nigeria is Ghana, where Adinkrah (2011) noted that whilst there is no reliable data specific to the country, 90% of the population believe in witches. Adinkrah's content analysis of vigilante hunts for child witches appearing in local media between 1994-2009 found 13 cases involving a total of 9 boys and 9 girls. The small number in Adinkrah's research stems from under-reporting and failure to view the harming of these children as abusive.

In the UK, there is no systematic recording of cases of WSP. The only systematic collation of relevant data is undertaken by the Department for Education (DfE) as part of its Children in Need (CiN) Census, which requires children's services departments in England to provide data on the number of assessments undertaken where child abuse linked to faith or belief (CALFB) was identified as wholly or part of the concern. The DfE's motivation for collating these data stemmed from a need to understand the scale of the issue following the death and abuse of several children after the killing of Victoria Climbie in 2000 (see 2.7.2). These data are published annually by the DfE. Data shows that in 2016-2017, there were 960 assessments identifying CALFB completed by local authorities, and by the following year, this increased to 1630. In the following three years, 2018-2019, 2019-2020 and 2020-2021, the numbers recorded were 1950, 2080 and 1950 respectively (DfE, 2021). The cumulative figure over these six years totalled 8,570, which implies approximately four assessments per day undertaken by children's services departments.

The fact that these data cover the wider category of CALFB, means that it cannot be relied upon to provide a true indication of the number of children accused of being witches or possessed. As other statutory services (police, health, education) are not required to record cases there is no systematic national data on the number of children accused. Another concern is the CiN Census data is published in aggregate form for each local authority, and provide no demographic information on who those children are, their family circumstances or the outcome and impact of an accusation. It also does not provide any information on if the accused had siblings or elaborate on their siblings' experiences. Furthermore, an assessment undertaken does not necessarily entail an actual accusation, as even inaccurately referred WSP cases must

be recorded as the reason for completing the assessment. Therefore, the data might include miscategorised cases (Kinmond et al., 2019).

The only available research data specifically focused on WSP in England comes from the work of Stobart (2006) and La Fontaine (2009). Stobart's research (further discussed in 2.7.1) identified 38 cases involving 47 children between January 2000 and 2006. La Fontaine's (2012) research covered a longer period between 2000-2008 and identified 42 cases of children accused of WSP. The small number of cases coming to the attention of the authorities has been raised as an issue by both Stobart and La Fontaine (2016), who both suggest cases are underreported. Briggs et al., (2011) also draw attention to the small number of this type of abuse and contrast this with the large number of believers in African communities.  As many of the cases concern children from minority ethnic groups, evidence suggests that these communities are too reticent to seek support from services mandated to provide support, because of mistrust. This reduces the chances of cases coming to light (Stobart, 2006). La Fontaine (2016) provides a detailed catalogue of reasons why cases may go undetected and highlights at a macro-level the custom of minding one's own business that pervades British culture. La Fontaine also interestingly focuses on how the "othering" of children from communities where accusations occur and the indifference shown towards them by others not domiciled with them, as being further reasons for underreporting.  The invisibility of these children is seen in cases where professional practice is predominantly adult- focused and fails to capture the experience of children. La Fontaine also draws attention to a disinterest in and ignorance of witchcraft by the authorities and white neighbours. They are therefore unlikely to understand the seriousness of the issue, leading to a child's disclosure being ignored or dismissed.

## 2.6 Explanations and understandings of accusations of spirit possession and witchcraft

Human existence comprises a plethora of experiences, both good and bad. Beliefs in witchcraft have long provided an explanatory framework to understand these experiences. Cimpric (2010:10) considers these beliefs as 'a theory that explains and justifies a conception of the

universe'. Evans-Pritchard (1937) was one of the first scholars to outline the logic of witchcraft beliefs and his analysis illuminated how these beliefs are activated when human experience coincides with misfortune, or a need to improve one's circumstances (see also La Fontaine, 2016). The need to understand why things happen through the lens of witchcraft beliefs is an intimate affair, as the accused is almost always someone within the accuser's inner circle (Cimpric, 2010). Scholars have identified several circumstances that trigger witchcraft beliefs. Illnesses, both physical and mental are understood by some, as being caused by witches (Molina, 2005). The aetiology of neurological disorders such as epilepsy is also considered to be caused by witches (Carod-Artal et al., 2007). Writing about the experiences of children diagnosed with HIV/AIDS, Tenkorang et al., (2011) outlines how those with certain health conditions are considered witches. Children with disabilities can also be deemed witches and blamed for their families' hardships (Secker, 2013). Those with mental health conditions continue to be viewed as less than human, aligned to the spirit world (Rassool, 2019) and feared by kinfolk. Writers have drawn attention to the gendered nature of witchcraft beliefs in societies where the behaviours of girls and women are attributed to witchcraft when it is perceived to breach the socially acceptable code of behaviour (Hermkens, 2015). Comaroff and Comaroff (1993) who take a macro-economic position on the issue, suggest that it is a response to capitalism and globalisation, as these systems have increased inequality. Others have identified the rise in Pentecostal churches across the African continent and a theology promoting the existence of child witches, which serves to disadvantage vulnerable children, who are likely to be accused and reward faith leaders who benefit financially for conducting exorcisms (Foxcroft, 2014; Cimpric, 2010; Molina, 2005). However, the view that Christian doctrine promotes such beliefs about children has also been criticised (De Boeck and Plissart, 2004).

The role of poverty appears to feature prominently as a causal factor, however, Miguel (2005) provides a novel explanation linked to the poverty claim. Miguel found that in rural Tanzania a rise in the killing of witches occurred during times of flooding or drought caused by climatic changes. Therefore, climatic changes are at the root of accusations and not poverty. The poverty cause and effect claim, which has also been echoed by others such as, La Fontaine

(2009) and Alston (2009), has also been challenged because it does not explain why other countries with the same beliefs and similar societal shocks do not experience accusations. It was also observed that the wealthy are not excluded from accusations (Riedel, 2012). Golooba-Mutebi (2004) also disputed the poverty claim after researching accusations in South Africa. According to Golooba-Mutebi, poorer Mozambican refugees in South Africa who were found to have more social capital than South Africans who did not experience accusations. The various reasons postulated by researchers and commentators show the importance of understanding how accusations may occur and how it relates to societal events and systemic issues (Powles and Deakin, 2012). Furthermore, Reidel (2012) argues that whilst economic instability or neglect of the education sector may cause upheavals, accusations occur or wane due to systems that are traditional or pre-existing and therefore must be viewed as due to a radicalisation of ideas about witchcraft.

## 2.7 Accusations a new phenomenon?

A review of the literature shows that writers have posited various positions on whether child witches are a "new phenomenon". Scholars suggesting that it is not new include Yengo (2008), who argues that an ancient belief that still exists today in the Bight of Benin region that labels newborns with congenital deformities or difficult births as being associated with child witches. La Fontaine (2016) provides anecdotal evidence indicating that in the Kongo region, child witches were sold into slavery in the nineteenth century. Despite the accounts of both Yengo (2008) and La Fontaine (2016), there is no available historical data to confirm child witch accusations. The most compelling historical evidence of the existence of the belief in child witches comes from Evans-Pritchard's (1937) seminal research on witchcraft beliefs amongst the Azande people of South Sudan. He refers to the Azande belief that children are capable of being witches but stresses that their power remained dormant during childhood, so they were never accused.

Several writers who believe it is a new phenomenon signalled a period when it started. Brain (1970) was the first to suggest the belief in child witches and accusations was a 'new phenomenon'. Brain's account of accusations among the Bangwa people of Cameroon found that children were originally considered 'children of gods', but structural changes in society after colonialism eroded this perception and birthed the belief in child witches. Next came others. Geschiere (1980) found in south-eastern Cameroon a 'new type of child witchcraft' called mbati which targeted virgin boys. Fisiy & Geschiere (1990) provide a further account in the same Cameroonian region where two children accused of being witches confessed in court to the crime of witchcraft. De Boeck's (2002) anthropological research in DRC was the next to research the topic. He found that changing perceptions of childhood from innocence to being capable of inimical acts against kinfolk, led to the belief in child witches. According to De Boeck, children used this newfound perceived power to display their agency and influence in their community and family. De Boeck's account of these children presented them as not only at risk (of accusation), but a risk to others because child witches instilled fear in society. In later research, De Boeck (2009) noted that accusations began in the 1990s and described it as 'a thoroughly modern phenomenon'. Foxcroft (2009), like De Boeck, sees it as taking form in Nigeria during a similar period. Chineyemba et al., (2010) provides more granular information concerning Nigeria and found that accusations took form in the Akwa-Ibom state in 2001.

Writers stressing that it is a new phenomenon based their view on a plethora of causes. Despite La Fontaine's (2016) anecdotal evidence of nineteen century child witches, in her earlier work, she argues that it is a modern phenomenon because African traditional beliefs never propagated such thinking (La Fontaine, 2009). Others have argued that child witch accusations only started to surface in some countries with the advent of popular media's reinforcement of the belief which served to confirm, disseminate and uphold it (Foxcroft, 2017; Hanson and Ruggiero, 2013).


Further positions on the matter point to the birth of accusation in many countries coinciding with the occurrence of recent macro-societal factors of war and institutional collapse, which created societal "multi-crises" and an atmosphere where accusations are a means to return to

the equilibrium to a stable society. These issues have led to a rise in individualism, conflicts between the sexes and consanguine relationships across the generations (De Boeck, 2000). Under these circumstances, community and family settings become increasingly unstable, to the point that hierarchal structures marked by a parent's control over their child become disrupted, as parents are not able to assume their responsibilities (Cimpric, 2010; De Boeck, 2000). This breakdown in traditional family hierarchical structures and the move from a collectivist culture to one based on individualism is further evidence of a type of system change never seen before that has led to changing attitudes and beliefs about the nature of childhood. Hanson and Ruggiero (2013) similarly posit that the destabilisation of African family life caused by capitalism is responsible for an individualistic culture, which has eroded traditional kinship ties. Whereas Molina (2006) understands the problem from the perspective of war-torn contexts, where the spectre of child soldiers changed the perception of children within these societies from being a gift from God to one capable of doing evil. Acts of criminality increased the conceptualisation and visibility of child witches within these societies.

The evidence presented above suggests that accusations are a new phenomenon, with many writers pointing to a period between 1970 to 2000 when cases started to feature. This development appears to feature mainly in some sub-Saharan countries. The period when cases started to feature internationally, reflects similarly with the UK, as in the 1990's there were a number of accusations that led to deaths.

## 2.8 What we know about the experiences of the accused and non-accused siblings in the UK?

Since accusations of WSP against children are a relatively new phenomenon, what is known about the experiences of and impacts upon these children is limited. Published literature or data that are available mainly focuses on children of African background, and specifically on the

accused not the non-accused.  As a result, as discussed in 2.2, this review drew on non-peer reviewed and grey literature to obtain data on the experiences of the non-accused.

### 2.8.1 Insights from research

Accusations against children occur when the experience of misfortune abounds, and there is a logic behind which the child is accused (Molina, 2006). The evidence suggests that those accused are children with a 'difference' or not considered 'normal' on grounds of their behaviour, health, and disability (Isioma, 2019; Molina, 2005). The most serious consequence of an accusation is death. Many accused children experience severe forms of violence and neglect inflicted by perpetrators to rid them of perceived evil or to extract a confession (La Fontaine, 2012; Bussien; 2009). Foxcroft and Secker (2010) state that a third of children accused in the Nigerian state of Akwa Ibom experience violations of their human rights. Many also experience discrimination and exclusion from their community (Alston, 2009). Stigmatisation reduces these children to a sub-human status, resulting in a denial of their rights to medical treatment and education (Secker, 2013). The curtailing of human rights also extends to a denial of a right to family life, as many accused are feared by family members and abandoned (De Boeck, 2009; Molina; 2005). The types of abuse and neglect experienced by the accused include the full range of harm and they may experience multiple forms of harm simultaneously. These experiences include rape, burning, forced labour, starvation, acid attacks and children with albinism whose body parts are considered magical are maimed and the body part used in rituals (Garcia, 2013; Cimpric, 2010; Schnoebelen, 2009).


Tedam (2014) argues that harm occurs during an exorcism but falls short of saying if labelling a child is harmful. In 2017, in a criminal case involving a father who believed his 13-year-old son to be possessed, the trial judge set the precedent that 'Those who are told, especially by parents, that they are possessed by evil spirits are vulnerable. That vulnerability is further magnified when that is a child' (Yorkshire Evening Post, 2017). This clearly signifies that labelling a child as possessed makes them vulnerable to harm.

None of the international literature on child accusations addresses the experiences of siblings or other child relations. This absence reflects a glaring and unexplained knowledge gap. Much of the existing UK research likewise focuses on the experiences of the accused (Simon et al., 2012). However, Stobart (2006) remains one of the main works cited, making a major contribution to understanding the nature of the belief system, experiences, impact and outcomes mainly for the accused and to a lesser extent non-accused siblings. It created space for the issue to be debated. Stobart found that between 2000-06 there were 38 reported cases of WSP accusations involving 47 children. Stobart's study showed that accused children lived in complex family structures and were largely first-generation migrants. The children were mainly from a Black, Asian or minority background with just one white English family. The families were mainly Christian, and others included five Muslims, one Hindu, one family that alternated between different faiths and in 11 cases this information was unknown. The accused were considered "different" due to having ill mental or physical health diagnoses, disability, "challenging" behaviour or having nightmares and bedwetting. Some were scapegoated and experienced the full range of abuse and neglect. Stobart did not specifically explore the experiences of non-accused siblings but identified that 25 of the 47 children accused had siblings. Non-accused siblings witnessed the abuse of the accused. The accusers were mainly parents/carers and faith leaders. Two siblings were encouraged to participate in the violence; several siblings were not allowed to interact with the accused child; a total of 23 non-accused siblings compared to 18 accused were taken into long-term foster care. Stobart does not expand on why more siblings were taken into local authority care compared to the accused, or whether non-accused siblings were separated from the accused upon entering the care system. The research also did not provide data on the long-term implications of this and there was scant evidence provided concerning socio-economic circumstances.

La Fontaine's (2012) research also looked at cases of WSP accusations but narrowed the research field to London. La Fontaine was particularly concerned about how researchers lump different beliefs under the umbrella of WSP, which led her to embark on a project to clearly identify only cases of WSP accusations. La Fontaine accessed the London Metropolitan Police database and interviewed social work professionals. In total, 26 cases of witchcraft and 16

cases involving spirit possession accusations were recorded between 2000 and 2008 these were analysed. There were 59 accusations made which comprised 39 accused of being witches and 20 possessed by evil spirits, with some children being accused of both. La Fontaine's findings were not dissimilar to Stobart's in terms of the characteristics of those accused, abuse suffered, family structure and effect of an accusation. Like others (discussed above), La Fontaine focuses on the impact poverty and unemployment have on migrant families, in particular, how this saps aspiration, along with dreams about achieving economic stability in a wealthy country. With wealth being beyond the reach of many of these communities, the loss of hope and a need to explain this misfortune creates the instability that could lead to an accusation. La Fontaine identifies 12 different categories of accusers, with the majority being pastors or from the same household e.g., mother, father, stepparent. Other accusers included relatives and church elders. The literature overwhelmingly points to accusations as an intimate affair between kin and as the dark side of consanguine relationships (Isioma, 2019). This relation extends to family members overseas, as La Fontaine found two children sent to Kinshasa for an exorcism and abandoned there. La Fontaine devotes attention to the role of Christian faith leaders within African led majority churches as accusers and their engagement in deliverance practices which are harmful to children. La Fontaine indicates that many of the children accused were half-siblings but does not look at the experiences of non-accused siblings. An important finding from La Fontaine's work that provides some insights into the experiences of the non-accused siblings concern some being taken into the care of children's service with the accused, and others left in the care of accusers following the accused being removed. La Fontaine found that in cases where the non-accused were left with the accuser no further accusations occurred. This finding is of interest because there is no known evidence if these children go on to be accused, how their relationship with the accused develops after being separated and the long-term outcomes of living with an accuser.

In response to safeguarding concerns related to accusations of children in African communities in London, Trust for London which is a funding provider focused on improving the quality of life of Londoners, directly funded four charities to tackle the issue at a community, family and faith levels. These organisations were involved in training professionals, parents, and faith groups,

lobbying the government and providing advice and support to victims/survivors. Some of these organisations are Africans Unite Against Child Abuse, Churches Child Protection Advisory Service (now called Thirty:One Eight), Victoria Climbie Foundation and Congolese Family Centre. Each organisation sought to develop initiatives aimed at strengthening the communities' capacity to respond and safeguard the rights of children at risk. Whist the evaluation report on the effectiveness of the programmes does not provide information from direct accounts of accused and non-accused siblings, it offers valuable insight into how the socio-economic pressures, institutional structures, geopolitical challenges (such as immigration) and the socio-cultural context increase the harm to children (Briggs et al., 2011). It concludes that tackling structural inequalities, social exclusion and deprivation and differences in value structures between African and UK communities could reduce harm to children. The findings of this evaluation offer key insights into how the interplay between macro-level factors such as the culture and values of the dominant group may lead to tensions at a meso and micro system level. It also draws attention to the impact of transnationalism. Briggs et al's., (2011) focus on the impact of deprivation in African communities is of interest, as it adds to the evidence that poverty is a causal factor that may generate an accusation.

Trust for London funded another project in the London Borough of Newham called the Dove Project which was led by Africans Unite Against Child Abuse. The death of Kristy Bamu (see 2.8.2) was the motivation behind the formation of this one-year project, which focused on providing mental health support to survivors and the training of professionals to ensure the system worked to respond appropriately to cases. This work took a multi-agency approach and included children's services, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, and other faith and community organisations. The project identified 11 children who were either African, Asian, Black Caribbean or of Mixed ethnicity (TSIP, 2014). The report did not provide data on the context, circumstances or experiences of the accused and non-accused.

Alongside the few academic research sources, the most valuable sources of information concerning the experience of children in these cases come from criminal court cases and serious case reviews (SCR), all of which are in the public domain. According to UK government guidance for England and Wales, local safeguarding children partnerships (LSCP) (previously

known as LSCBs) are required to undertake an SCR when a child has died due to abuse or neglect. It also applies when there is a suggestion of serious harm and there are concerns about the local authority responses. In these instances, safeguarding board partners and others work together to ensure the child is safeguarded (HM Government, 2018).

 I shall now provide an account of six cases where it was identified that the accused have a sibling. These cases were chosen because of the availability of information on siblings.

### 2.8.2 Evidence from case reviews

**Khyra Ishaq**, Birmingham City Council.  Khyra lived with her mother, stepfather and five siblings. The case was characterised by parental mental health, parental childhood abuse, reconstituted family, home-schooling and inadequate multi-agency responses. The family were practising Muslims. Khyra died aged seven and leading up to her death, along with her siblings, experienced starvation and severe chastisement. The adults believed her to be possessed by an evil spirit (Radford, 2010). The impact of the accusation on the siblings included them also believing Khyra to be possessed. Evidence suggests that the siblings survived partly due to Khyra forgoing eating scraps of food and feeding it to them. The SCR noted that the siblings experienced significant trauma and one suffered from a re-feeding syndrome, which occurs when feeding resumes following starvation (Radford, 2010).

**Child B**, Hackney Local Authority. Child B arrived in the UK from Angola, following the death of her mother, to live with her aunt Sita Kisanga, 35, Sebastian Pinto, 33, the brother of Sita and another adult who remains unnamed. The accusation that Child B was a witch was made by another child in the household, and this was acted upon by the adults, who sought and received confirmation of this from a pastor. Child B was made to sleep in the bathroom, forced to fast, punched, slapped, kicked, and chilli pepper was rubbed into her eyes. She also suffered 43 injuries from being cut with a knife. It was established that the adults had originally intended killing her and when plans changed, she was abandoned on a London street, found by a street warden and initially placed under police protection. The other child in the household was made

the subject of an investigation between the police and children's social care under s47 of the Children Act 1989.

**Anita B**, Hounslow Local Authority. After her parents separated, Anita lived with her mother and an older brother. Two adult siblings lived away from home. This Christian family originated from West Africa. There was a history of domestic abuse and by age 13, Anita B experienced her first mental health episode; including auditory hallucinations and a belief she was possessed by 'evil demons'. Subsequent periods of improved mental health were followed by further deterioration, refusal to attend school due to bullying, going missing and attempting suicide. This child's complex life was further complicated by one of her brother's religious beliefs. This brother converted to Islam from Christianity. He mentioned to professionals his concern that his mother's Christian faith made Anita B think she was demon possessed. Anita B later converted to Islam also.  Following a period of going missing, it was discovered that this brother took Anita B to Egypt, where she later died at the age of 15 years. It is unclear what happened, but she likely died according to her brother's account, of accidental death from a fall. However, the police suspected that she may have been taken to Egypt to be exorcised from an 'evil spirit'. The brother was convicted of her abduction and received a prison sentence (Carmi, 2016).

**Kristy Bamu,** Newham Local Authority. Kristy who was 15 years old at the time, was born in France and was of Congolese heritage. He travelled to the UK from France with four siblings - two of them adults, and two children- to spend Christmas 2010 with his eldest sister, Magalie Bamu, her partner, Eric Bikubi, and their baby daughter. Initially, Kirsty and two of the visiting siblings were accused of being witches by Bikubi and a bedwetting incident led to him being accused. The siblings were then systematically abused and tortured by both Bikubi and Magalie. The abuse continued over several days with the victim forced to fast and pray, and his visiting siblings forced to participate in the abuse of Kristy. Kristy suffered 130 separate internal and external injuries; he succumbed to his injuries and died by drowning in the bath where 'cleansing rituals' were being performed (Pull, 2013). His siblings who journeyed with him to England acted as witnesses during the trial and it is not known what happened to Bikubi and Magalie's daughter.

**Ayesha Ali**, Barking and Dagenham Local Authority. Ayesha who was of a South Asian and Muslim background was eight years old at the time of her death. At the time of her murder, Ayesha lived with her mother Polly, her mother's partner, Kiki Muddar, and a younger sibling. Ayesha's parents had separated. Kiki Muddar used a series of fake personas on social media to befriend Polly and convince her that Ayesha was possessed. The mother and Kiki Muddar subjected Ayesha to systematic abuse in the form of beatings and emotional abuse. Both women were convicted of her killing. There is limited information about Ayesha's sibling to report on (BBC, 2015).

**Bilal,** local authority withheld by the SCR. Bilal a nine-year-old boy of Black British African heritage with significant developmental and communication needs who lived with his parents and siblings. His lived experience included a parental belief that he was possessed which led to him being taken out of the country to be exorcised. He was also subjected to Hijami, which is an Islamic practice involving placing a heated glass cup over skin that has been lightly cut with a razor. Bilal and his siblings were systematically abused by their parents, removed from school, imprisoned in the home and denied healthcare. Bilal's deteriorating health prompted an older sibling to contact Childline[2] (Powell, 2020).

## 2.8.3 Combined insights

Drawing together the combined findings from research and case reviews, there are several key themes that provide insight into the experiences of the accused and to a lesser extent the non-accused sibling. Upheavals causing macro-social, economic, social and cultural shocks reverberate across all settings and these create the context and circumstances that ignites the belief system leading to an accusation. Based on the evidence available, these children are mainly from a Black, Asian or other minority ethnic background and are either Muslim or Christian. Individual characteristics and poor family bonds increase the vulnerability of the child. The evidence suggests the abuse occurred for a prolonged period in most cases, but

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[2] a helpline for children to access if they need support

there is limited attention given to whether abuse was experienced before the accusation. There is a glaring lack of recognition of the experiences of the non-accused despite their not being excluded from the same levels of abuse and violence. Siblings as accusers, especially siblings of the same generation, add a new dimension to the profile of perpetrators. Predominantly, the perpetrators have been those in parental or religious pastoral roles. This raises an important issue concerning how religious and cultural beliefs shared between siblings are subjectively interpreted and acted upon towards each other. The limited evidence available also raises alarm about the international dimension involving children taken overseas for exorcisms, as in the case of Anita B, Bilal and detailed in La Fontaine (2009). This emphasises another concern which I have written about elsewhere (Bartholomew, 2015) concerning the need to take a transnational approach to working with families because they come from transnational communities and within this to consider the impact of inequalities and marginalisation on the lives of minority groups. Further areas of concern and knowledge gaps relate to the long-term outcomes for both groups of children, particularly the non-accused children that remain in the care of accusers and how sibling relationships unfold. There is also a knowledge gap concerning how the accused and non-accused interpret each other's experiences and what support they require following the accusation as well as the role of faith leaders and organisations in perpetrating violence.

## 2.9 Professional knowledge and experience of dealing with abuse linked to accusations of witchcraft and spirit possession

The increasing levels of ethnic and religious diversity across the UK reinforce the need for professionals to be culturally and religiously literate (Bernard and Harris, 2019). Research shows a sizeable number of social workers have grown up with religious and spiritual beliefs and these are held onto during their lifetime (Gilligan, 2009; Furness and Gillian, 2006). Research also demonstrates that UK social workers are respectful of and positive towards incorporating religious and spiritual beliefs within assessments (Furman et. al., 2004). However, this exists

against a backdrop of health and social care professionals being unprepared to effectively work with families from different religions (Dinham, 2018).

With children from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds identifying 'religion' as being fundamental to self-identity (O'Beirne, 2004), it is worrying that professionals struggle to effectively incorporate religion and culture in their work. A focus on ethnicity is particularly important, as across several indicators there are stark disparities in outcomes for children of a minority background compared to their white counterparts. Children from Black and some Mixed ethnic groups are overrepresented in the care system (Bernard and Harris, 2016). There is burgeoning evidence pointing to the challenges of overcoming oppressive and racist practices and developing cultural competence (Brandon et al., 2020; Bernard & Harris, 2018). Extending the debate, Singh and Tedam (2019) provide much insight into social work's journey with race and anti-racism. This has involved adopting 'colour-blind' and Eurocentric approaches. This approach coupled with an ethnocentric curricular, integrationist approach has worked contrary to the ideals of social work values of social justice and equality. Consequently, this has produced social workers entering and working in the profession with a lack of readiness to engage with diverse service users (Tedam & Cane, 2022).

There seems to be clear policy rhetoric to acknowledge the importance of adopting a "person-centred" approach to working with children by including religion, spirituality and culture within assessments (HM Government, 2018). However, there also appears a mismatch between the rhetoric and how this is operationalised in practice and supported by organisations. This is perhaps reflected in the growing number of SCRs evidencing professional failure to explore the cultural and religious context within assessments leading to serious consequences for children (Brandon et al., 2020)

The disparity between rhetoric and practice may in part be due to the lack of qualifying and post-qualifying training for social workers to assist with developing their skills and knowledge base (Furness and Gilligan, 2014; Furman et. al., 2004). Gilligan's (2003) research on student social workers found that the topic of religion and/or spirituality was too difficult to broach in practice for personal reasons bordering on their inadequacies; such as feeling embarrassed, to

approach service users on account of subjects deemed too personal to discuss. A further study of social work students by Furness and Gilligan (2014) found that organisations provided limited opportunities for staff development around religion, belief and non-belief.

However, some scholars argue there is a wider agenda responsible for the social work profession's struggle. Hodge (2002) argues that social work has a history of oppressing certain religious groups and produces workers who are consciously or unconsciously hostile towards these groups. This is despite the profession's early history being rooted in Christian theology. Whiting's (2008) research on church-based English social work posits that social work has adopted a secular stance resulting in an 'unspoken consensus' towards practical atheism. This has stifled debate on religion and faith, which gives rise to cultural incompetence and religious illiteracy. Dinham (2018) also raises the issue of secularism, arguing that it has immobilised professional practice concerning religion and belief. Gilligan (2009) warns that professional failure to develop religious literacy and cultural competence may result in 'religion-blind' and 'belief-blind' practices. This indictment of social work practice is difficult to refute in the light of repeated messages from SCRs, showing professional failure to maintain respectful cultural curiosity and a limited understanding of the religious and cultural identities of children assessed. It is also an indictment of the professionals' inability to overcome their own bias when working with families from ethnoreligious backgrounds different from their own (Tedam, 2016).

What has been discussed in this section provides a baseline that helps to contextualise the challenges professionals experience when working with faith and culture (further discussed in 7.10). Cases of WSP accusations against children – who are largely from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds are generally complex, multi-layered and include other safeguarding concerns such as child trafficking (Garcia, 2013). Professionals working on such cases must possess a sophisticated level of religious and cultural literacy. Beyond this, there is a more specific question of what professionals know or understand about WSP. Oakley et al. (2017) who conducted the only recognised research focused on professional knowledge of WSP, surveyed 1,361 multi-disciplinary frontline professionals including community organisations and faith communities across England to examine their knowledge of CALFB. With

CALFB being an umbrella term, which extends beyond WSP accusations against children, this research cannot be relied upon entirely to provide evidence of professional knowledge of the topic of this study. However, it does provide some insight. The authors found that although 61% of respondents felt confident that they understood the term CALFB, only 33% were confident they could identify indicators of it. Only 52% felt able to confidently respond to such cases, and 25% indicated they had received specific training on CALFB. This research, which I believe needs to be replicated with a larger sample size and using a methodology that examines professional knowledge over a longer period found that more must be done to improve professional knowledge and multi-agency working.

One issue not addressed in the literature concerns professionals' personal beliefs and the impact of these on their practice concerning others' beliefs and actions linked to WSP. Having worked with social workers who themselves believe that children can be witches or spirit possessed, my extensive professional experience in this field confirms to me how the effects of their own beliefs on their practice also need exploration (see 6.4).

## 2.10 Human Rights framework

WSP accusations are a global issue affecting children, women, older people and persons with albinism and have been on the United Nations Human Rights Commission (UNHRC) agenda for over a decade. In 2009, the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Philip Alston is noted as saying, "In too many settings, being classified as a witch is tantamount to receiving a death sentence" (Alston, 2009). As such, the UNHRC recognises WSP accusations as a human rights violation that has affected more than 20,000 women, children, older people and persons with albinism in the past decade (UNHRC,2019).

The UNHRC's approach to tackling the issue focuses on 'harmful practices associated with the manifestation of belief in witchcraft' or spirit possession (UNGA, 2021), not with the belief itself. This focus strategically avoids being engulfed in a debate about defining the belief system. Additionally, focusing on harm and not belief recognises the rights to religion and conscience guaranteed under Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political

Rights General Comment on freedom of religion and belief (UN, 1966). However, Briggs and Whittaker (2018) are critical of an approach that allows for tolerating beliefs because it runs the risk of ignoring the connections between the belief and abuse.

The work of the UNHRC through its Independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism, in 2017 embodied the first noticeable attempt to move the United Nations (UN) member states to adopt a resolution aimed at protecting the human rights of victims/survivors of witchcraft accusations (UNHRC, 2019). This resolution which was adopted by the UN in 2021 is an important step toward galvanising support from member States to develop solutions to tackle the human rights violations experienced by those accused (UNGA, 2021).  Whilst this is to be commended, it is naïve to believe that a human rights framework can instigate universal change. As Ashforth (2015) argues, a human rights approach disregards people's genuine fear about WSP. A further concern is that the human rights approach relies on the premise that there is a universal acceptance that we equally see each other as human and should be afforded the same rights. On the other hand, WSP beliefs downgrade those believed to be witches or possessed as subhuman or no longer human. This means there are many communities that see human rights as irrelevant for the accused.

The main UN convention which makes wide provisions for the prevention and protection of children from harm caused through WSP accusations is discussed below.

## 2.10.1 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

The UNCRC was ratified by the UK government in 1991 and came into effect the following year. The Convention contains 54 articles with 40 of these focusing on substantive rights that children possess. These cover civil, political, economic, cultural and social issues. The UNCRC provides a child-centred framework through which professional practice and intervention services should be guided. The Committee on the Rights of the Child considered the harmful elements related to practices associated with WSP accusations. They did not specifically outline

harmful actions but provided the following framework to determine that practice is harmful (UNHCR, 2019) (see Appendix XIV).

Three Convention articles are particularly pertinent to WSP accusations against children accused and their non-accused siblings. Accusations against children are a form of child abuse and the accused and their non-accused siblings experience emotional abuse, physical torture and exploitation (Stobart, 2006). Under Article 19 children have a right to be protected from abuse and neglect.  Article 37 provides that children shall not be subjected to torture, cruelty or inhumane or degrading treatment. Article 9 gives States the authority to remove children from their parents, but only where it is in their best interest. Therefore, in cases where children are accused and their siblings are harmed, they can be removed from carers to a place of safety (see Appendix XV for details of these article). The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child is the body that assumes responsibility for the implementation and monitoring of the Convention. The Committee's role involves using this rights framework to support signatories to improve the conditions for children. The Committee's last report (2016) on the United Kingdom did not refer to WSP accusations but identified the disproportionate impact of poverty on minority ethnic groups as a concern, along with the levels of bullying and racism. The Committee made several recommendations urging the UK government to work towards improving outcomes for these and other children (Committee, 2016).

## 2.11 UK Law, Policy and National Guidance

Victoria Climbié's case remains the most high-profile case in the UK of a child murdered due to WSP beliefs (Bahunga, 2013). The report of the Inquiry into Victoria's death sparked national outrage due to the extent of the abuse suffered by Victoria and the failure of statutory services to protect her (Laming, 2003). Although WSP beliefs were central to the cause of Victoria's death, the Inquiry's focus on it was tangential, and none of its recommendations specifically addressed the issue of harmful practices associated with these beliefs. The role of three churches featured prominently in the Inquiry, as they were all implicated in 'diagnosing'

Victoria as being possessed by an evil spirit and took 'remedial' measures to rid the evil spirit from her. However, none of the recommendations focused on regulating religious organisations from undertaking such activities. The Inquiry led to legislative changes aimed at strengthening the child protection system, for example, through the Children Act 2004 and policy changes through the *Every Child Matters* (ECM) framework, which set out specific desired outcomes for children (HMG, 2004). However, legislative and policy changes failed to tackle the issue of accusations of WSP against children. For example, ECM focused on assisting children in achieving their full potential by focusing on ensuring that they: Be healthy, Stay safe, Enjoy and Achieve, Make a positive contribution, and Achieve economic wellbeing (HMG, 2004). Since then, CALFB has struggled to be a priority for policy makers. One striking omission from ECM policy is a separate outcome focusing on the religious/spiritual needs of children (Furness & Gilligan, 2010). The failure to consider this as a specific outcome reflects a failure to recognise the 'whole child' – including religion/spirituality and belief.

## 2.11.1 Developments in law

The death of Kristy Bamu led some voluntary sector organisations such as Africans Unite Against Child Abuse, to call on the government to provide an extra layer of legislative protection by criminalising branding a child as a witch or being possessed (AFRUCA, 2010). This call for action came 477 years after the practice of witchcraft became an ecclesiastical offence, but 280 years after witchcraft ceased to be a criminal offence (Greenfield et. al., 2012, UK Parliament, 21 November 1963). The call for action was contrary to the position of the Victoria Climbie Foundation, which was set up following the death of Victoria Climbie to improve multi-agency child protection response, which believed that existing legislation protected children and punished offenders. The matter was debated in Parliament in 2013, as part of wider amendments to Section 1 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933. Steps towards criminalisation were unsuccessful because Parliament considered existing child protection and criminal legislation already afforded children protection. Parliament's decision not to legislate mirrors advice from academics, who critique the efficacy of regulation (Forsyth, 2016;

Greenfield et. al., 2012). Conversely, evidence from Tanzania points to a decrease in accusations following regulation in 2015 (United States Department of State, 2021). Nevertheless, in many countries where witchcraft laws exist, enforcement does not actually occur (Cimpric, 2010) because the authorities are concerned that prosecuting alleged perpetrators gives the impression that they are on the side of witches (Greenfield et al., 2012).

### 2.11.2 Developments in policy and guidance

Whilst legislative changes failed to materialise, the trajectory for strengthening guidance and policy initiatives moved in the opposite direction. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) introduced non-statutory guidance titled '*Safeguarding Children from Abuse Linked to a Belief in Spirit Possession*' for professionals working on cases of child abuse linked to an accusation of spirit possession against children (HMG, 2007). Its content was largely based on the findings of research undertaken by Stobart (2006). It is widely acknowledged to have been the first attempt to provide professionals with an overview of the belief systems, how to identify risk, undertake assessments and support children at risk. It also advised LSCBs, which were introduced by the Children Act 2004 and placed a duty on specific organisations to work together to safeguard children and to take preventative steps to protect children by building links with faith communities. However, the non-statutory footing of the guidance meant professionals were not mandated to refer to it to inform their practice. Its subsequent withdrawal from circulation a few years later with no explanation given reflected the level of importance placed on it at the time by the DfES and other government agencies. Although it has since been withdrawn from circulation, the historical antecedent to later child protection guidance was produced at a regional level by LSCBS (LSCP, 2022).  It also advised LSCBs to take preventative steps to protect children by building links with faith communities.

The main policy document focused on multi-agency working for England and Wales is named 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' (HMG, 2018). Since 2010, this document has been revised three times and each edition focused to a larger or lesser extent on the issue of abuse

in faith settings and the need for a stronger focus on safeguarding children. For example, the 2010 edition contained detailed information on the responsibility of faith settings to safeguard children, but the 2015 edition reduced this to one paragraph of five lines. The cutback in the 2015 edition reflected a deregulatory approach to safeguarding children by the then government administration. The current 2018 edition contains detailed guidance again, perhaps due to rising national concerns about the abuse of children in faith settings.

In the wake of several deaths and significant harm to children following Victoria Climbié's death, a national working group (NWG) on Child Abuse Linked to Faith or Belief under the secretariat of the DfES was established in 2011. Comprising of charities, some statutory services and mainly Christian leaders, the NWG worked with the government to develop a national action plan aimed at tackling the issue through a four-pronged approach directed at engaging communities, empowering practitioners, supporting victims and witnesses and communicating key messages (DfE, 2012). Unlike other contemporaneous national action plans or strategies, like the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy (Home Office, 2021), this one was published without government funding to implement its 16 recommendations and statutory services were not made aware of their responsibilities to implement its recommendations. Awareness of the existence of the national action plan among professionals remains limited (Oakley et al., 2017). Furthermore, the NWG work appears too focused on African and Christian communities and did not include women, who are also accused. A decade on, it has not been reviewed mainly because it was not implemented in the first place as such, and no positive results have been recorded. The Parliament's Education Committee discussed witchcraft accusations against children in 2012, and they featured in the Committee's final report titled 'Children first: the child protection system in England' (House of Commons, 2013), but beyond this, the political will to implement any further national policy initiative seems to have dissipated. The literature does not account for this, but the downward trajectory of impetus may be related to an increasing trend towards practitioners and policy makers adopting ideas of mindfulness and wellbeing, which has curtailed a focus on religion and belief (Dinham, 2018).

However, the recent growing national concern about the abuse of children in faith settings has refocused and re-energised attention on WSP, albeit the focus is on sexual abuse. This has

come in the form of a statutory Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA), which was established in 2015 under the Inquiries Act 2005. The Inquiry included WSP within its scope, as through the exorcism process some children have been sexually abused (IICSA, 2021). Further recent developments that have reignited focus include a crossbench All-Parliamentary Party Group (APPG) on Safeguarding in Faith Settings which was launched to focus on safeguarding concerns relevant to any community of faith, belief or religion. The APPG's remit includes a focus on WSP accusations against children, but this is limited to faith settings and does not include other contexts. In my capacity as the then Head of the National Female Genital Mutilation Centre in 2019, I gave evidence to the APPG and implored them to consider the plurality of 'faith settings' as accusations against children may occur during religious/faith events, on the street, disused buildings where religious services are held, over the internet or within the home. Following a hiatus due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the APPG was revamped in 2021 with the same mandate (Thirty-one: eight, 2021). It is hoped the APPG's work will raise awareness and improve policy and practice in the immediate future.

## 2.11.3 Child protection law

The Children Act 1989 remains the most significant source of law concerning children and is an important tool professionals use to protect children accused of WSP. One significant measure introduced by the Children Act concerns the 'paramountcy principle' which demands a child's welfare be paramount in disputes relating to their upbringing. Sections of the Children Act relevant to the discussion include Section 22(5) (c) which requires professionals when working with children to give due consideration to the child's 'religious persuasion, racial origin, and cultural and linguistic background'. This is further bolstered by social work assessment guidelines that emphasise the need to include the religious and cultural identity of children as part of an assessment (Department of Health, 2000). Similarly, health professionals are increasingly paying attention to patients' religion and beliefs, and there is a move towards giving religiously influenced approaches to health care equal importance as medical and social models (Crips, 2017). However, recent legislative changes brought in by the Children and

Families Act 2014 removed the duty for local authorities to consider ethnicity when a child is being considered for adoption. This single change means Black or other minority children accused of WSP and non-accused siblings can be placed with adopters outside their own ethnic community (Tedam, 2016). This makes it all the more imperative that adopters should understand WSP beliefs as this is critical to understanding the lived experience and needs of these children and ensures that their culture and beliefs are not 'othered'.

In cases where a child is at risk of or has suffered significant harm, Section 31 of the Children Act 1989 places a duty on local authorities to protect them by investigating concerns. It also places a duty on local authorities to assess the needs of children and consider every 'child in need', and render support so as to safeguard their health and development. Where there is a need to protect children immediately, local authorities can seek an Emergency Protection Order from the courts under Section 44 of the Children Act and Section 26 gives the police powers to remove children at risk of significant harm from their carer for up to 72 hours.

I previously discussed the measure brought in by the Children Act 2004 that established LSCBs (Local Safeguarding Children Boards), which has since been superseded by Local Safeguarding Children Partnerships. The Children and Social Act 2017 has mandated that in England and Wales, local authorities, the police and health authorities are responsible for working together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in their area. Therefore, this body plays a significant role in ensuring that multi-agency safeguarding arrangements are in place to protect children, that training is available for professionals and that communities are aware of its role to protect children and   to hold organisations to account.  In addition, this body also conducts safeguarding practice reviews. Some LSCPs offer training to professionals, but this is an exception to the norm (Oakley et al., 2017).

## 2.12 Conclusion

British society is on the path of become more diverse and while this is to be celebrated, it

presents new challenges concerning the protection of children from religious and cultural beliefs that might be harmful. Whilst beliefs in WSP are not in itself harmful and not new, children being accused is a recent phenomenon. It is highly unlikely that these beliefs will wane because misfortune abounds, and it is likely that WSP will continue to be used as an explanatory framework to make sense of why bad things happen. Furthermore, modernity has failed to result in a reduction in the belief but has instead seen it morphed to accommodate changes in locale, context and time.

The literature on WSP accusations against children is still relatively sparse, especially research focused on the UK. From the literature that is available, there are definite concerns for the welfare of the accused child and non-accused sibling. With WSP accusations being an intimate affair, with the family being focal to experiences and outcomes of the children involved, there is a need to understand its impact on all the children in the household. Additionally, accusations and further harm to children all occur against the backdrop of pressures on professional services, challenges concerning inequalities faced by Black and minority ethnic children. Limitations and challenges are abound and there is significant reliance on professional competence that needs to take into account religious as well as cultural beliefs and practices. This study extends the focus beyond the limited scope of solely the accused child and takes on a more holistic approach.

The literature review highlighted a number of barriers and challenges to conducting research on this topic. Therefore, researching WSP requires a robust methodology and research design. In the next chapter, I discuss the methodology and provide a detailed account of the research design used to answer the research questions.

# Chapter 3

# Methodology

## 3.1 Introduction

Methodology refers to the approach and process as to 'how' research is undertaken (Creswell, 2013). Dunne et al., (2005) outline six elements to methodology. They are ontology, epistemology, ethical issues, micro-political and macro-political as well as practical issues. Developing a methodological approach is shaped by research questions (Bryman, 2015). Mills and Birks, (2017) posits that methodology helps researchers conceptualise the research, influences how decisions are made, how the researcher positions themselves to encounter participants and how data are collected and analysed.

The methodological approach underpinning this research is Bhaskar's (1979) critical realism which recognises that the social world is observable and real. I start the Chapter by outlining the ontological and epistemological orientation and how the methodology guided by these, are drawn from critical realism. Whilst conducting this research, I encountered several challenges. This meant that the methodology was a shifting and evolving process. Therefore, I explore the challenges faced due to micro-political obstacles and how these resulted in refocusing my research. This is followed by an outline of the revised research focus, including new research questions and design. In the next section, I detail the approach taken towards data collection and proceed into the next section where I discuss the approach to data analysis. In the penultimate section, I discuss and reflect on my position as a researcher. The Chapter ends with a focus on ethical considerations.

## 3.2 Research Methodology

The philosophy of critical realism started with the work of Roy Bhaskar (1975) and has since been described as an international movement in philosophy and the human sciences (Archer et al., 1998). An important starting point to understanding critical realism is to consider the notion of 'epistemic fallacy'. For a critical realist, ontology must not be reduced to epistemology, or in other words the 'nature of reality' (ontology) should not be reduced to our 'knowledge of reality' (epistemology) (Bhaskar, 1998;27). This is because human capacity is limited, or as Fletcher (2017:3) aptly puts it, 'Human knowledge captures only a small part of a deeper vaster reality.' To reduce reality to what we can know is what Bhaskar calls an 'epistemic fallacy', and he has criticised both positivism and constructivism for doing just this - reducing ontology to epistemology (Bhaskar, 1998:27). Positivism does this by holding that reality can be identified through the conduct of scientific research, whilst constructivism views reality as constructed through human discourse and knowledge, 'reducing the realm of the real to how reality is interpreted' (Tikly, 2015:6). Critical realism therefore seeks to resolve this problem by placing ontology above epistemology and by rejecting the reduction of reality to ideas (Jessop, 2005). By doing so, critical realism offers a scientific alternative (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) and middle ground between positivism and constructivism.

Bhaskar argues that individuals shape their world but are simultaneously constrained by structures in society. Social structures, for example linguistic and legal systems, are pre-existing and are enduring aspects of the social world (Tilky, 2015). According to Danermark et al., (2019), structures cause experiences to occur because of causal mechanisms that operate 'underneath' observable phenomena. Houston and Montgomery (2017) indicate that to understand the importance of social structure in critical realism requires an understanding of how Bhaskar views the social world.  A core tenet of critical realist ontology is a stratified objective reality rather than law-like explanations to make sense of social phenomena. For Bhaskar, reality is layered and exists on three levels or domains, that consist of the empirical, the actual and the real.  The empirical, concerns what can be observed, the sensed experience or experienced events. The empirical is the transitive level of reality, the things we know, ideas and where actions occur (Fletcher, 2017). The actual domain consists of all events irrespective of our experience of them. The real, consists of causal mechanisms which when triggered

generate or cause events to occur (Bhaskar, 2008). An illustration of a critical realism in the form of an iceberg is provided by Fletcher (2017) in Figure 2.

**Figure 2. Critical realism ontology, (Fletcher, 2017:183)**
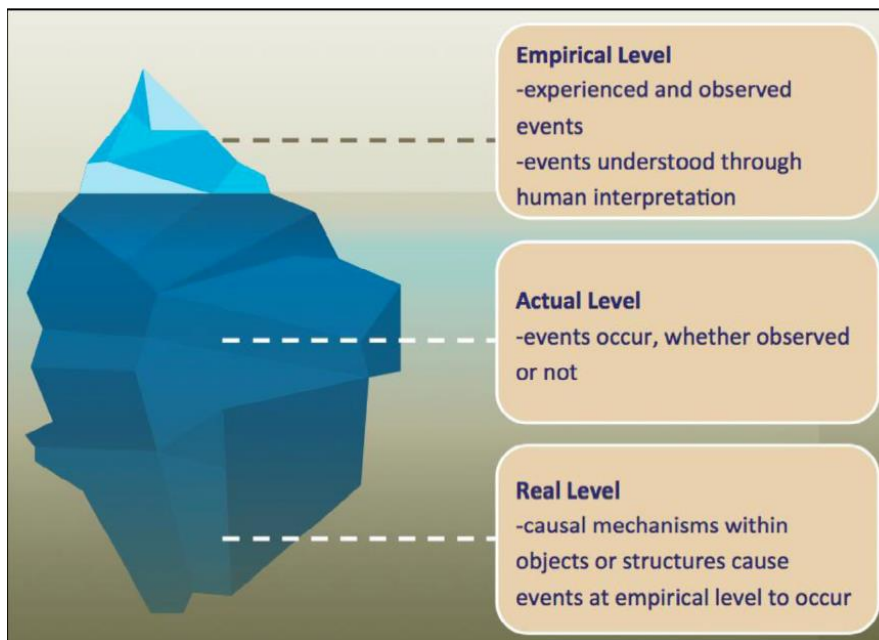


Causal mechanisms have a direct impact on what happens at the two other levels. Critical realists contend that this real world is directly knowable and that both the actual and empirical can be discovered through the filter of our experience and perception, but that we can use various strategies to enable our knowledge to be as close as possible to both. By taking this layered approach, critical realism allows research to delve towards the deeper strata of the real, primarily the underlying mechanisms responsible for the phenomenon. For example, whilst attachment is not something tangible, it is considered real and has an impact on the empirical and actual domains (Houston, 2001). Therefore, this ontological position demands that social science focuses on explaining phenomena that are observable vis-à-vis underlying mechanisms (Blaikie, 2007).

