

A rapid literature review of evidence on child abuse linked to faith or belief



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CWRC Working Paper No. 15

October 2012

The Childhood Wellbeing Research Centre is an independent research centre with funding from the Department for Education. It is a partnership between the Thomas Coram Research Unit (TCRU) and other centres at the Institute of Education, the Centre for Child and Family Research (CCFR) at Loughborough University and the Personal Social Services Research Unit (PSSRU) at the University of Kent.

This report was produced by the Childhood Wellbeing Research Centre (CWRC) and funded by the Department for Education.

The views that are expressed in this work are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education.

Published by and available from:

Childhood Wellbeing Research Centre (CWRC), Institute of Education, 20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL.

www.cwrc.ac.uk

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Executive Summary

- The Childhood Wellbeing Research Centre (CWRC), based at the Institute of Education, was commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) to conduct a small-scale review of previous research on 'child abuse linked to faith or belief'. This will be used to help inform future policy in the area.
- The review set out to address the following questions:
 - Q1: What does the literature tell us about the incidence of abuse in the UK, and other selected countries where belief in witchcraft and related concepts is a factor?
 - Q2: What is known about the characteristics and context of child abuse linked to faith or belief in the UK and other selected countries?
 - Q3: What does the literature reveal about good practice and lessons to be learned for practitioners, agencies and communities so as to reduce this type of child abuse in the UK in the future?
 - Q4: What are the gaps in the evidence base?
- The term 'child abuse linked to faith or belief' is open to multiple interpretations, and this review was confined to those specified below; others, not reviewed here, include types of child abuse that are loosely associated with 'faith' or 'belief', such as medical neglect related to religious belief. We should also note methodological difficulties in distinguishing between 'witchcraft' and 'spirit possession' and between 'ritual child abuse' and 'satanic child abuse' (see Methodology and Appendix One). Literature included in this review covers four areas of child abuse linked to faith or belief:
 - Abuse that occurs as a result of a child being accused of witchcraft or of being a witch
 - Abuse that occurs as a result of a child being accused of being 'possessed by spirits' – that is, 'spirit possession'
 - Ritualistic abuse
 - Satanic abuse.
- Key findings:
 - Q1 'What does the literature tell us about the incidence of child abuse linked to faith or belief in the UK and other selected countries?'
 - There is a dearth of literature quantifying the incidence and characteristics of child abuse linked to faith or belief in the UK. For **witchcraft and/or spirit possession**, there are two main sources presenting evidence of incidence: Stobart's analysis of Metropolitan Police cases

(2006; 2009) and the more recent (as yet unpublished) research from La Fontaine (2012).

- Stobart identified 38 cases of child abuse (involving 47 children) between January 2000 and 2006 that can be linked to accusations of 'possession' and 'witchcraft'. These cases were mostly from the London area (32/38 cases, with the rest from elsewhere in the UK). La Fontaine (2012) has recently followed up the work of Stobart in order to try and disentangle accusations of 'witchcraft' from those of 'spirit possession'. This work is currently unpublished but we were given access to it and permission to reference her findings in our report. She identified what she describes as 26 'clear cases' of witchcraft between 2000 and 2008. These were identified through a mixture of sources: 14/26 came from cases tagged for Project Violet, 7/26 came from cases collected by Carly Thrale for her reports to the Metropolitan Police and which were subsequently used by Stobart for her report to DfES). The remainder came from case information collected independently by La Fontaine. All were UK based. Stobart and La Fontaine argue that: a) the group of children that could be identified as being involved in abuse related to spirit possession and/or witchcraft represents a very small proportion of all children who are abused in the UK; b) the true number of cases is likely to be underreported, especially to the police.
 - **Ritual and satanic abuse** should not be considered as identical with witchcraft and/or spirit possession but it is included in the definition of 'child abuse linked to faith or belief' used for this review. The data reporting on ritual and satanic abuse stem largely from the US (with the exception of La Fontaine, 1994 and Gallagher, 1996; 2001) and from the period 1990-1995. The UK literature included in this review suggests: a total of 84 cases from around the UK (concentrated in the East Midlands, London and Manchester) could be identified as 'ritual and organised abuse' between 1987 and 1992. (Cases appeared to peak in 1989 and then decline – La Fontaine, 1994: 7-8). These represent a small minority of all child protection cases in the UK (La Fontaine, 1998). Gallagher et al. (1996: 218) identified 45 cases between January 1988 and December 1991 that met the criteria of 'organised, ritual or institutional abuse' in England and Wales.
- Q2 'What is known about the characteristics and context of child abuse linked to faith or belief in the UK and other selected countries?'

child abuse linked to faith or belief in the UK and other areas, and also the small number of cases identified in the literature so far, perhaps this finding is not surprising. Much of what is known to date about lessons to be learned and good practice stems mainly from the work of a small number of non-government organisations such as Africans Unite Against Child Abuse (AFRUCA), Churches' Child Protection Advisory Service (CCPAS), the Congolese Family Centre (CFC) and the Victoria Climbié Foundation (VCF). These organisations are working directly with the communities involved to challenge this type of abuse. Much of the available practice literature however has limitations: it has not been robustly evaluated and should therefore be considered as 'practice wisdom'.

