



(Jane Ikpezia: Courtesy CRARN )

**THE CAUSES AND PREVALENCE OF ACCUSATION OF WITCHCRAFT AMONG  
CHILDREN IN AKWA IBOM STATE  
JUNE 2008**

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## **Abbreviations and Acronyms**

AKS	AKWA IBOM STATE
AKWATCHAP	Akwa Ibom War Against Trafficking and Child Abuse programme
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
CRA	Child Rights Act
CRARN	Child Rights and Rehabilitation Network (CRARN).
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
FGD	Focus Group discussions
HIV	Human Immuno-deficiency Virus
IDI	In depth Interviews
LGA	Local Government Area
MOWASD	Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development
NAPTIP	National Agency for Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons and other related matters
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
PACT	Prevent Abandonment of Children Today
SSN	Stepping Stones Nigeria
UNICEF	UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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And most importantly, thanks to all our children.

Dr. Eleanor Nwadinobi  
Consultant

## 1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The report summarises the findings of a research carried out in Akwa Ibom State, and in Eket Senatorial zone in particular, to investigate reports of prevalence of children being accused of witchcraft. This study seeks to provide a descriptive analysis of the history, belief and practices of “child witches”. The study summarises the key findings and recommendations made from the qualitative study involving a total of 80 FGDs and IDIs conducted. A few case studies were documented from the findings.

The presence of children labeled as “child witches” is known to virtually everyone across the state and is practiced State-wide. The children are called witches and blamed for untimely deaths in the family, broken homes, problem at work, loss of work, pain and sickness. These children who are labeled as witches are abandoned, ostracized and violated in several ways. The primary accusers and perpetrators of violence are members of the immediate family who attempt home – made remedies, which include beating, acid baths, setting ablaze and killing.

The children are taken to churches, shrines and traditionalists who use one, or a combination of prayers, praise and worship, oil in the eyes and ears or to drink. Other extremely harmful remedies meted out include beating, chaining, sawing, tying up, herbal enemas and nails driven into the head. These superstitious beliefs have become a fertile ground for churches, shrines and traditionalists who have cashed in on the situation to provide a remedy in the form of exorcism and deliverance. Therefore, they may be the ones to prophesy that a child is a witch or a family member may bring such a child to them to be delivered. It is a common site in AKS to find up to five sign boards advertising churches, competing for space at a street junction. One can also find a plethora of banners promising miracles and deliverance, such as “CARRY YOUR BABY IN 90 DAYS” Some of these churches are highly organised; with several branches while others are one-man one room churches.

The genesis of this issue has been attributed by respondents, to initiation by older witches as well as the presence of movies which have depicted children as witches who bring all manner of ill-luck in families. It is also thought to be passed on through food, so much so, that the name given to snacks received from another child is also called “witch”.

These children are thrown out of homes by parents, ostracised by the community and end up on the streets eating from garbage. They may even progress to drugs and robbery and are in danger of being trafficked. They can be found in settlements in parks, near markets and filling stations and uncompleted buildings. There is also a high rate of teenage pregnancy amongst the girls.

One of the striking findings is the high level of stigma and discrimination which the children go through. They are seen as defiled and capable of defiling. The extreme stigma robs them of any social support network from their families, communities and churches. They are called names at school and suffer mob attacks. They therefore go through both physical as well as psychological trauma.

Some of these children are being given shelter by child protection agencies of Government and Civil Society Organisations such as MOWASD, NAPTIP, CRARN and SSN. These agencies

provide shelter, feeding, education and medical care. There is however a danger in further increasing stigma when they are put in separate institutions and kept out of mainstream schools.

There are a few recorded success stories of reunification with families and reintegration into communities, by CRARN. However, the vast majority of accused children continue to be stigmatised due to the negative mind set of the people. The recorded successes have occurred when the children have been taken in by their grandparents or other close family members who live in totally different communities. The best successes have been recorded in cases where the parents have kept the accusation secret from other community members. They have then taken the children for counselling at the child protection CSOs on a daily basis without having them live in.

Public enlightenment efforts such as PACT, an annual enlightenment programme, and advocacy rallies such as the one held on the 15/5/08 World Family day, have yielded positive results. The positive results include commitment to passing of the Child Rights Bill into Law. An internet petition sponsored by Kelli Stowe, has been signed by more than 1,000 people in over 30 countries. Advocacy efforts such as a recently held Zonal workshop on child rejection in South-South States created an opportunity for the issue to be extensively discussed and for high level commitments to be extracted from key players such as the Governors, wives of Governors and Commissioners of relevant ministries.

As a result of these key findings the following recommendations are being proposed:

1. Locate, track, number and document all affected children.
2. National Protection Systems should be strengthened<sup>1</sup>
3. Advocate for the immediate passing of child rights Act
4. Establish family courts and a task force to protect children
5. Establish an agency to regulate churches.
6. Prosecute offenders and perpetrators.
7. Strict regulation by the National Film Censors board.
8. Have programmes that will enhance social change<sup>2</sup>
9. Expand public enlightenment programmes especially at the grass root/community level.
10. Lobby for inclusion of child protection in the State school curriculum in social or religious studies.
11. Harnessing the expertise of civil society and other partners such as Christian Association of Nigeria, political parties and oil companies.
12. Emphasise reintegration and reunification with families and communities for children already residing in shelters.
13. Provision of counselling centres for day case rather than residential centres
14. Invest in massive training of counsellors
15. Strengthen the protective role of families through promotion of parenting education.<sup>3</sup>

#### **Case Study 1**

Paul Eme is the first son of his father who is proprietor of a school. Paul was accused of being a witch by his step mother. His step mother took him to the Liberty church where the pastor pronounced him to be witch. His step-mother drove him out of the house.

