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International Journal of
Sociology and Anthropology

April-June 2019
ISSN: 2006-988X
DOI: 10.5897/IJSA
www.academicjournals.org



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Full Length Research Paper

Moral panic and social order: Analysis of Akwa Ibom street children

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Received 19 November, 2019; Accepted 26 February, 2020

The incidence of street children around the world had raised concern about social order. Scholars have paid attention to socioeconomic and psychological implications ignoring the cultural dynamics that contribute to this development. This paper focuses on a category of street children in Akwa-Ibom state of Nigeria. They are the child-witches, thrown to the street due to witchcraft label masterminded by parents and pastors. Structural functionalist and Moral Panics theories were adopted. Focused group, participant observation, key informants, and in-depth interviews, as well as narrative analysis were employed. The paper revealed that while the phenomenon of street children in Akwa Ibom portrayed moral panic, Eket people, conceive behaviours that violate norms as a threat to social order, and consequently sanctioned. It recommends that parents should inculcate societal norms and values to their children. It concludes that the extremity of the sanction and the paradoxical presence of children on the street is an aberration of order.

Key words: Social order, Akwa Ibom street children, moral panic.

INTRODUCTION

Street children have gradually become common sights in most cities of the world. The term designates children who inhabit the street either as their permanent residence or means of livelihood. Most of their daily interactions and social relations occur there with little or no adult supervision or care. However, some are supervised by adults because some are sent by parents and guardians to work or sell wares to supplement income as Kaime-Atterhog (1996) and Aderinto and Okunola (1998) noted. This paper explores the ordeals of a category of street children that has been incriminated in Akwa Ibom state of Nigeria, owing to witchcraft label masterminded by the clergy who label children as witches, also pose as

exorcists to whom parents' recourse to. Consequently, they are sent out of their homes by their parents into the street to fend for themselves. Street living is precarious, even worst, is that the children under consideration are linked with witchcraft, which sets them at enmity with the community that perceives witchcraft as heinous. Thus, the children are abhorred, hounded, beaten, abused and violated by members of the community that consider them as undesirable. Abandonment of the street also exposes them to inclement weather conditions and criminal tendencies like stealing, alcoholism, drug abuse, child trafficking, prostitution and a host of other vices common among street children as scholars have

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observed (Ebigbo, 1996; Lugalla, 1995; Aderinto, 2007; Hassen and Mañus, 2018).

Statement of the problem

Studies on street children have featured in many scholarly works; they have explored various dimensions of the problems of street children, ranging from homeless and lack of privacy, to the socioeconomic, psychological and the health implications of street life. The phenomenon of street children has also been examined from diverse disciplinary backgrounds as sociology, psychology, economics and education (Oloko, 1989; Ebigbo, 1996; Osemwegie, 1998; Aderinto, 2007), but while they, undoubtedly investigated the menace of the street child, the anthropological content of their research is little, even less is the investigation of street children from the discipline of anthropology, which should actually be interested in the sub-culture that evolves from the street. Also, that with huge literature on witchcraft from anthropological studies, little attention has been paid to the involvement of children in the craft. Again, in criminology where literature is replete on juvenile delinquency, child witchcraft is rarely conceived as a form of deviancy. Therefore, this paper has become relevant as it bridges the above-mentioned gaps in the literature. More so, that it approaches the discourse from two disciplinary backgrounds -anthropology and criminology.

With an anthropological lens, it interrogates the phenomenon of street children from cultural dimension, stressing emic interpretation and response to behaviours that threatens communal norms and values that define collective conscience, which the children, by their involvement in witchcraft- a cultural reality- have defiled. From criminological angle, it views the response of the community as a moral panic, -a hysterical overreaction to juvenile delinquency and the labeling perpetuated by those Becker tagged moral entrepreneurs. This blend depicts interdisciplinary collaboration incorporating moral panic theory, traditionally used in criminology in anthropological research.

Objectives of the study

This paper focuses primarily on three objectives stated below:

1. To examine the behaviours of street children vis-à-vis communal norms, in order to uncover what in their conducts or behaviours make them elements disruptive of the social order.
2. To analyze the instance of Akwa Ibom street children from the standpoint of moral panic. The intent is to highlight the consequences of street living both to the children themselves and to the society at large.

3. Lastly, to explore other dynamics in the street child's malady that has hampered social order in the community.

Akwa-Ibom street children: a historical overview

Prior to the child witch saga, abandonment of children on the street had been rare in Akwa Ibom state. But, in the past decades, there has been a stereotypical image of children as witches and this has led to high incidence of street children in Akwa-Ibom state. This, as earlier stated, was made popular by the activities of some spiritual homes, particularly the prayer houses that have grown in response to desires for spiritual solutions to existential problems. The pervasive fear of witches has bred a deep sense of spiritual insecurity among the people. The fear stems from the community's belief that witchcraft involves the invocation of and consort with the devil, and that witches possess supernatural powers that enable them to transform to animal familiars and perpetuate malevolent and evil acts. Thus, they pose legitimate threats to people. The fear was further heightened in *The End of the Wicked*, - a movie produced by Liberty films, which portrayed children as being capable of incarnating evil and death through their involvement in witchcraft, as indicted in the documentary titled "Saving the African Witch children". Subsequently, some parents became apprehensive and suspicious of their children/wards and those who manifest deviant characters like lying, greed, stubbornness, or possessing unusual boldness or those considered as being destructive (attributes associated with witchcraft; Ukpabio, 2003:76) were regarded as witches, to be taken to churches where men of God can pray and drive out the evil. This was the social climate in which fears of child witches emerged in Akwa-Ibom, and was further intensified by the experiences encountered in the prayer houses through the activities of men of God, who capitalize on the charged social atmosphere to offer prophecies that easily indict children as witches and consequently, they were rejected and abandoned to the street.

LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL EXPLANATION

The prevalence of street children is generally alarming. The question of why they are on the street prompted many studies, which indicate that the factors leading to children being on the street are multidimensional and vary from place to place as studies indicate. They were created by war and armed conflict (Loforte, 1994), poverty (Osemwegie, 1998), peer influence (Aderinto, 2007), unemployment (Onyebukeya, 2008), and a weakened family/communal ties (Akintunde, 2009), death or family disorganization (Hassen and Mañu 2018), and homelessness (Taylor and Walsh, 2018). Some studies have equally traced the emergence of this social malady

to issues and problems of civilization (UNICEF, 1985). Although it has been conceived as a form of child abuse and neglect (Chineyemba, 2014), some view their visibility on the street as a cultural reality, noting that children work, not necessarily as a form of exploitation, but as part of the socialization process requisite for integration into the society (Ebigbo, 1996). Much as this assertion is credible, our view, particularly as it relates to Akwa Ibom street children is that they are victims of an unjust society grappling with an unstable economy that has produced avaricious elites that latch on impaired family relations to allocate to vulnerable children a position in the dislocation in the society that has hampered social order.

Perception and treatment of street children

Generally, street children are perceived as nuisance by members of the public, this perception stems from fear that they constitute a security threat as they can be easily lured into criminality criminal activities. More often, this fear stirs up hatred, hostility and violence against them. But the violence meted to them by some members of the community calls for caution. Cunha (1992) affirms this, noting that the act of violence against street children is not seen as an act of injustice, but is regarded as 'favour' done to society. Hassen and Mañus (2018) added that violence and abuse has become a daily reality for street children. This is particularly true for Akwa-Ibom street children who are berated, violated and molested by members of the public. Many ignore the fact that some of them are pushed to the street by circumstances beyond their control; as an escape route from torture, brutality and hostility of the family who want to exonerate themselves from the stigma and evil associated with witchcraft. Even, others consider the street a haven from the discrimination and segregation from the community owing to the label. The fact is that some children opt for the street as a last resort, when no other option is open to them. Anyuru (1996) argued that if children were given the necessities of life like food, clothing, protection, security, and access to good education, supportive and caring parents, only few would choose to live or work on the street. Indeed Beauchemin (1999) added that while street children have become a social problem, it is pertinent to note that they are not responsible for their dilemma. However, Akwa-Ibom street children are viewed differently, as witches, they are perceived as initiators of their own misfortune.

Theoretical framework

This paper anchored on structural functionalist and moral panic for theoretical explanations. Structural functionalists theorizing on how societies cohere noted that social order is prerequisites for the survival of the society. We

specifically examined Emile Durkheim (1947) and Parsons (1951) explanations of social order and Stanley Cohen's (1972), and other models of moral panic as theoretical basis for the explanation of this work.

Functionalists view social order as a regular and ordered pattern of relationships. They maintain that society is a complex system composed of many structures, with each structure functioning to maintain the whole. They believe that order and stability resulting from the cooperation of the various institutions or structures are indispensable for the maintenance and normal functioning of the society and its constituent parts. They opined that there are functional prerequisites that must be met by a system to function effectively, one of which they stated is social order.

Durkheim (1947) noted that social order is most important of all functional prerequisites. He observed the egoistic and selfish nature of humans; attributes that manifests as pride and self-seeking and could result in conflict and disruption of social relationships. To curtail these attributes and enhance peaceful co-existence, he coined collective conscience as that which summarizes common belief and sentiment as the basis of social order. He argued that the collective conscience restrains individuals from acting in terms contradictory to the requirement of the society. He believes that consensus on fundamental moral values are necessary for social solidarity because it binds individuals together to form an integrated unit.

Parsons (1951) on his part believes that commitment to common values bound by system of regulatory normative rule is the basis of social order in society. He pointed out that if members of society are committed to the same values, they will tend to share a common identity, which can provide the basis for unity and cooperation. He added that when values are institutionalized and behaviour is structured in terms of them, social equilibrium is attained.

Moral panic theory

Moral panic was first propounded by Stanley Cohen (1972), who explained moral panic as "a condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media." Thus, he believed that in an incident of moral panic, persons or groups perceived as posing threats to societal values and interest are identified by society's guardians. He noted that often, the mass media and socially accredited experts -who includes editors, bishops, politicians and other 'right-thinking' people; voice their diagnoses and solutions on people they perceive as threats (Folk Devils), thus arousing social concern, anxiety and panic over the disruption of established value system vis-a-vis social order. Other scholars (Goode and

Ben-Yehuda, 1994, Hall et al., 1978) have advanced other models of moral panic -interest group, grassroots and elite-engineered to further elucidate the concept.

The grass root model emphasizes that moral panics originate in a pre-existing, widespread public concern. In their views, the prevalence of these issues of public concern among some sectors of the society is what causes the moral panic. Moral panics must therefore be founded on a genuine public concern bothering on moral values which also can be amplified by the media.

Goode and Ben-Yehuda advanced the elite-engineered model, theirs was to further explain the where and why of moral panics. Like Cohen, they believe there are individuals in the society - political, economic, religious and other influential elites that instigate moral panics through their control of the major institutions of society. They argued that these elites deliberately and consciously create a moral panic to divert attention from other societal problems to protect their own interests, by creating fear and concern toward a behaviour that is exaggerated from an existing minor problem. They believe this is achieved through elites' control of major social institutions like the media and other agents of social control- the police and the judiciary. They agree with Cohen that the media play key roles in instigating moral panics but maintain that the media amplifies rather than originate the panic.

The two theories fit into our inquiry. Functionalist's emphasis on moral and common values that define the social order among Eket people, elucidates the response of the community to what they perceive as a threat to the norms and values (*Offort*) that define their collective existence. Moral panic on the other hand, pictures the situation of Eket street children that aptly fit into Cohen's description of Folks Devils. The thrust of the other models of moral panic is equally useful as we shall analyze later. Based on the relevance of these theories to our discourse, they are adopted as the basis for the explanation of the reality of Akwa-Ibom street children.