- The published literature on good practice identifies four main areas of best practice, and we added a fifth, derived from points raised in academic literature. These areas of good practice are: Understanding the wider context; Early identification; Developing partnerships with communities; Working with places for worship and faith communities; Professional development.
- Q4: What are the gaps in the evidence base?
 - Child abuse linked to faith or belief remains a relatively new area of research in the field of child protection. It is therefore less appropriate to speak of 'gaps' in the research and more appropriate to speak of 'priorities' for research and practice. These priority areas are reflected in the recommendations below.
- Key recommendations:
 - Incidences of 'child abuse linked to faith or belief' need to be systematically recorded by social workers and other professionals in order that a more accurate picture can be derived about the true number of cases involved. It would also be valuable if the type of abuse (physical, emotional, sexual or neglect) were routinely recorded.
 - More support could be provided to frontline professionals (such as the police and social workers) to help them systematically to record and collect data that specifically identifies cases of 'witchcraft', 'spirit possession', 'ritual child abuse' and 'satanic child abuse'. At present such cases are not routinely recorded;
 - Guidance could be developed to help identify what is meant by and included within the concept of 'child abuse linked to faith or belief'. This would be helpful for practitioners when identifying and distinguishing between different types of child abuse linked to faith or belief cases;

- Further research is needed to explore the attitudes and responses of child protection professionals in relation to religion and child abuse, in order for practitioners to take account of the religion and beliefs of those they are working with (see Gilligan and Furness, 2006).
- Practitioners should be encouraged to make better use of tools that exist; for example, tools developed by the London Safeguarding Children Board to help agencies working with families where there are concerns about parental care. Additional tools/guidance may need to be developed if existing tools do not fully meet requirements.
- With the exception of one evaluation (the Safeguarding Children's Rights special initiative by Briggs et al., 2011), there have been very few evaluations of initiatives operating in this field, though the number of initiatives is increasing. Much of what is known to date about lessons to be learned and good practice stems mainly from the work of a small number of non-government organisations, including Africans Unite Against Child Abuse (AFRUCA), Churches' Child Protection Advisory Service (CCPAS), the Congolese Family Centre (CFC) and the Victoria Climbié Foundation (VCF). More research is needed to evaluate local initiatives.

Background

In early 2011, following a consultation on child abuse relating to a belief in witchcraft and spirit possession, a working group¹ was set up by the Department for Education (DfE) to understand better the principal issues. It was agreed that stronger coordination of activity was needed both nationally and locally to raise awareness, develop the skills of practitioners and to support communities themselves in combating and resisting such abuse.

Since then, the working group has worked at both national and regional levels to produce a national action plan for England to tackle child abuse linked to faith or belief (DfE, 2012). The action plan focuses on four themes: engaging communities; empowering practitioners; supporting victims and witnesses; and communicating key messages. The DfE requested that the Childhood Wellbeing Research Centre (CWRC) conduct a small-scale review of previous research in this area. This would be used to help inform future policy.

Policy context

Following recent high profile cases, such as those of Victoria Climbié (2000) and Child B (1995), it became apparent that belief in spirit possession and accusations of witchcraft may have contributed to a small number of cases of child abuse. In response to the Victoria Climbié case, the government initiated an independent inquiry, The Victoria Climbié Inquiry, which led to a series of reforms in the child protection system. The case of Child B led the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) to set up a working group, Project Violet, to assess the impact it might have on child protection in London. The initial project was confined to the London area.

Further to this, the MPS initiated the Community Partnership Pilot Project which consulted African and Asian communities in two parts of London about child protection issues. It was clear from the discussions that took place that the belief that children can be “possessed” was widespread across both communities and could in some circumstances lead to abuse.

In 2007 the Department for Education and Skills published non-statutory guidance, *Safeguarding Children from Abuse Linked to a Belief in Spirit Possession* (HMSO, 2007), intended to help practitioners apply 'Working Together to Safeguard Children 2006' to the particular needs of children who are abused or neglected because of a belief in spirit possession.

Policy responses at a regional level have included the creation of a second Community Partnership Project (2007) by the London Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB). LSCB has undertaken the strategic work to develop

¹ 'The National Working Group on Child Abuse linked to Faith or Belief'.

partnerships between statutory authorities, local groups, communities and third sector agencies to better protect children who come from minority ethnic groups. This has included developed strategy and practice guidance for safeguarding children in minority ethnic, culture and faith communities, groups and families with specific reference to spirit possession, and also specially appointed practitioners to work with local communities on safeguarding children.

This remains a relatively new area of policy, which continues to develop as more incidences of child abuse linked to faith or belief are uncovered. In early 2011, following a consultation on the issue of child abuse relating to a belief in witchcraft and spirit possession, a working group² was set up to better understand the issue and to explore how the Government can work with local authorities, voluntary and community organisations and local areas to tackle this problem. It was agreed that stronger coordination of activity was needed both nationally and locally to raise awareness of this issue, develop the skills of practitioners and to support communities themselves to resist such abuse.