A critical realist ontology provides me with a good framework to explore the phenomenon I am researching. The outcome of an action such as an accusation of WSP is due to causal mechanisms, which operate in a context. It demands that accusations of WSP should not be understood only at the empirical level of experience but must instead be explored at the three-layered reality. I do this by taking a deeper look at the phenomena and recognise that something real is happening, which is not just a construction of different social realities. By focusing on analysing and explaining psychological behaviour and mechanisms that generate WSP accusations along with the contexts in which they occur, I enabled a better theoretical understanding of this issue. The emancipatory element of critical realism posits that the identification of the effects of causal mechanisms can have transformative power (Fletcher, 2017).

Critical realism has been criticised as being a broadchurch when it comes to its interpretation (Alvesson and SKoldberg, 2009), as some have aligned themselves to a 'moderate' constructivism methodology (Elder-Vass, 2012). Whilst I acknowledge the credibility of the different positions, I see critical realism with its strong ontological perspective that reality exists independent of our awareness of it, as being the most appropriate approach that allows for an understanding of the social world through engaging with structures that activate causal mechanisms that generate events that are experienced by people within them (Bhaskar, 1998). Oliver (2012) argues that methodological development in the application of critical realism in research has been lacking. Even Bhaskar (2013) has made a clarion call for further development of its application. Whilst critical realism does not designate itself as a set of methods (Fletcher, 2017), it supports the blending of different research methods (Maxwell & Mittapalli, 2010). Mingers (2001) further advances the argument by stating that as different types of objects of knowledge exist with different ontological and epistemological status, this allows for different research methods to be used to obtain multiple insights on different phenomenon. In this study, I employed a mixed method approach, and this allowed me to take a practical and plausible approach towards answering the research questions.

Using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory as a theoretical framework provided a lens to interpret experiences and events occurring in different settings and levels in the ecological

system. Using critical realism allowed me to move the analysis beyond individual experiences (empirical level) and events (actual level) taking place across the ecological system to the real level to reveal causal explanations/mechanisms that generate 'experiences' and 'events'. Therefore, I found that using a critical realist approach with its ontological acceptance of a hierarchical reality and Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory allowed for a unique approach to interrogating and analysing the data.

## 3.3 Original research design

In addition to understanding the scale and nature of WSP accusations against children, my aim was to explore and better understand the experiences of the non-accused, alongside the experience of the accused. I also examined the professional responses to both parties. My original aspiration was primarily to extend and deepen understanding of the experiences of non-accused siblings from their own perspectives. This is an area that is little explored in the research literature. The non-accused are also marginalised in practice. The intention was to contrast these experiences and perspectives with those of the accused. This was hoped to develop knowledge and understanding to better enable practitioners and ensure that all children affected by these circumstances are protected.

WHRIN and its partner agencies agreed to assist with identifying research participants. They did so by providing access to their adult clients who had been accused in their childhood of WSP. Through the accused, access to their non-accused siblings was also enabled. Since organisations working in this area mainly support the accused, this approach was undertaken to maximise the chances of recruiting siblings in pairs. To achieve this, together with WHRIN, we employed sound ethical standards, which involved WHRIN selecting and approaching clients suitable for the interview, with their name and contact details provided to me only after permission was obtained.

Ethical approval from the University of Sussex was obtained in November 2015. However, despite efforts by WHRIN and myself, I failed to recruit a sufficient number of participants.

WHRIN were unable to contact some accused clients, and others approached either did not want to revisit the issue, and/or they had a fractious relationship, or no relationship, with their sibling, so were unable to approach them. Additionally, WHRIN's partners were unable to identify sufficient prospective participants. These difficulties necessitated a rethink of both the focus and the sample group, the recruitment process and research methods, albeit with the continuing support of WHRIN. As nine months had passed with minimal recruitment, a revised plan was needed that took account of my own schedule. I was mindful of Robson's (2012) argument that 'real world' research must allow for the time and resources available to the researcher. Changing research questions and their design highlights the challenges of doing research in the real-world and the need to take an iterative approach (Creswell, 2013; Dunne et. al, 2005).

## 3.4 Revised research focus, questions and design

For the revised approach, I maintained focus on the experiences of the accused and non-accused. However, I included a wider range of family members, professionals, community and faith leaders who had knowledge and whose lives were in some way touched by WSP accusations against children. Inclusion of these participants allowed the study to provide multiple alternative perspectives on the meaning of WSP accusations against children, in addition to experiences and outcomes for the accused and non-accused siblings, as well as their responses to these.

As outlined in 1.4, I developed the following new research questions:

**Main research question:**

What are the experiences and outcomes of witchcraft and spirit possession for accused and non-accused children, and how effective are professional responses?

**Subsidiary-questions**

1. What are the contexts in which these accusations arise?
2. How are accusations of spirit possession and witchcraft understood?

3. What happens when an accusation occurs and how is it experienced?
4. What are the medium and long-term impacts of an accusation?
5. How are children oriented towards responding to professionals?
6. How effectively do professionals respond to the non-accused sibling and the accused?

For the revised research plan, I continued doing qualitative and quantitative research. O'Leary (2014) suggests that mixed methods research can adopt one of the following three positions. These are a question-driven perspective; a quantitative perspective with acceptance of qualitative data; or qualitative perspective with the acceptance of quantitative data. In this study, I used a qualitative study with acceptance of quantitative data. Critical realism permits the use of plausible approaches to answering research questions. As this research aimed to obtain multiple perspectives along with statistical and secondary sources of data, this emphasised the need to use a mixed method approach.

There was a change in the data collection methods and qualitative data analysis method used. Accessing the police database and obtaining survey data remained a core part of the data collection method. A new element of the study involved accessing case records from a charity working with the accused and non-accused. However, I suffered a further setback when previously agreed access was subsequently denied (see 3.10 for an explanation of the reason). This was unfortunate because I was allowed to view the files before extracting the data, and it contained useful demographic data on the accused, non-accused siblings and family members, including information on their experiences and outcomes following an intervention. Despite this setback, the insights generated from the interviews solicited insights into participants' experiences from multiple perspectives. The quantitative method used also proved a valuable approach, as it provided data on the phenomena and how it is experienced and by whom. This enabled focus to be placed across the three domains.

### 3.4.1 Sampling

The revised research design did not set out to interview a specific number of participants. Instead, I aimed to have a mix of participants. They were the accused, non-accused, family members, community and faith leaders/healers. I aimed to obtain a good representation of perspectives from as many participants as the recruitment process allowed when there was enough data available.  Garnering a wide range of participants was important because I needed to garner as many participants as possible to obtain multiple perspectives.

The recruitment of participants was done purposively and through snowball sampling from community and faith groups, collaborative research partners and from my professional network. Purposive sampling involves the researcher seeking out individual participants, groups or organisations because of their explicit links to the research topic (Silverman, 2013). Using purposive sampling involves making strategic decisions concerning where and how to undertake one's research (Lewis-Beck et al., 2003). Snowball sampling is a type of purposive sampling which involves the researcher using a small group of participants relevant to the topic being researched and using these connections to identify and recruit others (Bryman, 2015). Using this approach involved requesting the support of participants and potential ones to recruit others. This sampling approach comes with risks as it can result in a biased group of participants because they are likely to identify participants like them and not from others who are not connected to them (Silverman, 2013). To overcome this at the initial stage, I tried to recruit a diverse sample based on professional background, gender, faith and ethnicity (see 5.3).

**Survey sampling**

Under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, requests to public organisations must be responded to within 20 working days of receiving them, however, if the cost of extracting the information exceeds £450 these organisations may refuse the request (UK Government, 2019). With surveys being dependent on the willingness of participants to participate, the legal duty placed on public organisations meant that there was a high response rate to my FoI request. In

the case of the police surveys, 90% were returned within the 20 working days timeframe and 87% for children's services. The case data on the police database was obtained for the years 2014-15, 2015-2016 and 2016-2017.

In addition to the FoI, I negotiated access to a police force in the south of England database used to record contact with members of the public. I initially sought agreement in principle from senior officers at various levels within the organisation and then embarked upon applying to obtain ethical approval from its department responsible for granting access to researchers. Ethical approval was subsequently received.

### 3.4.2 Recruitment via WHRIN and its partners

I used a multi-pronged approach to recruit research participants given the range of individuals representing the diverse groups to be recruited. There were no requirements for those accused, non-accused siblings or family members to be kin because they could provide information about the accused or non-accused without being related. Additionally, the other participants recruited were not required to have any involvement with the non-accused sibling, accused or family members included in the sample.

I continued to work with WHRIN and its partners to identify suitable potential participants (according to the agreed criteria). Witchcraft and Human Rights Information Network (WHRIN) and its partners also placed announcements about the research on their websites and social media accounts.  Through these activities, I succeeded in recruiting 6 participants. Gatekeepers agreed that they would only approach participants believed to be in sufficiently good emotional health, and this was essential given that participants may have experienced abuse and could still be affected by the trauma caused (see 3.11).

For participants identified by WHRIN and its partners, the organisations made the initial contact on my behalf with potential participants meeting the inclusion criteria. This ensured that their clients' rights to privacy were preserved until informed consent for me to contact them was gained. One problem that could not be resolved concerned these organisations only contacting

those likely to give a positive account of their work, and this had the potential to skew the findings. However, based on the interviews conducted, I believe that these participants provided candid accounts of their experiences.

I provided all gatekeepers with an information sheet (see Appendix III, VII, VIII and IX) to give participants and those I recruited through contacts and connections were also given one. I contacted a French-speaking Christian Church and presented the research to the congregation to facilitate their recruitment. It was also translated to French with the assistance of a translator as one participant requested this (see Appendix XIII). Gatekeepers agreed to confirm expressions of interest and permission to pass potential participants' contact details on to me. Once received, I then contacted them directly, by telephone/mobile giving a personal introduction and a full recapitulation of the information sheet to help with creating some level of trust with participants. Following this discussion, I gave prospective participants an opportunity to reflect on whether they wanted to participate and agreed that I would contact them after a couple of days to seek confirmation if they consented to participate (see 3.11).

### 3.4.3 Recruitment via my own connections

I used my previous and current experience and connections through working on this issue to gain access and invite potential participants to take part in the research (see 3.10).  I took every opportunity to discuss the research when delivering presentations at conferences or when delivering training and also when offering case advice. At a community level, I visited five churches and two mosques, some being new contacts and others previously contacted and used my professional network to negotiate contact with three other places of worship. I also attended six religious conferences/training, where WSP was being discussed. To develop trust, I visited some of these churches and mosques more than once and took part in services/prayers. This method achieved limited success with recruiting participants, but I gained invaluable experience by meeting religious experts and leaders.

Whilst the accused are already considered to be a seldom heard group, their non-accused siblings are a harder group to identify. Therefore, where I could gain access to the accused, non-accused and family members, I asked them to introduce the research to their relatives. This approach was not ideal, as it relied on there being a continuing relationship between and with them, but it did result in the accused and non-accused being recruited to take part in my research.

I made direct contact with participants identified through my professional contacts via telephone and discussed the research. I followed up if they expressed interest, with an email that included an attached information sheet. Prospective participants were then invited to take time to consider whether they wished to take part in the research. I then followed up with either a phone call or email seeking confirmation if they consented to participating. In any event, all agreed to participate when first approached so I organised interviews. For all participants, I obtained a signed consent form (See Appendix I and II). I was required to seek approval of the ethics board from one Local Authority to interview their staff.

In all cases, whether contacted via WHRIN and partners, or directly when I contacted prospective participants, I made a further judgement on their suitability to participate in the research. I based suitability on my professional experience and training on mental health and wellbeing. In interviews when participants became upset, I encouraged timeout and paid attention to their emotional cues to ensure I provided support throughout the interview.

### 3.4.4 Survey recruitment

The survey element of the research involved contacting all 39 police forces and all 152 social services departments in England. The survey was conducted through a Freedom of Information (FoI) request under the Data Protection Act 1998, and Freedom of Information Act 2000. Individuals designated responsible for collating their organisation's responses to FoIs were those directly participating in the survey.

### 3.4.5 Recruitment challenges

Despite the change in research design, problems recruiting participants and securing interviews continued. Potential participants changed their minds after initially agreeing to participate. Considerable effort was dedicated to recruiting accused, non-accused and parents who initially agreed to participate. The process involved making several phone calls, email exchanges, and face-to-face meetings before receiving consent. These participants lived across the UK, which involved making several long journeys.

A number of police officers and faith leaders whom I contacted had direct and valuable experience of having had prior contact with people who would have been ideal participants who could have helped my research. Regrettably, a large number of them backed out citing a range of reasons. One faith healer interviewed introduced me to a leader of a faith organisation who invited me to attend an event on jinn possession, and exorcism led by a visiting Iman from overseas. I was given one-to-one access to the Imam and allowed to observe him giving advice privately to adult attendees with their consent. Witnessing the advice given by the Imam provided first-hand insights into how jinn possession is addressed from an Islamic perspective.

With community leaders I attended their offices to undertake the interview only for it to be cancelled with no explanation provided. Two social workers changed their mind about being interviewed and one shared with me their concern that my interest in the topic could lead to a "bewitched" child turning me into a witch. Recruiting these participants would have increased the sample size by 17 participants and would have included a more representative and diverse group.

### 3.4.6 Interview Participants:

**Who are they?**

 The sample selection criteria determined that the non-accused sibling and the accused participants were men and women, aged 18 years and above. The experience of an accusation

for both groups had to occur during their childhood (under the age of 18 years). Family members inclusion was based on their direct experience of having an accused family member (under 18-year-old), who must also have had a non-accused sibling (under 18-year-old at the time of the accusation). For professionals, faith leaders/healers and community leaders, their selection was based on their experience of working with those accused and/or non-accused children. Therefore, they must have had previous experience of working on a case.

### 3.4.7 Sample achieved

My pursuits at recruiting participants resulted in a sample size of 22 participants. Table 1 gives the breakdown of the types and numbers of participants. I must acknowledge whilst the sample size in each category is small, the data presented are addressing all the different perspectives I was able to reach and is not representative but more so illustrative in each particular case.

**Table 1. Type and number of participants**

| Type of participant | Number interviewed |
|---|---|
| Accused (one accused was also a community worker) | 4 |
| Non-accused siblings | 2 |
| Parents | 2 |
| Community leader | 2 |
| Psychotherapist (children) | 1 |
| Social workers (Local Authority) | 2 |
| Social workers and pastor | 2 |
| Independent social worker | 1 |
| Pastor | 3 |
| Psychiatrist | 1 |
| Imam | 1 |
| Healer | 1 |
| Total | 22 |

## 3.8 Data collection methods

### 3.8.1 Survey

I designed the FoI questionnaire surveys (see Appendix XI and XII) for police forces and children's services departments to explore what could be discovered about known cases in England of children accused of WSP and non-accused siblings. The questions were designed to achieve the overarching goal of linking them to the research questions (Robson, 2012). The survey results provided answers to the first, second, third and sixth sub-questions. Having worked in children's services departments and in partnership with the police for several years, I am familiar with both the terminology that these organisations use, and what information they routinely capture and record. I therefore drew on this knowledge to develop the survey questions in a way that maximised chances of being answered and answered accurately. Most were closed questions and were developed to extract nominal data categories relating to the demographics of accused and non-accused. Respondents also proffered information on the type of harm experienced and what happened to these children in terms of their care status.

For the police database accessed after four months, I obtained access which was contingent on working alongside a police officer who extracted the data. More specifically, I sat next to the police officer whilst they searched for relevant cases. When a particular case was found, the case recording was read to me and once it fitted the criteria, I recorded the data using the data extraction form designed for this study (See Appendix X). This assisted me to organise the data in a manageable and coherent manner.

## 3.8.2 Interviews

Interviews were divided into two groups: 1. those with accused and non-accused, and 2. those with family members, professionals, community and faith/healers leaders and community leaders. For each group, a different interview method was used.

*Interviews with accused and non-accused:*

This study focuses on a sensitive topic, with sensitive, stigmatised and vulnerable participants who are considered hard-to-reach and seldom heard. This presented challenges when interviewing them. The literature is replete with advice on how to overcome such challenges. Liebling and Shah (2001) note that sensitive research themes require an approach that emphasises building a trusting relationship and attending to the power balance between participant and researcher. It also requires adopting an inclusive and collaborative, as well as an empathic approach (Cook, 2012) when working with stigmatised groups. These positions guided how I approached the pre-interview and interview stages.  Based on this insight and experience of working on past cases, I wanted to interview the accused and non-accused using a method which recognised their agency. One that was empowering, that reduced the inherent power dynamics present in interviews and that allowed for a relationship to be built.  Ideas of experts by experience, which acknowledge the power of participants with extensive experience of the social problem being researched (Preston-Shoot, 2007) influenced the interview method chosen. I was drawn to Wengraf's (2011) Biographical Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM), which allows for a historical 'whole view' account from participants about their experience of the phenomena, along with their evaluations of the impact of an accusation and how professionals and others did or did not intervene. In BNIM interviews, the process involves three sub-sessions. The first interview involves the researcher asking the participant an open-ended 'Single Question aimed at Inducing Narrative' (SQUIN). Once the question is asked, the researcher remains quiet, cedes power to the participant who controls the interview. The notes taken by the research forms a SHEIOT (Situation-Happening-Event-Incident-Occurrence-Time), which is used by the researcher to ask questions in the second interview. The second interview

is led by the researcher, who asks the participant questions based on the narrative they provided in the first interview and in line with the SHEIOT. The third interview is optional and is used by the researcher to widen the net to obtain data not covered by the participant in the previous two interviews.

I adapted BNIM to a two-stage interview process, with the second interview focused on asking questions based on the SHEIOT and wider questions that needed to be asked to answer the research question. This adapted two-stage interview process kept to the authenticity of the method as much as possible, as it continued to allow for rich narratives to be elicited in the participants' voice and uninterrupted in the first instance. With limited time available to complete the research adapting BNIM into a two-stage process saved time and the flexible approach allowed for follow up questions to be asked and in any order. The adaptation of BNIM was also undertaken by Hesketh (2014) in his research with disaffected young people with success. However, Hesketh advised that to use an adapted version with young people successfully, attention must be paid to getting the first question right. This allows for participants to respond according to their development, age and their past experiences of having limited agency with adults. Whilst my interviews were conducted with adults, Hesketh's findings provided much insight on how I should approach interviews. In the first interview, I anticipated that participants would have not been acquainted with an interview method that allowed them to talk uninterrupted for the entire interview. Therefore, I devoted time to explain the method and the two-stage process. After explaining what the research was about, I asked the interviewee a single question framed to align with the BNIM method's first stage, which was:

> 'Please tell me the story about the accusation that occurred, tell me about your life before the accusation and then all the events and experiences that have happened since then; begin whenever you want to begin, I won't interrupt, I'll just take some notes for afterward.'

I asked no further questions, listened to the story being told and took notes to follow up in the second interview. This non-authoritative approach gave the interviewee the power to direct the story in whatever trajectory they wanted, giving them agency and choice.

I provided these participants with a copy of the transcript of the first interview before commencing the second one. Not all the participants wanted a copy of the transcript, but for others, providing transcripts reminded them of what was previously shared, and this proved a useful strategy, as there was a gap between interviews. It also provided clarity, showed participants that I could be trusted as I recorded their interview accurately and allowed for further narratives to be elicited. One interviewee was particularly moved after reading the interview transcript and claimed that this helped them to make further sense of what they had experienced.

In the BNIM method, the second interview takes the form of asking questions based on what interviewees disclosed in the first interview and questions are directed in the same order raised in the first interview. In the second interview, I adapted the method by asking follow-up questions based on the first interview and further questions not covered in the interview guide, which covered the main themes I wanted to discuss, to ensure the data obtained allowed for the research questions to be answered. (See Appendix IV for the Interview Guide).

To further enable the non-accused sibling and the accused to talk about difficult experiences, I asked participants to bring with them to interviews an artefact that meant something to them, or expressed something about themselves. This could be a photo, or something they have kept, a personal or household object, so they could talk about why they had chosen it. Research is about engagement and not solely about data collection (Banks, 2001), so the use of visual methods was to stimulate participation. The artefact itself was not intended to be the subject of analysis. Instead, its significance was as an aid or a trigger to telling their story. In any event, none of the participants brought an item to the interviews and exploration of this with them revealed no reason for making this choice. However, I do not believe that participants not bringing an artefact to the interview affected the elicitation of narratives, as I was able to build rapport and I think, participants openly shared their experiences.

A total of 4 accused and 2 non-accused participants were interviewed twice. The first interviews on average lasted 45 minutes and the second interview between 90 and 180 minutes. Interviews often took place with gaps of 4 to 6 weeks due to my own and participants'

schedules and because it took time to transcribe the first interviews verbatim in order for me to provide the transcripts for participants.

*Interviews with family members, professionals, community and faith leaders/healers:*

With family members, professionals, community, and faith leaders/healers, I used semi-structured interviews. This approach entails the interviewer asking the interviewee a series of open and closed questions that are normally outlined in an interview guide. There was latitude to alter the order of questions and allow follow-up questions (Bryman, 2015). The relatively informal style of this method allowed for the exploration of the themes in a relatively structured way. These interviews were focused less on gaining the participants' holistic and detailed personal narratives, but more on eliciting specific information and insights based on experience, and in particular, their perspectives on the experiences of the accused and non-accused siblings. The diversity of representation in this sample is indicative of my concern to obtain multiple perspectives on a common issue they have all encountered. These multiple perspectives and experiences provide a broader understanding at the empirical level that facilitated causal explanations to be revealed. These participants were asked to talk about their knowledge of accusations of WSP. They were also asked to relate their experiences of being involved with non-accused siblings and the accused. By drawing on specific, unnamed case examples, their accounts of what happened to the non-accused sibling and the accused, the impact of the accusation, what interventions looked like and what could be learned were also explored. I designed one interview guide for family members and another for professionals and faith leaders, because based on their respective roles, they would have different insights and responses (see Appendix V and VI for the topic guides). One interview was conducted with each participant, save one parent who had a second interview because a change in schedule resulted in their having limited time to complete the first interview. A total of 16 people were interviewed with each interview taking approximately 60 minutes. I made verbatim transcripts of these interviews.

## 3.9 Data analysis

The data analysis process was guided by my critical realist standpoint, which means that it was theory-driven and employed abductive and retroductive processes (Fletcher, 2017). Abduction analysis involves obtaining new explanations for empirical data using theoretical frameworks (Tikly, 2015). Retroduction involves making inference- the task involves identifying causal mechanisms that generate an event (Houston, 2001). To get to the stage of abductive and retroductive analysis, the interview data was analysed using a thematic approach.

I used the six steps/phased specifications for thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), who described thematic analysis as 'a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data' (Braun & Clarke, 2006:79). They further describe it as a recursive approach that requires time, which I found to be a true reflection of the method particularly concerning the time it took to complete the analysis using their approach. Their method prescribes taking a six-step thematic approach. The analysis was guided by critical realism ontology- reality is layered according to the empirical, actual and the real (Stutchbury, 2022). I listened to the recordings on my return journey from interviews, and this allowed me to immediately reflect on what I had just heard from the participant, and I made notes. Therefore, I approached phase one of Braun and Clarke's method already immersed in the data. I transcribed all interviews verbatim. In phase one, I read and re-read the transcript taking further notes, which I used to assist with identifying ideas and points of interest. I did this reading and rereading from the perspective of the participant. This process allowed a type of interim analysis to be done following the transcription of interviews (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). During meetings with my first supervisor, I discussed these emerging ideas, and this helped to guide my thinking on how to further approach the data.

Phases 2 and 3 focus on generating codes and sorting these to produce themes. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) argue that the researcher must be adept with skill and expertise, because they perform the most important role in the research. As I approached the data at the phase 2 stage,

I felt uneasy because I lacked confidence with regard to how best to do it. Others have highlighted the problems experienced by researchers during the analysis stage, which is partly due to thematic analysis not having clear techniques (Bryman, 2015). Sakata et al., (2019) articulated their experience of data analysis during their PhD research and described the process as messy and challenging. I devoted much time trying to identify literature and training courses to build my confidence. I eventually found a course delivered by Dr Simon Watts from the University of East Anglia on qualitative data analysis and attended two sessions of the same course in 2018 and 2020. I employed the approach to coding and identifying themes developed by Watts (2014).

Watts (2014:6) describes coding as tracing 'a path from the descriptive to the interpretive' and the aim of coding 'is to identify the key themes, issues, and meanings within the data set in a thorough and systematic fashion'. I was thorough and systematic by adhering to the prescribed steps. To generate codes, I looked at the data through the lens of what Watts calls the 'first person' perspective, which is a data driven approach to data analysis. To do this, I read the transcript in the spirit of wanting to be close to the data, so I tried as far as possible to understand the participants' words and viewpoints from their perspective. Throughout the process of reading the transcript, I asked myself 'what is being talked about' at that point in the transcript at an empirical level, and once identified, I wrote a code in the left-hand margin e.g., 'community'. I identified if the participants mentioned again, this alerted me to a possible emerging theme.

Following this descriptive coding process, I followed what Watts refers to as taking an interpretative coding approach, which focuses on looking at the transcript and asking at identified points 'how is this issue being talked about' (Watts, 2014)? Undertaking this allowed me to identify a further code, which I placed in the right-hand column. I followed this process throughout the data corpus, and I identified sub-themes based on the different ways participants spoke about an issue. At the end of the process, I examined the entire data corpus

and extracted all emerging themes and sub-themes. I completed the process reviewing the themes and sub-themes to ensure that it answered the research questions. By doing this, I completed phase 5 of Braun and Clarke's approach. Using retroduction allowed me to take a fluid approach towards moving through the data to understand what was happening across and between the empirical, actual and real levels of reality. This worked to identify causal explanations that generated WSP accusations and what shaped professional responses.

In the end, I found the process of analysing the data a fruitful exercise. Whilst Braun and Clarke provided a useful approach, it was in the 'doing' of analysing the data using Watts' (2014) practical steps that simplified the task and allowed me to make straightforward decisions on prioritising the data. I was able to arrive at phase 6 feeling confident that the data analysed related the participants' story.

*Survey data analysis*

These data were collated and analysed using Excel for descriptive statistical analysis and this provided useful insights occurring at an empirical level. I developed an Excel spreadsheet that had three tabs, one for each year the data was provided for. On each spreadsheet, at the top contained variables for the accused and non-accused (see Appendix X). Examples of the variables included characteristics such as age, ethnicity, gender and religion. It also included information on the reason for the accusation, type of abuse experienced, or if they were placed in care, or if they were subject to a child protection plan, or if placed under police protection and who the accuser was and the outcome following professional intervention. After collating the data, I analysed it to identify the values for each variable and depicted it using graphs and charts. Where the data showed there were emerging themes, I extracted quotes from the 'Reason for the accusation' column to illuminate the experience (Eldh et al., 2020) of the accused and non-accused.

## 3.10 Positioning myself as researcher

In this section, I explore my own reflexivity as part of the critical realist approach taken and demonstrate how I negotiated some of the methodological issues raised by being an insider researcher.

As a practising social worker, I am keenly aware of how "self" influences and impacts relations with clients (Dominelli, 2017). These are issues intertwined with being an anti-oppressive practitioner, which concerns tackling structural inequalities and divisions in the lives of clients or workers with the aim of meeting their needs irrespective of social status. This interactive and/or symbiotic relationship between workers and clients also exists between the researcher and the researched. Denzin and Lincoln (2005:45) describe research as 'an interactive process shaped by the researcher's personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity and those of the people in the setting'. I am an embodiment of these multiple identities. I am black, male, heterosexual, an immigrant, Christian by faith, social worker and a researcher. This has been, from the outset, the vantage point from which I have positioned myself, as a culturally and religiously intuitive insider rather than an ostensibly detached, presumption-free observer. Who I am, my subjectivities, past experiences, and knowledge of the phenomena I am exploring have been intrinsic to the research process and indeed to the whole study.

To begin with, I recognise that my methodological stance as a critical realist is influenced by my experience of working in a profession characterised by getting clients to tell their stories and the belief that structures and systems are real and influence experiences. As a social worker, I encourage clients to share intimate details about their experiences (empirical domain) of events in their lives (actual domain) and in so doing, I gain insight into identifying possible causal mechanisms (real domain). This influenced my positioning in interviews with participants, as my interview method (see 3.8.2) privileged a non-threatening atmosphere where some participants had control of parts of the interview process.

Creswell (2013) argues that a researcher's experience shapes how they interpret a situation. I am therefore aware of how my subjectivities may affect my ability to understand different

approaches. Being mindful that I am researching communities similar to mine i.e., immigrant, Black, minority, Christian, and professionals with the same professional background, I anticipated that this would have implications. For example, several times participants solicited my views on whether witchcraft or spirit possession occurs. These encounters forced me to contend with my Christian beliefs about the subject matter. Sensitive research can engender reluctance in participants' willingness to respond, so there were fears my responses to such questioning could be counterproductive if my viewpoint were incongruent with participants' views. My intention was not to undertake reflexive dyadic interviews, which entails the researcher purposely and openly share personal stories (Ellis & Berger, 2003). Despite this, at times I openly shared that I am Christian, and I recognise that these beliefs exist within Christianity but that I honestly found it difficult to endorse them. Whilst I did not feel challenged by this self-disclosure, I did not want my position to hamper participation in the research. In the event, participants were generally candid in interviews after becoming aware of my extensive professional experience. Sharing my professional experience of cases previously worked on helped to build rapport with the participants.

Over the years, the positive links developed with various professionals and community/faith groups as a social worker reaffirmed my insider status. At various junctures throughout the research process, I capitalised on this. My insider status enabled access to elite individuals as well as recruitment of participants through my existing connections with churches, mosques and community groups. A point of accomplishment has been gaining access to a police database, which my insider status as an "expert" leveraged support for the research.

It is important to note the fact that I had a pre-existing professional relationship with some participants (professionals) whom I had interacted with before and during the interview. A couple of participants indicated that they had prior contact with me e.g., through the training I had delivered, unbeknown to me. This aspect of being an insider concerned me because I did not want their perception of me as an 'expert' in comparison to themselves to affect interviews by overstating their experience to impress me. I attempted to counteract this by being aware of power differentials in interviews and tried to reinforce that they had an experience most professionals did not, and that this was important to share regardless of the quality of the

intervention they were discussing. These dynamics that unfolded in interviews also demanded scrutiny through the lens of what Finlay (2012) calls relational reflexivity. Finlay draws attention to how both the researcher and the participant are co-constructing the interview, and this requires the former to be aware of not only overt relational dynamics, but also those unexpressed, or implicit intersubjectivities. Additionally, there was anxiety around researcher bias and directing interviews with professionals based on my ideas. Using supervision as a reflexive space helped to minimise this challenge and I consciously practised being a reflexive researcher, as I understood how problematic my over-familiarity with the topic presented issues. Also, there were times I felt interviews were steering towards being professional supervision, as the interview questions identified gaps in knowledge and where this occurred, I was mindful of how this could make professionals feel subordinate. None of the disclosures by professionals required confidentiality to be breached. However, where these participants saw a gap in their knowledge or practice, I used this as an opportunity for them to reflect and explore what they would do differently. Often after the interviews with professionals, they took the opportunity to further reflect, and I provided the time and space for this to take place.

There were also aspects of the research process and experience that underscored my position as an outsider. Not belonging to the groups being researched and not fully understanding the culture or environment emphasised my sense of lack of belongingness. Such a status is noted as resulting in researchers being unable to identify and understand a participant's life experiences (Hayfield & Huxley, 2015). In my case, this happened in religious spaces where I was not part of the same faith group or where the topic was considered too sensitive to discuss. On occasions I used my Christian identity to gain access to certain faith groups. However, in some instances, encounters with faith leaders or congregants caused me discomfort, which I perceived as minor aggression or avoidance. This happened where congregants assumed that my research linked their faith/beliefs to practices where children have been harmed, or where my interest in the topic connected me in some way to WSP. These suspicions made me realise how I had failed to anticipate and negotiate the socio-political and politico-religious climate within which my research was taking place. These encounters reinforced the need for me to position myself within these environments not as an expert insider but as an outsider willing to learn from

experts by experience (Pawelz, 2018). There were other occasions too when my position and status resulted in scrutiny and I saw myself as an outsider. For example, because I look ethnically different, or am not of a particular religion, entering some religious spaces led to hostility from gatekeepers.

Effectively, I encountered the insider-outsider researcher dichotomy to be fluid and not binary (Thomson & Gunter, 2011), and at times being an insider-outsider position either provided or hindered access. One example of this occurred when agreed access to an organisation's case records that I had brokered on account of my insider professional status and an established professional relationship, was later denied because I had changed jobs and my new employer was viewed as a competitor organisation. This experience affected me emotionally. I felt that my loyalty and trustworthiness was being questioned and I was unprepared for this. In retrospect, I realised that I had entered some spaces with a naïve sense of entitlement due to my insider positioning.

Revealing my biases, experiences and the emotional impact of conducting my research is part of the process of being reflexive (Creswell, 2013). Birks (2014:25) posits that 'reflexivity is an active process of systematically developing insight…to guide your future actions'. By dissecting actions, self and the relational aspects of encounters with participants positioned this work as a reflexive study. Conducting this research was an iterative process and reflexivity guided me in making methodological changes and conducting interviews. Embracing a reflexive approach was essential to overcoming my insider bias and ensured I critically reviewed my involvement in the study and how it shaped what I produced (Birks, 2014). Being reflexive, enabled decision-making when strategic decisions about changes in the aims of the research, plan and methodological approach needed to be changed (Finlay, 2012). I found being reflexive was a process of becoming a better researcher, as one could never be fully reflexive due to limits in humankind's mental abilities to do so. As indicated above, I developed my reflexive approach by reflecting on the research process with my supervisor and using this to guide what I did next. Having a record of supervision sessions with my supervisor was particularly helpful and I kept notes (not a journal) of my thoughts following interviews. Using these notes helped me to plan interviews, reflect on participants' accounts and process my thoughts on the research process. I

also benefitted from informal conversations with fellow researchers. I used them as a sounding board on issues of methodology, participant recruitment and theory when I had to refine and adapt my research plan. Some of these issues will be discussed further in the next section.

## 3.11 Ethics

Research is a moral enterprise that demands researchers act morally by doing no harm or damage to participants by protecting their welfare. Research ethical standards regulate the behaviour of those involved in research and offer protection to participants by providing guidelines that regulate and promote the integrity of the research (May, 2011). Throughout my research, I was mindful to adhere to the ethical principles set out by the Economic Social Research Council (ESRC, 2015), locally by the University of Sussex Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee and other organisations to which I had to apply separately for ethical approval. I received ethical approval from the University of Sussex Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee in 2016. However, I had to submit a new application because of the redesign of my research in May 2017, which received approval the following month.

In this study, I explored a highly sensitive issue, which had the potential to have a lasting and ongoing impact on those accused, non-accused and relatives because they had direct experience of being in abusive situations. Ethical issues arise before interviewing takes place and after the study has been completed (ESRC, 2015), so I was mindful that asking participants to revisit what could be traumatic memories or to discuss what may continue to be painful experiences could cause distress. These could have even extended to further disclosures that surface due to a repressed memory unearthed by my interviews. For this reason, I ensured that appropriate steps were taken to obtain informed consent and the Information Sheet. I shared with participants before interviews highlighted that this was a possibility. For the accused, non-accused and their parents, the gap between our first discussion about the research and the second contact to confirm if they wanted to participate also gave them time to consider possible risks and if they wanted to proceed. For professionals, community and faith

leaders/healers, I provided them with a copy of the Information Sheet specifically designed for them (see Appendix III, VII, VIII, IX AND XIII) I provided them with full details of the study, what it involved and implications related to participation. For all the participants, I considered how my positionality could influence their decision to consent to participate. I ensured that participants were aware that they could withdraw at any time before data analysis commenced and outlined what they were giving consent to. Therefore, I treated informed consent as not a single, finite event.

Before proceeding to the interview stage, participants signed a Consent form (see Appendix I and II) which I countersigned and gave them a copy to keep. I also kept a copy for my reference.

I took the necessary steps to protect the identity of participants by using pseudonyms to ensure anonymity was preserved. I explained to participants that apart from myself, only my supervisor would have access to interview transcripts where pseudonyms were used instead of their names. Audio recordings were done via a mobile phone which was also password protected. I stored all data (written and recorded) on my password protected laptop in a way that ensured it could not be linked to the participant. All recordings were deleted after being transcribed and transcripts have been archived in line with the university's protocol.

Interviewing participants who were family members did raise privacy issues as family members shared information about their relatives who did not disclose this to me in their interview. I maintained strict confidentiality and did not share this information. I was also careful not to disclose this information inadvertently, or to engage in a line of questioning that gave an indication that I was privy to information they did not think I would be aware of. However, I intend on producing a report of my findings for WHRIN, so there is a possibility that from the research findings, participants may be able to identify what another family member said about them. The implications of this were discussed with participants and this did not result in anyone withdrawing from the study. I also think that the two interviews over an extended time period with the accused and non-accused helped to build trust between us and this worked towards ensuring they continued in the research. However, two of the accused interviewed did not want

their non-accused siblings to participate in the study, and when I explored the reasons for this, they said they did not wish to revisit the past with them.

I adhered to the principle of confidentiality and made it explicit to participants in discussion and on the information sheet (see Appendix VII, VIII AND IX) that what they said in the interview would be confidential and not reported to WHRIN, its partners or another participant. I also clearly outlined to participants, in advance, the limits of confidentiality (ESRC, 2015) and under what circumstances it would be breached.  For example, if they disclosed that a criminal offence had occurred and where abuse had taken place. I also stressed that if I needed to contact the police or children's service, they would be informed if it didn't place a child in danger. The limits of confidentiality did not hamper the recruitment and retention of participants, as they were willing to participate despite the limits.  The FoI data provided by children's service and the police are public information and published online by these organisations. Therefore, confidentiality is not required to be maintained. However, ethical approval received from the police force that allowed its data to be accessed mandated that its details not be revealed and I have adhered to this request.

During interviews with the accused and non-accused, there were instances where some cried, and others were upset when talking about their experiences. Where this occurred, I employed a range of strategies, such as providing them with the support details of services and I used my skills as a social worker, developed over years of working on these complex cases to work sensitively and effectively with participants during these times. I developed a support plan with WHRIN, as the organisation has longstanding experience working in this specific field to provide additional support for participants if needed. The interviews also had a cathartic effect for some of the participants, as they gave them for the first time an opportunity to reflect on and disclose intimate parts of their experiences which they had never shared.

All the data from the survey was received in an anonymised form. The police officer who accessed it from the force's database did not share with me any identifying details of individuals on the IT system.

## 3.13 Conclusion

In this chapter, I provided an account of the many contours of the research process I encountered. Critical realism and its ontological view of the social world as stratified guided the methodology and methods used. The methods used allowed for insights concerning what occurred at the empirical level towards the deeper level of the real. This study has shown that undertaking real-world research is an iterative and not a linear process (Robson, 2015). Therefore, researching such a sensitive issue as WSP may require researchers to consider from the outset to prepare beforehand if changes in methodology and research design may be needed. The methods used in this study were effective in eliciting the data needed to answer the research questions. The need to consider ethical issues and having established connections with communities and professionals and working with and through a collaborative partner can provide much needed access. The need to consider one's position as a researcher and how multiple identities influence the research process is of importance when researching WSP. Researching this topic would have been challenging as a total outsider, but being an insider does not reduce it, so being able to manoeuvre between the two is a prerequisite (Stutchbury, 2022). Ethical considerations point to the need to view informed consent not as a one-off event and that the principle of 'do no harm' is embraced by ensuring confidentiality and anonymity. In the next chapter, I present the first findings which focus on the data obtained and analysed via the police database and FoI request.

# Chapter 4

# National Profile of Witchcraft and Spirit Possession Allegations Against Children

## 4.1 Introduction

The research seeks to develop an understanding of WSP allegations against children and the vigour of professional responses to them at a national level. The best approach to gain this understanding is to obtain information from nationwide services responsible for protecting these children. These include the relevant police forces and children social care (CSC) organisations. Unfortunately, the responses from the police and CSC do not allow for a comprehensive national picture to be formulated. However, the data obtained enabled some insights about WSP and the effectiveness of professional recording. Therefore, as the data is partial, they provide some answers to these research questions but not all.

The chapter is divided into three main sections according to the source of information obtained. It focuses on the FoI information gathered from the police forces and from children services' departments across England. It also considers information garnered from one English police force's case file database.

## 4.2 National police force Information

In 2018, I sent an FoI request to 38 English police forces and accessed one police force's database. The FoI request asked for the following information for 2014-15, 2015-2016 and 2016-2017.The information requested was specifically for the number of cases referred, demographical data, type of abuse experienced, number of accused and non-accused involved and the outcome of the investigation (see Appendix XII). Ten (29%) police forces could obtain data on this type of abuse by conducting a text search, but they did not record any cases for the years requested. This meant that 27 (71%) police forces could not provide data because of their inability to record or search their information management system. This incapability stems

from WSP accusation not being a specific crime. Therefore no crime code is available to code the offence.  The problem is further compounded by the fact that the record management system does not allow for a search of the database to be done without a crime code as the database either contains no relevant information on the matter. FoI requests that require extracting the information taking longer than 18 hours also exclude information being released. The latter explanation was provided by eight police forces because to obtain data on WSP cases would require reviewing all crime data for the years requested (see Table 2). The police responses highlighted how the disparate approach of police data management systems hinders developing a national picture of this type of abuse. This inconsistency with data collection by the police resembles what has also happened concerning other crimes mainly experienced by minority groups in the UK, that is, "honour related" abuse and forced marriage (Khan et al., 2021).

**Table 2 Reasons for not providing an FoI response: Police**

| | **Why unable to respond to FoI** | **No. of Police Forces** |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | The information requested is not in a format that allows the data to be requested | **7** |
| 2 | A text search of the database was undertaken, and no records found | **10** |
| 3 | No information available; no relevant offences were recorded | **9** |
| 4 | No relevant crime code to search the database, so it is not possible to obtain the information | **3** |
| 5 | Providing the information would exceed the appropriate time/cost limit of 18 hours prescribed by Section 12 FOI Act. | **8** |

The West Midlands Police's[3] response to the FoI initially fell into the first category. However, some months later I received an email from this police force indicating its commitment to

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[3] Data provided from an FoI request, so name of the organisation can be revealed

supporting the research by providing data for the years requested plus for the year 2014. There is no known evidence that this data has been presented elsewhere and with data at a national level being unavailable, this data provides a snapshot into understanding the issue. The data provided included information related to gender, ethnicity and role type of the victims[4] (see Table 3). However, of significance is that this police force failed to provide information on the non-accused despite it being requested and this highlights the invisibility of non-accused children.

**Table 3 Number of offences where children have been accused and children's gender- West Midlands Police**

| Year | No. of offences | Gender-accused male | Gender-accused female | Gender unknown |
|------|------|------|------|------|
| 2014 | 3 | 6 | 3 | |
| 2015 | 4 | 9 | 6 | 1 |
| 2016 | 5 | 4 | 14 | |
| 2017 | 5 | 6 | 8 | |
| Total | 17 | 25 | 31 | 1 |

The West Midlands Police is the second largest law enforcement agency in the country and covers the areas of Birmingham, Coventry and Wolverhampton. It serves a population of 2.8 million, with 18% from an ethnic minority background. In the four years between 2014 and 2017, there were 17 offences committed against 57 children. Information on the nature of the offences was not provided, so it is not possible to comment on the type of harm experienced. Of these children, 25 were male and 31 female and one child's gender was unknown. Ethnicity data included the broad categories of Asian, Black and White North European. A more detailed ethnic categorisation would have provided better insight into the specific origin and cultural background of these children. This data would have assisted in obtaining a better understanding of how cross-cultural and ethnic factors influence this type of abuse. Asian and Black children were most prominent in the data, with the former having slightly higher

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[4] Victim is the language used by the police

numbers. The visibility of White North European children as victims is significant given limited information concerning this segment in previous UK research. Stobart (2006) identified one White British child and La Fontaine (2016) none.

In the period covered, Black and Asian children are disproportionately overrepresented. The data evidences 26% and 30% respectively of those accused of WSP and 7% were White (see Table 4 below). The proportion in the 'Not Known' ethnicity category is significant. Recording ethnicity provides a fuller understanding of this kind of abuse from a socio-cultural perspective, indicating whom it affects and how to prevent harm. Its absence raises questions about the quality of the data being collected, the lack of the police's understanding as to why it is important to record this data and/or the police officers' ability to input data onto the data management system.

**Table 4 Ethnicity of the accused - West Midlands Police**

| Ethnicity | 2013-14 | 2014-15 | 2015-16 | 2016-17 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Asian | 3 | 5 | 6 | 3 |
| Black | 3 | 3 | 6 | 3 |
| White North European | 0 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Not Known | 3 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Total | 9 | 15 | 19 | 14 |

## 4.3 Children's Social Care responses

The FoI request asked for the following information for 2015-2016, 2016-2017 and 2017-18. The FoI request to Children's Social Care (CSC) services failed to allow for any insight into the national incidence that could shed light on demographic data, information on the experiences and outcomes of and or the accused, non-accused or about the perpetrator. Only one local authority responded by providing a full response to the FoI request, and another responded with sparse information. Two other local authorities provided data for child abuse linked to

faith or belief instances, but not specifically accusations of WSP. All other CSC departments failed to respond (see Table 5).

**Table 5 Number of local authorities with reasons for not responding to the FoI**

| Why unable to respond to FoI | No. of CSC |
|---|---|
| Information not available / no cases referred | 76 |
| The information is not easily extractable from the records. | 38 |
| Providing the information would exceed the appropriate time/cost limit of 18 hours prescribed by Section 12 FOI Act. | 32 |
| Not something required to report on to DfE | 4 |
| Providing the data might identify the child | 1 |

Chapter 2 (see 2.5) noted that DfE requires CSC to provide data on CALFB as part of its annual CiN Census data returns. The category of CALFB includes cases:

'where a child has is at risk of, has been or is being abused because of his or her parents or carers' belief system. This includes, but is not limited to, belief in witchcraft, spirit possession, demons or the devil, the evil eye or djinns, Dakini, kindoki, ritual or muti-murders and use of fear of the supernatural (DfE, 2021).'

To ensure CSC departments were providing accurate responses, I cross-referenced the 2017-18 Children in Need (CiN) Census data with the CSC departments that responded to the FoI request stating 'Information not available/no cases referred', 'The information is not easily extractable from the records' and 'Not something required to report on to the DfE' (see Table 4.3). The CiN Census data for 2017-18 identified 120 CSC departments reporting cases where an assessment was undertaken due to concerns about CALFB. Whilst this approach is not ideal because CALFB is not restricted to WSP allegations, the possibility existed that these local authorities did assess the needs of these children. I contacted a sample of 25 CSC departments and had brought to their attention that they reported CALFB cases as part of the CiN Census data and, therefore,

the possibility existed that cases of WSP accusations did occur in their department. Choosing 25 CSC departments was due to the limited time available to follow up with more.

None of the 25 CSC departments provided further information, as 22 failed to respond and 3 provided explanations for being unable to respond. One local authority responded that the, "…category 'Abuse linked to Faith or Belief', is a wide term and incorporates Honour Based Violence, Forced Marriage, Radicalisation and Domestic Abuse." The categorisation of these forms of abuse as CALFB is incorrect as domestic abuse has its own reporting category and 'Honour' Based Violence and forced marriage falls under the domestic abuse category. Furthermore, the DfE reporting guidance specifically states forced marriage must not be recorded under CALFB (DfE, 2021).