Paul has been living at CRARN for about one year

Paul's father visits him at CRARN occasionally but is not willing to take him home due to the stigma associated with "child witches"

When asked to describe in his own words how he feels he said "I feel so bad when my step mother called me a witch. I could not play or talk with people"

<sup>1</sup> UNICEF Executive Board Annual session June 2008 11 pg 4

<sup>2</sup> UNICEF Executive Board Annual session June 2008 11 pg 4

<sup>3</sup> UNICEF Executive Board Annual session June 2008 30 pg 9

16. Strengthen the protective role of communities through<sup>1</sup> non-coercive and non-judgemental approaches.

## 2.0 Introduction

### 2.1 Background

Akwa Ibom State (AKS) is one of the coastal states in the South-South geo-political zones of Nigeria Delta Region. AKS has three major ethnic groups the Ibibio, Annang and Oron with Ibibio being the main language. With a population of 3.9 million people (2007 census) it is Nigeria second largest oil producing State. AKS has thirty one Local Government Areas, with the majority of the rural populace engaging in farming. Akwa Ibom State is often described as a uni-cultural State where the norms, taboos, customs, traditions, rituals and myths are the same.<sup>2</sup>

Akwa Ibom State was created in September 23, 1987 and was carved out of the Old Cross River State. AKS is not new to being accused of harmful traditional practices. Mary Slessor (1848-1915), the Queen of Calabar, was a Scottish missionary who lived and worked with the people of Okoyong for many years. She is credited with stopping the killing of twins in these parts and stopping the trial of witches by the Calabar Ordeal Bean. A Dr W F Daniel first reported the use of this bean; *Physiostigma Venenosum*, a woody vine and known to all students of Physiology worldwide in 1846. People suspected of Witchcraft were forced to eat some of the beans, which contained *Physiostigmine*.<sup>3 4</sup>

In the same vein, the existence of “child witches” is a cultural belief which is State-wide. It is generally believed that any ill-luck that befalls a family ranging from a down turn in business, to ill health, infertility, even death is caused by a child or children in the family.

Some accounts trace this phenomenon back to the Portuguese or Spanish influence in Akwa Ibom. The general belief is that a spell is given to a child through food and/or drink. Following the airing of the Liberty church movies, children could not share food items such as buns with other children. The food is seen as taboo and capable of affecting the recipient. The food itself is referred to as “witch” The child who eats this “witch”, is then called out in the night where his soul will leave the body to be initiated in a gathering of witches and wizards. In the words of one of the parents Comfort Samson Robson “Parents should not allow their children to go about so that they may not be given witches”. Some respondents referred to their children being initiated by eating witch from rich people.

Another school of thought blames the genesis of child witches as the exploitation by churches. Fake prophets in churches, give false prophesies, by telling parents that their children are witches. They then extract confessions under pressure and then proceed to charge a fee for deliverance. This usually requires repeated visits. This has brought about a proliferation of

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<sup>1</sup> UNICEF Executive Board Annual session June 2008 31 pg 9

<sup>2</sup> AKS 2008 Diary

<sup>3</sup> [babawilly.blogspot.com/2007/07/tribal-stereotypes-in-nigeria-comedy](http://babawilly.blogspot.com/2007/07/tribal-stereotypes-in-nigeria-comedy)

<sup>4</sup> [www.dacb.org/stories/nigeria/slessor\\_mary](http://www.dacb.org/stories/nigeria/slessor_mary)

business churches. In some cases the accusation is set up due to interpersonal jealousy, hatred and maliciousness between people who have fallen out.

In this context, UNICEF Enugu commissioned the study to determine the magnitude of the problem in Eket, Akwa Ibom. The information generated, will inform programming and interventions aimed at eliminating such harmful practices in the wider context of protection of children from exploitation and abuse.

### **3.0 International and Local Laws Relevant to Child Rejection**

Practices of child rejection which include abandonment, grievous harm, abuse and killing have legal consequences as stipulated by International, National and State laws.

#### **i) Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)**

The CRC, adopted by General Assembly in 1989, and ratified by Nigeria in 1995.

Ratification, however, does not mean that the provisions of the CRC automatically become part of the Nigerian domestic law. Article 12 of the Nigerian Constitution states that “no treaty between the Federation and any other country shall have the force of law except to the extent to which any such treaty has been enacted into law by the National Assembly”. It was in 2003 that Nigeria enacted the CRA as a Federal legislation to be adopted by 36 States. The CRC spells out the basic human rights of children including the right to survival; to protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation amongst others.

#### **ii) The Child Rights Act**

The aim of the CRA is to provide and protect the rights of the Nigerian Child. Akwa Ibom State has just adopted the CRA in July 2008. The CRA is relevant to child rejection in several ways including for example:

Section 11 “Every Child is entitled to respect for the dignity of his person and accordingly no child shall be:

(a) subjected to physical, mental, or emotional injury, abuse, neglect or maltreatment, including sexual abuse.

(b) subjected to torture, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment

Section 14(2) of the CRA states that every child has the right to maintenance by his parents or guardians in accordance with the extent of their means, and the child has the right, in appropriate circumstances to enforce this right in the family court.

#### **iii) Criminal Code**

There are punishments by law for child rejection practices which are criminal such as

Section 315 of the Criminal Code Act provides that any person who unlawfully kills another is guilty of an offence which is called murder or manslaughter according to the circumstances of the case. The punishment for murder and manslaughter under sections 319 and 325 of the criminal Code Act is death and life imprisonment respectively.



Section 341 of the criminal Code provides that any person who unlawfully abandons or exposes a child under the age of seven years, in such a manner that any grievous harm is likely to be caused to it, is guilty of a felony and is liable to imprisonment for five years.

Section 335 of the Criminal Code provides that any person who unlawfully does grievous harm to another is guilty of felony and is liable to imprisonment for seven years

Sections 23 and 24 of the Trafficking In Persons (Prohibition) and Law Enforcement and Administration Act, 2003 as amended in 2005 (NAPTIP ACT) makes it an offence punishable with life imprisonment for any person to deal or trade, purchase, sell or take any person in order that such person be held or treated as a slave.

#### **4.0 Objectives of the Study**

This study is a descriptive analysis of the issue of “child witches”. The main objective is to document the causes and prevalence of accusation of witchcraft among children in Akwa Ibom state.

The specific research objectives of this assignment include the following:

- i) To map the Communities in Eket where the practices are prevalent and to trace how the practices spread
- ii) To document the historical background
- iii) To find out prevailing knowledge, attitudes and practices as well as customary behaviour and values
- iv) Identify and fully describe the structure, principal officers and any other relevant information of CSOs/NGOs that are involved in providing care and support for children affected by the above practice.
- v) To ascertain existing Government documents and policies
- vi) To document interventions and legal frameworks
- vii) To come up with recommendations for further action

#### **5.0 METHODOLOGY**

The major sources of data for this study were qualitative primary data supported by secondary data.