Since then, a national action plan for England to tackle child abuse linked to faith or belief has been developed (DfE, 2012). This action plan was created to help raise awareness of the issue and to encourage people to take practical steps to prevent such abuse. It has been developed in partnership with members of the National Working Group, including central government and local statutory partners, faith leaders, voluntary sector organisations and the Metropolitan Police and other individuals and organisations. The action plan focuses on four themes: engaging communities; empowering practitioners; supporting victims and witnesses; and communicating our messages. The plan identifies key problems and solutions under 16 actions and includes a number of short case studies profiling some of the work already undertaken to tackle this type of abuse. It highlights areas where more needs to be done by government, local agencies, voluntary and faith and community sector partners to address this form of abuse.

² 'The National Working Group on child Abuse linked to Faith or Belief'

Aims

The overall aim of this review was to provide a short report drawing together current knowledge of research on the issue of child abuse linked to faith or belief, spirit possession and witchcraft. The evidence to be included was to focus on published research.

This is not a full-scale literature review. The aim was to carry out a review of literature and to extract messages from the most relevant documents and reports in order to address the questions stated below. The review was to focus largely on UK literature, whilst also searching for relevant literature from selected OECD countries (the US, Belgium and France).

Research questions

- Q1: What does the literature tell us about the incidence of child abuse linked to faith or belief in the UK and other selected countries?
- Q2: What is known about the characteristics and context of child abuse linked to faith or belief in the UK and other selected countries?
- Q3: What does the literature reveal about good practice and lessons to be learned for practitioners, agencies and communities so as to reduce this type of child abuse in the UK in the future?
- Q4: What are the gaps in the evidence base?

Methodology

The literature search primarily aimed to identify published and peer-reviewed literature. However, because of the lack of peer-reviewed literature, some grey literature (i.e. non-academic literature and unpublished data) was also included – such as, for example, research reports funded by UK government departments.

Whilst our approach draws on elements of a systematic review methodology for searching and screening (see Appendix One), we were not able to carry out anything approximating to a full systematic review. However, we have attempted to capture messages from as much of the relevant literature as possible, given the available resources and timeframe.

Appendix one details the different stages of our search strategy, and the process of refining our inclusion criteria.

Final inclusion criteria

The inclusion criteria used to screen and include studies for this review required that we:

- focus very largely on papers from the UK; however, some papers from selected OECD countries could also be included (from the US, Belgium and France). Cases from Africa would be excluded;
- focus on papers dating from 1995 onwards;
- include only papers where child abuse was explicitly referenced;
- include all variants of child abuse – including: physical, emotional, sexual and neglect;
- include any examples of religious belief of families;
- include papers that focus on child abuse linked to any religious group, or related to 'witchcraft' or 'spirit possession'. Sexual abuse by paedophiles within a religious community (for example, Roman Catholic abuse) was outside the scope of this review. However, abuse that occurs by faith leaders who accuse children of being witches or possessed by evil spirits was included.

Definitional issues and caveat

Searching and screening for material that could be defined as 'child abuse linked to faith or belief' was problematic because there is no agreed definition of or consensus about the concept of 'child abuse linked to faith or belief' within the UK (or further afield). It is possible that our decisions as to what to include reveal a bias in respect of some types of child abuse linked to faith or belief. Certainly the review refers almost exclusively to UK child abuse related to spirit possession and witchcraft, and the evidence included is often confined to reporting on the same few authors who have published evidence in this area. The principal reason for this is that there is a dearth of UK evidence on the incidence and characteristics of other types of child abuse linked to faith or belief, such as that which occurs as part of a cult or satanic ritual (most of this evidence comes from the US).

We do not, therefore, claim that this is an exhaustive or systematic review, although we have sought to capture evidence from a wide range of sources, particularly those in the UK. Key messages have been extracted from the most significant documents and reports, and the evidence collated to address the research questions as guided by the search criteria.

Much of the literature presenting data on the incidence and/or characteristics of child abuse linked to faith or belief tends to conflate cases of 'witchcraft' and 'spirit possession' and does not, therefore, clearly distinguish between them. While most religious groups have a history of believing in individuals who are possessed by evil spirits (Barker, 2009; La Fontaine, 2012), only in Africa is this belief in evil spirits reported to be linked with witchcraft and the idea that children may be witches (Barker, 2009). It is debated in the literature (La Fontaine, 2012) whether cases of witchcraft are the same as cases of spirit possession, and whether these two types of child abuse linked to faith or

belief should be grouped together. However, this review was restricted by the available data and constrained to group 'witchcraft' and 'spirit possession' together in order to address the first two research questions, on the incidence and characteristics of this type of abuse.

Similarly, it was difficult to present data on the incidence and characteristics of ritualistic abuse separately from satanic abuse because the literature often discusses them together, even though child abuse that is reported to be part of a ritual may or may not be carried out in the name of Satan. For example, Lloyd (1991) argues that 'the term 'ritual child abuse' is often used interchangeably with the term 'cult ritual child abuse' and that the former 'lacks precision' (p.124).

Another notable issue is that much of the included literature refers to abuse in general terms; none of the analyses currently conducted compares the types of abuse, i.e. physical, emotional, sexual or neglect with the characteristics of the child / context of the abuse. Stobart (2006; 2009) does however describe the type of abuse experienced by the children in the cases she has examined for 'witchcraft and spirit possession'.

