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Exploring the use of juju in Nigerian human trafficking networks: considerations for criminal investigators

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ABSTRACT

This exploratory study examines a seemingly unique method of control used to psychologically bind Nigerian women and children to their traffickers. In order to manipulate the victims' fear of spiritual retribution, they initially undergo a juju ritual whereby they swear an oath to the spirit world, promising not to escape or disclose their exploitation to the authorities. The aim of this research was to explore how this process affects the victim and what considerations this phenomena raises for criminal investigators. The methodology employed qualitative data obtained through interviews with front-line practitioners from the United Kingdom. Results suggest the oath is one of several mechanisms used by traffickers to instil fear. Others include rape, physical threats, threats of deportation and perceptions of police corruption. The main recommendations are to empathise with the victim's fear of spiritual retribution; develop trust and rapport; take a joint-agency approach and provide access to psychological and spiritual counselling.

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When you're trying to protect a witness from the unseen, who can walk through walls, doors and when their sleeping, you realise this is going to be a problem. (Research participant)

Introduction

In 2013 the Institute of Public Policy Research published the most extensive report to date on Nigerian trafficking into the United Kingdom (U.K.). Entitled *Beyond Borders* (Cherti, Grant, & Pennington, 2013), the Ministry of Justice report highlighted to the criminal justice arena, to what had previously been researched solely in academic terms, a seemingly unique methodology employed by Nigerian traffickers to control their victims. Prior to being trafficked, victims would be taken to shrines to make oaths of secrecy to the spirit world, undergoing what was termed a 'juju ritual.' Due to fear of spiritual retribution, victims would refuse to disclose their experiences to law enforcement nor cooperate in criminal investigations. Likely to be presumed a rarity, official figures from U.K., European and Nigerian law enforcement agencies indicate the prevalence of the phenomena to be both international and greatly underestimated.

With a lack of empirical research on this topic in terms of victim cooperation in criminal investigations, this study takes an exploratory approach in order to fill the gaps in existing knowledge for the international law enforcement community, as well as identifying any challenges and barriers to victim cooperation that are specific to the Nigerian context.

In order to achieve this aim, the study initially presents an overview of the literature to provide background and insight into the nature, potential scale, psychological issues and current investigatory guidelines on the phenomena. The results of empirical research are then presented, which utilised semi-structured interviews with U.K.-based law enforcement, Non-Government Organisations (NGO), safe house providers and anthropological experts with first-hand experience of investigating such cases. These results are then discussed and recommendations presented, followed by the author's final thoughts.

Nature and scale

A phenomena acknowledged by researchers in the early half of the last decade (Achebe, 2004; Carling, 2006), in 2008 the Federal Government of Nigeria's human trafficking agency (Nigerian National Agency for Prohibition of Traffic in Persons [NAPTIP]) advised that 90% of Nigerian women and children that had been trafficked to Europe were first taken to shrines to make oaths of secrecy (Mojeed, 2008). The oath would be made during a spiritual ceremony known as a 'juju ritual' and conducted by traditional medicine men. The ritual itself requires the victim to swear an oath to the spirit world; to work hard, repay any incurred debts to the trafficker and deny all knowledge of exploitation if encountered by law enforcement (Pichler, 2012, p. 2; Skilbrei & Tveit, 2008, p. 24). To reinforce the oath, traditional medicine men take clippings of the victim's hair and nails, cut the victim's skin to take their blood and lock them in coffins, all in order to control their life force and enable the spirits to locate her wherever she goes (Achebe, 2004, p. 181). Such is the level of fear that the oath instills, victims believe any breach will result in the spirits inflicting horrific and violent acts upon them or their family (End Child Prostitution and Trafficking UK [ECPAT UK], 2009, p. 1; Jones, 2011; Kara, 2011). When discovered in the U.K. and Europe by police and care agencies, victims have refused to talk and try by any means possible to return to their trafficker (Boff, 2013; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2010).

In 2010 the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) published its Strategic Threat Assessment on Child Trafficking in the U.K. It reported that between 2009 and 2010, 18% of trafficked children went missing from local authority care; many within the first 48 h (Child Exploitation Online Protection [CEOP], 2010). A similar report by the Children's Society (2012) identified that Nigerian children ran away as they were still under the control of their trafficker, and feared the consequences of breaching their oath. The oath therefore alleviates the need for chains or locked rooms, as the fear of spiritual retribution psychologically binds the victim to the trafficker.

Since the first official data reports were published by the United Kingdom Human Trafficking Centre (UKHTC) (now under the auspices of the National Crime Agency [NCA]), Nigerians have consistently been one of the top five identified nationalities of potentially trafficked victims located in the U.K.

As shown in Table 1, this accounts for 1451, or 10.2% of all potential victims (where nationality has been recorded). In addition, according to the 2014 Eurostat working paper on trafficking in human beings, Nigerians comprised the highest number of recorded non-EU nationals identified as victims by EU member states between 2010 and 2012 (Eurostat, 2014). Although a breakdown on exact figures for gender and nature of exploitation are not publicised, it is acknowledged by these reports that the majority of victims are women and children who are trafficked for sexual exploitation.

Since the first conviction of its kind in Europe in 2011, there have only been three other convictions in the U.K. relating to victims who were known to have made the oath. This could indicate the number who have undergone the oath is relatively few, however the aforementioned figures would strongly suggest otherwise.

It is therefore proposed that a significant number of Nigerian females trafficked for sexual exploitation to the U.K. and Europe may well have undergone the oath. As already suggested, the oath may prevent victims from attempting escape, identifying themselves to law enforcement or disclosing their experiences. Where there has been a potential lack of knowledge of the existence of juju, the oath and its effects on the victim; investigators are unlikely to identify a victim as having undergone the ritual,

Table 1. Breakdown of total number of victims referred to the National Crime Agency (NCA) per quarter and total number of Nigerian nationals per quarter since 2009.