##### **i) Pre Planning**

Two pre-planning sessions were held at the UNICEF Enugu Office. The purpose of those meetings was to discuss the details of the terms of reference.<sup>1</sup> Issues such as scope of the assignment, logistics and likely key informants were also discussed.

The preplanning was followed by the development of research tools.<sup>2</sup>

The research instruments used in the study were designed to gather information on select indicators needed to meet the stated research objectives. The inventory of indicators for the study

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<sup>1</sup> See Annex 1

<sup>2</sup> See Annex 5,6,7

and the relevant sources of data required to obtain them are found in table 5.1. The table explains at a glance the information that each of the research tools is designed to supply.

*Table 5.1 Inventory of indicators for the study on child witches in Akwa Ibom*

	<b>INDICATORS</b>	A	B	C	D	E
1	Customary values and Belief about child witches		X	X	X	
2	Historical background		X	X	X	X
3	Communities in Eket where the practices are prevalent	X	X	X	X	
4	Prevailing knowledge and attitudes and Practices	X	X	X	X	
5	Stakeholder efforts	X	X	X	X	X
6	Ascertain existing Government Documents and Policies		X	X	X	
7	Recorded successes in reintegration of children		X	X	X	

**KEY**

A-Survey for children

B- FGD

C- Key informants' questionnaire

D -IDI

E-Secondary data

**ii) Sources of Literature**

A desk review was carried out in order to gather initial scope of work already done on child witches as well as to determine the ease of accessing resources and doing and gathering information.

The resources accessed include the following:

- Books
- Policies
- Reports<sup>1</sup>

The research draws on literature from fields of anthropology, sociology, and child related policies. Materials are also drawn from international organisations such as the United Nations.<sup>2</sup>

**iii) Field visits**

It was necessary to make visits in the company of staff of CRARN who were local indigenes and who spoke both the local language and the different dialects which exist in the different Local Government Areas. For example, the language spoken in Eket is different to that spoken in Oron.

A cross-section of localities were visited in order to get a broad based view of the issues involved. The field visits were crucial in linking us to the key stakeholders whose input contributed to the study. The Field visit included visits to communities in Eket, neighbouring Esit Eket, Nsit Ubium, Oron and Uyo, the capital of AKS.

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<sup>1</sup> The full list of resource materials is as attached in annex 2

<sup>2</sup> “World report on Violence Against Children Paulo Sergio Pinheiro and Strategy on Child Protection passed by the UNICEF Executive Board in June, 2008

Communities were visited in order to meet with local community leaders and to get their perceptions regarding the issue. Markets, fuel stations and motor parks were visited to see the places where the children live in settlements and spend some time during the day. A visit was also made to a roadside mound where a child had been recently buried close to the bush where there is a settlement of “child witches”. The police station in Esit Eket was visited to determine the involvement of the police in the issue of “child witches”.

Visits were made to Government offices, in order to have a deeper understanding of the government response and awareness of the issue of “child witches” and to what extent child protection interventions are carried out. Immanuel Hospital, Eket was visited to gather information on available interventions for such children.

Interviews were conducted with pastors of mushroom churches who carry out “deliverance” of children dubbed as witches.

#### **iv) Focus Group Discussions (FGD)**

FGD was carried out using the FGD format in Annex 5 as a guide. These round table discussions were very informative and interactive. It was interesting to note that even amongst staff of the same institution there were differing opinions on belief and attitudes

On the issue of child witches, the FGDS were conducted amongst the following: 10 CRARN staff, 50 CRARN children and 10 parents/grandparents.

#### **v) In Depth Interviews (IDI)**

In dept interviews were targeted at different members of the community in order to get a sense of their beliefs and attitudes, as well as their thoughts on how the problem should be tackled. Ten members of the community interviewed including:

- Community leaders
- Police
- Village youth
- Village head
- Pastors
- Doctor

The respondents were more willing to talk about conditions and experiences in an in depth interview, as opposed to in a group setting where they would be reluctant to talk openly.

11 IDIs were conducted at Government offices such as NAPTIP, Ministry of Women Affairs

#### **vi) Questionnaire Administration**

The questionnaires provided information on

- Characteristics of the respondents
- Belief, Knowledge and perception
- Attitude to child witches by the stigmatised children themselves
- Attitude by non-stigmatised children regarding child witches
- Issues regarding reunification and reintegration in communities
- Recommendations from adults and children

The questionnaires were administered and filled in by the individuals.

- **16 Stigmatised children-** The questionnaires for the children in the CRARN institution were specially designed to elicit their knowledge and attitude on how they are being treated, and the level of stigma. The questionnaires were self administered by the children who could read and write. Most of them were able to write the answers themselves but received assistance in spelling from the teachers.
- **6 Non stigmatised children** – Children in the Stepping Stones school in their highest class which is Primary 2 in the age range of 6-8 years were able to fill the questionnaires themselves. The reasoning behind the administering of questionnaires to non-stigmatised children, was to find out how much other children are aware of this problem and their attitude towards “child witches”
- **10 Adults in Reunited Families** were interviewed privately in order to get a sense of what caused the child to be rejected in the first place and how they were eventually convinced to take the children back.
- **10 Children** in reunited families were interviewed privately in their homes in order to get any information which they may be reluctant to divulge in the presence of their parents
- **6 Teachers** were interviewed in a main stream school

## **6.0 Key Study Findings/ Data Analysis**

The information contained in this section is from the in-depth interviews with key informants and supplemented where appropriate by views expressed in the FGDs. In addition, the views of the respondents from the questionnaire administration are analysed to get a complete picture. A few case studies were developed from the findings and some verbatim quotes are also presented to further strengthen the evidence.

### **6.1 Mapping of Communities**

This mapping has been achieved through the compilation of communities where accused children in this study hail from; as well as communities where respondents said they had encountered cases or where the practice of labelling children as “child witches” exists.

