

# The Effects of Witchcraft on the Well-Being of High School Students in Nairobi, Kenya and Their Implications for Educational Leadership

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## Abstract

Witchcraft is an enigma in many societies of the world today with some denying it exists while most believe in its existence and are influenced by it to a large extent. In many education institutions, especially high schools, witchcraft is mostly blamed for students' hysteric behavior, sudden drop in school attendance, and other real or imagined behavior such as hearing of invisible compulsive voices, appearances or actions of supernatural beings that cause students to faint and/or convulse, speak strangely under the influence of supernatural powers and hallucinate, among other weird behaviors. These episodes are reportedly resolved by involvement of demon exorcists, intercessors and even stronger "witchdoctors" and other "higher" supernatural powers to negate the effects of witchcraft. In some institutions, these episodes are recurrent. The aim of this paper was to investigate the effects of witchcraft, including witchcraft accusations and witchcraft imaginations, on the academic, social-economic and spiritual welfare of high school students (adolescents). Data was collected from a purposeful sample of ten (10) students and four (4) teachers who were known to have been witnesses of such experiences in a private high school in the environs of Nairobi. It is the hope of the author that findings of the study will empower school administrators and leaders to mitigate the effects of real or imagined witchcraft.

**Keywords:** Witchcraft, Adolescents, Educational leadership, Students' well-being, Witchdoctors, Supernatural

## 1. Introduction

Witchcraft is part of human reality and imagination in almost all cultures of the world. Although many modern scholars and citizens are skeptical about its existence, a study in all cultures shows that all cultures have always had the concept of witchcraft as part of their reality. It is the definition of the terms that perhaps seem to generate diverse schools of thought on the subject. Some scholars describe witchcraft as different from sorcery, magic, psychic, divination and traditional healers; while others seem to include all the above or a combination of some part of witchcraft (Ruickbie, 2004; Ariadne, 2005). Hence, "witches belief in deity ranging widely, from impersonal creative forces at one extreme to actual personalities taking a part in the individual's life at the other; the range of belief systems expressed ran the gamut from atheism to pantheism" (Ruickbie, 2004, p. 44).

A study into literature on witchcraft shows that its definition has historically evolved. Scholars have argued that in the ancient times, witchcraft was part of human life and survival. For example, "in the mythological imagination of the Northern Europeans, East of Midgard was their very own 'Birthplace of All Sorceries,' the home of the great and most feared Witch, Angerbode. Encircled by impassable mountains and trackless forests, the peoples of Northern Europe held Witchcraft dear, both as the font of wisdom and the scapegoat of disaster" (Ruickbie, 2004, p. 9). This perception seems to have been lost due to the rise of various religious perspectives, including Christianity and Islam, which prohibit the practice and consultation of witchcraft (Deut. 18:10-1; Quran 113:4). The growing negative perceptions towards witches and the fear of them in society historically generated decisions towards banning their craft, trails and persecutions and even extermination of anyone suspected to be a witch (Ruickbie, 2004). This was especially prominent in the mediaeval period. "It was not until the very end of the medieval period (ca. 1500) that a definition emerged of the witch as a person in league with the devil . . . In the period from 1000-1500 concepts of the witch ranged from that of benevolent healer to feared sorcerer or sorceress" (<http://www2.kenyon.edu/projects/margin/witch.htm>). By the end of the period witch accusations escalated, leading to persecution of those who were or suspected to practice the vice (Ruickbie, 2004; Buckland, 1986).

After a period of suppression and apparent demise of the practice, the resurgence of witchcraft has been slow but sure. According to Ruickbie (2004), after the persecutions:

The European witch-hunts were over, but witchcraft and the idea of witchcraft would never die out. In the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, witchcraft was re-examined, reinterpreted and ultimately, re-invented. . . . To the ancients witchcraft was largely viewed as maleficent magic. To the Christians witchcraft was a Satanic conspiracy to corrupt the souls of good people. But now, to the scientific rationalist, was something else entirely: it was the Old Religion. (pp. 22-23)

Modern witchcraft in the West is vibrant because it is considered an old religion of the pagan world of Europe whose study is warranted (Ruickbie, 2004). Today there are even academies and resources offering

higher training in witchcraft for those who want to know about or to practice witchcraft (Buckland, 1986). But this has been revamped with new understandings of the “craft”.