Period of data	Total no. of all referrals to NCA (adult and minor) per quarter	Total no. of Nigerian nationals referred to NCA (adult and minor) per quarter	Percentage of total referrals to NCA per quarter (%)	Ranking by country of origin per quarter
Oct.–Dec. 2016	1011	59	5.8	5
July–Sept. 2016	901	63	6.9	4
April–June 2016	1002	67	6.6	4
Jan.–March 2016	895	54	6	4
Oct.–Dec. 2015	939	65	6.9	4
July–Sept. 2015	839	63	7.5	3
April–June 2015	757	56	7.4	3
Jan.–March 2015	731	72	9.8	3
Oct.–Dec. 2014	637	60	9.4	3
July–Sept. 2014	631	64	10.1	2
April–June 2014	506	55	10.9	2
Jan.–March 2014	566	65	11.5	3
Oct.–Dec. 2013	562	48	8.5	3
July–Sept. 2013	394	39	9.9	3
April–June 2013	383	55	14.4	2
Jan.–March 2013	407	43	10.6	2
Oct.–Dec. 2012	332	40	12	2
April–June 2012	292	52	17.8	1
Jan.–March 2012	238	48	20.2	1
Oct.–Dec. 2011	249	37	14.9	1
July–Sept. 2011	249	48	19.3	1
April 2009–June 2011	1664	298	17.9	2
Total	14,185	1451	10.2	

Note: Data obtained from statistics published on the NCA website: <https://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/publications/national-referral-mechanism-statistics>.

nor the resultant psychological effects and will be unlikely to make the necessary adjustments to their investigative methodologies. As a starting point, we therefore need to develop our understanding of juju as a Nigerian belief system; the resultant psychological effects of the oath; and identify gaps in current investigative training on the phenomena.

The spirit world

Osaghae and Suberu (2005, p. 11) suggest religious identities in Nigeria are usually classified into three – Christian, Muslim and Traditional. Of the three, Osaghae and Suberu propose that traditional religions are the least politically active, numbering several hundreds of ethnic groups and subgroups who worship different gods and goddesses. However, Ellis and Ter Haar (2004, p. 24) contest that Nigerian politicians and academics alike regularly seek the guidance of traditional spiritualists. Nigerian belief systems are also known to be syncretic in nature, whereby certain ethnic groups have a long-standing tradition of co-operation and sharing across religious beliefs (Westerlund, 2006, p. 123).

The term *juju* is not easily defined, with most Nigerians accepting that it may come in a myriad of forms. Ellis and Ter Haar (2004, p. 54) explain that there are effectively two worlds, the visible and the invisible, or the real and the spiritual. Divinities and spirits are believed to act as intermediaries between mankind and a self-existent being, or God (Abioje, 2013, p. 46). Through divination and sacrifice at the hands of medicine men; objects, words and gestures are imbued with the power of these spirits to bring about the desires of those who seek their assistance (Cherti et al., 2013, p. 42). Once infused with spiritual power, these items can be used to bring wealth or ensure a safe journey, and more interestingly to protect from, or do harm to their enemies (Adams & Dzokoto, 2005, p. 53). In the trafficking context, these items are known to include nails, hair and menstrual blood taken from the victims; all in order to create an intimate link between victims and the spirits that would seek to do them harm. The ritual therefore appears designed to ensure total compliance to the oath

(Achebe, 2004, p. 181), whilst also purporting to protect the women on their journey, thus providing a convenient way to traffic and mentally dominate victims (Harrop, 2012a).

Perhaps the most significant contribution to our understanding of the phenomena came from interview-based research by Kara (2009, p. 90). Previously rescued victims repatriated to Nigeria divulged how their respective oaths included promises to repay debt, never to report to police, and never to discuss the nature of their trip with anyone. Because of this strong traditional belief in many Nigerian communities, a trafficked person believes that the oath will continue to have power for all time and anywhere. The fear that the juju oath invokes has now established a profitable relationship between Nigerian traffickers and the indigenous medicine men they pay to conduct the ritual (Jones, 2011).

Psychological chains

The literature cited indicates that the oath acts as a psychological barrier to seeking police assistance, yet there are also the resultant psychological issues of isolation and sexual exploitation for an investigator to consider. Human trafficking victims have been shown to share significant similarities with various systemic coercive systems used upon other captives (Hidalgo & Hopper, 2006, p. 191). Examples could include hostages and prisoners of concentration camps, whose treatment result in profound, long-term, psychological trauma (Heffernan, 2011, p. 7). Research by Dittmore (2006, p. 366) showed that continual exposure to rape and assault triggers the victim's innate survival responses at a biological level. With ongoing exposure to threats, a person's physiological and psychological responses are continually active, even if the threat diminishes or is removed altogether. Therefore, the resultant traumatic impairments do not necessarily pass with the victim being removed from exploitation, but may continue as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Flannery, 1999, p. 78; Herman, 1998, p. 146).

Staggs (2014) suggests symptoms of PTSD can include:

- memory problems that are exclusive to the event
- negative thoughts or beliefs about one's self or the world
- distorted sense of blame for one's self or others, related to the event
- being stuck in severe emotions related to the trauma (e.g., horror, shame, sadness)
- severely reduced interest in pre-trauma activities and
- feeling detached, isolated or disconnected from other people.

In an interview-based study by D'Cunha et al. (2002, p. 73) on the health consequences in trafficking victims of sexual exploitation, results showed a high proportion experienced ongoing depression, guilt, insomnia, suicidal thoughts and inability to recognise and reject the false promises of their recruiters. A 2011 report by the National Board of Social Services in Denmark reported Nigerian females trafficked for sexual exploitation often have a 'very high frequency of PTSD symptoms,' with the related mental and psychosomatic symptoms interpreted by the victim as a result of breaching the juju oath (Rasmussen, 2011, cited by Harrop, 2012b, p. 7). It can therefore be seen how psychological abuse and coercion can be as effective as physical violence in controlling the victim, as well as being easier to conceal and often overlooked by authorities (Hidalgo & Hopper, 2006, p. 185).