Some respondents said the belief in “child witches” is very strong in most parts of Akwa Ibom State with the practices most endemic in Oron, Ibaka fishing communities. Street children were found during the field visit at the CRARN Academy in Eket, Eket by the Mobil station under the trees, the market place, the Motor Park as well as uncompleted buildings in Uyo. The full list of communities recorded by respondents appears in Table 2:

Table 2: LGAs and communities in Akwa Ibom where the practice of labelling children as “child witches” occurs:

<b>EKET</b>			
Senatorial Zones			
<b>A. EKET CENTRAL</b>	<b>B. EKET URBAN</b>	<b>C. OKON</b>	
Idung Udo	Odoro Enen	Okon	
Effo	Idua		
Ikot Udo Ata	Afaha Uqua		
Ikot Eket	Afaha Eket		
Ikot Uso Ekong	Afia Nsit		
Esit Urua			
Ede Ebuk			
Idung Offiong			
Idung Innang			
<b>ESIT EKET</b>			
Uqua Isidoho		Idung Akpalto	
Ebekpi		Edo	
Udua Akwe		Idung Akpentuan	
Adrounkid		Uquo	
<b>UYO</b>			
Ibesikpo	<b>IBENO</b>	<b>EBOHO</b>	
	Mpanak	Urunoko	
<b>URUAN</b>			
	<b>OKOBO</b>	<b>IKOT ABASI</b>	
Ekpene Obo	Fotakinyang		
Abia Akpan	Idung Akpeakpan		
Edo Atai	Aqua Tong		
Akpautong	Afaha		
Ikot Ayo	Idungobong		
Etebi	Aseng		
<b>ORON</b>			
Udunwe	<b>ETINAN</b>	<b>NSIT UBIOM</b>	<b>MBO</b>
Akai Uro	Mbieto	Uduk Obong	Udiesi
Mbukpo Eyokan	Aka Etinan	Akai	Ibakpa
Ediko			

## 6.2 Historical origin, customary beliefs and local names

Different views were expressed as to the historical origin of “child witches”.

Oral traditional stories and folklore passed down believe that witches are usually frail; old people especially those who outlived their children. In some cases old witches would transfer their craft to their children as a means of protection. Some respondents claim that as more and more aged witches were dying, they found it difficult to find members among the younger population who were born again and religious and therefore incapable of being initiated. They therefore moved to the very young who are impressionable and vulnerable.

Some respondents say that the issue of child witches can be traced to 1998/1999 when two films called “End of the Wicked” and “Coven” by Evangelist Helen Ukpabio of the Liberty church was released. From the time of the airing of the two movies, the church cashed in on it. The act of prophesying that a child was a witch and the carrying out of deliverance became the main preoccupation of the Liberty church.

There are those who trace the origin to lack of parental care. Parents who are irresponsible do not look after their children, but instead send them out as house helps. These children feel insecure and are more likely to hallucinate. They are the ones who are always doing the dishes for example, and yet when a plate is broken they are blamed as having witchcraft.

The majority of the respondents agreed that the emergence of child witches, abandonment and killing is a very recent phenomenon. Teachers of CRARN were the only group where one hundred percent of the staff did not believe at all, in child witches. Other groupings such as NAPTIP, MOWASD teachers in the Stepping Stones School had mixed belief in the existence of child witches with over 50% saying they had encountered them personally. The two institutions which will be seen as key allies in Government, i.e. NAPTIP and MOWASD, have shown a high level of belief in the existence of child witches. Any meaningful intervention will require serious reorientation with these groups. All of the CRARN staff attributes the origin to the presence of the two films mentioned above. Only 20% of non CRARN respondents mentioned the origin of the practices coinciding with the release of the films.

### i) Local names and vocabulary

The knowledge of indigenous names is important not only for how people view the issue of child witches but also for education and enlightenment programmes.

### ii) Child witch

The local name is Ifot and is a direct meaning of witch

There are different variations such as

- *Ndito Ifot*- plural ,
- *Enyen Ifot* - singular
- *Ayin Ifot* –baby witch
- *Etok Ifot* –little witch

In English, they may be called child witches, child of witchcraft, and witchcraft children

A prophet in a church may give a child the name witch or wizard.

Other respondents referred to the children as

- Abandoned children
- Street Children
- Initiates
- Slaves
- Victims
- The accused
- Foreign child

Respondents themselves seemed to view the issue as not to be discussed and referred to it in various terms mostly in hushed tones such as:

- Witchcrafts
- The phenomenon
- Diabolical practices
- Spirit of evil
- Cult
- Unclean spirit
- Witched spirit

Various names were given to the place of domicile of witches such as

- Realm of superstition
- Ancient world
- Bottom of the sea
- 

The different names for describing the removal of witchcraft include

- Deliverance
- Exorcise
- Cast out
- Purification

### **iii) Prevailing Practices**

#### **▪ Reasons for accusations and branding**

Several reasons are given for accusing children of being witches. The varying range of misfortunes in the family or community includes sickness and death in the family, infertility, loss of a job, and poor sales in the market. Other reasons include sleep walking and mental disorders. Also common, is the situation where there is a step mother or father following the remarriage of a biological parent.

Of the children in CRARN who filled self- administered questionnaires the following were mentioned as reasons for accusations:

- Poor market sales- 1,
- Death of parents -2,
- Presence of step parents- 3,
- Non specific -7,

- Prophecy by pastor -2,
- Crying of a baby who was being carried -1<sup>1</sup>

The accusation may also involve the child being accused of initiating his/her siblings. Of the 140 children in CRARN, there were 14 families which had two or more siblings resident at CRARN. An example of children being accused initiating their siblings appears in case study 5 where Erit was accused of initiating her 5 and 2 year old sisters.<sup>2</sup>

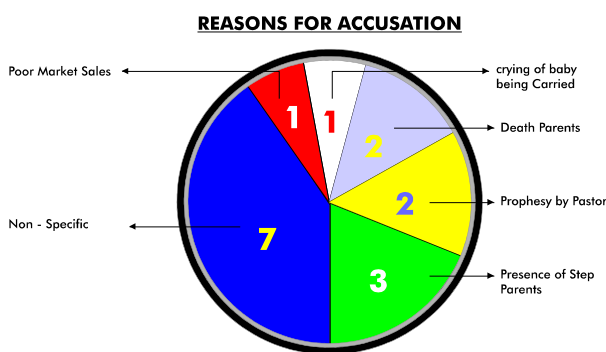
Most of the accused children were middle or last children in the family. Where the first son was accused it was usually by a step parent who saw the first son as a threat to her own child being the heir apparent. The culture of the high premium placed on the first son played out in the fact that most of the accused children were either middle or last children in the family.