The founding of the modern witchcraft movement is associated with Gerald Gardner who began and later teamed up with the occult-curious Doreen Vaiente to popularise the “Modern Witchcraft Religion of Wicca. [which] is portrayed by its practitioners as a religion of invention with individual creativity at its core” (Ruickbie, 2004, p. 28). The resurgence of the craft has attracted the attention of many including governments. For example the “US government spends over 70 million dollars on psychic research per year” (Ariadne, 2005, p. 9).

In Africa, the subject of witchcraft is a constant feature of daily human life. Like in the Jewish community, witchcraft is acknowledged but not encouraged. In some countries, witchcraft accusations have brought much suffering to those perceived to be perpetrators, and sadly including children (Rasmussen, 2008). However, many scholars and professionals are even afraid to investigate the phenomena for fear of being attacked by witches. In Kenya, it is the journalists who have been bold enough to investigate this phenomena but with reports of unexplained camera failure in some situations. For example, some television stations have broadcasted interviews with self-proclaimed witchdoctors. In one situation a witch by the name Ann Mutheu indicated happiness for being a witch and demonstrates how she dresses and gathers her tools of the craft during practice, to protect people from the works of thirty witches who live in the neighborhood, presumably tormenting people. She explained that she is successful in bewitching those who steal others’ property with the effect that the culprits experience strange stomach ailments or other consequences until they give back what they have stolen or until they report to her that they had returned stolen goods ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W0OAGp69\\_MA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W0OAGp69_MA)). In another situation, the journalists posed as clients and went through some rituals (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0j1vYhS9zNA>). There are several documentaries on YouTube that indicate the existence of witchcraft, witch accusations and imaginations. There are known witches who are constantly consulted by people with various physical, psychological and socio-economic maladies. These have diverse effects on people.

Many scholars and educational practitioners are skeptical about witchcraft. This could be because they have been traditionally trained in the application of the positivistic “scientific method” and have to empirically test validity, reliability and credibility of data. However, in the process of scrutiny and due to the apparent conflict of science and faith propagated by their sometimes agnostic and atheistic professors, the existence of witchcraft is denied and wished away as superstition. This has been the case even though empirical studies are known not to prove any cause-effects relationships. Progressively, the application of mixed methods of empirical studies has provided opportunity for investigation into the witchcraft phenomena.

Teklemariam, and Nyenze’s (2002) study showed that in schools, “witchcraft continues to dominate the minds of many teachers and students especially during moments of crisis when they are looking for the answers to vexing issues. They go back to traditional way of explaining misfortunes when current scientific technology, religions and medicine do not seem to provide the answers.” Kiremu (2009) found existence of witchcraft beliefs and self-confessed witches among Christians in the Chuka of Meru, Kenya. Mwalwa (2001) found that some few church members, among the Kamba people, still consulted witches when they were faced with crises. Mbondo (2006) found the practice of witchcraft among the Akamba Christians rampant:

At least (80%) of Christians admitted frequent and constant consultation to traditional specialists commonly known as ‘Awe’. It is found that most Christians irrespective of gender, marital status and age seek and consult these powers when confronted by problems. In this connection, the Akamba Christians are seen in behaviors that subscribe to witchcraft such as wearing protective charms, keeping broken pieces of pot on top of their houses and complaining of being bewitched by their fellow Christians. The voluntary and repeated confessions and lynching of witches, some of whom are Christians proves that the belief in witchcraft exists among Akamba Christians. This being the case those who do not openly admit witchcraft’s existence do so on the surface. ([www.researchkenya.or.ke/api/content/abstract](http://www.researchkenya.or.ke/api/content/abstract))

Muchiri(2000) researched on the practice of witchcraft among the Kikuyu community and established that:

..... witchcraft, sorcery and divination are still present in Gikuyu society. [Thirty-three] 33% of the respondents indicated awareness that witches are still present in the post-Christian society while 73% indicated that the practice of sorcery is still going on among Christians in Tetu Division. We had no problem in finding out whether divination is still present in Gikuyu society since we found diviners that we interviewed. This study also found that the Church is aware of the presence of witchcraft, sorcery and divination since some of the people who had been accused of the practices and those who had confessed of the practice are Christians. ([www.researchkenya.or.ke/api/content/abstract](http://www.researchkenya.or.ke/api/content/abstract))

There are very few studies that have shown the effects of witchcraft on students. Teklemariam and Nyenze (2002) found that “teachers and students practiced witchcraft mainly for protection from being bewitched by their rivals and to perform better academically” in the Ukambani area. Thomas (2012) found that the religious education curriculum used images and examples of female witches that seem to affirm the conventional societal

association of witchcraft to females.

