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Gendered injustice: A comparative analysis of witchcraft beliefs and witchcraft-related violence in Ghana and Nepal

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Witch-hunt is an often overlooked but major social problem in many of the societies in the Global South. Ghana and Nepal represent two such societies where modern-day witch-hunt is frequently reported. This study examines the similarities and differences in witchcraft beliefs and practices in Ghana and Nepal as well as the perpetration of aggressive acts against putative witches in these two societies. Among the issues explored are superstition, witchcraft beliefs, socio-demographic characteristics of victims and perpetrators of witch-hunts, as well as the socio-cultural contexts within which witch-hunts occur.

Key words: Witchcraft, witch hunt, witches, wizards, Ghana, Nepal.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the number of media reports featuring violent persecution of putative witches has burgeoned. Ghana and Nepal represent two countries that have featured prominently in media reports on witch-hunts (ActionAid, 2012; Global Health Promotion, 2012; MacDougall, 2011; "Mob Kills Three," 2012; "Nepal Mob Burns 'Witch' Alive," 2012; Parajuli, 2013; Paudel, 2011; Shrestha, 2012; Whitaker, 2012). Other countries noted for violent witch-hunts against alleged witches include India, Papua New Guinea, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda (Behringer, 2004; Global Health Promotion, 2012). In response to the media reports concerning witch-hunts, a number of single-country analyses of the

phenomenon have been conducted (Adinkrah, 2004, 2008, 2011; INSEC, 2012). There have been few comparative analyses of violent witch-hunts against alleged witches. To fill this gap in the literature, contribute to knowledge, and extend current understanding of witch hunts in contemporary societies, this article sought to provide a comparative analysis of witch-hunts and witchcraft-related violence against suspected witches in two countries in the Global south—Ghana and Nepal. The article begins with an exploration of witchcraft beliefs in these two countries. It then proceeds to examine patterns of witch-hunts in these two societies. Among the issues examined are: (1) the socio-demographic

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characteristics of witchcraft accusers and victims of witch-hunts; (2) the nature of violence perpetrated against alleged witches and (3) the response of the state and criminal justice institutions to witch-hunts and; (4) the activities of non-governmental agencies engaged in the campaign to extirpate witchcraft-related violence. Throughout the article, the authors maintain that witchcraft-related violence against putative witches is a form of gendered injustice mounted against socially and economically marginalized groups of innocent victims, most of whom are women—elderly, extremely poor, widowed and unmarried—who are treated as scapegoats for myriad individual, familial and community misfortunes.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Witchcraft is generally defined as a supernatural power possessed by a person who is known as the witch or wizard. Witchcraft power is used to influence the health (longevity, sickness, drowning, death), or behavior of another person (the witchcraft victim) or to cause a physical action (e.g. drought, earthquake) or social event (unemployment, divorce, auto accident) in the victim or the witch's society. In both Ghana and Nepal, witchcraft is believed to be a supernatural power possessed by witches (Debrunner, 1978; Bannerman-Richter, 1982; Global Health Promotion, 2012).

In the multiethnic nation of Ghana, there are as many terminologies for witchcraft and their practitioners as there are multiple spoken ethnic languages. Among the Akans of Ghana, the word *bayie* is used to denote witchcraft while the word *obayifo* is used to describe the witch. While the word *obayifo* describes the witch, people who wish to distinguish between a male wizard and a female witch generally use the word *baribonsam* for the male witch or wizard. Among the Sisala ethnic group of Northern Ghana, a female witch is called *nyisi* while a male wizard is *hila*. In Nepal, witchcraft is commonly referred to as *boksipratha*. A witch is called a *boksi* and a wizard *bokso*.

While, in both societies, people believe that there are beneficent or benign witches, there is a general consensus in both societies that most witches and wizards are generally maleficent or destructive and use their supernatural powers to cause pain, terror, death and other forms of afflictions and misfortunes upon their victims. Examples of the pain and suffering that alleged witches are believed to be capable of inflicting on human victims as individuals and communities include diseases and illnesses, drought, epidemics, earthquakes, crop damage and premature death (ActionAid, 2012; Adinkrah, 2004, 2008, 2011; Debrunner, 1978; Paudel, 2011; Shrestha, 2012; Sah, 2007; Sosywen, n.d.).