Investigating the invisible

In-house investigator training in the U.K. on the specific modus operandi of Nigerian trafficking or the phenomena of juju is non-existent and relies on ad hoc training courses delivered by external agencies (ECPAT, 2014). The College of Policing's Authorised Professional Practice on the investigation of modern slavery refers to the term juju, as well as advising investigators to ensure that any interpreter is not affected by a belief in the influence of spiritual practices (College of Policing, 2015, 2016). It does not however offer any guidance on investigative methodologies to overcome the psychological barriers created by the oath and ritual. The Crown Prosecution Service (2011) provides non-specific guidance on the case management of trafficking investigations, such as selection of qualified interpreters through

the Ministry of Justice Framework Agreement or the National Register of Public Service Interpreters, but again offers no practical advice on cases involving Nigerian victims and those under the influence of juju. This is also the case for The Ministry of Justice *Achieving Best Evidence in Criminal Proceedings Manual*, which provides guidance to police on interviewing strategies for vulnerable and/or intimidated witnesses (Ministry of Justice, 2011).

Lessons can however be drawn from the experiences of other countries and their efforts to engage with victims. The most extensive practical example would be the Dutch led *Operation Koolvis*, an international investigation (in collaboration with several domestic and international law enforcement agencies) into the trafficking of Nigerian females across Europe. A report by the UNODC (2010) showed that 140 victims were identified during the investigation, with four main suspects located in the U.S., U.K. and Ireland. To overcome the fear of the oath, investigators took the approach of involving a Nigerian priest and a former Nigerian trafficking victim in order to build trust. This proved successful and resulted in the initial conviction of three males (Orakwue, 2014). Through international collaboration, the fourth was later extradited to the Netherlands by the Nigerian government (Oyedele, 2014).

Employing the use of a priest was also agreed upon by several Nigerian agencies, who had collaborated in 2009 to produce a handbook for Nigerian investigators, prosecutors and other justice actors. Authors Abdulrahim, Egede, and Taylor-Nicholson (2009, p. 44) suggested six key recommendations when dealing with victims who had undergone a ritual and oath:

- show empathy and do not put pressure on the trafficked person to testify in court
- help the trafficked person to seek spiritual/psychological counsel where she/he requests it
- provide as much physical protection as possible
- employ the help of an expert witness to emphasise the effects of the ritual oaths in the case
- prosecute the priests or others who administered the oath where possible and
- provide information to the trafficked person on her/his rights under law, and the legal effect of any false contract that might have been saved.

A review of the literature has enabled us to examine the concept of juju and highlighted how Nigerians may assimilate this belief system with other mainstream religions. After identifying the intricacies of the oath, ritual and resultant psychological impact, one can begin to understand how these methods instil such a level of fear in victims. Nigerian publications have provided practical recommendations on victim management, as well as other European investigations showing innovative approaches to develop trust with victims. However, an apparent lack of training on juju, the oath and how this may manifest in victims is likely to not only inhibit the investigators ability to take a case to trial, but also their ability to identify the victim as such in the first instance. It is therefore vital to go beyond merely highlighting this issue within the criminal justice sector and to offer investigators practical considerations. In order to achieve this, the following research questions need to be addressed:

- (1) Who are these women and children?
- (2) What are their belief systems?
- (3) What happens during the ritual?
- (4) What oath is made and what is the consequence of breaching it?
- (5) What, if anything, should investigators be aware of during the investigative process when dealing with such victims?
- (6) What recommendations would be given to criminal investigators by front-line practitioners with experience of such cases?

Methodology

In order to answer the research questions, the author chose to conduct semi-structured interviews with criminal investigators involved in U.K. stated cases, as well as U.K.-based partner agencies and anthropological experts with first-hand experience of victims who had undergone the juju ceremony.

Due to the lack of literature in terms of actual cases, a qualitative approach was deemed appropriate in order for participants to raise the challenges and barriers to victim cooperation that they felt were important and had personally experienced. As such, the methodological approach was explorative in nature with the aim to develop an initial understanding of investigating such cases, provide practical recommendations for future investigations, and act as a platform for subsequent studies.

Participant selection

Open source research using key word searches of ‘juju,’ ‘Nigeria,’ ‘police investigation’ and other variations identified a total of three stated cases in the U.K. whereby the victims were known to have undergone the ritual. Due to the seemingly small pool of potential police or other agency experts, a purposive sampling method was employed to identify the police investigating officers in all three cases. As proposed by Oliver (2006), this form of non-probability sampling is appropriate in studies of this nature due to the specialist knowledge required to explore the research issue.

A series of emails and telephone calls enabled the author to make direct contact with the investigating officers in all three trials, resulting in two police detectives (officers-in-charge) from two separate trials agreeing to participate. These police detectives then provided the names and contact details of two anthropological expert witnesses, each of whom had provided evidence in their respective trials. Contact details were also provided by one of the police detectives for a National Crime Agency specialist interviewer who had conducted some of the victim interviews, as well as a safe-house provider who had provided accommodation and access to counselling during the investigation and pre-trial period. An NGO specialist in juju and African culture was also identified to the author by one of the anthropological experts. Sampling therefore became response-driven, with participants identifying further potential participants. Although an effective method in a study of this nature, the author was aware of implications on participant anonymity. This was addressed by not confirming that the recommended potential participant would be contacted.

Final interviewees consisted of two police detectives (male), one National Crime Agency specialist interviewer (female), one NGO specialist (female), one safe-house provider (female), and two anthropological expert witnesses (female).

In order to maintain anonymity, interviewees were allocated the following acronyms:

- Police detectives (P1 and P2): Officers-in-charge of U.K. stated cases of Nigerian victims trafficked under the influence of juju
- National Crime Agency (NCA): Specialist interviewer conducting interviews with Nigerian victims trafficked under the influence of juju in U.K. stated cases
- Anthropological Expert Witnesses (AEW1 and AEW2): Academics in African religious practices and expert witnesses on juju in U.K. stated cases
- Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO): NGO practitioner with first-hand experience of dealing with Nigerian victims of trafficking who have undergone juju oaths and
- Safe House Provider (SHP): Secure accommodation provider who specialises in providing ongoing care and support for Nigerian victims of trafficking who have undergone a juju ritual.

Interviews

Each interview was audio-recorded and lasted approximately one hour, taking place at various locations across the U.K. at the participants’ convenience. Questioning was semi-structured and explorative in nature, beginning with open-ended questioning in order to obtain a full, uninterrupted account of their experiences with victims in relation to their respective expertise. Topics were not prompted by the author and only probed for further detail if initially raised by the respective participant. The same six research questions were then posed to each participant, regardless of their background, in the hope of drawing out new and potentially innovative approaches for investigators to consider in future cases.