Study location/site

Akwa Ibom is one of the thirty-six states in Nigeria. It is made up of 31 local government areas with the capital in Uyo. There are three major ethnic groups, namely, the Ibibio, Anang, and Oron. Eket is classified as one of the major Ibibio ethnic groups (Udo, 1983, Offiong, 1991, Ekong, 2001). Though some claim it is a distinct ethnic group from the Ibibio (Enodien 2008)

Eket people have their hometowns in Eket and Esit-Eket L.G.A.s, which in recent times have become a conurbation engulfing several villages made up of indigenous ethnic groups. The political structure of Eket comprises of three, embracing Afaha, Abighi and Atebi clans. The three are further divided into sub-clans of Okon, Afaha-Eket, Idung-Inan and Ekid-Odiong, among others. Eket is administered by a paramount ruler. The

paramount ruler and clan heads constitute the administrative council. Also, there are village heads of the respective villages.

Eket people are predominantly Christians, as such, there are innumerable churches scattered around the city, particularly those noted for prophecy and proffering solution to misfortunes. This has led to increase in spiritual help seeking attitudes and the high patronage of churches believed to have the capacity to deal with the deep-seated sense of spiritual insecurity arising from the fear of the known and the unknown.

Ethical considerations

Ethical issues were considered for this study that utilizes human participants. It was necessary to protect the privacy and safety of the participants. To ensure this, the researcher expressed the aims of the research clearly to all participants, including the then paramount ruler of Eket, whose permission was sought before proceeding with the study in the community. Being a scholar himself, he understood the intent and willingly granted the permission. The village heads of the respective villages used were also informed. Similarly, at CRARN, permission and consent of the institution were sought and obtained from the president. Verbal consent of all informants, including the children was obtained before conducting the interviews. Of course, the willingness of the participants was crucial for establishing rapport and gaining the trust of the participants in the ethnographic study, especially as it relates to witchcraft, which is situated in context, as an issue of human security. Furthermore, in keeping with the promise of anonymity and confidentiality, a deliberate effort was made to avoid using names, but where it became necessary to mention names, pseudonyms were used to refer to informants. Also, the photographs were excluded even though a full album was collected in the course of the research work. Finally, the researcher exercised candor and magnanimity, especially at CRARN Centre, where gifts in cash and in kind were given to the children. Other participants were compensated for their lost time.

METHODOLOGY

This paper in part, responds to the call by scholars (Rohloff and Wright, 2010) to take the explanation of moral panic beyond theoretical development to empirical investigation. Using ethnographic study conducted in Eket, the paper sought to explain emic interpretation of the involvement of children in witchcraft, and abandonment of the children on the street, as a communal response to deviation from their collective conscience.

Characteristics of the sample

The demographic data collected for the study include gender, age, place of origin/residence and reason for abandonment. The sample

cuts across all social boundaries. The age distribution of the sample is broadly categorized into adults and children. A total of 110 adults, which comprised 55% of the total sample, were interviewed. 90 children (45%) of the entire population were interviewed; they comprise street children within and outside of the CRARN Centre. The children's age range was between 2 and 18 years (statutory age). Forty-five males and forty-five females were purposively sampled. In all a total of 200 people were sampled.

Sample procedure

Eket community is the population of study, and it comprised of the indigenous people and the residents of Eket. Random and purposive samples were used in this work. Random sampling was used in the community for in-depth interviews. Random sampling offered every member of the community equal chance of being selected for interview. Informants include male and female, indigenes and residents of Eket, opinion leaders and royal fathers, social workers, artisans, students, market women, health workers and the general public. Purposive sampling was used for selecting key informants. This is because they have deep insights and privileged information on the issues under investigation due mainly to the positions they occupy. Purposive sampling was also adopted in selecting children within and outside CRARN for interview. This is because a specific category of street children was the focus of the study. At the CRARN Centre, the children numbered over 200; purposive sampling was used to select 80 out of them for observation and interview. The criterion used was that they had lived on the street, as a result of witchcraft label, before they were rehabilitated. The rationale behind this choice was the need to know their experience of street life. This category of children was identified with the assistance of one of the staffs, the female key informant at CRARN.

Method of data collection

As an ethnographic study, qualitative data were sought using multiple methods which include; participant observation, focused group discussion, in-depth interviews and key-informant interview. Unstructured interview based on question guide was used. It was designed to allow informants freedom to raise other issues that may not be included in the questions but are relevant to the direction of the research. However, question guide was used to maintain focus.

Participant observation

Participant observation was carried out at the CRARN Centre where most of the children were rehabilitated. At CRARN, the researcher was actively involved in the daily activities of the Centre throughout the duration of the study, which lasted over one year. She was involved in teaching, counselling, playing, cooking, reconciliation, advocacy and town hall meetings organized by CRARN. This gave her ample opportunity to observe staff and children's behaviours. Involvement in reconciliation exercise, gave her the privilege of visiting their homes and interacting with parents, and asking questions about how their children were labeled, why they took to the streets and their willingness or otherwise to accept the children back. She also visited six children that were reconciled with their families. They were reached through the help of a key informant at CRARN. Participant observation availed the researcher the opportunity of being involved in the town hall meetings organized by CRARN Steppingstone Nigeria (SSN- another NGO that supports street children) in Eket. In one of such meetings, participants included royal fathers, women leaders, opinion leaders, street children and social workers drawn from CRARN and SSN.

Although the town hall meeting was not exclusively organized for this work, the researcher was privileged to participate in the programme, and that offered her the opportunity to share views, interrogate and observe perceptions and attitudes of stakeholders towards street children.

Focused group discussions

Two focused group discussions were also held; One with pastors and another with some members of the community. Five pastors, drawn from different denominations were present. They were reached through the assistance of a pastor friend, who was the secretary (at that time) of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Eket chapter. Pastors were major key players, both in the labeling act and in the exorcism performed on the children. In some instances, their opinions were sought, and their suggestions were vital in parents' decision on abandonment of children as interview revealed. Information elicited from them includes the role they played in labeling/detecting witches, processes involved in exorcism and other relevant information. The second focused group discussion was drawn from the community, six members, which comprised of a market woman, a police officer, a commercial motorcycle rider, a nurse, a social worker and a fuel attendant working at a filling station. This group was reached through personal effort of the researcher. The composition of this group was purposively selected to cover the category that encounter the children the most, especially for the ones outside the CRARN Centre, as they engage in their daily routines on the street. Information relating to the activities of the children on the streets and the attitudes of members of the public towards them was elicited from this group.

Key informants

Four key informants were purposively selected from the adult sample for interview. Two were staff of CRARN, the resident officer living with the boys in their hostel and the staff serving as administrative officer, charged with the responsibility of taking and keeping the records of the children. Two other key informants were selected from Eket community. The village head and the clan head of Eki-Odiong and Ikot-Afaha respectively. They are vast in the culture of the Eket people, and gave relevant information relating to their norms and values. They also explained the roles and behaviours expected of children in the family and the community.

In-depth interview

Ninety (90) children (forty-five males and forty-five females) were used for this study. Eighty (80) was drawn out of the two hundred and fourteen children (214 children, 108 males and 106 females) resident at the CRARN Centre as of the time of study. They were purposively selected for observation and interview. The remaining ten (10) were drawn from the streets. The number of children on the street could not be ascertained due to their itinerant nature. Though, most of them had been taken off the street to the institutional home (CRARN), to forestall the hostility they face from members of the public due to witchcraft label. Several attempts made to reach them at Que -River hotel, where some of them taken refuge proved abortive. However, the ten interviewed were reached at Steeping Stone Nigeria (SSN) office, where they collect weekly stipends for upkeep. The researcher got involved with SSN and CRARN in the course of carrying out advocacies, town-hall meetings and campaigns against the abuse of children in the community.

In the community, 95 adults were randomly selected for in-depth

Table 1. Distribution by age.

Adult	Percentage	Children	Percentage	Total	Total percentage
110	55	90	45	200	100

interview. Informants include the paramount ruler of Eket, parents, community leaders, social workers, health workers, women, artisans, pastors and members of three churches selected for the study, indigenes and residents of Eket. They gave information relating to the children, their activities, attitudes, public perception, treatment and other relevant information about them. Apart from primary data sourced through the above-mentioned methods, secondary data were also sourced through journals, published and unpublished documents, books, magazines, newspapers, and the internet to complement primary data. The data collected, both primary and secondary were examined for content and meaning and was presented as narratives in this paper.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research findings are outlined as follows:

1. Akwa Ibom street children are products of witchcraft labeling.
2. *Offort* (unwritten traditional injunction) is the basis for prescribing acceptable behaviours among Eket people.
3. Deviation from *Offort* is sanctioned in many ways, including witchcraft labeling.
4. Abandonment is one way the community sanctions violations of norms. Therefore, abandonment of children on the street is the community's attempt to reinforce sanction deviancy, communal norms and reinstate social order.
5. Behaviours labeled are common in children; it is thus a form of moral panic.
6. There is more to the street children phenomenon in Akwa-Ibom state than deviation from norms.

While a lot of themes are central to this ethnographic study, this paper focused on two cardinal ones: Abandonment of children and the resulting street children phenomenon as a communal search for social order. The moral panic generated due to the paradoxical delusion of order owing to indiscreet abandonment of children on the street, conversely impairing the order it aimed to achieve. Other factors that are contributory to the street children phenomenon in Akwa-Ibom were also examined to ascertain the credence or otherwise of the purported search for social order. Beginning with the demographic characteristics of the respondents, the study proceeded to the findings and discussion of the intent and thrust of the research objectives.

Distribution of demographic characteristics of respondents

Several demographic characteristics of the respondents/

informants were examined. Table 1 shows the age distribution of informants. The age distribution of the sample is broadly categorized into adults and children. A total of one hundred and ten (110) adults comprising 55% and ninety (90) children, comprising 45%, of the informants/respondents were used for the study. Age is a key variable in this analysis because age, particularly, that of the children is important in understanding/accounting for their behaviours, and as well, in evaluating the appropriateness of the sanction meted on them.

The children age ranged between 2 and 18 years old (statutory age). More emphasis was laid on the age of the children because their age is important in understanding/accounting for their behaviours, and as well, in evaluating the appropriateness of the sanction meted on them. Observation and interview with them revealed that most of the children that are abandoned on the street on account of the witchcraft label fall within this age bracket. This raised the concern, that children in their formative age are thrown out of the house, so they are denied the opportunity of acquiring the basic norms and values the family should inculcate in children, as the primary agent of socialization. Also, abandonment exposes them to hoodlums who prey on them. As children that mostly depend on adults for instructions and guidance they are prone to the influence of these people, who are ready to exploit them. More so, it is astonishing that children between two to five years old could be labeled as witches. At the CRARN Centre, it was observed that two of the children were two and three years old respectively and can hardly express themselves. It raises questions as to how they practice the craft. Little wonder, Tonga people of Zambia would suggest that children do not have the resources to obtain witchcraft nor the magic it requires to practice the craft (Colson, 2000).

Distribution by gender

Gender is another demographic variable considered in this study. Though gender does not make much difference in the conception of witchcraft held by Eket/Akwa Ibom people, as males as well as females, are believed to practice witchcraft. (Chineyemba, 2014, Ekong, 2001, Offiong 1991). However, it was necessary to examine how gender is reflected in the Akwa Ibom street children, and in the search for social order.