Although in what follows, we treat as inter-changeable 'witchcraft' and 'spirit possession', and 'ritual child abuse' and 'satanic child abuse', we acknowledge that these types of child abuse linked to faith or belief should ideally be dealt with separately.

Defining 'child abuse linked to faith or belief'

We have included material that best met the final screening criteria. The literature covers four areas of child abuse linked to faith or belief:

- Abuse that occurs as a result of a child being accused of witchcraft or of being a witch
- Abuse that occurs as a result of a child being accused of being 'possessed by spirits' – that is, 'spirit possession'
- Ritualistic abuse
- Satanic abuse

Review timetable

The review was conducted between April and August 2012.

Findings

Detailed information about the findings from the searching can be located in Appendix 1. Table 1 in Appendix 2 lists the 22 papers included in this review to address the research questions. Of the 22 papers included in this review, 16 were from the UK and 6 were from the US; the review did not identify literature from other OCED countries and cases from Africa were beyond the

scope of this review. However, we did include an example of good practice in Belgium and France evidenced in a UK report (Stobart, 2006).

There was a considerable overlap between papers that had been recommended to us by personal correspondence, Google searching, and searching of the peer-review electronic databases and archives at INFORM.

The small proportion of material identified for inclusion reflects the fact that much of the material we identified was non-UK based, and was either about religion or child abuse but not both. We also ranked peer-reviewed material over grey literature, such as newspaper reports and online news articles which typically provided no source details (and were often from the US). While some of this literature looked useful for providing contextual material, none were useful for addressing the specific research questions of this review.

Q1: What does the literature reveal about the incidence of abuse in the UK and other selected countries where belief in witchcraft and related concepts is a factor?

Witchcraft and spirit possession

There is a dearth of literature quantifying the incidence of abuse related to witchcraft or spirit possession in the UK. Stobart (2006; 2009) 'provides the only systematic analyses of relevant cases to date' (Gilligan, 2008) of child abuse linked to faith or belief that could be labelled as involving spirit possession or witchcraft. The 38 cases on which Stobart reports (2006; 2009) were identified between January 2000 and 2006, and are mostly based in London (32/38 cases), with the rest from elsewhere in the UK. However, La Fontaine (2012³) has recently followed up the work of Stobart in order to try and disentangle accusations of witchcraft from those of 'spirit possession', using three sets of data: Project Violet cases, cases collected by Carly Thrale (nee Spargo) for the reports to the Metropolitan Police (used by Stobart, 2006) and additional data collected independently by La Fontaine. The total number of cases considered by La Fontaine (2012) is 26, dating from 2000-2008; all were UK based.

Stobart's analysis (2006, 2009) discusses instances of 'witchcraft' and/or 'spirit possession' that were collated from metropolitan police cases for 'Project Violet', 'a project set up by the Child Abuse Investigation Command as a response to the practice of faith and/or belief-based ritualistic abuse of children' that arose from a few publicised cases, such as that of Victoria Climbié and 'Adam' whose torso was discovered in the River Thames (Pull, 2009). Project Violet identified child abuse linked to faith or belief to be a global issue, with elements such as exorcism common across many faith groups, although offences were 'generally, but not exclusively, confined to African and Asian diaspora communities in the UK' (Pull, 2009: 180).

³ This is an unpublished report and reference to this report has been kindly granted by the author.

Although both Stobart (2006, 2009) and La Fontaine (2009, 2012) present figures for cases of witchcraft and/or spirit possession involving children, both argue that the true number of cases is likely to be underreported, especially to the police. This is because child abuse linked to faith or belief is acknowledged to be a hidden crime and therefore difficult to quantify (Metropolitan Police, 2012). What can make quantification problematic is that 'possession by spirits is not always considered harmful' and some religions of the world use 'possession by spirits as a form of worship' (La Fontaine, 2012) so it can be difficult for professionals and researchers alike to identify cases that clearly link child abuse with faith or religious belief. Stobart's analysis (2006, 2009) does include information from various community and other non-governmental groups in an attempt to identify as many potential cases as possible beyond those officially reported to the police. Even so, there are acknowledged problems with identifying which of these cases could be labelled as witchcraft and/or spirit possession, especially since the identified cases rarely refer to witchcraft accusations (La Fontaine, 2012). For example, La Fontaine (2012) reports that seven of the Project Violet cases reported allegations only of spirit possession. However, these cases are very likely also to have involved allegations of witchcraft, but the case files did not have sufficient detail recorded to make this clear. Additionally, 'children are frequently victims of abuse which crosses categories' (Gilligan, 2008: 29). For the reasons given above, and until such cases are better documented and a consensus is reached on how such cases should be defined in the UK, no available source will provide an accurate reflection of incidence of this type of abuse.

Overall, both Stobart (2006, 2009) and La Fontaine (2009, 2012) agree the group of children that could be identified as being involved in abuse related to spirit possession and/or witchcraft represents a very small proportion of all children who are abused in the UK. After taking account of possible double-counting, Stobart (2006, 2009) settles on a figure of 38 cases of child abuse (involving 47 children⁴), identified between January 2000 and 2006, that can be linked to accusations of 'possession' and 'witchcraft'. The majority of the cases examined by Stobart were from the London area (32/38) with the rest from elsewhere in the UK. Although most cases identified by Stobart took place in London (32/38), she argues this should not be considered a London only problem (Stobart, 2006: 12).