As noted, the concept of the beneficent witch exists in both societies. Among the Akans of Ghana, it is believed that good witches and wizards are able to utilize their witchcraft power to facilitate economic prosperity,

academic success and marital bliss for their children and other family members (Adinkrah, 2004, 2008). Among the Sisala ethnic group of Northern Ghana, Grindal (1972) described a widely held belief that female witches (*nyisi*) were perpetually destructive and evil while male witches (*hila*) perpetrated fewer evil deeds with their witchcraft.

In Ghana, there is a general belief that maleficent bewitchment stems from envy, jealousy and vengefulness (Adinkrah, 2004, 2008, 2011; Debrunner, 1978; Bannerman-Richter, 1982). Alleged maleficent witches are believed to use their witchcraft power to bewitch people for whom they harbor feelings of envy and jealousy. For example, a destructive witch would use his or her witchcraft to destroy the crops of a successful farmer. Also, a witch could use his or her witchcraft power to afflict illness or death upon a son or daughter of a neighbor. Still, a witch may use his or her maleficent witchcraft to cause damage to an automobile or other material property belonging to a neighbor they are jealous of. Among some ethnic groups in Ghana, such as the Akans, a witch can only use his or her witchcraft power to cause harm or death to a member of his or her matrilineage.

The international and comparative literature on witch-hunts reveals that in many instances, witch-hunting is often a scapegoating measure in which socially and economically marginalized groups and persons such as young children, lower-caste persons, widows, physically and mentally handicapped persons, and the indigent are blamed for all manner of individual or societal woes (Adinkrah, 2004, 2011; Jensen, 2007). The following analysis suggests that witch hunts in Ghana and Nepal fit this pattern.

RESEARCH METHOD AND DATA SOURCES

Information presented in this article was obtained from various secondary sources.¹ In the case of Ghana, newspaper articles on the subject of witchcraft spanning the period 1970-2012 were analyzed for information on witches, witchcraft, and witch-hunts. Supplementary data were obtained from Ghana-based internet websites (e.g. Ghanaweb.com; Ghanamma.com). Additional information was obtained from publications produced by Ghana-based NGOs (e.g. ActionAid and SOSYWEN) working to prevent violence related to witchcraft accusation and reintegrating accused witches into their families and communities. In Ghana, newspapers and internet websites are a major source of information on issues of violence, crime and deviance. Each of the major national newspapers maintains a staff of expert journalists who conduct detailed investigations into issues of criminality

¹Obtaining primary data on witchcraft-related violence is extremely difficult due to the sensitive nature of the topic. In this preliminary comparative research, we rely on secondary sources.

and deviance. A number of NGOs also operate in vantage parts of the country, providing specialized services to women victims of abuse. These organizations periodically publish information about their activities.

In the case of Nepali witchcraft and witch-hunts, data were obtained through a content analysis of annual reports produced by the Informal Sector Service Center (INSEC), a human rights NGO. INSEC is a national human rights organization operating throughout Nepal since 1988. INSEC's primary goal is documenting human rights violations across the country and their data have been widely cited by national as well international organizations (see Adhikari, 2013 for details). Supplementary information was gathered from news articles, news magazines, internet sources and annual reports produced by NGOs working in the human rights arena (Parajuli, 2013; Paudel, 2011; Shrestha, 2012). Additional information on witchcraft beliefs and practices was obtained from a review of the extant scholarly literature on witchcraft and witch-hunts in the respective countries (Adinkrah, 2004, 2008, 2011; Bannerman-Richter, 1982; Debrunner, 1961; Global Health Promotion, 2012; Grindal, 1972).

Witchcraft beliefs in Ghana and Nepal

Ghana is a multiethnic, multi-religious and multilingual country of about 25 million people. The population comprises several ethnic groups with distinctive cultures, values, beliefs and norms. It is notable that each of these ethnic groups has a complex set of beliefs about witchcraft and witches. While there are similarities in witchcraft beliefs and practices shared by these ethnic cultures, there are also some salient differences. Given that the Akans are the largest ethnic group in Ghana, comprising about 50 percent of the population, this article focuses mainly on the witchcraft beliefs and practices of the Akans.