### 1.1 Theoretical Development

Witchcraft phenomenon can be understood through folklore theories.

Folklore encompasses the customs, knowledge systems, games, beliefs, practices, literature, performing and nonperforming arts, which include dance music, theatre, drama, painting, sculpture, making of crafts with several materials, festivals among others. The process of transmission of knowledge contained in all the aspects of folklore mentioned above through sustenance, reshaping, renewal, creation of variants has been a continuous phenomenon since the human civilization appeared on this earth. (Gupta, n. d., ¶4, 11)

Specifically, the anthropological arm that explains cultures and cultural dynamics. Specifically, the theory of functionalism, which deems culture as a living organism which has capacity to reproduce, grow and die, through its organs, explains why people believe in what they do. In the bio-cultural theory:

Malinowski suggested that individuals have physiological needs (reproduction, food, shelter) and that social institutions exist to meet these needs. There are also culturally derived needs and four basic “instrumental needs” (economics, social control, education, and political organization), that require institutional devices. Each institution has personnel, a charter, a set of norms or rules, activities, material apparatus (technology), and a function. Malinowski argued that uniform psychological responses are correlates of physiological needs (Porth, Neutzling & Edwards, n. d.).

As already discussed earlier in this paper, the witchcraft phenomena has been in existence in many primal societies throughout history. Its continuity may be explained by the human need for self- perpetuation as they seek to protect themselves of harm and possible extinction. The need to protect themselves from what seems to be mystical life circumstances is seen to be only addressable through mystic approaches.

According to Malinowski, as quoted by Porth, Neutzling and Edwards (n. d.),

1. “Culture is essentially an instrumental apparatus by which man is put in a position to better cope with the concrete, specific problems that face him in his environment in the course of the satisfaction of his needs.
2. It is a system of objects, activities, and attitudes in which every part exists as a means to an end.
3. It is an integral in which the various elements are interdependent.
4. Such activities, attitudes and objects are organized around important and vital tasks into institutions such as family, the clan, the local community, the tribe, and the organized teams of economic cooperation, political, legal, and educational activity.
5. From the dynamic point of view, that is, as regards the type of activity, culture can be analyzed into a number of aspects such as education, social control, economics, systems of knowledge, belief, and morality, and also modes of creative and artistic expression”. (1944, p. 150)

The above elements explain why the witchcraft phenomenon is perpetuated from generation to generation. Even where societies have prohibited the practice of witchcraft and punished perpetrators, the vice continued secretly (1 Sam. 28: 3-25) and resurges with a different outfit, such as the religion of Wicca mentioned earlier in this paper. The need for humanity to understand the invisible forces that affect them positively or negatively cannot be ignored. These forces continue to propel the institutions of spirituality/religion, and the creative arts, among others. Hence, witchcraft, real or imagined, will continue to be a force in society and needs to be clearly investigated, understood and addressed.

### 1.2 Effects of Witchcraft

The effects of witchcraft have been debatable with some claiming an existence of good witches/witchcraft and others reporting of bad or evil witches/witchcraft. Those perceived to be good are termed witchdoctors, usually socially accepted as those who offer treatment for people experiencing problems associated to witchcraft. The notion of “good” witchcraft emanates from phenomena where those who think they are bewitched and suffering seek the help of witchdoctors who are able to undo the “spells” of the witch. Hence, witches apparently operate different ranks or levels, each level requiring different sets of skills and paraphernalia (Ariadne, 2005). Those considered to “heal” are usually termed witchdoctors. Some people argue that witchdoctors are not witches, while others are of the opinion that they are witches of a higher rank and therefore are able to reverse the effects of spells cast by lower ranking witches. Ariadne (2005), a self-proclaimed witch and trainer of witches, insinuates that witches can choose whether to be good or evil and advises her trainees not to use their “magic power” to cast evil spells (p. 7).

Magick (sic.) is the energy thought fueled by your emotions. When you focus everything you are to a specific goal or outcome – Magick energy has the power to make it so. . . . Your spirit, mind, belief, and focus can control these hidden energies. Every person, with the right mental and spiritual tools has the ability to use Magick energy to get the results they want in life. (2005, p. 8)

The two different perceptions of kinds of witches imply two polarized notions of its effects. Some opine that witchcraft has positive effects for those who have interacted with it (Ruickbie, 2004; Buckland, 1986). This might be grouped in two categories:

1. the witches themselves who benefit economically from their practice and
2. the “healing seekers” who might experience some relief of their real or perceived suffering.