Another CSC department response had also included within the CALFB cases that did not fit its intended category. This CSC department response stated the following:

> "The Council has reviewed the 12 cases from 2017/18 where there was an Assessment Factor of "Abuse Linked to Faith or Belief". These cases related to the following; expressing the wish to convert to Islam. Children living in a household where the mother was subject to Honour Based Violence from the father. Male circumcision without appropriate medical treatment. Risk of Female Genital Mutilation."

The last CSC department response showed a failure to understand that WSP is categorised under CALFB. This quote is an excerpt from the response received:

> "You appear to be classing a 'child abuse linked to faith or belief' as a 'child accused of witchcraft or being possessed by an evil spirit' which is not correct."

The data being sought, was explained in the FoI request (See Appendix XI) and subsequent email correspondence. Additionally, the DfE provides detailed guidance on what should be categorised under the CALFB. These responses show a lack of understanding of the CALFB, how it is categorised and reported to the DfE. It suggests that DfE CiN Census data as incorrect and that further work is needed with CSC departments to categorise and record data appropriately.

Redbridge CSC[5] is the only department which responded to the FoI request. Redbridge reported having no cases in 2017 and one in 2018. This young person, whose religion is recorded as Christianity, was accused by his mother of being a witch. He and his sibling were noted as being emotionally abused but were not made subject to a child protection plan and were not removed from their parent's care by the local authority.

The two CSC departments that responded to the FoI request but focused on CALFB were Bradford and Brighton and Hove Councils. Their data sheds light on the wider forms of harm under CALFB, some of which could include WSP and provides some insight into the extent of the issue and the socio-demographic data. The following CALFB data is presented here as an indication of the possible incidence of the phenomenon and to provide some insight into who the children are that are experiencing harm due to beliefs associated with CALFB. However, there is a possibility that these two CSC departments could have also miscategorised cases under the CALFB category. Bradford CSC's response stated that it could not narrow the database search to find cases of children being accused specifically of WSP, but that "the closest we have is the national risk factor code of "Abuse linked to faith or belief"." They provided the following data. In 2015-16 there were 36 children in the year who were assessed as being at risk of abuse linked to faith or belief. Of these, 19 were male and 17 female. Thirteen were under five, 6 were aged 5-9, 10 were aged 10-15 and 7 were aged 16+. In 2016-17, there were 68 children in the year who were assessed as being at risk of CALFB. Of these, 32 were male and 36 female. Nineteen were under five, 15 were aged 5-9, 20 were aged 10-15 and 14 were aged 16+. The two periods the data covered revealed that 104 children were assessed for concerns involving CALFB and for one CSC, this appears to be significant.

Brighton and Hove CSC provided less data than Bradford CSC. The data provided showed that between 2017-18 and 2018-19, there were 64 children with an indicating factor of 'abuse linked

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[5] Data provided from an FoI request, so name of the organisation can be revealed

to faith and belief'. Of these 64 children, there were 25 children during 2017-18 and 39 children during 2018-19.

For both CSC departments a total of 168 children were assessed for concerns related to CALFB. Both departments failed to provide data on the non-accused, which points to the lack of focus on these children. The Bradford dataset showed that accusations against girls slightly outnumbered those against boys by two and under-fives had more accusations levelled against them compared to other age groups. Whilst children of all age groups are being accused, under-fives appear to feature at a high rate. This characteristic raises questions about whether age is a factor determining vulnerability for this type of abuse, as it is a factor for other types of abuse (Brandon et al., 2020). The ethnicity of these children was not provided.

## 4.4 Police database

As section 3.4.1 showed, the police database accessed belonged to a police force in the south of England. It contains information on reported incidents of crime, including textual information on the allegation, socio-demographic data (age, ethnicity, religion, gender and location) of the victims, alleged perpetrators and others included as part of the incident, agencies involved and outcomes of the investigation.

### 4.4.1 Accused: Socio-demographic data

The data reviewed covered years 2014-15, 2015-16 and 2016-17. There were 42 alleged crimes of WSP recorded in 2014, 63 in 2015 and 27 in 2016, resulting in a cumulative total of 132 alleged crimes referred to the police force.

Detailed scrutiny of these 132 recorded cases revealed that 78 cases concerned WSP, involving 98 children. The rest were associated with other beliefs e.g. extortion by a fortune teller. The

incidence of recorded cases varied considerably across the 3-year period, with 24 cases involving 29 children in 2014, rising to 38 cases involving 52 children in 2015, and reducing to 16 cases involving 17 children in 2016 (see Figure 3). In 2016, there was a discrepancy between the number of cases reported to this police force and the greater number of cases reported to the DfE, as part of the CiN by CSC departments in the area covered by this police force. Without reasons to explain this discrepancy, I have to surmise that cases are not being referred to the police by CSC departments which need further exploration.

**Figure 3 Number of cases by year**
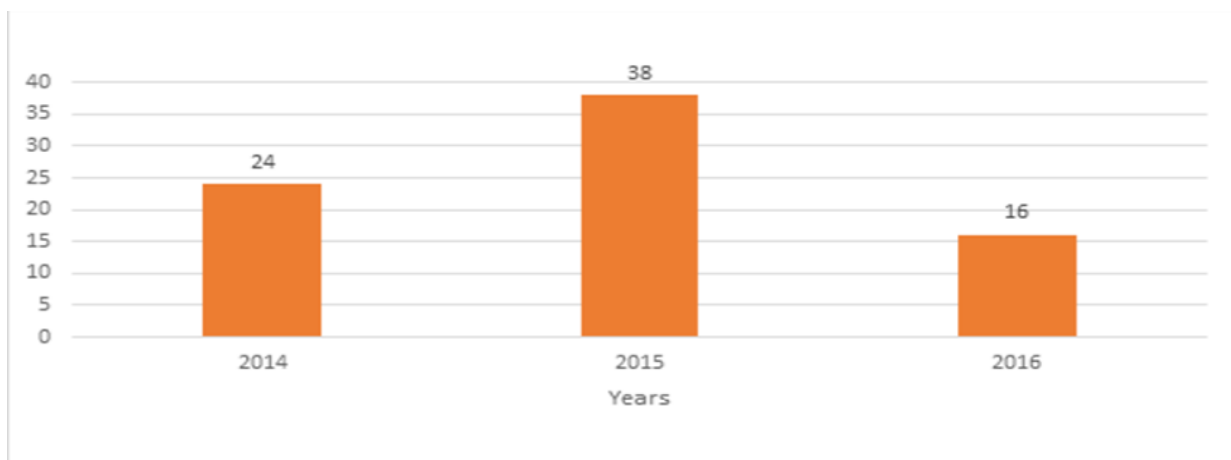


### 4.4.2 Nature of accusation and how it came to light

Of the 98 children accused, the large majority 77.5% were believed to be possessed (see figure 4 below). The language used to describe this belief by accusers included, 'the devil is inside of the child', 'the child is demon possessed' or 'possessed by a jinn', or 'the child is a devil child'. In one case, for example, a teenage girl who terminated her pregnancy shared this information with two employees of her carers. The employees then told her that she was possessed by a sex demon and proceeded to take her to a pastor to exorcise her. In this case, the accused is White and the accusers Black African. While it is difficult to draw conclusions from this case example, I believe that the ethnicities of the accuser and accused are significant, as there is no known

available UK data concerning White children being accused by those of other ethnic backgrounds or when beliefs and cultures of different ethnicities intersect concerning WSP.

There were 12 cases involving 22 children accused of being witches. Interestingly, in many of these cases, more than one child was simultaneously accused. There were ten cases where two or more siblings were accused together. In one of these cases, ten children, including a sibling group of four, were collectively accused of being witches by a pastor. And in another two separate cases, two siblings were accused of being witches. In the remainder of these cases, one child was accused. Of these 10 cases, two cases involved two children accused of being both witches and spirit possessed, suggesting these beliefs are not mutually exclusive and can be connected or that the terminology is being used interchangeably. As I have been unable to find in the literature children being accused of being both a witch and spirit possessed, it is not possible to expound on the finding's significance, as there was little further information recorded. I am left to surmise that if an accusation of being a witch or spirit possessed may lead to a child being harmed, then being accused of both possibly needs further attention in terms of possible enhanced risk.

**Figure 4 Number of witchcraft and spirit possession accusations**
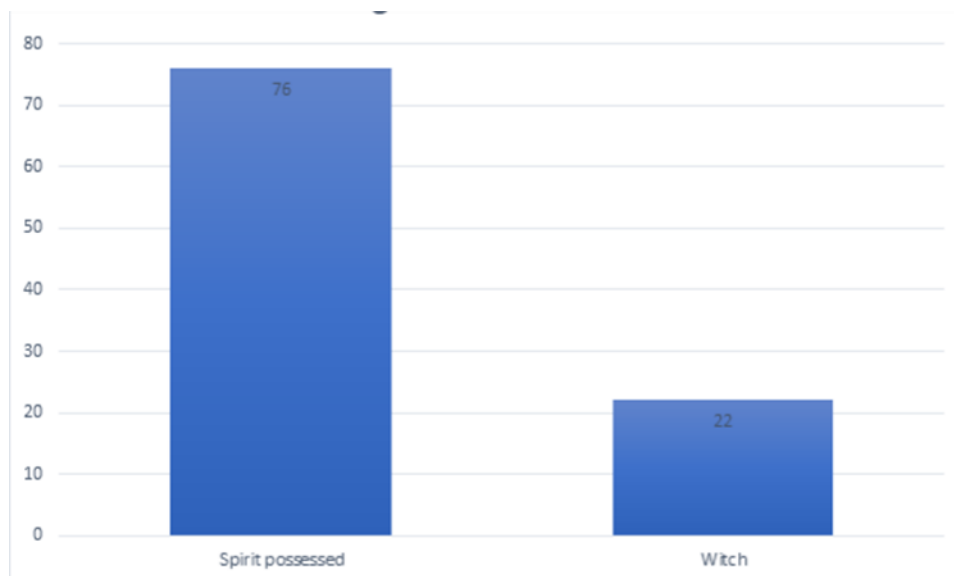
Accusations came to the attention of the police and other professionals from diverse sources. In some cases, the accuser shared with professionals their belief that the child was either spirit possessed or a witch, and the concern was subsequently referred by the professional, usually a teacher or health professional, to children's social care or the police. It was not possible to discover what facilitated a disclosure by the accused. There were a small number of cases where an accused child or their non-accused sibling reported it to the authorities. In one case, a young person walked into the police station and reported being called a witch by her parent and alleged she was the victim of physical and emotional abuse. It is noteworthy that both the accused and non-accused disclosed the abuse, as the findings from interviews with the participants highlighted barriers preventing disclosure (see 6.3). This suggests that the problem is more widespread than the number of recorded cases, and that these are simply the cases that managed to come to the attention of professionals. There are other cases where members of the public or neighbours reported the accuser to the police. However, in most cases disclosures were not forthcoming from the children or from perpetrators.

### 4.4.3 Nationality and ethnic origin

The police database recorded the background of the children mainly in terms of nationality and ethnicity. It was not possible to interpret the reasons for conflating nationality and ethnicity and categorising children in this inconsistent manner. One explanation could be that it would have most likely been the individual police officer's decision to categorise a child's ethnicity. Additionally, in nine cases, the child's background was not recorded, and one child was recorded as of mixed background but categorised as Nigerian. The recording relies on the police officer's knowledge of the difference between nationality and ethnicity, along with their willingness and ability to capture and record it. The data shows that 93 (95%) children accused were of a Black or Asian background. More detailed scrutiny of the background of these Black and Asian children, as shown in Figure 5, indicates that they are South Asian, sub-Saharan African, Black Caribbean and Black British. The children categorised as White comprised White

British (4) and White Brazilian (1). This data suggests that Black and Asian children are overrepresented compared to their White counterparts. However, the presence of the White ethnic group draws attention to the need to focus attention on all children and not position WSP as an issue affecting only minority groups.

**Figure 5 Nationality and ethnicity of those accused of WSP**
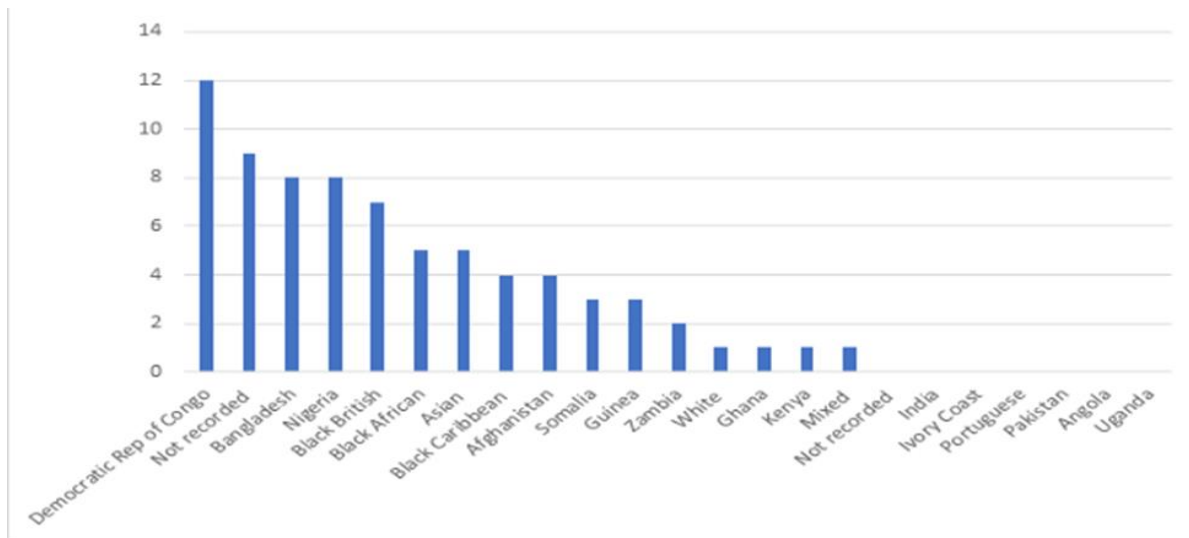


4.4.4 Gender and age

Among the 98 children accused, there were 48 girls and 45 boys. In five cases, the child's gender is unknown (see figure 4.7). Gender does not appear to avert running the risk of WSP accusation. This has been reported elsewhere concerning children accused (Stobart, 2006; Save the Children, 2006).

The data showed the average age of a child likely to be accused is 10 years old. The number of teenagers, 13-17 years old (focus placed on teenagers under 18 years old), accused totalled 43. This was 54% of all children accused. The presence of older teenagers in the dataset deviates from Stobart's (2007) findings. She found that most of the children were between 8-14. Compared to younger age groups, teenage cases were more complex in terms of the level of

risk factors presented, and the cumulative harm experienced appeared to result in significant concerns for their welfare and development.

Two cases featured teenage children and their adult siblings accused together. In one of these cases, a teenage girl and four female adult siblings were believed to be possessed and they all experienced poor mental health. The other case involved a teenager and two adult siblings accused together.

### 4.4.5 Religion and Culture

A quarter of cases identified the religious background of the child, indicating that there were many more cases where this data was not recorded. Where recorded, the child's religious background is recorded as Christian (44) or Muslim (29). As discussed in 2.4, beliefs in WSP exist in many faiths, therefore, the presence of children of Christian and Muslim backgrounds raises questions not only about safeguarding children from these backgrounds, but also possibly children from other faiths not featured in the data. There is an absence of children/families with no religious background. This is significant because the belief that children could be witches or spirit possessed exists amongst those with no religion, which is a finding of Stobart (2006).

Five cases lacked data on both the children's religion and background/origin. Failure to record religion where the alleged crime is linked to religion/belief means an understanding of the child's experience is missing important contextual information about the children's experience. It also raises concerns about their understanding and recognition of the problem and its relationship with faith and culture. This is particularly so in cases where there was a direct link to faith leaders, who were allegedly the accusers as well as faith organisations involved in harming children.

 Cultural background was ignored in most cases, as there was no exploration of what an accusation meant culturally for the family, indicative of a lack of curiosity about the child's lived experience. An example of this involved a family accusing the police and ambulance service,

who intervened to protect a child during what was described as an 'exorcism', of misunderstanding their culture, which resulted in the police acquiescing to the family's demands for them not to be involved. This case, like others, raises questions about professionals accepting cultural difference as a justification for abusive practices. This hampers the safeguarding of children. There were other cases where, if the cultural context were known, interventions to safeguard children would have most likely been undertaken. Three cases involving three sets of twins who were accused offer good examples of this. These children came from backgrounds where a twin is considered evil, which increases their vulnerability to accusations (Cimpric, 2010) and professionals failed to explore links between this and the accusation. A possible remedy would be the increased availability of culturally specific advice for professionals or an ethnically diverse workforce.

### 4.4.6 Age, gender and religion

When age is considered with gender, the average age of an accused girl is 11.6 years compared to 8.5 years for boys. The data further shows that the intersection of age and gender is particularly significant in the 15-17 age group, as three times as many girls (18) were accused compared to boys (6). More girls (15) than boys (13) were also accused in the 10-14 age group, but given the small numbers, this difference is not significant. Conversely, for the younger age groups, the number of boys accused is significantly higher than that of girls. There were 40 accusations against both boys and girls between the ages of 0-9 years old, and of these, more than half were boys (25). The cases show that children aged 1 and below (5) were also accused, showing that children of all ages could be accused.

Nine of these girls were recorded as being Christian, eight as Muslim and for one girl, her religion was not recorded. The majority were recorded as black African (14) and this was followed by Asian (2), White British (1) and Portuguese (1). (Portuguese is not an ethnicity, but this is how it was recorded).

## 4.4.7 Type of abuse

The different forms of child abuse are recorded in four categories: physical, emotional, sexual and neglect (HM Government, 2018). The files recorded the type of abuse the child experienced, and whether they were subjected to a child protection plan or CiN plan. In other cases, the type of abuse was identified from the case recording about the child's experience. Emotional abuse featured as the most common abuse experienced. However, what is noticeable is the multiple forms of abuse children experienced, with physical and emotional abuse being the highest (26%). Figure 6 depicts the various types of abuse experienced. The multiple forms of abuse experienced in both WSP cases seem indicative of the complex nature of these types of cases.

**Figure 6 Types of abuse experienced by accused**
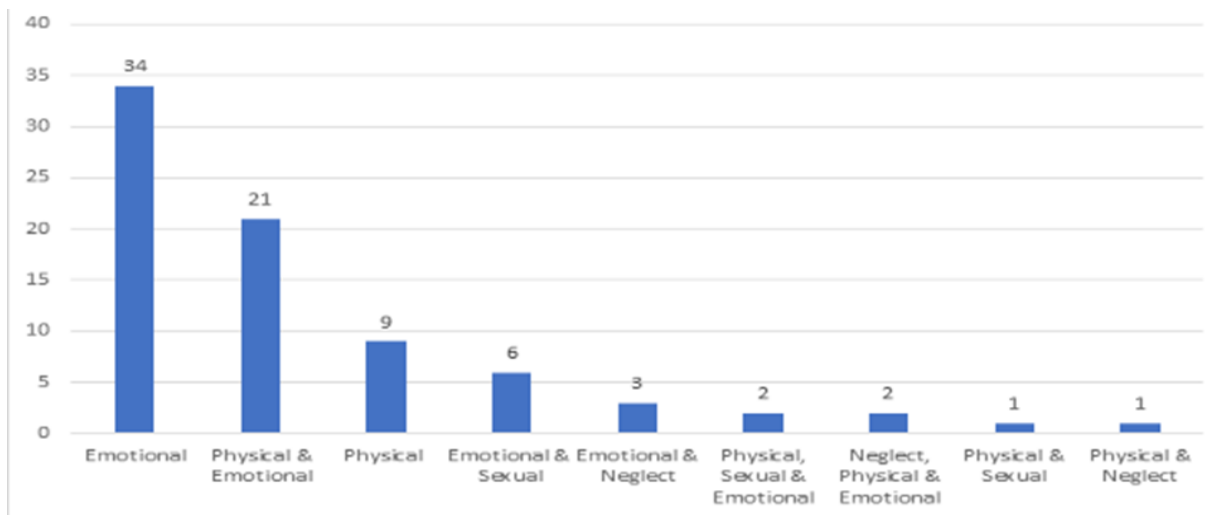


How the harm perpetrated to the accused happened was described in the records, which allowed for a detailed analysis of each case to identify the incidence of the different forms of mistreatment experienced. Beatings presented as the most common type of maltreatment and usually occurred along with other forms of harm. A range of other forms of ill treatment, (see

Figure 7) were meted out to children. One case involved a girl made to drink a potion which resulted in burns to her mouth. Some children were cut to release the devil or evil spirit believed to be inside them. Shouting took place when accusers and/or faith leaders were directing the evil spirit to leave the child. The neglect cases involved a combination of the home environment being disorderly or the child presenting as unkempt, hungry and/or left at home alone. Some children presented as highly distressed because of the cumulative effect of the various forms of ill treatment experienced. In one case, a child attempted suicide and in two other cases, two children threatened suicide.

**Figure 7 Type of maltreatment experienced by accused**
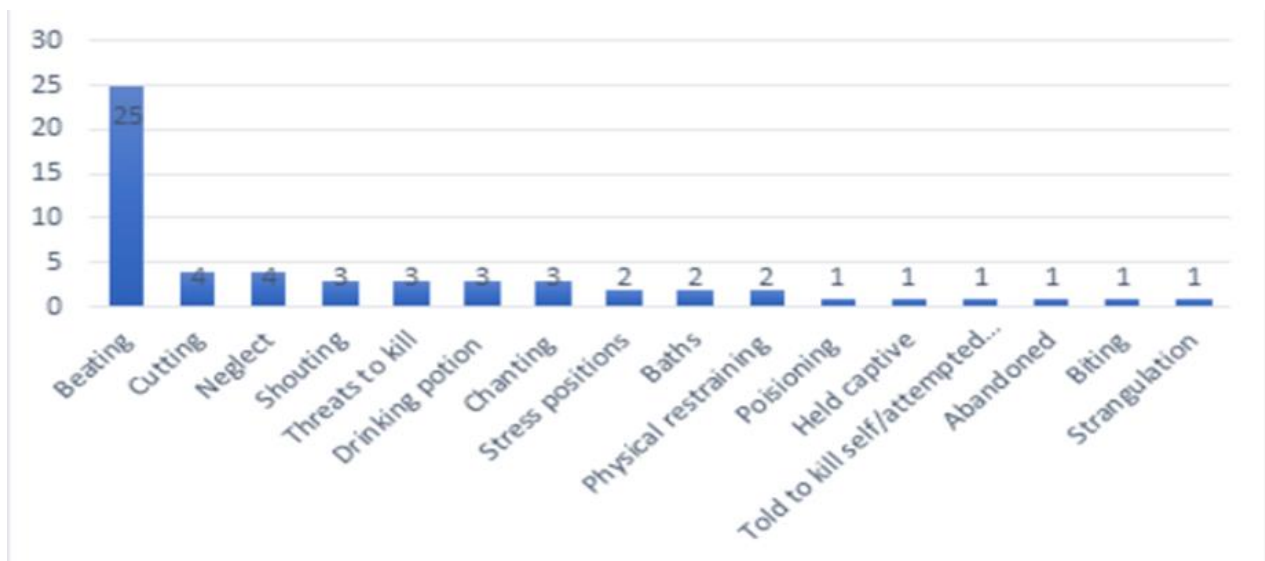


### 4.4.8 Characteristics/trait/behaviour of the accused

Recorded cases offered insight into a particular trait, characteristic or behaviour of the child which influenced or contributed to the accusation (see Figure 8). Some children had more than one. In some cases, a child's behaviour described as "problematic" by the parent was the deciding factor that led to the accusation. Where this was the main concern, reasons for the accusation included involvement in gang activity, a child's behaviour labelled "uncontrollable" by the parent, truanting from school or insolence towards the parent. Developmental concerns

such as autism, ADHD, speech and language development delay, along with disability, poor physical and mental health and special educational needs were featured in many cases. This is consistent with the findings in the literature (Rassool, 2019; La Fontaine, 2016). Where mental health featured as a concern, five girls experienced issues which either led to an accusation or the ill health attributed to the ongoing abusive home environment. These five girls experienced more than one type of abuse and the forms of harm experienced involved violence and emotional harm. The harm caused to them often occurred before an accusation, during the deliverance from an evil spirit or to cleanse them from being a witch.

Parental concerns about their daughter's sexual activity and the sexual orientation of sons featured in a few cases. These findings raised an interesting point about how parents interpret the perceived deviations or inappropriate sexual behaviour in young people and how their religious beliefs are used to make sense of this. It also links to notions of how sexual impurity is associated with danger and the need to use ritual to reinstate purity (see Chapter 7 for a fuller discussion on this). Some accusers subjected children to inhumane and degrading treatment to perform a version of 'conversion' therapy. One example involved a parent smearing chili pepper in the eyes and rectum of a boy believed to be devil possessed.

The case records showed that the histories of some girls were often complex, marked by what parents considered "problematic" behaviour (8) and often linked to concerns deemed "improper" behaviour for a girl. These gender stereotypes included missing from home, gang involvement, sexual activity or sexual abuse. Two cases involved professionals' concerns about risk of female genital mutilation (FGM) for girls in the 15-17 age group and another case involved a 14-year-old. In these three cases of supposed spirit possession and FGM concerns, the police's investigation focused on FGM and failed to explore further the child's disclosure of being accused of being spirit possessed. This suggests that the child would have been left in an abusive situation, as the records failed to show if these concerns were being addressed by another agency. In another two separate cases, two girls were at risk of a forced marriage and accused of being possessed after their parents assumed they had boyfriends and disapproved

of their cigarette smoking, partying and indolence. These findings highlight the need to consider WSP beside other forms of harmful practices such as FGM and forced marriage. They also suggest the importance of considering it within the context of gender-based violence. A child's experience of being accused could be one form of an array of various forms of violence experienced concurrently.

**Figure 8 Characteristics of accused children**
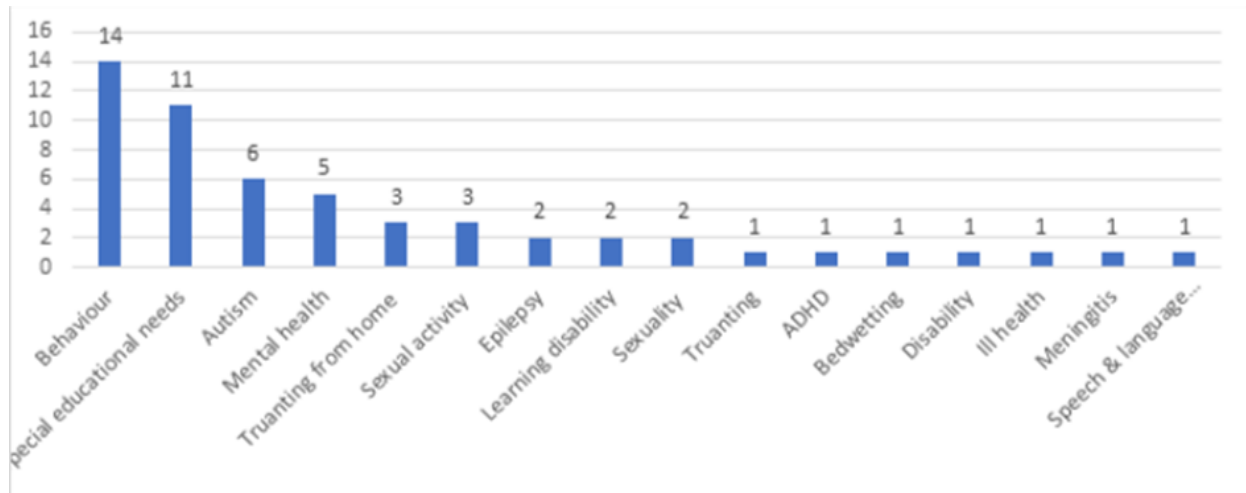


## 4.5 Non-accused siblings

Unsurprisingly, the records contained far less information on non-accused siblings compared to the accused. Records in four cases stated that there were non-accused siblings, but there was no information about them. The data suggested that police investigations primarily focused on those accused, possibly because they are considered victims of crime whereas the non-accused are not. However, the data did allow some insights to be drawn from the experiences of the non-accused.

There were 107 non-accused siblings (children and adults) of those accused and an additional two children who lived with the accused child but were not related to him/her. The total connected to the accused is 109, of whom 86 were children and 23 adult siblings. The presence of adult being jointly accused at the same time as a child is a significant finding to emerge from the data, which has not been recorded elsewhere, although adult siblings participating in the

abuse of an accused child have (Pull, 2013). For example, in one case of spirit possession it was alleged that an adult male sibling restrained his sister, a child, for other family members to conduct an exorcism.

The average age of all the accused is 10.78 years and for non-accused children, the average is 9 years old. It is not possible to surmise if it is common for the accused to be older. More non-accused children were in the 10-14 age group 23% (25). There are also more non-accused children in the 0-4 age group compared to those accused in the same age group. The gender of 39 boys and 33 girls was recorded, and 11 not recorded. While the difference in gender appears insignificant, cross-referenced with age, the gender of more girls was recorded in the 10-14 age group and of more boys in the 0-4 age-group (see Figure 9). A further two children had no age and gender recorded, along with four where only data on gender was available.

**Figure 9 Age and gender of non-accused children**
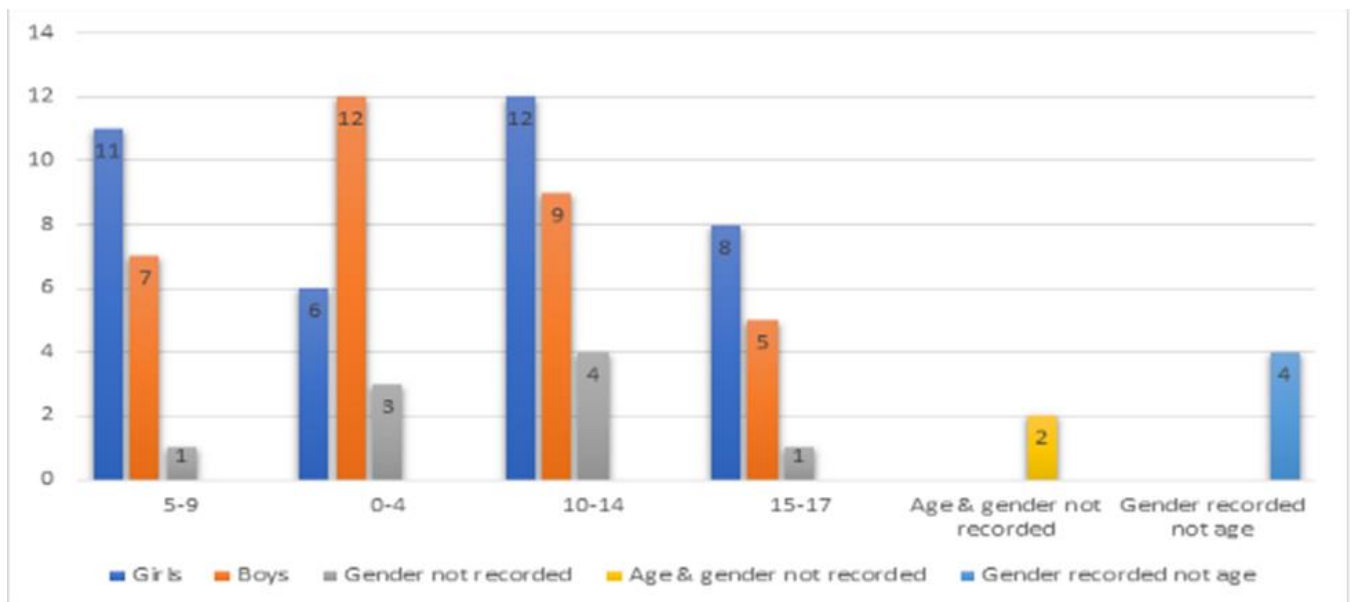


## 4.5.1 Nationality, ethnicity and religion of the non-accused

Nationality, ethnicity and religion were not consistently and/or specifically recorded for all these children. It is possible that this was not recorded because the recording of this data mainly focused on the accused as only they are viewed as the victim. In some cases, it was

assumed that the data concerning nationality, ethnicity and religion of the accused and non-accused were the same. However, in one case, the religion of the accused was dissimilar to the non-accused sibling because the former rejected their Islamic faith, converting to Christianity. This conversion was prompted by what she described as an exorcism conducted by an Imam, which made her disapprove of the Islamic faith. Despite her experience being a single case, it raises the issue of the impact of an accusation on religious beliefs following a traumatic event of a religious nature and how it is used as a mechanism to cope.

The same conclusions drawn about the accused apply to the non-accused, where a sub-Saharan, South Asian, European, and Black Caribbean background/origin is concerned (see Figure10).

**Figure 10 Nationality and Ethnicity non-accused**
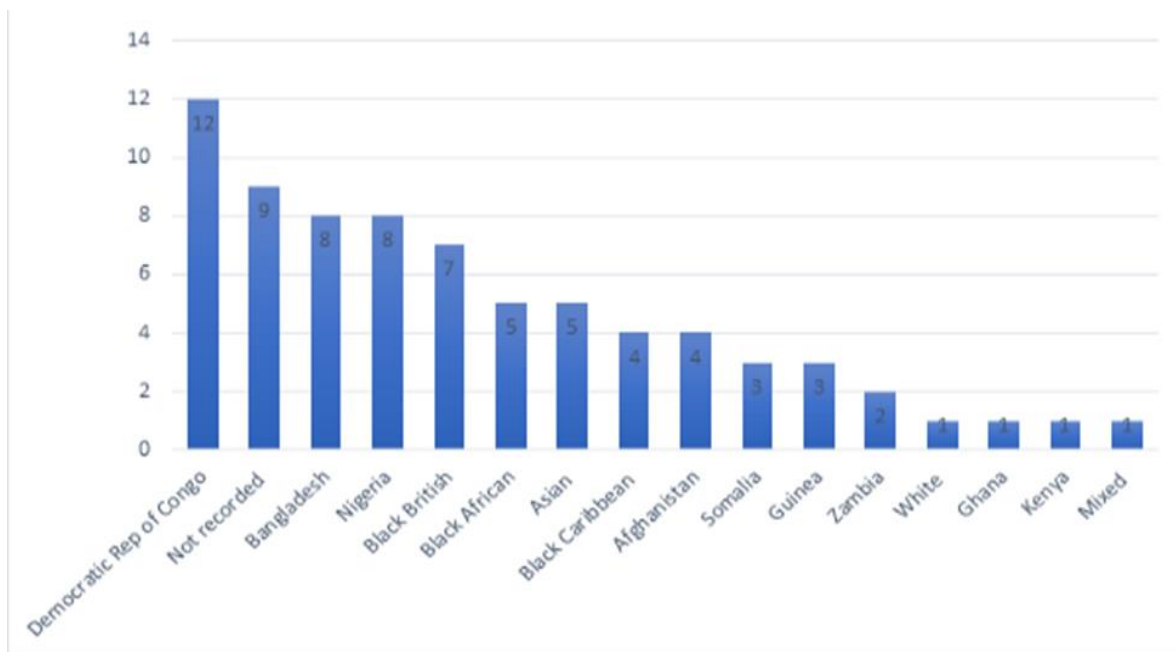
### 4.5.2 Characteristics/trait/behaviour of the non-accused

The records failed to identify distinguishing traits or behaviours for non-accused children that matched that of their accused sibling, expected of consanguineous siblings.

### 4.6 Family history of Witchcraft and Spirit Possession

There were three cases involving other family members subjected to a deliverance of some kind before the child went on to be accused in the future. One case involved an older adult brother, believed to have been delivered from a demon who went on to attempt a deliverance of his sibling. Similarly, in another case, the father was said to have been delivered previously from demons by a pastor, and he and this pastor attempted to do the same to his child, who they both believed to be possessed. The circumstances involved the child's father having previously conducted a deliverance of his sister-in-law. The experiences of these three children raise concerns about the safety of children where there are adults in the family who have been through some form of deliverance. It also suggests the need to explore family history of WSP where there are concerns that a child is accused. No accusation should be viewed as a first incident in the family. Family history as a factor during interviews with participants is discussed further in 5.5.

### 4.7 Accusers

The data consistently contained information on who initiated the accusation. In all cases apart from two separate cases involving two children self-identifying as being possessed, accusers were identified as kin, neighbours, faith leaders, or "friends of the parents" and/or in positions of authority. Children in this dataset were not likely to be accused by strangers but by someone close to them. The case records contained limited information about the characteristics of the accusers despite their being a relative of the child. Only six parents were identified as having

poor mental health and one stepfather who was autistic accused his stepchild of being a witch. A close look at those categorised as the accuser as seen in Figure 11, shows there is a predominance of mothers (41), which is similar to Stobart's (2006) and La Fontaine's (2016) research findings. The data said nothing about whether they had a partner, so it is possible they were single mothers and, therefore, the main carer. There were six other cases involving mothers who jointly accused children with others e.g., adult siblings, faith leaders or relatives. Fathers (13) (see Figure 11) as accusers also featured in the sample, but significantly less than mothers.  In one case, a father who is a pastor accused his child of being spirit possessed and there is no evidence on the file that the church he ministered at was informed. Stepparents as accusers were less present in the data, which differs from Stobart's (2006) finding.

**Figure 11 Who are the accusers**
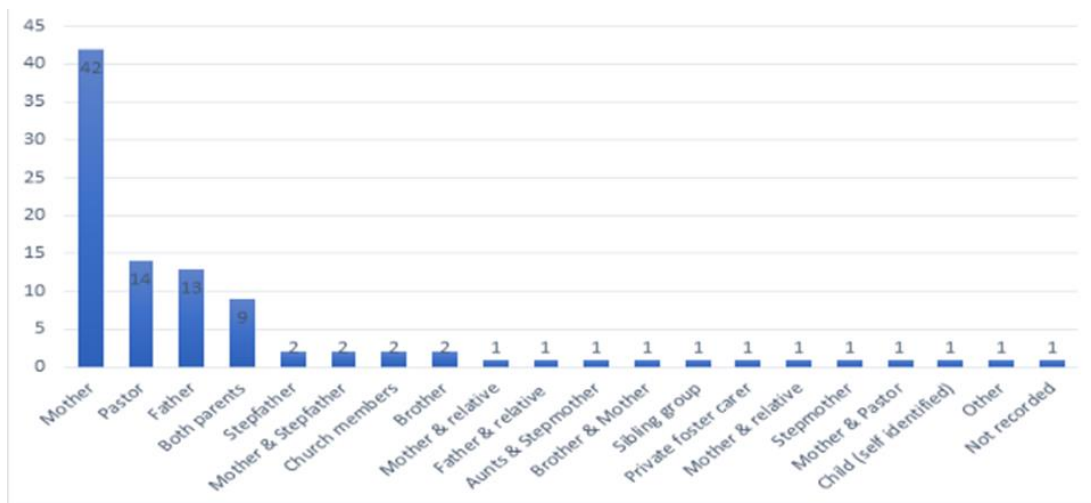


The presence of pastors (14) being singly responsible for accusing a child suggests the influencing role of the church in "diagnosing" and 'delivering' children. The cases involving pastors accusing children led to them taking steps to achieve a deliverance. In one case, a group of 10 children with four being a sibling group, were accused by a pastor who went on to conduct a deliverance in the presence of adults, some of whom were parents/carers of the children. Of significance is that none of the adults present raised concerns about the welfare of

the children. The inaction of communities to safeguard these children is further discussed in 5.7. Unauthorised foster carers as accusers have featured elsewhere in research which further indicates how such arrangements increase the vulnerability of these children to abuse (Stobart, 2006). There was one case involving an unauthorised private foster carer as an accuser, and the child involved was consequently placed into the care of the local authority. Figure 11 further shows a total of 20 cases, involving 22 children, where the child was accused by more than one person, such as both parents (9), parent and relative, parent and pastor or parent and stepparent.

There were also cases of children accused by a brother (2), a sibling group of sisters (1) and jointly by a brother and mother (1) (see Figure 11). In all the cases where siblings were the accusers, they were adults implicated in physically and emotionally violent behaviour towards their accused siblings. In one case, a sibling accuser admitted to historical sexual abuse of the accused sibling and in another case, the brother and mother accused the child, and the former took the accused to a faith leader to be exorcised. Families convening and congregating together to conduct a group exorcism featured in cases, and an example of this occurred within a hospital setting following an accusation by the child's brother. The family then held the child down and engaged in what was described as an exorcism. Common themes in cases of siblings as accusers are their Muslim background, the accused being girls believed to be possessed by a jinn; action was taken to remove the jinn by violent means.

## 4.8 Parent/carers' and faith leaders' actions to 'deliver' the child

Parents/carers usually engaged in different forms of help-seeking behaviour if they believed their child was a witch or possessed. In many cases, it took the form of either praying, fasting, harming the child through the performance of a deliverance, or seeking help from a faith leader or healer.

Three main groups of faith leaders and healers were sought out for help by family members/carers. These were Christian faith leaders, who were mainly pastors (in one case a Church of England vicar was approached), and imams were the point of contact for Muslim families. Healers were the third group accessed by parents of both Christian and Muslim backgrounds. Case records referred to healers as 'witch doctors' or 'traditional healers'. In three cases, where the family's religion is recorded as Muslim, they sought the help of healers at Ruqyah Centres.[6] In another case, the mother took the child to a "witch doctor". However, in many cases, the family member/carer unilaterally acted and did not seek the advice or intervention of faith leaders to deliver the child.

Twenty cases contained information on the actions taken by the faith leader/healer. The range of actions focused on delivering the child from being a witch or possessed. In two cases, advice was provided by pastors but the details of the advice given was not recorded. A description of what faith leaders did whilst conducting a deliverance or exorcism was not always or fully recorded, and this made it difficult to understand the events that gave rise to these experiences. The reason for the lack of recording is unknown. Based on what available data there is, children were subject to range of practices. One case involved a teenage girl accused of being a witch by her mother, bathed in a potion by a pastor who then made her drink a potion containing 36 limes.

In five cases, the parents either took the child (7) overseas to remove evil spirits or to "cure" them from being a witch or expressed intentions (4) of doing so. One child disclosed being taken to Bangladesh, 'stripped naked and bathed by the imam'. In two other cases, the children and parents believed the intervention of the overseas faith leader was successful. Another case involved a school referring a child to children's social care because of her failure to return to school after a holiday. In this case, the initial concern focused on forced marriage, as the

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[6] Ruqyah is a term referring to the recitation of certain verses in the Quran, which are aimed at removing evil spirits or protecting oneself from evil spirits.

parents objected to the girl having a boyfriend. The child later disclosed to teachers being taken to see a faith leader who performed a ritual to remove an evil spirit believed to be inside her. Cases of children being taken overseas lacked information on the details of the faith leaders involved, or if enquiries were made with the authorities overseas. There was no reference to steps taken to return these children to the UK or to prosecute the parents.

The role of religious figureheads in the financial abuse of congregations seeking deliverance and exorcisms continue to be a growing problem (Foxcroft, 2009). Four cases had information on the remuneration received by faith leaders for their intervention. The largest fee charged involved a mother whose colleague referred her to a man described as a "witchdoctor" to whom she paid £9000 to "cure" her son of autism who was believed to be possessed and when this failed, a further £16,000 was required to be paid. In the three other cases, the amounts paid by parents were £50, £200 and £300.

The evidence suggests that the help sought by parents/carers is not only linked to their religion but to "remedies" dictated by their culture. This mix of cultural and religious approaches to resolving these issues suggests how complex the beliefs are. This requires professional responses that are steeped in an understanding of a child's ecological, social, cultural, religious identities and their environment if they are to be safeguarded. The data also suggests issues concerning transnationalism and the safeguarding of children as some children were moved to other jurisdictions and abused during their supposed deliverance process. However, this is further complicated by the fact that in two cases, children and their parents reported that the help received from faith leaders "cured" them and they reported no abuse occurred. This raises the issue of a child's and parent's human right to practise their religion or belief and when to limit or refuse this right in these cases.

## 4.9 Professional responses to the accused and non-accused

Professional responses to protect children took varying forms of intervention. Some involving the use of legal powers and others making the child subject to a child protection plan. The majority (74) of children remained in the care of parents/carers. A total of 24 accused children were placed into the care of the local authority and of these, half have siblings. The data did not consistently record the section of the Children Act 1989 used to remove the child from the parent/carer's care. However, based on the available information, four children were placed into the care of the local authority with parental agreement (s20 Children Act 1989). Two accused siblings placed into care under s20 refused to return to their mother's care and no recorded information provided an explanation for these children's decision. The police in another case exercised powers available to them under s46 of the Children Act 1989 to protect nine children. Police placed one child under police protection twice, the first time after an allegation of familial sexual abuse and the second time following an accusation that the child was spirit possessed. One local authority took steps to obtain an interim care order following the child being placed under police protection. In a further case, the local authority secured the protection of two children by obtaining a care order under s31 of the Children Act 1989. In one instance, the local authority obtained an emergency protection order to secure the safety of a child.

The police and social workers managed the risks to 12 children via child protection plans and for two children, a CiN plan. Five children placed under police protection were then placed on a child protection plan. The use of a safeguarding agreement, which is a non-legal document drafted by the local authority with agreed actions to be undertaken or behaviour restricted by the parent was used to protect one child. It was not possible to determine the efficacy of using a safeguarding agreement, but this as a safety measure received previous criticism in FGM cases (Carver et al., 2022). A further case involved the placement of an accused baby into a facility with the mother (the accuser), who received 24-hour support to care for the child and no information about the outcome for the non-accused sibling. In another case, a 15 year old accused boy was accommodated in a hostel and no information was available concerning his

experience, or what happened to his older and younger siblings left in the care of their parent. A further example involved a child being removed from his/her parents' care and placed with a family friend after being placed under police protection.

The 12 accused children requiring legal powers to protect them had a total of 26 non-accused siblings. These non-accused siblings were not afforded the same safeguarding responses, as they were left in the care of the parent who alledgely abused the accused. Eleven non-accused siblings became looked after children along with their accused sibling, and for one non-accused sibling, the case file failed to indicate if they were removed from their parent/carer's care. Fourteen non-accused remained in the care of their parent/carer while their accused sibling was placed into the care of the local authority.

The data failed to provide information on the length of time these children remained in the care of the local authority, the length of time separated from their non-accused sibling and the impact this had on sibling relationships. With research emphasising the negative impact of entering the care system, particularly when siblings are separated, it is possible that these siblings' experiences were similar (Monk & Macvarish, 2018).

An interesting finding to emerge concerned the difference made by the presence of siblings following the accusation. Non-accused who witnessed the maltreatment of the accused in some cases reported the abuse to professionals. The data suggests that those reporting the abuse of the accused were significantly emotionally affected by what they had witnessed.  For example, in one case, two siblings who were described as frightened by the abuse of their accused sibling they witnessed. In some cases, the protection of the non-accused was considered alongside that of the accused and the data showed that six non-accused were made the subject of child protection plans alongside the accused. In these cases, the types of abuse experienced included physical and emotional abuse, emotional abuse and neglect, emotional abuse and physical abuse (see Figure 12). Where data are recorded, in 48% of cases the non-accused experienced emotional abuse from witnessing the abuse of the accused (see Figure

12). A further important finding concerned a few cases where the protection of the non-accused child seemed to have been overlooked or ignored despite their being at risk of harm. For example, in one case, only the accused child was made the subject of a child protection plan and not their non-accused sibling despite concerns for emotional abuse of the sibling. CiN plans were used in four cases to protect and support four accused children, but the eight non-accused linked to them were not made subject to these plans.

