

Is Casting Out Devils Too Dangerous? Another Death Reported

Amid a recent string of exorcism-related deaths and violence, German prosecutors said Wednesday that a 41-year-old Frankfurt woman died during a brutal exorcism gone horribly awry, it was reported.

German police arrested five suspects, including two teenage boys, for allegedly pummeling the woman's stomach and chest "in a bizarre bid to free her from the 'demons' inside of her," the *Mirror Online* reported.

A judge had issued an arrest warrant for a 44-year-old woman, her 21-year-old son, her 19-year-old daughter and two 15-year-old boys.

The woman had been tied to a bed and beaten extensively, prosecutors said. To stifle the woman's screams, a towel was allegedly stuffed in her mouth and she choked to death in the hotel room, prosecutors said.

The woman's body was covered in bruises, according to reports by the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*.

Prosecutors say they had been attempting to rid demons from the woman who was believed to be possessed.

Meanwhile, police say a second possible victim was found in a house in nearby Hesse.

She was suffering from hypothermia and dying of thirst, they said. The house had reportedly been rented by the alleged exorcists.

The incident follows reports of an increase in exorcisms and

exorcism-related deaths in recent years.

"It is a big phenomenon," says J. Gordon Melton, a Methodist minister who directs the Institute for the Study of American Religion. "There is a lot of exorcism going on."

Last year, two women stabbed and killed two children during an "exorcism" in Maryland. One woman, Monifa Sanford, pleaded guilty to first-degree murder. Sanford and Zakieya Avery, the mother of the children, believed they were "demon assassins," WUSA9 reported.

The women told investigators that they believed evil spirits jumped successively between the bodies of the children, ages 1 and 2, and that an exorcism was necessary to drive the demons out.

"It began with an attempt to break the neck of the youngest child; it proceeded into strangulation and ultimately graduated into stabbing," State Attorney John McCarthy reportedly said during trial.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, families have cast more than 50,000 children out of their homes, claiming sorcery and witchcraft are destroying their loved ones. In some cases, exorcisms are performed, and many involve violence.

"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.

In 2013, four members of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church faced charges of kidnapping, acts of torture and barbarism for performing an exorcism on a teenage girl.

The four were accused of tying up the 19-year-old Cameroonian girl in a crucifixion-type position and keeping her bound for seven days to a mattress. The attorney for the men said they

were “acting in faith” because they were convinced she had been possessed by a demon.

A spokesman for the Seventh Day Adventists said the men had been expelled from church before the alleged attack and that what happened had nothing to do with their teaching.