One positive effect is seen to include participation in personal and social responsibility. In the modern witch movement, witches can market their art and establish their craft as business, must participate in social action and hence are gaining popularity. According to Buckland (1986),

Today, across America, it is not at all unusual to find open Wiccan festivals and seminars taking place in such unlikely places as family campgrounds and motels such as the Holiday Inn. Witches appear on television and radio talk shows; they are written up in local and national newspapers and magazines. Witchcraft courses are given in colleges. Even in the Armed Forces, Wicca is recognized as a valid religion— Department of the Army Pamphlet No. 165-13 “Religious Requirements and Practices of Certain Selected Groups—A Handbook for Chaplains” includes instructions as to the religious rights of Witches right alongside those of Islamic groups, Sikh groups, Christian Heritage, Indian Heritage, Japanese and Jewish groups. (p. 8)

As such, witchcraft movement is gaining of popularity.

Another benefit is seen be in the area of spirituality. In addition to the social aspect of the practice, witchcraft is progressively being seen an alternative means of spiritual expression. According Buckland (1986),

Witches and witchcraft are no longer what they were thought to be. Gone are the pacts with the Devil, the evil imp familiars and the toe-curling curses. In their place we find a vital religion practicing spirituality equality and seeking the improvement of the world. Witchcraft changes [and improves] the lives of those it touches. . . Christianity in the West is in crisis. With increasing access to alternative forms of knowledge Christianity is no longer the only road to salvation. With the spread of free-market capitalism into every aspect of our lives, we are now even free to choose what spiritual path we will follow. And people are choosing Witchcraft. (pp. 52-3)

The above benefits have arguably been used to legalize the practice as part of human rights in some countries. However, for the most part, witchcraft, is perceived to have negative outcomes

#### 1.2.1 Negative Effects

The effects of witchcraft have been reported to range from physical, socio-economic, psychological and spiritual (Petrus, 2016; Thomas, 2012; Teklemariam and Nyenze, 2002; Kesamang and Taiwo, 2010).

#### 1.2.2 Gender Issues

One of most cost effects emanates from witchcraft accusations, where the vulnerable in society, particularly older women are suspected to be witches. The growth of the movement seems to have an increasing number of women to the extent that witchcraft and witchcraft accusations have been associated with females (Thomas, 2012; Rasmussen, 2008). However,

...magic was not the preserve of women in the ancient world, but in the tales of the heroes, warriors who preferred the drawn sword to the wand [and] the magic users they encountered were almost always women - an arrangement greatly enjoyed by the Odysseus, through the ruin of Jason. Nor was magic the preserve of the goddesses: Hermes was the greatest magician amongst the Olympians. Yes it is a goddess who has become most closely associated with Witchcraft . . . (Ruickbie, 2004, p. 5)

The polarization of perceptions on witchcraft as vice practiced by women has led to ostracizing some, persecution and related consequences of rejection such as poor self-esteem, depression, illness and even death.

#### 1.2.3 Other Effects

A study was conducted to investigate teachers’ and students’ perceptions on witchcraft and its effects on formal education in Mwingi District, in Kenya among on a sample of 123 from 26 public schools. . . . The researchers showed that the major types of witchcraft practiced in the district were white witchcraft, black witchcraft, “majini” and devil worship, among others. The study also revealed that, among students, witchcraft practices caused school dropout, indiscipline, poor concentration in class hence poor performance and sicknesses (Teklemariam & Nyenze, 2002).

Another study by Kesamang and Taiwo (2010) revealed that in Botswana, where mythology included the maneuvers of witches, “Setswana mythology has a telling effect, to a large extent, on the thought processes of the average Botswana [Junior Secondary School] JSS student. This resulted in significant negative relationships between the students’ socio-cultural background and their attitudes towards school science on one hand and their achievement in school science on the other hand” (p. 919). Studies within school settings are scanty and more are needed.

## 2. Methodology

The current action study applied the phenomenological design of the qualitative approach. A sample of ten (10)



students and one (1) teacher were purposefully selected from a private high school that was known by the author to be dealing with students reporting witchcraft effects. For triangulation, three (3) more teachers were included through the snow ball approach, based on relevant experiences in the subject of witchcraft. Data was collected through face to face interviews with a guidance of a semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix A). Data was analyzed using selective coding.