The wide range of reasons for accusing the children highlight the variations in socio-cultural perspectives, and the fact that any enlightenment campaign will need to recognise the heterogeneous nature of the society.

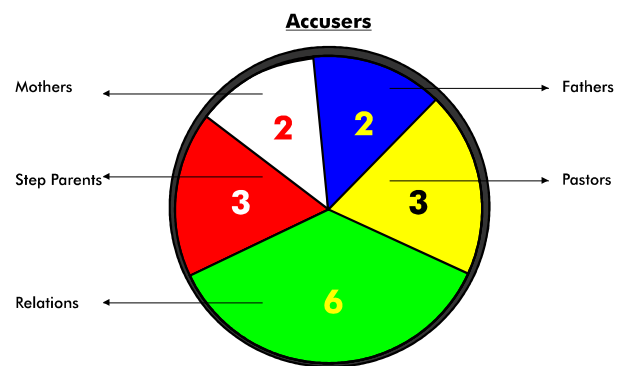
▪ **Accusers**

The accusers or those who pronounce the child a witch include Parents, step parents, siblings, and pastors in churches or herbalists in “healing homes”; the accuser may decide to carry out the local remedy or may seek help from a deliverance minister, pastor or herbalist.

Of the 16 children in CRARN who filled the self - administered questionnaires the following were mentioned as accusers: Father-2, Mother- 2, Pastors-3, and Relations-6 and step parents- 3<sup>3</sup>



Pie chart 1



Pie Chart 2

iv) **Place of deliverance**

<sup>1</sup> See Pie chart 1

<sup>2</sup> See page 24

<sup>3</sup> See Pie Chart 2



Deliverance takes place in the following locations

- Churches
- Prayer House
- Shrine
- Traditional medicine practitioners

**v) Deliverers/Exorcists**

Those who carry out the deliverance include some pastors and evangelists. A child may be suspected or pronounced a witch in a prayer house, during fasting or tarry night or may have been brought by the parent. Parents who have been reunited with their children after staying at CRARN believe that the counselling sessions are “a type of deliverance”.

**vi) Ways of determining a successful deliverance**

Those who claim to deliver use certain signs to claim a successful deliverance. These include vomiting and passing of stool. The gullible clients believe these to be signs despite the fact that the concoctions are so unpalatable that vomiting would be a natural consequence, or that the insertion of herbal enema would cause a child to pass stool frequently.

**6.3 Methods of Deliverance**

These methods were listed by respondents as methods of deliverance which they had either experiences or had heard of:

**i) Forced confession**

Some of the parents in the study claimed that their children confessed willingly to them. However the children when asked privately explained that they were left with no option than to confess for fear of beatings and to avoid the ordeal of further questioning. These confessions are most times made under duress or even hypnosis. Questions are asked repeatedly if she/he is going to the witch world, this questioning may be accompanied by threats until the child succumbs. If the child says “yes” may be beaten. Over time the children may hallucinate.

**ii) Prayer**

The deliverance prayer may go on for days, months or even years. During this time the person administering the deliverance sees visions. This may be accompanied by praise and worship. Part of the deliverance or exorcism may include “assignment” such as buying certain items such as oil and leaving them at a road junction. Informants referred to this as casting out, breaking the yoke or exorcism

**iii) Fasting**

Children are not allowed to eat or drink for periods of up to a week. Fasting may be seven (7) days, one month, or may be repeatedly every Saturday. Fasting may mean abstaining from both food and water. The parent/s of the child is required to join in the fast. They are usually kept in the church premises, and therefore, this constitutes a form of starvation.

**iv) Oil, salt water and other liquid concoctions**

In the process olive oil or concoctions are given to them to drink. Oil is rubbed on their bodies, on heads, in mouth, eye, ear, all over body. The other method is squeezing water and drinking of fluid squeezed from *mbritam* – a bitter plant.

Vomiting or defecating of any of these substances may be taken as proof that the deliverance has succeeded. Herbs are put in the in eyes or ears. “Holy water” and salt may also be used. Some of these concoctions are given in the form of an enema, which is a method commonly used by the medicine men.

**v) Tying up or chaining**

An example was shared by the respondents whereby Uduak Samson Eyo a 10 year girl was tied by the ankles and hung upside down for two days. When she was freed she escaped by running into a bush. This method may also involve the use of chains, blindfolding and being kept in dark room.

**vi) Beating**

Children may be beaten with the local stem-*mbritam* (*see picture below*). The use of a broom stick is also common. In the case of Michael Itah-Esan, he was flogged by a pastor of Jesus Revive Ministry. This left deep gashes in his body after which he was left in a bush to die. It was when people came to photograph the dead body that he was discovered to still be barely alive.



(local plant *mbritam*-good at inflicting maximum pain)

**vi) Hot poker up anus**

An iron instrument or knife may be heated on the fire and inserted into the anus as a means of deliverance leaving behind serious burns.

**vii) Torture by pouring Acid**

One of the children at CRARN - Mary Sunday Dan, aged 9 years her own mother poured acid over her, after she was treated, a huge scar is testimony to the agony she could have gone through.

**viii) Throwing in bush or abandoning in the market**

I met two year old Emilia<sup>1</sup> who was found wandering in the market for two days. She had been simply dumped in the market with no trace of who left her there. Abandonment may be preceded by isolation or locking up.



#### **Case study 2**

Two year old EMILIA was found wandering in the market for two days. She was simply dumped in the market with no trace of who left her there.

#### **ix) Using a saw or knife**

In the case of Jane Ikpezia, aged 8 years her mother used a saw and tried to saw off her head.<sup>2</sup> Body marks and scarification are some times made and herbs inserted in the scars

#### **x) Driving of nails into the head**

The internet report by journalists reported in the Guardian showed pictures of children who had nails driven into their heads and who ended up mentally ill, such a child exists at CRARN.

