

'Child Witches' Horrifically Abused to 'Beat the Devil Out'

Spiritual warfare lurks in the shadows of churches in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where priests and pastors enact countless horrors in the name of fighting the devil.

Families cast more than 50,000 children out of their homes, claiming sorcery and witchcraft are suffocating their loved ones.

"These witches they eat human flesh, they drink human blood," Gallicane Catholic Church Father Alexis tells the *MailOnline*. "It is the work of the devil. Witchcraft kills the love within the child. It fills them with hate, it makes them eat their father, fight with their brother. Witchcraft is part of our tradition; it is part of Congolese culture. Children can become infected with sorcery but we carry out exorcisms to help children find their families again."

The accusations are tied to poverty, *USA Today* reports. If a family says a child is a witch, they can kick the child out of the house, affording the family more money for themselves.

Human Rights Watch estimates that 70 percent of the roughly 15,000 street children in the Congolese capital were kicked out of their homes after being accused of witchcraft.

According to a report by United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), witch accusations are exploited by revivalist, charismatic or Pentecostal churches—not just Catholic churches.

"Their pastor-prophets fight against witchcraft in the name of

God, identifying witches through visions and dreams, and then offering treatment—divine healing and exorcism—to the supposed witches,” the report reads. “This ‘spiritual’ work, often of a violent nature, reinforces beliefs in witchcraft and increases accusations.”

Despite an increased awareness of the horrors through articles and BBC documentaries, the practice lingers.

The *Daily Mail* detailed the exorcisms priests and pastors perform.

“Squeezing a toddler’s eyeballs and shoving his thumb into her tiny nose a Catholic priest purges a child of the devil, one of many exorcisms he carries out every day,” reads a recent article.

“Flicked with holy water, her face smeared with olive oil and poked violently in the stomach, two-and-a-half-year-old Angel bursts into tears as she is rid of the evil spirits that lurk within her.

“The child wriggles to free herself but her mother holds on firmly, insistent that she endures the exorcism to protect her from the sorcery that many in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) believe controls their lives.”

Though child witchcraft is part of Congolese tradition, organizations like UNICEF are actively seeking to protect the children from the violent exorcisms, which includes a regulation of both traditional healers and Catholic and Pentecostal churches.

Once set free from the “sorcery,” the children are then cast out on the street, perpetuating a devastating cycle of poverty and accused witchcraft.