La Fontaine's (2012) recent analysis identified what she describes as 26 'clear cases' of witchcraft between 2000 and 2008. These were identified through a mixture of sources: 14/26 came from cases tagged for Project Violet, 7/26 came from cases collected by Carly Thrall for her reports to the Metropolitan Police and which were subsequently used by Stobart for her report to DfES). The remainder came from case information collected independently by La Fontaine. All were UK based.

⁴ Five families had more than one child involved in the case.

Ritual abuse and satanic abuse

La Fontaine (1994: 3) provides two helpful definitions of ritual and satanic abuse which highlight the complexities involved in distinguishing between such cases:

- Ritual abuse 'is a sexual abuse where there have been allegations of ritual associated with the abuse, whether or not these allegations have been taken any further or tested in the courts';
- Satanic abuse 'implies a ritual directed to worship of the devil' but 'allegations may not indicate the intention of the ritual or indicate that it is focussed on the devil, so it seemed more accurate to use the broader 'ritual abuse' for all the cases in the study'.

In terms of incidence, Goodman et al. (1995; US study) suggest that 'there are many more children being abused in the name of God than in the name of Satan' (p.14). Allegations of satanic abuse originated in North America (La Fontaine, 1998). The first reported UK case of sexual abuse related to ritual religious activity was in 1982 in Shropshire, with the majority of such cases being reported between 1987 and 1990 (La Fontaine, 1998).

In 1994, La Fontaine obtained quantitative and qualitative data to assess the 'extent and nature of organised and ritual abuse' in the UK. Her study suggests a total of 84 cases from the UK could be identified as 'ritual and organised abuse' between 1987 and 1992 (cases appeared to peak in 1989 and then decline – La Fontaine, 1994: 7-8). 62 of these cases were given the final classification of 'ritual abuse' (Table 1, page 32: La Fontaine, 1994). She notes that these represented a small minority of all child protection cases (La Fontaine, 1998). In La Fontaine's survey (1994) a disproportionate number of cases of 'ritual and organised abuse' came from the East Midlands, London and Manchester areas. Indeed, there was a geographic spread of allegations from one social work team in Nottingham to surrounding areas.

Taking a broader definition to include cases of organised, ritual or institutional abuse, Gallagher et al. (1996: 218) identified 45 cases between January 1988 and December 1991 that met these criteria in England and Wales. Looking more specifically at the extent of suspected cases of ritual child sexual abuse, Gallagher (2001) found 'six cases where there were concerns around children's involvement in ritual abuse and six cases where adults alleged that they had been the victims of ritual abuse when they were children' (p.230). These cases together 'constituted 0.1% of all child protection referrals to police and social services and 0.2% of all child sexual abuse' cases (Gallagher, 2001: 230).

In the US, Bottoms et al. (1996; US study) carried out an analysis of ritualistic and religion-related child abuse allegations within the US made during the 1980s from data collected using a stratified random sample of clinical members. Because 'there was no widely agreed-upon definition of either ritualistic or religion-related abuse', they gave respondents 'a general characterisation of the kinds of abuse we were interested in' (Bottoms et al. 1996: 4-5) from which to quantify the cases. They identified 457 child ritual

cases and 264 'child religion-related cases' (Bottoms et al., 1996: 7). Overall, they found 'more evidence in religion-related than ritual cases', with ritual cases often lacking concrete evidence supporting the accusation of ritual child abuse, irrespective of whether the report was made by children or adults (Bottoms et al., 1996: 21-22). They suggest that while 'some acts of child abuse qualify as ritualistic', few cases can be identified as 'highly organised, intergenerational, international child abusing satanic cults' (Bottoms et al., 1996: 29).

Q2: What is known about the characteristics and context of child abuse linked to faith or belief in the UK and other selected countries?

Witchcraft and spirit possession

The number of cases identified as 'witchcraft' and/or 'spirit possession' in the UK is very low. This makes analysis of the characteristics of such cases problematic, and caution should be exercised when drawing conclusions about this information.

Evidence suggests that witchcraft and belief in spirits is a cross-faith issue: 'beliefs in possession by spirits may occur in many religions and the spirits may not always be considered evil' (La Fontaine, 2012). Indeed, La Fontaine (2012) argues that 'possession by spirits is not always considered harmful' with some religions using a belief in spirits as form of worship (p.4).