#### **xi) Pouring of Petrol and setting ablaze**

In the case of 10 year old Jeremiah Victor Friday, his own father poured petrol over him and struck a match and locked him in a room. He escaped by climbing out through the ceiling.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Her photo appears over leaf

<sup>2</sup> Jane's photo appears on the cover page

<sup>3</sup> Case study 7



Case study 3: 14 year Comfort Bassey's brother poured petrol over her

(Comfort Bassey)

If child is not cleansed from the witchcraft, the child is given a local berry – *esire*. This berry is known to be very poisonous. The belief is that if the child is not a witch, he/she will survive after ingesting the poisonous berry. The community comes out to grind the berry and to give it in a large quantity to the child.

#### **xii) Burying alive**

There are reports of instances where a child has been buried up to the neck.

#### **xii) Drinking of cement**

There are reports of children being asked to drink cement mixture so that they could die.

Others means: Of the 50 pupils in the FGD at CRARN, 20 had been beaten in a church, 21 had oil poured over them and 23 had participated in fasting and prayer.

### **6.4 Stigma and discrimination/exclusion**

Stigma is the common thread that weaves through all the findings. At the centre of the factors that influence the stigma are the social norms (accepted behaviour), social values (accepted aspects of importance) and social beliefs (ideas accepted to be true). These cultural elements do not vary from urban to rural areas neither do they vary from educated to non-educated.

Once a child is branded as witch, a high level of suspicion begins. The chances of the stigma being a life long label are high unless the child relocates or is wholeheartedly welcomed back into the community. The fact that the child is taunted in school by the peers and teachers, and that this may continue in the home and within the community may support the argument for

institutionalising the children. There is also the problem of the lack of trust that exists between the child and the parent who accused him or her in the first place. Case study 4 below clearly describes these different social factors.

However, the fact that the children who live in the support centre will one day need to move on either to higher education or into the larger community will need to be carefully considered.

Looking at the fact that most of the respondents in the home wanted to go back to their families, and yet some of them who had been reunited were unhappy due to the stigma they suffered in the wider community, one can only conclude that each case would need to be treated on its own merit. There was a difference in opinion regarding the permanent or temporary institutionalisation of the children from respondents during FGDs for these same reasons.

According to the World Report on *Violence Against Children*, numerous studies have established the negative impact of institutionalisation and the existence of high rates of violence such as abuse by members of staff as well as the lack of uniformity in patterns of de-institutionalisation. The report recommends other family-based alternatives when family reintegration is not possible.<sup>1</sup>

## 6.5 Trauma and long term susceptibility



### CASE STUDY 4

Idorenyen and her brother Abasinbong were accused by their dad of being witches. After spending 2 years in CRARN, they now live with their paternal grandmother.

She is benefiting from a scholarship from CRARN to go to secondary school. Idorenyin however is not enjoying going to school and would love to go to a school far from home where she is not known to study. She complains that both the students and teachers isolate her. The children do not play the local clapping game “noti” with her at school.

Her two brothers have suffered from the stigma so much so that her eldest brother is being held in a remand home and the middle brother has said he would not like to go to school.

In her own words, “I will never live with my father again”

<sup>1</sup> World report on Violence Against children Paulo Sergio Pinheiro pgs 183-186

From the analysis of available secondary information, it was clear that the study on Child witches could not be confined to physical trauma alone.

The interrelatedness of the physical, social and psychological factors becomes a factor in determining the effect of these beliefs and practices on the children. The children have scars of varying sizes and proportions as a constant reminder of what they have suffered. These physical scars are not as deeply etched as the emotional scars which these children bear as evidenced by their struggling to hold back tears when recounting their ordeals. There is also the problem of not being able to forgive those who accused them in the first place. It is more difficult when it is a parent especially a mother. In the words of Ime Robson whose mother accused her of being a witch “*I felt that what she did was bad, and she does not want me, so I do not want her*”

The feeling of rejection and abandonment coupled with insecurity and low self esteem may lead to depression, alcohol and drug abuse as well as violence.

### **6.7 Children Vulnerability**

These children by virtue of accusations and abandonment are extremely vulnerable simply because the two institutions which should normally provide safe haven - the family/home and the church (for Christians) are the very ones which constituted a threat. The children are therefore exposed to prostitution either as means of survival or as easy prey for sexual perverts looking for underage children. Thus they are also vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. Also, in the context of HIV/AIDS further investigation would be required in order to determine how many of these children are actually orphans of AIDS deaths who suffer a double tragedy of being blamed for causing the death of their parents. They are also easy prey for ritualists who use human body parts for their rituals. Less likely to be reported among the disappeared since they are ostracised and parents have cut them off. Cross border influence and migration since Gabon and Equatorial Guinea are boundary countries. Mob attacks are frequent even extending to those who either care for them or shelter them. Sometimes children are simply abandoned with no trace of their parents and they are too young to give any information<sup>1</sup>

Below are some verbatim expressions about their feelings:

*I want parents to take good care of their children-Idorenyin Edon*

*I feel they should arrest my step-father-Nsikan Sunday Umoh*

*I feel so bad when my step-mother called me a witch, I could not play or talk with people- Paul Ene*

The UNICEF Child Protection Strategy advocates for a rights-based approach in creating a protective environment, where girls and boys are free from violence, exploitation and unnecessary separation from family.<sup>2</sup>

### **6.7 Role of Churches**

Information from the survey revealed that the churches which are supposed to provide shelter and succour have become the very place where the violations are further perpetuated.

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<sup>1</sup> See case study 2 of Emilia

<sup>2</sup> UNICEF Child Protection Strategy 1.2 pg 1

Respondents gave the names of the churches where they sought deliverance.<sup>1</sup> The churches referred to here, are usually non-orthodox or Pentecostal.

Churches have deliverance ministers who claim to be able to exorcise the witch. They fuel the belief by being the ones to either pronounce the child a witch or offer confirmation after which they offer treatment. This treatment is called deliverance and the price for deliverance ranges from 20,000 to 40,000 naira per child. Whereas in the interviews with pastors, they claimed to use only prayer and fasting, children and parents reported cases of beating, starvation, and other types of deliverance.