Table 2 shows the number and percentage of the informants by gender. The adult sample is 110, fifty-

Table 2. Distribution by gender.

Gender	Adult		Children		Total	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Male	57	28.5	45	22.5	102	51
Female	53	26.5	45	22.5	98	49
Grand Total	110	55	90	45	200	100

Table 3. Family background.

Family background	Number	Percentage
Broken home	55	61
Single mothers	20	22
Foster homes	9	10
Grand parents	6	7
Total	90	100

seven (57) males comprising 28.5% and fifty-three (53) females (26.5%) of the total adult sample were interviewed. The sex distribution for male adult is slightly higher than that of females because three out of the four key informants interviewed were males. This in part, reflects the social structure of the community, as two out of the four key informants were chosen for the study because of the position they occupy in the community. Forty-five (45) boys (22.5%) and 45 girls (22.5%) of the children were interviewed. The sex distribution of the sample for the children is equal, although the number of boys at the Centre was slightly higher than the girls (108 males and 106 females), the difference is insignificant. It is, however, consistent with other studies on street children that record more boys than girls (Project Concern International, 2002; Save the Children 2009; Hassen and Mañus, 2018). The reason is obvious, socialization and gender role differentiation in a patrilineal society like Eket would account for constraining girls to the domestic domain while boys dominate the public space such as the street.

Table 3 shows the distribution of the informants according to their family background. Family background of Eket street children was important for the understanding of the reason for being sent out of the home. In view of this, the children were interviewed in the study, and some of their homes were visited as well to confirm/authentic their claims. First, it was discovered that most of them are from poverty-stricken families where survival is critical as some parents earn meager income as night watchmen (security guards), motorcycle riders, or are self-employed as petty traders and subsistence farmers where regular income is not guaranteed, and when it is earned, it is so low and hardly adequate to sustain the family. Some children stated that their parents are unemployed. It is, thus, difficult to

generate income to cater for their families which in most cases is large, ranging, from 4 to 10 as the interview revealed. Some are even unemployed single mothers, lacking the financial capacity to care for their children. This financial hardship contributes to the street children phenomenon as counseling with a parent at the CRARN Centre revealed. Some of the parents blame their economic situation on witchcraft, on that ground; send their children out of the home to disavow their responsibility as parents.

The children's position in the family varies, but a common factor is that the majority (61%) is from broken homes as shown in the Table 3, and most of them lived with stepparents (Dad or Mum). Twenty (20) of them, comprising (22%) was raised in families headed by single mothers, because, as was discovered during the interview, some were born out of wedlock; others have lost their fathers, or their parents had separated, and they are left in the custody of their mothers. Nine (10%) lived with foster parents; majority of whom are not related to them, while six (7%) lived with their grandparents. It is worthy of note that those that lived with grandparents also had other members of the extended family living with them. All of these have implications for street children as they become vulnerable to witchcraft accusations, especially that in Eket, witchcraft is blamed for every misfortune, including personal or systemic failures as it offers some people cogent rationale for exonerating themselves or the society of failures, by deflecting the blame on others.

Place of origin/residence.

Another important variable considered in this study is the place or origin or residence of the informants, Basically,

Table 4. Distribution by place of origin/residence.

Origin/residence	Respondents			
	Adults		Children	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Eket/Esit-Eket LGAs	52	47	68	75.6
Other LGAs in Akwa Ibom state	27	25	22	24.4
Other state in Nigeria	31	28	-	-
Total	110	100	90	100

Table 5. Reason for abandonment.

Parameter	Number	Percentage
Marriage break-up	36	40
Pastors' labeling	23	25.6
Economic hardship	13	14.4
Family misfortune	12	13
Others	6	7
Total	90	100

since the subject matter relates to communal norms, values, morals and belief system and responses based on them, we limited the informants to indigenes and residents of Akwa Ibom state. This is because people's experiences can be interpreted from their cultural predilections. Also, that environment can influence or predispose people to accept certain beliefs, norms and value system hence we interrogated people from other states in Nigeria, but are resident in Eket, Akwa Ibom state.

Table 4 shows the distribution of the informants according to their place of origin or residence. Most informants (84.5%) are of Akwa-Ibom origin. 75.6% were from Eket and Esit-Eket Local Government Areas, while 24.4% are from other LGAs in Akwa-Ibom, state. Out of the 24.4%, from other LGAs, 17.4% resided in Eket/Esit-Eket with their parents/relatives before they were labeled; only 7% of them resided in other LGAs of the state before they were labeled, but were rehabilitated at the CRARN center as at the time of this study. Thirty-one informants (adults) comprising 28% of the sample are from other states of the federation but are resident in Eket as well. It is obvious from the data above that the dominant sample in this study is of Akwa-Ibom origin (84.5%). It is important to interrogate the place of origin, as people's experiences can be interpreted from their cultural predilections. Also, that environment can influence or predispose people to accept certain beliefs, norms and value system.

Table 5 shows the reason the children advanced for their abandonment to the street. Lastly, the reason why the children were abandoned to the street was examined.

The commonest reason given for being sent out of the home is witchcraft label. Ninety (100%) of the children interviewed confirmed they were labeled as witches (that was the criteria used for selecting them for the interview). Thirty-six children (40%) blamed their ordeals on father's wife (marriage breakups). As earlier stated, family break-up is one of the reasons why children are thrown out to the streets to feed for themselves. Step-mothers' engage witchcraft narratives to muster support, because it presents a convincing reason for sending out the children they perceive as threats or sources of conflict to their marital relationship. Some of the children confessed that they quarreled with their father's wife, whom they said mistreat, starve or outrightly hate them. Twenty-three (25.6%) of the children blamed their street living on pastors, because as pointed out earlier, Akwa-Ibom street children are products of witchcraft labeling masterminded by the clergy. Interview with the children revealed that most of them were either labeled or have the label authenticated by the clergy before they were thrown out of the house. One stated that it was their pastor that advised her father to send her out, calming that her witchcraft is stubborn after a fruitless attempt at exorcism. A few (7%), of the children blamed their street living on other factors (such as family misfortunes-death, sickness, loss of job). Some said it was friends, some neighbours, others claimed uncles implicated them. 14.4% linked theirs to economic hardship (earlier highlighted). 68 out of 90 (75.5%) of the children said they were labeled in churches, the remaining 22 (24.5%) were indicted by other children that had been labeled previously. 52 (60.5%) had experienced exorcism by men

of God, 6 (7%) with traditional healers and 25 (32.5%) said they were not taken anywhere for exorcism because of the monetary involvement. The longest time the children spent on the street was eight (8) years, as at the time of the interview; and for most of them, it ranged between three and five (3-5) years. 32% were on the street for less than one year before they were rescued and taken to CRARN for rehabilitation.

The norms and values of Eket people

Norms are the standard patterns of behaviour of a community. It is the basis of prescribing acceptable behavioural patterns to which members of a given community are expected to comply. They are the yardstick for measuring conformity, as well as standards. Norms are passed on to younger generations through the process of socialization. Eket community does not prescribe formal laws as the paramount ruler stated, rather, there is an *'offort'* (unwritten traditional injunctions) which translates as socially approved norms and values and acts as a sort of collective conscience that guide behaviours. The royal father stated that no Eket person or anyone domicile in Eket can interfere or mutilate *offort*, which comprised of several norms, because the repercussion of such act is severe. He further opined that norms and roles can be gender and age biased, but noted that, generally, children of any age and gender are expected to perform those roles that will sustain the continuity of the group or family traditions. Obong-awan, the women leader of Okon community in Eket, speaking further on norms, stated that children are expected to be respectful, obedient and honest. They must embody sound character and, as image bearers, reflect and practice what the community upholds. She added that children must uphold communal norms, for to do otherwise is to bring shame to their families and the community at large. She specifically pointed out that children that are stubborn, idle, insolent, greedy, jealous and wicked or those that refuse to heed the advice or instruction of parents and, or, keep bad company signal the death of an image, both of individuals and the collective, because personal character and community image are of intricate complex web. Speaking of children's roles, one parent said it includes running errands for their parents and helping with domestic chores. The village head of Uda Ikot-Afaha, said they carry out community assignments like sanitation, erecting village halls and lots more, depending on their age. They are indispensably positioned as utilitarian assets, on whom the moral and existential capacities of family and society rest.

Street children: as aberration of norms and order

As earlier stated, Akwa-Ibom street children differ from

their counterparts in other places; theirs is a result of witchcraft label, which is construed among Eket people in two forms, one, as a person that has confessed, or has been indicted by another witch, a traditional doctor/spiritualist or a pastor (Offiong 1991, Chineyemba, 2014), two in the form of deviation from norms and values. People whose behaviours diverge widely from expected norms are susceptible to witchcraft label as interview revealed. This notion is generally applicable irrespective of age, but since we are primarily concerned with children, those accused of witchcraft often demonstrate behavioural misconducts like stubbornness, insolent, greed and disobedience that parents find incomprehensible. Whereas, societal expectation is that children should comply with the directives of their parents or guardians, as the assumptions is that whatever directives parents give is in the best interest of the child. However, in a changing dispensation informed by increase in information technology and access to the media, this notion of parent-child relations is willingly challenged or completely broken away from by the children (Davis, 1980). This departure defies and challenges parental authority and breed intense intergenerational conflict between parents and children that is often interpreted as one of insolence and insubordination. When children are insolent, unruly or blatantly flout and disregard the authority of their parents, parents find such acts disturbing, not only because it contravenes moral codes, but also, because it challenges the control of authority and existing order in the family, and glaringly portrays parents/family negatively. When children constantly engage in acts that contravene collective conscience, they signal the weakness of the family and the community as having lost their control over them. Children that breach communal norms in this regard, stand the risk of character scrutiny as the clan head asserted, and because blame must be ascribed to someone in times of mishap, such children become ready scapegoats on whom evil is attributed at times of family crisis. This agrees with the moral panic theory, that society identifies scapegoats, characterized as a suitable screen to whom the ills of the society is predicted and attributed (Hunt 1997). Suffice to state, however, that the children often targeted tend to be those that are already in vulnerable positions either because of family misfortune (death, sickness, unemployment, poverty) or vulnerable due to the crisis that impair family relations (marriage breakups and remarriages, step father/mother imbroglio). This goes to affirm Becker's (1963) assertion, that labeling is a matter of social definition. The badness of an act stems from the way people define it, in which situation and with respect to which people. This particularly holds true for some of the children who are perceived as sources of drain on family resources or those that find themselves at the heart of family dynamics in times of crisis, such children as we observed, were easily accused of witchcraft. Thus, the already vulnerable

positions of the children were exploited to the extreme through accusations of witchcraft, which, in any case, represent an attempt to resolve the crisis within the family (Ranger 1991; Olsen, 2002).