Stobart's report to the DfE (2006) and her chapter in La Fontaine's (2009) 'The Devil's Children' provide the most detailed analysis of the defining characteristics of this type of child abuse linked to faith or belief (based on 38 cases). The following are common to all cases she identified as accusations of children being possessed by evil spirits or being accused of witchcraft:

- Period of UK residency: Stobart argues that the evidence points to this type of child abuse linked to faith or belief being 'more common amongst new immigrant communities' (Stobart, 2009: 156). However, half of the cases (19) were born in the UK (Stobart, 2009);
- Religion: although only 22 of the 38 cases analysed had this information, the majority of these (20) were recorded to be of a 'Christian' group;
- Family Structure: households with complex family structures (e.g. a mixture of step-children, fostered/adopted and birth children) and larger family households (e.g. mixtures of adults: parents/carers, aunties/uncles and grandparents) seemed to typify these cases. In such households it was often unclear who the actual parent or carer was, particularly as Stobart argues, it is common 'in many cultures the head female in the household is called "mother" and the head male, "father" (Stobart, 2006: 14). Often the real relationship was not disclosed (Stobart, 2009);
- A child with a difference: this describes cases in which carers report difficulties with accepting a child 'with certain characteristics or behaviour' that make them stand out from the other children in the

family (Stobart, 2009: 158). Examples include: challenging behaviour (such as rebelliousness, disobedience, independence and defiance), bedwetting, having bad dreams, disability (such as epilepsy, stammer, deafness, learning disabilities, autism, mental health issues and a life-limiting illness) - which are viewed as a sign of 'witchcraft' or 'possession' by the parent/carer (Stobart, 2009: 159-163).

Some characteristics could not be determined. For example, 'it is rare for the nationality of the parent or carer to be recorded in case files' (Stobart, 2009: 155). Religion was also not routinely recorded in the case notes examined by Stobart (2009) and in 16 of the 38 cases it was unknown whether the carer was associated with a particular place of worship (Stobart 2006: 14).

La Fontaine (1998) argues that 'it is a long-established finding of anthropology that witchcraft accusations are not randomly distributed' (p.74), being directed at 'outsiders' who are 'socially marginal' in some way.

Stobart (2009) classified the 38 cases she examined into eleven groups of abuse: beating, burning, cutting, semi-strangulation, starved, bath sleeping, kept off school, tied up, wants child removed, threat of abandonment, and neglect. She argues that neglect and beating 'featured prominently' in the cases. (Figure 12.12, p. 160 in her chapter shows approximately 18/38 cases she examined were classified as 'neglect' and 25/38 cases were classified as 'beating'). None of the cases are reported to be sexual abuse. However, the type of abuse is not compared to the characteristics of the child/family, so it is not possible for example, to distinguish whether children within large/complex families were more likely to suffer neglect or some other form of abuse.

As for reasons for the abuse, two features stand out from the analyses by Stobart (2006; 2009) and La Fontaine (2012):

- Involvement of religious group leaders: leaders of religious groups have been reported to act in the role of confirming parent or carer suspicions that the child is either a witch or possessed by evil spirits. In some cases, religious group leaders may also directly accuse children. La Fontaine (2012) in particular notes the central role played by 'pastors' in accusations;
- Scapegoat: the arrival of a new child into the family (for example sent from overseas to live with distant extended family in the UK, as in the case of Victoria Climbié) may coincide with some misfortune in the family, which may lead to the family blaming the new child for the turn of events. This may act as the catalyst for the abuse of that child.

Stobart (2009) comments that it is 'the vulnerability of these families' that may make them 'susceptible to exploitation' from religious groups, for example through the encouragement of seeking 'treatment through exorcism' (Stobart, 2009: 167).

While Stobart (2006, 2009) and La Fontaine (2012) largely agree in their analysis of the characteristics of these cases, there are two notable

differences between them. While Stobart argues that 'gender does not appear to play a significant role' (Stobart 2009: 10), La Fontaine (2012) finds that 'more girls than boys are accused of witchcraft' (p.9). Additionally, La Fontaine (2012) notes the 'predominance of accusations by women' which she says is not documented elsewhere (p.11). The two authors also slightly differ in terms of the age of children accused of witchcraft: while Stobart finds that 'the majority of children came in the 8-14 age range' (2009: 153), La Fontaine finds 'the largest category of children . . . accused of witchcraft is that of the teenagers aged 11-15' (2012: 9). La Fontaine (2012: 9) goes on to say that 'children accused merely of being possessed by evil spirits seem to be younger'. However, La Fontaine cautions against reading too much into these data because the figures are too small to be significant.

Ritual abuse and satanic abuse

Despite the allegations of cult involvement in the 84 cases La Fontaine reviewed in 1994, she finds no evidence of an organised group (such as a paedophile ring) being behind the child abuse (La Fontaine, 1994). La Fontaine (1998) comments that child abuse that takes place in conjunction with some ritual activities are often 'a ragbag of elements invented to further the abuse, having no similarity either to occultism or, indeed, to the allegations of satanic abuse' (La Fontaine, 1998: 188).

Most of the cases of this type of child abuse linked to faith or belief are described as 'family based' (48%, La Fontaine, 1994: 11). La Fontaine (1998) remarks in her later research that unlike cases of sexual abuse, which occur 'anywhere in the socio-economic spectrum', the 'majority of satanic abuse cases involved extended families of the poor, together with neighbours or friends of the adults' (p.73). La Fontaine discusses 84 satanic abuse cases in her 1998 research 'Speak of the Devil' (La Fontaine, 1998). Eighteen of these cases were identified within extended families. She notes that these family members may not necessarily live together but 'maintain close relations between their separate households (La Fontaine, 1998: 66).