Analyses

The interviews were transcribed and manually coded for themes. The initial themes identified were: *belief; evidence gathering; investigatory approach; joint approach; oath; ritual; other mechanisms of fear; and victim interviews*. In order to explore the research questions posed at the conclusion of the literature review, the study included concepts that subjectively had the potential to, either directly or indirectly, have some bearing on the investigative methodology chosen by an investigator when dealing with cases specifically involving Nigerian females who had undergone the juju ritual. It is acknowledged by the author that this method of analysing qualitative data is subjective by nature and therefore would almost certainly differ if conducted by a third party.

Limitations

This study suffers from significant methodological limitations. As this topic of research is relatively unknown in the criminal justice arena there is a limited pool of prospective participants with the relevant experience to approach. In addition, the inclusion of investigators only in cases that resulted in conviction also limits the scope of potential data. Despite this, those that did partake had specific knowledge on the subject and appeared to be open and candid during the interviews. The author is aware that the relatively small sample size is unlikely to be representative of the phenomena in all forms, but would argue that this study is explorative in nature and the findings are sufficient to satisfy the research aim.

Results

Who are these women and children?

Victims ranged in age from as young as thirteen (P1) through to the eldest who was in her forties (SHP). Five out of seven participants described the victims as having a minimal level of education, often originating from rural areas (P1, SHP), the Edo State (P2) and Benin City (NGO). Participants directly related origin and education as factors that influenced vulnerability to promises of education abroad by traffickers (P2) and their degree of belief in juju (NCA, NGO). AEW1 stated that due to victims' lack of education, some were not aware of their origins in the traditional sense. They could not name their village, town or even country.

All victims experienced by all participants were from very poor backgrounds, which lead to young girls being sold by their families into exploitation as a matter of course (P1, P2). P1, P2 and AEW2 expressed that this system results in a limited family network and victims are often orphaned as a result, with AEW2 further suggesting that victims may also become orphans as they are disowned by parents who suspect them of being witches.

Six out of seven participants had experienced victims who had been indoctrinated into fear of spiritual retribution from an early age. NGO explained that victims had been immersed in a traditional belief structure throughout their early lives. That said, six out of seven participants confirmed that victims had a dual belief system, comprising of Christianity and traditional belief. P2 and NCA noted that God is the almighty spirit, but admitting belief in juju is believed by victims to offend God. This had raised issues for one police participant when interviewing victims. 'They have an outer veneer of Christianity but they have a belief inside about spirits ... This is what causes problems when interviewing victims, because when you ask them, "Do you believe in juju?" They will say no' (P2).

Both police participants referred to cases where the victims had been raped both prior to leaving Nigeria and whilst within the U.K. Victims had been raped by family members, whilst engaged in street prostitution in Nigeria, and by the traffickers prior to being trafficked. P1 suggested this was as a method of reinforcing the oath, whereas NCA felt it was an additional form of control.

Limited technological awareness was a consideration raised by P1, P2 and NGO, as some victims had limited knowledge of electronic equipment used as a matter of course in U.K. investigations.

One example given by P2 was when a victim was asked to identify a suspect in a video identification parade. On seeing the suspect's picture on the screen, the victim was horrified as she thought the image could see her.

What happens during the ritual?

As shown in Figure 1, participants gave a range of acts that had been performed upon the victim during the rituals. P2 identified cutting to usually be above the breast bone, but together with NCA and SHP, had also seen instances across the entire circumference of the stomach, arms, legs and feet. NGO and AEW1 added a cautionary note, in that the scarring's may also be tribal, which had been suggested by the defence in court proceedings.

P1, P2 and NCA encountered victims who had not only witnessed animal sacrifice during the ritual, but were made to consume the body parts. Some were made to chew chicken livers, chicken hearts and drink blood. The removal of hair and nail clippings, rubbing soot into the cuts and mixing these items was commonly identified. AEW2 offered an explanation for this process by stating that, '[The items] are ingredients of juju. They then say that the victims are in there. Your body is now mixed up with magic and so you can never get away from it.' The removal of underwear to obtain menstrual blood was raised by P2 and NCA. AEW1 believed this to have sexual connotations, acting as a method to control that part of the body. Blood had been smeared over their bodies (P1), as well as instances of victims being made to undress to make them feel more vulnerable (P2).

P2, NCA, NGO and AEW1 had all experienced victims who had been locked in coffins, with NGO further stating that this took place over an entire night. AEW1's explanation for this was that, 'The significance [of being placed in coffins] would mean death. If you disobey, if you break the curse, you will have death.'

A significant consideration raised by P1 was that victims had also been subjected to a version of the ritual by the trafficker in the U.K. This consisted of the victim being wrapped in red cloth and having dust blown in their face.

One of the girls said that when she got into the U.K., that was where the ritual took place ... and of course we know that it was the trafficker that did it. And the rituals were quite similar, so he must know what takes place. It's authentic enough for the girls to still have that fear and very similar to those that said they were taken to a witch doctor back in Nigeria. (P1)

Interestingly, both anthropological experts affirmed that each person who performs the ritual in Nigeria has their own unique methodology.

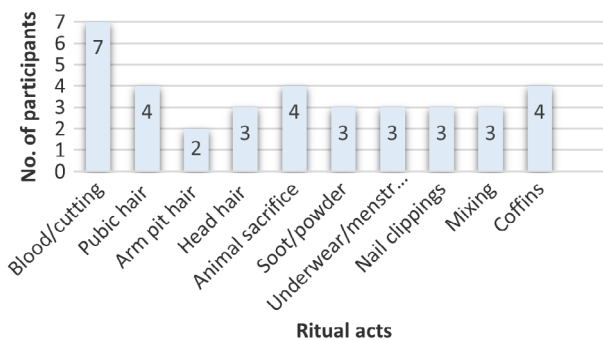


Figure 1. Types of acts performed during juju rituals.

What oath is made and what is the consequence of breaching it?

Participants experienced victims who had disclosed making oaths to repay debt (P1, P2, NCA, NGO), subservience (P1, P2, NCA), not to attempt escape (P2, SHP, AEW2), not to disclose to anyone what had happened to them (P2, SHP), and a combination of the above (see Figure 2). All participants identified death as the main consequence of breaching the oath. Victims disclosed to participants that spirits would take retribution in several ways. P1 relayed an example whereby, ‘The spirit will enter when she sleeps, make her mad, give her nightmares, make her barren so she can’t have children, and [then] she will be killed.’