Other types of deliverance carried out by churches and prayer houses, include those mentioned in section 6.4. Some churches which make efforts at reunification with families are stigmatised by their communities. According to a senior pastor of Redeemed Covenant Ministry “I suffered the loss of members due to my efforts to send children back to their homes.” He no longer carries out deliverance but partners with CRARN and refers members of his congregation CRARN.<sup>2</sup>

A family would normally seek spiritual advice and support from the church in times of need. The fact that there are so many churches points to the fact that it is a lucrative business and they are enjoying patronage of members. Needs to be a regulatory body which will ensure that the churches are registered and their activities monitored

The fact that they constitute in some instances, both the accuser and the deliverer by being the first to pronounce the child is a witch. They may even go on to diagnose that the child has initiated his or her siblings. Promptly offers deliverance.

## **7.0 Stakeholders’ Efforts**

It will not be possible to make significant achievements without political support, and involvement of stakeholders to achieve transformational change at all levels

### **7.1 Government:**

Existing Government documents, policies and efforts: Following are efforts that have been made by Government:

- Akwa Ibom War against Trafficking and Child Abuse programme (AKWATCHAP)
- NAPTIP State Working Group -2005
- Akwa Ibom State Children’s Parliament
- The child rights bill was submitted by the children’s parliament and has been before the AKS House of Assembly since June 2005 is yet to be signed in to law.
- Ministry of Women Affairs home for abandoned children
- Prevent Abandonment of Children Today (PACT)
- PACT was first held in 2006 and next in 2007. It takes the form of a seminar with various speakers including lawyers, police, youth leaders, politicians, and children’s parliament. PACT has created a lot of awareness in the locality of Eket where it was held. The

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<sup>1</sup> The list in annex 8 was supplied by CRARN

<sup>2</sup> He asked for anonymity in view of the stigma this might cause

strategy employed by PACT can be replicated for a wider audience. Plans are underway to bring down to community level and to go to schools

Advocacy efforts include PACT an annual enlightenment programme, and advocacy rallies such as was held on the 15/5/08 World Family day, when a group of stakeholders including the Commissioner for women Affairs, and CRARN children, marched to the Governor asking for child rights law, support for food, shelter, education and health. They also had an internet petition sponsored by Kelli Stowe signed by more than 1,000 people in over 30 countries. The Governor received the petition from head of Children Council. The Governor promised to be father and senior brother the children. He made commitments such as promising to pass the Child Rights bill by August and work with MOWASD for children, blamed the pastors.

## **7.2 Civil Society Organisations**

### **i) Childs Rights and Rehabilitation Network (CRARN)**

CRARN is community based, with very dedicated staff but can only cope with a few children. The children are able to continue their education, receive counselling, feeding, shelter and Medicare largely through support from Stepping Stones and occasional philanthropists. CRARN Networks with other NGOs, Government departments such as MOWASD and NAPTIP. They have a good working relationship with the police who have helped in ensuring that a few parents who have abandoned their children are forced to take them back. Akwa Ibom is an oil producing State and Mobil oil workers who work in the very remote areas are able to alert CRARN when they find abandoned children.

### **ii) Stepping Stones Nigeria (SSN)**

SSN supports the work of CRARN, by paying staff, building structures, supporting feeding and giving scholarships. This is in the form of a mentoring SSN has a model primary school but does not have accused children in the school. The Founder of Stepping Stones resides in the United Kingdom.

## **8.0 Strategies that have worked:**

### **i) Reunification**

The process of reuniting children with their families is a delicate one but offers for now the only glimmer of hope CRARN has successfully reunited 16 children with their families.

### **ii) Counselling**

Efforts should be stepped up through communication and dialogue with the communities to change behaviour and convince parents that witchcraft does not exist. This however has been rarely achieved because once the child is labelled a “witch”, it is considered a life long label.

Convince parents that CRARN has “delivered” them. Counselling of a child which is called “deliverance”. CRARN counsels both the children and the parents. For parents who believe that only deliverance will heal their children, the counselling of their children is believed by them to be deliverance. Efforts should be stepped up to counsel children who had been coerced into confessing to denounce the confession and convince them that they are not “witches”.



### **iii) Arm of the law**

By using the police to trace and force the parents to collect their abandoned children Signed undertaking in court. In the case of *Utitufon* who is seven years old she was falsely accused of killing her father. Her mother took her to a church where she was beaten after which she dumped her at CRARN. CRARN got the police to arrest her mother who then collected *Utitufon* once she was convinced that she had been delivered.

### **iv) Confidentiality is critical**

Maintaining privacy and secrecy concerning the issues with children and among their relatives through sending children to far away schools where teachers and students will not taunt them in their new places of aboard. Working through willing members of the family and extended family and work with the grandparents in the absence of direct parents has worked successfully and enhanced by the confidentiality that safeguards the children. These influencers in the family tend to have a strong say in what happens in the family.

In some cases the grandparent will take in the child even in defiance of his or her own direct child. Cases of success have been recorded in which a member of the family accepts the child. The child then lives happily with the family member in a totally new environment where the stigma of being a witch is not present.

### **v) Day “deliverances”**

This has been shown to be one of the most successful strategies for unification for the following reasons:

- The child stays with her nuclear family rather than having to go to a member of the extended family.
- The daily sessions of counselling are considered to be a type of deliverance by the parents.
- The fact that the child does not live in the institution reduces the likelihood of being stigmatised
- A high level of confidentiality is maintained.
- The child’s education is uninterrupted since the counselling sessions do not require missing school for long periods of time
- The long period of time and repeated efforts in trying to reunite children who have been institutionalised will be avoided

### **vi) Scholarships as incentives**

Some of the children who have been reunited have been given scholarships as an incentive to keep them in school and reduce the risk of their being abandoned by their families due to poverty.



#### **CASE STUDY 5**

7 year old Erit is the first in a family of three children. She was accused of being a witch by her father. When her father died the church accused her of not only killing her father but initiating her 5 year old and 2 year old sisters. Her mother, Affiong took the three children to a herbalists who prescribed a herbal enema. She was referred later by a pastor to CRARN. After 3 sessions of daily counselling she became convinced that the children had been delivered. She received a scholarship for Erit Affiong took us to the back of her house where the interview was conducted in hushed tones. According to her” once it is noticed by the community, you are nothing “. Her advice to other parents is “Do not expose the child”.