In pursuit of this, parents are left with two alternatives: One, to seek a solution from pastors with regards to difficult children, who represent a problem for them, howbeit, at a very high cost of exorcism charged by pastors (buttressing elites engineered model). The second option open to parents is to accept the label, reject and abandon the child on the street, because abandonment is, as the paramount ruler of Eket stated in his book, one of the ways violators of the norms are sanctioned. But this sanction has grievous implications, especially for the children. As Becker (1974) rightly observed, such treatments deny them the ordinary means of carrying on the routines of everyday life open to most people, and because of this, the labeled must develop illegitimate route. On this backdrop, labeled children in Akwa-Ibom sought an alternative route to life. Street living became the available option open to them, and because street life is perilous, they encounter great difficulties there. One, street children are doubly stigmatized. Witchcraft and street child (ren) are disparaging labels that are despicable and deprecatory on the image, reputation and personality of the children. Both labels create social distance difficult to cope with. Social distance correlates with spatial distance and social exclusion which invariably limit their societal acceptance. This has significant implications for self-conceptualization, particularly in that it raises the perception to undesirable factors in self-construction. As Haralambus (2004) has observed, the individual self-concept is largely derived from the responses of others, and to this end, the labeled tend to evaluate them and act in the light of the responses of others. The danger inherent in this is that it may set them on what Becker (1974) has termed a "deviant career". That is, continuing in the act for which they were labeled. Witchcraft label invites expulsion and create outsiders whose chances in life are reduced. Generally, as we observed, members of the community distance themselves from the children, associating them with evil. For instance, street children in Eket were denied admission in public schools. Some that were sent to the apprenticeship programme (spray painting) by the NGOs that support them (CRARN and Stepping Stone), were expelled and rejected because the landlord and co-tenants of their master insisted, they should be thrown out. They were thus, denied the opportunity of acquiring skills desired for self-reliance and economic empowerment necessary for sustenance and meaningful existence. Street children were in this sense, stigmatized, marginalized and discriminated against. They became alienated and unwanted as social outcasts, and in their attempt to create a world of their own, with its meanings and realities, they often engage in discrepant acts that further damage their identity, mar relationships

and disrupt the social order.

Two, street children are obtrusive because street living negates societal expectation that the home, rather than the street is where sane people live. The children revealed that street life is hazardous and uncertain, because they had to fend for themselves. To do this, they engage in menial jobs like sweeping market stalls, carrying luggage for people and washing of plates in restaurants, to make a living. But, these jobs only last if the label is not known to their employers. Once the label is known, they were displaced, and they resort to illegitimate means of meeting basic needs. Some of them owned up to pilfering, burgling peoples' shops at night, engaging in commercial sex practices to earn a living. Some made the market, their permanent residence, scavenging from the gutter and dust bins to eat. Such is the fate of Eket street children. They live in socially precarious and unpredictable circumstances where survival is dependent on chance. Stealing was inevitably employed by the children as a survival strategy. Many of them confirmed they pilfered, stole from peoples' shops, and some had served as spies for armed robbers. Another admitted they fight, smoke marijuana and cannabis and even sell it to get money. These acts contravene collective norms and further affirm the community's assertion about them as amoral. And because such practices were carried out within public space, which is collectively shared with other members of the community, involved in the social production and construction of the space, they are mistreated by members of the public. Most of them bear the scars of rejection inflicted on them because they occupy spaces which were not intended for them. They were constantly molested by hoodlums and preyed upon by child traffickers, who capitalized on their predicament to gain advantage. In return, they have become violent and hardened in their bid to defend themselves against the incessant hostilities and assaults they suffer from members of the public. Thus, the children-society relations have constituted new risks and uncertainties and social order is further threatened.

Street children and moral panic

Scholars have considered moral panic as a disproportionate overreaction to a person, situation or series of events (Hall et al., 1978; Garland, 2008). Similarly, Akwa-Ibom children witchcraft and the resulting street children phenomenon vividly fit into the description of a moral panic. Beginning with Cohen's model, Eket street children simply fit into the description of scapegoats. The resident staff at CRARN, who also served as one of the key informants, observed that the behavioural incongruities the children depict is common among other children, but noted with regret, that 'these ones' are singled out for bad image characterization. This further affirms Tannenbaum (1938) assertion, that

delinquent act, which children/adolescents engage in as adventure and fun could be misinterpreted, and when it persists, it is redefined as evil. The evil image portrayed them as children to whom members of the community's fear and anxieties are cast. Eket street children project sentiments of fear and ambivalence because it is believed that as witches, they possess powers that can harm their victims. Witchcraft is sandwiched in fear narrative, the fear about the safety of lives, as witchcraft is implicated in what is malevolent and causes harm and could outrightly destroy or exterminate human lives. It is also founded on the threat it poses to the moral order and collective existence of the community through the selfish interest witchcraft promotes over collective good. Fear, as scholars have observed, play an important part in creating moral panic, because it promotes a sense of disorder and anxiety that things are out of control. This raises a sense of urgency that something must be done, exorcism is resorted to, but when it fails, abandonment of the children on the street becomes inevitable. The irony of the panic is that, abandonment of children on the street, poses greater threat, as street living disposes them to criminal tendencies and security threat that further threaten the social order.

Furthermore, witchcraft, the underlining reason for Akwa Ibom street children, existed historically and in contemporary times, and has been an issue of public concern as the grass-root model of moral panic poised. Several studies (Offiong, 1991; Ekong, 2001; Chineyemba, 2014; Umukoro, 2016; Iwenwanne, 2018), have documented several witch-hunts, concerns and widespread public outrages raised over witchcraft in the state. The child witch episode is only one of the numerous that has drawn public attention and concern.

Elite engineered model poised that moral panics are instigated by elites, who use it as a smoke screen to divert attention from their hidden motives. Similarly, Akwa-Ibom children witchcraft and the subsequent street children malady are masterminded by the clergy, people that are socially accredited as moral entrepreneurs in the society. They initiate the panic for their egoistic and selfish interest, because it allots to them social visibility and economic capital that accrue from exorcism (Chineyemba, 2017; Fakoya, 2009). Our observation in the churches visited, revealed that the clergy devise various means of extorting money from their members/clients. They raise funds, collect offerings and seed faiths and even impose assignments, all in the bid to make money. Exorcism for them has become money spinner at the expense of vulnerable children. A parent confirmed that she spent huge amounts of money on exorcism, and when she could no longer afford it, she had to send the child out to the street.

Like most episodes of moral panics, Akwa-Ibom street children (child witches) was media driven. The film titled 'the end of the wicked', produced by Liberty films, was alleged by the media to have raised public consciousness

about the existence of children in witchcraft. Coupled with the charged social climate already tensed with spiritual uncertainties and fears, the awareness created by the movie stirred up agitation about the existence/ involvement of children in witchcraft. Since the media is the court of public opinion, it largely influences, forms and inform public opinion on issues of public concern. Thus, through the movie, the public adopted the position of elite on the capacity of children to practice the craft. Also, the documentary on channel C4 titled "Saving the African Witch Children", sponsored by Stepping-Stone; a UK based Non-Governmental Organization (NGO), that went viral on the issue of children witchcraft, raised mass hysteria about the cruelty and mistreatment of Akwa Ibom street children. Since then, there has been several articles and posts on the internet on Akwa Ibom children witchcraft. It is thus initiated and sustained by the media.

Beyond the propositions of moral panic theorists, Garland (2008) identified the features of moral panic to include; concern, hostility, consensus, disproportionality and volatility. Akwa-Ibom street children narrative incorporates all of these. Thus, it can rightly be described as a moral panic, because of the anxiety portrayed over what constitutes a threat to fundamental systemic values necessary for effective functioning of the community. The concept of morality, however, suggests a dichotomy between right and wrong or good and evil as Wright (2015) asserts. The moral dimension necessitates the need to explore further, what in the conception of Eket people, constitutes social order.

Street children and the search for social order

Situating Akwa Ibom street children in the sphere of moral panics alone, conjures the notion of inappropriateness and overreaction to children's deviant behaviours (Garland, 2008; Rohloff and Wright, 2010; Falkof, 2018). Because to the outsider, the invasion of the streets by children could appear to mirror the failure of the family and the community that have objurgated their roles as the bedrock of children's welfare and protection, but there is the emic interpretation of the phenomenon. Social order like functionalists observed, is requisite for the survival of any group or society. It therefore follows, that for any society to cohere, efforts must be made to ensure compliance to what defines collective existence and binds the society together to sustain the indivisibility and peaceful co-existence of members of that society. As the Paramount ruler of Eket stated, collective conscience (*offort*) governs the behaviour of members of Eket community. Deviations from them are sanctioned because it violates the cultural ethos and threatens social order of the society. Individuals whose behaviours diverge widely from social norms are sanctioned either through moral coercion like satirical statements and ridicule, verbal abuse, or more

severe sanctions like an accusation of witchcraft affirming (Offiong 1991; Noah, 1993). The village head of Eki-Odiong, further added that violators of communal norms could also be fined or ex-communicated. The paramount ruler, however, noted that the sanction is relative to the nature of the offense one commits. That in odious cases, like murder or an accusation of witchcraft, drastic measures is deployed. He recalled that such violators in the past were abandoned to the evil forest (*Akai Edoho*). This presupposes that abandonment as is the case of street children, has been one of the ways violators are sanctioned in Eket. This is presumable because, as Ekong (2001) and Offiong (1991) stated, being labeled a witch, Ibibio conceive of such individual as posing serious threat to life and to the cooperate existence of the community. It is worthy of note, however, that the Ibibio are not alone in this, Hunter (1936) equally observed among the Ponder of South Africa, that any who violate norms or whose character diverge widely from societal expectation like being stingy or quarrelsome is liable to be smelt out for sorcery or witchcraft accusation. Similarly, the Ibibio look out for such negative image characterization in people, because they know from life experiences that disequilibrium in society is not only caused by spirits, but also by individuals living in the society. They understand that whereas social relations inevitably entail a certain amount of friction, which may be because of breach of moral codes or communal norms and values, perpetrators of acts that violate societal norms are probed for causes of their actions. Assessment of human nature and behaviour that are at variance with societal expectation like subversion of roles, violation of norms and values, breach social order, fragments and disintegrates the society.

Eket people, and the Ibibio in general perceive witchcraft as a world in opposition to that of normal society, favouring individual interest over collective good. Thus, street children are perceived as incarnations of social disintegration, because they violate groups' expectations of solidarity and sharing that are inherent in communal life and in the current definition of normality through their involvement in witchcraft. On this backdrop, the community does not view them from human rights' perspective; as vulnerable or helpless victims that elicit sympathy and support. Neither do they consider the community's response to their behaviours (conducts) as a hysterical overreaction as analyst assumed (Holley, 2016; Ellison, 2018; Hadithi, 2019). This points to the relativity of the concept of meaning, that the meaning people attach to situations or events could stem from their cultural predilections. It thus follows, that the children are rather perceived in emic view, as actors and aggressors, and blamed for their predicaments, being found in opposition as witches, evil and amoral. This opposition from the *offort* point of view stirs up agitation to what constitutes a deeply moral evil because it can destroy all that the society represents. Regrettably so,

when children, on whom posterity depends, become agents of such opposition that takes on a value, as a reality that threatens normative ethos. To this end, they are perceived as undesirable and abhorred by the people as elements disruptive of the social order.

Other dynamics in the Akwa- Ibom street children scam

Having envision from the community's point of view, the moral concern that justifies the moral panic that informs the abandonment of children on the street, it is pertinent for scientific objectivity, to examine the wider spectrum involved in the Eket street children issue.

It is our observation that the phenomenon of street children in Akwa Ibom goes beyond normative discourse. It hinges on the changing image and the role of children, which may take different forms depending on family's experiences in terms of misfortunes. It also, latches on the challenges of parenting in a depressed economy. It is quite common in Akwa-Ibom as we observed and confirmed during our visit to their homes to see single parents saddled with the task of raising their children alone. The challenges such parents face in terms of responsibilities and the ability to meet children's needs is extremely demanding in a depressed local/national economy with high rate of unemployment. Thus, failures to meet up with parental responsibilities are masqueraded through witchcraft labeling. Two residents of Eket in the interview noted with regret, that some people use witchcraft to cover up their inability to cater for their children, whom they cannot adequately care for, due to their financial incapacitation. Worst still, that the kinship system that had been a support to families grappling with economic hardships among the Ibibio has been weakened by individualization as MODO and Chinyemba (2015) studies confirmed.