**Figure 12 Types of abuse experienced by non-accused**
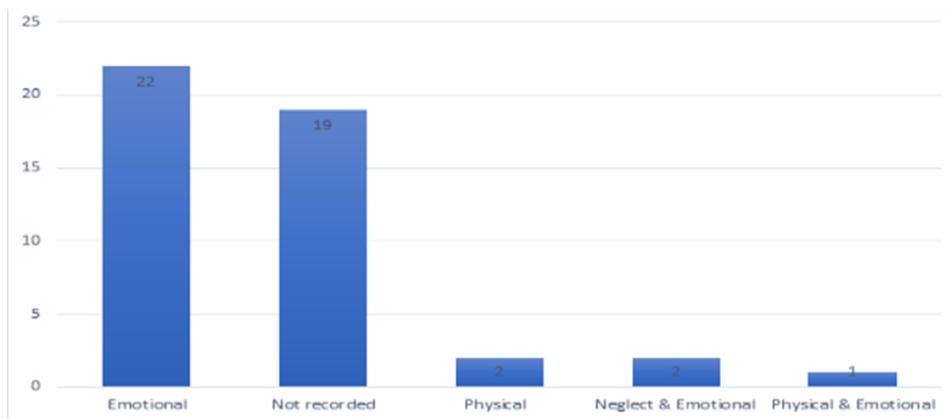


Further evidence of the inconsistent approach used to protect the non-accused concerned the use of child protection measures available under the Children Act 1989. In one case, an accused child was placed under police protection and their two non-accused siblings were left in their parents' care. A further case involved using an Emergency Protection Order to protect another accused child and leaving their non-accused sibling with their parent. This trend of not protecting the non-accused sibling continued in two other cases where the accused children entered the care system voluntarily with parental consent under s20 of the Children Act 1989, but their siblings, 7 in total, remained with their parents. In another case, the police and other professionals were aware of child protection issues before two children were accused, and the local authority secured a Care Order (s31 Children Act 1989) to protect them, but their non-

accused siblings were allowed to remain in their parent's care. This is despite their witnessing the abuse of their accused sibling.

The salient point drawn from this evidence is the unequal professional responses given to the non-accused, which is significant because research continues to draw attention to the increased risk of siblings who live with their abused sibling (Hoffman and Edwards, 2004). The police data provided further evidence of the unequal level of protection afforded to the non-accused in comparison to what was afforded to the accused through the intervention of the Courts.

## 4.10 Professional responses to accusers

Legal action was rarely taken against accusers despite serious crimes committed against children. Nine cases recorded police responses about accusers with none resulting in a conviction. Of these nine cases, seven accusers were mothers and two fathers. The Crown Prosecution Service decided not to prosecute in four cases, one due to insufficient evidence and another because the child refused to give evidence. Two mothers and a father were arrested under caution, but the outcome of this was not recorded and two other mothers received a police caution (one for assault and the other for child cruelty). Despite faith leaders' involvement in allegedly causing harm to children, professional responses failed to take action against them, especially via a legal route leading to criminal conviction. Only two cases resulted in a referral to the local authority designated officer (LADO), who is the local authority professional responsible for conducting investigations against professionals who encounter children as part of their work duties and where it is alleged that they have harmed them. In cases investigated by the LADO, the burden of proof to determine culpability is based on a balance of probability, which is lower than the burden of beyond a reasonable doubt set in criminal law. In cases where the LADO finds that the allegation is founded, this should then be referred to the Disclosure and Barring Service, which is the body that determines the suitability of professionals to work with children and vulnerable adults and if they should be barred from

working with them because of their actions (HMG, 2018). Although some faith leaders allegedly committed crimes against children, many were not questioned or investigated. In addition, there were no attempt to explore the faith leaders' risk to other children, both in their professional and personal life.

## 4.11 Conclusion

The data presented mainly focused on information obtained from the police database. The lack of data available meant that it is not possible to know whether the characteristics of children, families, accusations and professional responses evident within these cases are typical of other areas. Therefore, the picture they draw, whilst not representative, is nonetheless informative. However, this study is the first to use regional and national data where possible to try to draw a profile of the accused and non-accused of WSP, their circumstances and professional responses. A prominent finding is the absence of data recorded based on religious background and on the nature of the allegation. Given the differences in the belief systems based on religion and culture, failure to obtain this information means a full understanding of the child's experiences is absent. Problems with information recording suggest that the reported incidence of WSP is inaccurate and that even less is known about these children. The different data sources overwhelmingly point to Black African, Black Caribbean and Asian children affected as accused and non-accused. However, it is notable that white children also featured in the dataset as being accused. This finding suggests the need to protect all children by engaging with all ethnic groups.

The data suggest that an accusation occurs within the content of a web of other safeguarding concerns and that all children in the household must be considered vulnerable. This is also of significance as the family history of WSP and exploration of previous accusations in the family are factors that must be taken into account when assessing risk to children in these cases.

The evidence suggests that the type of harm meted out can be severe and administered by intimate others and faith leaders both individually and by more than one person and in a group

or community setting. This has implications for how relationships unfold in the home and faith setting. An interesting finding is the role played by non-accused child siblings in voicing concerns for their accused sibling. Additionally, since non-accused siblings are also abused, they can be a vital source of information about what unfolds in the different settings. However, there is evidence that their views are not being considered.

The range of behaviour engaged by accusers suggests a possible lack of insight into the harmful impact, consequences and implications of such behaviour. The multiple forms of harm experienced by the accused were also mirrored in the experiences of the non-accused. Two significant findings are that the majority of children accused and their non-accused siblings remain in the care of the parent, despite them being the alleged perpetrator. The actions of the accusers are seldom criminalised. The failure to instigate criminal proceedings and CSC intervention via LADO points to a worrying trend of accusers not being held accountable for their actions. Whilst it may not always be in the child's interest to prosecute parents for harming their child, the decision not to take action must be based on robust investigation and the case file precedents appear to suggest improvements are required. Many children remain in the care of their parents/carers who have harmed them. The international dimension of these cases is unexplored, as the case record contained no information on the faith leaders or faith organisations overseas where children were taken to be exorcised despite disclosures of abuse in these settings. The need for professionals to be culturally competent was further found in cases where accusations intersected other forms of harmful practices.

The findings presented in the chapter builds on some of the evidence provided by Stobart (2006) and La Fontaine (2009). One drawback concerns the limits of survey data, as it does not allow access to the children and professionals to explore what triggers events at the base level and to obtain first-hand accounts of how children experience abuse. These are questions explored in the next two chapters.

# Chapter 5:

# Understanding the Context, Unfolding and Experiences of Accusations

## 5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present the qualitative data to support and substantiate the understanding gleaned from the quantitative data. The analysed qualitative data has allowed for a deeper understanding of the emotive issues from different perspectives.

The chapter begins with a focus on the contexts within which accusations occur. A thematic analysis of the interview data across participant groups shows that identity features such as ethnicity, nationality and religious persuasion influence how WSP is understood. Therefore, I present the socio-demographic profile of the participants and understanding gained of WSP. The final section focuses on unfolding the experiences of WSP from the perspective of each participant.

## 5.2 Religious, Cultural and Socio-economic factors

The need to understand context is vital, as it helps to explain the context within which accusations occur. This helps to identify factors that might explain why some children might be more at risk and how support services should be designed. To achieve this, I asked participants questions about the context within which accusations occurred. This contextual information evidenced the importance of understanding how religion, culture and socio-economic factors can give meaning to accusations. An exploration of context also enables analysis of the different systems and levels within the system and how they relate to each other.

### 5.2.1 Religion

All the accused, non-accused siblings and parents described religion as a central feature of their family history. They described family life as being marked by the daily performance of religious

practices, which included regular attendance at a church or mosque, reciting family and individual prayers daily, reading religious texts and for those who are Christians, playing only religious music at home. They were also exposed to different religious beliefs that confirmed the existence of witchcraft and/or spirit possession. Michael (accused) provided an example of this:

> Growing up in Matadi, Congo, that was before I came to England, I used to go to church, as my father is a pastor...and he preached about there being witchcraft. My family went to my father's church, and I knew about kindoki (Congolese term for witchcraft) because I saw children being accused. In Congo, there is a lot of this, so I grew up knowing about Kindoki and witchcraft.

The theme of growing up in a religious environment was also present in the parents' accounts, who also discussed the importance of replicating a religious ethos in their family. Riaz (parent) illustrated the need to develop his children's religious identity:

> Yes, I am Muslim and I raise my daughters to practice the religion... Yes, before the Imam said that my daughter had jinn, I practised my religion and followed it. I brought [up] my all my children according to Islam.

Riaz's comment shows how religious beliefs are transmitted from one generation to another and helps to possibly understand Michael's experience through the lens of a parent. Faith and community leaders provided further insights concerning the importance of religion and discussed the importance of faith leaders in people's lives. They believed that these families were often religious because their worldview acknowledged the presence of evil and the need to protect their family through religious engagement. During the interview with Mick and the other Christian faith leaders, they painstakingly spent time showing me or reciting relevant scriptures to confirm their position on this:

The Bible says, we are fighting against principalities and powers in High places, so we need the protection from God...So for my people (Congolese), the church is important and teaching their child the way of God (Mike, pastor).

The validation of the spiritual realm by Mike provides a deep insight into the mindset of those who believe in WSP. It also sheds light on what may be viewed as a binary worldview that is split between the spiritual and physical realm and how only God can offer protection. Professionals also provided insights into the role of religion in these families, which reflected the views of the accused and non-accused. An important finding centred on the religious life of the accused and non-accused before the accusation as being syncretic, that is, involving more than one religious belief system being practised. The mixture of different competing beliefs practised in tandem was presented as being confusing for these participants. One such example is provided by Sid, who grew up in a Christian home but was exposed to other beliefs:

Sid (non-accused): Growing up my dad was into a lot of magic, he was into witchcraft and a lot of spiritual types of things, he had a lot of books, and we used to read a lot of books that my dad had and all very weird things like Ouija Board and Tarot cards.

Leethen: Your dad did these things even though he used to go to church?

Sid: Yes.

Leethen: Did those types of practices cause any problems within the family?

Sid: Erm, at first no one really knew...a lot of people didn't know what kind of stuff my dad was reading and what he had in the house. Me and my brother being very curious, we would look at his books and we will see all of this magic and will read it righteously. Just recently, I found a Bible of Satan in my shed, so I was thinking what the hell was he doing with that.

Leethen: In the first interview, you said that you kind of practiced witchcraft a bit, but you didn't delve into it, is this what you meant?

Sid: Yes.

Leethen: How old were you when this started?

Sid: I was like six, seven years old.

Leethen: So, when did you know about witches and spirit possession.

Sid: I can't remember the exact time but it's like I always knew about it.

Only one professional provided an account of a syncretic religious context. Ian who worked with a sibling group, described:

> The father was a pastor, kind of Christian pastor. The children were being brought up in a kind of Christian quasi-Spiritual witchcraft way (Ian, psychiatrist).

The accounts of the participants point to the role of religion as a necessary part of these children's lives. Religious beliefs and practices commenced at an early age with parents taking an active role in transmitting such beliefs. The expression of faith was not bounded by one faith, as for some, it involved a mixture of religious and occult beliefs. The fact that none of these children's family life was devoid of being religious provides insight into the possible worldview in families.

### 5.2.2 Cultural context

The accused and non-accused participants are all Black African ethnically, and their parents/carers are first generation African immigrants. The two parents interviewed, (Riaz and Tilly), who are Black African, spoke about the cultural context they raised their children in, which centred on replicating as much as possible how they were raised by their parents. For both, culture was as equally important as religious belief. Riaz (parent) explained his views on this in the following comment:

> Being Somali means that I have to teach my children the Somali way. This is different to how the culture is here and how they train their kids. I know how bad it is sometimes, how they [British parents] do it, so I do it our way.

Riaz's comment shows how the need to uphold his culturally influenced childrearing practices holds strong in the face of worrying external influences. This perception of the "other" (British parents) as engaging in "poor" parenting gives Riaz superiority and this reinforces his views on doing it the Somali way. Keeping hold of one's cultural beliefs from their homeland also featured in the accounts of community and faith leaders. These participants discussed how the cultural context of these communities are also being impacted upon by Western society:

> We come to the UK and we don't want to change. We hold on to life "back home" because it is what we know, and this is how we raise our children (Beni, community leader).

"Back home" here is described as a comfort zone and cultural beliefs deemed indispensable. It also highlights why it is important to understand the influence of culture on parenting and the need of professionals to be culturally sensitive and competent. Like Beni, the accused and non-accused participants described their parents' parenting style as being influenced by African culture and described their homes as an "African home":

> Growing up in an African home, everything was about discipline, we was, my parents was very strict, sometimes over the top, unnecessarily over the top, every little thing they was ready to beat you up for anything, that was like a tradition growing up in West Africa, that's how they bring up kids... They didn't try to compromise with modern day tradition (Sid, non-accused).

> I wouldn't say my dad abused us in any way. I think that my dad had this strong African way of raising us. He will beat his children to make them go on the right side, I was taught that way. I believe that but I think he overdid it though. I even say to my dad sometimes, you don't need to beat a child to listen to you or to do something (Alice, accused and community worker).

Punitive parenting is characterised as "African" parenting and interestingly, "African homes" are seen in a negative light. Parenting that was considered obsolete and unchanged by modern influences suggests some insight into Western ideas of what "good" parenting entails and this is juxtaposed with what they experienced. Despite Alice's experiences of harsh parenting, there is

an element of her belief in its efficacy, and an acknowledgement of the motivation to bring children to the 'right side'. However, this approach has a caveat, it is tempered because alternative measures can be used to achieve the same desired outcome that the harsh parenting intended to achieve.

The experience of being parented by African parents/carers and the view that they grew up in an "African" home invariably resulted in these participants describing themselves as African. Based on the accounts of the accused and non-accused, their parents' experience of inherent inequalities influenced their parenting style. Punitive parenting was seen as prerequisite for preparing children for entry into a world unkind to Africans. "Africaness" was crafted as a struggle and the parenting style created a culture of fear within the home for some of the accused and non-accused:

> My dad thought that the more he mistreated us, the more he berated us, the more harder we would work to become better people. I don't know where that came from, that was a cultural thing according to him. He said that we were having it easy, the way I am treating you if you was back in Nigeria it would be much worse. If I beat you, if I hit you, he used to say this is child's play. In his mind, he justified what he was doing because it could be a lot worse in Nigeria. He would say remember you are African in this country, so you are going to be treated a lot worse, so it is better you learn this from your home first before you feel it outside, so being African I kind of believed him to some extent (Kelly, non-accused).

The accused and non-accused participants spoke about there being cultural expectations and understandings of what is childhood. For them, this concept of childhood showed children as respectful of adults' views and as having no agency:

> Growing up we weren't expected to answer back. They expected us to sit there and be quiet and say nothing when they were abusing us. You had to be a quiet, passive child...My older sister [accused] was like our mom, she had to do everything for us, cook, clean, wash and she would sometimes beat us. Then there was the way my parents treated my sister and I because we are girls, we had to look after our brothers not only because they were younger, but because we are girls, that's what they do in Nigeria... They used to take out my brothers to McDonalds and they would come back home with it and not bring any for us, mind you there was no food in the house (Kelly, non-accused).

Cultural expectations about children's behaviour inculcates a sense of helplessness on their part. Kelly's account of how girls are disadvantaged in comparison to boys draws attention to the influences of patriarchy on perceptions of childhood and how such ideology can create a cultural context.

### 5.2.3 Socio-economic context

For many of the accused and non-accused, the accusation occurred within a context of deprivation and economic hardships. For example, the community leaders discussed the socio-economic consequence of being a migrant and refugee, which was based on their first-hand experience. This primarily focused on descriptions of a community on the economic fringes of society (see Briggs et al., 2011) because of their precarious status. Beni described the following:

> I came here from Congo and I suffered for 10 years because I didn't have my papers [indefinite leave to remain in the UK]. Many of these families are just like this, they suffer, they do a little work here and there and they have to live that way (Beni, community leader).

This view of the community as an "underclass" also appeared in the experience of the non-accused and all but one accused. Their accounts of childhood poverty contributed to the development of a further sense of being different and disadvantaged at a young age. Sid and Alice discussed this in the following comments:

> In my life, I have seen poverty in different levels because growing up here we didn't have nothing. I remember eating rice and ketchup growing up [laughs], yeah and going to your friend's house and trying to be indirect and ask for food. Seeing that they eating something and it is just like what about me, and trying to give signals, so I know what poverty was here (Sid, non-accused).

> If we had breakfast at home and we go to school and have lunch that's it and then having to see all your friends with one pound. At the time £1:50 was a lot of money. Yeah, and my friends will have sometimes £2 and I will be like wow, you got £2 and I got nothing

and they will be like, how come you don't have money man you are poor aren't you. You know, and having to admit all that is hard (Alice, accused and community worker).

Parent participants also gave detailed accounts of deprivation. Their accounts similarly shed light on being a migrant and refugee and the struggles of settling in a new country:

> I came here from Somalia because of the civil war. When I came here it was not easy you know. It was a struggle, not speaking English. My situation was not good but it was better than Somalia. It took a long time before this changed. Being on benefits was not good. Raising my children then was hard (Riaz, parent).

These challenges faced by the community were also acknowledged as a legitimate experience by some professionals, who recognised the deprivation faced by the accused and non-accused children they worked with:

> I remember working with a family, mother had come to the UK and overstayed, so had No Recourse to Public Funds and dependent on the children's father. You know what, she still used to give the church money although she didn't have. Instead of using the little she had to care for the children, she gave it to the church (Yasmeen, psychotherapist).

Yasmeen's comment draws attention to the competing interests of parents who despite facing deprivation balance religious adherence to give money to the church against the needs of children. This is a point of contention that was also highlighted by the accused and non-accused:

> My mother used to give all of her money, the little she had to the church and we had to do without. There were times when we did not have food or electricity and we had to do without. No crisps or sweets or anything like that. She used to give my sister £1 for lunch money and she used to buy sweets for us with that...Me and my brother used to go to steal at the local shops and I also used to steal from other children's lunch boxes. I remember my mom used to give us bread and butter to take to school and one day I told her that other children laughed at me because of my lunch and it improved slightly after that (Kelly, non-accused).

The context provided by the accused and non-accused compared to the parent's account offers two overlapping perspectives of the struggles of living in deprivation. It is against this backdrop

that life was experienced for these children. Diana is the only accused who did not come from a deprived background. This is illustrated in the following comment:

> I was born in America because my mother had existing health issues, so she wanted me to be born there and to get health care...I came to the UK to attend school…My parents own businesses and they were able to send me to the UK to attend school to protect me from what has happening (Diana, accused).

Diana's comment shows that accusations can occur in economically secure families and how wealth can provide a layer of protection. What Diana's parents achieved would have been difficult for the majority of families from Black African communities because they are at the lower end of the socio-economic ladder. Therefore, while Diana's experience provides a different understanding of the socio-economic experience, this is vastly dissimilar to that experienced by others.

## 5.3 Socio-demographic and identity profiles of interviewees

Table 6 presents information about participants' ethnicity, sex, religion and/or beliefs, and roles, as the background to examining how the participants conceptualised, experienced and understood accusations of WSP against children. As discussed in Chapter 3 (see 3.4.6), the sample includes both those with direct lived experience of encountering WSP in their personal lives and those responsible for safeguarding them. The majority are of a Christian background, which limits understanding of the issue from other religious perspectives. The professionals in the sample do not reflect the differences of all professional backgrounds. However, their first-hand experience of working on cases enabled them to provide insights about their experiences of WSP. Three of the four faith leaders were Christians and the fourth an Imam. The faith healer (hijama practitioner) is a Muslim female of British Asian background. The accused and non-accused siblings were of a West African background; all describing themselves as Christian at the time of the accusation. Two accused and one non-accused sibling have since left their Christian faith and now describe themselves as believing in a higher celestial being not linked to any religion.

**Table 6: Individual Participant Profiles**

| No | Pseudonym | Participant type | Sex | Ethnicity | Religion/No religion (at time of allegation) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Diana | Accused | Female | Black African (Nigerian) | Christian |
| 2 | Alice | Accused & Community Worker | Female | Black African (Congolese) | Christian |
| 3 | Michael | Accused | Male | Black Africa (Congolese) | Christian (now Agnostic) |
| 4 | Cathy | Accused | Female | Black African (Ivorian) | Christian |
| 5 | Kelly | Non-accused | Female | Black African (Nigerian) | Christian (now Agnostic) |
| 6 | Sid | Non-accused sibling | Male | Black African (Nigerian) | Christian |
| 7 | Riaz | Parent | Male | Black African (Somalian) | Muslim |
| 8 | Tilly | Parent | Female | Black African (Nigerian) | Christian |
| 9 | Yasmeen | Psychotherapist | Female | Black African (Somalian) | Muslim |
| 10 | Ian | Psychiatrist | Male | White European | Christian |
| 11 | Anna | Social Worker | Female | Black British (Black Caribbean) | Christian |
| 12 | Aquila | Social Worker & Pastor | Female | Black British (Black Caribbean) | Christian |
| 13 | Agnes | Social Worker | Female | White British | Jewish |
| 14 | Bailey | Social Worker | Female | White British | Atheist |
| 15 | Yemi | Social Worker & Pastor | Female | Black African (Nigerian) | Christian |
| 16 | Mike | Pastor | Male | Black African (Nigerian) | Christian |
| 17 | Winston | Pastor | Male | Black African (Congolese) | Christian |

| 18 | Jan | Pastor | Female | Black British (Black Caribbean) | Christian |
|----|-----|--------|--------|--------------------------------|-----------|
| 19 | Hamid | Imam | Male | Black African (Somalian) | Muslim |
| 20 | Hamida | Hijama Practitioner (faith healer) | Female | British Asian (Pakistan) | Muslim |
| 21 | Timothy | Community Leader | Male | Black African (Congolese) | Christian |
| 22 | Beni | Community Leader | Male | Black African (Congolese) | Christian |

Their shift in religious beliefs occurred because they believed that Christian beliefs were the driving force behind the abuse and this engendered strong feelings against the religion as illustrated by Kelly's (non-accused) comment:

> Because of what happened to me, I am more open-minded to different types of religion, I don't believe that there is only one religion, I don't believe there is one way to practice a faith. I am more spiritual more than anything, I wouldn't say that I am religious...I believe that I don't follow anything, I don't read the Bible, I don't do anything like that, but I believe there is a higher power, I believe that has worked for me.

Whilst some participants developed an individualised and personal construction of a God, which was as a result of their experience related to WSP accusations, others did not experience a shift in their religious belief. They continued to practice Christianity and this helped to build their resilience:

> When my mom [stepmother] used to beat me, call me witch, I used to pray to God to protect me. I would cry a lot... Once I had a dream, this white tall man wearing a white dress and looking at it, it was a picture of Jesus and he carried me, I was being carried and I said, am I coming to heaven and he said to me, you will come to heaven, be strong. Just be strong, yeah and sometimes I think, dreaming about him it is kind of like, it built me up and made me who I am today, that's why I always walk with positive thinking. I know that nobody can hurt me because I got God inside me (Alice, accused and community worker).

Alice and the others like her, described an active, continuing engagement with their faith, which continues to be a core part of their identity. Therefore, the current religious identity of the accused and non-accused is characterised by a belief in some sort of God and is divided between those who believe in a personal God and those who believe in a Christian God.

All the accused, non-accused, family members, faith leaders and community leaders were of Black African ethnicity but only 3 of the 7 professionals were Black African. The others were White British and White European. With most of the social work, psychotherapy and psychiatry workforce being undertaken by those of a White ethnic background (Cabinet Office, 2019) the children concerned are most likely to encounter professionals from another background, so it is vital to understand how White professionals make sense of the issue and if they are culturally attuned to the needs of these children.

### 5.3.1 Additional socio-demographic profiles

The average age at the time of the accusation was nine years old (see Table 7). Though their interviews demonstrated remarkable recall of events even though they are now adults, we cannot know whether there is more information that would have been included had the interviews occurred directly after the events. Additionally, it is possible that their subsequent life experiences may have altered their recall of events. However, interviewing these participants as adults gives the additional benefit of hearing their reflections on the long-term impact of an WSP accusation. The passage of time also makes it likely for the recollection to be less traumatic given the distance from the event and how they have conceptualised the events over time.

**Table 7: Age at time of the accusation and at time of interview**

| Participant | Age at time of accusation | Age now |
|---|---|---|
| Diana (accused) | 5 | 21 |

| Alice (accused) | 10 | 35 |
|---|---|---|
| Michael (Accused) | 10 | 26 |
| Cathy (Accused) | 11 | 21 |
| Sid (Non-accused) | 8 | 27 |
| Kelly (non-accused) | 11 | 30 |

## 5.4 Accusations of spirit possession and witchcraft: how are they understood?

This section focuses on a theme 'the spiritual world is the real world', generated through analysis of how participants made sense of what accusations meant and represented. The spiritual world is seen as an alternate world operating alongside the physical world where humans exist. It is occupied by spirits, demons, ghosts and other entities. The accounts show multiple divergent understandings of WSP, developed through religious beliefs, the media and professional practice.

### 5.4.1 Meanings: slippage in understanding what is spirit possession and witchcraft

Understandings of WSP from the perspective of the accused and non-accused are of particular importance as they demonstrate the views of those most directly affected. These participants had a consistent understanding of WSP and referenced their religion and African identity as factors contributing to their knowledge of it. This comment by Alice provided a clear account of how these participants understood what is witchcraft and spirit possession:

> Spiritually, I am a Christian, so basically, we believe in the devil, Satan, and those spirits, you can't see them... We as in the Congolese community we already know about this and sometimes it was like an everyday thing... There are evil spirits that can actually enter you spiritually, not physically, and that person cannot harm you physically they can harm you spiritually...A witch is someone who already knows I am a witch, I can fly spiritually, I can do you harm and knows who he or she is. Someone is spiritually possessed; she or he may be doing something evil that she or he is not aware of that... (Alice, accused and community worker).

A few other participants similarly understood WSP along the same lines as the accused and non-accused. They also used their religious and ethnic identity to help articulate the meaning:

> From my view as an African, what I can say is that African people do believe in witchcraft, which is the power, supernatural power a person can use to harm other people that is what we call witchcraft. Spirit possession is, a person could be possessed with good spirits, which you can use to help people. But the evil spirit can possess someone and that person is going to behave wrongly, doing things that's going to harm other people. There is a link with witchcraft but witchcraft is something which is in a person and spirit possession can come to anyone but it is not anyone that can be a witch. It's particular people who can be a witch (Timothy, community leader).

Of significance are instances where there were marked differences in understanding the meaning of witchcraft and spirit possession.

*Spirit possession*

In chapter 1, it was noted that no universal definition of WSP exists. These terms mean different things to different people, based on their religion and culture and are influenced by time and place of origin. Within this sample however, parents, Christian faith leaders, community leaders and some social workers had fairly similar definition for spirit possession. Their understandings of spirit possession is based on a religious model, which described it as the occupation of the human body by a foreign entity:

> Demons and evil spirits exist. These things are real and the word of God says these things are real...Spirit possession is when an evil spirit, demons and these things enter you and take over control and causes you serious issues, this is spiritual (Jan, pastor).

The two professionals who defined it differently were the psychiatrist and psychotherapist. Their understanding of spirit possession was framed by a bio-medical model influenced by their professional training and working in a medical setting. These two participants defined it in the following ways:

> It is a kind of state, physical state, state of mind, spiritual state where one experiences being possessed by spirits, so that spirit is living in that person, or someone else thinks someone is possessed by the spirit and then, their behaviour is being controlled by a spirit (Ian, psychiatrist).

So, spirit possession from my personal perspective would be something that hmmm some kind of distress they would convey; some distress they would convey. And they would not be able to put it down to any medical diagnosis or cause or traumatic cause; so it would be unexplained distress that they are not able to explain in any other sort of measurable way...it would be causing you some kind of distress and the only way you could describe it would be from a spiritual perspective (Yasmeen, psychotherapist).

The way Yasmeen chose to define WSP conflicts with her religious beliefs, as she later acknowledged the existence of Jinns:

Muslims believe in Jinns, so as a Muslim, I believe there are Jinns, spiritual beings. I haven't grown up with these things around me, but I believe they exist.

Yasmeen's two different definitions raise questions about how professionals may hold contradictions within their own beliefs and professional values/standards. There is also a further question concerning, what mechanisms allow them to act professionally whilst holding alternative beliefs? A further alternative understanding of spirit possession accepted the existence of evil spirits but denied that these entities can possess an individual. This understanding of spirit possession postulated by Hamid (Imam) provides an alternative view of the phenomenon:

In Islam, we believe Allah created jinns from smokeless fire... There are some Muslims who believe that jinns can possess people, but I do not believe this. Jinns are powerful, but God created humans to be more powerful than jinns. This is why they can't harm you, jinns cannot possess you. I do not believe in possession by jinns.

Hamid's view as a Muslim faith leader differs from the other Muslim participants who witnessed seeing a spirit possessed person:

Hamida (Hijama practitioner): Evil spirits, jinns, exists and it possesses people. I have seen it possess people...Jinns are spirits, evil spirits, the Qur'an talks about jinn. There is a book in the Qur'an on it. It was created like humans and exist in the spirit world.

*Witchcraft*

There were also divergent views on witchcraft (witches) among the participants. These views emerged where religious dogma provided no confirmation of its existence.

> From my own faith perspective, I don't think that a child could be possessed, err sorry be a witch. Being possessed, I think that is a possibility...but witches do not exist in Islam (Yasmeen, psychiatrist).

> In my religion, we do not believe in witches. I do not believe in such things (Riaz, parent).

Not believing in witchcraft did not mean a lack of understanding of it. Participants who described themselves as Muslim, namely, Yasmeen, Riaz, Hamid and Hamida, did not believe in witches but still understood witchcraft. This understanding was nurtured through what they had seen in the media, the cases they had worked on or in conversations with others:

> I think the first time I heard about it was after Victoria Climbie and other cases...It is when they think a child has powers, something psychic and they can harm other people (Yasmeen, psychiatrist).

This understanding of witchcraft via professional practices was also the means through which White participants who did not believe in it developed an awareness of it. An understanding of witchcraft was relevant for Ian (psychiatrist), Bailey (social worker) and Agnes (social worker) and is illustrated in the following comments:

> I suppose in terms of my theoretical underpinning knowledge, I feel that it is something that I have learnt on the job, rather than something that I have had significant experience of. It was not something that I focused on in training, it was more when I had my first case of exorcism, I had to start thinking about where these beliefs come from and the impact of such beliefs and how firmly held they are and how that could relate to the safety of the child. I think at the start, I mean I wouldn't call myself experienced in it but I have had a couple of cases that have you know, mostly kind of church-based cases have involved spirit possession and exorcism. So, they are separate things I know they can be seen, I think it is only the family has labelled them, one of them labelled it as exorcism, and one was spirit possession deliverance. So...I don't know, it is a really interesting area, it is really complicated (Bailey, social worker).

I had heard about it in books in the Jewish community, through literature and when I was a teenager read a book that included it but beyond that as a social worker, I attended some training around spirit possession and witchcraft... My understanding and it's limited, I use spirit possession to talk about beliefs in a supernatural element, in that supernatural realm it has the power or powers to inhabit people or affect people and direct their decisions and actions and that there are ways in which the human realm or the supernatural realm can be brought together. And witchcraft I have less experience with, I haven't looked into it as much but my understanding is that their beliefs that certain people possess powers beyond the human and they can be called witches...Families that I have worked with talk about black magic or "African" magic and some of that could be good but used by the wrong people might be harmful and very dangerous (Agnes, social worker).

There is a marked difference between Agnes' and Bailey's attempt to articulate their understanding of WSP. There is also a sense of a distance between them and what they are referring to. Agnes attempts to convey her understanding of it by articulating concepts of a spiritual realm, its crossover with the physical world and the ability to possess supernatural powers. Bailey on the other hand struggles to define it and shows limited insight. This possibly highlights difficulties engaging with and understanding the cultural and religious beliefs of others. It further suggests that cultural and religious competence should be the core to any training and professional practice (Furness and Gilligan, 2010).

There were two social workers whose understanding of WSP appeared contradictory and conflated, eschewing different concepts about the supernatural. Such understandings seemed confused and included ideas that did not relate to WSP:

Erm, so with witchcraft my understanding of it is when a family or a group of people believe a person is possessed with evil spirits, so they believe that the child is like also a witch or they got evil spirit inside of them and they believe the child is possessed with ancestors from the past coming back into their bodies, so they go back to the openings and then the child is evil and therefore curses things around them and bring misfortune to people around them, so they blame the child, scapegoat the child for the person [accuser] it's okay. And spirit possession is more when, I think it is more religious where a bit like ritual abuse in that type of concept as well where they believe in spirits, the holy spirit, so where the other one was witch has an evil like the Wizard of Oz witch, the spirit

one is much more powerful or where they believe like God and the devil, it is more the devil rather than being a witch. Do you understand? (Anna, social worker).

This understanding of WSP raises concerns about professional knowledge and responses. It is of significance because these professionals have worked with the accused and non-accused and understanding WSP is an important part of safeguarding them. Professional responses will be discussed in the 6.4.

## 5.5 Witchcraft and spirit possession: a matter for the generations

Many participants shared their views of those they considered responsible for children being spirit possessed or a witch. Their view suggests that WSP accusations point to a generational and systemic issue within families. The Christian faith leaders and some accused and non-accused believed responsibility rested in the hands of older generations. One example of how this is understood is provided in the following comment:

> A child can be possessed or can be in witchcraft but only an adult train him to make him to be so. You know when people see this child as demon possessed or a child witch, the question is this, they may say this, I have seen a little snake here, that means the mother snake is not far from this place, because that little snake does not appear by themselves. So, if you see a child is possessed or a witch, they must have got it from somewhere, if you call them a witch someone has trained them (Mike, pastor).

Mike's explanation suggests that a child accused is symptomatic of a wider issue linked to adults who are responsible for the situation. Snake has a Biblical connotation of being evil, so Mike's snake analogy illuminates understanding that there is a perilous situation and points to concerns that children being witches or spirit possessed signify a tainted bloodline. Mike goes on to speak of children as being unaware of their state and advises that the solution should focus on the adults who initiated the child:

> Children do not know that they are possessed or not, they are not really aware of anything. They can't harm you, it is the adult who initiated them. Children, they can

change, if and, depending on the environment, depending on the people around them what they are going to teach them or what they are going to tell them.

The interesting point in the above comment is the belief that children could be possessed or be a witch but have no ability to cause harm. Mike's view that accused children cannot cause harm is similar to Evans Pritchard's (1937) who found that whilst the Azande people from Central Africa believed children can be witches, they thought that the witchcraft element in children is too small for them to harm others.

Jan and Yemi also shared similar views to Mike concerning identifying the source of the problem when a child is accused:

> A child can become possessed or witch if the mother or family member has passed it onto that person. For example, in a drink they have done something to, actually done something with the drink and given to the child, once the child has taken it they sleep, if you sleep at night that child, the person who gave the child that drink will spiritually come out from his or her body and takes the child. Basically, they have opened the child's eyes already. They can actually take the child to go into the spiritual world to destroy other people (Yemi, pastor and social worker).

These participants suggest scrutiny of adults is needed because they are the evil ones, whilst children lack agency and are portrayed as unwitting accomplices. This focus on parental involvement suggests that communities with similar beliefs may ostracise the entire family and not just the accused child. Therefore, parental actions to deliver or exorcise the accused child is possibly an attempt by adults to protect themselves from also being accused. This deeper focus on accusations being generational also featured in the narrative of other participants but this was not understood in the same way as understood by Mike, Jan and Yemi. These accounts focused on parents and adult family members who were accused as being spirit possessed or a witch:

> I actually have an uncle who from my family back home, one of my uncles, he was doing witchcraft, he was a witch when he was delivered from the church. He spoke about it and according to him, he was given that from his, it was passed on from his dad (Alice, accused).

Alice reveals three generations being accused of being witches in her family and the mode of passing it on hereditarily. Like Alice, Kelly, a non-accused, shared a story of her mother being labelled a witch for the alleged murder of her father's partner:

> Kelly: Our father had a mistress that died in childbirth. I don't mean to call her a mistress as that sounds derogatory, but he had this other woman in Nigeria that died after giving birth. My mother was accused of killing her by people in Nigeria, of killing her; they said she (her mother) was a witch.
>
> Leethen: What did your father think?
>
> Kelly: I don't know but he used to do strange things. When it happened, he used to make us taste his food after this woman died, he thought that our mother would poison him, so he used to make us taste his food before he ate it. At first, I used to be happy that my father would give me his food, but years later I found out it was because he thought our mother would poison him. How horrible, he would do that to his children.

Kelly's account point to an issue concerning "love rivals" and how WSP beliefs could be used to explain conflict. This matter of "love rivals" also featured in the accounts of Cathy and Alice (accused) believed it the tensions between parents and step-parents led to an accusation:

> Yeah, my step-mom and my mom know each other from back home and they never liked each other because of my dad. She [step-mom] she didn't like my mom and she used to beat me because she didn't like my mom [Cathy, accused].
>
> I didn't know all of this until later on. They didn't get on and me, I got caught in it. All this happened because she didn't like my mom [Alice, accused and community worker].

These participants' accounts highlight factors associated with family dynamics and generational conflict. It suggests that family members have knowledge of accusations occurring across the generations. This is an important finding as it demands that attention is focused on exploring family history of WSP accusations, how past accusations have been managed and the need to explore outcomes for those previously accused.

## 5.6 Accusations: the backstory and the 'right thing' at the time

In all accounts provided by participants, there was a history, usually a series of traumatic events experienced by the accused, their siblings and families, some continuing for several years that culminated in the accusation. Of significance are the events that triggered the accusation. These accounts included harrowing narratives of abuse, financial problems, marital problems, immigration problems, parental/carer alcohol abuse, bereavement and illness:

> Before our mum passed away, she asked one of her brothers to help her to bring up one of her kids in England. So, I was chosen and I stayed with my uncle and his wife who I came here with. So, I was supposed to call them my parents. They were my parents in the paperwork they did. So, they were my parents and nobody knew about that so, and when I moved here my mom had just died and I didn't have time to grieve and I had to call her (aunt) my mom (Michael, accused).

It became clear from all participants an accusation commonly occurs at a point of serious disruption in family life. When it does, it is an attempt to label, define and so legitimise taking action to remedy their situation. It is the starting point of trying to achieve a solution and is viewed as the "right" thing to do for those who believe their circumstances are unbearable. Michael's backstory of the death of his mother is a point of disruption. For those who believe that they are under attack by the accused, it is an overwhelming experience which results in taking steps to protect oneself, family members and the non-accused. The actions taken are abusive towards the accused but are deemed necessary:

> So, if I give you an example of a case that I worked with of a little girl, who behaviour became erratic and the child probably was exhibiting behaviours, which the girl could not understand that could be things like epilepsy. Often children with epilepsy and fits are deemed to be possessed. This mother became concerned about the child's behaviour, she was also experiencing financial difficulties, things were going wrong in her life and she felt this child was possessed caused her problems. She went to her pastor. The pastor prayed over this child and said to the mother, yes indeed your child is possessed. Now, that mother was revealed to identify the issue (Aquila, social worker and pastor).

Aquila's comment depicts circumstances under which a child's life of abuse starts. An accusation provides the space through which family problems are framed, actions are justified, solutions acted upon, and this is viewed as "a good thing" by accusers.

## 5.7 Crime of the family and community

Research shows that child abuse is under-reported because it occurs in private (Mok, 2008). All participants' narratives pointed to accusations and abuse occurring at home, but these accounts also showed other sites, like the community, faith organisations and in the full gaze of relatives, community members and religious congregations. It is unsurprising that accusations occurred in the family and faith setting, as this is well documented in the literature. However, the role of the community as a witness, as direct and indirect perpetrator and accuser has been overlooked. How this is manifested is illustrated in the following account:

> For example, the parents were told [by the pastor], if your child is being naughty but that included like a baby crying, then the way to resolve it is by hitting them with a belt until they stopped crying and they had to do types of exorcism outside the leisure centre at midnight and it was in public. The children were hit with belts and wires and it was supposed to be spiritual. It was a kind of systematic way of doing it (Bailey, social worker).

A further point registered by Bailey, found in the accounts of other participants, concerns linkages between accusations and a bystander culture. Put differently, this relates to the community's involvement in crimes of commission and omission, which allows accusations and abuse to continue in the presence of others. This raises an obvious question about why this occurs in this community? A possible explanation for this arose in the accounts provided by some of those interviewed. These participants commented on steps taken by the community to disassociate itself from the accused and this influences why acts of commission and omission occur. This is illustrated in the comments by Beni and Timothy:

People in the community know what is happening to these children but they will do nothing about it. If they find out a child is a witch, they would say don't associate with them, they would keep their children from being with that child (Beni, community leaders).

They [the community] don't know the spiritual state of the children who are going to come to an event. So, don't send your children there. In French they say 'a tadam' [spelt phonetically] it means the spiritual state. So the souls of those people you don't know their soul, are they witches or not? How can you send those children to those events? (Timothy, community leaders).

In both of these accounts, the accused is seen as unworthy and undeserving. The "dirt" they embody is soul deep, and this places them at the periphery of the community, or not to be associated with. Timothy's comment also sheds light on the precautionary steps taken by the community to protect themselves from children believed to be witches and others whom they suspect. This overlaps with Alice's discussion below (see 5.8.2) concerning violence towards the child being seen as directed towards the evil in them and not the child itself. Timothy went on to provide further insight into how the community works to isolate and shun those accused:

In 2003, we were running a supplementary school and the children in the case involving a well-known child witch case [Child X] and that lady of the two children who witnessed the abuse of Child X was attending the supplementary school and other mothers told others that they had to be careful because the children in the Child X case who are involved in that case may be witches and they are attending the supplementary school. Sometimes, I will call the mothers and say to them that we are going to start the class, where are your children and they will say daddy I don't want my children to go to the school because of the two children in the Child X case (Timothy, community leaders).

Timothy's experience of his interaction with parents, draws attention to their religious and cultural worldview and how communities understand and make sense of the threat posed by the accused and non-accused associated with them. Concerns with stigma and ostracisation present as issues for the accused and non-accused, which continues long after the accusation. These parents' actions also suggest fears of risk of contagion and possibly a loss of one's social status if

"infected". The main point here is that for communities to respond in this way, they need to have a collective understanding of pollution and knowledge of how to nullify it.

Apart from the abuse occurring within a group and/or community environment and within a public and private space, an important feature involved the fluidity with which accusers operated across different settings. Another feature was how interactions and relationships unfold and the experience of the accused across different sites. Bailey's (social worker) account showed how this occurred in a case involving a girl:

> There was an argument between her parents which is kind of interconnected, she started behaving really strangely for example, shouting, screaming, pulling her hair out, vomiting, not responding to her name when she was being asked what's wrong, what's wrong. What the step-mum said, remember the step-mum is the pastor, there were members of the church visiting whilst she went out to call the girl's father. They took her into the toilet, I don't know where it came from, but the step-mum started to film as the girl was being held down by three different people, members of the congregation and they started to beat her on the stomach shouting for the devil to get out of her. So, I think that the way she was behaving for whatever reason the people interpreted it as her being possessed...Initially, I was told that nobody else came back to the home, and step-mum was saying that I don't have anything to do with this, I don't believe in this but then we later found out that her and two other members of the congregation involved in beating her had come back [home] with them.

Bailey's comment, like others mentioned above, challenges the view that the abuse is hidden. Those in faith and community settings in positions of power can have intimate access to the home and community. This insight suggests that professional responses should consider all the settings traversed by the accused and non-accused and identification of those directly and indirectly involved in different settings.

## 5.8 What happens when an accusation occurs and how is it experienced?

### 5.8.1 Fear, shock and disbelief

None of the accused appeared to have any intimation that an accusation would be levelled against them, so being accused was marked by fear, shock and disbelief. The accusation had an immediate emotional effect because they had an acute awareness of the consequences of being labelled a witch or spirit possessed. The professionals' contact with the accused and non-accused often occurred sometime after a "deliverance", so a gap existed between the accusation and when the professional became involved. These participants (professionals) described the accused as experiencing fear and shock caused by the deliverance ritual, which involved harming the child.

> I remember this one case where the boy was taken overseas and he was held down and his stomach cut and from what I understand to release the demon inside him. There was mobile phone footage of this. The boy was distressed, crying and frightened (Yasmeen, psychotherapist).

While an accusation is a damaging experience, what appeared to make the experience worse is the accuser being kin. The continued abuse and heightened threat increased the level of fear experienced by the accused. Added to this, the fear of harm occurred across different settings:

> One time my uncle came home drunk, and he was shouting where is that witch boy and he came to my room and was shouting all kinds of things at me. Boy, I was frightened. They used to also keep me up at nights and say not to sleep because I am a witch and it is at nights I go kill people. I remember one time I went to visit my other uncle in North London. He was also angry with me and wanted to kill me and I was frightened of him...I was tired of them accusing me and one Sunday I decided that I had enough, so I decided to run away from home. I used to ride on the night bus, and it was frightening because I was just a kid (Michael, accused).

The sense of shame felt by the accused stemmed from accusations and "deliverances" occurring in the presence of others outside the family. This mainly occurred in a faith setting in the presence

of other congregants. In all cases, accusations were first made by parents/cares and then confirmed by a faith leader:

> Tilly (parent): Yes, I believed the pastor when he said my daughter was possessed.
>
> Leethen: Okay, but did you believe that she was possessed before the pastor said so?
>
> Tilly: Yes, I believe that she was possessed, because she was behaving in a strange way and saying things about the devil will get us and all these things.

Therefore, accusations were levelled twice and by two significantly powerful individuals in the child's life. This meant that they re-lived the fear, shock and shame and this was further aggravated by the experience of the faith leader's accusation and "deliverance" occurring in the presence of congregants. For some, both accused and non-accused, this often led to a need to stop attending the place of worship:

> When my mother [stepmother] accused me, she took me to church and the priest told me it was true. I couldn't say anything. I didn't believe it was happening to me. I didn't want to go to church again, you know everyone knowing about me. It was terrible (Alice, accused and community worker).

The shock and disbelief often converged with and led to a strong sense of denial of their new unwanted status of being labelled a witch or spirt possessed. However, knowledge of religious texts was used in some cases to debunk the accusation but not necessarily the belief in WSP:

> I just didn't believe it. Those things are the false negatives, the devil, once the devil knows how to play with your mind and he will put a lot in your mind. Once you live with a positive mind the devil can't get to you, and is once you think something negative, what does the Bible say, think positive and you will not be living like this (Alice, accused and community worker).

Whilst religious knowledge was used to discredit accusers, for some participants this served to reinforce the belief that the accusation was correct especially, if made by someone they believed

more knowledgeable. Additionally, since the belief in WSP was validated by their community this made it easier to accept the accusation:

> Yes, at the time when it happened, I believed my sister was possessed because my parents and the pastors had said so (Kelly, non-accused).

From the perspective of the non-accused, the accusation resulted in feelings of fear of their siblings. The lack of a warning sign about the impending accusation and the drastic change in their sibling's behaviour also increased the sense of shock and fear experienced by the non-accused:

> So, when I was 11, I just started secondary school and my sister was 16, it was September 96, we shared a bunk bed in our room, and at 2 o'clock, I woke up and my sister was rambling a lot. So, I was really, really scared, erm. I ran upstairs to tell my parents that my sister was acting really strange and then she started screaming and would not stop. She was screaming about the devil, the devil is, he is on it, you know he has basically come to get us and things like that...She did not sleep and she was screaming and rambling and shouting and they said that there is nothing they can do for her (Kelly, non-accused).

The accused did not initially think their non-accused siblings were affected by the accusation. It was only when exploring more fully the impact of the accusation that their understanding of the experiences of their non-accused siblings grew. So, the accused's understanding of the experiences of the non-accused only surfaced when I fully explored it with them. The other participants, professionals, community and faith leaders and parents also overlooked what the accusation would have meant for the non-accused. Jan's (faith leader) response to questions about this showed how attention is directed towards the accused without consideration of the needs of the non-accused sibling:

> Leethen: Do you remember if the child had a sibling?
>
> Jan: Yes, she had a younger sister.
>
> Leethen: What happened to her? Did you have contact with her? What was it like for her in the family?
>
> Jan: No, I can't remember. I didn't have contact with her.

Leethen: How come?

Jan: They brought the sister (accused) to see me and I don't really see other children in the family unless they are the one with the issue.

## 5.8.2 So called 'safety behaviour'

When an accusation occurs parents/carers immediately employed preventative action to secure the safety of the non-accused, themselves and others. By 'safety behaviour', I mean an action directed towards exorcising the "evil" to secure protection. The religious practices involved praying, fasting, restrictions on dress and controlling the non-accused's interaction with relatives. The accused and non-accused were also subjected to rituals such as having to bathe in potions and ingesting unknown substances. These activities occurred in all cases, though the nature of the engagement in religious practice and the types of "safety behaviours" differed. Engaging in "safety behaviours" brought no success. The elusiveness of success after engaging in "safety behaviours" resulted in the need to 'shop around' for further help, and this was accompanied with an increase in religiosity. Tilly (parent) described her experience of subjecting her children to "safety behaviours" and Alice (accused and community worker) about her personal experience:

> Tilly: I started going to church every day, praying all the time and do all these things. I made the children [non-accused siblings] pray and I used to fast a lot... When I saw no change, I would go to another church.
>
> Leethen: How many churches did you visit?
>
> Tilly: I went to a lot.
>
> Leethen: Did any of them help?
>
> Tilly: It would help for a while but in truth nothing changed.
>
> Leethen: What did they tell you to do?
>
> Tilly: [Laughs] I had to pray and one church made me stop wearing pants, it was like I lived in church. I also gave them money but nothing changed, my daughter was possessed.