The study investigated effects of witchcraft on students' well-being at a selected private high school in Nairobi. Among the students interviewed were five boys and five girls, all adolescents. Demographic information indicated that a bigger percentage of those interviewed, four were represented by the form four class. Two from form two class, one represented by form one class and one was represented by form three class and one college student. The highest percentage in terms of age was 5 (50%) which represented the age of 16-18 years and 5 between 19-21 years of age. The interviewees were from Luo community, Kamba community, Luhya community and Kikuyu community. Among the teachers interviewed two were female and two were male. They ranged between 35-51 years of age, from Ukambani and Luhya communities.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

#### *3.1 Definition of Witchcraft by Students*

Respondents said witchcraft was a state of being in possession of harmful paraphernalia to harm others using evil spirits. Another respondent said it was a practice that makes one to suffer physically, mentally, socially, psychologically or even academically using charms. Some defined witchcraft as the use of spirits to dictate or control the living.

Seven (70%) of the respondents claimed to have witnessed a case of witchcraft among their peers face-face; a school principal explained that in every group of 20 students, about 8 are affected by the witchcraft phenomena.

#### *3.2 Perceptions on Witchcraft Perpetrators*

Students and teachers seemed to be in agreement that witchcraft is usually directed to someone by close relatives and neighbors who may have ongoing interpersonal conflicts. Two student interviewees in form four class disclosed an attempt of witchcraft on them by close relatives and a neighbor who were very envious of their brilliant performance in school. They reported that these witchcraft attempts were done while students were in their primary schools. They felt their poor performance in primary school's final exams was attributed to witchcraft. Both students explained that before their performance began to deteriorate, they were bright students.

Some reported that both men and women can be witches. They can identify the ability of a child in that early age and so engaged to spoil them while they (children) are not aware. Some students explained that mature people just wanted to settle their differences through envy and revenge using children who were very innocent. One lamented, "I did nothing wrong to deserve this." Teachers also gave examples of reported relational problems between students and some relatives that were purported to have bewitched the students.

#### *3.3 Effects of Witchcraft*

##### *3.3.1 Phobia*

Phobia was perhaps one of the most frequently reported effect of witchcraft. Due to witchcraft experiences, accusations and imaginations, both students and teachers agreed that many live in fear. One respondent claimed that it was not safe for him to travel to their homeland especially during holidays. He claimed that envious neighbors could plan to harm him and his family because they are prosperous. He claimed that villagers at one point attempted to kill their mother because of claim that she was a witch.

This was also affirmed by a school Principal who reported that a good number of her students do not go to their homes for fear of witchcraft. Instead, their parents had made arrangements for them live with relatives or guardians – usually in urban areas.

Phobia was reported to be more evidenced during examination times and during competitive sports. Instances of students' fainting during these seasons were blamed on witchcraft.

##### *3.3.2 Isolationism and Relational Problems*

Students who reported being affected by witchcraft experienced isolation either by desertion by colleagues or by separating themselves. Two respondents claimed that sometimes in school they felt like they did not want to associate with anybody. They also claimed that their relationships with parents deteriorated because of powers they could not withstand. Respondents also complained of eye problems such as shedding tears during exams, eyes turning brown and swelling.

Some students affirmed that they encountered frustrations and pressure from family members who did not understand their predicaments and even teachers who beat them mercilessly for their failure in performance. This continued to affect them relationally as they faced rejection. It also continued to negatively affect their performance in other areas of life such as self-esteem and academic performance.

### 3.3.3 Physical Ailments

Some student respondents claimed that they felt pain in their stomachs and had frequent sicknesses. One respondent also complained of eye problems such as shedding tears during exams, eyes turning brown and swelling. Several students explained that becoming sick during exam periods was usually related to witchcraft. One respondent claimed that she almost failed to do her KCPE examination because of sudden eye problem and when she consulted a traditional healer through the help of her parents, they were advised she had been bewitched.

One teacher concurred with students that witchcraft caused persistent physical ailments. He explained how he had suffered severe headaches when young and when his mother invited a witch, he was relieved after a ritual. He explained:

One time, I remember it was around 11.30am, my brothers and I were just resting in our cottage (*esimba*) after work. That lady came, entered our house without greeting us and slowly proceeded to our bedroom where I was sleeping on bed. I woke up and sat on bed because I did not know what was going on. She stretched her hand outside through the window to the roof of our grass-thatched house and managed to remove a bunch of stuff rubbed in polythene bag, a size of a small football. She went back to my mother's house and started unwrapping the stuff. My mother called all of us to see and the *Omusali* [one who prays] woman declared that that was the witchcraft that was haunting us. She claimed that since then we were now free. Among the stuffs that I noted from that black magic were: used pens, torn papers, pieces of clothes, nails, hair, remains of foodstuffs etc. I did not understand how my headache disappeared. Since then, I was healed.