Another component in the dynamics as earlier hinted, is the materialistic and egoistic interest of some elites who manipulate the existing disequilibrium in the society to assert their opinions on defenseless children, allocating to them a position in the dislocation in the society that has hampered social order. Concealing their latent selfish motives, they pose as exorcists on whose domain resides the exclusive right of exorcism to whom desperate parents' recourse to. They thus affirm Taussig's (1980), assertion that the regulation of social activity is computed by men calculating their egoistic advantage over others. Driven by their inordinate passion for wealth, the lucrative enterprise is ostensibly employed to the detriment of vulnerable children whose gory tales reveal the iniquitous violation; they suffer from these elites under the pretense of exorcism. As shepherds, pastors hold influential positions in Eket community that is largely Christian. Therefore, their views are highly sought and respected in spiritual matters and issues of moral concern. Since witchcraft is situated in spiritual realms, their opinions are

significant. Little wonder, a parent could abandon his child on the street at pastor's instruction, as one of the children revealed.

In summary, the study opines that the phenomenon of street children in Akwa-Ibom is multifaceted. On the periphery, it could be a normative search for order, hence interpreted as a sort of cultural resistance to oppositional value that threatens communal bond and social order. Thus perceived, labeling reflects the people's strong desire for adherence to norms by ensuring conformity as the fear of witchcraft labeling compels members to comply with societal norms and values. Abandonment of children on the street is therefore the community's effort to reassert norms, reinstate and strengthen social order. But it can also be interpreted differently, especially when viewed as a moral panic, considering that delinquency is a common phenomenon among juveniles. The callous abandonment of children on the street and the security threats it poses, negate social order. Also, from the angle of the material interest and the deceit that shrouds the exercise, particularly the egoistic and mercantile exorcism carried out by the clergy. It reveals the blatant avaricious quest for wealth and the dearth of mutual concern for the afflicted which also violate the Eket/Ibibio sense of brotherhood and communality. Ironically, this greed goes unpunished. It thus glaringly portrays the incongruities in interpretation of collective conscience (*offort*) and inconsistency in application of sanction to violators, as only vulnerable children are singled out for whatever reasons that are personal and may be consistent or inconsistent with the general will. This further affirms Becker's assertion that the act of labeling lies in the interest of those that defines it, those he called 'moral entrepreneurs' that interpret the behaviours of the children and label them as evil, amoral and elements disruptive of the social order.

In conclusion, this paper assert that the incidence of children living on the street, completely estranged from their family is an abnormality and public display of the failure of parents as custodians of children whose onus it is to see to their welfare, and to inculcate communal norms and values as primary agents of socialization. It is also indicative of the breakdown of communal solidarity and the sense of brotherhood that obligate members of the extended family/community as partners with children upbringing. Again, the selectivity in the application of sanctions to deviation from the collective conscience (*offort*) across groups is a blatant display of irregularity that contradicts the moral value and the social order it purports to strengthen. It is concluded thereof, that the phenomenon of street children in Akwa-Ibom state is an erroneous search for order because the extremity of the sanction defeated its traditional goal of preserving social order.

In view of the above discourse, it is recommended that:

1. Parents should effectively inculcate societal norms and values to their children.

2. Conscientious efforts should be made by governments and human rights activists to enlighten parents and community leaders on the rights of children.

3. Children on their parts should obey their parents and abide by their instructions.

4. Advocates of children's rights and social analysts should understand the local context and give credence to a communal value system.

5. There should be consistency in interpretation of societal/moral values to avoid discrimination and favouritism.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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Full Length Research Paper

Knowledge and perceptions of female genital mutilation among African immigrant women in Windsor, Canada

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Received 27 December, 2019; Accepted 25 March, 2020

The objective of this is to investigate African immigrant women's perceptions of female genital mutilation (FGM) within the Canadian Criminal Code. Ten African immigrant women resident in Windsor, Canada were selected using snowball sampling for interviews. These women were of four African nationalities, namely Nigeria, Ghana, Somalia and Sudan. Semi-structured interview protocol with open answer possibilities guided the interviews. Most of the participants (70%) had undergone FGM, 25% had not and 5% were unable to confirm their FGM status. Participants' perceptions of sexuality remained inconclusive, and were linked to their ethnicity and religion. The participants noted that the association between FGM and infertility in western societies was questionable and Eurocentric. Despite the prevalence of FGM, African nations have high fertility, averaging six or more children. Participants reported the need to provide a prevention protocol that is not based on ethnocentric values but gives adult women the choice to be circumcised or not. Although recent literature in developed countries continue to highlight the negative outcomes of FGM, participants in this study are starting to question the criminalization of FGM based on protecting the rights of women and children because of the 'restructuring and reconstruction of the vagina' in developed countries.

Key words: Female genital mutilation (FGM), fertility/infertility, African immigrant women.

INTRODUCTION

World Health Organization (WHO) defines female genital mutilation or cutting (FGM/C) as "all procedures of modification that involve partial or total removal of the external genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons" (WHO, 2008; 2016). WHO (2017) also classified FGM/C into four types: Type I: "Sunna"/clitoridectomy, which is the partial or total removal of the clitoris and/or prepuce; Type II: Excision is the partial or total removal of the clitoris and the labia

minora, with or without excision of the labia majora; Type III: Infibulation is the narrowing of the vaginal orifice with a creation of a covering seal by cutting and repositioning the labia minora and/or the labia majora, with or without excision of the clitoris. Type IV: All other harmful procedures to the female genitalia for nonmedical purposes (for pricking, piercing, incising, scraping, and cauterization). An estimated 130 million women are subjected to genital mutilation or circumcision, with an

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additional 2 million new cases each year (Epstein et al., 2001) in Africa, Middle East (for example Alkhalileh et al., 2018) and Southeast Asia, and with 3 million Africa girls at risk of FGM/C annually (UNICEF, 2013).

With globalization and increasing migration of persons from the south to the north due to ethnic conflict, wars, natural disaster, and in search of greener pastures, there is an increasing international efforts to reduce the practice of female genital mutilation (Cook et al., 2002; Gele et al., 2012; Tamaddon et al., 2006; Toubia and Shareif, 2003; Varol et al., 2014). Evidence shows young African girls living in Europe, Australia and North America are at risk of experiencing FGM/C (Johnsdotter and Essen, 2017; Johnsdotter and Mestre, 2017; Jordal et al., 2019; Packer et al., 2015; Prazak and Coffman, 2006; Shell-Duncan, 2008; Wahlberg et al., 2019; Zurynski et al., 2017) because of social and cultural pressure on parents to maintain the practice, despite laws of host countries prohibiting it (Matthews, 2011; Bellemare et al., 2015; Elneil, 2016; Varol et al., 2014). Rather than designing and implementing policies and programs to educate all Canadians including refugees and immigrants, the federal government passed a legislation criminalizing female genital mutilation in 1997 (Buhaglar, 1997; Ontario Human rights Commission, 2000). Yet, many Canadian physicians remain inadequately trained to handle clients presenting complications from the 2,000-year-old practice.

FGM/C has been reported as a violation of human rights (Bewley, 2010; Hosken, 1981; Jaeger, et al., 2008; Krivenko, 2015), and serves as a rite of passage to adulthood, a method to ensure premarital virginity, social acceptability, marital chastity and marriageability (Jacobson et al., 2018; Johansen, 2016; Oljira et al., 2016), to promote femininity, modesty, for cleanliness and as a religious requirement (WHO, 2008). In addition, empirical evidence from home and host countries documents its consequences on the physiological (Skaine, 2005), psychological (Shell-Duncan and Hernlund, 2006), sexual functioning (Berg and Denison, 2012), fertility and infertility (Almroth et al., 2005; Larsen, 2002; Larsen and Yan, 2000), and obstetrics and gynecological health (Chalmers and Harshi, 2000; Wuest et al., 2009; Zurynski et al., 2015, 2017) of girls and women. However, current studies hold that the sexual impact of FGM/C remains inconclusive (Johnson-Agbakwu and Warren, 2017). Hence, FGM/C has been described in different ways: as a "tradition that has mutilated too many innocents for many years" (Dirie and Miller, 1998); as "strange and disturbing" (Lightfoot-Klein, 1997:131); as a "deeply emotional and brutal human drama" (DeMeo, 1997:1); and as "inhuman practice" (Annas, 1996:331). In recent times, it has been referred to as "vacation cutting" (Chiodini, 2017), and some equate it to cosmetic surgery redesigning the vaginal (Chiodini, 2017).

Nonetheless, regions practicing FGM/C see it as "a rite

de passage" (Obi, 2004; Mandara, 2004), a significant part of culture (El-Gibaly et al., 2002; Meniru et al., 2000; Missailidis and Gebre-Medhin, 2000). In addition, the practice perpetuates ethno-cultural identity, family honor, preservation of virginity for increased marriageability (Abathun et al., 2016; Johansen, 2016; Oduro et al., 2017; WHO, 2016), and to enhance sexual functioning and pleasure (Catania et al., 2007; Kaplan et al., 2013; WHO, 2016). Some scholars argue that it's a spiritual and religious demand (Berg and Denison 2013; Johnsdotter and Essen, 2005; Mohamud et al., 1999), while other studies (for example Johnsdotter, 2003; Islamic Relief Canada. (2013-2016), hold that religion has nothing to do with FGM/C. For example, younger Muslim girls question such position by pointing out that the Holy Quran (chapter 2:223) recognizes women's right to sexual satisfaction from their husband. Western feminists, civil groups and activists see FGM/C as "a violation of human rights with no health benefits (Bewley, 2010: 1317), while American Association of Pediatricians described it as a ritual female cutting of female minors, which led to the policy recommendation to allow doctors to "nick" female genitalia, as a cultural compromise" (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2010).

Earlier western reports on female genital mutilation described the practice as barbaric, uncivilized and reflective of the underdevelopment of the regions where the practice exists (Hosken, 1981, 1994). Although western feminists have been in the forefront to eradicate FGM, some Third World feminists (Njambi, 2004; Nnaemeka, 2005; Obiora, 2005) argue against universalizing female genital mutilation and the need to position it with cultural settings, because it goes beyond being a feminist. In *bridging North and South*, the author argues that third world feminists have to balance their views about women's rights and oppression while still understanding that ethnicity and culture also contribute to the actions (Nfab-Abbenyi, 1997). Euro-centric values, beliefs, and practices shape Western discourses on female genital mutilation.

Despite international legislation on violence against women including FGM/C, of which many nation states are signatories, many societies find such laws not enforceable (Hafner-Burton and Tsutsui, 2005). This western positioning of female genital mutilation has informed the crafting of anti-female genital mutilation laws criminalizing the practice. For instance, in 1997, the Canadian government added female genital mutilation as an aggravated assault to the Criminal Code (Packer et al., 2015). Under Section 268 of the Canadian Criminal Code, "A person may be charged with aggravated assault, while under section 273-3 anyone who removes a child under the age of 18 ordinarily resident in Canada with the intent to perform FGM is liable and faces a penalty of five years imprisonment. Similarly, section 221 holds a person may be charged with criminal negligence causing bodily harm and carries a maximum penalty of

ten years imprisonment, while section 220 holds that criminal negligence causing death carries a maximum punishment of life imprisonment. In addition, persons who aid another to commit the offence (section 23) or failure to protect an underage (under 18 year) resident in Canada from undergoing FGM can also face criminal charges and carries a maximum penalty of five years (section 273-3). Parents are not exonerated from the law as section 215 holds that The onus also lies with parents to protect a child as failure to provide the essentials of life for a child under the age of 16years carries a maximum penalty of 2years imprisonment (Government of Canada, 2019; Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2000).