Alice: My stepmom used to take me to church and made me pray in front of the church. This was embarrassing, and you know how they pray loud and shout at you... She [stepmom] used to separate me from my brother and she beat me.

Leethen: Why did she separate you?

Alice: Because she didn't want him to be a witch too.

Leethen: Why did she beat you?

Alice: She used to beat me. You have to understand that if you believe a child is a witch, they are beating the witch.

Alice's isolation from her brother provides a possible explanation for why siblings are made to engage in "safety behaviours". The risk of contagion and proximity as a risk of pollution demanded the attention of parent/carers. Kelly (non-accused) provided an account of her experience:

> It was like being indoctrinated and losing oneself to the will of the group... You know my mom praying naked, telling us not to close our eyes else we will die or having a perfectly normal holiday to Great Yarmouth and then being told you have to drink the salt water, the sea salt water because you won't become demon possessed and at the same time you get home and being told that the devil is still using you.

"Safety behaviours" are often unwritten rituals that require intimate knowledge about its potency. It also requires strict adherence to what it demands and failure to do so can result in adverse consequences. As the threat of WSP is commonly believed to be linked to family members, the "safety behaviour" is likely to involve steps to reduce contact with them and embarking on activities directed towards nullifying the threat they pose. Breaches are considered a threat to the safety of the immediate family. Sid (non-accused) commented on his experience of this:

> Sid: I would say after my sister was possessed the home environment became hyper religious. We was made to attend church during the week after school, my parents made us pray all the time and we couldn't associate with the other children, not even family. I remember one time I went to play basketball with my cousin and after my father beat me because he said my cousin's father, he said dem people evil, so he beat me. We just had to stay at home or go to church…Yeah, you see after my sister's situation, we was not

allowed to mix with some of our family because my parents thought they caused the situation, so he beat me.

From the perspective of faith leaders, their involvement in nullifying the "evil" was described differently, as it achieved its intended purposes by using "harmless" practices and their involvement also came after parents sought the "wrong" intervention of others:

> Parents come to me all the time to pray to remove Jinn. Sometimes they would come to me after seeing other people who made them do bad things like wear Taweez [an amulet containing scripture worn for protection], or do this, or that, but no that is not right. All you have to do is pray for them, recite the Qu'ran and pray that's all. This works, not all the other things you see (Hamid, imam).

Professionals and community leaders also described types of "safety behaviour" used by parents and faith leaders and the impact on the accused. Collectively they failed to see the benefit of the faith leaders' actions and called into question the legitimacy of their actions. Engagement in "safety behaviour" can also have an international dimension as children are removed overseas (previously discussion in 4.8). Parents/carers are noted for taking such steps following failure of faith leaders in the UK to heal the accused. However, consideration of how non-accused siblings were involved and a recount of their experience was lacking:

> The mother used to go to a church and take the children all night. That church used to do night vigils, so they kept the child up all night praying. This thing is bad because when it didn't work, they would go here and there. One family sent the brother and sister back home [DRC] for deliverance and the church killed him. The sister is still alive in DRC (Timothy, community leader).

Timothy, like others shows how "safety behaviour" can be a continuing process that can result in harm and death. However, from the perspective of faith leader participants, it can also be "harmless" as they viewed it similar to praying. A further issue which is discussed in the next chapter is an engagement of "safety behaviour" as an activity that occurs openly in the presence of others in different settings.

From the perspective of the accused and non-accused, they engaged in "safety behaviour" that focused on self-protection. The types of self-protective behaviour engaged with involved a combination of praying and taking steps to avoid violence being inflicted on them. Of particular interest is the safety behaviour of a religious nature used to obtain spiritual protection from the accused:

> I had friends, Congolese friends as well and Nigerian friends as well. I used to talk a lot about it [accusation] and they will say to me, I remember one of my friends, Martha [name anonymised], she's Nigerian, I remember she told me "In my church we use erm, for your mom to stop doing this to you, you know we have like Holy water, take the Holy water and throw it around your room and it will keep your mom from hurting you or calling you names." But because at the time, I was a very, very strong Christian, the Bible said we do not use anything, we cannot use any objects or anything as gods. We pray in the name of Jesus, so I just used to pray (Alice, accused and community worker).

Engagement in religious activity to counteract abuse highlights a level of awareness at a young age with regard to measures to protect oneself from harm. The identification of her friends' ethnicity shows how different communities with different traditions could share a common understanding of WSP but have different solutions. Although Alice did not follow her friend's advice, the sharing of this information between peers of similar ethnic and religious backgrounds emphasises how a shared understanding of the issue can lead to the development of a support network.

## 5.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored three research questions which focused on the contexts within which accusations occur, how it is understood and what happens when an accusation occurs jointly with how it is experienced. The findings of this research reveal that families come primarily from a background of deprivation. Deprivation combined with religious and cultural beliefs create situations that encourage beliefs in spiritual causes to problems. Limited social capital due to low socio-economic status engenders feelings of being different. An important finding is the view that the belief is intrinsically linked to being African. This is of significance because beliefs associated

with WSP beliefs are mainly negative, so the view that it is intertwined with one's identity has implications about the accused and the non-accused's sense of self-perception.

The multiple understandings of WSP beliefs highlight the need to explore its meanings for all involved. However, it is noteworthy that whilst there are multiple meanings, the study has shown that there is a lack of clarity and muddled understanding of what WSP is. This is likely to create situations where children are not safeguarded and may also create barriers to disclosure (discussed further in the next chapter).

A further significant finding concerns the history of WSP allegations in families and the possible generational trauma this may have caused. This is an issue requiring further exploration especially in terms of how previous generations of the non-accused have been affected and how this is replicated in the current experiences of the non-accused. The history of WSP accusations must also be explored concerning various types of "safety behaviour" relied upon.

The harm caused to the accused and non-accused should not be considered hidden, as it is often played out in environments outside the home environment and in the presence of many different relatives and community members. The act of branding a child a witch or possessed also requires community silence, community involvement and community bystanders. This is partly because communities with these beliefs act out of fear of the accused. Their response should therefore be viewed as a form of self-preservation.

The experiences of the accused and non-accused point to feelings that invoke fear, shock and disbelief. However, failure to recognise that the non-accused experience this emotional response suggests an absence of focus on the needs of these children who have not been accused. This requires attention because the impact on the non-accused also extends to their engagement in "safety behaviour" that can be equally harmful to them as it is to the accused. The matter of "safety behaviour" and what is acceptable and unacceptable especially for faith leaders also

requires further attention. This is an important issue as the current practice allows deliverances in the form of prayer to be performed but there is a lack of clarity on what type of different forms of prayer are permitted. This is further complicated when the accused and non-accused are removed overseas especially to countries with limited infrastructures that can offer protection.

How professionals respond to these issues will be discussed in the next chapter, which also focuses on the medium to long term impact of an accusation and how the accused and non-accused respond to professionals.

# Chapter 6: Impacts of an accusation and the effectiveness of professional responses

## 6.1 Introduction

This chapter is the last of the findings from the data analysed from interviews with the various participants. The focus of this chapter is to address the last three research questions (see 3.4). The multiple perspectives when analysed, generated several themes and sub-themes that highlighted the impact of an accusation over time. It also showed how children perceive and position themselves interacting with professionals and their responses. Whilst the small number of interviews impedes the study's ability to make generalisations, it provides informative and meaningful data that augment the understanding of WSP accusations. It also sheds light on its impact and suggests areas for consideration for the purposes of safeguarding children and improving professional practice.

The first section focuses on analysis of the data from all participants concerning the medium and long-term impacts of an accusation. I discuss these under four emerging themes. These are lost childhood, experiences and outcomes across different settings, mental wellbeing and relationships. The second section focuses on mechanisms which influenced the accused and non-accused responses towards professionals. In the final section, attention is directed to the quality and effectiveness of professional responses with particular attention focusing on what motivated and influenced their practice.

## 6.2 The medium and long-term impacts of an accusation

Media reports and case reviews on WSP have focused on events leading up to and the immediate impact of an accusation (Carmi, 2016; BBC, 2015) and these sources provide limited information about the medium to long-term impacts. Some evidence exists in the research literature concerning the medium-term impact of an accusation on the accused (De Boeck,

2005; Stobart, 2006; La Fontaine, 2009). However, less is known about impact on non-accused siblings. This section presents the voice of the accused and non-accused, with perspectives from other participants concerning the impact of an accusation. It provides data that has not been featured elsewhere and should be viewed as an area of interest for further research.

With many participants experiencing the accusation between the ages of 5-11 years, I have defined the medium-term as up to 5 years after the accusation, and long-term 5 or more years after the accusation was made.

### 6.2.1 Lost childhood

Both accused and non-accused experienced abuse before the accusation. Following the accusation, the level of abuse intensified over the years. Evidence of these contexts was discussed in Chapter 5. Therefore, the data suggests that an accusation was not the first adverse childhood experience. This is a significant finding because whilst it is possible to identify outcomes, it is not reliably possible to disentangle medium to long-term outcomes of accusations from the impact of all the rest of abuse experienced. Therefore, the sense of childhood lost includes the entire period of their formative childhood years and not from the point of the accusation onwards. The accused and non-accused referenced their ethnicity as being instrumental in contributing to their experiences of having a lost childhood as ethnicity contributed to feelings of being different and thereby treated differently. The church replacing home as their main setting featured strongly and this is unsurprising as communities facing these issues seek out support from faith organisations. The accusation exacerbated their mental health and isolation. This was further heightened by the juxtaposition of two different childhoods, that is their sense of lost childhood and the perceived "normal" childhood of peers. Sid (accused) commented on this:

> But my childhood was very shocking and strange. The society that we live in, especially [being] from an African background affected me because going to school children didn't

understand what we were going through at home, so life was very serious. I experienced a lot of changes, depression from a young age from as little as 7, 8 years old. Thinking I am going home and then I'm going to church and these kids are talking about after school they are going here, going there and I am going to church. It was a Pentecostal church that was very, very strange. We will be there from morning to afternoon, to evening, sometimes straight after school, and there was a lot of teachings about demons, devils, about darkness about Satan, it was very negative, very extreme. So, that had a psychological effect on me because I think to myself something is not right. Automatically, I would think to myself as a kid there is something going on there, there is something wrong and there was a high level of seriousness in the house everything was like, you couldn't have a normal childhood, go out and play, go to school, enjoying life as how kids are supposed to which was a blessing and a curse at the same time because it exposed me to the realities of life, but I think that for that age it was throwing us at the deep end by not giving us time to learn how to swim and that affected me a lot.

When discussing the long-term impacts, the accused and non-accused had a sense that they could have achieved more if they were afforded the same opportunities as other children. This feeling of losing out was further intensified where there was a sense of unachieved aspirations because life in the UK was perceived as a haven for untold opportunities. This was particularly the case for Cathy, Alice, Michael who came to the UK during the childhood for a "better" life:

> I never had what other children had. Everything for me was a struggle, they sent me from Africa to live here, to make something of my life and I don't think I gained... All I remember as a child is the abuse. I remember one time [after the accusation] she beat me, and she cut my hair off and there's more. When I reached 17, I left home because I couldn't take it no more. I used to not want to go home and stay out late and when I went home, she would beat me. Then I started to sleep by friends, then one day I decided not to go home (Cathy, accused).

Professionals were unable to comment on the long-term impact, because of their short period of involvement with cases. Faith leaders too, provided limited insight. However, community leaders with long-established position in communities gave them a vantage point that allowed them to have continuing contact with families. Their accounts mainly reflected those provided by the accused and non-accused. However, there were two striking effects, one caused by the

death of the accused and the impact this had on the non-accused.  Secondly, how stigma accompanies both the accused and non-accused throughout their lives:

> Alice (accused and community worker): I will tell you the truth erm. The children were younger, so they didn't really know what was going on but now the kids have grown [now adults] and people who heard about the case erm. Because apparently, she [accused] mentioned doing something to one of them [non-accused] now basically the way the community looks at them [accused and non-accused], it will be like be careful with that one, that one is a witch you know.

> Leethen: So, did it follow them throughout their childhood?

> Alice: Yes, because many families in the community once they found out or heard about that child being like that [a witch], trust me they kept their children safe and tell their children to be careful with so and so. So, yes, all the children experienced that in the community and it is still the situation for that boy [non-accused sibling].

The stigma attached to the non-accused and accused is described by Alice as being impossible to escape from and remains throughout their life course. The permanence of this "dirt" is match by the community's long-term need to protect themselves from the accused and non-accused. The community's ostracism of them is a form of "safety behaviour" discussed previously (see 5.8.2).

Concerning the loss of childhood through death Beni (community leader) provided the following comment:

> Some children have been sent back home and they were killed. It is sad because these children come here for a better life and then they send them back home and they don't know people there. This is a death sentence. It's sad because that child could have made it here.

Whilst the loss of childhood for the accused through death is an immediate outcome, its impact for the non-accused has long-term implications:

> After that boy died, she [non-accused sibling] received no support and we arranged for her to go to an orphanage. She is still there now [DRC] and she is still suffering to this day (Beni, community leader).

For the accused and non-accused, lost childhood encapsulate this developmental period and is not limited to the experience of the accusation. The impact of the abuse, being ostracised, "othered" whether connected to ethnicity, or religion and the absence of opportunities to achieve all worked towards engendering this loss. For some, the prolonged nature of the abuse eventually reaches a point where flight becomes the chosen method to protect themselves. However, for others as described by Beni, there is a finality through death, and this has a long lasting ripple effect on the non-accused.

## 6.2.2 From home to schooling, education and work

The following section discusses the accused and non-accused as one group unless otherwise specified. School life is supposed to be an enjoyable time, a protective environment where friendships, sometimes lifelong, are formed. Education also offers opportunities to develop skills and knowledge, providing the beginnings of what is needed to further one's social capital. Based on the accounts of all participants, the accused and non-accused experienced schooling in the medium term as problematic, disruptive and marked by low achievement. The impact of the abuse, both before and after the accusation affected their emotional development and this impacted on their ability to focus on learning. The long-term outcomes were mixed as some achieved academic success. Before exploring this further, it is important to stress based on the accounts of some professionals, school provided some level of safety for Alice. This is illustrated in Alice's comment:

> I used to love going to school. I used to call it like a family because you got all your friends. I used to be happy at school until at the end of the day when it was time to go home, I would say oh no (Alice, accused and community worker).

The sanctuary of school was not universal as the other accused and non-accused described it as unsafe along with the home environment. Threat from peers was cited as a factor that made school feel like an unsafe environment in the medium term:

So, at school I didn't have friends, I used to keep to myself…but other peers in my class thought I was strange and then stopped talking to me and I even got told that I would get beaten up because I kept on telling people that they were going to go to hell, so they were going to really bash me up [chuckle]. So, I felt that was really isolating, I felt my sister [accused] was really isolated as well, and I think she was treated poorly by my mum because she was possessed by a demon, according to this church (Kelly, non-accused).

The accused and non-accused ability to mentally focus on school work was hijacked by ruminating thoughts about homelife and being overcome by thoughts about what is possibly happening at home. In some cases this immobilised them:

I was scared not only for me but for my sister [accused sibling] mainly I would think what if she harmed herself or if she accidentally runs into the road. I don't know how am going to live with that, that was the fear that resided within me every day when I went to school. If I go back home and something bad happens if she burns the house down, there are so many different possibilities. I couldn't even talk, it was like being in shock, that shock is like going to live with you for a very long time, it's like a fear of the unknown, just random, your life changes within a second. It's just like if you leave the house one day, you going to the park and there's an explosion at your house, it's dramatic enough (Sid, non-accused).

Data analysed showed that the thought of returning home from school made the accused and non-accused anxious. Therefore, I identified key phrases used by the accused and non-accused to describe returning home from school. These centred on feelings of trepidation and impending danger. For example, descriptions of "home as horrible" and "explosion at your home" point to the continuing possibility and unpredictability of the extreme forms of abuse they experienced. In addition, Kelly and Sid describe having an intense sense of being "different" from peers and where Kelly adopts a "saviour mode", Sid identifies his difference as being "strange" and internalises his experience. These accounts draw attention to how beliefs shape a child's self-identity. It also shows the effect of being "othered" by peers, showing how some experiences are internalised. These accounts depict how a deeply religious environment with beliefs which focus on hell and the devil can be difficult to navigate for children. The result of being unable to do this has serious implications for them.

Despite the school setting being problematic for most of the accused and non-accused, they experienced varying levels of academic success at secondary school. While Alice (accused) achieved consistently, Sid (non-accused) and Kelly (non-accused) and Diana, Cathy, Michael and Kelly (all accused) suffered academically. Alice noted that her resilience was derived from having friends and from her strong rejection of being labelled a witch. For the others, the impact of the accusation caused a lack of interest in their academic career. They developed disruptive behaviours in class and felt lost in a system that was perceived to be geared against them, which led to lengthy school absences and exclusions from school. Their behaviour was interpreted as "problematic" instead of being understood as a response to abuse. Some behaviour was extremely threatening, and others were subtle. Ian commented on an accused young person he worked with who required psychiatric support following the accusation. The non-accused siblings likewise needed psychiatric support.  According to Ian, this young person exhibited an intent to harm others at school:

> So, we had a young woman who was in foster care who was behaving very
> strangely and tried to take a knife to school to stab someone. She was
> taken into care along with the other children [her siblings] (Ian, psychiatrist).

There were also incidences of school absences that because of periods of hospitalisation due to poor mental health, truanting due to feelings of isolation and abuse at both school and home. The following participants explained how the abuse affected their academic experience and achievements in similar ways:

> Yes, I went to college, I did retakes, I tried to improve them, but because of my brother's
> [mental health] episode, I could not complete college. My academic life has been
> somewhat inconsistent due to problems within the family, so I kind of came to the
> conclusion that I am at this stage of my life where I am not going there academically
> (Sid, non-accused).

> Before I came to this country, in Nigeria the teachers used to abuse me. I remember
> when I was younger one teacher made me eat salt. It was ridiculous, so I came here for
> my secondary school education, but that didn't make a difference because people in the

community still called me a spirit. All this affected me, and I didn't go to school for some time, I couldn't focus on my work and my school work got affected (Diana, accused).

The combination of abuse described by both accused and non-accused and the sense of threat coming from the home environment could not be contained in that environment for any of them. It is therefore not surprising that this resulted in some being able to achieve academically while others failed. Strong evidence exists confirming the negative impact of abuse on academic attainment (Romano et al., 2015). However, this has not been previously explored with focus on the impact of an accusation on children and their schooling and therefore warrants further attention.

Looking closely on the impact of an accusation on the non-accused's academic attainment, Timothy, community leader, and parent, Tilly drew attention to the challenges faced by them:

> Their siblings, seeing their sister or brother being accused as a witch and asking what is, are going to be told that witchcraft can come and kill you during the night, those children are going to live with fear. And this is going to be all their life, it is affecting the education, they go to school and sometimes the teacher is talking but the child is not there (Timothy, community leader).

> Yes, all of them were affected even the other two [non-accused]. They didn't do good at school…one of them [non-accused] had big issues. My daughter [accused] didn't finish school, she was in and out and in the end she had to stop because she was in hospital too much (Tilly, parent).

As social work interventions were brief (3-6 months) so the social workers were not able to provide insight into the impact of an accusation on the accused's and non-accused's schooling experience in the medium or long-term. Education attainment was also curtailed by the removal of children from the UK to countries with a lack of resources (see 5.8.2 for a discussion on "safety behaviours" and sending children overseas). Timothy, Yasmeen and Beni worked on cases where this occurred and whilst they acknowledged the risks posed to children in the UK, this pales in comparison to the threat children faced in some other countries due to the dire consequences of what it means to be a witch or spirit possessed there.

Some of the accused and non-accused went on to graduate from university. Alice (accused and community worker) had a positive secondary school experience and Kelly (non-accused) who struggled at secondary school completed tertiary education. However, for Kelly, her journey was challenging and she talked about the financial and emotional costs experienced:

> I don't think I was bright, so I didn't do good at exams. I loved to read, and this helped me as I was able to block out everything. I went to college and did over my exams and then I worked as a carer for a few years. I loved that job because I was helping people. I then got a grant, and I went to university, and I did English, but I didn't like it, so I dropped out. My father was angry with me, because...all his friends he boasted to about his daughter going to university would laugh at him. I didn't care. I left home, I was homeless, and I didn't have any money. I then worked as a carer until I got back into university...I grew up having nothing, so when I get paid, I buy something nice for myself and my little sister [non-accused] because she suffered so much.

At the time of Diana's (accused) interview, she was on the path to completing a degree. Diana's schooling was marred with absences due to being hospitalised for being mentally unwell. The drive to overcome the odds propelled Diana towards gaining entrance into university and this was nurtured through her developing a duty of care for her siblings whilst at university and strengthening her sense of belonging:

> I think that I am bright, it's just I had a lot going on at school. I eventually had to accept things and move on, that's how I was able to return to school. One day I thought that if I killed myself how would it affect my siblings, so I decided to get better...I finished the head of my class and went back to receive an award…Then when I started university, I was at [university 1] first that was difficult as well, because it is quite big compared to university 2. I felt like the people there [university 2], because people there are Black British.

### 6.2.3 From schooling to work

The choice of career path for some of the accused and non-accused was motivated by their experience of the accusation against them or their siblings. Alice (accused and community worker) and Kelly (non-accused) felt their experience gave them a particular intuition and empathy, so they worked in the field of child protection and family support.

Yes, I worked at B Centre. I was a family support worker and I worked with children to safeguard them, and we used to have educational programmes for the Congolese community…I know when something was wrong with them [children]... It's not because I am psychic, it's because of my experience… (Alice, accused).

Although in Kelly's case her unyielding desire to protect children brought her into conflict with her manager, it exposed her own vulnerabilities and her need for further support:

At work, I am a good advocate for children. I feel like no one spoke up for me to protect me, so I have to speak up for the children I work with and sometimes I get myself into trouble. I recently had a clash with my manager because I didn't agree with her decision. I feel that this thing about good enough parenting is rubbish, parenting must be the best for children who have already experienced bad parenting, so I am not going to agree to place a child with someone questionable. So, I did my own thing and went against my manager, and I almost lost my job. I had a meltdown in the office, and I walked out. I met with my manager, and I was told that if it happens again, I would be dismissed (Kelly, non-accused).

Wanting to help others featured as a value to live by and developed into a passion for helping other accused and non-accused. Michael (accused), Sid (non-accused) and Cathy (accused) did not work in child protection but this is something they aspired to achieve. Michael recognised the challenges with achieving this because he did not have the qualifications and instead used his experience to educate professionals:

After college, I didn't work. I was in care so social services helped me and I stayed with my foster carer until I moved to my flat. I work now as a painter/decorator. It's just something to do until I find something else... I am also doing my thing as a motivational speaker. I talk about my experiences and help professionals so that they know about it. Remember, I told you about my head teacher who didn't understand my situation? I don't want that to happen to any child (Michael, accused).

Not all the accused and non-accused gained employment, experienced job satisfaction or were able to formally support others with similar experiences. For some there was a correlation between poor educational attainment and poor employment prospects:

I didn't have no education and I had to make money. So, my brother [non-accused] was doing this thing with credit cards and I did it with him. We eventually got caught and I was convicted for it (Sid, non-accused).

Cathy too reflected on how her poor academic attainment and the complicating factor of being homeless affected her employment prospects:

It was hard for me at school, and I was homeless you know...Yes, my friend helped me. Her mother was nice to me and helped me. I really didn't have no one to depend on and I had to find a job. I now work at a coffee shop. I have to pay bills [laughs].

It is evident that an accusation had a significant impact on both the accused and non-accused and impacted their educational attainment and careers. The impact on schooling appeared significant for the majority in the medium term, but in the long-term some of them appeared able to overcome the challenges. Factors influencing their ability to succeed included having a sense of belonging, will-power, not accepting the accusation, wanting to safeguard other children and opportunities to gain financial security. The complex nature of the abuse they experienced meant that it is unsurprising some faced significant achievement barriers, as research has shown the indisputable correlation between abuse and attainment scores (Slade & Wissow, 2007). What is remarkable is the ability of some of these participants to achieve academically in the long-run and obtain jobs where they can use their experiences to safeguard children. These achievements should not be understated, given the context of harm they experienced and the serious impact the accusation had on their mental health and wellbeing.

### 6.2.4 Mental health and wellbeing

This study found no variations in the impact on mental health between the accused and non-accused. Research points to a strong body of evidence confirming links between childhood abuse and poor mental health throughout the life course (Bellis, 2016).  From the accounts of

the accused and non-accused, theirs and their siblings' mental and emotional wellbeing was affected to varying degrees. They suffered a range of mental health conditions such as bipolar disorder, depression, anxiety, anorexia and schizophrenia. The accused and non-accused described details of poor mental health, commencing during childhood and continuing into adulthood that resulted in periods of hospitalisation, self-harm, substance misuse, suicidal ideation, attempted suicide and self-isolation. This highlights the possibility that the escalation in abuse following the accusation hastened their development of poor mental health. However, it was uncertain if the onset of these mental health conditions was due to the accusation and the continued abuse, as participants gave accounts of being emotionally distressed and mentally unwell (undiagnosed) before the accusation. Therefore, their poor mental health could be attributed to the abuse experienced pre-accusation and the environment within which they lived. Similarly, it was not possible to disentangle medium to long-term mental health outcomes of accusations from the impact of all the rest of combined abuse experienced. Essentially, it is impossible to attribute the accusation as the single cause for poor mental health and wellbeing. However, the accused and non-accused indicated that from the point of the accusation onwards, their levels of mental distress heightened. One reason for this was due to the nature of the "safety behaviour" that they were subjected to which had a long-term negative psychological impact. This is illustrated in the following comment:

> You know, I remember one time the church had this thing, okay if your sister is possessed by a demon, this is what they said to my mom, if your daughter is possessed by a demon then there is a likelihood that demon might come into the other children, so you have to bath them in salt water. And one time my mom invited the male pastor to bathe me [unclothed] in salt water which I felt very, very uncomfortable with. It later turned out this man was a paedophile in Ghana and I just felt like, looking back on that I was completely, I was completely shocked and psychologically it is still difficult for me to cope with this, how much power my mum gave to these people in the hope that my sister would be healed and because of that when my sister was having an episode, a bipolar episode she [mother] would go to the hospital and be like you don't need to take your medication (Kelly, non-accused)

With homelife being marred by a chronic subjection to deprivation and/or abuse, exposure to these conditions was often difficult for them to comprehend and this created further emotional

turmoil. Sid discussed his mental health diagnosis, including the impact of his sister's (accused) diagnosis on him and his attempt to comprehend what unfolded:

> My experience with mental health is, I didn't know anything about bipolar [his diagnosis] or any type of mental conditions. I was probably about eight years old...I was probably nine years old when my sister had an episode [Schizophrenia] of mental breakdown. At first it was very frightening to see someone you know all your life, to know that they always acted in a certain way and then they change dramatically, out of the norm...Some of the things she was doing was very strange and I didn't know how it happened because there were so many different confusions in the family. It really affected me because it was not nice seeing someone you love in hospital and not knowing how you can help them. It wasn't something that was physical [mental illness], it's more spiritual I should say because it's not really physical, it's not like a wound that can actually heal or help to heal so it was quite shocking (Sid, non-accused).

While Sid struggled to comprehend his and his sister's mental health and circumstances, others arrived at a place of recognising and accepting their compromised mental health. Their level of self-awareness led to acceptance of their situation:

> It was a dark time for me, I didn't want to live anymore. I wanted to give up...It was really bad to the point that I had to get hospitalised because I wasn't able to cope with anything. I was really depressed, and I was really suicidal and things like that so, I had to understand, I wasn't okay until I was okay... And I remember, I think before that yeah, I went to see this doctor, Dr Benjamin [name anonymised], she worked at a hospital, where kids with mental problems or mental history...The doctor started to ask me a few questions and all that stuff at that time, I was like I don't know, I was like a ghost. I was like, I was like, I remember I was crying quite a lot. I was crying and then the doctor said we are going to do something for you. We are going to send you to a place called DC [name of hospital anonymised] for two to three months. Then I started to go to the hospital, they took me out of school completely, that was secondary school (Michael, accused).

Receiving help did not mean an end to concerns about mental health and wellbeing, as bouts of poor mental health were experienced as an unending event influenced by different circumstances. Therefore, the impact of the accusation and pre-accusation experiences has a long-term impact on mental health and wellbeing. Cathy discussed her ongoing journey since the accusation and how she managed her anxieties:

I didn't care about anyone anymore. There were times I never went home because of the abuse, the shouting and she didn't give me food...I had really bad days you know. Even now I get anxious about things because I am afraid things will go bad. You know I think if things go wrong, I would be blamed for it. In my head, I know I am not a witch, but there is something in my head that thinks they would blame me even people who don't know my past. I just don't want to get it wrong, I then find myself doing things to get people to like me, I go to the extreme (Cathy, accused).

Developing coping strategies to manoeuver life's challenges were necessary and were employed both in the medium and the long-term. This is illustrated in Cathy's comment above, as the mental strain of having to deal with the stain of an accusation is difficult to relinquish and whilst she shows insight into her actions, she overcompensates to cope with her situation. Other forms of coping in the long-term included self-imposed isolation from family members due to ongoing family conflict, substance misuse and participation in religious activities. Sid provided the following comment to explain how he coped:

Mine was depression [bipolar], it was just being overloaded, because I didn't understand what was going on in my life and my family, I was very confused, so I smoked [cannabis] and I drank a lot erm, probably over excessive. I was drinking, and smoking excessively, and I was really confused and one day I had an outburst and I got arrested and they took me to hospital. They didn't section me which was good because I didn't believe I was mental, I just had too much to drink, too much to smoke; that was the first episode. Then the second episode was when I wanted to commit suicide (Sid, non-accused).

A significant finding concerned the accused's limited insight on the medium impact of the accusation on their non-accused sibling. The reason for this was due to the accused's view that the abuse was directed towards them and/or because they never fully disclosed the extent of their abuse to their non-accused sibling to shield them. The non-accused, Sid and Kelly, had a keen awareness of the impact on their accused sibling and other non-accused sibling. Kelly discussed the impact of the accusation on her non-accused siblings in the following comment:

My brother too had taken on some of that behaviour, but I felt that they were very scared. My youngest brother was six and my other brother was silent about it, but I felt like the impact of it did not manifest until they became older. My other brother later

developed bipolar and schizophrenia and then my younger brother developed bipolar Kelly, non-accused).

Turning to the perspectives of other participants, social workers showed some insight into the impact of an accusation on the accused child in the short-term and acknowledge that at the time of their involvement in cases, they failed to consider the non-accused. These professionals' involvement in cases did not extend over a long period. Tilly (parent) reflected in the interview about the impact of the accusation on her children's mental health and acknowledged her failure to consider how this affected the non-accused. The opportunity to reflect on this enabled her to arrive at a place where she was able to recognise how both the accused and non-accused were affected:

> Tilly: I never thought about how it affected the other children [non-accused]
>
> Leethen: Why do you think you never considered it?
>
> Tilly: With everything going on, I didn't think about them because my daughter was the one unwell.
>
> Leethen: Looking back now, do you think they were affected mentally?
>
> Tilly: Yes, except the last one as she was a baby, but she (youngest child) has serious problems now. I can see now how it affected their mental health. The other ones [non-accused] were ill in the head too, if I think about it, if you know what I mean? They were all affected.

On the other hand, community leaders, Beni and Timothy, Yameen (psychotherapist) and Ian (psychiatrist) suggested that the accused and non-accused were both psychologically affected by the abuse of the accused. There was a general recognition that the accused suffered mentally and that the effects were long-term and that these effects also applied to the non-accused. These participants who stressed that the non-accused suffered mentally because they witnessed the abuse, were sometimes abused themselves when subjected to harmful purification rituals and had to collude with the abuser. A consistent feature of these participants' account centred on the home environment being in a heightened state of anxiety and this created mental stress for the accused and non-accused. Ian (psychiatrist) provided an

account of a family he worked with that described how the accused and non-accused mental

health was affected:

> The siblings were affected too and she [accused] presented as disturbed…The family
> held strange beliefs and there was a huge issue with power and control from mom onto
> the children and from the children towards each other… She [accused] controlled them,
> so in therapy they [non-accused] would look to her first before they said anything…The
> girl [accused] was absolutely highly, highly, highly disturbed throughout her life and the
> witchcraft element added to this because it completely, completely shattered any sense
> of identity, cohesive identity. She goes into these disassociated states. She blanks out
> and she goes completely silent and looks possessed, looks like she is in an altered state
> of mind and in those states of mind comes on at times of stress or she's finding a
> particular situation or person difficult… All the siblings disclosed much later on that they
> had watched their sister [accused] being sexually abused by their father in the bath.
> They [non-accused] will watch her being made to stand in the corner on one leg and be
> beaten if she didn't do something properly or correctly…This girl and her siblings were
> all disturbed really. It is really sad because I don't think that we were able to help her
> and the siblings, we just had to hold them.

It is important not to overlook the impact on the non-accused as their mental health is also

affected by the accusation and ongoing abuse. The participants' accounts highlight the extent

of their mental distress and how this can extend into the long-term. This demands attention be

paid to providing immediate and ongoing mental health and wellbeing support for these

children. In the next section, I present the findings on how the accusation impacted

relationships.

## 6.2.5 Supportive and Fractured relationship

From the perspectives of all the participants, their family life before the accusation was

characterised by continuing dysfunction in multiple areas of their life, especially in

relationships. When the accusation occurred, family relationships were already strained.

Therefore this made it difficult to attribute these fractured relationships solely to the

accusation, because disentangling the abuse that occurred pre- and post-accusation from

family dysfunction is not straightforward. A further finding to note is that family relationships

came in various forms. (1) Between accused and- non-accused. (2) Between accused & non-accused and parent/carer. (3) Between accused, non-accused and other family members. The quality of these relationships were affected by the role played in the accusation and its aftermath. When the accusation occurred, Alice (accused) and Cathy (accused) indicated that their non-accused siblings provided comfort, moral support and cared for them. The non-accused confirmed they also responded to their accused sibling similarly.  Diana's (accused) situation was more complex as her full-siblings were supportive and provided moral support, but her half-siblings with whom she always had a fractured relationship with, levelled accusations at her. Where sibling relationships were supportive, the accusation tended to increase their bond, but only to a certain point as relationships deteriorated to varying degrees as they entered adulthood. However, during the period of the accusation, they worked together to help the accused to survive the abuse.

For Alice, Cathy and Diana (accused), their non-accused siblings rejecting their parent's accusation and being able to confirm that the accusers were abusive, whether they be parents or other family members, were the main factors contributing to the development of this bond between them:

> Back then living with my family like I was saying my sisters and brothers never believed it because they knew what type of mom she was, and that it wasn't true [the accusation] ...Basically, first it was the family and secondly it was just us, the kids. We used to talk about them two [parents], how bad they are, they are the ones who are witches, we are not [laughing], and we the ones who will talk and say when we grow, we will never see them again. We will come together, we will cry, we will wipe each other's tears, we will be strong, we will never allow this to happen to our children, those are evil people you know (Alice, accused).

From the perspective of the non-accused and some of the other participants, they shared similar accounts of disbelieving the accusers and how both groups joined forces to support their siblings. Kelly who worked with her two other non-accused siblings to support their accused sister went on to describe how this occurred:

> We used to help each other. Together we used to pray and pray, pray for our sister to get better. Looking back on it we loved each other and just wanted her to get better.

Although there was a powerful sense of being my "brother's/sister's keeper" in relationships between the accused and non-accused, the latter did not have a full picture of what happened to their accused sibling. Whilst it is understandable that those abused may generally withhold elements of their abuse because of shame, trauma or fear, there is a need to understand why this happens to find solutions. Neither Diana nor Cathy disclosed the full extent of their experience to their siblings:

> I think it's best my sisters and brother don't know what happened to me, well everything because they know some. It's better this way because I won't cope if they knew what happened to me (Diana, accused).

> I have not told my brother and sisters everything. No, no, I would not tell them because that's their mom and my stepmom, so they wouldn't want to know their mom did me these terrible things (Cathy, accused).

The need to withhold information from siblings is a coping mechanism for the accused as sharing may open a pandora's box. Therefore, it is a way of protecting their non-accused sibling from learning about something traumatic. The decision not to share was influenced by their relationship with the accuser. For Cathy it is a way of maintaining "family" if her half siblings remain in the dark and keep their mother in a positive light. Michael who was accused by several family members, withheld it from his cousin [child of one of his accusers] because he did not think his cousin would believe what his parents did to him. However, with time, information is shared but in a piecemeal way:

> The kid [cousin] was younger than me and I didn't want to tell him. I don't think he would have believed. I have since told him some stuff. Yeah, he knows what his parents did to me, but not everything (Michael, accused).

Amongst the wider group of participants, some were unable to account for the impact of an accusation on sibling relationships. Most faith leaders were unable to demonstrate an understanding of these relationships because they did not construe the task of healing to extend to mending relationships. However, the two faith leaders who were also social workers,

Aquila and Yemi, showed some critical insight in their role as a faith leader. Whilst generalisations are unable to be drawn from this due to limited numbers, it provided useful insight. Aquila spoke about how family relationships become severed as a way of self-protection:

> I think no that's a worry, the other children were not encouraged to be around that child [accused]. What they are trying to do is not to build that connection [between the accused and non-accused]. The attachment is not there and that's not good for family relations. Children will pick one of the children [accused] to survive... I think the other siblings around a child treated that way are going to be scared. Either they are going to become aggressors or co-abusers, or they are going to have to separate themselves from the family somehow and that puts them at risk (Aquila, faith leader and social worker).

Some social workers, as well as Yasmeen, psychotherapist, registered concerns for sibling groups but failed to explore the quality of sibling relationships in their work. The community leaders were more keenly aware of the impact of an accusation on sibling relationships, as their role within communities and intimate involvement in cases gave them a unique vantage point. This included unfettered access to families in the UK and overseas. In some cases, they had contact with members of the same family in the UK and their homeland. Beni proffered an account of the impact of an accusation on sibling relationships concerning a family he worked with:

> He [accused] was separated from his family. Them here, he there [overseas] and no one wanting to deal with him. Now, nobody wants to deal with him, not even his sisters [in England] to this day. They treated him so, so bad (Beni, community leader).

The international dimension is further explored by Timothy who outlined how the practice of banishment for being a witch or spirit possessed can have an impact on non-accused siblings who remained in the UK:

> You know one day one of them [non-accused sibling] came to the mom and said I had a dream about our sister [accused]. {And said} I haven't seen her for a long time and ask the mom where is she? You know children can ask a question and children can dream as

well and you know what happen, they went to see the pastor. Dreaming about that child [accused] who was sent back home [Kinshasa] and the pastor seized the opportunity to say the sister [accused] is coming [in the spirit], so that she can initiate the others [non-accused] to become witches. This is a terrible thing that is going on, all those manipulations. This is really terrible, and those children are really affected. As young they start to believe that.

Banishment of accused can also have an impact on the child-parent relationship and this can be long-term. The community leaders discussed how this led to parents regretting their actions and feeling a sense of loss, as rekindling these relationships proved difficult overtime:

> I know one woman who sent her daughter back to the Congo and we at that time we took that girl and we put her in one of our Centres in Kinshasa. Even the BBC, Bret Jordan [anonymised] [journalist], went to interview that girl I think was 2005 and now that girl is really grown up and the mother now is regretting her child is far away from her. It is the pastor who said to her that she was a witch and the mother is now suffering that separation between her and her child (Timothy, community leader).

With sibling relationships enduring and outlasting most other relationships, its significance cannot be emphasised enough (Monk and Macvarishet, 2018). However, for some of the accused and non-accused, their relationship with each other was fractured when the accused was placed into the care of the local authority. Some professionals and the accused discussed the impact of this type of separation and noted that this type of separation was especially problematic when contact was curtailed or if they had disengaged overtime or when a closed adoption had occurred. Alice described how an accused relative was placed into the care of the local authority 14 years ago and that since then there has been no contact with family:

> It's not good especially because that child [accused] is very innocent and he was a small boy [non-accused]…After what happened to her it changed everything. Social services took her away and the boy too. He is back with the family, but the girl has never returned…no one knows where she is now…I think this has affected him you know (Alice, accused and community worker).

Despite the accused and non-accused describing their sibling relationships as supportive in the short and medium term, in some of these relationships, fissures developed that eventually

resulted in fractured relationships in the long-term. In some cases, the relationships became
fractured because the accused or non-accused tried to protect themselves from ongoing
distress and abuse. In others, they tried to protect the other person. In some, they attempted
both:

> I don't talk to any of my siblings anymore. My youngest sister, I don't really talk to her to
> be honest. I try to keep myself to myself. I don't see my older sister [accused] either
> because she has her life to live and I don't want to put her under any stress that would
> get her hospitalised. I have my own issues too so I keep to myself (Sid, non-accused).

All the accused and non-accused salvaged some form of relationship with their parent/carer,
but this depended on several factors and occurred five years and beyond after the accusation.
It is important to note again that because of the small number of participants, it is not possible
to generalise, so the following data presented should be viewed as a starting point to
developing an understanding of the issue. Forgiving their accuser and the non-accusing
parent/carer who allowed the abuse to happen and seeking them out to communicate how
they felt, provided a path to healing and re-establishing relationships. However, these
relationships were characterised as weak:

> I had to get to a place where I had to stop being angry because every time, I think about
> what they did to me, I got angry. Then again, I was grateful for what they did for me
> because they brought me here from Africa that's why I didn't want to get them in
> trouble. So, one day I decided to go see my auntie and uncle [accusers] and I told them
> that I don't blame them. That helped me to get over it. I still go see them now and their
> kid, he looks up to me (Michael, accused).

Forgiveness was also featured as a virtue in the case of other accused and non-accused and like
Michael, it propelled them to a place of peace. Forgiveness as a necessary ingredient to
(re)building relationships with accusers was discussed by Cathy who found the need to confront
her past in order to move on:

> Cathy (accused): One time I went back to see my parents. Actually, by that time my
> father had left her [mother]. I asked him why he didn't protect me from her and he just

couldn't say anything. You know African parents would never say sorry. He just looked at me and I know it meant he was sorry. This helped because he hugged me.

In the long-term the accused and non-accused were also able to rekindle relationships with parents/carers, because the need to forgive was a requirement of their religious beliefs and this also led to new relationships being formed. At the time of the interview, these rekindled relationships were in the recent past, therefore, it was not possible to understand fully how they may evolve. Supportive sibling relationships appeared to be influenced by the "all in the same boat" experience, as this helped to develop a sense of camaraderie and uniting to overcome the abuse. The impact of the accusation on mental health and the need to isolate to protect oneself reflects continuing conflict. Of significance are the relationships that remained unresolved because of ongoing conflict and separation. These are issues that require further attention because the former could assist with healing and the latter because it raises safeguarding concerns and welfare issues.

**Other relationships**

All the non-accused and the following accused, Diana, Michael, and Cathy, experienced ongoing challenges with establishing and maintaining meaningful relationships with friends and partners. None of them were married. Alice (accused and community worker) is the only one of these participants who had her own children. These participants save Alice indicated that the abuse experienced caused them to develop feelings of mistrust which permeated personal relationships. The thought of having to share their experiences of the accusation was anxiety provoking and this too curtailed their ability to form relationships. Michael (accused) commented on this:

> I have never had a relationship [smiles]. I don't know, I just keep to myself and do my own thing.…This thing messed me up and I couldn't trust or believe people. What happened is kind of personal and when I think about it, telling it all is stress. But yeah, I am overcoming this (Michael, accused).

The ability to form relationships with peers and partners was also affected by ongoing poor mental health and the ongoing task of having to process their abusive past. Alice's ability to develop an intimate relationship was borne out of view that she never accepted the accusation:

> Well, yes it affected me but remember I didn't accept it. I think will power and believing God protecting me helped. So, me, I had friends and was with my children's father.

The discussion will now move towards professional responses to WSP allegations against children, starting with children's own orientation towards professionals. This is followed by a discussion in the next section on the nature and effectiveness of professional responses.

## 6.3 Perceptions of professionals

It is worth reiterating that the accused and non-accused sample size is too small to make generalisations. Their perception of professionals and their responses offer a unique opportunity to develop learning on what should be considered was working for them.

The accused and non-accused described in detail their contact with professionals pre and post accusation. A focal issue for them concerned the professional's ethnicity and how this influenced their willingness to disclose the accusation and ongoing abuse. A consistent theme centred on their belief was that WSP happens predominantly in Black communities and that white professionals lacked the knowledge and/or understanding it. The assumption that WSP is not a "white" person's experience equated to the view that white professionals were unlikely to recognise the signs, possibly disbelieve a child who made a disclosure and fail to act on their disclosure. Consequently, the ethnicity of the professional acted as a barrier to disclosing accusation and ongoing abuse. This is of significance as most of the professionals they engaged with were white. Alice (accused and community worker) commented on her experience with her teacher and how her "whiteness" acted as a barrier despite her admiration for her:

> I wish that my tutor will just adopt me, and I used to be so close to her and sometimes I will just look at her and I just want to call her mom. But I never told her [about the accusation and abuse]. I remember her name used to be, what was her name again?

Ms. May [anonymised]. Yeah, I will just look at her and just wish that she will adopt me and, but you know, that was it.

Leethen: So why didn't you tell her?

Alice: I don't know. Well, I didn't think she would believe me, because this witchcraft thing is mainly amongst us Black people, Africans. White people too but white people tend to not believe in those things.

In Alice's comment, she refers to my identity as a Black person and assumed that this in some way confirmed my ability to understand WSP. I read this as a further indication of the perception that being Black translated to having a better understanding of WSP. An important point to make is that critical to safeguarding children is creating opportunities for them to disclose. Evidence suggests it is easier for children to disclose abuse if professionals can build a rapport with them (Clark and Moss, 2011).  In the case of the accused and non-accused in this study, this became a challenge when the ethnic identities of the child and the professional were dissimilar. This points to the importance of the need for a diverse workforce and culturally competent professionals particularly when it comes to safeguarding black children (see Bernard and Harris, 2016).

However, ethnic closeness between the accused and non-accused and professionals did not translate to facilitating disclosures, as Black professionals encountered were perceived as not child focused. This perception inevitably made these professionals unsafe adults to disclose to. Whilst it is not possible to generalise about this but based on the accounts of the accused and non-accused, their perception of Black professionals belonging to a culture that places an emphasis on the rights of parents above children prevented them from disclosing. For some of the participants the situation resulted in a loss of hope and their unfortunate disengagement with this child protection process:

> One time my parents had beaten me up and I went to school with a black eye. My teacher asked me what happened, and I lied, but they still called social services. I remember it was a Nigerian social worker and my parents told me to lie because they told me that they would take me and my brothers and sister away. The social worker colluded with my parents, so I didn't tell him anything, he was on my parents' side, telling me how much I was getting them in trouble and that I should behave myself

(Kelly, non-accused).

The little insight provided by the accused and non-accused showed that from their perspective, in a community context (see 5.7) where multiple adults stood silent during the abuse endured due to WSP accusations, professionals would have needed to work extra hard to communicate to children that they might provide something different. The discussion thus far points to an important finding concerning how these children are caught in a double bind between the interplay of different ethnicities. Neither professional ethnic closeness nor a difference contributes alone to eliciting a disclosure or increases the likelihood of protection. The need for professionals to be culturally competent and uphold ethical values, regardless of their ethnicity, could therefore improve the chances of these children being protected. These factors raise critical questions about trust both within and across cultural and ethnic boundaries.

## 6.3.1 Professional role and stance

This section focuses on perceptions of professional roles and stances. Firstly this is from the perspective of the accused and non-accused themselves, thereafter, from the perspective of professionals, and community members.