Like Ghana, Nepal is a complex society. It is a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multicultural society. There are presently more than one hundred and twenty ethnic groups speaking over a hundred languages (CBS Nepal, 2014). Despite the myriad ethnic groups and varied religious groupings, it is noteworthy that witchcraft belief is universal across Nepali society, cutting across all ethnic, religious and linguistic groupings.

Although no self-reported survey results currently exist in either country to determine the extent to which people in both societies hold witchcraft beliefs, anecdotal evidence suggests that the vast majority of the population in either country profess beliefs in the existence of witches and witchcraft. In Ghana, it is estimated that over 90% of the population believe in the existence of witches and witchcraft. Indeed, witchcraft beliefs cut across all socioeconomic rungs of the society—from the peasant farmer to the university professor, from the apprenticed

mason to high-ranking politicians (Sah, 2007; Adinkrah, 2004, 2008, 2011).

Acquisition of witchcraft power

There is belief in both societies that witchcraft can be passed on from one person to another. In Nepal, there is a belief that women can pass their witchcraft power onto their daughters who can also pass it onto their children in a never-ending cycle. Many Nepali believe that witches learn their witchcraft from their mothers and pass it down across generations (Sah, 2007). Among the Akans of Ghana, a similar belief exists. It is believed that a grandmother or mother can pass on the witchcraft heirloom to a favorite grand-daughter or daughter. In both societies, it is believed that witches can put the witchcraft substance into food and serve it to the intended benefactor. When the person eats the food, they acquire witchcraft power. Also, in Nepal, it is believed that a witch can bewitch a potential victim by putting a substance inside food which is then served to the intended target. When they eat the food, they will get sick or die.

The socio-demographic characteristics of alleged witches and wizards

The vast majority of persons accused of witchcraft in Nepal are females. Only rarely are males accused of witchcraft. This is also the case in Ghana where the majority of persons accused of witchcraft are females (Adinkrah, 2004, 2011). In Ghana too, the majority of accused witches seeking refuge in prayer camps and witch sanctuaries are females.

The majority of persons accused of witchcraft in Ghana are elderly (Adinkrah, 2004, 2008). This is also true in Nepal although in Nepal, recent INSEC data revealed that young adults between the ages of 21 and 40 years predominate among persons accused of witchcraft, followed by persons between the ages of 41 and 60. Persons older than 61 years are more rarely accused (INSEC, 2012).

In both Ghana and Nepal, there is a general belief that children have the capacity to possess witchcraft power. However, in both societies, adults are believed to comprise the majority of witches (Adinkrah, 2008, 2011; Paudel, 2011). Only occasionally are children targets of witchcraft accusation and witch-hunts. However, the proportion of children accused of witchcraft and subjected to violent victimization has increased in Ghana (Adinkrah, 2011).

In both Ghana and Nepal, persons often accused of witchcraft tend to share a number of characteristics in terms of socio-economic background. Alleged witches tend to be illiterate, undereducated, unemployed and poor. It must be emphasized that in both societies, poor

and illiterate persons are unlikely to know their civil, political, legal or human rights. Most cannot afford legal counsel to represent them in civil litigations against their accusers or to have other means to protect themselves in the face of abuse. They are therefore susceptible to witchcraft accusation and subsequent mistreatment.

In Nepali society, where caste system is prevalent, *boksis* (witches) usually hail from the lower castes including *dalit* or the untouchables (Paudel, 2011). The prevalence of lower caste persons among those accused of witchcraft and violently persecuted in witch hunts stems from their social and economic marginalization. Lower-caste women suffer triple vulnerabilities, as women, lower caste and poor and are particularly prone to be scapegoated for individual, community-wide and societal afflictions or woes.

Available evidence from both Ghana and Nepal shows that widows are more likely to be victims of witchcraft accusations and witch-hunts than women who are married or single (Dahal, 2013; Paudel, 2011). In Ghana, reports of witchcraft-related violence against widows is particularly rife among ethnic groups in Northern Ghana where, as a result of patrilineal forms of inheritance, succession and property rights, widows may be heirs to husbands' material property. Perhaps the absence of physical protection from a male partner and older sons makes widows more susceptible to accusations of witchcraft and physical mistreatment. The absence of protectors or social support makes a person particularly vulnerable to accusations of witchcraft. Similarly, people who are handicapped or disabled are more likely than others to be accused of witchcraft. In both countries, physical characteristics of persons vulnerable to witchcraft accusation include emaciated bodies, wrinkled faces, stooping posture, toothless, gray hair, reddish and yellowish eyes and "ugly" appearance. Women who have little to no head hair are also susceptible to witchcraft accusation and subsequent physical mistreatment. Women who have facial hair are also susceptible to witchcraft accusation (Adinkrah, 2004; Sah, 2007).