Initial perspectives of traditions and customs are expected to change. Hence, this paper explores the perspectives of African immigrant women living in Windsor Canada, where FGM is illegal and criminalized

Theoretical framework

This paper adopts the social constructionist approach, which focuses on how individuals gain meanings of practices through everyday lived interactions and experiences. According to Lorber and Martin (2007), such theoretical lens allows for a holistic analysis, embodying the physical and the symbolic. Social constructivism allows us to engaged in gendered and cultural examination of social phenomena. Thereby, portraying perspectives of FGM/C as defined, shaped and contested as both cultural and individual levels. According to Schildkrout (2004), the body is a product and site that embodies the cultural and the individual landscapes. As such, FGM/C is a cultural practice that leaves scars and designed to create a clean and perfect body in accordance to cultural expectations. This paper adopts social constructionism to explore and provide an understanding of the perspectives of African immigrant women about FGM/C and any changes resulting from the new context of the host society due to migration.

Study context

Windsor, located in southwestern region of Ontario, has also been identified, as has one of the highest rates of immigrants proportional to its population, having the sixth largest concentration of people who have ancestral ties to Africa. According to Statistics Canada (2011), Windsor has the highest proportion (33.3%) of low-income population living in very low-income neighborhoods. Windsor is a border town with Detroit, Michigan, USA. The low legal age for alcohol and tobacco consumption, attracts young Americans to visit Windsor bars regularly on weekends and has opened more avenues for social and sexual networking (Vingilis et al., 2006). This networking is likely to create unique local nuances in regards to sexuality, sexual health and cultural practices. Therefore, it becomes crucial to conduct a study that

focuses on Windsor because issues such as inter-country migration or mobility, social hubs, and diversity may nurture cross-border politics and relations.

Research approach

The research adopted a qualitative approach to provide in-depth information and understanding of the diverse and cohesive perspectives of FGM/C among African immigrants in Windsor, Canada.

METHODOLOGY

Prior to the data collection, the author and a research assistant built a community rapport through consultation and briefing meeting with leaders of the various African ethno-cultural groups in Windsor. At the meeting, we formerly sought the approval of the ethnic community organization through a meeting with the community leaders, in which we discussed the nature of the study and its objective. Upon receiving their approval, the leaders linked us to the women leaders in their communities, who subsequently became the first female respondents. Respondents were recruited using snowball sampling technique until we attained a point of saturation. Interviews lasted approximately sixty to ninety minutes.

The interviews were guided by an interview guide containing a list of questions related to perceptions, experiences, and criminalization of FGM in Canada. We pre-tested the interview guide with non-participating African community such as Rwanda for clarity and to convey correct meanings. Verbal consent of each participant was obtained at the beginning of every interview. Confidentiality was guaranteed before the start of each interview and was maintained by using pseudonyms in place of real names. Interviews were in English, and carried out at the home of the respondents by trained female interviewers, who identify with the respondents by birth and heritage. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at anytime without any penalty. The interviews took place during the period of September 2004 to February 2005. Interviews were audio-recorded.

The basic criteria included African women living in Windsor, Ontario and were in their reproductive age of 15 to 50 years; with at least one living daughter, and have been resident in Canada for at least five years. The 5-year residency limit was applied to ensure that the women have some knowledge about Canadian policy and laws on FGM.

Analysis

Data analysis began with verbatim transcription of the recorded interviews. The transcribed data were analyzed using grounded theory procedure (Straus and Corbin, 1990). The study deliberately ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the data as suggested by Lincoln (1995); through the use of quotes and descriptions to guarantee conformability and dependability of all emerging themes arising from a content analysis (Lincoln, 1995). We maintained consistency in our data analysis using code and recode procedure by two independent persons, the researcher and one of the student interviewers. The researcher and the student, a research assistant had independently coded and recoded the data. The data obtained were further discussed with five of the respondents separately as a means of reducing misinterpretation and to also confirm the translation.

RESULTS

Participants' characteristics

Of the ten research participants, three were of Nigerian origin, one was Ghanaian, four were Somalis, and two were Sudanese. All the respondents were married, six had university degrees, three were in the university, and the other had Grade 12 equivalent. The mean age of the respondents was 39.35 years. The research participants included persons who were born and raised in urban and rural areas of their heritage countries. At the time of the study, almost all the respondents were either schooling or self-employed or working as wage earners. Sixty percent were of Islamic faith while forty per cent were of Christian faith. Although all spoke English, they also retained their indigenous dialect.

Knowledge and perception of FGM

The participants commonly believed that FGM was supported by both tradition and Islamic religion, and perpetuated by the desire to promote tradition and to respect ancestors. Participants of Islamic faith stated that Islamic support for FGM was for clitoridectomy, known as *Sunna*, and not the more complex form known as infibulation. Five per cent argued that FGM is against Islamic teachings and more of an ethnic tradition promoted in the name of culture. Although seventy per cent of the participants have undergone FGM, twenty-five have not undergone FGM while five per cent were not certain of their FGM status. In addition, 50 percent reported their daughters born in Africa had undergone FGM before migrating to Canada, 38 per cent were unsure if their daughters undergone FGM, and twelve per cent reported their daughters did not undergo FGM. Irrespective of their personal experiences, there was a common preference for clitoridectomy a minor form of FGM than infibulation, which ten percent reported they had. All women noted that under the Canadian context, they would not subject their daughters to FGM, but were critical of the criminalization.

The consensus was that the "Canadian system failed to put into consideration their culture in which children were the property of their patrilineage, and mothers cannot dictate to their husbands' families what to do with their children." As such, a daughter can be a victim of FGM without the approval of her parents. The criminalization of FGM puts the onus on the parents to safeguard their daughters from such practice. For some of the women (45%), it means they would not travel to their heritage society with their daughters, and this has meant families not visiting home as a unit until the children are old enough to defend themselves from becoming a victim of FGM. In addition, the women noted that deliberate attempt have not been made by Canadian government to educate immigrants of their position, however they have gained their knowledge through secondary sources

including friends relatives and at times from their *Imams* in the mosques. Although most of the women believed that eliminating FGM would put the reproductive rights of women in their personal hands, many opposed the argument linking FGM to sexuality and infertility. The women reported that the high fertility an average of five children among African immigrants in Canada does to support such position and as such, is likely to point to other hidden agenda in the international interest to eliminate FGM.

The decision makers behind FGM were identified as mainly women both in the past and in the present. Mothers and grandmothers were primarily involved in the decision to have a daughter undergo FGM in their heritage societies. However, in Canada both parents are involved when there was a decision not to perform FGM. Nearly half of the participants supported their parents' primary motive for FGM, to decrease sexual desire or promiscuity in females. The women cited that criminalizing FGM in Canada has created intergenerational conflict. She reiterated that:

We are finding it difficult to control our daughters' sexual activity in Canada.

The system gives so much right to our children. Children now come in and out of their homes with total disregard to parental rules and demands. Some start sex so early, get pregnant, drop out of school or continue schooling as single mothers.

The worst is that the system perpetuates such behavior through legislation against spanking. And the encouragement given children to move out of their parents' home into government housing or subsidized residency (Somali woman, 45 years)

Another woman said:

Child discipline is now in the hands of government and not with parents. And, children are taught to call 911 when disciplined by parents. Children now have power over their parents. They talk now talk down on us in disrespect. Telling parents they do not know anything. This is Canada (Nigerian woman 35 years).

Religion and FGM

The majority of the women (65%) of Islamic faith argued that there might be support for clitoridectomy in Islam and definitely not infibulation, while others argue that Islam does not support FGM. However, the study notes that respondents who had undergone infibulation had parents who linked FGM to their Islamic faith. However, Christianity remains silent on the struggle to eliminate FGM, as this has not become a sermon topic despite the international call for its elimination. Yet, there is nowhere in the Bible supporting FGM, although male circumcision was required after the eighth day. For many Christians, this was also translated to mean eight days for female

circumcision, as man used in the Bible was seen as a generic term connoting both male and female. Among the Christian respondents, their experiences of FGM were clitoridectomy, a minor form of FGM. In Canada, many would not have their daughters undergo FGM because there is no social support for it while resident in Canada, but cannot guarantee that this would not take place if they take their daughters back to their heritage societies.

Sexuality, marriageability and FGM

In this study, the participants reported having some doubts about some of the motives such as marriageability, because “we see our men anxiously seeking to derive sexual satisfaction from women who are not circumcised and some abandoning their wives to marry uncircumcised women, particularly white women referred to as *mugunzu*.” However, the highly educated women noted that religion, whether “Islam or Christianity respected women’s right to sexual pleasure also”. For example, one participant reported that

Islam calls for women’s right to sexual pleasure and satisfaction just as men too.

However, women would not abandon their husbands and children in search for sexual satisfaction and pleasure (Somali woman, 35).

Chapter two, the biggest chapter of the Quran called “The Cow” bears credence to this, by ordering the man to give the woman the right to have pleasure, to give the foreplay and to get the wife to have sex repeatedly and to wait for her to ask for sex.

Your wives are a place of sowing of seed for you, so come to your place of cultivation however you wish and put forth for yourselves. And fear Allah and know that you will meet HIM. And give good tidings to the believers (Quran, 2:223).

The women irrespective of their religion also noted that:

Although both Islam and Christianity recognize women’s sexuality, sexual pleasure remains a man’s issue. Women are to be submissive to their husbands, to serve and satisfy them needs. Male sexuality is openly discussed while female sexuality is tabooed and invisible (Nigerian woman, 40 years).

For instance, rape under the Penal Code 33 Section 282 deems rape to have occurred when: when sexual occurs with a woman occurs against her; without consent and with her consent obtained under fear of death or hurt; with her consent, ... home societies like Nigeria a man cannot be accused of having sexual intercourse with his wife under duress, use of force or threat

Education and FGM

This study shows that respondents with higher education

and long stay in Canada were more likely not to defend or condone FGM in any form or way. This is a pointer that their enhanced status in Canada may have influenced their perception and are more learned in their knowledge of their religion and culture, as well as adopt a more critical look into the norms, values and beliefs of their heritage culture. These women were strongly against their daughters or any other female being subjected to FGM practice.

The participants reported that western formal education enhances women’s knowledge and wisdom through exposure to information and broad-based ideas. Thereby, the women reported: “we begin to adopt a critical lens toward examining one’s own heritage culture and that of our host society”. First, “we experience some form of alienation when we hear criticisms of our cultural practices, particularly in terms of the language that categorizes such practices as uncivilized, and portray women as having no rights whatsoever. But, we do have some rights, probably not the rights demanded by western women.” Consequently over time, we begin to see things differently and more from a western perspective. That is when we begin “to question some of our heritage cultural practices including arranged marriages and FGM”.

Migration and FGM

A majority of the women (63%) reported that they would not give up their cultural obligation to be sexually passive and to provide satisfaction to their male partners at the expense of their own sexual gratification. A typical response from the women holds that:

I can now demand participation in household decision making such as purchases, children welfare. But, I cannot aggressively demand sexual gratification, as my husband may misinterpreted this to mean I must be having an affair... As such, I am likely to remain in a relationship where my sexuality is not an issue (Ghanaian woman, 36 years).