With the ethnicity of the professionals being a factor influencing engagement with the accused and non-accused, a further barrier for them was due to the role adopted by some professionals. The accused and non-accused were also less likely to be trusting of some professionals because of the organisation they represented. This usually stemmed from their community's mistrust and suspicion of organisations believed to be engaged in discriminatory practices towards them. Sid and Michael illustrated this:

> First of all, you just know not to talk to dem people [children's services]. You are always told that social services take children away in the community. So, when this thing happened, my parents told me not to say anything to the social worker because they

would take us away and we would go into foster care and never see them again. So, we didn't say anything, I told them that I had made it all up (Sid, non-accused).

I interpreted attitudes like Sid's and others towards professionals and services as a result of how they have responded in some past cases and evidence suggests they have responded in ways that led to children from these backgrounds being unsupported (Gilligan & Akhtar, 2006). Histories and continued experiences of disproportionally harsh treatment may have also led to these stories being passed down between generations (Joseph–Salisbury et al., 2020).

The social workers believed that the organisation they represented was perceived by communities as discriminatory and this tainted how their role was perceived by communities:

> If you think about this, they don't trust us and we don't trust them, so we are dealing with a trust issue. They all believe we take away children, so there is a fear there. They don't trust social services, so me as a social worker going in there and if a police officer comes with me then what do you think would happen? Remember, it is a closed community and they don't trust us (Aquila, social worker and faith leader).

This meant that mistrust featured as a mechanism hampering effective engagement and this is fuelled by the powers vested in statutory services to remove children at risk of significant harm from families. The threat of this and working closely with the police, considered as another mistrusted organisation further complicated the social workers' ability to work with the accused, non-accused and their families. Negative perceptions of children's services were reinforced by the community and faith leaders:

> Ah, social services is part of the problem for the community. You think they would go to social services to tell them? Social services are seen as bad and you don't want them in your life. Even in Africa they know social services are bad [laughs] (Beni, community leader).

Other participants, such as the faith leaders, Mike, Winston and Jan and community leaders Beni, Timothy and Alice (accused and community worker) indicated that families would engage if it served their purpose. These participants discussed this broadly and in cases of WSP

accusations where the parent/carer wanted to relinquish responsibility for the child. To achieve this required engagement with children's services. Mike offered the following explanation:

> When they don't want the children, you give them to social workers and others in the community to look after them...Yes, they go to social services and they say here take this child...Yes, this happens in the community when they don't even like social worker. Here take this child… Yes, they would give the child away (Mike, faith leader).

A further explanation offered by these participants related to how the belief in WSP motivated parents/carers to engage with services that they would not under normal circumstances. The parents/carer's fear of the child accused was viewed as enough to make parents/carers engage with children's services because of the perceived power of the organisation to remove children:

> Because, as I told you earlier, a witch can hypnotise or infect you as well...they can infect other children in the family, so the parents don't want them there. We know as Christians if you are living with a witchcraft person, we believe they are the one who will be scared of us not we scared of them. We will continue to live with them but if they are real witches and you are not a Christian you ought to run away from that person because he will make you like a hell. You will lose your job, things will be really bad...They [parents/carers] don't like social services but when this happens, they would give them that child and keep the other child [non-accused] (Alice, accused and community worker).

There are a few implications to this perspective. A significant issue is what happens to the child if children's services do not acquiesce to the parents/carers request. Another concern is if the accused is removed, do they then leave the non-accused with the accuser. In Chapter 4 (see 4.9) data was presented that showed the accused placed into care of the local authority and the non-accused left in the care of accusers. Whilst no explanation was provided indicating whether this was in response to parent/carer's request, the above comment provides a possible explanation how this may have benefitted parents/accusers. This scenario pointed to the need for professionals to have an understanding of the belief system held by parents and parental motivations. In the next section professional responses provided will be focused on.

## 6.4 Professional responses

As discussed in Chapter 2, professionals are required to follow statutory guidelines outlined in Working Together to Safeguard Children (HMG, 2018) and local child protection procedures. These policies and procedures aim to ensure that child protection systems operate in a consistent and uniform way. Findings from interviews outlined the approach taken by professionals and whether the outcome led to the children being safeguarded.

### 6.4.1 Disjointed multi-agency responses

From the perspective of the professionals, multi-agency working on cases involving WSP accusations was disjointed. There was a general sense that casework was overcomplicated by multiple discussions at multiple meetings because professionals failed to grasp the complexity of cases. There was a sense from them that this created a professional network that was ineffective and resulted in risk averse responses. In the cases they discussed, it appeared that professionals myopically focused on the accused and had a limited understanding of risk, resulting in a failure to assess the experiences of all children in the family. Bailey (social worker) commented:

> In the first case there was a long process in between getting the referral to go into the strategy [meeting] and then a legal planning meeting…I did not take into consideration the level of concerns as it came in as a Local Authority Designated Officer referral. Actually, we were not looking at the bigger picture in relation to what was happening to all of these children. I think there's quite a lot of interest in it [child accusations] as well as, it is not something that you see every day. I felt that I was managing this case with all of the different people on my back, even actually senior managers. We did group supervision and stuff, you will see other social workers panicking, and I would think kind of take a breath and think about this more calmly instead of thinking that what happened is so awful that these children shouldn't be at home...This is the general reaction when you are discussing these cases. In this case the school was probably the least concerned, but not less concerned than I was. The police after they had interviewed the stepmother, seemed to think that it wasn't as risky as they had initially thought. They wanted to go down like prosecution, obviously there was an investigation

but, they went in all guns blazing, kind of get it to court, and stuff I think that we really needed to unpick it more.

While there were divergent views on how to respond to risk, as remarked by Bailey, professionals also cited the effects of "group think". From their perspective, this happens because professionals are influenced by cases such as Victoria Climbie, which represents the worst case scenario of what of could happen. This resulted in an absence of professional challenge and courses of action taken without consideration of its implications:

> It can be frustrating at times to get the network to shift. In cases where there is witchcraft, people get nervy. They think the worst, the first thing is they think Victoria Climbie and then it is difficult for them to shift (Anna, social worker).

Professional responses were influenced by their personal beliefs, experience of working on cases, knowledge of WSP and understanding the risk. The way professionals responded to concerns fell into three discrete categories. (1) Those who did not believe in WSP. (2) Those who believed in WSP but this did not influence their practice and (3) those who believed and struggled in their practice.

Only one professional, Bailey (social worker), fell into the first category:

> I don't have a religious background, so I don't believe in these things and had to learn on cases which, as I said, wasn't ideal. When the case came in and I was allocated it, I had to Google some of the information. I hadn't worked with these cases and didn't understand it, so I used Google…Yes, it helped because I was able to find stuff to read up on.

There is recognition from Bailey that she's disadvantaged by her lack of religious knowledge. However, her attempt to compensate for this through the use of Google raised questions about the possible credibility of the material accessed and there is a wider issue about the need for training and professional development.

### 6.4.2 Professionals separating their beliefs from their secular practice

In contrast to Bailey's perspective discussed immediately above, were those professionals whose belief in witches and/or spirit possession informed their understanding of the phenomenon, but their professional responses were guided by secular safeguarding principles and policies. These professionals included Ian (psychiatrist), Agnes (social worker) and Yasmeen (psychotherapist), who believed in spirit possession but not witches, and Anna (social worker), who believed in both. Ian, Yasmeen and Agnes learned about witchcraft beliefs through training, media reports and casework experience. They, including Anna also discussed how their seniority and experience gave them the confidence to use their religious background to understand WSP beliefs and simultaneously operate in adherence with child protection procedures:

> Yes, I believe these things could happen. I don't think this affects my practice. I have worked on cases over the past 15 years and I have worked in senior roles in local authorities. I have always followed procedures. I don't want another Victoria Climbie (Anna, social worker).

Like Anna other professionals were clear in their views that an accusation is abusive and accused children must be referred to children's services. For these professionals, the mechanism of professionalism allowed them to separate their beliefs from practice and so adhered to professional guidelines.

### 6.4.3 Professional struggling with tensions between their beliefs and secular practice

Finally, there were five professionals who used both secular and religious safeguarding approaches in their responses to WSP. Participants in this category experienced WSP personally or encountered it within their family and/or community. These participants included Aquila (social worker & pastor), Yemi (social worker and faith leader), Timothy and Beni (community leaders), and Hamida (Hijama practitioner). They tended to work within child protection guidelines but were conflicted when it came to separating their beliefs from practice. Yemi

provided an account of an interaction with a parent and this illustrated how her beliefs about WSP influenced her actions:

> She [parent] wanted to know my full name and I wanted to know why she wanted to know my full name, because I am aware that people will use your name and put it at their altar and do invocations. So, I wanted to know, why?

Social workers are often the leading professionals coordinating multi-agency interventions in child protection cases, so they cannot avoid interaction with service users. Yemi's response raised questions about how professionals may themselves feel spiritually threatened by service users. Based on this, a further point to consider is the "safety behaviour" employed by professionals. Yemi went on to explain how she achieved this:

> As a Christian, I pray and I fast regularly. As a pastor, I don't live like other people live. I don't drink or party and I don't eat food from people or go to restaurants...because they put evil in food and then you end up possessed.

Professionals taking pre-emptive steps to protect oneself from falling victim to the nefarious spiritual activities of service users raises questions about how this manifests itself in cases where children are believed to be witches or spirit possessed.

There were further difficulties for those in the dual role of pastor and social worker. Yemi and Aquila had "delivered" children believed to be spirit possessed or a witch. And Yemi in her role as a social worker offered spiritual advice to children worked with. Yemi commented:

> Yes, I have done that before [giving spiritual advice to service users in her social work role]. I have gone out to see a 15 year old that went missing, that was hearing voices. She said that the voice told her to go somewhere else and then the mum rang, and the voice told her to ignore the mum's voice. Then I said next time what you need to do is to call upon Jesus, and say Jesus take me back. And then Jesus will send his angels to direct you back instead of you ending up in the hospital- because she collapsed. I said do you go to church? and she said no, so I said to her she needs to find a good church and then go there and, you know, come and have your deliverance and find a good one, not the ones where they beat you.

Yemi and Aquila were not ignorant of the tensions between their beliefs and practices. They were also keenly aware of the implications of allowing their practice to be influenced by their beliefs and demonstrated an awareness of harm caused to these children by some faith leaders. They expressed awareness of the tensions between their beliefs and professional roles, and between impulses to respond as a faith leader and the professional requirements as a social worker. Yemi expressed anxiety related to offering advice:

> Yemi: She [young person] could of then ring the manager and say what I said, and then they would've said that I cannot say that [offer spiritual advice] and then it would have amounted to gross misconduct. Then I will lose my registration. So, I said that is the only restriction, but sometimes you are pushed to say something.

> Leethen: So, do you find it difficult at times?

> Yemi: Very, that is why most pastors don't work because you cannot mix that too because there might be something that you can't do, you have to keep quiet.

Aquila (pastor and social worker) like Yemi has at times taken the same approach of telling service users to undertake spiritual activities. Aquila explained:

> I said there is nothing wrong with you getting prayed for, getting cleansing doing all the things you could do to fortify yourself and strengthening yourself spiritually...I offered to support her and that we could pray together.

Accused and non-accused spoke about how they anticipated if a professional shared their accuser's worldview and how this would prevent disclosure. In the context of these children's lives, probably Aquila's advice would be received as evidence of what Kelly earlier called 'collusion', shutting down an opportunity for disclosure and leaving them unsafe. Aquila further directed attention to how engaging as a faith leader affects her role as a social worker:

> Yes, they [employers] know that I am an ordained interfaith minister, which means, I have the privilege of worshiping with anybody from any faith as long as they believe in God...I also do house blessings. So, there is a custom and a belief that when African or Caribbean families move into a property it needs to be cleansed of any negative spirits

or negative energies and I might well be asked to pray and to cleanse that house...In relation to spirit possession of children, I had people in the community speak to me about their children, children with disabilities, children with autism in particular, children with epilepsy, ADHD why is this child acting so, or why is this child having these fits, why is my child relating to things I can't see...At work, I try to not go into this in detail. In the community, I can do these things, but work is a different story because I know how these things are viewed, but sometimes you have to act.

Whilst Yemi and Aquila offer the most striking examples of conflict between personal beliefs and professional safeguarding standards, this also involved other professionals in other contexts. Ian (psychiatrist) provided an example of a mental health ward for children where he worked and encountered staff who believed a former deceased colleague to be a witch and the children in the hospital ward to be possessed:

Ian: One of the members of staff who is Nigerian had a concave chest, a chest defect and she went to Nigeria and died there unexpectedly. There was great fear that this person was a witch because of the concave chest. There were also sightings of spirits at night on the unit and there was also some communication with the young people around their spirit or communication with it or some kind of interpretation of what the young people, all sorts of young people did. A belief by the staff that these young people were actually spirit possessed as opposed to being psychotic, so there was a big dichotomy between a Western interpretation of mental illness and a spirit-based interpretation of these young people. We basically had a consultation with the worker Sam [anonymised] from the X charity [anonymised].

Leethen: the sightings, who saw them?

Ian: Some of the African staff.

Leethen: Did they do anything to prevent these things from happening? Anything religious or cultural?

Ian: Sam came and we had a big staff group conversation as a way of beginning to explore these issues... There was about 30 people there.

These accounts showed how professionals adopted positions that presented a dilemma that remained unresolved. It is striking that these professionals continued to practice with this tension whilst being aware of how it could be viewed as them failing to adhere to social work

ethics and values. The perspectives of these participants point to the need to explore the role of religion for professionals, especially concerning their personal beliefs and its influence on practice.


## 6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, attention was focused on understanding how accusations manifest itself over time in the lives of the accused and non-accused. The focus was also on how these children respond to professionals and how professionals respond. From the perspective of the accused and non-accused, accusations should be considered as part of a continuum of abuse that commences pre-accusation. This draws attention to the need for professionals to approach and assess cases by including past experiences of abuse. The findings suggest that the non-accused suffer similarly to the accused, but that the impact of this is not recognised. Their invisibility suggests gaps in awareness of WSP accusations and the need to develop child-focused interventions.


The interplay of professionals' beliefs, understanding, experiences and consideration of ethics warrants serious attention, as some professionals struggle to operate according to statutory duties. Furness and Gilligan (2010) address this issue and recognise the role belief-systems play in assisting social workers in making sense of their everyday encounters. They also focus on how actions and decisions are influenced by these belief-systems. These professionals need a platform to discuss how beliefs and practice collide and how they could best coexist in the workplace. There is also a further issue concerning the safety of workers as well as in the context of spiritual safety in the workplace. This is an area of focus that has received no known attention in the literature and requires further exploration.

This study has also shown that when considering professional responses, it would be wrong to focus narrowly on individual practice, as the professional network is implicated in being

ineffective in some cases. Therefore, a systematic approach to understanding professional

responses would be a preferable approach.

# Chapter 7

# Discussion Chapter

## 7.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I critically evaluate and discuss the findings from the qualitative and quantitative chapters.  I engage with them through a theoretical lens which has enabled me to maximise the benefits of adopting a realistic approach to guide my study. I also scrutinise the findings in light of the wider existing literature. The aim of this research has been to enhance the understanding of WSP accusations made, how children respond to professionals and vice versa. It also examines how professionals respond to cases. The findings presented in Chapters 4 to 6 show that WSP accusations are complex. The findings also show that the experiences of the accused and non-accused siblings are multi-dimensional and that both are affected in varying degrees. WSP accusations are embedded in a broad cultural, religious and socioeconomic context that influences behaviour across multiple settings. These experiences were not consistently recognised by professionals who experienced several challenges when attempting to understanding WSP. Some professionals also drew upon their beliefs to guide their decision-making which made their practice questionable. The accused's and non-accused's cultural and ethnic assumptions of people acted as a barrier to disclosure as they felt "othered" by the services received from professionals.

Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems theory (see 2.3) allowed me to operationalise the use of critical realism. I achieved this by analysing the experiences and perspectives of participants across the different ecological levels to understand what was happening at the empirical and actual levels of reality. I then moved my analysis beyond the empirical and the actual levels to identify causal or explanatory mechanism that influence experiences and events that occur across the ecological environment. I also use Mary Douglas's (1966) work, Purity and Danger (see 2.3.2) as a framework to explicate different aspects of the complex ecological picture. Douglas's work has been particularly useful to conceptualise and contextualise cultural and religious beliefs, understandings of WSP accusations, why families and communities

behave towards children viewed as 'dirt' and how this comes across through interpersonal relationships and eventually becomes internalised.

## 7.2 Socioeconomic, cultural and religious context

The macrosystem represents the blueprint of a society. It is malleable and any changes in it affects behaviour and development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). According to Bronfenbrenner (1977), society's blueprint differs on the basis of culture, ethnicity and religion for different social groups and reflects the existence of various belief systems operating simultaneously. This allows each specific group to have their own ecological environment. This brief outline of the macrosystem is important to understand, as it illuminates understanding of the significance of the social, political, cultural and economic context that enables development.

### 7.2.1 Socioeconomic context

Accused, non-accused, parents and community leaders commented on the level of social deprivation in their communities and families (see 5.2). The accused and non-accused were keenly aware of their socially deprived status and how this affected social encounters and identity (see 5.2.3). Briggs et al's. (2011) work on WSP accusations against children in African communities in London, similarly points to how the impact of contextual factors of poverty, social exclusion, including negative migratory experiences create the groundwork and platform that give rise to accusations. Looking further afield, studies on WSP carried out in sub-Saharan Africa point to an array of structural factors, including the impact of poverty and its effect on the rest of the ecosystem (De Boeck, 2009; Save the Children, 2006). This finding on the socioeconomic context is congruent with the wider literature.

This finding on poverty is significant on several grounds. Firstly, it is the first known account in the UK to reveal the socioeconomic context from the perspective of the accused and non-accused. Secondly, it provides a contextual account of the ecological environment, which sheds light on the extent of deprivation in these communities. Thirdly, where the belief in WSP exists,

poverty has been interpreted as a misfortune, which increases the risk of an accusation (De Boeck, 2009). Poverty has a detrimental impact on development and adds extra layers of difficulties to these children's lives. A further point concerns evidence that children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to experience poor mental health, physical health and exploitation (Bernard, 2018). These are factors that affected both the accused and non-accused. It provides an example of how macro level economic policies impact Black and Asian families and how structural inequalities increases the vulnerability of these children.

A further significant consequence of poverty concerns children from poorer backgrounds experiencing increased levels of adversity in the home and harsher punishment (Straus and Stewart, 1999).  Parenting style is also affected by deprivation and children in families with a low socioeconomic status are likely to experience authoritarian parenting practices (Hoff and Larsen, 2019), which reflects the experiences of the accused and non-accused (further discussed in 7.2.2). Katz et al.'s, (2007) research on the relationship between poverty and parenting found that parents from low socioeconomic backgrounds experienced higher levels of stress and an unsupportive environment that was linked to inconsistent parenting practices. This evidence suggests that the poverty impacts the proximal processes between the accused and non-accused, their interactions with parents and the activities they engage in. Understanding the impact of poverty is critical because it is a generative mechanism that causes events like an accusation to occur and influences parenting practices.

## 7.2.2 Cultural context

The accused and non-accused described the cultural context along two lines. One focused on the home culture and the other on societal culture. They described homelife and parenting practices in terms of "Africanness". Their interpretations of "Africanness" appeared negative, as they interpreted their parents' behaviour as harsh, authoritarian, abusive and unaccepting of

Western influences. The effect of time appeared to have little influence on parenting. This experience of being parented in this way seemed to be partly rooted in the need of their parents to prepare them for a society that is "harsh" towards Africans. What these participants suggest is that their parents' lived experience of being "othered" influenced and shaped their parenting style. This experience of being "othered" viewed through the lens of Said's (1978) concept of Orientalism provides a good framework to understand this situation. A main tenet of Said's Orientalism portrays the Orient as the antithesis to the Occident and the latter's use of its hegemonic strength to create its own image of the other. Orientalism has a direct and impenetrable influence on the values, culture and laws of a society and creates an ecological environment that influences parents' child raising habits. It is understandable for migrant parents to parent according to their culture. Studies on parental ethnotheories have shown that parental practices are influenced by culture and socioeconomic status (Hoff and Larsen, 2019). Taking it one step further, Durgel et al., (2009) found that a parent's immigration status, cultural background and socioeconomic status influences what they value the most in terms of aspirations for their children. Participants like Beni (community leader), Riaz (parent) and Tilly (parent) admitted that their culture influenced their style of parenting (see 5.2.2). Maintaining their culture is ever more important in a society where acculturation does not improve one's socio-economic circumstances due to racial discrimination.

The accused and non-accused's sense of powerlessness was cultivated by cultural expectations around the need for children to acquiesce to the cultural norms imposed on them by adults, by being obedient and unassertive. For them (accused and non-accused) this translated into feelings of being unable to speak out about the abuse. The accused and non-accused perception of self reflects a child-parent power-dynamic that points to relationships between adults and their children being dominated by the power of the former (La Fontaine, 2016). Returning to the matter of "Africanness" and the accused and non-accused perceptions of this, their experiences of parenting framed their attitudes towards their parents' culture as negative. As the context encompassed abuse before being accused, it is unremarkable that they held such views, as abused children tend to have negative views of their abusive parents (Halperin, 1983). However, it is remarkable that their views focused not on their parents' traits or the

influence of structural violence and inequalities on parenting, but more so on their culture. While culture can provide a useful framework to understand parent-child behavior it is too simplistic to allocate blame solely on culture (Fontes, 2005). Interestingly, despite "Africaness" being seen as negative, they all defined themselves as African. They were also conditioned to believing that being African was a disadvantage, and that a harsh form parenting was in preparation for a structurally violent world. Thus, their home culture inculcated a sense of being different from their white counterparts, which had implications for how they interacted with others in various settings.

This manifested itself in varying ways, relating to how the accused and non-accused perceived cultural differences between them and white professionals. This created a perception that white professionals were not culturally competent and this formed a barrier to disclosure (see 6.3). The accused's and non-accused's experiences of being 'othered' cannot be separated from them being from an immigrant and socioeconomic background. The accused's and non-accused's experience of being 'othered' can be explained as a direct result of the impact of how the Orientalists frame the racially different. Said's (1978) Orientalism applied to the experiences of immigrants has demonstrated how racial othering children in schools can led to them being disproportionately affected by school exclusions (Baak, 2018). Additionally, evidence suggests immigrant families face challenges due to immigration laws and policies that are incorrectly applied by services (Bernard, 2018). It is evident that identifying differences is an automatic cognitive process (Gülerce, 2014). However, the schema used to give meaning to this difference is socially constructed. These socially constructed categories such as white vs black and cultured vs uncultured, have been designed to create inequality. Bhaskar (2008) identifies this as dualism and outlines that this occurs as people are drawn and focussed on differences rather than similarities.

 The influence of culture undoubtedly played a critical role in the lives of the accused, non-accused and parents. The macro-level cultural blueprint created by the influence of societal

culture on beliefs, caused parenting in minority groups to be shaped by interactions between the accused and non-accused and various others in a myriad of settings. This also resulted in their essentialising culture and developing stereotypical views about what "Africanness" means. Culture is presented as a source of disempowerment, which impacted their identity formation (Bernard and Gupta, 2008).

### 7.2.3 Religious context

The accused and non-accused's experience of the religious context reflected a macrosystem that presented racialised groups as religious and the white majority group as spiritual (Wong and Vinsky, 2009). This was reflected in the participants' account of Africans having a propensity to adopt WSP beliefs. This process of "othering" religions of minority groups has led to a spirituality vs religion hierarchy, with the former representing Euro-Christians and the latter, racialised groups. This positioning is said to have created a new form of Western racism (Henery, 2003). This too should be seen as a product of how the West racialise religious differences and construe it as a threat (Chandrashekar, 2017). Evidence suggests that there is not only ignorance but also an exaggerated response by professionals to black Christian groups. The media and public's perception are that WSP is primarily an issue that is faced by Black Africans outside a religious context and within Pentecostal churches where Blacks of African origin form the majority and that WSP narrative categorises it as a matter primarily for Africans. This is not to defend religious groups who harm children, especially since the findings show faith groups as accusers, but to highlight the disproportionate attention based on race alone. The perception held by the accused and non-accused that their religious beliefs were different and misunderstood shaped their interactions with others in their social environment.

Like culture, religion helps to build ethnic identity, and cultivates a sense of pride in one's culture (Bernard, 2018). The accused and non-accused grew up having a well carved out religious identity from an early age. The accused, non-accused, parents and community leaders spoke about the important role religion played in their lives prior to the accusation (see 5.2.1).

This is unsurprising as faith organisations are known to provide a sense of community and vital support for ethnic minority families (Bernard, 2018). Furthermore, engagement in religious practice provides a safety net mitigating against stressful situations (Leondari and Gialaman, 2009). This research found that a significant relationship existed between religious beliefs and accusations, as most participants' understanding of WSP was framed by a religious worldview and accusations occurred within a religious context.

## 7.3 Different understandings of witchcraft and spirit possession

The research confirmed the multiple understandings of WSP. These multiple understandings are influenced by religion, atheism, experience, ethnicity, culture and professional knowledge (see 5.4.1). The participants' views are that a child could become a witch or succumb to spirit possession if they fall victim to the nefarious activities of others, or if they willingly accept invitations by evil spirits or inherit it corresponded with the literature (Cimpric, 2010; Molina, 2005; de Boek, 2005). Evans-Pritchard (1937) first reported this, and others have since confirmed the belief. Varying understandings could also come from those of the same religious and ethnic backgrounds.

The existence of different understandings of WSP is not new (Tedam, 2016; Bussien, 2011). The issue here is to develop an understanding of what it means from the perspectives of all involved. This is important because in the UK, research on WSP uses a uniform understanding, ignoring the importance of a nuanced understanding in cases and communities (Briggs et al., 2011; Stobart, 2006). Operational definitions and not a single definition will probably be needed but varied understandings present challenges. For example, a professional's understanding influences their responses. A faith leader's understanding determines forms of interventions and affects both the accused's and non-accused's reaction to an accusation (see 6.4). Therefore, it is important to explore its deeper meaning for everyone involved in cases. This approach is needed because systems of belief differ from society to society (see Douglas 1966). Therefore how it is understood and what is considered 'dirt' in one society may differ to

another. Interpreted through the ecological systems model, responses to events are influenced by our perceptions of them and differences in understanding occur because individuals are influenced differently by context and relationships (Bronfenbrenner 1977). This exemplifies what Bronfenbrenner (1977) refers to as 'development in context', as behaviour impacted by the environment. Once the meanings are understood in a specific case, this could result in all having a better understanding of the belief system and the level of risk involved. Knowledge of this will therefore help to plan an appropriate form of intervention. For example, there are instances when a child accused of being possessed poses no harm to others, but the child is at risk of causing harm to itself (La Fontaine 2016). This differs from cases where children are believed to be witches and cause harm to others (Cimpric, 2010). Furthermore, the differences in understanding of WSP need to be examined alongside solutions to address these misconceived perceptions. This is vital because "dirt" needs neutralising but methods to purify "dirt" are not universally accepted (Douglas, 1966). The implication of this is that some purification methods may conflict with UK child protection law (macrosystem) as evidenced by the police data, and including accounts given by all participants.

The study's findings showing that understanding WSP and categorising "dirt" have implications ingrained in culture and beliefs. For some participants who harbour the notion of WSP as a norm this would make tackling these issues complex. Understanding society's culture is important because an awareness of it will illuminate how social structures and relationships are framed (Newman and Newman; 2020). The varied meanings of WSP also act as a reminder that different definitions of abuse exist because it is influenced by beliefs, culture and context (Munroe, 2019).

## 7.4 Inconsistent recording

A key finding concerns failure to record data on religion, recording nationality for ethnicity and minimal information on the cultural significance of an accusation. The inconsistent recording of

data by professionals is a perennial problem highlighted in serious case reviews and research and is a contributory factor leading to a failure to protect children (Brandon et. al., 2020). The responses to these failures have led professional bodies and employers to provide training and guidance for safeguarding professionals (BASW, 2020). However, despite this, the study shows the problem persists due to a lack of awareness of what is WSP, inadequate electronic recording or effective information management systems, poor understanding of the differences between ethnicity and nationality and poor, or indeed the absence of any form of record keeping. The matter of limited professional knowledge of WSP, is reflected in Oakley et al.'s (2017) research which recommended religious literacy training for professionals, and increased dialogue between minority communities and professionals. The absence of national prevalence or incidence data for the accused and non-accused means any available data are of immeasurable value and a start to understanding the issue.

From an ecological perspective, understanding who the child is at the centre of the ecological system is key to making sense of their developmental trajectory. The lack of data on child characteristics means that professional interventions are limited in scope because they fail to consider all aspects of a child's identity. Poor recording, including other factors like unreliable reporting systems, may contribute to failures identifying child abuse. The absence of data about the non-accused further complicates the matter because limited understanding of these children's experiences means they go unrecognised by professionals. Fundamentally, it demonstrates that administrative processes occurring at the exosystem could directly affect the wellbeing of children.  In the next section, the discussion focuses on these children based on the available data analysed.

## 7.5 Who are the accused and non-accused?

It is important to remember that this study is the first to provide any data on non-accused siblings, and therefore, the first to provide insights into their experiences. The data covered the age when the accusation occurred, gender, ethnicity and religion (see 4.9). Similar data for the

UK has been presented elsewhere for the accused, but the sample size reported is significantly smaller than this study and failed to provide sociodemographic data related to the non-accused children (Stobart, 2006; La Fontaine, 2009). Additionally, it did not include perspectives sourced directly from the accused and the non-accused. Research on this topic has primarily focused on country, region, specific ethnic and religious groups (Brian, 1970; De Boek, 2000; Adinkrah, 2011) and this regrettably does not provide a broad understanding of the crux of the issue.

In this study, the findings showed that the accusation led the non-accused to having a new role in the family, community and faith group. This role was contingent on what happened to the accused. Being the sibling of the accused also made them somewhat invisible, as their personal experiences and their specific emotional needs were often ignored by the accused, professionals, parents and faith leaders (further discussed in next section). It is important to stress that people of all ethnicities are accused, but this study's data are skewed towards Black and Asian children, so their experiences are the focus of this analysis. The presence of White children in the police forces' data, albeit small, warrants more attention (see 4.4.3). Understanding it would provide a deeper understanding of whether causal mechanisms are altered by race, ethnicity and cultural influences.

The findings show the accused commonly have autism, poor mental and physical health including behavioural difficulties (see 4.4.8, 5.6 and 6.2). Other researchers have found that these characteristics are associated with accused children (Save the Children, 2006; De Boeck, 2005). These characteristics have cultural meaning that downgrade them to the status of marginal beings, which influences how others respond to them, the social roles ascribed, relationships, education and career chances (Cook, 2012).

Autism, poor mental health, physical ill-health and behavioural difficulties were considered evidence of defilement or what Douglas (1966) refers to as "matter out of place". They are

considered breaches of natural laws, "abnormal" and as a threat or evidence of the presence of evil. The polluted are always in the wrong, and the characteristics of the accused give them the status of an outcast or marginal beings (Douglas, 1966). This evil is believed to be highly infectious and has implications for all within the settings occupied by the accused. Goffman's (1963) conceptualisation of individuals with "discreditable" characteristics suggests that those accused of WSP suffer stigmatisation that leads to trauma and psychological harm for them (Cimpric, 2010). Distinctively, this study has also shown that the implication of this for those associated with the accused is one of secondary stigma. Both the accused and non-accused experience stigma over time and in different settings. Stigma as a mechanism should be viewed as another form of power and control exerted over these children by the accusers between different settings- at the micro, meso and exo-levels.

Returning to the matter of role, a salient feature of Bronfenbrenner's work is the notion of role, which he defines as 'a set of behaviors and expectations associated with a position in society' (Bronfenbrenner, 1977:25). An accusation should be seen as the accused taking on a new role, one characterised as "dirt". This new role causes what Bronfenbrenner calls an 'ecological transition', which concerns a change in position in the environment due to a change in role, setting or both (see Bronfenbrenner, 1997:26). The role and perception of childhood are culturally and religiously influenced (Munroe, 2019), and have oscillated between purity and evil over time. In Britain, there is no consensus on where children lie between the two (La Fontaine, 2016). This liminal state of being between pure and evil influences beliefs that children are capable of being witches or spirit possessed. A consequence of this is that it presents children as a risk because of their perceived ability to subject others to filth. Pathological images of some children as evil witches and spirit possessed exist worldwide and this has served to cement their status as being marginal beings (La Fontaine, 2016).

## 7.6 What are their experiences of abuse?

A range of findings from this study about the accused and non-accused experiences of WSP accusations, sheds light on the context of their abuse, the surrounding relationships and the impact of WSP on their lived experience.  Findings showed the non-accused experienced a plethora of abuse resulting in significant harm. Of particular significance are the findings that indicated that the non-accused also experienced such abuse (see 4.9).

Sibling relationships were also marked by separation and loss. Siblings play an important role in a child's identity, so separation in the form of ecological transitions to a different setting comes with clear disadvantages (Wilkinson and Bowyer, 2017). The non-accused being left in the care of the accuser reflects the experience of children in other circumstances who remain with abusive parents/carers whilst their abused sibling is removed (Pollock, 2012). The accused's and non-accused's exposure to harm is reflected in research that suggests being exposed to one adversity is an indication of other forms of familial adversities experienced (Sharratt et al., 2022). This reinforces the finding of this research that the accusation is not the first incidence of abuse. Like the accused, the abuse the non-accused experienced occurred across the home, faith organisations, community and school settings. At an actual level the accusation triggered a series of ongoing further events, which showed that the abusive experiences at home and faith organisation were connected and inflicted for the same purpose.

It was evident that based on the perspectives of some participants, the accused's and non-accused's experience of wider societal context and macrosystem factors like culture and spiritual beliefs caused them to develop a self-identity that compartmentalised them as being "othered". This appeared to be a by-product of Orientalist ideology that has constructed a macrosystem based on inequality. This also links to Honneth's (2014) recognition theory and his notion that minority groups struggle for recognition because dominant groups (re)produce unequal structures and define minority groups as they wish. The consequence of this experience for the accused and non-accused manifested in how they perceived statutory organisations and professionals. It is evident the macrosystem blueprint (societal culture)

created a context which influenced certain experiences, and this made the accused and non-accused feel different. The need for recognition and respect appears to be critical mechanisms needed to ensure they feel accepted and perhaps this may reshape their self-perception and perception of others.

The literature on WSP relating to children has mainly started at the point of the accusation as though that is the start of the abuse (Foxcroft, 2009; La Fontaine, 2009; Stobart, 2006), but my findings emphasised that the accusation is usually a continuation of abuse already being experienced. The consequences of witnessing the abuse of a sibling on mental health and wellbeing is well documented in research (Teicher and Vitaliano, 2011). Similarly there is strong evidence confirming the traumatising effect of witnessing parental abuse of a sibling (Tucker et al., 2021). In addition, the experience of poly-victimisation is positively correlated to declining mental health and wellbeing (Hamby et al., 2010). This is significant because the accusation signified the experience of multiple forms of harm and an increase in the intensity of the abuse. This study has identified factors at different layers of the ecological environment that may have contributed to poor mental health and wellbeing outcomes. These factors at the different ecological levels include isolation, poor peer relationships, abuse and neglect, trauma, parenting style, culture and parental abuse. The empirical level experiences at the microsystem level included isolation, trauma, "harsh" parenting style, abuse and neglect. At a mesosystem level, some experienced poor relationships with peers and teachers, discord between step and biological parents and isolation from relatives and community.

Despite both groups experiencing harm, professionals, one parent (Tilly), faith and community leaders often focused on the accused. This lack of recognition of the experiences of the non-accused surfaced for the first time in interviews (see 6.2.4). Because their abusive experiences started before the accusation, it was not possible to attribute poor mental health to the accusation. However, the experiences of the accused and non-accused indicate that the level of mental health suffering could be significant. Participants like Sid, Kelly, Michael, Dianna and

Cathy showed that hospitalisation and formal mental health diagnoses were partly a by-product of the abuse. The impact of this on their developmental trajectory was obvious, as they struggled, to varying degrees, through the educational system and in their careers. This is intelligible as mounting evidence suggests a correlation between mistreated children, academic failure and the likelihood of dropping out of school (Snow, 2009). Once again, it is not possible to draw conclusions from this small sample, but the accounts of these participants are important as they highlight the long-term impact which has not been evidenced before in the literature. Furthermore, cultural and religious interpretations of mental health point to its aetiology as being WSP (Rassool, 2019). This study and others (Stobart, 2006; La Fontaine, 2009) evidence that accusations are being levelled against children.

## 7.7 Relationships

The findings showed that the child-stepparent relationship had a significant impact on the accused's and non-accused's developmental trajectory. Whilst no one particular factor can explain abuse in stepfamilies, it is viewed as a complex family structure, incomplete and with cultural norms governing social encounters (Ganong and Coleman, 2017). Further research on abuse within such family structures also suggest there is a high rate of abuse occurring in them (Temrin et al., 2011). Extant research on WSP provides no evidence confirming stepparents as accusers of their biological child when a stepchild is present in the family (Save the Children, 2006).

Evolutionary theory provides a possible explanation for why stepparents may target their stepchild. It suggests that stepparents are less invested in their non-biological children and this makes them vulnerable to abuse (Debowska et al., 2020). Therefore, it is likely that reconstituted families increase the vulnerability of these children because they are threatened by both the stepparent and biological parent.

A further finding that centred of the role of the stepparent pointed to conflict at the mesosystem that occurred across two ecological systems and concerned step-mother and biological mother relationships. This involved them being "love rivals" (see 5.5). Based on the account of these accused, their stepmothers continued the enmity toward their biological mother vicariously through them. Of significance, this manifested itself despite them being in different countries. It will be wrong to draw conclusions from this very small sample, but this finding provides some sense of how accusations may be used to exact revenge and implicate the accused and non-accused. To improve the situation for the accused and non-accused would require the adults working out their differences and having better communication between themselves.

Whilst this study provides insight into the accused and stepparent dynamic, what seems missing in the literature is an understanding of the role played by biological fathers who are present at the time of the accusation and who do not accuse their child. This study provides little insight on this issue (see 6.2.5). These relationships are presented as a web of tension between all involved which as previously highlighted directs attention to how reconstituted families increase the vulnerability of children.

Another significant finding of this study concerned the relationship between the non-accused and the accused. The sibling-sibling dyad was marked by a complex interplay of abuse, support and/or indifference and this changed over time. The findings showed that there were four cases involving adult siblings as perpetrators of multiple forms of abuse (4.7). Whilst the number of cases is small and not robust enough to make generalisations, it highlights the need to consider the role of adult sibling abusers. With sibling abuse ranked as the most common form of interpersonal violence (Kiselica and Morrill-Richards, 2017), and the one least likely to be recognised, defined and responded to as violence (Kettrey and Emery, 2006), it is important to understand how they both internalise and make sense of their experience of an accusation, especially where they are step or half-siblings.

The above addressed abuse by siblings but conversely the data also confirmed how sibling relationships may be supportive (see 6.2.5). Research on sibling relationships in dysfunctional homes shows how they work to protect each other, but at the same time, the environment also engenders difficulties (Dunne, 1988). According to participants, like Alice, Kelly and Sid, the support they offered each other seemed to reduce the impact of the abuse temporarily. This finding suggests sibling affection can moderate the impact of stressful events (Gass et al., 2007). However, an important finding is that the accused had less insight into the impact of the abuse on their non-accused sibling, whilst the non-accused were more likely to commit to memory the impact of the abuse for themselves and the accused. Considering these findings through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's (1977) chronosystem, it highlights the need to look at the impact of an accusation as a significant event on sibling relationships over time.

## 7.8 Safety behaviour

This study has shown a modus operandi involving the levelling of an accusation and a bid to exorcise evil. Douglas' (1966) work on pollution with cultural and religious rules governing what is forbidden or acceptable helps explain how accusations occur. When defilement occurs or pollution rules are broken there is a thrust toward returning to order because existing patterns are destroyed by disorder. The accused and non-accused often mentioned how following the accusation, there was a marked increase in the level of religiosity within the family. This is a quest for order achieved through ritual. Action to nullify danger presented by marginal beings is enacted by others (Douglas, 1966) in the microsystem in the home, faith organisation and community. An important finding is that this could include sending a person overseas. This emphasises the need to consider multiple ecological environments and how ecological transitions are experienced. Therefore, the assessment of the needs of some of these children must include an understanding of laws, culture and religious beliefs that are part of the macro-system and how this influences other systems. Additionally, a further complexity concerns causal mechanisms in ecological environments overseas which may have an influence on experiences and events in England.

The study shows that the non-accused had to engage in different forms of "safety" behaviour (see 5.8.2) through their engagement in rituals. The level of religiosity engaged in by the accused and non-accused were described as abusive and difficult to comprehend. Engagement in religious activities can be cathartic during periods of distress. However, this study has showed how different forms of practices and religiosity could have a detrimental effect on mental health (Dein, 2020). This highlights the need to consider what practices should and should not be allowed but the likelihood of reaching a consensus on this is challenging.

A growing body of research on religiosity and abuse confirms a correlation exists. Stout-Miller et al., (1998) found a positive significant relationship between religiosity and child sexual abuse. Concerning physical abuse and religiosity, Rodriguez and Henderson (2010) found individuals exhibiting extrinsic religiosity had increased potential to instigate physical abuse. Religiosity may also worsen situations for those facing family dysfunctions (Strawbridge et al., 1998). Further evidence on the influence of parents' religiosity on parenting style, suggests that it can include such forms as using harmful behaviour towards children (Caputo, 2004). Religiosity and child abuse is replete with evidence of the connection between them (Stout-Miller et al., 1998).

In the context of WSP, this research has demonstrated the importance of understanding the religious journeys of families before and after the accusation. The changes in religious beliefs and practices and how religious activities are experienced and practised are therefore also crucially relevant. Therefore, this must be viewed as part of the chronosystem as it entails experience and significant events over a lengthy period of time. These events would not have occurred without the allegations being directly and indirectly sanctioned by the parent. The role of faith leaders has been characterised in the literature concerning WSP, as abusers who propagate false theology to extort money from parents/carers (De Boeck, 2009; Foxcroft, 2014; de Boeck; 2016). Faith leaders are perceived as powerbrokers between the spiritual and physical world with powers to influence both (Bussien et al., 2011). Possession of special powers to heal is given to those who can for a time, dispense with rational control (Douglas,

1966). This being 'one after god' stresses their authority and influence over parents and more so over the accused and non-accused. With this being the backdrop of social encounters between the accused, non-accused and faith leaders, the level of excessive power wielded by faith leaders is clear.

The findings related to safety behaviour helps our understanding of the various forms of behaviour used to nullify the threat of danger and why such behaviour is resorted to. It is therefore important to understand how various forms of safety behaviour are enacted in different settings.

## 7.9 Family, Faith and Community setting

These non-accused also traversed the same settings of home, faith organisation and community, just as the accused did as indicated above. Therefore there was considerable overlap of experiences of abuse and their ill-effects of such abuse were similar. Their role-change to being a non-accused sibling was obviously in direct response to the accusation made against their sibling. In the various settings, the non-accused also became a protector of the accused, abuser and victim/survivor. At a microsystem level, the accused and non-accused had social encounters between them and others with the most significant proximal influences occurring in the family, faith and community settings because the accusation and abuse occurred there. In these settings, the accusation resulted in an ecological transition for the accused and non-accused, and this impacted their social encounters and social structures that they inhabited.

With most of the accusations occurring in the home and with parents/carers being the primary accusers, the setting warrants attention with regard to how the environment is experienced by the accused and non-accused. Sid described his home using the metaphor of an 'explosion',

which is used to describe a hostile home environment (see 6.2.2). The other accused and non-accused accounts mirrored this description. The use of "explosion" to describe his home setting provides a different perspective on the experience, one that focuses on an embodied metaphor. Woodin et al. (2021) contend that the metaphor is likely to be experienced viscerally which is likely to occur in a setting deemed emotional (Samur, er al., 2015). 'Explosion' should be seen as an outward expression of the internal discomfort experienced from the relationship with parents/carers and others in the home setting.

The faith setting was also experienced as an emotional setting due to the violence meted out there. Faith organisations became a central part of the lives of these children. They become their substitute home with the faith leader exerting more power than their parents. Faith leaders traversed into the home-faith organisation settings unfettered, and a hierarchical form of influence existed with faith organisations being at the summit. According to the ecological systems theory, the home is supposed to be the most proximal level (Brofenbrenner, 1977), however, for the accused and non-accused their immediate context became jointly the faith and home settings.

The role of faith leaders has been subjected to scrutiny in cases of WSP, as they have been labelled exploitative and propagating false beliefs (Foxcroft, 2014; Foxcroft, 2009). They achieve this by using the misfortunes created by an unstable socio-economic and cultural context to accuse children of WSP and charging parents for spiritual intervention (Briggs and Whittaker, 2018). It would be wrong to label all faith leaders as such, as some have worked to tackle the issue of accusations against children in favour of the children (Briggs et al., 2011).

Parents/carers acquiesce to faith leaders because in many communities, faith leaders are believed to possess tangible spiritual powers. According to Douglas (1966), these powers are both 'internal', lying in the pysche, such as the ability to connect to a spiritual force and having

the gift to heal others, and 'external', the ability to provide blessings, charms and invocations. Possessing these controlled powers elevates a faith leader's role in society by making them highly respected. The power believed to be vested in faith leaders allowed them to influence the family and community settings and provided them with sometimes unfettered access to the home and community.

The perceived powers of faith leaders also give their religious organisation power and control over their community. This suggests that within the microsystem and mesosystem there is a hierarchy of influence, with the religious organisation being at the summit.  The inter-relationships between the microsystem, particularly parents/carer-faith leader relationships are important to understand, as these are the most powerful in the life of the accused and non-accused. In other words, the nature of the relationship between the parents and faith leader significantly impacts the development of the accused and non-accused. This dynamic should be seen as a causal explanation for why faith leaders are able to accuse and abuse children without apparent consequences.

A key finding of the study was that accusations and abuse were being witnessed or perpetrated by the community. This occurred in both closed and open public spaces, making it visible to a chosen few and sometimes to many others (see 4.7 and 5.7). Consequently, the study has shown that WSP accusations and abuse should not be considered hidden, as it can happen in "plain sight". This is contrary to what has been reported elsewhere (Miller & Bourlet 2005). The experience of the community's participation in abuse mirrors cases of forced marriage and "honour" based abuse (Julios, 2016) and has featured in the literature relating to WSP (Tedam and Adjoa, 2017). The challenge is therefore to understand the reasons that allow this level of abuse to occur. The findings showed that the community's risk of contagion and fear of the accused and non-accused featured as reasons that allowed this to occur.

The family-community dyad is thus important to understand, as communities can be a source of harm or of support (Riedel, 2012; Adinkrah, 2011). Communities studied here adopted either position. Considering the interrelationship between family, faith organisation and community settings. Faith leaders and organisations exerted considerable influence and control across the full expanse of the microsystem. The faith leaders derided the ability of statutory services to make positive changes, as they believed WSP to be a spiritual matter to be resolved spiritually. In situations like this, social workers offering secular support are likely to be viewed as agents of evil (Humphrey, 2015) and this may cause families to not accept support. The findings also showed statutory services failed to contact faith leaders during investigations or to hold them accountable for allegedly abusing children (see 4.10). This failure inevitably sends a message to communities that faith leaders are powerful (Foxcroft, 2014). The paternalistic view held by parents/carers and communities that faith leaders know best may place these children at continued risk.

To label communities resistant to affording children rights and to protection would be wrong as the police data showed that some members of the community referred concerns to the police and that some community leader participants also commented on their engagement work with statutory services (see 4.4.2). Community initiatives have achieved some positive attitudinal changes in communities and faith leaders (see Briggs et al., 2011). However, these initiatives are timebound as it is linked to funding and this makes addressing the issues superficially or in a piecemeal fashion.

## 7.10 Professional responses: values, beliefs and (mis)recognitions

The image of statutory services portrayed by the accused, non-accused and some other participants of children's services should be considered as a serious barrier to accessing support. Their perception that statutory services discriminate against their community has been evidenced in research (Bernard and Harris, 2018). There is an element of truth in this as social work education and professional practice have been indicted for being discriminatory. For

example, Beck and Wahab (2015) showed how social work education reproduces oppressive practice and Singh and Tedam (2019) argue that the practice of social work occurs within the context of oppression of minorities. Furthering this argument, Mukherjee and Chowdhury's (2014) examination of social work on international study brochures shows how it replicates stereotypical imagery. This infiltration of Orientalism into social work teaching rears itself in practice, especially where there is engagement with immigrants and certain religious groups. Eliassi (2013) argues how the culture of immigrants is "othered" by social workers and therefore subjected to discriminatory practices. In response to this challenge, academics have written extensively on promoting the importance of anti-racist and anti-oppressive practices (Singh and Tedam, 2019; Dominelli, 2017).