Spatial aspects of witchcraft accusations and witch-hunts

In both Ghana and Nepal, accusations of witchcraft are more common in rural areas. However, witchcraft-related violence is not unknown in urban areas (Adinkrah, 2011; "More Cases of Torturing Women," 2013). In Ghana, about 50% percent of the total population resides permanently in rural communities of less than 5,000 people. In Nepal more than 60% percent of the population lives in rural communities. In both countries, rural communities tend to be more deeply steeped in traditional religious beliefs and practices where illnesses, diseases, accidents and other forms of misfortune are most often attributed to

the actions of witches and wizards.

In Ghana, witchcraft accusations and violence against putative witches occur throughout the society, but with different patterns in the northern and southern parts of the country. In the north, where witchcraft accusations come from relatives and non-relatives, vigilante-perpetrated witch-hunts appear to be more common. Witch camps and witch sanctuaries, where persons suspected or accused of witchcraft flee to obtain a refuge from violence, are a phenomenon in the northern regions of Ghana only. In the southern part of the country, witchcraft accusations come primarily from family members and the violent witchcraft perpetrator often goes undetected and underreported. Persons accused of witchcraft may be taken to a Christian prayer camp to be exorcised of witchcraft but are released soon after what has been determined to be successful treatment.

In Nepal, INSEC data demonstrate that in 2011, witchcraft accusations and violence against accused witches were more common in the Terai region of the country. This was followed by the Hill region. It was least common in the Mountain region. Of the three topographical regions of Nepal, Terai is the poorest one. Most people in Terai are illiterate, live in poverty and lack access to healthcare facilities. Witchcraft accusation may be associated with poverty and illiteracy prevailing in Terai. In addition, most *dalits* (untouchables) live in southern Terai, and as mentioned below, *dalits* are often accused of witchcraft. The Mountain region of Nepal comprises small villages and population in a given village tends to be homogenous. Villagers live in a closely connected society. Additionally, most people living in the Mountain region are Sherpas who practice Buddhism. It is possible that witchcraft is less common in the Sherpa community and others practicing Buddhism.

Socio-demographic characteristics of witchcraft accusers and perpetrators of witchcraft violence

In Nepal persons who make witchcraft accusations are usually members of the upper caste, people who are orthodox in their religious beliefs. In many instances, accusations are made by rural residents who hold traditional religious beliefs and ideas. Nepal has a history of caste-based discrimination. Despotic monarchs and hereditary feudals ruled the country from 1768 to 1990. The authoritarian regimes introduced caste system and the society was divided along a caste hierarchy. In the process of creating a caste-based discriminatory society, poor and otherwise downtrodden people were placed at the bottom of the hierarchy while Brahmins and Chhetries got the rank of "higher castes." This was not a coincident as most rulers and those who served in the king's court belonged to higher caste. This practice is deeply embedded within the Nepali society to this day. Poor, destitute, or otherwise less fortunate people are

considered a curse to the society and these accusations often come from the more successful higher castes. Witchcraft is one of the most common accusations.

In Ghana, persons making witchcraft accusations are usually male and young (Adinkrah, 2004, 2011). In most cases of witchcraft accusation, a younger person is making a witchcraft accusation against an elderly person (Adinkrah, 2008). Witchcraft accusations are also made by persons who feel that their illness, lack of financial progress and general well-being, or misfortune has a spiritual basis. In Ghana, witchcraft accusations are also made by ministers of religion, pastors, spiritualists and *mallams*. In Nepal, witchcraft allegations may be made by ordinary persons as well as various religious functionaries such as the *jhankri*.