It is important to note that even though the physical ailment was healed, and such experiences continue to encourage the existence and pursuit of witch interventions, witches do not address causes of the problems. They deal with symptoms. In fact, all interviewees indicated that witches "revealed" those who had bewitched their clients. Usually exposed are not practitioner witches (as witches seem to protect those in their "craft") but those purported to have consulted witches.

### 3.3.4 Hallucinations and Astral Travel Projection

In some cases, those who reported being bewitched encountered hallucinations. Respondents said that cases of students falling, fainting and seeing visions could be the result of witchcraft. They said cases of attempting to commit suicide could be caused by witchcraft. Seizures and violence also implied that the victim wanted to drop out of school. According to one principal, "some students experience hallucinations. They usually hear voices or see images of people visiting them such as their grandmother or other relatives. We know they are under the influence of witchcraft because when they fall; they are unusually very strong physically, to the extent of overpowering a couple of strong men. They groan and sometimes speak in voices different from their normal". One respondent also claimed that someone used to shave her at night! Whenever she woke up, she missed some hairs or part of head was shaved. In another interview, a student respondent explained that her colleague, who admitted to be a witch, after "inheriting" it from the grandmother, was very influential in school. One night, she stunned everyone because of an out-of-her-body (austral travel projection) experience.

When we went to the dorm at night, those of us who slept in the same dormitory conversed with her before we slept. However, some who had remained along the corridor also shared heated conversations with her. The following day some of the conversations came up and there was a controversy when some students said they were with her in the dormitory and others insisted they talked with her on the corridor – the same time. She confided with us [dorm-mates] that she had capabilities of traveling out of her body. We realized the reason why we had always found the window opened even when the dorm captain had ensured it was well locked. She said her grandmother usually visited her at night and they would meet along the road, outside the school compound, in their 'spirit' states. Her body would however remain in her bed. This scared us so much that my friend and I requested to change dorms. . . .

Later the girl was expelled from school for attempting to burn the administration block.

### 3.3.5 Poor Academic Performance

Some respondents blamed witchcraft for poor academic performance. Five of the respondents claimed that they certainly dropped in their academic performance because of reasons they could not tell. I interviewed three teachers who reported that witchcraft accusations were common among students who experienced an abrupt drop in school performance. A school Principal explained: "students suffer from real witch attacks, but many suffer due to imagined witchcraft. There are students who attribute their poor performance in school on witchcraft." One student mooted, "I began to drop drastically in academic performance the moment my grandmother got to see my report form." The explanation given after her mother consulted a witchdoctor was that as a step granddaughter her excellent academic performance was way above her siblings, the biological grandchildren. This had caused the grandmother to be envious and hence she bewitched her by taking the report form to a witch. From the data collected, academic performance may also be a result of secondary effects related to absenteeism from school. One of the teachers explained that "some students, especially those who hear voices or faint, are

disrupted in the academic studies. We sometimes send them home to seek help.”

For some persistent effects, students may be terminated from schooling, especially in boarding schools. “You know, we sometimes do not know what to do with the children. When you cannot control when a child falls and where they fall, it is dangerous for the health of the children. Sometimes parents take them to day schools for close monitoring”. It is possible that such children are affected, academically and otherwise, by transitional problems as they lose important friendships and relationships and begin to create new ones in a new context.

#### 3.3.6 School Drop-out

Both teachers and students affirmed that those who reported being bewitched could eventually drop out of school. Dropping out of schools can be an outcome of poor academic performance, ill-health or rejection or a combination of several factors. Respondents indicated that some of their colleagues affected by witchcraft had eventually dropped out of school. One teacher explained how a boy child, ritually recruited by a witch relative to be a wizard, left school before completion. He explained that it was due to interference from spirits that would command him to engage in witchcraft-related activities at night and he would be too tired to go to school. He eventually had to abandon school altogether.

One teacher explained, “I know a woman who bewitched a high school boy, who had impregnated her daughter. I know the boy. When he was asked to marry the girl, he refused and said he wanted to continue with school. The woman told him he will not enjoy the schooling after destroying her daughter. A few months after the boy reported to school, he became mad and had to drop out of school. To date, he just goes around the town collecting papers”.

The above cases were perceived to be evidence that witchcraft exists and has some effect on students and teachers.

