



Child abuse linked to Faith & Beliefs

DEBORAH UDAKIS CONSULTANCY LTD

Child abuse linked to Faith & Beliefs

Definition of child abuse linked to faith and beliefs (what do we mean).

- ▶ The belief in concepts of witchcraft and spirit possession, demons or the devil acting through children or leading them astray (traditionally seen in some Christian beliefs), the evil eye or djinns (traditionally known in some Islamic faith contexts) and dakini (in the Hindu context).
- ▶ Ritual or multi murders where the killing of children is believed to bring supernatural benefits or the use of their body parts is believed to produce potent magical remedies.
- ▶ The use of belief in magic or witchcraft to create fear in children to make them more compliant when they are being trafficked for domestic slavery or sexual exploitation.

Any abuse that takes place against those who are branded (or labelled) either as a witch or as having been possessed by an evil spirit is unacceptable.

Significant harm (including murder) can occur because of concerted efforts to 'excise' or 'deliver' evil from a child (or vulnerable adult).

This kind of abuse is under-reported. Reasons for this is that it can be tricky to identify and seem 'unbelievable' and 'unthinkable' - key is to accept that for some children this happens.

Spotting the signs that this abuse exists can prevent escalation from 'subtle' harms that may often go unnoticed by many, to 'extreme' situations where there is loss of life.

Witchcraft beliefs are used to blame a person (rather than circumstances) for misfortune that happens in life.

Common factors and causes

- ▶ Belief in evil spirits
- ▶ Scapegoating
- ▶ Bad behaviour
- ▶ Physical & emotional differences
- ▶ Gifts and uncommon characteristics
- ▶ Complex family structure.



Common factors and causes

A range of factors can contribute to the abuse of a child for reasons of faith or belief.

Some of the most common ones are below.

Belief in evil spirits

Belief in evil spirits that can 'possess' children is often accompanied by a belief that a possessed child can 'infect' others with the condition. This could be through contact with shared food, or simply being in the presence of the child.

Scapegoating

A child could be singled out as the cause of misfortune within the home, such as financial difficulties, divorce, infidelity, illness or death.

Bad behaviour

Sometimes bad or abnormal behaviour is attributed to spiritual forces. Examples

include a child being disobedient, rebellious, overly independent, wetting the bed, having nightmares or falling ill.

Physical and emotional differences

A child could be singled out for having a physical difference or disability. Documented cases included children with learning disabilities, mental health issues, epilepsy, autism, stammers, deafness and LGBTQ+.

Gifts and uncommon characteristics

If a child has a particular skill or talent, this can sometimes be rationalised as the result of possession or witchcraft. This can also be the case if the child is from a multiple or difficult pregnancy.

Complex family structure

Research suggests that a child living with extended family, non biological parents, or foster parents is more at risk. In these situations they are more likely to have been subject to trafficking and made to work in servitude.

Forms of the abuse

- ▶ Physical Abuse
- ▶ Emotional Abuse
- ▶ Neglect
- ▶ Sexual Abuse



The forms of abuse that can occur fall into the four main categories below.

Physical abuse

This can involve ritualistic beating, burning, cutting, stabbing, semi-strangulating, tying up the child, or rubbing chilli peppers or other substances on the child's genitals or eyes.

Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse can occur in the form of isolation. A child may not be allowed near or to share a room with family members, and threatened with abandonment. The child may also be convinced that they are possessed.

Neglect

In situations of neglect, the child's family and community may have failed to ensure appropriate medical care, supervision, education, good hygiene, nourishment, clothing or warmth.

Sexual abuse

Children who have been singled out in this way can be particularly vulnerable to

sexual abusers within the family, community or faith organisation. These people exploit the belief as a form of control or threat.

Where does the abuse occur?



Where does it happen?

Child abuse linked to faith or belief is not confined to one faith, nationality or ethnic community.

Examples have been recorded worldwide across various religions including Christians, Muslims and Hindus.

The number of known cases suggests that only a small minority of people who believe in witchcraft or spirit possession go on to abuse children and adults.

Abuse may happen anywhere, but it most commonly occurs within the child's home.

What to look for?