Typology of harms caused by witchcraft in Ghana and Nepal

As previously mentioned, perceived harm inflicted by witches and wizards through witchcraft vary, ranging from bad harvest to loss of employment and from disease affliction to even death. For the sake of establishing symmetry between the societies, we propose a typology of harms caused by witchcraft. Based on our analysis, perceived losses suffered by witchcraft victims can be grouped under the following three categories: (1) material damages, (2) personal damages and (3) intangible damages.

- (1) Material damages may include harms such a bad crop harvest, sickness and death of farm animals (poultry, cattle, pigs), loss of personal property through theft and fire damage, loss of home and other material property through adverse climatic changes and natural disasters.
- (2) Personal damages may include pain and suffering caused by illnesses, injuries from accidents and premature death in the family.
- (3) Intangible damages may include mental illness, infertility, sexual impotence, alcoholism, divorce or marriage failure, failure to find spouses, imbecility, etc.

In Nepal, witches are blamed for the failure of cows and buffaloes to produce milk or a reduction in their milk production (Sah, 2007). It is also believed that witches can cause insanity (Sah, 2007). In both Ghana and Nepal, it is believed that diseases caused by witchcraft cannot be cured by conventional medicine. In Ghana, it is believed that witches can cause school children to become dullards by removing the brains of the child victim.

In Ghana and Nepal and societies where witchcraft belief is prevalent, suspicion of witchcraft causes strained social relations. In Nepal for example, parents are often

reluctant to allow their children to visit neighbors and relatives whom they suspect to be witches. The fear is that, the suspected witch may bewitch the child by offering food, drinks and other witchcraft-infected items to the child, thereby causing the child to sicken or die. In Ghana, some people living in the city cease going to their hometowns for fear that their witch relatives who live in the rural areas will bewitch them, and cause them to lose their jobs, marital partners, fall ill, or suffer some other misfortune or even die.

Socio-cultural contexts of witchcraft accusations

Witchcraft accusations usually occur when people suffer one or more material or intangible losses. In both societies, illnesses, financial troubles and a range of other misfortunes are associated with witchcraft. Among many Ghanaians and Nepali, it is believed that witchcraft can be used to cause material, personal or intangible losses described above.

There is evidence that in some communities in Ghana and Nepal, witchcraft-related violence is a form of gender injustice used as a ploy used by aggrieved men and their agents to deprive widows and other women of their succession rights and inheritance rights to property. In Northern Ghana, as well as Nepal, existing research shows that male relatives use accusations of witchery, threats of violence and actual forms of violence to dispossess female family members of their legal or cultural rights to property and succession ("Women Tortured for Being Witches," 2013).

In both Ghanaian and Nepali communities, accusations of witchcraft are sometimes made by neighbors against neighbors against whom they bear a grudge or with whom they do not get along (Sah, 2007). Sometimes witchcraft accusations against neighbors stem from the envy or jealousy of accusers themselves. For instance, envy from a neighbor's economic success may spark an accusation against the more successful neighbor. In polygynous marriages, rivalry among co-wives may cause one woman to accuse another wife of witchcraft.

Types of mistreatment meted out to accused witches

Extant research shows that in both Ghana and Nepal, persons accused of witchcraft are often subjected to various forms of physical and mental indignities. Alleged witches are forced to strip naked, are beaten, tortured, ostracized and banished from their communities. In some extreme cases, persons accused of witchcraft are killed (Adinkrah, 2004, 2008, 2011; Dahal, 2013; Shrestha, 2012).

In Ghana, among the Northern ethnic groups, accused witches are sometimes banished into witch camps or sanctuaries. Once accused of witchcraft, the alleged

witch must flee the community and obtain sanctuary from one of these camps in his or her community or risk being murdered. In Nepal, there are no such sanctuaries for accused witches, but communities may expel accused witches into an uncertain exile.

In Nepal, accused witches are vulnerable to various forms of torture (Paudel, 2011). In some cases, soot is smeared on the face of the alleged witch. In some instances, witches are forced-fed with human urine and excreta (Dahal, 2013; Parajuli, 2013; "Witch Hunting," 2013). Some alleged witches are forced to wear a garland of shoes around their necks. Many alleged witches are physically assaulted or battered with sticks and other blunt objects, beaten with hands, or struck with the feet. Some reports indicate that suspected witches are occasionally forced to handle red hot irons with their bare hands or forced to inhale fumes from burning hot chili peppers. These extreme forms of mistreatment often cause the alleged witch to confess to the accusations of being witches, possessing witchcraft, and using maleficent witchcraft leveled against them. The brutality of such mistreatments has led to suicide among tortured victims struggling to cope with the physical and psychological trauma of their ordeals (Paudel, 2011). In the most extreme case scenario of mistreatment against putative witches, the accused witches are killed. There have been several reports of women being burned alive on suspicion of being witches and practicing witchcraft in Nepal (Parajuli, 2013; Shrestha, 2012).