#### 3.3.7 Depression

Some students reported that depression, suicidal thoughts and actual suicide was common among their colleagues who reported being haunted by witches. Depression may be a secondary symptom of witchcraft effects and is likely to result from stigmatization of those suspected to be associated or affected by witchcraft. Eventually, depression may lead to suicidal thoughts or actual suicide.

#### 3.3.8 Violence/Crime

Two teachers explained that some of the students who reported being affected by witchcraft were also sometimes caught involved in violence/crime. This was witnessed in cases of students’ unrest which sometimes resulted in destruction of property and harm to students - e.g. Kyanguli Secondary School (Ndetei, 2004). One student explained how a girl who admitted to be involved in the practice of witchcraft, through grandmother’s influence, mobilized students to burn a teacher by burning the administration block where the teacher was. However, this was not actualized as one fearful student leaked the information to the teacher and the girl was expelled from school.

### 3.4 Mitigating Effects Real or Imagined Witchcraft

The effects of witchcraft can be mitigated using various approaches such as guidance and counseling, curriculum revision, research and publication, and spiritual intervention.

#### 3.4.1 Guidance and Counseling

A high school principal reported that she had witnessed cases of real and imagined witchcraft. In some situations witchcraft was used to explain some surprising or mysterious happenings. Whether some stories represent real or imagined witchcraft activities may not be verified. However, these witchcraft beliefs, accusations and imaginations have diverse and sometimes hazardous effects on those who perpetrate them. Teachers explained that addressing the subject of witchcraft with students could help them deal with it. One explained that some students with witchcraft accusations and imaginations had remarkably improved, both in their academic performance and otherwise, after counseling sessions.

It is therefore necessary to address the subject and train students on how to handle relational problems that lead to conflict, envy, and mistrust, among other evils, causing people to be superstitious against each other. In this regard, counseling departments need to be strengthened and the personnel involved need to be adequately trained to handle diverse psychological issues.

#### 3.4.2 Curriculum and Witchcraft Issues

Thomas (2012) observes that the religious education curriculum of Ghana had propagated propaganda that most witches were female. This imagery therefore affected women and girls negatively and needed to be addressed.

The curriculum of Kenya does not address the issue of witchcraft but briefly touches on the fact that traditional societies consulted diviners, traditional medicine-men, and ancestral spirits, among others in an attempt to solve to their problems. This is done in a few phrases and does not explain what was done and whether those “experts” exist today and what their current roles are. Students, therefore, are constantly faced with a phenomenon that is so real to them, and yet without any requisite knowledge, skills and attitudes to

combat the negative effects of that reality.

It is therefore necessary that curriculum developers may introduce content that will help students converse on witchcraft intelligibly and to equip them with skills to combat witchcraft accusations and imaginations.

### 3.4.3 Research and Publication

The existence of witchcraft cannot be denied and even in the west, its reality can no longer be concealed. According to Buckland:

Witchcraft is not merely legendary; it was, and is, real. It is not extinct; it is alive and prospering. Since the last laws against Witchcraft were repealed (as recently as the 1950s), Witches have been able to come out into the open and show themselves for what they are. And what are they? They are intelligent, community-conscious, thoughtful men and women of TODAY. Witchcraft is not a step backwards; a retreat into a more superstition-filled time. Far from it. It is a step forward. Witchcraft is a religion far more relevant to the times than the vast majority of the established churches. It is the acceptance of personal and social responsibility. It is acknowledgement of a holistic universe and a means towards a raising of consciousness. Equal rights; feminism; ecology; attunement; brotherly/sisterly love; planetary care—these are all part and parcel of Witchcraft, the old yet new religion (1986, p. 1).

There are more self-confessed witches from all over the world. In fact information in this regard is available in published and non-published books and documentaries. While scrutiny must be given to establish authenticity, it is important that scholars and researchers apply due diligence to address the situation. This is a call on African societies to address the phenomenon. It is possible to gather evidence which provides an opportunity for the use of scientific method to explore the phenomena.

### 3.4.4 Prayers/Exorcism and Chaplaincy

Both teachers and students indicated that prayers and exorcism provided deliverance for those affected by witchcraft. When students were asked for their opinions, to give solutions to the problem of witchcraft among students, five respondents (50%) claimed that spiritual men, strong in faith through prayers could break the powers of witchcraft. Two respondents who were victims of witchcraft claimed that they have recovered a great deal because of being helped in prayers. They affirmed that pastors and spiritual leaders should rise to occasion in their fight with powers of witchcraft.