### **Case Study 6**

5 year old Goodness Bright is the fourth child in a family of 6 children. She was accused of causing her fathers business to collapse. Her parents spent 38,000 naira at a herbalist who gave herbal enema. They then went to several churches that almost starved them to death with repeated fasts. One of the churches took 40,000 from them. They then went to another pastor who told them of CRARN. They had two sessions of counselling. According to the mother, Goodness “no longer sees things at night”

## **8.0 Challenges**

8.1 One of the greatest challenges is the reluctance of members of the public to speak openly about the subject of witches. It was easier to speak to groups who were already involved in advocacy or working with CRARN such as NAPTIP, MOWASD, SSN and the police. It is such a stigmatised subject that the mere mention of the subject caused a walking away or outright refusal to discuss the matter. It was therefore difficult to get a full complement of respondents such as school teachers and pupils as well as pastors. An account was given of verbal abuse on a foreign journalist who attempted to interview deliverance pastors.

## **9.0 Limitations of study**

The study is limited to Eket and Esit Eket LGAs. It does not therefore claim to be a State wide study and does not give a comprehensive view of all the variations that may exist in the state. The study should be viewed as largely exploratory and descriptive to serve as a point of reference or baseline for evaluating any future interventions. The burden of proof is clear, as long as the issue of witches is shrouded in mystery and there is no proof of children flying on brooms or changed /metamorphosed into animals one is left to superstition and speculation.



### **CASE STUDY 7: The Case of Jeremiah Victor Friday 10 years**

Jeremiah's father lost his job as an off shore oil worker. The father consulted a Pastor who accused Jeremiah of being the cause of the ill luck.

His father poured Petrol over him and set him ablaze. Jeremiah managed to escape through a ceiling. He was rescued by CRARN who treated him for burns and took the case to court. His father was convicted with a sentence of life imprisonment with hard labour. Jeremiah who was desperate to go home and be with his father, pleaded for pardon.

The judge therefore got Jeremiah's father to sign an undertaking before the child was released to him. After eight months Jeremiah's younger sister was knocked down by a motor cyclist and lost some teeth. Jeremiah was accused by his mother for causing the accident. Jeremiah was repeatedly tortured after which he ran back to CRARN.

#### **Discussion/dilemma**

The fact that Jeremiah's father is in breach of the court order means that he faces imprisonment. The dilemma now remains the fact that

Imprisoning him will mean the loss of the bread winner in the family driving them to poverty and will worsen Jeremiah's position.

## **10. RECOMMENDATIONS**

In the light of the foregoing findings and information the following are recommendations for mitigating the problem of abandoned children

### **i) Legal and regulatory**

- Advocate for the immediate passing of child rights Act
- Establishment of family courts and a task force to protect children
- Establish an agency to regulate churches.
- Prosecution of offenders and perpetrators.
- Strict regulation by the National Film Censors board

### **ii) Tracking**

Locate, track, number and document all street children.

A census of street, abandoned, accused and institutionalised children should be taken in order to give an idea of the magnitude of the problem and for interventions to be meaningful

### **iii) Information and public enlightenment**

- Public enlightenment programmes especially at the grass root level. Drama troupes will be a useful resource for public enlightenment since they work by using local content to develop a script leading towards behaviour change.
- Inclusion of child protection in the State school curriculum in social or religious studies.

- Harnessing the expertise of civil society and other partners such as Christian Association of Nigeria, political parties and oil companies.

#### **iv) Counselling**

- Reintegration and reunification with families and communities for children already residing in shelters.
- Provision of counselling centres for day case rather than residential Clients.
- Massive training of counsellors

#### **v) Parents and communities**

Strengthen the protective role of families through promotion of parenting education.

Strengthen the protective role of communities through non-coercive and non-judgemental approaches.

Whilst there is a strong need for significant change in attitude to children by all concerned, perpetrators need to be punished publicly as a deterrent.

Use of other family-based alternatives when family reintegration is not possible.

#### **vi) Schools**

Inclusion in the State school curriculum in social or religious studies

Equal rights and inclusiveness of all children in schools

The use of drama and debates regularly in order to destigmatise the issue

Standard model shelters for temporary use only

#### **vii) Child Protection CSOs**

The strategy for day-case “deliverance” developed by CRARN in reunification is replicable and can provide a basis from which the State Government can refine their efforts.

CSOs can be supported to conduct massive public enlightenment, provide basic services –food, health and education and spearhead advocacy

#### **viii) Children**

Plans should be made to develop a well targeted safe reintegration strategy for each child.

There is the need to integrate them into main stream schools and not segregate or institutionalise them unless it is absolutely necessary or when their lives are threatened.

Voices from the children themselves recommended the following:

“I want parents to take good care of their children.”

“Support my grandmother who is taking care of me”

“Give me skill training to make me survive in future”

“I want government to give me food, clothes and education”

“I want government to build a house for us”

“Give my mother money for business so that she can take care of us”

#### **ix) Advocacy**

The need for advocacy with the key decision-makers and gatekeepers at State, Local Government and community level will be critical if children are to be protected.

In order to develop an appropriate strategy all players need to come to the table.

**x) Churches**

Registration of all churches

Monitoring of church activities

Mandatory Inclusion of child protection in sermon notes

**xi) Dissemination strategy**

A good dissemination strategy of this report should be embarked upon to ensure that

It serves as a tool for strategic planning, advocacy, programming for child protection in AKS and any other State where the practices are prevalent.

**Replication of the assignment**

In view of reports of incidence in other states a comparative study should be embarked upon for a holistic intervention.

## **ANNEXES**

- 1) Terms of reference
- 2) List of books and websites reviewed
- 3) Sample Introduction letter
- 4) List of People Met
- 5) Sample of FGD guide
- 6) Sample of IDI
- 7) Sample of Questionnaires
- 8) List of churches
- 9) Mapping of communities

## **Supporting Documents**

- 1) Taped confession
- 2) Sample letter of complaint
- 3) Transcripts of questionnaires

## **Bibliography**

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- 4) World Report on Violence Against Children – Paulo Sergio Pinheiro
- 5) Assessment of Violence Against Children at the Basic Education in Nigeria