Accused witches in Ghana face a similar fate. Many are beaten with the hands, feet, sticks and blunt objects. Some are stripped naked, have their hair shaven off, are smeared with hot chili peppers, chained to logs and exposed to the elements. It is not uncommon for a suspected witch to be killed by her attackers. Witch hunts in northern Ghana have led to the death of scores of accused witches (Adinkrah, 2004, 2011).

The extent of witchcraft-related violence

In both Ghana and Nepal, the true extent or prevalence of witchcraft-related violence is unknown. Cases reported by the media constitute a small fraction of the total volume of witchcraft-related violence that occurs in both countries. First, the vast majority of such violence goes on in family households behind closed doors. Most of these incidents go unreported to law enforcement officials or other authorities. The reasons are myriad. First, some victims consider family-related conflicts as private matters that fall outside the purview of public officials. Second, many victims of witchcraft-related violence fear reprisals, and believe that the violence and mistreatment will escalate once the assailants are reported to the police.

In both Nepal and Ghana, accusations of witchcraft, refutations or denials of witchcraft accusations and counteraccusations of witchcraft often lead to verbal

assaults, physical battery, and other forms of interpersonal violence against relatives, neighbors and strangers.

Activities of human rights organizations fighting witchcraft-related violence

In both Ghana and Nepal, human rights organizations have emerged to deal with the violence perpetrated against those accused of being witches. Many of these emerging organizations are non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including women's rights organizations, children's rights organizations and anti-violence organizations. Prominent among these organizations in Nepal are the Women's Rehabilitation Center (WOREC) and the Women's Foundation of Nepal (WFN). In Ghana, aggressive campaigns to eradicate witchcraft-related violence and to improve the conditions of victims of witchcraft-related violence have been waged by such organizations as the Southern Sector Youth and Women's Empowerment Network (SOSYWEN) and ActionAid. The Commission for Human Rights and Administrative Justice, the Ghanaian government's sole human rights agency, has joined forces with local NGOs to combat witchcraft-related violence. Sensitization campaigns, awareness campaigns and workshops have been mounted and efforts to reintegrate women currently sequestered in witch camps have been organized.

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Based on our preliminary research, we find that there are similarities and differences in witchcraft beliefs and practices in Ghana and Nepal. While *boksis* (witches) are predominantly females in Nepal, in the case of Ghana, *abayifo* (witches) can be female, male, elderly, children or even infants, but are primarily elderly females. In both societies, alleged witches hail from marginalized groups. They are predominantly poor, elderly, female and widowed. Table 1 summarizes some of the major similarities and differences in witchcraft beliefs and practices in Ghana and Nepal.

As shown in Table 1, both Ghana and Nepal have separate terminologies for male and female suspects of witchcraft. There are also similarities in the physical and social characteristics of suspected and accused witches. In terms of treatment, there are interesting differences. While in Ghana some suspected witches in the Northern part of the country are banished to witches' camps, there is no such provision in Nepal. Nepali suspects, like their counterparts in Ghana, are subjected to numerous inhuman treatments such as physical torture and psychological abuse. Moreover, in both Ghana and Nepal, diagnoses of witchcraft and identification of putative witches are made by religious functionaries such as witch doctors in Ghana and *dhami* and *jhankri* in

Table 1. Some similarities and differences in witchcraft in Ghana and Nepal.