The findings showed that teachers and health professionals were referral sources to the police (see 4.10). Once referred, children's services and the police responses ranged between being protective, "semi"-protective (providing some protection and not recognising the possibility of continued harm) and in the worst cases, failing to respond when the abuse occurred. Professional responses concerning the non-accused showed a failure to recognise their experience and the possible effects on them (see 4.9). There were cases of adult siblings with mental health needs being accused and no record of their being referred to adult services. The ability of professionals to recognise abuse has received significant attention, with evidence suggesting that professionals under-recognise emotional abuse and neglect (Glaser, 2002). Looking more specifically at WSP, it has been evidenced that professionals lacked confidence in recognising WSP as an issue (Oakley et al., 2017). Focusing on the experiences of Black children and serious case reviews (SCR) (including SCRs involving WSP), Bernard and Harris (2018) found that professionals failed to recognise abuse, or indeed misunderstood their experiences, as they lacked specific knowledge of WSP and other cultural and faith-related issues. Bernard and Harris also found variability in the way SCR authors incorporated the issue of Black children's culture and race in their analysis.  Their evidence reflects the findings of this study, which confirms that professionals fail to recognise experiences occurring at an empirical level and the impact of such events. Consequently, this misrecognition may result in a lack of insight

concerning what lies at a deeper level, which is the generative mechanisms that give rise to the events and experiences across the micro, meso, exo and macro systems that come into play. Undoubtedly, this has implications for the protection of these children as the form of intervention would be uninformed by the reality of the situation.

As discussed in the previous section, the accused and non-accused were abused across different settings and in an orchestrated manner. The multiple perspectives of the various participants point to professionals failing to respond appropriately to concerns about faith organisations. The interviews with participants and findings from the police database suggest the actions of some faith organisations should have been investigated for participation in organised abuse, because the harm occurred across multiple settings ranging from family, community and faith group setting (London Safeguarding Children Partnership, 2022). The occurrence of organised abuse has a specific meaning within the UK children's protection system. As soon as the definition and criteria are met, it triggers a multiagency response initiating safeguarding measures at the exosystem level. Bronfenbrenner refers to this as distal processes because these events are not situated in the presence of the child. Therefore, events at the exosystem level set the parameters of what happens at the lower levels and influences safeguarding outcomes for children. In effect these distal influences modify and shape proximal processes. However, the findings showed no instances of organised abuse measures implemented and no explanation justifying this inaction. It is uncertain if organised abuse is being ignored, or professionals are (un)aware of the procedures and policies. Consequently, this absence raises concerns about the quality of safeguarding interventions, the possible lack of understanding of WSP, risk and how communities respond to WSP cases. Decisions to instigate organised abuse processes are made by senior managers located at the exosystem level. The absence of such measures being implemented directs attention specifically to where change is required.

Some of the professionals and some of the accused and non-accused described system failures that resulted in disjointed responses. Social workers, Bailey and Anna, discussed this when they described multiagency responses as risk-averse, disjointed and siloed (see 6.4). The importance of working in partnership is the benchmark of a good safeguarding system (HMG, 2018). It involves professionals in different agencies working together, following relevant policies and procedures to safeguard children.

I have thus far, highlighted issues of procedure and system that have affected how professionals respond at an exosystem level. I now focus on an important finding concerning professional values and beliefs which are influenced by factors situated at a macrosystem level. Professional responses emphasised that through the process of professional socialisation, professionals can override personal views and work to uphold the ethics of their discipline (Ashton, 2010). They showed that for some the causal mechanism of "professionalism" enabled professionals to manage their beliefs effectively. However, professional socialisation through training, professional ethics and values are not uniformly distributed amongst professionals (Hantman et al., 2006). Whilst for some professionals their values might remain dormant or unconscious, possibly because of fears that their views would be "othered", the opposite is a reality for those who perform a dual role of faith leader and social worker. The findings showed that they struggled to control the influence of their culturally and religiously shaped perspectives. On this note, I direct attention to those professionals whose values and beliefs and professional knowledge combined to produce questionable forms of practice. It also registers how a professional's conduct in their personal and professional life is shaped by their values (Gilligan and Furness, 2010). An example of this is Yemi who refused to give her full name to a service user in case it was used in a ritual against her (see section 6.4.4).

This point leads to a further finding concerning professionals who believed the children they worked with are either possessed or are a witch and the impact this had on their practice. A significant finding of this study is the absence of research exploring WSP beliefs amongst

professionals and whether holding such beliefs affect how they work with service users and colleagues.  The interview findings showed the need for further research on this issue and the development of a broad curriculum that includes religious and cultural sensitivity and a focus on understanding oneself as the starting point to becoming a competent professional. It must be acknowledged that some professionals may be secretive about their beliefs for fear of being ridiculed (Gilligan and Furness, 2014) or to balance the need to be uncritical. However, others might struggle, so attention must be centred on identifying how best to assist professionals to resolve any tensions between their beliefs and professional standards.  It is important to recognise professional values and at the same time, support professionals to practice within the law, policy, and ethical codes and to make sound judgements and decisions. It is also important to be sensitive to the reality that they do this mainly under conditions of uncertainty, and in response to difficult situations occurring at the levels of the empirical and the actual.  While this may not resolve any contradictions between personal beliefs and professional values, it offers an opportunity to support professionals.

## 7.11 Conclusion

This chapter laid out the findings and analysed them through the lenses of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and Douglas's work on Purity and Danger. The study revealed the experiences of the accused and non-accused across the different levels of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, analysed the events that occurred across the ecological system and presented findings which provided insights into the explanatory and causal mechanisms that generated them.

The findings suggested that an accusation is a life changing abusive event for the accused and non-accused. They experienced similar levels of abuse, which started before the accusation and intensified over time. They were also similarly impacted and this affected several areas of their lives in the medium to the long-term. Of significance is how the context and particularly the macrosystem (culture, values, spiritual beliefs), and accusation shaped their perception of self and interpersonal relationships with parents and professionals. These children had a broad

mesosystem with the main proximal processes occurring in the family, community and faith settings. Any approach to understanding the lived experiences of these children must consider the interconnectivity between these settings and the power dynamics between the parent and faith leader. Communities appear to have a firm belief in WSP, which is difficult to shift. These factors highlighted how WSP is a complex matter and understanding the context within which it occurs is important.

How the accused and non-accused's position themselves relative to professionals had a significant impact on their social encounters between them. The findings pointed to the interplay between ethnic difference and similarity and how this influenced the quality of these relationships. The psychological (e.g., cognitive distortions and bias) and structural mechanisms (e.g., social work education) affecting professional judgement and practice suggest that a multipronged approach is needed to reduce their impact on practice. Bronfenbrenner's work provides a helpful framework for explaining professional responses, as it directs attention to the influences of culture and religious beliefs, which are part of the macro-level system, and how they direct and control lower system settings, events and individuals. As a critical realist, I uphold the position that values play a critical part in the production of knowledge, and it is needed to advance human emancipation (Bhaskar, 1998). However, how knowledge has been produced and implemented by professionals has placed some of these children at risk. Critical realist thinking maintains that an important next step is to challenge discriminatory and oppressive mechanisms (Houston, 2005) because one aim of research is to challenge the status quo. This research has done this by drawing attention to the plight of the accused and non-accused and identified issues with professional practice with the aim of improving safeguarding outcomes.

In the next chapter, I move forward from this discussion to make suggestions for increasing awareness of the pertinent issues, improving professional practice and strengthening means of safeguarding children. Focus is also placed on my reflections during the course of undertaking my research whilst conducting this study.

# Chapter 8

# Conclusion

## 8.1 Introduction

There has been limited research on WSP with regard to children being accused in the UK, and even less is known about non-accused siblings of the accused. The related literature therefore is also very scant. This study aims to address this lack by exploring the experiences of the accused alongside the non-accused. It also aims to achieve a fuller understanding of WSP accusations, how they are experienced by the accused and non-accused and the impact it has on them. It also examines the professional responses from perspectives of all those who were in one way or another involved. Through gathering and analysing data drawn from diverse sources thematically, this study has generated new ways of understanding the topic and offered new insights for safeguarding children. It also suggests areas for further research.

I used the ecological system theory as the framework to support a critical realist approach to interpreting the findings. I have also drawn on Mary Douglas' concepts of purity and danger to illuminate key elements of the ecology of WSP. This allows the analysis to delve beneath the experiences that participants describe. This helps in understanding the fundamental (including causal) mechanisms that shape and explain them.

This final chapter outlines this study's original contribution to knowledge. The chapter is divided into six sections under the following headings: key recommendations, challenges and limitations, suggestions for further research, dissemination, personal reflections and concluding reflections.

## 8.2 Original contributions to knowledge

The dearth of literature focusing on WSP enabled my research to focus on an under-researched area. Reasons for scant attention to WSP include the failure of international and governmental organisations and of academics to recognise or understand it. The topic's association with cultural and religious beliefs and under-represented communities are areas that receive little attention (Secker, 2013; La Fontaine, 2012; Gilligan, 2009). Evidence of this lack is the fact that the most recent of studies are a decade or more old. That of La Fontaine's (2012) and Stobart's (2006). Thereafter, there seems to be limited further published research.

The dearth of UK literature on the topic meant that the thesis frequently refers to the two UK studies undertaken by Stobart (2006) and La Fontaine (2016), and these have made cursory mention of siblings. This research project has attempted to address and improve knowledge of the experiences of children who were not accused. However, it is important to reiterate that there were only two non-accused siblings in the sample of 22 participants but the perspective of other participants provided further data on them including the data from the police force's database. I adopted a multi-pronged and multi-perspective approach which allowed for my research questions to be answered.

There were challenges in conducting this research project. These were difficulties accessing the non-accused and accused, limited data available from statutory services, difficulties with negotiating access to data held by statutory services, small number of known cases which made accessing professionals a challenge and finally, having to negotiate the mistrust displayed by faith communities to me. Being considered an "insider" also presented some challenges. At best I was perceived to be a threat by some organisations. These issues warranted changes in the study's research questions, sampling, data collection methods and my approach to analysis. Overcoming these challenges was not easy and was mainly achieved because of my insider status. My position as a professional, working at the forefront academically and professionally

on WSP matters nationally and internationally access to key informants and police records. My study is the third known research project, after Stobart (2006) and La Fontaine (2009), where a researcher was allowed direct access to a police force's database. These successes have allowed me to provide insights from a breadth of sources that could not have been achieved by others.

The challenges posed by studying WSP cases also include the matter being a taboo topic affecting "hard to reach" and seldom heard of groups. This enquiry has shown that overcoming this challenge requires taking an iterative approach and accessing multiple sources of data, which allows for the research process to continue if one line of enquiry falters. The study therefore offers researchers insights on designing and conducting future research.

Apart from WSP not being an object of much systematic study, it has also been under-theorised in social work. The approaches taken to conceptualise this research has provided new ways of interpreting and explaining the phenomenon. More precisely, because WSP cases are complex and influenced by a myriad of contextual issues, using an ecological systems theory has allowed for a better understanding of the developmental outcomes for the non-accused and accused. This is enabled by looking beyond the impact to individual characteristics to considering them within holistically within their ecological environment. Thus, using this theory has provided insight at a micro level concerning how they experience the phenomenon in different settings and how interactions between the different microsystems responded to the accusation. Understanding events at the exo-system level provided insights into how professionals respond and at a macrolevel the effects of culture, religion, beliefs and laws on the experience of the accused and non-accused. The study showed the significance of considering experiences and events over time and the impact these changes caused. Bronfenbrenner's (1989) chronosystem which focuses on significant life events over time illuminates understanding on how WSP accusations should be considered. Theorising and conceptualising the findings through the lens of Purity and Danger provided insights into how at an individual level, WSP cases are

understood and how and why individuals, faith leaders and communities behave and respond to "dirt". Using one approach to analysing and interpreting these data would have provided a limited understand of the issue, thereby failing in its attempt to grasp the nature, context and impact of WSP accusations.

By furthering the understanding of WSP using these approaches, it is hoped that it stimulates a broader, more informed discussion on the topic. The study is timely as it comes at a time when the UN recently adopted a resolution (UNGA, 2021) (see 2.9), requiring member states to recognises WSP accusations and labelled abuse linked to it as a human rights violation. This is a historic act that shows a growth in interest of the topic, but the resolution only focuses on those accused and does not specifically focus on children or recognise the impact on the non-accused. Additionally, it is still left to be seen if this results in any material change. This project offers findings that can support signatories of the resolution, international human rights bodies and others with insight on the need to broaden the scope of those who are affected.  This should also include non-accused siblings.

It is timely that my research project concerns were undertaken at a time of societal debates on structural racism, inequalities and their impact on children (Tedam and Cane, 2022). These issues have been longstanding, but the Covid-19 pandemic has reenergised debates and magnified the disproportionate effects on minority groups. The narratives of the accused and non-accused centred on their experience of being "othered" on cultural, ethnic and religious grounds and the impact of this on relationships with each other, peers, parents and professionals. This undoubtedly adds to debates on how racism and other forms of "othering" act as a causal mechanism generating events and experiences within the sphere of WSP accusations. It also has relevance to social justice.

It must be reiterated that this is a small research project with a very disparate sample. Therefore, it is not possible to over-generalise the findings. However, the claims this research can make are that it offers insights that have not previously been available. These are enhanced through theorisation and contextualisation in ways that have not previously been attempted that enable better understanding. The study also suggests directions for improvement in policy and practice, one that is informed by the explanatory and causal mechanisms that generate experiences and events to occur at different levels of the ecological environment.

## 8.3 Key Findings

The summary of key findings presented here is organised according to the multiple levels of the ecological environment- starting with the macro level and continuing through the exo and meso to the micro level. Critical realists are fallibilists, in that it views explanations of reality as being imperfect (Bhaskar, 1979). Therefore, these findings should be viewed as such.

A finding of this study was that the characteristics and behaviour of the accused set them apart as "dirt" which led to them being accused. Additionally, the non-accused should not be considered as being on the periphery as they too suffered a similar fate in terms of their mental health and abuse. Findings concerning individual characteristics mainly focused on the characteristics of the accused and there was less of this for the non-accused. The experience of the accused does have an impact on the experience of the non-accused. Therefore, the power of association directs attention to the impact of courtesy stigma on the non-accused and stigma on the accused. Stigma provided a useful explanatory mechanism to understand how the community responded to them and how this affected their empirical lived experience and influenced consequential events.

Whilst it is useful to understand issues of individual characteristics and behaviour, this fails to facilitate comprehension of the deeper explanatory mechanisms operating. The findings showed the need to consider the influence of the macro system context. At a macro system

level, the culture and religious beliefs of the accused and non-accused are presented as a sub-culture of the wider societal blueprint (culture). This is based on the view that the group with hegemonic powers does not understand their community and lived experiences, and therefore engendered feelings of being different on religious, cultural, socioeconomic and ethnic grounds. These factors had a profound impact on self-perception and how the accused and non-accused engaged in social encounters across different layers of the environment. For example, at a meso system level, the accused and non-accused perceived that some professionals were not psychologically invested in them because of their ethnicity, religion and cultural background. Therefore, the process of "othering" featured as an explanatory mechanism that increased their vulnerability. These are important to understand as it emphasises the context within which accusations and their development occur. For example, having an appreciation of religious beliefs is important not just for understanding the accusation, but also for recognising and understanding its effects on the accused and non-accused. Knowledge and understanding of the cultural context can inform how mainstream UK culture is in many ways at odds with the cultures and religious beliefs of some immigrant communities. It can also reveal how the culturally influenced ideas about WSP affect the accused and non-accused thereby facilitating developing ideas on how culturally informed interventions could be designed.

The research also highlighted issues related to the socioeconomic status of the community. Whilst ethnicity is not a proxy for poverty, it cannot be ignored that recent evidence shows that 53% of Black children, 55% of Pakistani children and 61% of children from a Bangladeshi background live in poverty and this trend has remained the same for several decades (Sparrow, 2022). The experience of social deprivation is intertwined with being "othered" (see 5.2.3) and this added another layer of complexity to how they engaged with the world. Therefore, social deprivation should be viewed as a mechanism that generated empirical level experiences and events at the actual level.

There were a number of other critical findings concerning events occurring at the exo system level. These included poor recording, mis-categorisation of cases, disjointed multiagency responses, with professional values and beliefs surfacing at a practical level in ways that affected the quality of safeguarding responses. The study showed that all participants drew on their 'situated knowledge' of what WSP is.  There is a clear need for professionals to understand the meaning of WSP for all involved. Those with a lived cultural and religious experience of it were able to articulate a deeper understanding of what it is and its manifestations in everyday life. For professionals, closeness to the belief caused tensions as it conflicted with prevailing policies and guidelines. This raised questions about the nature and impact of safeguarding policies and procedures in England and whether they should be developed to reflect the diversity that characterises British society. At present they can be described as 'mono-policies and procedures' as they are not culturally and religiously informed and may therefore direct professional practice in a manner that is discriminatory. This study, focus on WSP, has demonstrated how they may lead to misreading the needs of children from minority groups. The need for competency building of some professionals featured as a much-needed form of intervention. Some professionals were able to practice without being influenced by their beliefs. Professionalism as an explanatory mechanism helped to explain why they were able to function in their duties to safeguard children.

The study also exposed the lack of administrative data on WSP allegations against children, which reflects poor recording and understanding of the phenomenon amongst professionals. This led to failure to recognise the experiences of the non-accused. The lack and inconsistency of data prevents proper analysis of the needs of these children and limits the ability to provide informed responses. These actions and behaviours determined how events occurred at the meso and micro levels.

Findings related to the meso system concerned the interactions between different settings at a micro system level. Accusations resulted in the family, faith and community members working

in unison to return the system to normality. The response required someone with powers that allowed them to do this, and the power rested with faith leaders. This led to the development of a hierarchy of power between parents and faith leaders with the latter being above the former. The parent-faith-leader dyad appeared to be one of the most significant relationships that affected the accused and non-accused.

Another finding concerning the meso system related to how disputes between parents and stepparents affected the micro system inhabited by the accused and non-accused. This study revealed a possible explanation of why this tendency exists and how it caused a series of events that permeated the micro system inhabited by the accused and non-accused. The reason appeared to be the existence of a "love triangle" that led the stepmother to accuse their stepchild. Whilst poor attachment between the non-accused and stepparent did not feature as an explanatory mechanism, it is possible that this is a factor (Stobart, 2006).

Relations with stepparents was a significant factor that led to an accusation and featured as a significant microlevel proximal influence for the non-accused. This finding is particularly interesting because it raises questions about the strength of the relationship between the siblings too, as the accused remained clandestine about some of the abuse their sibling's parent inflicted on them. Sibling relationships were characterised as being supportive in the medium term and grew less strong over time. The quality of these relationships, however, may not be as they seem because the accused appeared not to recognise the abusive experiences of the non-accused. The findings presented thus far show several interlocking explanatory mechanisms that generate experiences in real life which increases the vulnerability of the accused and non-accused.

Another relationship concerned the non-accused with their parents. Parents appeared to feel the need to protect their non-accused child(ren), not from the impact of the accusation but

from the danger presented by the accused. This generated further harm as the parents' purification attempts to "heal" the accused included the non-accused in the purification process, which resulted in them being abused too.

Relationships with fathers as non-accusers when stepmothers were the accusers also raised issues concerning the role of parents who do not accuse but fail to protect children. The abusive and sometimes dysfunctional nature of these relationships for some of the participants did not result in relationships being permanently terminated. A combination of factors, such as forgiveness, resilience, disbelieving the accuser and obtaining an apology from the accuser increased the chances of rekindling relationships. A further finding concerning relationships centred on the struggle to form or maintain intimate relationships with partners. This reflected the long-term impact of an accusation.

Another finding concerned relations with peers. The accused's and non-accused's encounters at school with peers did not buffer the effects of the accusation and abuse. Contextual factors like poverty, culture and beliefs had an impact on these micro system level social encounters, which resulted with some feeling isolated and angry about being misrecognised.

The study shows that it is important to consider the chronosystem with its focus on time and the context of development. This stressed the necessity to consider the empirical and actual levels over the course of a lifetime and the accusation featured as just one amongst several significant life events.

## 8.4 Suggested implications

The main endeavour of social enquiry is to develop an understanding of the object of research and sometimes to inform change. Part of the reason I was drawn to critical realism was that it went beyond the domain of the empirical and actual and into the real. This requires attention to be directed towards revealing generative mechanisms which are social structures generating events and experiences. Using a critical realist's approach has encouraged me to develop insights beyond an individual's experience conveyed to me, with the hope that causal explanations can either be challenged and/or changed. The findings of a small study cannot be generalised, so it is important to recognise that this presents challenges in making recommendations. Instead, I have drawn upon insights from the study that may point towards an improved understanding of causal explanations, and this is the basis on which I now highlight the implications that these suggest for practice, policy, and for further research. I have again used the ecological systems model as the framework for organising discussion of these implications. Doing so is not unproblematic, as some implications sit across more than one level. To overcome this, I have discussed each implication in the area where I believe it would have the strongest influence in effecting change.

## 8.4.1 Macro level implications

Making changes at a macro level presents challenges, not only because society's culture is often entrenched and takes time to shift. For example, to dismantle stereotypical views about racialised groups that permeate culture would take time. However, there are still measures that could be considered seriously and implemented:

a.      Mono-policies and mono-guidance may help to perpetuate discrimination. Therefore, it is important to have children's policies and guidelines that recognise the diversity of children's needs. All policies and guidelines should have this focus and should be co-produced with communities with relevant experience.

b.      Consideration should be given to exploring if a civil order like the Female Genital Mutilation Order should be implemented to protect children especially in cases where they are removed from the UK- WSP Accusation Protection Order.

## 8.4.2 Exo level implications

There are key issues with professional practice and knowledge. The following considerations focus on this area:

a.      To improve and augment professional knowledge and practice, multi-agency training should include improving understanding of WSP, what the child's world (accused and non-accused) look like in these cases and how to apply different theoretical frameworks to conceptualise the findings of their assessments.

b.      Learning institutions preparing students for the professional world should have a culturally and religiously informed curriculum.

c.      Religion and culture are important to the families involved in these cases and to some professionals. Organisations should consider how best to support staff with beliefs and non-beliefs concerning WSP. Beliefs surrounding WSP are likely to be ingrained and difficult to shift, therefore, an inherent tension between personal beliefs and professional values may prevail. Organisations should work to identify areas where these tensions may exist. Where professional's responses are affected by personal beliefs, organisations must create spaces where they can talk freely about such issues without fear of being reprimanded.

d.      Organisations should routinely audit cases to ensure there is appropriate recording and categorising of information and demographic data.

e.      Professional supervision should allow professionals to surface their beliefs and values in a safe and respectful manner. This may require supervisors being trained on how to achieve this.

f.      Professionals should receive training on how cultural and economic diversity affects safeguarding children with some focus on how contexts create disadvantage and how this is manifested. It should also include the effect of their experience of being "othered" and the impact on practice.

g.      Professionals should receive training on investigating cases where organised abuse may be occurring and how the modus operandi typifies WSP cases and how to engage with faith organisations.

h.      Multiagency learning events should include faith leaders and this should focus on deliverance and safeguarding children, the role of faith organisations within a multi-agency response and child development.

i.      Professionals working WSP cases should consider using an ecomap that considers the proximal and distal influences, including the child's overseas ecological environment, for the child's development. This would identify the extent of the family network that presents risk or support.

j.      To support professional learning and development organisations should co-design interactive tools and resources on WSP with the accused and non-accused, as their lived experience may provide insights that are not currently available in practice guidance.

k.      Consideration should be given to creating a profile of problematic WSP cases and accusers to develop an understanding of what works to protect children.

l.      The National Action Plan to tackle child abuse linked to faith or belief should be updated and consideration should be given to include the non-accused including a focus on all communities (including white communities). The action plan should also focus on targeting how to effect change at the macro, exp, meso and micro systems.

### 8.4.3 Meso level key implications

The meso level findings point to several factors leading to enmeshed responses to the accusations and an interconnectedness between the different settings that work together to cause harm to the accused and non-accused. Key implications to consider include:

a.       Safeguarding professionals should engage with the wider community. This engagement should initially focus on developing trust and confidence in each other because according to participants' views the current context creates feelings of being "othered" and stigmatised. Building on this approach with focused and open discussions on safeguarding issues and developing an understanding of what is abuse and debunk myths associated with characteristics considered "dirt" e.g. mental health and autism.

b.       The important role faith leaders play in WSP cases cannot be overstated. Any engagement with them should take a strengths-based approach where they are recognised as experts with solutions to problems facing their community. This should be the starting point and the next step could then be directed towards where there are inherent differences in beliefs and practices that are harmful to children.

### 8.4.4 Micro level key implications

The findings showed that the relationship between the accused and non-accused and the other characteristics of micro level settings created many tensions and difficulties for the development of positive outcomes. To address these issues the following key implications should be considered:

a.       School governing bodies should include developing a whole school approach to raising awareness of WSP which includes parents and communities. This could include a focus on how to discuss a sensitive topic like WSP with children.

b.      Professionals working with these children should consider how their "difference" affects their life and consider how to build resilience and positive relationships and create an atmosphere that allows disclosures to be made.

## 8.4.5 Individual level key implications

The research found that children's individual characteristics increase the risk of their being accused and how this has consequences for the non-accused. Therefore, key implications to consider are:

a.       Provide the accused and non-accused with support that is culturally appropriate, as this would help improve access.

b.      The accused are targeted because of their discredited individual trait or behaviour and the non-accused are implicated because of their proximity and kinship ties. Attention should be directed towards helping these children develop positive self-images about themselves and community. This can be done through professionals working directly with them and through their school curriculum.

## 8.5 Challenges and Limitation

Whilst this study never aimed to achieve generalisations because of its small scale, several challenges were encountered that made the original project envisaged, difficult to realise. Some challenges were distinct to this particular study and to my own professional role. Others were common to research on sensitive and contested topics with "hard to reach" and seldom heard groups.  Inevitably, these challenges led to some limitations. However, they were embraced as part of a learning process, with changes made to research questions, design and methods in order to achieve the aim of exploring and developing an understanding of the experiences of the accused and non-accused and the appropriate responses to them.

The following are some of the challenges and limitations encountered. I start by outlining the original focus of the study and the changes made and issues concerning recruitment and gatekeepers. A discussion on the nature of the sample included in the revised study and the status of retrospective information is then discussed. In the final section, I turn to the limitations of the administrative data which were intended to enable me to contextualise the findings, which raises questions and has sound implications for improvement.

### 8.5.1 Recruitment and gatekeepers

Working with WHRIN, the collaborative partner, I aimed to provide expertise and access to participants but there were challenges with the latter (see 3.3). The revised focus initially felt like a setback. However, the reshaping of the approach to data collection to include other participants resulted in insights into professional practice. It also enabled a deeper understanding of WSP and brought to the forefront considerations that would not have been obtained if only the accused and non-accused had been interviewed.

A further challenge concerned the charity that reconsidered giving access to case files and service users (see 3.10). This data would have supplied further insight into the experiences of the accused and non-accused and the quality of professional practice. The issue of impact of a change in the researcher's position is an issue for future researchers to consider as a barrier to working with gatekeepers.

### 8.5.2 Interview Sample and Sample size

The lack of ethnic diversity concerning known cases is an issue for research and this research too did not benefit from a wide diversity of views. Obtaining the views of a more representative group of participants would have been beneficial as differential ethnic, racial, cultural and

religious perspectives are the key to advancing a sound understanding of WSP cases and how to safeguard children. The inclusion of participants from a similar background in research of WSP means that they provided contextual knowledge that is relatively similar. Despite this, the study should be seen as a step in the right direction, or a starting point because there is a gap in research concerning WSP in the UK. Furthermore, having commonality in views and experiences allowed for specific insights into the cultural and religious beliefs of the participants.

The data from the police database highlighted patterns of incidence, reporting and to some degree, responses to cases. However, the absence of and poor recording of any data affected the ability to draw conclusions about the accused and non-accused. Nevertheless, the absence of data and poor recording is a finding that could be generalised as being specific to the organisations that took part in this research.

Given the sensitive nature of the topic, ethical approval to interview children would have been impossible to obtain. Therefore, taking retrospective accounts of adults with direct experience of being accused and non-accused is a suitable alternative, as the gap between the traumatic event and the interview provides a level of distance that helps participants reflect in a meaningful way. However, retrospective recall comes with the challenge of recall bias, especially when it involves traumatic events since these can affect the perception of things. However, this does not necessarily negate the quality of the data generated through interviews.

### 8.5.3 Contextualising Service Data

The study highlighted concerns with the police database accessed and survey data obtained from children's services departments and other police forces. There was also an absence of data, especially concerning the non-accused, which is a key finding. More data would have

broadened the contextual picture of incidences and responses to WSP. It would have also allowed the in-depth findings to be situated in a more developed way.

The data from the police database highlighted several practice issues that suggest children were not adequately protected. Where interviews with professionals provided an opportunity to seek clarification for actions taken, secondary data does not allow this to occur, as it imposes limitations on what can be interpreted from the data (Bryman, 2015). This is an issue that came up with regard to the police database, as I would have liked to have asked questions to clarify action and more frequently, inaction.

The limitations of not having a diverse sample and the lack of and absence of data reflect the reality of undertaking research. The sample did manage to include accused, non-accused and parents and this ensured that there are accounts directly from those affected. Whilst there are limitations, there are also strengths to the study. Representativeness was achieved through the police and children's services data. This data also allowed for the study to provide findings of patterns of incidence, reporting and responses.

## 8.6 Personal reflections

Undertaking and completing this doctoral research has allowed me to reflect on the journey I have taken for the past few years. During the time, I have developed both personally and professionally, so it has been a positive experience. I begin this section with thoughts on how I believe doing the research challenged my thinking and allowed me to develop critical and analytical skills. Engaging with participants was an emotional and thought-provoking experience, so I explain some of the main areas of tension and learning I had to contend with. Working as an "insider" came with challenges including keeping within the role as researcher. I reflected on what occurred and how I dealt with this. The last three areas of reflection I focus

on are the isolating nature of doing research, how I had to challenge my own ways of working and writing and how my position influenced the way that I conducted the research.

The quantity of material I collected, the form of analysis and multiplicity of sources afforded me deeper insights into WSP and the influence of professional beliefs on practice. This allowed me to shift from having a micro to a macro understanding of the issue. Interpreting the findings through a critical realist lens and drawing on theoretical frameworks previously unfamiliar to me, enabled me to advance and frame my understandings of WSP and arrive at meaningful explanations that reached beyond the individual experiences (or indeed individual 'pathologies') of the accused, non-accused and accusers. Taking this approach augmented and improved my analytical thinking and understanding of structural factors at play that generated accusations.  This also made me think about participants differently as I felt that I was starting to understand their experiences in a different way.

Despite my previous professional engagement with the accused and non-accused, the heart-rendering stories shared in interviews were sometimes overwhelming. I recognised that participants allowed me to access hidden parts of their lives, and this was humbling. There were times in interviews that the stories shared appeared humanly impossible to comprehend, and it had an impact on me. I shared some of the interview transcripts with my supervisor and discussing it in supervision helped me to process my thoughts and feelings. This experience allowed me to develop an empathic approach to interviewing, which meant that I continually reminded myself of the privileged position afforded to me. During the research process, some participants enquired about my interest in researching the topic. The quizzical gaze of participants broaching this question made me think that they may think that I am linked to WSP in some way. There were also questions about my religious beliefs, whether I believed in WSP and genuine concerns that I could be a victim of a child witch. These questions were not easy to answer, as I felt uncomfortable sharing personal views, not only because it is personal, but because I did not want to influence the participants' answers. The questions did not challenge

my beliefs, nor do I think it affected my findings. Sharing aspects of my positioning helped build rapport, but more importantly, I found that these beliefs are ingrained, and it is unlikely that my position would have swayed participants. This reflection was more personal than professional. The next reflection presented initially as personal, but then became professional one.

This concerned my experience of being denied access to a charity's case files and service users when they had previously agreed access. I felt a sense of rejection and questioned the quality of the professional relationship because I had a good working relationship with the organisation. This experience taught me the importance of boundaries and that professionalism must always prevail. This allowed me to accept the situation and move toward a new position concerning the methodology.

In my role as a social worker, I offer consultations to professionals on cases and whilst some may mention their beliefs and values, in-depth disclosure of personal beliefs does not always surface. However, the beliefs expressed by some social workers I interviewed, including those with an absence of knowledge about WSP made me want to provide advice and direction. There were times when I struggled to be a researcher and not a social work manager. At times, I felt frustrated by the quality of the safeguarding responses. Sometimes it was those with no belief or understanding that concerned me.

Another feeling that I had to contend with was isolation. As previously indicated research on WSP has received little attention in the UK. Therefore, at times, I felt like there was no point of reference to learn how best to proceed. Researching a topic that receives little national interest makes the research process more challenging because the support of others is less forthcoming. However, with the support of supervisors who provided sound advice, I was able to overcome this.

My prior professional experience of working with children accused of WSP, and with adults who had been accused during childhood, meant that I had extensive experience in this field that most safeguarding professionals are not privy to. However, my proximity to the issue at times created blind spots, which sometimes led me to write about my research without fully explaining what I meant. Therefore, I had to adjust the way I approached the writing of the thesis. Reflective discussions and written feedback from my supervisors made me aware of this and helped me to think about the potential audience and readers of the thesis. I also attended two workshops on effective writing skills for PhD students and this helped me think about how to write with the audience in mind. I am keenly aware that the immediate audience will be the examiners of my thesis, to whom the story it tells must be convincing and compelling. I am also hopeful that my work may be of scholarly interest to others keen to pursue further research in and around this field.  However, my aspiration for doing this study is to improve the body of knowledge about safeguarding children and about WSP and professional practice. Being a member of the National Working Group on Abuse Linked to Beliefs in Witchcraft and Spirit Possession (NWG), there are opportunities to inform and write policies and guidelines for organisations. I will capitalise on opportunities when presented to highlight the findings of this research.

One final and important reflection to highlight concerns my positionality and the feelings it engendered at various times during the data collection phase. The police database data and interviews showed that the children involved are mainly from Black and Asian ethnic backgrounds. Being an ethnic minority myself, I identified with the struggles they encountered in terms of structural inequalities and "othering". One consolation of doing this study is in the hope that the findings add to the body of knowledge on WSP and provides a broader understanding of the issue by discussing it using different theoretical lens. The findings and implications I have drawn from them may also help professionals and policymakers understand, respond differently to, and improve outcomes for these children. I plan to engage proactively and directly with both policy makers and professionals, through training and through my involvement with the NWG.

## 8.7 Suggestions for further research

This study demonstrates both the pressing need for in-depth understandings of and responses to WSP allegations against children, and how such research would benefit from combining an ecological approach with a critical realist approach. This will allow a clear focus to be placed on the impact of contextual factors on accusations themselves, on the experiences of the accused and non-accused, and on professional responses, exposing the generative mechanisms that operate across the ecological environment that give rise both to empirical (lived) experience, and to actual events and actions. It would include interrogating how risks at different levels of the ecological environment individually and collectively work together to increase risk.

Findings from this study showed that children accused have behavioural needs, mental health needs, disability, and LGBTI+, are Black, Asian and of different genders. Future research should therefore consider taking an intersectional approach as this would further develop understanding of the complex needs, levels of protection and support needed for these children and non-accused siblings. One area not explored in this study, but in need of exploration, are WSP allegations among other ethnicities, since the data from the police showed the presence of white children and little is known about this group.

I now focus on suggestions for further research directly intended to improve professional practice. Debates on WSP often speak about communities without acknowledgement that professionals are part of these same communities. Whilst this study focused on the experiences of the accused and non-accused, the stories from professionals raised serious issues about professional beliefs in WSP and its impact on practice. Whilst there is literature on professionals' religious beliefs and practises (Gilligan and Furness, 2006), it does not specifically focus on professionals' beliefs in WSP and how these impact practice when working with a child believed to be a witch or possessed. This is a neglected area that requires attention because it has implications for how these professionals engage with children in their personal life and as a

professional and faith leader. This latter point on dual roles, especially where safeguarding professionals engage in work that promotes a conflicting value base and ethical position to social work, needs further research.

The survey responses from children's services departments highlighted errors in categorising CiN census data on child abuse linked to faith or belief cases. This raises questions about the data quality of the DfE CiN census data. These data are also the nearest that can be obtained to developing insights into the prevalence of WSP. The DfE should consider providing access to this dataset to analyse its quality and provide insights into the experiences of these children. This research project could be similar to the triennial review of safeguarding practise reviews, or a replication of Stobart's research (2006).

A further area requiring attention by researchers concerns professional safeguarding responses, both at an organisational and individual level. Research involving different safeguarding professionals will help surface what multi-agencies responses look like, insights into professionals' understanding of WSP and how to develop comprehensive safeguarding responses.

The sensitive nature of the topic means that researchers who are likely to gain access to potential participants may well be those whom participants identify with on religious, cultural and ethnic grounds. Based on this further research might consider using action research or peer research as a beneficial method of enquiry. Having said this, methods that also allow some distance from the researcher, such as telephone or online (eg. Zoom) interviews, might also be beneficial, as this may serve to make the participant feel safe and willing to share.  Longitudinal research would also help with providing a deeper understanding of the life journeys of the accused and non-accused, and the resultant changes in their characteristics and outcomes.

## 8.9 Dissemination

I commenced my PhD in 2014, and one year later, I published an article on the topic in a peer-reviewed journal. During the research process, I also delivered presentations, drawing on the findings of the study, at four conferences to multi-agency groups of professionals, with one at an international conference hosted by the United Nations. I have also incorporated some of the study's findings in training and travelled to other countries to deliver training on the topic. As a member of the NWG, opportunities are available to me to disseminate the findings to multi-agency professionals and academics. The DfE is the secretariat of the NWG, so the findings would be directly delivered to policymakers at a national level. As part of the agreement with the police force that provided access to their database, I agreed to deliver a presentation on the study's findings to staff. I anticipate that this will take place in Summer 2023. I plan to organise with the collaborative partner an online webinar to present the study's findings. This is also likely to take place in Summer 2023.

I am confident and hopeful that my extensive professional experience in this field, combined now with my research-based knowledge, means that I am uniquely well placed to achieve these dissemination plans. My intention is to create and take all possible knowledge exchange opportunities, in order to stimulate and mobilise areas of improvement to professional practice and policy formation with regard to children accused of WSP and their non-accused siblings.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Consent Form Accused and Non-accused

**CONSENT FORM FOR STUDY PARTICIPANTS**

**Please sign this form after you have read the Information Sheet and/or listened to an explanation about the research.**

PROJECT TITLE: Accusations of child spirit possession and witchcraft: Experiences                    and outcomes for non-accused children within the family network

_____

Project Approval _____

      Reference: _____

I agree to take part in the above study being undertaken by the Social Work PhD student Leethen Bartholomew. I have had the project explained to me, have asked questions which have been answered satisfactorily and I have read and understood the Information Sheet, which I have kept for my records. I understand that agreeing to take part means that I am willing to:

- Be interviewed by the researcher for about 3 hours.
- Make myself available for a further interview should that be required.
- Allow the interview to be audio taped and for the researcher to take handwritten notes if required.
- Accept the conditions of anonymity and confidentiality outlined below.
- According to these conditions, allow the researcher to use the information I provide in all reports of the findings of the research study.

I understand that the researcher will keep securely all information that I provide, including keeping separate any information that identifies me personally.

I understand that my name will be changed in all reporting of the research and that no information will be reported that identifies me to those who do not know me. However, I understand that it may nonetheless be possible for my sibling or for a member of [name agency] to recognise me in what is reported since they know my story.

I also understand that the information I provide will be handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. All information will be kept strictly confidential, except where something I say raises serious concern for my own or another's safety and welfare. If this happens, I understand that as long as it is safe to do so, the researcher will discuss this with me before reporting the necessary information to an appropriate body.

I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the interview, and that I can withdraw at any stage without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way. I understand that I am unable to withdraw after December 2019.

After the interview, I may also choose to withdraw all or part of the information I have provided at any point up to December 2019. If I wish, I will be provided on request with
**Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet and/or listened to an explanation about the research.**

 a written record of what I have said; this will enable me to identify any information I may wish to withdraw.

I understand that the information I have provided will contribute, in anonymised form, to a doctoral thesis that will be publically available, and to other publications and presentations. I will also receive a copy of a summary report of the research findings.

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research. Please sign your consent below.

You will be given a signed copy of this Consent Form to keep, and refer to at any time and the researcher will also keep a signed copy.


   Name:_____

Signature:_____

   Date:_____



Researcher's name: _____

   Signature: _____

   Date: _____



 **Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet and/or listened to an explanation about the research.**

## CONSENT FORM FOR STUDY PARTICIPANTS

**Please sign this form after you have read the Information Sheet and/or listened to an explanation about the research.**

PROJECT TITLE: Accusations of child spirit possession and witchcraft: Experiences and outcomes for non-accused children within the family network

_____

Project Approval _____

Reference: _____

I agree to take part in the above study being undertaken by the Social Work PhD student Leethen Bartholomew. I have had the project explained to me, have asked questions which have been answered satisfactorily and I have read and understood the Information Sheet, which I have kept for my records. I understand that agreeing to take part means that I am willing to:

- Be interviewed by the researcher for about 1 hour.
- Make myself available for a further interview should that be required.
- Allow the interview to be audio taped and for the researcher to take handwritten notes if required.
- Accept the conditions of anonymity and confidentiality outlined below.
- According to these conditions, allow the researcher to use the information I provide in all reports of the findings of the research study.

I understand that if the researcher were to have any concerns about the wellbeing of the children and families in the cases I discuss or consider that instances of unprofessional or unethical behaviour have been discussed, these will be raised with me for clarification/action before being passed onto the responsible person within your organisation.

I understand that the researcher will keep securely all information that I provide, including keeping separate any information that identifies me personally.

I understand that my name will be changed in all reporting of the research and that no information will be reported that identifies me to those who do not know me. However, I understand that it may nonetheless be possible for someone who I have with or for a member of [name agency] to recognise me in what is reported since they are of my involvement in a case.

I also understand that the information I provide will be handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. All information will be kept strictly confidential, except where something I say raises serious concern for my own or another's safety and welfare. If this happens, I understand that as long as it is safe to do so, the researcher will discuss this with me before reporting the necessary information to an appropriate body.

**Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet and/or listened to an explanation about the research.**

I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the interview, and that I can withdraw without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way. I understand that I am unable to withdraw after December 2019.

After the interview, I may also choose to withdraw all or part of the information I have provided at any point up to December 2019. If I wish, I will be provided on request with a written record of what I have said; this will enable me to identify any information I may wish to withdraw.

I understand that the information I have provided will contribute, in anonymised form, to a doctoral thesis that will be publically available, and to other publications and presentations. I will also receive a copy of a summary report of the research findings.

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research. Please sign your consent below.

You will be given a signed copy of this Consent Form to keep, and refer to at any time and the researcher will also keep a signed copy.

Name:_____

Signature:_____

Date:_____

Researcher's name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

## Appendix III: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET (Professionals, Community and Faith Leaders)

THIS INFORMATION SHEET IS FOR YOU TO KEEP

Study title

Accusations of child spirit possession and witchcraft: Experiences and outcomes for non-accused children within the family network

Introduction

My name is Leethen Bartholomew and I am doing some research for my doctoral studies at the University of Sussex. I have been a social worker for the past 19 years and for 11 of these years I have worked with families where a child has been accused of being witch or possessed by evil spirits. Over the years, I have tried to increase awareness of the issue amongst professionals and communities in the hope that children and young people are protected and supported.

I have asked [name of gatekeeper/individual] to pass on to you this information sheet so that I may invite you to consider participating in this study. The reason that [name of gatekeeper/individual] have contacted you on my behalf is that it is important for your privacy that I do not know who you are unless you give your permission that I may contact you direct.

This information sheet is intended to inform you about the research, so that you have all the necessary information to help you decide if you might be interested in finding out more, before making any decision about whether or not to participate. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what your participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish.

What is the purpose of the study?

Over the past two decades in the UK, there has been a number of high profile cases involving children who have been accused by their parent or carer of being possessed or being a witch. Some of these children have been harmed and consequently taken into social services care. In a number of these cases their brothers or sisters witnessed them being harmed; sometimes children who were not accused were taken into care too. In most cases, not only the accused child but also their sibling(s) are likely to have been affected by what happened. It is very important that we understand what this is like for each of them, so that we can understand better how to respond to their needs. It is also important to hear the views of professionals, faith leaders and voluntary sector organisations, as they play a part in ensuring these children are protected and supported. The study aims to do that. The study will begin in July 2017 and end by September 2020.
Why have you been invited to participate?

You have been invited to take part in this research because of your experience of being involved in working on cases involving children who been accused of being a witch or possessed by evil spirits. Based on your experience you have a rich source of information about these children and their family.

Do you have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you agree to take part, you can change your mind at any time. You will be free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason up until December 2018. If before, during or after the interview you no longer want to take part all you need to do is tell me this and no pressure will be placed on you to change your mind. You may also decide after the interview that you do not want all or part of the information you have given me to be included in the study. With your permission, I will audio record the interview and then write down a record of what you have said. If you would like to see this record you will be welcome to ask for it, and you can then let me know any time up until December 2018, if there are any parts, or all, of the record that you would like to withdraw.

What will happen to you if you take part?

If you agree to take part, I will discuss what the interview will involve and arrange to interview you either at your office or at another location of your choice. I can also arrange a secure venue where it can take place. I will ask you to sign two copies of the consent form which I will also sign. You will keep a copy of the consent form for yourself along with this information sheet. I will also keep a copy of the consent from for my records.

 Interviews will be arranged to fit in with your schedule. The interview will take about 60 minutes. The format of the interview is based on asking you semi-structured questions where you will have the opportunity to answer questions and I will have the chance to ask follow-up questions if needed. The types of questions I will ask are: what is your knowledge of spirit possession and witchcraft, how does it affect children, what do you think are the causes of an accusation and how does it affect children who have been accused and their non-accused sibling. I will also like you to tell me about any specific case examples, which will be anonymised as the children and their family have a right to privacy. You will not have to answer any questions that you do not want to answer, and you will be able to take a comfort break if needed, to end the interview at any time or postpone the interview.

I will also ask you if there is anyone in you professional network, or past or current adult clients/service users who experienced being accused as a child, their non-accused sibling or a family member may want to take part in the research. I will ask you not to tell me their names or details, but to approach them first on my behalf. You do not have to do this to participate in the research. It is entirely up to you if you wish to do this. If you do suggest someone, I will give you a separate information sheet to pass on to them. They will then be able to decide if they are willing for you to give me their contact details, so I can get in touch with them to explain more about the study and see if they would like to participate too.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

The topic of this research is emotive as it involves the possible abuse and neglect of children and you may have experienced distress whilst involved in the case. Therefore, talking about it in the interview might lead to you feeling distressed and after the interview it may still be on your mind. However, if at any time during the interview you feel distress, I will stop it and you do not have to continue any further and will not have to provide an explanation. I am also a social worker and I abide by the code of ethics of my profession, so I will make your wellbeing a priority at all times.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Sometimes talking about your involvement with children and families you have worked with can be cathartic. Reflecting on cases might also provide insights you might not have considered before. This study is one of the first to focus on the experiences of both accused and non-accused siblings so by taking part you will be making an invaluable contribution towards helping us understand the issue. This will have the effect of helping others in a similar position as you to better protect and support children in similar circumstances. Your contribution may also help shape future research on the topic. I will also provide you with a report of the main research findings; everything in there will be anonymised, but you will be able to see the contribution you have made.

Will your information in this study be kept confidential?

As far as it is safe to do so, everything that is said in the interview will be kept strictly confidential; it won't be reported to your employer or another organisation. However, there are some exceptional circumstances where I may have to disclose information. This would only happen if you told me something, which indicates there are serious concerns for your safety and welfare, or poor practice that could lead to concerns for the safety and welfare of others, and these concerns are not already known by those who can help. If this happened, unless it is unsafe to do so, I would discuss my concerns with you before reporting it to those who need to know.