Unlike cases of witchcraft and spirit possession, age is an important distinguishing feature of these cases. La Fontaine (1994) argues that 'the nature of the allegation varies with the age of the child(ren) concerned', with teenagers providing longer and fuller accounts than younger children (p.18). The allegations of younger children were found to be influenced by adults, especially their mothers (La Fontaine, 1994). Additionally, the 'types of organised abuse can be distinguished by gender': boys are concentrated in paedophile networks but girls are not clustered in any one type of case (p.13).

Some cases of religion-related child abuse have been characterised by descriptions of possession by evil spirits and exorcisms but this is less likely to typify cases of ritual abuse (Goodman et al., 1995: 5; US study).

Bottoms et al. (1996; US study) found a geographical bias to certain states of the US, with reports particularly concentrated along the 'bible belt' (p. 7). They also found that 'compared with sexual abuse cases in general, ritual abuse is often described as involving multiple perpetrators and victims' and 'ritual

cases involved significantly more female victims than religion-related cases' (Bottoms et al., 1996: 15). Bottoms et al. (1996) argue that consistent with other research on sexual abuse, 'victims generally knew their abusers, who were often their parents' (p.16) and consequently the most common setting for this type of abuse was the parents' or relatives' homes (p.18).

As for the reasons cited for abuse, Landa (1991; US study) finds no defining characteristic of the families that become involved in cults or rituals of this nature. She argues that 'individuals who become cult members are not necessarily more insecure than the average person; they are not weak-willed, directionless, or, as a rule, young' (p. 2). Indeed, Lloyd (1991; US study) argues that 'Christianity, Buddhism and Islam were once considered to be cults.....cults splinter off from major faiths and from other sects periodically' (p.128). Landa (1991) concludes from her analysis that it is 'guilt and fear instilled in members through mind control' that makes ordinary people do unordinary things like commit abuse of their children (p.3). Often it is the behavioural signs a child exhibits (such as stress, sleep disturbances, aggression towards toys/pets/humans, or bed wetting) after or during the abuse that are the main indication a child has been a victim of ritual child abuse (Lloyd, 1991: 129).

Religion-related child abuse in general

Bottoms et al. (2004; US study) compared victims' retrospective reports of religion-related child physical abuse to other reported cases of child physical abuse. They found that the 'basic characteristics of religion-related physical abuse are similar to non-religion-related physical abuse' (p.87). For example, they found no difference between 'religion-related abuse' and 'non-religion related abuse' in terms of: frequency of occurrence, likelihood of having been disclosed or acted upon by legal or social service authorities (which they argue rarely occurred in the cases they examined), victim characteristics (age, religious affiliation, and religiosity), and perpetrator characteristics (religious affiliation, gender). However, they argue that their study provides enough evidence to suggest that 'religion-related abuse should be considered distinct from other forms of child abuse' (p.106) because they identified 'significant differences' between the two groups in terms of their reported long-term psychological wellbeing: 'in particular, victims of religion-related abuse displayed more depression, anxiety, hostility, psychoticism, phobic anxiety, and paranoid ideation' (although the latter two effects weakened after taking into account proxy measures of abuse severity (p.107).

Rodriguez and Henderson (2010; US study) carried out a study in the US examining the connection between religiosity and physical child abuse risk using self-completion measures of religiosity, social conformity, and child abuse potential. They administered these measures to two hundred and seven regularly attending Christians of various groups (predominantly White, educated, and upper middle class). They found that 'extrinsic religiosity was associated with increased physical abuse potential, with greater social conformity further moderating this association' but 'intrinsic religious orientation was not associated with abuse risk' (p.84). They also investigated two additional markers of religiosity: literal interpretation of the Bible and

church attendance. They found that ‘respondents who held a more literal interpretation of the Bible obtained higher child abuse potential scores’ and ‘socially conformist beliefs appear to be the component that elevates abuse risk’ (p.91). They caution that ‘the particular nature of religiosity needs to be considered when interpreting a connection between religiosity and abuse risk’ because ‘religiosity per se may not be as critical to predicting physical abuse risk as selected approaches to religion or particular attitudes the religious individual assumes in their daily life’ (p.84).

Q3: What does the literature reveal about good practice and lessons to be learned for practitioners, agencies and communities to reduce this type of child abuse in the UK in the future?

We did not find many published examples of good practice that specifically related to child abuse linked to faith or belief. However, given the recent identification of this type of abuse in the UK and also the small number of cases identified so far, it is perhaps not surprising that little is documented about how professionals involved in child protection respond in such cases and what constitutes good practice.

Much of what is known to date about lessons to be learned and good practice stems mainly from the work of a small number of non-government organisations, including Africans Unite Against Child Abuse (AFRUCA)⁵, Churches’ Child Protection Advisory Service (CCPAS)⁶, the Congolese Family Centre (CFC)⁷ and the Victoria Climbié Foundation (VCF)⁸. These organisations are working directly with the communities involved to challenge child abuse linked to faith or belief. Much of the available practice literature has limitations: it has not been robustly evaluated and should therefore be considered as ‘practice wisdom’. To date there have been very few evaluations of initiatives operating in this field, though the number of initiatives is increasing. One recent evaluation was the Safeguarding Children’s Rights special initiative (Briggs et al., 2011). This initiative began in 2007 and aimed to develop and strengthen community–based preventative activities focused on tackling child abuse linked to beliefs in witchcraft and spirit possession. Through this initiative the Trust for London funded existing outreach work of four organisations; AFRUCA; CCPAS, CFC and VCF. The evaluation was conducted between 2008 and 2010 and set out to assess the work of these organisations. There is also a growing peer review literature on social care practice in dealing with this type of abuse, but again little of this is evidence based.