- ▶ Physical injuries
- ▶ Key words
- ▶ Child's appearance
- ▶ Parent does not have bond with child
- ▶ Poor attendance
- ▶ Jewellery symbols / amulets

What to look out for

Indicators of child abuse linked to faith or belief include the following:

physical injuries, such as bruises or burns (including historical injuries/scaring)
a child reporting that they are or have been accused of being 'evil', and/or that they are having the 'devil beaten out of them'

the child or family may use words such as 'kindoki', 'djin', 'juju' or 'voodoo' - all of which refer to spiritual beliefs

a child becoming noticeably confused, withdrawn, disorientated or isolated and appearing alone amongst other children

a child's personal care deteriorating (eg rapid loss of weight, being hungry, turning up to school without food or lunch money, being unkempt with dirty clothes)

it may be evident that the child's parent or carer does not have a close bond with the child

a child's attendance at school or college becomes irregular or there is a deterioration in a child's performance

a child is taken out of a school altogether without another school place having been arranged

Wearing unusual jewellery/items or in possession of strange ornaments/scripts.

Victoria Climbié



Victoria Adjo Climbié (2 November 1991 – 25 February 2000), was a child who was tortured and murdered by her great-aunt and her boyfriend. Her death led to a [public inquiry](#) and produced major changes in [child protection](#) policies in the United Kingdom.

After suffering months of horrific abuse at the hands of her great aunt and her great aunts boyfriend, Victoria Climbié died aged just eight on February 25 2000.

Kingdom of God.

After they left, the mini cab driver was horrified at Victoria's condition and took her straight to the accident-and-emergency department at North Middlesex Hospital; she was then transferred to the intensive-care unit at St Mary's Hospital.

The ambulance crew who drove her to St Mary's described how although Kouao had kept saying, "my baby, my baby", her concern seemed "not quite enough", and that Manning seemed "almost as if he was not there".

Victoria died the following day at 3:15 pm local time.

The pathologist who examined her body noted **128 separate injuries** and scars on her body, and described it as the worst case of child abuse she had ever seen; Victoria had been burnt with cigarettes, tied up for periods of longer than 24 hours, and hit with bike chains, hammers and wires.

THE VICTORIA CLIMBIÉ CASE

- There were 12 chances to save the life of this eight year old girl. Instead, she died of 128 injuries. How could a child in Britain die like this?



There were 12 chances to save Victoria's life.

Victoria Climbié

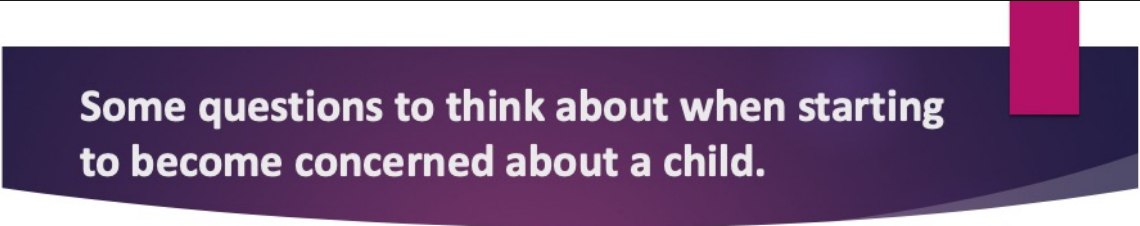


As a result of this case the Government passed the Children Act in 2004 which provides the legislation for ensuring the safety and protection of children, young people and families.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EtAfwENUUps>

As a result of Victoria Climbié's death, the government passed the Children Act 2004.



Some questions to think about when starting to become concerned about a child.

- ▶ What are the beliefs of the family
- ▶ What is the family structure?
- ▶ Are there reasons why the child might be picked on?
- ▶ What is the preferred language of the child and family?

Reporting abuse



Follow your own safeguarding reporting procedures and those of the local authority.

Do not delay.

Remain professionally curious.

Follow your child protection / safeguarding reporting procedures.
Always remain professionally curious

Useful links

[AFRUCA: Africans Unite Against Child Abuse](#)

A UK charity advocating the rights and welfare of African children.

[Barnardo's National FGM Centre](#)

This provides a comprehensive overview of CALFB. It covers what CALFB is, health implications, justifications for it, the law and signs that a child could be at risk

[Child trafficking Advice Centre \(CTAC\)](#)

A team that provides advice for professionals responsible for safeguarding children from trafficking.

[Thirtyone:eight](#)

An independent Christian charity which helps individuals, organisations, charities, faith and community groups to protect vulnerable people from abuse.

Phone: [0207 735 8941](tel:02077358941)

[VCF: The Victoria Climbié Foundation](#)

An organisation campaigning to improve child protection policies and practices.

[The Witchcraft and Human Rights Information Network](#)

WHRIN's work enables greater understanding and awareness of these complex issues so that solutions can be developed to prevent further violations of human rights from taking place

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www.deborahudakis.co.uk

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