The fear of such consequences was reiterated throughout by every participant, as well as how victims would attribute any misfortune to breaching the oath (see Figure 3). Examples included a pregnant victim who had disclosed her account to police and whose child proved to be autistic, which she was convinced was punishment by the spirits (NGO). Spiritual retribution was also extended to the welfare of investigating officers, with P2 recalling, ‘[The] interviewing officer had a cold and looked quite ill. The girl said that it was the juju that was affecting her.’

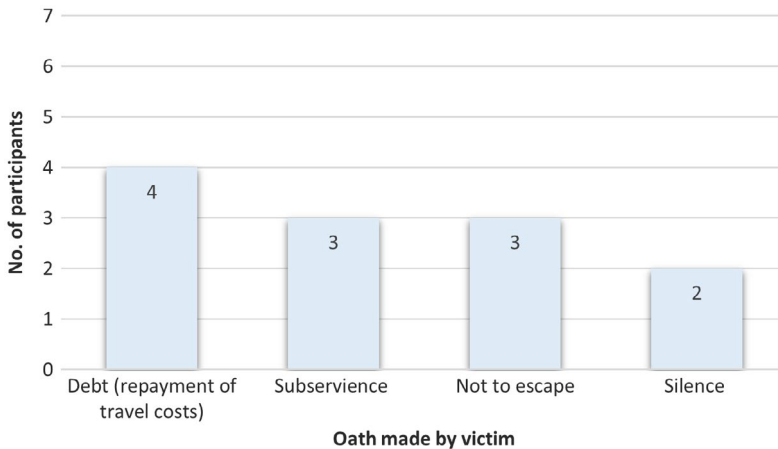


Figure 2. Types of oaths made during the ritual.

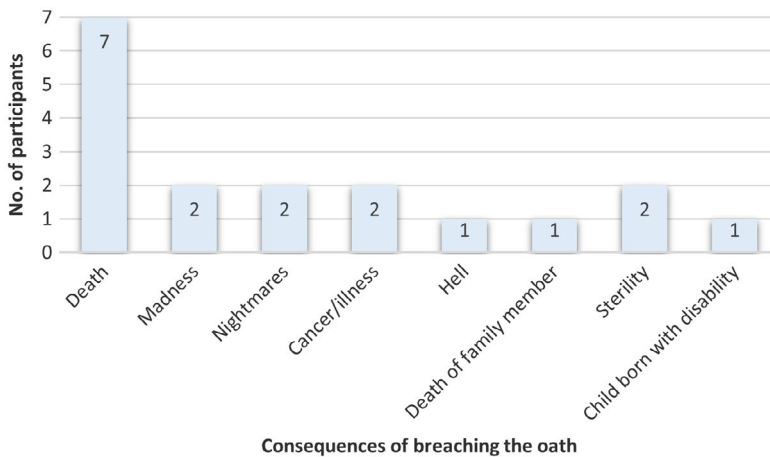


Figure 3. Consequences of breaching the oath.

What, if anything, should investigators be aware of during the investigative process when dealing with such victims?

The purpose of this research question was to focus the police and NCA participant's thoughts on issues that had arisen during the evidence gathering stages of their investigations, as well as giving other participants opportunities to comment on, and justify, their thoughts on how investigations could be tailored to victims who had undergone the oath. Responses to this question were drawn together into four main concepts: *victim interview*, *translator selection*, *physical evidence gathering* and *other mechanisms of fear*.

Victim interview

All three criminal investigators (P1, P2 and NCA) raised the issue of victim interviewing and had consistently utilised a video-recorded interview. This was cited as best practice for Achieving Best Evidence (ABE) and an opportunity for the victim to give a free-narrative (NCA). P1 quoted a total length of 8 h of interviewing per victim, a necessity affirmed by the NCA participant as such an in-depth interview prevented the requirement for victims to re-tell their story.

Law enforcement participants (P1, P2, NCA) agreed that briefing the victim on the logistics and purpose of the recorded interview was important, as it provided reassurance on confidentiality and an understanding of the process. Interestingly, an unforeseen cultural consideration arose for one police participant after remotely monitoring a victim interview from another room.

When we were interviewing the 16 year old victim I was in the monitoring room, and the girl [later] said to me, 'If you were taking me seriously, you would be interviewing me, not her.' Because males are higher in the hierarchy ... it's totally un-PC in our western culture, but in their eyes it's normal. (P2)

Despite this, P1, P2, NCA and AEW1 felt that the gender of the interviewer was an important consideration, and should always be female. Consensus among those participants was that a female was more appropriate due to the subject being sexual in nature.

Six out of seven participants identified objectivity as a major consideration in interviewer selection. Participants specifically advised that the selected interviewer must be able to keep an open-mind (P1); not shun anything they are told (P2); ignore their own preconceptions (SHP); walk in the victim's shoes (NGO); and take them seriously (AEW, AEW2).

The rate of disclosure by victims ranged between a few sessions (NGO) or a couple of weeks (P1), to two years (P2). NCA reported working with a victim for 12 months before she gave a full account. P1, P2, NCA and NGO all referred to victims initially disclosing scripts, or legends provided by the traffickers that they had to learn and recount if stopped by officials. NCA suggested probing the script once rapport had been built, with NGO suggesting that investigators must be patient and understand the reason for the initial dishonesty.

Police have this mind-set that, 'Oh she has a script,' and then they lose that relationship. Even if they have a script, I still believe it's a process because even the cases where they are using the script there are also points where the person forgets that script and that's where they may say that, 'I was told to say this.' (NGO)

P1, P2 and NGO referred to victims' 'drip-feeding' their accounts over a period of time. P1 and NGO both stated that this was in order to test the spirits, to see if anything bad would happen as a consequence of disclosing to the authorities. Once victims began to disclose in the interview, P1 saw a visible change in body language, especially when discussing the oath. NCA noted that when victims discussed consuming the body parts of animals during the ritual they would physically gag, as it was taking them back into that environment.