Headings	Ghana	Nepal
Terminologies	<i>Bayifo</i> (witch) <i>Baribonsam</i> (wizard)	<i>Boksi</i> (witch) <i>Boksa</i> (wizard)
Characteristics of Alleged Witches and Wizards	Women with facial hair, stooped posture, cantankerous, garrulous, talks to self; red eyes, yellow eyes; bald headed women, barren.	Women with facial hair, stooped posture, cantankerous, garrulous, talks to self; red eyes, yellow eyes; bald headed women, barren.
Diagnosis	(Christians) Revelation through prayer; Traditional Witch Doctor: Divination; kill a rooster; use cowries	See a faith healer (<i>dhami/jhankri</i>)
Alleged Victim's Treatment	(Christians) exorcism through prayer for alleged victim of bewitchment; Traditional Witch doctor: Witchcraft victim will drink specially formulated concoction or mixture.	Consult a faith healer (<i>dhami/jhankri</i>) who perform exorcism ritual which may involve killing a rooster
Societal Treatment of Alleged Witch	banished to witches' camps (northern Ghana) or Christian Prayer Camps (southern Ghana); beaten, killed.	Shaming, ostracism, cast out from society, beaten by mob; fed with feces; killed.

Nepal.

In the case of Ghana, witchcraft diagnosis is done by a number of practitioners including witch doctors (*obosomfuor*), Christian ministers or Muslim mallams. Nepali usually rely on a faith healer called *dhami/jhankri* for diagnosis.

Alleged victims of bewitchment in Ghana can be healed by consulting an *obosomfuor*, Christian pastor or muslim mallam. In Nepal, alleged victims of bewitchment may consult a faith healer (*dhami/jhankri*) who sacrifices an animal (e.g. rooster) and uses it in a ritual to restore alleged victims to their previous state or condition.

Neither Ghana nor Nepal has specific laws that offer special protections for accused witches or criminalize aggressive acts against suspected witches. Assaults in these cases are charged with battery and assault and prosecuted under the standard statutory provisions regarding battery and assault. In Ghana, persons who commit battery against accused witches and are prosecuted and convicted in court are sentenced to prison terms and financial penalties. Those who kill accused witches are sentenced to death or long prison terms. Similarly, in Nepal, existing law prohibits crime against any citizen, including accused witches.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In both countries, witchcraft accusations and concomitant violence are attributable to deeply ingrained superstitious beliefs that blame various forms of misfortune on the spiritual activities of marginalized persons and communities. In both countries, women's rights groups have fought to end this form of gender-based violence perpetrated primarily against women. However, there has been very limited success and violence against accused

witches persists on a large scale ("Women Being Tortured," 2013). Witchcraft-related violence is unlikely to be eradicated until some of the deeply-embedded/ingrained attitudes have been countered by formal education that provide scientific explanations for accidents, diseases, illnesses and other forms of misfortune.

In both Ghana and Nepal, despite the violence, sometimes lethal, directed against those accused of witchcraft, no laws currently exist that make accusations of witchcraft a crime ("Women Tortured for Being 'Witches,'" 2013). It is likely that the passage of such legislation, the stringent enforcement of such laws by law enforcement authorities, and the vigorous prosecution of offenders of the law will serve as a deterrent against witchcraft accusations and the associated violence against alleged witches.

In both Ghana and Nepal, there is evidence that the full scope of violence against putative witches is unknown. Many incidents of violence occur behind closed doors. Many victims do not report their victimization to the authorities because they consider it a private familial matter. Some victims are not aware of their legal rights. Some others fear that reporting their victimization to law enforcement authorities will lead to reprisals—lead to the escalation of violence against them. For this reason, community leaders and law enforcement authorities must become proactive in providing services for women who come forth with reports of witchcraft-related violence.

In both Ghana and Nepal, many of the witchcraft allegations/accusations and attendant violence are instigated by shamans, faith healers, pastors and other religious personnel whose purported divinatory practices lead to accusations against individuals (Adinkrah, 2004, 2008, 2011; Shrestha, 2012). Many of these persons are frauds motivated simply by greed and pecuniary

interests. The law should be used to deal drastically with any religious functionary making purported claims of abilities to detect witchcraft and witches.

In both societies, doctors, physician assistants and other health-service personnel are known to recommend to families with sick relatives to seek "spiritual assistance" for their afflicted relatives, particularly those not responding well to treatment. In such instances where a spiritual genesis is suspected, this often leads to accusations of witchcraft and violent mistreatment of a putative witch. For this reason, it is recommended that doctors and health service personnel refrain from making such recommendations.

Conflict of Interests

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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