On the issue of their body, the women generally reported: “we were brought up to protect and keep our body for our future husband to value and adore as a precious property.” For many of these women, they commonly reported that:

...Women’s sexuality was for men’s satisfaction, and a woman not reaching sexual gratification and climax was the norm and socially acceptable. In Canada, both my social networks in terms of friends, relatives and colleagues at work or school, as well as my husband has shown me the importance of women having sexual gratification, and to appreciate my body and feelings as ways to ensuring I seek and obtain sexual satisfaction (Sudanese woman, 32 years).

An exceptional case was noted in which a woman reported that:

FGM remain the norm in her home culture. Nonetheless, providing sexual gratification for both the male and female partners was socially approved. I am told to enjoy sex as much as I can, as this would boast my male partner's manhood and desire to seek for more rather than go elsewhere. I tend to fake this gratification at times just to keep my man and this has worked for me. Keeping my husband is what matters to me most than seeking for my own sexual satisfaction because at times I get it other times I do not because our tempo may differ during sex (Nigerian woman, 47 years).

Several women also claimed that they have learnt how to help themselves to gain sexual satisfaction rather than demand their rights to it from their husbands. For other women, they struggle to control their sexual urge and satisfaction. According to one of the participants:

I do not want to appear too sexually active or to know more of sex than my husband. Otherwise, he may begin to have wrong ideas in his mind such as me having an affair. Therefore, I learn to hold back my orgasm or show signs of over-excitement (Nigerian woman, 37 years).

Some of the respondents reported that some empowered women in their community begin to engage in culturally unacceptable behaviors such as partying without their husbands, engaging in extra-marital affairs, which destroy their marriages. A participant noted that:

Another woman after one year of arriving Canada had a child who turned out to be colored. The husband was the last to notice the difference, but once he realized that the child was not his, he simply moved out and sought solace with another woman who was not of African origin. The woman has since moved out of Windsor because of the ridicule from the other community members (Somali woman, 38 years).

Many other participants reported that a common practice was for their husbands to travel home and to continue to keep concubines and at times other wives, as they cannot bring these other wives to Canada. A participant reported that:

My husband abandoned the children and me in Canada while he went back home to marry another wife. He told me that he could no longer live in Canada because of all the rights they give to men and the caging of men from being men (Somali woman, 48 years).

DISCUSSION

Migrating to a new country brings exposure to new

norms, values and beliefs and an eventual influence on home culture and way of life. The lived experiences of migration like in this study have been shown to de-emphasize adherence to tradition while promoting adherence to the norms, values and practices of host society. The change in an individual's cultural identity involves the discovery of the shortcomings in the "realities and values" of our heritage culture (Ahmadi, 2003). To some extent, the African patriarchal sexual relationship and practices such as FGM and women's sexuality perpetuates embracing heritage way of life. However, female education and empowerment, the promulgation and enactment of progressive women-oriented policies and globalization may have contributed to changes in the perception to FGM and not the criminalization of FGM.

Although religion remains a significant factor in shaping values, norms and beliefs, religions are not homogenous entities, but have variations within a given sect. There are many variations within Christianity and Islam, and many of these variations have been influenced by and shaped by tradition, western norms and values, and other systems of thoughts. Although the findings like other studies (Johansen, 2016; Essen and Johnsdotter, 2004) show religion influences perception, there is need to show some caution in holding the view that religion such as Islamic religion supports not only FGM but specifically infibulation, the more serious form of FGM. This position flows from the fact that Middle Eastern countries like Saudi Arabia do not practice FGM while it is prominent in predominantly Christian countries (El-Damanhoury, 2013; UNICEF, 2013).

Education also plays significant role in shaping participants perspectives, a further attestation to the role of less education in perpetuating women's support of FGM. Hence, there is a call for a more holistic strategy to eliminating FGM/C that does not support only the criminalization but includes continuous education and enlightenment of newcomers and ethno-racial groups on FGM and the incorporation of FGM/C in the curriculum of Canadian medical schools. The medicalization of FGM/C in the name of clitoral reconstruction (Johnsdotter and Essen, 2017) will be eliminated. According to WHO (2010), health professionals engaged in FGM/C violate girls' and women's right to quality of life that ensures right to life, physical integrity and health. Consequently, it is important to avoid sensationalizing the practice in terms of adopting colonial and postcolonial language to describe and condemn FGM/C. Otherwise, such social representation of FGM/C in the host culture may result in girls and adult women contesting and resisting the practice.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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Full Length Research Paper

Challenges faced by the Bhotias for their livelihood and preservation of culture

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Received 3 January, 2020; Accepted 20 April, 2020

We frequently hear about the significance of cultural heritage. And while discussing humanitarian efforts, we might hear the phrase "cultural preservation." The term encompasses several activities surrounding maintaining ancient cultures from large nations all the way down to small indigenous tribes. However, the meaning of cultural heritage and its preservation needs to be ascertained. Heritage is an asset, something that is inherited or passed down from preceding generations and it does not consist of money or property, but of culture, values and traditions. Cultural heritage implies a shared bond and our belonging to a community which represents our history and identity; our bond to the past, to our present, and the future. While cultural preservation includes documenting and studying languages, preserving and restoring historic relics is significant to a culture or heritage; along with encouraging the preservation and use of indigenous or tribal languages and rituals. It has been evident that tribes play an indispensable role in preserving our rich and diversified cultural heritage which due to lack of awareness is dying day by day and if not being taken care of on immediate note, would become a notable loss for human beings. So, with the motto to save our culture from a gradual extinction, it is urgently necessary to overcome the challenges that come in the way of these tribes.

Key words: Bhotia tribe, culture preservation, heritage.

INTRODUCTION

The Bhotiya or Bhotia are an occupational caste of shepherds involved in rearing of sheep's, goats and yak etc. Numbering around 120,000 people, they mainly live in the northern states of Uttarakhand, Ladakh (now a Union Territory), Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Tripura, Sikkim, Jammu & Kashmir, West Bengal and Arunachal Pradesh. The tribal people who are identified as Bhotias of U.P have their permanent home or 'Maits' in the upper reaches of seven different river valleys falling within the Uttarakhand division. The seven river valleys

forming the homeland of the seven different tribal groups, are all called Bhotias (Figure 1).

Who are they?

Their face features resembles the Mongolian people (Image 1) and they are called with the title 'Pahari' or 'Hill people'. Different authors and people in general gave different explanations for the etymology of the term Bhotia.

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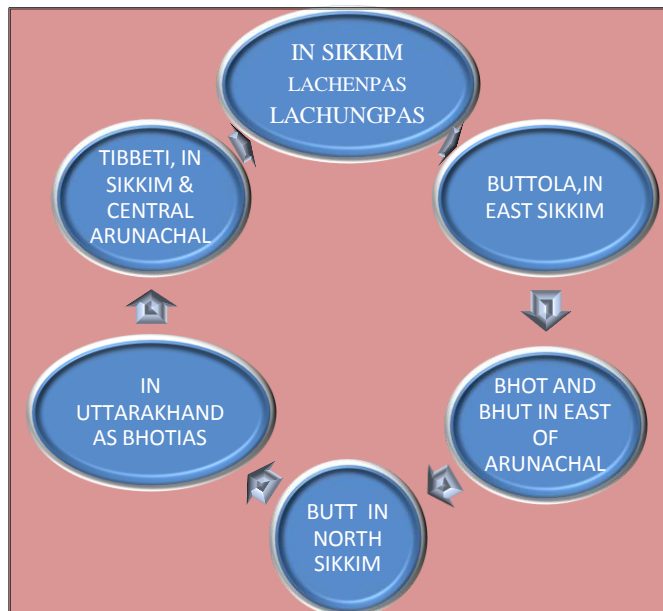


Figure 1. Bhotias are known with different names in different areas.



Image 1. A typical Bhotia woman.

Regarding Bhotias, Atkinson, 1973¹ mentioned that when we pass to north of the great snowy peaks, we get among a different people, the Bhotiyas. “Bod” the native name for Tibet, corrupted by the people of India into “Bhot”, has given rise to the name “Bhotiya” for the border tribes between the two countries. Basically, the term „Bhotiya” refers to a territorial group dwelling in the

“Bhot” tract. The earliest scholars like Shering, Smith, and Pant (1935) etc. agreed that, “If a straight line is drawn between Askot and Kapkot, the area to the north of this line will constitute the region locally known as the “Bhot” or the Bhotiya tract which is entirely distinct from the remaining Southeastern portion of the rest. But this delineation excludes the Mana and Niti groups”. In fact, “the term “Bhotiya” stands for a generic term of several distinct ethnic groups, which share many features in

¹ Atkinson ET. Op. Cit. 368

Table 1. Population and proportion of Bhotia as per 2011 Census.

Name of schedule tribe	Total population (2011)
Bhotias	1214 (771 Male, 483 Female)

common, at the same time, each group also exhibits certain sets of distinctive features which may be unique for one or more groups but not shared by the rest².

Origin

The Bhotia's moved across into India when in 1962 the Indo-Tibetan border was closed. Their main trade was to sell local Tibetan merchandise to India and inside Tibetan border as well. They were basically the nomadic pastoralists who traded salt and wool between India and Tibet. With large caravans of yak and mules they travelled to Tibet with Indian goods when the snow melted and bartered the goods for local Tibetan merchandise to be sold in India.

Their name Bhotia is derived from the word bhot which means Buddha. They are also called with different name as Bot, Bhotiya and Butia.

Distinct characteristics

Population size and distribution

According to the 2011 Census, a total of 39,106 Bhotia population with Scheduled Tribe status has been recorded (Table 1). Out of the total population, 37,873 were Hindu and 1,100 were Buddhist. The most popular languages among the Bhotia are Kumauni (13,150 speakers), Bhotia (7,592), Garhwali (5,765), Halam (5,300) Hindi (5,809), and Rongpa (481). There were a total of 510 births in 2010, corresponding to a birth rate of 13.04 per 1,000 (2001)². Before the partition of the State of Uttar Pradesh in Uttaranchal and U.P in Year 2000, the Bhotias were given special status.

Language

The Bhotias have been seen speaking different dialects in the states they reside in. For instance, in Sikkim they speak Boti, Rongba in Uttarakhand and Almora in Kumaon.

General occupation

The Bhotias are shepherds, goat herders and farmers.

They card and spin the wool for weavers to make into blankets, shawls, caps, socks and sweaters etc. At home the women knit jumpers, gloves, hats and socks for males and females with different designs which they sell locally. Some are involved in selling gems (coral and turquoise) and herbs. They also sell the products listed below.

Products mostly sold by the community are:

- (i) Herbal medicines.
- (ii) Fragrance based herbs for tea (Image 3).
- (iii) Thawe (kala jeera or caraway seeds).
- (iv) Hand woven Woolens.
- (v) Kwacho (Sakwa): Another wild herb, which grows abundantly in the lands of Bhotia. This is also used in dal and with fried vegetables.

Image 4 shows the researcher herself observing the selling of the Bhotia products.

Staple cereals

Rice, wheat and maize are their staple cereals which are eaten with the meat, usually sheep, pork, goat and poultry. Alcohol is prohibited but marijuana and hash is commonly used. Marijuana or Bhang as it is called locally grows wild in the region and is used as a readily available intoxicant. Bhang in Hindu mythology is associated with Lord Shiva who uses it to keep the world safe from his anger.

During Holi and Mahashivratri festivals, bhang (a mixture of ground marijuana leaves in milk) is distributed to everyone. Butter tea, a drink made by them from fermented barley or millets is served in religious ceremonies and social occasions.