Criminal investigators gave various methods to initiate topics within the interview following the free-narrative stage. P1 would begin with what has happened since being in care. P1 justified this as the victim's background often involved sexual abuse, the death of a parent or becoming orphaned. Not ideal initiatory subjects. Once rapport was built, those topics would be visited later on. NCA suggested initially approaching their Christian beliefs. 'Because most of them believe in God and they go to church on Sunday ... and in part of the rapport building that is one of the first things I do ...

to see if they believe in God, whether they go to church. This can lead into the subject of belief and juju.' (NCA). Other suggestions of approaching the topic of juju was asking about their dreams and/or what they are afraid of (P1).

Translator selection

Six out of seven participants raised the victim's language and dialect as a consideration. Victims involved with P1, P2, NCA and NGO could all speak Pidgin English, whilst all victims experienced by SHP could speak a sufficient level of English. P2 specifically felt that victims should have access to someone who spoke their first language rather than reverting to Pidgin, however NCA noted that the use of Pidgin enabled the investigator to pick up on certain words and phrases.

P1, P2, NGO and AEW1 had experienced instances when translators had not directly translated what the victim had said, but instead had tried to say what 'would normally happen' or translated their interpretation. An example given by P2 was when a translator used the phrase, 'made love to me' rather than rape. NCA suggested that briefing the translator on the subject content was important as it weeded out those that would not wish to hear, and subsequently translate, disclosures of rape and other forms of sexual abuse. P2 agreed with briefing the translator on the subject content, but for the reason that they may originate from the same region as the victim and therefore share their belief in juju.

I had an interpreter get up to go to the bathroom. After a while I get a call from the language services saying they have had a call from the interpreter saying she is stuck on a bus and won't be able to get there. I said, 'But she was here a minute ago!' (P2)

Physical evidence gathering

P1 and P2 highlighted that victims will be in possession of items that are both of evidential value and represent significant safeguarding concerns. These included mobile phones, credit cards, phone numbers in the lining of their clothes and SIM cards in their hair piece. The items were hidden in order to facilitate communication with their trafficker at a point of transit (P1, P2). It was also affirmed that any such search should be a mutual process, as giving them a choice acts to empower the victim, which can help them to begin the recovery process (P2). NCA addressed the concern for forensic examination if the victim disclosed being recently raped. P2 suggested that any such examination also afforded the examiner the opportunity to observe any scarring that may identify that a ritual has taken place. AEW2 did raise a logical consideration in that the seizing of forensic samples is to all intents and purposes the same process as the ritual acts performed in the juju ceremony.

P2 identified that it is a common practice for both victims and traffickers to sleep with bibles under their pillows. P2 explained that any such items located during residential searches affords opportunities to introduce belief as a topic in both suspect and victim interviews.

Other mechanisms of fear

Figure 4 shows that traffickers had employed several methods to instil fear in victims. In the experiences of P1, NCA and NGO, victims disclosed that traffickers had threatened to personally harm their families.

So sometimes they are trying to protect their family. So they try to find ways that [they] are able to speak truths of that so they might not have to say too much, because they feel 'Oh ... if the worst [gets out] the trafficker can link the arrest and the investigation through me.' (NGO)

Five out of seven participants acknowledged the victim's fear of police through perceptions of corruption.

She's not going to trust a police officer, because police are corrupt. I had one victim say to me, because I intercepted her on her way to Madrid, 'does that mean I'm yours now? Do I belong to you?' I had to convince her that I didn't own her. And she asked me how much money I wanted. (P2)

This issue was identified as an additional factor that prevented victims from running away from their traffickers (AEW1), as well as preventing disclosure to police because of inherent mistrust (P1 and

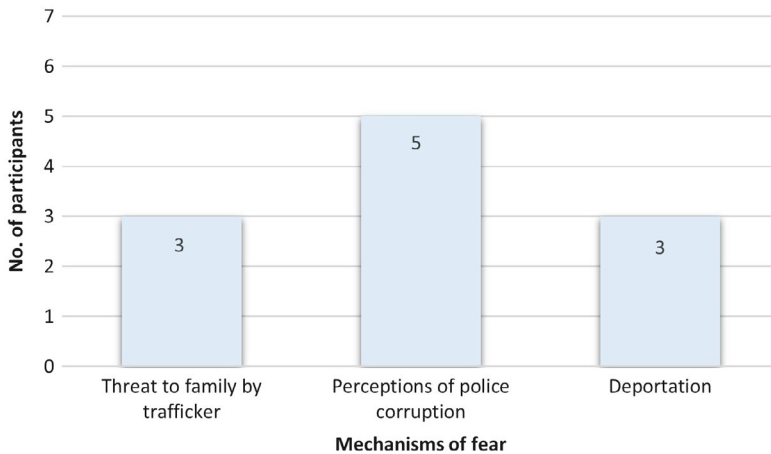


Figure 4. Factors other than the oath that caused fear to victims.

NCA). AEW2 suggested that traffickers felt the victim's fear of juju and the ritual was powerful enough to override, or counteract any threat that police or anyone else could pose.

Deportation was also a concern raised by victims in the experiences of P1, P2 and SHP. These participants qualified victims' concerns on returning home as fear of retribution by the traffickers, rather than fear of losing their immigrant status in the U.K. P1 noted that the trafficker had specifically stated to a victim that she would be deported if discovered by authorities.

What recommendations would be given to criminal investigators by front-line practitioners with experience of such cases?

Trust and rapport building

NCA and NGO specifically highlighted the importance of the first interaction with the victim as a consideration for investigators.

It's the basics. Food, clothing. You're not fighting the spirits ... what you're fighting at this moment in time is the control of the trafficker. If you give them the things that the trafficker doesn't give, you are automatically showing yourself as someone different. (NCA)

P1 mentioned that giving victims basic food and hygiene products should not be seen as a gratuity but a necessity, which also helps to differentiate the investigator from the trafficker.

'Oh you've given me something nice ... you haven't taken something from me and didn't expect something in return.' When they realise that you're not there to do anything like that then they start to trust you and they'll speak to you. It's all about trust I think. (P1)

Gaining the trust of the victim was a consideration raised by six out of seven participants. All six added that gaining trust can take time; but is assisted by the work of care providers and specialists that run parallel to the investigation.