I will keep all information that identifies you – for example your name, contact details, date of birth, the organisation that work with – strictly secure, and completely separate from any other information you give. I will be the only person with access to any information that identifies you. All the rest of the information you give me will also be kept strictly secure. The UK Data Protection Act 1998 will apply to all information gathered within the interviews and held on password-locked computer files and a locked cabinet.
No data will be accessed by anyone other than me. My supervisors may have access to the anonymised transcripts for quality assurance purposes.

In all the reports I write about the research, and in any talks I may give, I will not reveal your name or any information that identifies you – everything will be anonymised. What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of the research study will be used in my doctoral thesis in Social Work, which I am due to complete in 2020. I will also give you a copy of a report summarising the main findings. I also plan to write articles about the research for publication in professional journals, and to present my findings at professional conferences. My findings will always be reported in an anonymised way, to ensure as far as I possibly can that you cannot be personally identified.

Who is organising and funding the research?

I am conducting the research as a student at the School of Social Work, University of Sussex. The research is being partly funded by the Economic and Social Research Council.

Who has approved this study?

The research has been approved by the University of Sussex, Cross-School Research Ethics Committee.

Contact for Further Information

If you would like to find out more, please let [name of agency] know so they may give me your contact details and I will get in touch.

Alternatively, please contact me on:  Email: l.bartholomew@sussex.ac.uk  or phone: 07947366795.

I look forward to hearing from you or from [agency name] on your behalf.

If you have any concerns about the way in which this approach has been made or how the study is conducted, please contact my supervisor in the first instance: Elaine Sharland e.sharland@sussex.ac.uk

The University of Sussex has insurance in place to cover its legal liabilities in respect of this study.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and consider my invitation to participate in this research.

Date: June 2017

## Appendix IV: Interview Guide- Accused and Non-accused

• Outline what the research is about and explain confidentiality- limits of confidentiality.

**Starting question:** Please tell me the story about the accusation that occurred, tell me about your life before the accusation and then all the events and experiences that have happened since then; begin whenever you want to begin, I wont interrupt, Ill just take some notes for afterwards.

**Topics to be covered in the interview if not mentioned by participant:**

• Description family life before the accusation.

• Nature of the accusation.

• Who the family turned to for help at the time of the accusation?

• The impact of the accusation on sibling relationships, relationships with other family members and others.

• Impact of accusation on accused and non-accused immediately following accusation.

• How they believe the accusation has affected their transition into adulthood?

• How does each sibling believe the other experienced the accusation?

• What professionals did when they were informed of the accusation?

• Did professional involvement recognise the need to protect and support both accused and non-accused?

• How professional responses changed during their involvement?

## Appendix V: Topic Guide Family Members

• Outline what the research is about and explain confidentiality- limits of confidentiality.

      1.  Family life and the accusation

• Can you tell me about your family life before the accusation occurred?

• Can you tell me about the accusation? When did it occur? What happened? Who was involved?

• How do you think the accused and non-accused each experience the accusation?

• Why do you think that particular child was accused and not the sibling?

• What was it like for you having to experience a family member being accused?

      2.  Family relationships

• How has the accusation affected your relationships with different members of your family including the accused and their sibling?

• How do you think the accusation affected the relationship between the accused and their sibling?

• How did the accusation affect the accused and their sibling's relationship with others? • What type of contact do you now have the accused and their sibling?

• Were the accused and non-accused siblings separated at any time following the accusation?

      3. Professional, Faith leader/healer, Voluntary Sector Organisations (VSO) involvement

• Who did the family turn to for help at the time of the accusation?

• What contact did you have with professionals like social workers, police etc., faith leaders/healers, and VSO following the accusation?

• What did professionals, faith leaders/healers and VSO (if they were involved) each do when they were informed of the accusation?

• Did professional involvement recognise the need to protect and support both accused and non-accused?

• How did professional, faith leaders/healers and VSO responses change during their involvement?

• What advice would you give to professionals, faith leaders/healers and VSO respond to help the accused and their siblings?

## Appendix VI: Topic Guide Professionals, Faith and Community Leaders

General information questions
Name
Organisation
Position Length of time in post
**Topics to be covered in the interview if not mentioned by participant:**

1. Can you tell me what do you know about spirit possession and witchcraft?

• What's the meaning of both terms mean?
• How is it viewed in different religious context?
• When did you first hear about it?
• Where do they go to if they have to find our more information about it?
• How many of these cases have you worked on or been involved with?

2. From experience of working on cases can you tell me why you think children are being accused of being possessed or labelled a witch?

• Why are children being accused?
• Who are the accusers?
• What do family members do if they believe a child is possessed or a witch?
• What is the impact of an accusation on a child that's been accused?
• Do children who are accused also believe that they are possessed or a witch and also their sibling?
• What do you think is the best approach to helping them?
• What are the outcomes for children who are accused?
• Were you involved with the family before the accusation?

3. From experience of working on cases can you tell me about the siblings of children who have been accused of being possessed or labelled a witch?

• Do they experience any form of harm?
• Why do you think they were not accused?
• How is the non-accused child's experience different or similar from their accused sibling?
• How do you think an accusation affects their relationship with their sibling and other family members?
• What is the impact of an accusation on them?
• What are the outcomes for the accused non-accused sibling?
• Do you think the needs of non-accused siblings are recognised by those responsible for protecting them i.e. other family members, professionals, faith leaders/healers and voluntary sector organisations?

4. Can you give examples of where you have worked with children who have been accused, their siblings and family members?

• How many cases?
• Did you know them before the accusation?
• Demographics of the accused, non-accused and family members: ethnicity, religion and gender.
• What was the nature of the allegation?

• Who was the accuser?

• What were the experiences of accused and non-accused sibling?

• What was the action taken by family members?

• What were the outcomes for the children involved?

• Which professionals were involved and did they recognise the needs of the non-accused sibling?

• Can you describe what was the response by all those involved in the case?

• What would you do differently now?

## Appendix VII: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET (NON-ACCUSED)

**THIS INFORMATION SHEET IS FOR YOU TO KEEP**

**Study title**

Accusations of child spirit possession and witchcraft: Experiences and outcomes for non-accused children within the family network

**Introduction**

My name is Leethen Bartholomew and I am doing some research for my doctoral studies at the University of Sussex. I have been a social worker for the past 19 years and for 11 of these years I have worked with families where a child has been accused of being witch or possessed by evil spirits. Over the years, I have tried to increase awareness of the issue amongst professionals and communities in the hope that children and young people are protected and supported.

I have asked [name of gatekeeper/individual] to pass on to you this information sheet so that I may invite you to consider participating in this study. The reason that [name of gatekeeper/individual] have contacted you on my behalf is that it is important for your privacy that I do not know who you are unless you give your permission that I may contact you direct.

This information sheet is intended to inform you about the research, so that you have all the necessary information to help you decide if you might be interested in finding out more, before making any decision about whether or not to participate. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what your participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish.

**What is the purpose of the study?**

Over the past two decades in the UK, there has been a number of high profile cases involving children who have been accused by their parent or carer of being possessed or being a witch. Some of these children have been harmed and consequently taken into social services care. In a number of these cases their brothers or sisters witnessed them being harmed; sometimes children who were not accused were taken into care too. In most cases, not only the accused child but also their sibling(s) are likely to have been affected by what happened. It is very important that we understand what this is like for each of them, so that we can understand better how to respond to their needs. The study aims to do that. The study will begin in July 2017 and end by September 2020.

**Why have you been invited to participate?**

I am inviting you to participate in this study because as a child your sibling was accused of being spirit possessed or a witch. It is important that we learn about the experiences of siblings of accused children as this will help professionals to better understand the issue. I have asked {name the relevant agency/individual) for them to select and contact on my behalf clients/family whom they think may be

able and willing to tell their stories. You have been invited to take part either because (name the relevant agency/individual) asked you to participate or you have been asked by your sibling or family member.

## Do you have to take part?

It is entirely up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you, your sibling or family member are receiving support from [name the organisation that has referred them], and you say no to participate in the research, this will not affect any support they are receiving from them or any other organisation. If this information was given to you by [Partner Agency] please ask as many questions as you wish and take time to think about it before you make your decision. If you agree to participate then I will ask you to sign two copies of a consent form which I will also sign. You will keep a copy of the consent form for yourself along with this information sheet. I will also keep a copy of the consent from for my records.

If you agree to take part, you can change your mind at any time. You will be free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason up until December 2018. If before, during or after the interview you no longer want to take part all you need to do is tell me this and no pressure will be placed on you to change your mind. You may also decide after the interview that you do not want all or part of the information you have given me to be included in the study. With your permission, I will audio record the interview and then write down a record of what you have said. If you would like to see this record you will be welcome to ask for it, and you can then let me know any time up until December 2018, if there are any parts, or all, of the record that you would like to withdraw.

## What will happen to you if you take part?

If you agree to take part, I will discuss what the interview will involve and arrange to interview you in a safe and private place. This may well be, the [name organisation] where your sibling or family member receives/used to receive support and advice, but it could be somewhere else if you prefer. The interview will take about 3 hours and may involve a second interview. You will not have to answer any questions that you do not want to answer, and you will be able to take a comfort break if needed, to end the interview at any time or postpone the interview.

I will also ask you if your brother, sister, other family members or anyone else who knew about what happened to you may want to take part in the research. I will ask you not to tell me their names or details, but to approach them first on my behalf. You do not have to do this to participate in the research. It is entirely up to you if you wish to do this. If you do suggest someone, I will give you a separate information sheet to pass on to them. They will then be able to decide if they are willing for you to give me their contact details, so I can get in touch with them to explain more about the study and see if they would like to participate too.

## What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

It is important that you are emotionally well enough to be able to participate, as talking about your experience can cause distress, especially if it involved being harmed. There is a risk that you could become sad or upset during the interview. It is also important that your sibling(s) or family member you suggest to participate in the research is also emotionally well enough. I have a lot of experience of working with people in similar situations, so I am very sensitive when it comes to helping people to manage how they feel. I can assist you in receiving support either from [partner agency] or another organisation such as:

Samaritans: 08457 90 90 90
MIND: 020 8519 2122
AFRUCA: 020 7704 2261
The Victoria Climbié Foundation: 020 8619 1191

## What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Sometimes talking about past experiences can be helpful, as it offers an opportunity for your voice to be heard. This study is one of the first to focus on the experiences of both accused and non-accused siblings so by taking part you will be making an invaluable contribution towards helping us understand the issue. This will have the effect of helping professionals to better protect and support children in similar circumstances. Your contribution may also help shape future research on the topic. I will also provide you with a report of the main research findings; everything in there will be anonymised, but you will be able to see the contribution you have made.

## Will your information in this study be kept confidential?

As far as it is safe to do so, everything that is said in the interview will be kept strictly confidential; it won't be reported to [agency/individual] or any other organisation. If your brother, sister or another family member participates in the research I will not disclose to them anything you have said to me, nor will I talk to you about what they have said. However, there are some exceptional circumstances where I would have to tell someone else who can help. This would only happen if you told me something which indicates there are serious concerns for your safety and welfare, or for the safety and welfare of others, and these concerns are not already known by those who can help. If this happened, unless it is unsafe to do so, I would discuss my concerns with you before reporting it to those who need to know.

I will keep all information that identifies you – for example your name, contact details, date of birth, the organisation that has worked with you – strictly secure, and completely separate from any other information you give. I will be the only person with access to any information that identifies you. All the rest of the information you give me will also be kept strictly secure. The UK Data Protection Act 1998 will apply to all information gathered within the interviews and held on password-locked computer files and a locked cabinet.

No data will be accessed by anyone other than me. My supervisors may have access to the anonymised transcripts for quality assurance purposes.

In all the reports I write about the research, and in any talks I may give, I will not reveal your name or any information that identifies you – everything will be anonymised. However, because [name organisation/gatekeeper] know you, it is possible that they may still be able to recognise you even with a different name. Also your brother, sister, family member may be able to recognise you, and you may recognise them. I will do everything I can to limit this possibility, but you will need to bear it in mind when you talk to me, and afterwards if you want to think about withdrawing anything you have said.

## What should you do if you want to take part?

When you have had the chance to read this information sheet, think about it and perhaps talk about it with someone else if you wish, you can decide if you might be interested in finding out more about participating in the study. If you are, the next step will be for you to let [name of agency/individual] know

that you agree for them to give me your contact details. I will then call you so we can talk about it further and I can answer any questions you may have. Alternatively, you are also welcome to contact me direct if you prefer - my contact details are at the end of this document.

If you agree to participate, I will arrange to come and interview you. When we meet I will go over this information sheet first to make sure that you understand everything, and I will ask you to sign and keep a copy of the consent form.

## What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of the research study will be used in my doctoral thesis in Social Work, which I am due to complete in 2020. I will also give you a copy of a report summarising the main findings. I also plan to write articles about the research for publication in professional journals, and to present my findings at professional conferences. My findings will always be reported in an anonymised way, to ensure as far as I possibly can that you cannot be personally identified.

## Who is organising and funding the research?

I am conducting the research as a student at the School of Social Work, University of Sussex. The research is being partly funded by the Economic and Social Research Council.

## Who has approved this study?

The research has been approved by the University of Sussex, Cross-School Research Ethics Committee.

## Contact for Further Information

If you would like to find out more, please let [name of agency] know so they may give me your contact details and I will get in touch.

Alternatively, please contact me on:  Email: l.bartholomew@sussex.ac.uk  or phone: 07947366795.

I look forward to hearing from you or from [agency name] on your behalf.

If you have any concerns about the way in which this approach has been made or how the study is conducted, please contact my supervisor in the first instance: Elaine Sharland e.sharland@sussex.ac.uk

The University of Sussex has insurance in place to cover its legal liabilities in respect of this study

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and consider my invitation to participate in this research.

Date
June 2017

## Appendix VIII: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET (Family member)

**THIS INFORMATION SHEET IS FOR YOU TO KEEP**

**Study title**

Accusations of child spirit possession and witchcraft: Experiences and outcomes for non-accused children within the family network

**Introduction**

My name is Leethen Bartholomew and I am doing some research for my doctoral studies at the University of Sussex. I have been a social worker for the past 19 years and for 11 of these years I have worked with families where a child has been accused of being witch or possessed by evil spirits. Over the years, I have tried to increase awareness of the issue amongst professionals and communities in the hope that children and young people are protected and supported.

I have asked [name of gatekeeper/individual] to pass on to you this information sheet so that I may invite you to consider participating in this study. The reason that [name of gatekeeper/individual] have contacted you on my behalf is that it is important for your privacy that I do not know who you are unless you give your permission that I may contact you direct.

This information sheet is intended to inform you about the research, so that you have all the necessary information to help you decide if you might be interested in finding out more, before making any decision about whether or not to participate. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what your participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish.

**What is the purpose of the study?**

Over the past two decades in the UK, there has been a number of high profile cases involving children who have been accused by their parent or carer of being possessed or being a witch. Some of these children have been harmed and consequently taken into social services care. In a number of these cases their brothers or sisters witnessed them being harmed; sometimes children who were not accused were taken into care too. In most cases, not only the accused child but also their sibling(s) are likely to have been affected by what happened. It is very important that we understand what this is like for each of them, so that we can understand better how to respond to their needs. The study aims to do that. The study will begin in July 2017 and end by September 2020.

**Why have you been invited to participate?**

I am inviting you to consider participating in this study because of your experience of having a family member where it was believed that they were possessed or a witch as a child. I have asked {name the gatekeeper/individual} to select and contact on my behalf clients or family members whom they think may be able and willing to tell their stories.

**Do you have to take part?**

It is entirely up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you or a family member are receiving support from (name the organisation), saying no will not affect any support received from [name the organisation that has referred them] or any other organisation. Please do ask (partner agency if referred by them) as many questions as you wish, and take time to think about it before you make any decision. If you agree to participate then I will ask you to sign two copies of a consent form which I will also sign. You will keep a copy of the consent form for yourself along with this information sheet. I will also keep a copy of the consent from for my records.

If you agree to take part, you can change your mind at any time. You will be free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason up until December 2018. If before, during or after the interview you no longer want to take part all you need to do is tell me this and no pressure will be placed on you to change your mind. You may also decide after the interview that you do not want all or part of the information you have given me to be included in the study. With your permission, I will audio record the interview and then write down a record of what you have said. If you would like to see this record you will be welcome to ask for it, and you can then let me know any time up until December 2018, if there are any parts, or all, of the record that you would like to withdraw.

## What will happen to you if you take part?

If you agree to take part, I will discuss what the interview will involve and arrange to interview you in a safe and private place. This may well be, the [name organisation] where family member receives/used to receive support and advice, but it could be somewhere else if you prefer. The interview will take about 3 hours. You will not have to answer any questions that you do not want to answer, and you will be able to take a comfort break if needed, to end the interview at any time or postpone the interview.

I will also ask you if any of your family members or anyone else like a professional, faith leaders or member of a voluntary sector organisation, who knew about what happened to your family may want to take part in the research. I will ask you not to tell me their names or details, but to approach them first on my behalf. You do not have to do this to participate in the research. It is entirely up to you if you wish to do this. If you do suggest someone, I will give you a separate information sheet to pass on to them. They will then be able to decide if they are willing for you to give me their contact details, so I can get in touch with them to explain more about the study and see if they would like to participate too.

## What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

It is important that you are emotionally well enough to be able to participate, as talking about your experience can cause distress, especially if it involved being harmed. There is a risk that you could become sad or upset during the interview. It is also important that your family member you suggest to participate in the research is also emotionally well enough. I have a lot of experience of working with people in similar situations, so I am very sensitive when it comes to helping people to manage how they feel. I can assist you in receiving support either from partner agency or another organisation such as:

Samaritans: 08457 90 90 90
MIND: 020 8519 2122
AFRUCA: 020 7704 2261
The Victoria Climbié Foundation: 020 8619 1191

**What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

Sometimes talking about past experiences can be helpful, as it offers an opportunity for your voice to be heard. This study is one of the first to focus on the experiences of both accused and non-accused siblings so by taking part you will be making an invaluable contribution towards helping us understand the issue. This will have the effect of helping professionals and others to better protect and support children in similar circumstances. Your contribution may also help shape future research on the topic. I will also provide you with a report of the main research findings; everything in there will be anonymised, but you will be able to see the contribution you have made.

**Will your information in this study be kept confidential?**

As far as it is safe to do so, everything that is said in the interview will be kept strictly confidential; it won't be reported to [agency/individual] or any other organisation. If your family member participates in the research I will not disclose to them anything you have said to me, nor will I talk to you about what they have said. However, there are some exceptional circumstances where I would have to tell someone else who can help. This would only happen if you told me something which indicates there are serious concerns for your safety and welfare, or for the safety and welfare of others, and these concerns are not already known by those who can help. If this happened, unless it is unsafe to do so, I would discuss my concerns with you before reporting it to those who need to know.

I will keep all information that identifies you – for example your name, contact details, date of birth, the organisation that has worked with you – strictly secure, and completely separate from any other information you give. I will be the only person with access to any information that identifies you. All the rest of the information you give me will also be kept strictly secure. The UK Data Protection Act 1998 will apply to all information gathered within the interviews and held on password-locked computer files and a locked cabinet.

No data will be accessed by anyone other than me. My supervisors may have access to the anonymised transcripts for quality assurance purposes.

In all the reports I write about the research, and in any talks I may give, I will not reveal your name or any information that identifies you – everything will be anonymised. However, because [name organisation/gatekeeper] know you, it is possible that they may still be able to recognise you even with a different name. Also your family member may be able to recognise you, and you may recognise them. I will do everything I can to limit this possibility, but you will need to bear it in mind when you talk to me, and afterwards if you want to think about withdrawing anything you have said.

**What should you do if you want to take part?**

When you have had the chance to read this information sheet, think about it and perhaps talk about it with someone else if you wish, you can decide if you might be interested in finding out more about participating in the study. If you are, the next step will be for you to let [name of agency/individual] know that you agree for them to give me your contact details. I will then call you so we can talk about it further and I can answer any questions you may have. Alternatively, you are also welcome to contact me direct if you prefer - my contact details are at the end of this document.

If you agree to participate, I will arrange to come and interview you. When we meet I will go over this information sheet first to make sure that you understand everything, and I will ask you to sign and keep a copy of the consent form.

**What will happen to the results of the research study?**

The results of the research study will be used in my doctoral thesis in Social Work, which I am due to complete in 2020. I will also give you a copy of a report summarising the main findings. I also plan to write articles about the research for publication in professional journals, and to present my findings at professional conferences. My findings will always be reported in an anonymised way, to ensure as far as I possibly can that you cannot be personally identified.

**Who is organising and funding the research?**

I am conducting the research as a student at the School of Social Work, University of Sussex. The research is being partly funded by the Economic and Social Research Council.

**Who has approved this study?**

The research has been approved by the University of Sussex, Cross-School Research Ethics Committee.

**Contact for Further Information**

If you would like to find out more, please let [name of agency] know so they may give me your contact details and I will get in touch.

 Alternatively, please contact me on: Email: l.bartholomew@sussex.ac.uk  or phone: 07947366795.

 I look forward to hearing from you or from [agency name] on your behalf.

If you have any concerns about the way in which this approach has been made or how the study is conducted, please contact my supervisor in the first instance: Elaine Sharland e.sharland@sussex.ac.uk

The University of Sussex has insurance in place to cover its legal liabilities in respect of this study.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and consider my invitation to participate in this research.

Date: June 2017

## Appendix IX: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET (ACCUSED)

THIS INFORMATION SHEET IS FOR YOU TO KEEP

Study title

Accusations of child spirit possession and witchcraft: Experiences and outcomes for non-accused children within the family network

Introduction

My name is Leethen Bartholomew and I am doing some research for my doctoral studies at the University of Sussex. I have been a social worker for the past 19 years and for 11 of these years I have worked with families where a child has been accused of being witch or possessed by evil spirits. Over the years, I have tried to increase awareness of the issue amongst professionals and communities in the hope that children and young people are protected and supported.

I have asked [name of gatekeeper/individual] to pass on to you this information sheet so that I may invite you to consider participating in this study. The reason that [name of gatekeeper/individual] have contacted you on my behalf is that it is important for your privacy that I do not know who you are unless you give your permission that I may contact you direct.

This information sheet is intended to inform you about the research, so that you have all the necessary information to help you decide if you might be interested in finding out more, before making any decision about whether or not to participate. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what your participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish.

What is the purpose of the study?

Over the past two decades in the UK, there has been a number of high profile cases involving children who have been accused by their parent or carer of being possessed or being a witch. Some of these children have been harmed and consequently taken into social services care. In a number of these cases their brothers or sisters witnessed them being harmed; sometimes children who were not accused were taken into care too. In most cases, not only the accused child but also their sibling(s) are likely to have been affected by what happened. It is very important that we understand what this is like for each of them, so that we can understand better how to respond to their needs. The study aims to do that. The study will begin in July 2017 and end by September 2020.

Why have you been invited to participate?

I am inviting you to consider participating in this study because of your experience of being accused of spirit possession or witchcraft as a child. I have asked {name the gatekeeper/individual} to select and contact on my behalf clients or family members whom they think may be able and willing to tell their stories.

Do you have to take part?

It is entirely up to you to decide whether or not to take part. Saying no will not affect any support that you receive from [name the organisation that has referred them] or any other organisation. Please do ask (partner agency) as many questions as you wish, and take time to think about it before you make any decision.

If you agree to participate then I will ask you to sign two copies of a consent form, and to keep a copy for yourself along with this information sheet. I will also sign and keep a copy of the consent form for my records. Agreeing to take part will not mean that you cannot change your mind. You will be free to withdraw at any time, and without giving a reason up until December 2018. If before or during the interview you no longer want to take part all you need to do is tell me this and no pressure will be placed on you to change your mind. You may also decide after the interview that you do not want all or part of the information you have given me to be included in the study. With your permission, I will audio record the interview, and then write down a record of what you have said. If you would like to see this record you will be welcome to ask for it, and you can then let me know any time up until December 2018 if there are any parts, or all, of the record that you would like to withdraw.

What will happen to you if you take part?

If you agree to take part, I will discuss what the interview will involve and arrange to interview you in a safe and private place. This may well be, the [name organisation] where you, your sibling or family member receives or previously received support and advice, but it could be somewhere else if you prefer. The interview will take about 3 hours and may involve a second interview. You will not have to answer any questions that you do not want to answer, and you will be able to take a comfort break if needed, to end the interview at any time or postpone the interview.

I will also ask you if your brother, sister, other family members or anyone else who knew about what happened to you may want to take part in the research. I will ask you not to tell me their names or details, but to approach them first on my behalf. You do not have to do this to participate in the research. It is entirely up to you if you wish to do this. If you do suggest someone, I will give you a separate information sheet to pass on to them. They will then be able to decide if they are willing for you to give me their contact details, so I can get in touch with them to explain more about the study and see if they would like to participate too.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

It is important that you are emotionally well enough to be able to participate, as talking about your experience can cause distress, especially if it involved being harmed. There is a risk that you could become sad or upset during the interview. It is also important that your sibling(s) or family member you suggest to participate in the research is also emotionally well enough. I have a lot of experience of working with people in similar situations, so I am very sensitive when it comes to helping people to manage how they feel. I can assist you in receiving support either from [partner agency] or another organisation such as:

Samaritans: 08457 90 90 90
MIND: 020 8519 2122
AFRUCA: 020 7704 2261
The Victoria Climbié Foundation: 020 8619 1191

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Sometimes talking about past experiences can be helpful, as it offers an opportunity for your voice to be heard. This study is one of the first to focus on the experiences of both accused and non-accused siblings so by taking part you will be making an invaluable contribution towards helping us understand the issue. This will have the effect of helping professionals to better protect and support children in similar circumstances. Your contribution may also help shape future research on the topic. I will also provide you with a report of the main research findings; everything in there will be anonymised, but you will be able to see the contribution you have made.

Will your information in this study be kept confidential?

As far as it is safe to do so, everything that is said in the interview will be kept strictly confidential; it won't be reported to [agency/individual] or any other organisation. If your brother, sister or another family member participate in the research I will not disclose to them anything you have said to me, nor will I talk to you about what they have said. However, there are some exceptional circumstances where I would have to tell someone else who can help. This would only happen if you told me something which indicates there are serious concerns for your safety and welfare, or for the safety and welfare of others, and these concerns are not already known by those who can help. If this happened, unless it is unsafe to do so, I would discuss my concerns with you before reporting it to those who need to know.

I will keep all information that identifies you – for example your name, contact details, date of birth, the organisation that has worked with you – strictly secure, and completely separate from any other information you give. I will be the only person with access to any information that identifies you. All the rest of the information you give me will also be kept strictly secure. The UK Data Protection Act 1998 will apply to all information gathered within the interviews and held on password-locked computer files and a locked cabinet. No data will be accessed by anyone other than me. My supervisors may have access to the anonymised transcripts for quality assurance purposes.

In all the reports I write about the research, and in any talks I may give, I will not reveal your name or any information that identifies you – everything will be anonymised. However, because [name organisation/gatekeeper] know you, it is possible that they may still be able to recognise you even with a different name. Also your brother, sister, family member may be able to recognise you, and you may recognise them. I will do everything I can to limit this possibility, but you will need to bear it in mind when you talk to me, and afterwards if you want to think about withdrawing anything you have said.

What should you do if you want to take part?

When you have had the chance to read this information sheet, think about it and perhaps talk about it with someone else if you wish, you can decide if you might be interested in finding out more about participating in the study. If you are, the next step will be for you to let [name of agency/individual] know that you agree for them to give me your contact details. I will then call you so we can talk about it further and I can answer any questions you may have. Alternatively, you are also welcome to contact me direct if you prefer - my contact details are at the end of this document.

 If you agree to participate, I will arrange to come and interview you. When we meet I will go over this information sheet first to make sure that you understand everything, and I will ask you to sign and keep a copy of the consent form.

 What will happen to the results of the research study?

 The results of the research study will be used in my doctoral thesis in Social Work, which I am due to complete in 2020. I will also give you a copy of a report summarising the main findings. I also plan to write articles about the research for publication in professional journals, and to present my findings at professional conferences. My findings will always be reported in an anonymised way, to ensure as far as I possibly can that you cannot be personally identified.

 Who is organising and funding the research?

 I am conducting the research as a student at the School of Social Work, University of Sussex. The research is being partly funded by the Economic and Social Research Council.

Who has approved this study?

The research has been approved by the University of Sussex, Cross-School Research Ethics Committee.

Contact for Further Information

If you would like to find out more, please let [name of agency] know so they may give me your contact details and I will get in touch.

Alternatively, please contact me on: Email: l.bartholomew@sussex.ac.uk or phone: 07947366795.

I look forward to hearing from you or from [agency name] on your behalf.

If you have any concerns about the way in which this approach has been made or how the study is conducted, please contact my supervisor in the first instance: Elaine Sharland e.sharland@sussex.ac.uk

The University of Sussex has insurance in place to cover its legal liabilities in respect of this study.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and consider my invitation to participate in this research.

Date
June 2017

# Appendix X: Case file data extraction tool

| | A | B | C | D | E | F | G | H | I | J | K | L | M | N | O | P | Q | R | S | T |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Accused: Reason for accusation | Age | Ethnicity | Gender | Religion | Type of abuse | Accuser | Placed in to Care | Subject to CP Plan | Placed under police protection | Number of non-accused siblings | Age | Gender | Ethnicity | Religion | Type of abuse | Placed in to Care | Subject to CP Plan | Placed under police protection | Outcome |
| 2 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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| 13 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 14 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 15 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 16 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

## Appendix XI: Freedom of Information Request Children's Social Care

Dear FOI Officer,
 Re: Request for information on children accused of witchcraft and being possessed by evil spirits and their siblings.

I am a Social Work PhD student at the University of Sussex and I am researching the abuse of children accused of witchcraft and being possessed
by evil spirits and their siblings. I would like to request the following information under the Freedom of Information Act (1998).

Please could you tell me the number of recorded cases referred to your Children's Services Department where a child was accused of witchcraft or possessed by an evil spirit, during the financial years 2015-16, 2016-17 and 2017-18

In each case:
1.      How many accused were accused of being a witch or possessed by an evil spirit?
2.      How many siblings did each of these children who were accused have?
3.      The gender, ethnicity and age at the time of referral of each accused child
4.      The gender, ethnicity and age at the time of referral of each nonaccused sibling.
5.      The religion of the family.
6.      Who accused the child(ren) of being possessed e.g. mother, father, faith leader?
7.      What type of abuse did each accused child experience (physical, sexual, emotional or neglect)?
8.      For each accused and non-accused child, whether they were removed from their parent/carer's care by the local authority.
9.      For each accused and non-accused child, whether they were made subject of a child protection plan.
I would like to receive the final response by email please. My email address is l.bartholomew@sussex.ac.uk

Many thanks,

## Appendix XII: Freedom of Information Request Police

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST POLICE

 Dear FOI Officer,

Re: Request for information on children accused of witchcraft and being possessed by evil spirits and their siblings.

I am a Social Work PhD student at the University of Sussex and I am researching the abuse of children accused of witchcraft and being possessed by evil spirits and their siblings. I would like to request the following information under the Freedom of Information Act (1998).

Please could you tell me the number of recorded cases referred to your Police service where a child was accused of witchcraft or spirit possession for the financial years 2014-15, 2015-2016 and 2016-2017
In each case:
1.      How many accused children were there?
2.      How many non-accused siblings were there?
3.      The gender and age at the time of referral of each accused child of being a witch or possessed and their sibling(s).

If there's no applicable crime code please do consider conducting a search for all crimes for the requested period, where the victim was aged under 18, with a crime code relating to:
Trafficking- sexual exploitation, Trafficking- slavery, Abduction of a child, Abuse of a position of trust (within the sexual offences crime category) and a search using the following key words within the crime text: black magic / kndoki / ndoki / dakini / the evil eye / djinns / voodoo / obeah / devils / curses/ demons / child sorcerer / exorcise/ juju.

I would like to receive the final response by email please. My email address is l.bartholomew@sussex.ac.uk

 Many thanks
 Leethen Bartholomew

# US
**UNIVERSITE DE SUSSEX**
**Fiche d'information pour les participants à l'étude**
**Cette fiche d'information est à garder par vous**

 **Titre de l'étude**
**Accusations d'enfants d'être possédés de mauvais esprits ou d'être sorciers : expériences et l'impact de ces accusations sur les enfants de la même famille qui ne sont pas accusés.**
**Introduction**
Je m'appelle Leethen Bartholomew et je fais quelques recherches pour mes études doctorales à l'Université du Sussex. Je travaille en tant que travailleur social depuis 19 ans et, pendant 11 ans, j'ai travaillé avec des familles où un enfant a été accusé d'être sorcier ou possédé par de mauvais esprits. Au fil des ans, j'ai essayé de sensibiliser les professionnels et les communautés sur ce problème, dans l'espoir d'arriver à ce que les enfants et les jeunes soient protégés et soutenus.

J'ai demandé [nom du portier/individu] de vous transmettre cette fiche d'information afin que je puisse vous inviter à envisager de participer à cette étude. La raison pour laquelle [nom du portier/individu] vous a contacté en mon nom est qu'il est important de garder votre anonymat et comme ça je ne saurai pas votre identité à moins que vous donniez votre autorisation de vous contacter directement.

Cette fiche d'information est destinée à vous informer sur la recherche, afin que vous ayez toutes les informations nécessaires pour vous aider à décider si vous pourriez être intéressé à en savoir plus, avant de prendre une décision si vous allez participer ou pas. Avant de vous décider, il est important pour vous de comprendre pourquoi la recherche est faite et ce que votre participation impliquera. S'il vous plaît prenez le temps de lire attentivement les informations suivantes et en discuter avec d'autres si vous le souhaitez.

**Quel est le but de l'étude ?**
Au cours des deux dernières décennies au Royaume-Uni, il y a eu un certain nombre de cas très médiatisés impliquant des enfants qui ont été accusés par leur parents ou tuteurs d'être possédés de mauvais esprits ou d'être sorciers. Certains de ces enfants ont été maltraités et, par conséquent, pris en charge par les services sociaux. Dans la plupart de ces cas, leurs frères ou sœurs ont été témoins du mauvais traitement de ces enfants ; parfois, les enfants qui n'ont pas été accusés ont été pris en charge aussi. Dans la plupart des cas, non seulement l'enfant accusé, mais aussi son ou ses frères et sœurs sont susceptibles d'avoir été touchés par ce qui s'est passé. Il est très important que nous comprenions l'impact d'une telle expérience sur chacun enfant, afin que nous puissions mieux comprendre comment répondre à leurs besoins. L'étude vise à le faire. L'étude débutera en mai 2017 et se terminera en septembre 2020

**Pourquoi avez-vous été invité à participer ?**
 Je vous ai invité à participer à cette étude en raison de votre expérience personnelle comme un enfant qui a été accusé d'être possédé d'esprit mauvais ou de sorcellerie. J'ai demandé à {nommer le portier/individu} pour sélectionner et contacter en mon nom les clients ou les membres de la famille qu'il(elle) pense peuvent être capables et disposés à raconter leurs histoires.


**Etes-vous oblig**é **de participer ?**
Il vous appartient entièrement de décider de participer ou non. Dire non n'affectera aucun soutien que vous recevrez de [nom de l'organisation qui les a référées] ou de toute autre organisation. Veuillez bien

demander (Agence partenaire) autant de questions que vous souhaitez, et prendre le temps d'y réfléchir avant de prendre une décision.

Si vous acceptez de participer, je demanderai à chacun d'entre vous de signer un formulaire de consentement et de conserver une copie pour vous-même ainsi que cette fiche d'information. Accepter de participer ne signifie pas que vous ne pouvez pas changer d'avis. Vous serez libre de vous retirer à tout moment, sans donner une raison. Si avant ou pendant l'interview vous ne voulez plus prendre part, tout que vous devez faire est de me le dire et aucune pression ne sera placée sur vous pour avoir changé d'avis. Vous pouvez également décider après l'interview que vous ne voulez pas que tout ou une partie de l'information que vous m'avez donné soit inclus dans l'étude. Avec votre permission, je vais enregistrer l'interviewn, et ensuite écrire ce que vous avez dit. Si vous souhaitez voir ce que j'ai écrit concernant l'entretien, vous serez libre de me le demander, et vous pouvez alors me faire savoir à tout moment jusqu'en décembre 2018 s'il y a des parties, ou tout, de l'enregistrement que vous souhaitez retirer.

**Qu'est-ce qui vous arrivera si vous participez ?**

Si vous acceptez de participer, je vais discuter de ce que l'entrevue va impliquer et prendre des dispositions pour vous interviewer dans un endroit sûr et privé. Cela pourrait bien être le Bureau de [nom Organisation] où vous recevez le soutien et les conseils, ou ailleurs si vous préférez. L'interview prendra environ 3 heures et dépendant de ce que vous avez à dire que je pourrais vous demander à vous interviewer une deuxième fois. Vous n'aurez pas à répondre à toutes les questions auxquelles vous ne voulez pas répondre, et vous serez en mesure de prendre une pause en cas de besoin, ou mettre fin à l'interview à tout moment ou de le reporter.

**Quels sont les inconvénients et les risques possibles de la participation ?**

Il est important que vous soyez émotionnellement assez forts pour être en mesure de participer, puisque parler de votre expérience personnelle peut causer de la détresse, surtout si elle concerne une maltraitance vécue. Il y a un risque que vous pourriez devenir triste ou bouleversé pendant l'interview. Il est également important que vos frères et sœurs ou membre de la famille que vous suggérez de participer à cette étude la recherche soient également assez forts émotionnellement. J'ai beaucoup d'expérience de travailler avec des gens qui ont vécu des situations similaires, donc je suis très sensible quand il s'agit d'aider les gens à gérer ce qu'ils ressentent. Je peux vous aider à recevoir un soutien de l'Agence partenaire ou d'une autre organisation

Samaritans: 08457 90 90 90 MIND: 020 8519 2122 AFRUCA: 020 7704 2261 The Victoria Climbié Foundation: 020 8619 1191

**Quels sont les avantages possibles de prendre part ?**

Parfois, parler d'expériences passées peut être utile, car il offre une occasion pour vous d'être entendu. Cette étude est l'une des premières à se pencher sur les expériences des frères et sœurs non accusés et non-inculpés, donc en prenant part, vous allez apporter une contribution inestimable pour nous aider à comprendre ce problème. Cela aura pour effet d'aider les professionnels à mieux protéger et à soutenir les enfants dans des circonstances similaires. Votre contribution peut également contribuer à orienter des recherches futures sur ce sujet. Je vais également vous fournir un rapport sur les principaux résultats de ma recherche ; tout qui est dedans sera anonyme, mais vous pourrez voir la contribution que vous avez faite.

**Votre information dans cette étude sera-t-elle gardée confidentielle ?**

Dans la mesure où il est sûr de le faire, tout ce qui est dit dans l'interview sera gardé strictement confidentiel ; il ne sera pas signalé à [Agence/individu] ou à toute autre organisation. Si votre frère, votre sœur ou un autre membre de votre famille participe à l'étude je ne vais pas leur divulguer ce que vous m'avez dit, et je ne vous parlerai pas de ce qu'ils m'auront dit. Cependant, il y a des circonstances exceptionnelles où je devrais dire à quelqu'un d'autre qui peut aider. Cela ne se produirait que si vous me dites quelque chose qui indique qu'il y a de sérieuses inquiétudes pour votre sécurité et votre bien-être, ou pour la sécurité et le bien-être des autres, et que ces inquiétudes ne sont pas déjà connues de ceux qui

peuvent vous aider. Si cela se produisait, à moins qu'il ne soit dangereux de le faire, je discuterais de mes inquiétudes avec vous avant de le signaler à ceux qui ont besoin de le savoir.

Je garderai toutes les informations qui vous identifient-par exemple votre nom, coordonnées, date de naissance, l'organisation qui a travaillé avec vous, strictement sécurisé et complètement séparée de toute autre information que vous donnez.  Je serai la seule personne ayant accès à toute information qui vous identifie. Tout le reste de l'information que vous me donnez sera également gardé strictement sécurisé. La Loi sur la protection des données du Royaume-Uni 1998 s'appliquera à toutes les informations recueillies dans les interviews et conservées sur des fichiers informatiques verrouillés par mot de passe et dans une armoire verrouillée.  Aucune donnée ne sera accédée par quelqu'un d'autre que moi. Mes superviseurs peuvent avoir accès aux transcriptions anonymes à des fins d'assurance de la qualité.

Dans tous les rapports que j'écris sur la recherche, et dans toutes les discussions que je vais mener, je ne vais pas révéler votre nom ou toute information qui vous identifie ; tout sera anonyme.  Toutefois, parce que [nom Organisation/Gatekeeper] vous connait, il est possible qu'ils puissent encore être en mesure de vous reconnaître, même avec un nom différent.

Aussi votre frère, sœur, membre de la famille peut être en mesure de vous reconnaître, et vous pouvez les reconnaître. Je ferai tout ce que je peux pour limiter cette possibilité, mais vous aurez besoin de le garder à l'esprit quand vous me parlez, et éventuellement si vous pensez à retirer tout ce que vous avez dit.

### Que faire si vous voulez participer ?

Lorsque vous avez eu la chance de lire cette fiche d'information, pensez-y et peut-être en parler avec quelqu'un d'autre si vous le souhaitez, vous pouvez décider si vous voulez savoir plus sur la participation à l'étude. Dans ce cas, la prochaine étape sera pour vous de laisser [nom de l'Agence/individu] savoir que vous lui donnez l'autorisation de me donner vos coordonnées. Je vous appellerai pour que nous puissions en parler davantage et que je puisse répondre à toutes vos questions. Alternativement, vous êtes également bienvenu pour me contacter directement si vous préférez. Les détails de contact sont à la fin de ce document

Je vais aussi vous demander si votre frère, sœur, d'autres membres de la famille ou quelqu'un d'autre qui sait ce qui t'est arrivé a envie de participer à la recherche. Je ne vais pas vous demander de me dire leurs noms ou des détails, mais de les aborder d'abord en mon nom. Vous n'avez pas à faire cela pour participer à la recherche. C'est entièrement à vous si vous souhaitez le faire. Si vous suggérez quelqu'un, je vais vous donner une feuille de renseignements différente pour eux. Ils seront alors en mesure de décider s'ils sont prêts à vous donner leurs coordonnées de ma part, afin que je puisse entrer en contact avec eux pour expliquer davantage l'objet de l'étude et voir si elles veulent y participer également.

Si vous acceptez de participer, je vais prendre des dispositions appropriées pour venir vous interviewer. Lorsque nous nous rencontrons, je vais d'abord parcourir avec vous cette feuille d'information pour m'assurer que vous comprenez tout, et je vais vous demander de signer et de conserver une copie du formulaire de consentement.

### Qu'adviendra-t-il des résultats de l'étude de recherche ?

Les résultats de l'étude de recherche seront utilisés dans ma thèse de doctorat en travail social, que j'espère compléter en 2020. Je vais également vous donner une copie d'un rapport résumant les principales conclusions. J'ai également l'intention d'écrire des articles sur la recherche pour la publication dans les revues professionnelles, et de présenter mes conclusions lors de conférences professionnelles. Mes conclusions seront toujours rapportées de manière anonyme, pour vous assurer, autant que possible, que vous ne pouvez pas être personnellement identifié.

### Qui organise et finance la recherche ?

Je mène la recherche en tant qu'étudiant à la faculté de travail social de l'Université du Sussex. La recherche est financée en partie par le Conseil de recherches économiques et sociales.

### Qui a approuvé cette étude ?

La recherche a été approuvée par l'Université du Sussex, Comité d'éthique de la recherche inter-écoles
**Contact pour plus d'information.**
Si vous souhaitez en savoir plus, s'il vous plaît laissez [nom de l'Agence] savoir afin qu'ils puissent me donner vos coordonnées et je vais entrer en contact
 Alternatively, please contact me on: email:
 Alternativement, veuillez bien me contactez-moi sur mon email ou téléphone suivants :
[l.bartholomew@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:l.bartholomew@sussex.ac.uk); phone :  07947xxxxxx
J'espère entrer en contact avez-vous très prochainement directement ou par l'entremise de votre [nom de l'Agence].
Si vous avez des inquiétudes au sujet de la façon dont cette approche a été faite ou de la façon dont l'étude est menée, veuillez contacter mon superviseur en première lieu :
Elaine Sharland e.sharland@sussex.ac.uk
L'Université de Sussex a une assurance en place pour couvrir des dommages et intérêts légaux relatifs à cette recherche.
Merci d'avoir pris le temps de lire cette fiche d'information et d'envisager de répondre à mon invitation à participer à cette recherche
**Accusations d'enfants d'être possédés de mauvais esprits ou d'être sorciers et l'impact de ces accusations sur les enfants de la même famille qui ne sont pas accuses.**

## Appendix XIV: The Committee on the Rights of the Child on harmful practices

Criteria for determining harmful practices

Harmful practices are persistent practices and forms of behaviour that are grounded in discrimination on the basis of, among other things, sex, gender and age, in addition to multiple and/or intersecting forms of discrimination that often involve violence and cause physical and/or psychological harm or suffering. The harm that such practices cause to the victims surpasses the immediate physical and mental consequences and often has the purpose or effect of impairing the recognition, enjoyment and exercise of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of women and children. There is also a negative impact on their dignity, physical, psychosocial and moral integrity and development, participation, health, education and economic and social status. The practices are therefore reflected in the work of both Committees.

(a) They constitute a denial of the dignity and/or integrity of the individual and a violation of the human rights and fundamental freedoms enshrined in the two Conventions;

(b) They constitute discrimination against women or children and are harmful insofar as they result in negative consequences for them as individuals or groups, including physical, psychological, economic and social harm and/or violence and limitations on their capacity to participate fully in society or develop and reach their full potential;

(c) They are traditional, re-emerging or emerging practices that are prescribed and/or kept in place by social norms that perpetuate male dominance and inequality of women and children, on the basis of sex, gender, age and other intersecting factors;

(d) They are imposed on women and children by family members, community members or society at large, regardless of whether the victim provides, or is able to provide, full, free and informed consent.

## Appendix XV: United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

**Relevant Articles**

### Article 9

1. States Parties shall ensure that a child shall not be separated from his or her parents against their will, except when competent authorities subject to judicial review determine, in accordance with applicable law and procedures, that such separation is necessary for the best interests of the child. Such determination may be necessary in a particular case such as one involving abuse or neglect of the child by the parents, or one where the parents are living separately and a decision must be made as to the child's place of residence.

2. In any proceedings pursuant to paragraph 1 of the present article, all interested parties shall be given an opportunity to participate in the proceedings and make their views known.

3. States Parties shall respect the right of the child who is separated from one or both parents to maintain personal relations and direct contact with both parents on a regular basis, except if it is contrary to the child's best interests.

4. Where such separation results from any action initiated by a State Party, such as the detention, imprisonment, exile, deportation or death (including death arising from any cause while the person is in the custody of the State) of one or both parents or of the child, that State Party shall, upon request, provide the parents, the child or, if appropriate, another member of the family with the essential information concerning the whereabouts of the absent member(s) of the family unless the provision of the information would be detrimental to the well-being of the child. States Parties shall further ensure that the submission of such a request shall of itself entail no adverse consequences for the person(s) concerned.

### Article 19

1. States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.

2. Such protective measures should, as appropriate, include effective procedures for the establishment of social programmes to provide necessary support for the child and for those who

have the care of the child, as well as for other forms of prevention and for identification, reporting, referral, investigation, treatment and follow-up of instances of child maltreatment described heretofore, and, as appropriate, for judicial involvement.

**Article 37**

States Parties shall ensure that:

(a) No child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Neither capital punishment nor life imprisonment without possibility of release shall be imposed for offences committed by persons below eighteen years of age;

(b) No child shall be deprived of his or her liberty unlawfully or arbitrarily. The arrest, detention or imprisonment of a child shall be in conformity with the law and shall be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time;

(c) Every child deprived of liberty shall be treated with humanity and respect for the inherent dignity of the human person, and in a manner which takes into account the needs of persons of his or her age. 10 In particular, every child deprived of liberty shall be separated from adults unless it is considered in the child's best interest not to do so and shall have the right to maintain contact with his or her family through correspondence and visits, save in exceptional circumstances;

(d) Every child deprived of his or her liberty shall have the right to prompt access to legal and other appropriate assistance, as well as the right to challenge the legality of the deprivation of his or her liberty before a court or other competent, independent and impartial authority, and to a prompt decision on any such action.