A school principal reported,

We used to organize for prayers at school but we realized that was creating problems for us due to differences between parent's beliefs, perceptions and church affiliations. We decided to be sending them home so that parents can be in charge of the process. Some have gotten better after prayer and have been able to concentrate on studies. Some have become better after offering counselling services and teaching them that God is more powerful than witchcraft. However, some have continued to struggle and we have had to send some home from school after several episodes of attacks. These are especially those who faint and we recommend to their parents to have them transferred to day schools where their parents can easily monitor their welfare.

One of the ways to help schools is by reintroducing or strengthening the chaplaincy department. Some schools have not had chaplaincy and others have very weak ones. It is important to note that for societies that are highly spiritual/religious such as the Kenyan one, chaplaincy is an important department in handling witchcraft-related issues.

Some major world religions prohibit the practice of witchcraft though the practice of adherents still point to the disparity between the religious tenets and the reality of life. As already shown earlier, studies have found out that even Christians belief and consult with witchdoctors. It is therefore important for Christian leaders and particularly those involved in the chaplaincy department to be equipped with skills to help people deal with the question of suffering and evil, demons and angels among other Christian doctrines. The depiction of God as the ultimate Supreme Being with the power superior to those of other gods, magicians, sorcerers, witches, diviners, etc. as shown in scripture (Exodus 7:11; Leviticus 19:26; Deuteronomy 18:9-12; Isaiah 44:24-25; Acts 13:6-11; Acts 16:16-18; Acts 19:18-19), needs to be experienced in real life. Jesus exorcised demons with authority and his disciples are expected to do the same (Mk. 16:17; Matt. 10:8). While modern witchcraft movement disassociates itself from involvement with the devil, the Christian world view explains that there are two main forces in the spiritual realm – the power of good (God) and the power of evil (Satan). There is no neutrality and that explains why there are hierarchies of supernatural powers and the ability for an individual to operate from one level to another (Ariadne, 2005).

## 4. Conclusion

Although witchcraft is understood to mean different things to different people, there are characteristics that are common. Witchcraft:

1. is connected to the supernatural;
2. explains situations that are societal outliers and mystical;



3. is practiced at different levels of hierarchy in power and impact;
4. has overall negative effects on human beings;
5. can be counterattacked through higher hierarchy of witchcraft or through other supernatural means.

A part from witches who seem to be the beneficiaries of the “craft”, society seems to have overall negative effects; even those who claim to be “healed” live haunted by fear for those had bewitched them. Society therefore continues to be hampered by dysfunctional relationships and mistrust thrives. Such communities cannot flourish.

In schools, students suffer negative effects of witchcraft such as phobia, isolationism, school drop-out, physical illnesses, hallucinations, violence and crime and poor academic performance.

Educational administrators, leaders and curriculum developers must therefore work together to address the witchcraft phenomena. This should be done in a way to empower students to learn to relate with others, and to address salient matters in a healthy manner. They should also be trained to identify how to address their own challenges without blaming it on others. In addition to guidance and counseling for psychological issues, students should be trained on how to handle spiritual matters amicably.

It is important to also help teachers address issues of witchcraft because they too, as members of the society, suffer the consequences of witchcraft, real or imagined. Hence, chaplaincy departments can be used in addressing spiritual matters for the whole school. When such Christian leaders of integrity exorcise demons or heal afflicted persons, unlike in witchcraft, there is no fee involved, not night/secret consultations, and the outcome is freedom. Continued freedom of the recipient should culminate in the improvement of interpersonal relationships through continuous exercise of Christian disciplines. Forgiving wrongdoers and striving to live harmoniously with each other as God’s people created in God’s image becomes a priority. The fruit of Christian living should thus be evidenced in the world. On the contrary, the effects of witchcraft “relieve” does not address relational problems and the ultimate effect is continued fear, mistrust and sometimes despair. It is therefore unfortunate to see that Christian immaturity continues to affect Christian believers, subjecting them to beliefs and fear of witchcraft. Christ calls Christian believers to mature in faith in order to be offer solutions to the world, even on matters of effects related to witchcraft (1 Cor. 3: 1-4; Heb. 10: 12-4).

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## **Appendix A**

### **Interview Guide**

1. In your own opinion, how do you identify a person who has been involved in witchcraft?
2. What are the signs or symptoms of a bewitched student?
3. In your own words, what are the effects of witchcraft among students?
4. What do you think are the remedies or solutions for witchcraft?