Joint approach

All participants referred to the necessity of a multi-agency/specialist response to dealing with victims who had been trafficked and undergone the ritual. P2 suggested briefing case workers from social services and safe-house providers on juju and how it may manifest in the victims behaviour. In addition, P2, AEW1 and AEW2 also raised the concern around children going missing from care homes and foster providers. When asked why the children absconded, AEW1 proposed, 'Because of the fear of the juju and the trafficker. I really believe that. It's the remote control.'

Five out of seven participants identified psychological trauma as a major consideration for investigators when dealing with victims. P1, P2, SHP and NGO affirmed the necessity of access to counselling, whilst also obtaining a psychological report to be used during any subsequent trial (P2). SHP stated that the fear of juju would manifest as paranoia and irrational thoughts, and could also add to pre-existing mental health problems. NGO proposed that mental health problems were also as a result of the trauma experienced in the ritual itself, such as having to lie in a coffin overnight. NGO continued in that by giving victims access to counselling, ‘They are able to get rid of anxiety they do have. And then they would find it easier to disclose to police officers.’

Five out of seven participants mentioned some success with providing victims access to a Church in the U.K. This was qualified as ‘non-African Churches’ (P2, NGO, AEW1), as they had previously been linked to risks of re-trafficking (P2) and ritualistic practices (NGO). Providing access to religious guidance was believed to help as it allowed victims to be spiritually at peace (NGO), and ‘tapped them into’ their higher belief system of God, who could protect them (P2, NCA, SHP). AEW1 and NGO both proposed early involvement of previously rescued victims and specialists with understanding of the victims’ culture and belief systems. Both can assist in developing rapport with the victim and to overcome the trauma of their experiences.

Discussion

What initially became apparent from the results was that victims ranged in age and geographical origin, yet appeared to share similar backgrounds in terms of limited education, limited economic status and an early indoctrination into fear of spiritual retribution. As far as the victims’ belief systems, results corroborated existing theory offered by Westerlund (2006) as being syncretic in nature. As identified by participants and evidenced in *Operation Koovlis*, such a dual belief system actually offered a strategic opportunity to appeal to their ‘higher belief’ in God through the assistance of spiritual counsellors. In collaboration with previously rescued victims, this method helped to reduce the victims’ fears of spiritual retribution and disclose their experiences to investigators.

Anthropological experts supported previous research by Achebe (2004) and Harrop (2012a) on the acts commonly performed during the ritual, such as collecting and mixing body parts. What was not previously discovered in the literature review was instances whereby victims were made to consume the body parts of animals, which when discussed by victims in interview would cause visible changes in their body language. In addition, rubbing soot into the cuts was identified and explained by AEW2 as a way to mix up ‘the magic’ with the body, enabling the spirits to locate victims wherever they are. Therefore this perhaps highlights the importance of identifying the acts performed during the ritual, as particular elements are specifically used to remotely control victims and prevent cooperation with law enforcement.

Previous research had specifically mentioned cutting, but P2, NCA and SHP gave the specific locations as above the breast bone, or entire circumference of arms, legs and feet. Knowing the location of the cuts, or resultant scarring, may present an investigative opportunity for law enforcement to identify that a ritual has taken place. This is likely to occur during the seizing of clothing or forensic samples, a process which in itself may raise additional concerns for the victim. As AEW2 proposed, the normal investigative practice of seizing body samples from victims for forensic examination is in fact, for all intents and purposes, a re-enactment of the ritual. This suggests that investigators should explain to victims the purpose of the process, as well as where the items are stored and who has control over them.

The fact that versions of the ritual had also taken place in the U.K. was also a revelation. Items located in residential searches included red cloths covered in dust and bibles under pillows. This again offers law enforcement opportunities to identify potential indicators that victims may be under fear of juju.

The importance of the first interaction with victims was highlighted by P1, NCA and NGO, advising to prioritise the victim’s immediate needs above those of the criminal investigation. Providing basic food, clothing and hygiene products as required helped to differentiate law enforcement from the

trafficker and enabled trust to develop. This also assisted in counteracting some victims' perceptions of police corruption.

Even when trust had developed, investigators required patience as victims 'trickled' their disclosure over a period of time (up to two years) in order to test the spirits. As identified in the literature review by the National Board of Social Services in Denmark, any such mental and psychosomatic symptoms were then interpreted by victims as a result of breaching their oath. What became apparent in this study was that any such symptoms were not limited to the victims themselves, but also extended to the health of family members and investigating officers. Therefore even after full disclosure, victims may still construe any negative aspects of their lives, or even those around them, as retribution by the spirits and may instigate a form of re-lapse.

Careful selection of the interviewer and translator were considerations raised by several participants. In agreement with Abdulrahim et al. (2009), general consensus was that the interviewer should remain objective, keep an open-mind and show empathy towards the victim. P1, P2, NCA and AEW1 agreed that the interviewer should be female due to the sexual nature of the exploitation. However, if the issue of gender and male hierarchy becomes apparent during the investigation (as experienced by P2), there may be a need to explain the equal status of male and female investigators.

Identified as a concern by the College of Policing (2016), P2 verified the issue of translators who originate from the same areas as victims may well believe in the oath, and/or be reluctant to translate topics of a sexual nature. In an ideal world there would be a large pool of potential interpreters for investigators to select from. In reality however an investigator may be limited to those on the National Register of Public Service Interpreters, and subsequently who is available at the time and within a reasonable geographical proximity to where the interviews will take place.

Various methods to initiate victim interviews were proposed, such as focusing on what has happened to them since being in care and approaching their Christian beliefs. Although effective in these cases, these methods are contrary to existing theory. Section 3.25 of the Achieving Best Evidence in Criminal Proceeding Manual prescribes that interviewers should not try to initiate an account by focusing on the witness's background (Ministry of Justice, 2011, p. 74). Therefore this may show that elements of existing guidelines may need adapting when dealing with Nigerian victims of trafficking.

Participants specifically raised the consideration of a collaborative approach to victim management. Psychological counsellors and safe-house providers with knowledge of the resultant psychological manifestations experienced by victims can provide 24 h support – particularly vital when considering that some victims believe the spirits enter at night through their dreams.