Literacy levels

The level of literacy is very low in both rural and urban areas. Most of the Bhotia family cannot afford to send their children to school and require their help at home, with the goats and sheep or in the family business. The medical facilities are not available especially in the remote hilly regions of Uttaranchal and Himachal, and where available, they use both indigenous and modern medicines. Bhotias are quite open to family planning provided at least one son is born in the family.

² Uttaranchal. Data Highlights: The Scheduled Tribes. Census of India 2001.



Image 2. Traditional Bhotia home.



Image 3. Bhotia fragrance based herbs for tea.

Housing

A traditional Bhotia home is rectangular in shape, although they also make a triangular slope over the

house to save it from rain and snowfall (Image 2). For offering prayers to the deities they have stone shrines outside their houses where they burn incense made of pine and dried scented leaves of rhododendron that grow



Image 4. The researcher personally observing the selling of the Bhotia local products.

in the region.

Family structure

As part of their family structure, the Bhotias live in both joint and nuclear families. The paternal property in their culture is inherited by the sons equally. The eldest son succeeds the late father as the Karta, that is, head of the family. Bhotia women enjoy lower status than men. The lower status of women in comparison to men shows prevalence of 'Patriarchal Family' system in Bhotia Community. The women attend to all household tasks including, as in rural areas collecting fuel and fodder and fetching of water. They also card wool, spin yarn, do beautiful embroidery, knitting and weaving and actively participate in social and religious ceremonies. But, now by seeing more of the Silver Generation³ existence in Mana, it is evident that the younger generation is migrated permanently due to lack of job availability in the region. Only Silver Generation is shouldering the responsibility of cultural perseverance.

Customs

Marriages are arranged by negotiation between parents and other elders of the two families. Practice of dowry is prevalent in Bhotias but in goods only. They have rich oral tradition of folk songs, dances and tales that they

often share with other communities. "Chhura" is a popular dance in which an experienced old young man teaches a young shepherd the secrets of doing trade effectively. But due to migration this culture of Bhotia is also on the verge of decline.

Culture

The Bhotia worship all the major gods and goddesses of Hinduism as well as various regional, village and family deities. In Uttarakhand, the Bhotia have a mix of beliefs including superstition, amulets for good luck, curses, ghosts and witchcraft. To save them from the evil powers, the females used to wear a necklace with teeth of wild pigs and Yak moulded under silver pendant. And as a part of their culture, mother-in-law used to give it to their daughter-in-laws. Bhawani Devi (Mother of the World) is especially revered in Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh. The community lives daily in the fear of their gods and to overcome the fear they constantly strive to appease them with religious chants, rituals, and sacrifices. Pigs and goats are sacrificed to Goddess Bhawani and eaten by the devotees. Vishwakarma, the god of architecture is worshipped during the monsoons around August to September as well as Dussehra which celebrates Hindu god Rama's victory over the demon king Ravana and the triumph of good over evil and Diwali (Festival of Lights). The main god of the Bhotias is Ghantakarna who occupies the place of watchman in the Badrinath temple. And so the Bhotias can only be the traditional watchman

³ The writer denotes old age generation as Silver Generation.



Image 5. The Yak treated by the Bhotias as the holy animal. Picture Credit- Shikher Sharma (Showing the author thankfully acknowledging the support by the Bhotia community during the interview).

of the shrine (Jha, 1996). They also worship Yak and treat it as the holy Animal (Image 5).

All major festivals like Mahashivratri, Holi, Durga Puja and Diwali are celebrated by the Hindu Bhotia. The dead are cremated and the ashes immersed in a river – preferably the Ganges River which is considered holy in Bhotia community. Both birth and death pollution for specific periods is observed. Ancestor worship is also prevalent. They call their ancestors ‘Pitr’.

Objectives of the study

In a view to understanding the challenges faced by the Bhotia community, the study focuses on the following objective(s):

- i) To study the challenges faced by Bhotias in the last Indian village, that is, Mana.
- ii) To study factors affecting cultural perseverance of the community.
- iii) To suggest solutions for the given challenges.

Significance of the study

The rich tribal culture of Bhotia community needs to be preserved because these are our indigenous cultures and traditions. If the issue of their migration and extinction is not addressed immediately, then life that was once an integral part of everyday life would be lost.

Limitation of the study

- i) It is seen that most of the people of Bhotia community

have migrated to cities in search of jobs to meet their economic needs. So, a very small sample size was taken by the researcher for deriving inferences.

- ii) The unavailability of the data related to their population census and their actual rate of migration are one of the major hindrances in drawing conclusions. Data pre and post 2011 census is not available.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the last century, the population of Bhotia's is declining which is mainly associated with the decline in the agricultural land, much of which has been lost of due to forestation. Their art, craft and traditions are also facing a slow death due to their decreasing population. If their arts and artifacts, unique embroidery etc, are not preserved, it would not take long for these to be lost forever.

The Toda Tribe is also an extremely closed community who is hardly connected and allied to the rest of the world. This tribe is also deprived of the opportunities which connectivity offers. Todas are not the only tribe who is leading marginalized and excluded lives; we have other tribes who may also be in the same condition. According to the 2011 Census, the overall population of scheduled tribes in India is 8.6% of total population. In the last half century, India has lost nearly 250 languages and 196 languages have been declared endangered by UNESCO. The given status of languages is even more disappointing for us. In the North-East region, as many as 120 of these languages spoken by tribes and lacking a script, has been particularly difficult to be preserved. But, due to intervention of many institutions concerned about preservation of languages, this challenge has been

largely tackled. However, the role of digital media is also imperative as it allows for their documentation in audio-visual formats now. The recording of audio or video of folk songs/folk tales in different languages can help in the preservation of not just the language and dialect but also the folk culture. Performances of tribal folk songs and dances in the state fairs can also help in preservation of their culture.

Similarly, the traditional knowledge as regards sustainable living, farming techniques, architecture and medicines that tribals store in their memories can also be documented for preservation and communicated to others (Manzar, 2017).

In Uttarkashi District, Ravai Valley, "Chodda - a local folk song" sung by the local community is on the verge of extinction. It is also seen that from Garhwal area, it is totally extinct; however, it has to be preserved (Dainik, 2019).

"Markets, fairs, and dance and music performances are part of the rich tribal culture and heritage, and are also major forms of their livelihood. Hence, it is important to preserve and promote these cultures to uplift the quality of tribal lives (https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/articleshow/46243545.cms?from=mdr&utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst).

Not only are the results those of the past, cultural heritage are also a set of cultural objects. It is also the outcome of a selection process: a route of memory and oblivion that describes every human society on regular basis, whosoever is engaged in choosing—for both cultural and political reasons—what can be worthy of being conserved for future generations and what is not.

International conventions on the protection of cultural heritage and to promote intercultural understanding while stressing the importance of international cooperation, was adopted by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) in November 1972. Under the given convention, protection of cultural and natural heritage at national level was recommended.

Under United Nation's *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948), the right of people to enjoy the arts and to participate in the cultural life of community is incorporated (UNESCO, 1948).

Priorities identified for promotion and preservation of tribal culture through the Organizations/Central Schemes of the Ministry that are likely to be covered under TSP are – a) Anthropological Survey of India, Kolkata; b) Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya, Bhopal; c) Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation, Kolkata; d) Zonal Culture Centres; (e) Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Sikkim, Gangtok; (f) Central Institute of Cultural Himalayan Studies, Dahung, Arunachal Pradesh; g) National School of Drama; (h) Centre for Cultural Resources and Training; i) Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts; (j) Central Scheme of the Ministry (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2012)

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Primary sources

In-depth interview and observation

Content of questions raised during interview: To understand the challenges faced by Bhotia community for their livelihood and preservation of culture, the researcher has raised questions related to their education, their source of earning, health facilities available to them, any kind of government support for their development. Questions related to cultural aspects like, their fashion, food, religion, occupation, etc., were also raised with a view to knowing how they manage their lives by selling certain products earlier mentioned the specific challenges they are facing in the Mana village, their shift from Mana to the lower belts, and also their expectations from the government, NGOs and Society in general for preserving their rich and diversified culture.

Secondary sources

The researcher has also derived inferences from the secondary sources available in books, Internet etc.

Interview details of Mana Village

In Mana Village, a total of 20 persons (9 Men and 11 women) were interviewed using the convenience sampling technique.

DATA FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Possible challenges in preserving the culture

The Bhotia are a hardy community who live and work in remote inaccessible and very cold regions. Their existence is caught up in the daily struggle of making a living in unstable and difficult conditions. The researcher has made given recommendations and suggestions for their upliftment and perseverance of culture.

1) Better health facilities: As told by the respondents during interview and the observations made by the researcher, it was gathered that in case of any medical emergency, the community is solely dependent on their own ways and means of cure and treatment. But in case the health of a patient does not go well then the only option left to them are the medical facilities available in Badrinath region which is sometimes not adequate enough to cure the problem.

2) Better housing facilities: During interview, most of the respondents told that Government intervention is needed for proper construction and safety of their houses. They want regular visit of government officials to their place so that they can interact with them and let them know of the poor housing conditions.

3) Better education facilities: Though schooling facilities from May to mid-November is available to their children, their shift from mid-November to first week of May, and from Mana (hilly area) to lower belts of the region leads

to disturbance in educational graph of the students. So the government should make efforts to admit students in the plains of Chamoli or other districts of Uttarakhand as per the movement of Bhotias. And consider education of them as completion of full one academic year with children's promotion to further class.

4) Marketing of products: It was also inferred during interview that they sell their products via personal selling only. So, efforts are needed for providing proper 'Market Place' for the sale of the same. Their products did not find proper marketing: they have numerous products which are mentioned earlier. But these products are sold by themselves; their products should be marketed at national and international level.

5) Migration: According to the respondents, lack of educational and job avenues are the main reasons of their migration from Mana and the lower belts of Chamoli.

6) It is also found that not only tangible heritage (movable/immovable) like archives, objects, archaeology, buildings, landscape and heritage sites etc, but intangible heritage like identity, memory and unique crafts, stories etc, would also get extinct soon, if the issue is not promptly addressed.

7) It was also found that there is no government scheme available for their welfare and development.

SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1) Proper medical services should be made available to them, and proper audits of the dispensaries and hospitals should be done by the CMO's of the concerned area to ensure meeting of expected standards.

2) Better education should be made available to them in the Chamoli district only. So that the tendency of migration of the Bhotias from the district is stopped. Further, more qualitative/technical/outcome based education can be given to them to make the children at par with those studying in plains of Uttarakhand.

3) Local fairs for 2-3 months can be facilitated for them, so that they can directly sell their produce during such. Moreover efforts to get Geographical Indication Tag for the "Shyama Tulsi" fragrance leaves and "Kedar Kadvi" can be made.

4) NGO's and Organizations working in the field of development of tribal communities like TRIFED (Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India Limited), Ministry of Tribal Affairs (2012), Government of India NCST (National Commission Of Schedule Tribes), etc should look into the issue of extinction of a well-established culture and their struggle for the livelihood.

5) As part of preservation of culture, the name "Mana", that is, the last Indian village has to be forwarded for "Cultural heritage tag by UNESCO".

6) Similar to 'Wadi' Project in Chhatisgarh, NABARD should also take up projects for the upliftment of Bhotias (Deshlahara, 2011).

7) There is an urgent need to conduct population census in the Mana Village to have an idea of exact number of people living and those who have migrated to other areas. Also, further preventive steps should be taken to address the problems faced by them.

8) The government should introduce schemes for their development and have regular audit of same for getting desired results.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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