P1 and P2 identified a significant safeguarding concern whereby victims had hidden phone numbers in the lining of their clothes and SIM cards in their hair pieces. The items were hidden in order to facilitate communication with their trafficker at a point of transit. If these items go undetected there is a real risk of victims identifying their location to traffickers and subsequently absconding.

The results of the empirical study have both substantiated and expanded on the existing knowledge base identified in the literature review, as well as suggesting existing investigatory methodologies may need adapting when dealing with such cases. By drawing on the individual experiences and expertise of the participants, together with the findings of the literature review, the author now presents some realistic recommendations in the context of current capabilities.

Recommendations

Understand and empathise with the victim's fear of spiritual retribution

Victims may fear spiritual retribution if they disclose their experiences. They may 'trickle' information to the investigator in order to test the spirits, seeing if they take revenge on the victim for breaching their oath. Should sufficient trust be built that the victim assists in the case, the investigator should be aware that victims may interpret any misfortune in their lives, or even the life of the investigator, as a consequence of breaching the oath and this can result in a form of re-lapse.

Develop rapport and gain the trust of the victim

Victims are likely to mistrust as a result of the deception and abuse by the trafficker; or alternatively the psychological trauma through isolation has developed an inherent distrust of anyone other than the trafficker. In addition, they may have perceptions of police corruption and an inherent mistrust of authority figures due to familial abuse as a child. As a result, an investigator should explain what their motivations are at the first point of contact. Listen, understand and take the victim seriously. It is likely to take time to develop trust and relies on the patience and determination of the investigator.

Take a joint-agency approach

Potential victims should be allocated secure accommodation in safe houses and foster care. Brief the care providers around the oath, the ritual and how this may prompt the victim to abscond. Care providers are in a unique position to assist investigators as they provide the victim with a stable environment to recover and reflect on their experiences. Regular contact between investigator and care provider can ensure both parties are updated with any concerns that may arise.

Provide access to psychological and spiritual counselling

The victim may have suffered repeated sexual assaults and physical abuse at the hands of the trafficker. This is likely to have resulted in mild to profound psychological issues such as PTSD, which can manifest in memory loss and distorted sense of self-blame. Counsellors can work with victims to assess, diagnose and treat over a period of time. Psychological reports can evidence the psychological damage as a result of their exploitation. Most victims that have been identified in the U.K. have a dual belief system, comprising of both Christianity and traditional. The power of God is thought to supersede lesser spirits and has been shown to override the victim's fear of juju and the oath. A reduction in fear of juju and its power may allow the victim to disclose more readily and assist in the investigation.

Explain the purpose of obtaining bodily samples for forensic testing

Obtaining non-intimate samples, such as nails or hair, is essentially a re-enactment of the ritual. Brief the seizing officer and explain to the victim why they are being seized and what will be done with them.

Consider the victims may be hiding items on their person

Victims may not perceive themselves as such and are known to conceal items that will enable them to re-establish communication with the trafficker. This is primarily a safeguarding concern, but also offers investigative opportunities. The investigator should explain the purpose of seizing these items to the victim and request their consent.

Carefully select the victim interviewer and translator

The interview content is likely to be of a sexual nature and a victim may find it easier to discuss this with a female; as well as the possibility that the translator may not accurately translate disclosures of rape and sexual assault. A translator from the same region as the victim may have similar beliefs, or, similar to an interviewer may be unable to remain objective around the topics of spirits and the consequences of breaching the oath. If present, these factors may undermine rapport and diminish trust between the victim and the investigating officer.

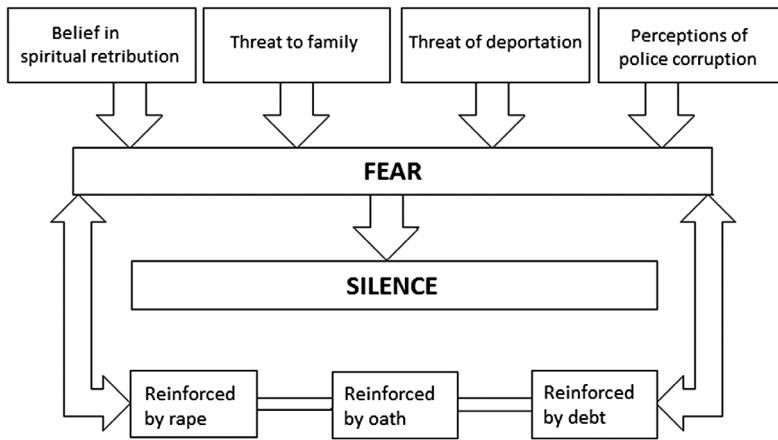


Figure 5. Graphical representation of factors that instil and reinforce fear in Nigerian victims.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to identify key issues for criminal investigators to consider, throughout the criminal justice process, when managing cases involving Nigerian victims trafficked into the U.K. who have been subjected to juju rituals and undertaken oaths of secrecy. A review of the literature acknowledged the existence of the phenomena, as well as how the ritual and oath results in potentially profound psychological trauma. Research appeared lacking however on how these issues manifested as barriers to victims cooperating in criminal investigations, or arguably more importantly – how to overcome them. In order to fill this gap, empirical research was employed to identify considerations raised by front line practitioners with first-hand experience.

The results showed that the overwhelming obstacle in an investigation appears to be the victim's level of fear. Fear cripples the victims, rendering them defenceless and resigned to their fate.

As illustrated in Figure 5, what has become apparent is that the trafficker employs a multitude of methods to instil and maintain that level of fear. These include physical threats to them and their family, threats of deportation, police corruption and the fear of spiritual retribution by breaching the oath. The oath, rape, and inflated debt reinforce this sense of fear and psychologically chain the victim. This in turn maintains compliance, preventing victims from escaping and disclosing to authorities. Combatting this fear presents a real challenge for investigators, as fear will prevent victims from disclosing their experiences and supporting prosecution. It is therefore the issue that must take primacy in an investigation of this nature.

As further cases come to light throughout Europe, it is hoped that subsequent research studies can incorporate larger sample groups in order to examine the phenomena in greater scale, enabling law enforcement agencies to develop investigative strategies tailored to the Nigerian context.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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