The National Working Group is undertaking and supporting a lot of good practice based work in the area of child abuse linked to faith or belief. However, it was not possible within the available resources and timeframe to

⁵ For more information on the work of AFRUCA see www.afruca.org

⁶ For more information on the work of CCPAS see www.ccpas.co.uk

⁷ For more information on the work of CFC see www.congolesefamilycentre.org

⁸ For more information on the work of the VCF see www.vcf-uk.org

provide an exhaustive or comprehensive representation of all local initiatives involving members of either the National Working Group or of other initiatives within the UK. Therefore, in what follows, we provide an indication of what is taking place using selected examples of good practice (from published literature only).

We have summarised the findings into four areas of best practice; we have added a fifth area of best practice based on emerging academic literature.

1. Understanding the wider context
2. Early identification
3. Developing partnerships with communities
4. Working with places for worship and faith communities
5. Professional development.

Understanding the wider context

Understanding the wider context in which child abuse linked to faith or belief occurs is critically important for preventing such abuse. An evaluation report of the Trust for London initiative 'Safeguarding Children's Rights: exploring issues of witchcraft and spirit possession in London's African communities' (Briggs et al., 2011) highlights the high levels of social exclusion experienced by African communities and the cultural gap between African and UK values, which increases the risk of harm. Addressing such social disadvantages can help create a safer environment for children in these communities and help to reduce the incidence of child abuse (Briggs et al., 2011).

Stobart (2006) points to examples from France and Belgium, which provide evidence that assisting families with resolving their problems and providing a 'breathing space' (for example; by taking the child away to be with a third party for a short period of time), produces a number of benefits: calming the immediate situation down; reducing the likelihood of the family blaming a child for arising problems; and avoiding the child being taken into long-term care.

Judgements and decisions made by safeguarding professionals about a child's welfare should be based on a sound holistic assessment of the child's needs, the parental capacity to respond to those needs and the wider context of the family and community.

The literature suggests that to best support children who may be affected by abuse linked to faith or belief, professionals working with these children need to take account of the religion and beliefs of those children and their families (Gilligan and Furness, 2006). However, this literature also suggests that there is reluctance among these professionals to take account of the religion and beliefs of those they are engaged in safeguarding (or for these professionals to take account of their own beliefs). Gilligan (2009) refers to this reluctance as a 'religion-blind' or a 'belief-blind' approach.

Early identification

The *Safeguarding Children from Abuse Linked to Belief in Spirit Possession* (HMSO, 2007) guidance has been designed to help professionals working to safeguard children to identify early on any possible involvement of witchcraft or spirit possession. It achieves this through providing information and advice

to practitioners to help them to apply the principles contained in 'Working Together To Safeguard Children' to cases where children are abused or neglected due to a perceived belief in spirit possession. The evaluation of the safeguarding children's rights initiative (Briggs et al., 2011) found that the current child protection framework is an effective tool for assessing cases where children have been accused of witchcraft and spirit possession. Briggs et al. (2011) argue that the guidance on recognition, assessment and intervention can help prevent early significant harm to a child.

Stobart's (2006) report revealed that schools were an important avenue in the early identification of cases of child abuse related to faith or belief. She found that a significant number of referrals came via teachers who noticed signs of neglect. Schools are therefore an important agency for professionals with safeguarding responsibilities to partner with to identify child abuse linked to faith or belief at an early stage.

In social care, early identification can be made difficult because the social care threshold criteria for engagement is often too high to pick up this type of child abuse at an early stage. In practice this means that when a case comes to light early and the child is referred to social care, social care is not in a position to act (Stobart, 2006). It is in these situations that non-governmental and faith-based organisations working in affected communities can act together to prevent such cases from escalating - for example, by making early referrals and interventions to public sector agencies (Stobart, 2006). An example of multi-agency working in this area (Stobart 2006) is the involvement of a non-governmental organisation in the work of a network of therapists based in schools supporting children with behavioural problems. Through this collaboration of therapists and the non-governmental organisation, several accusations of 'possession' or 'witchcraft' were uncovered within school settings.

Another example is that of the African Family Service in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets which was set up to support the statutory services and to strengthen the link between the statutory services and the local community. Their role includes helping identify child abuse linked to faith or belief in the community. This is achieved by having link workers within education, health and social care teams who receive ongoing specialist training. These link workers to the African Families Service act as a source of support and advice for social work, education and health professionals. The African Families Service also provides a reflective practice forum open to other local authorities where cases are brought for consideration and they receive recommendations on the next steps to be taken for the best interests of the child.

AFRUCA and VCF are also actively involved in improving how statutory agencies identify and respond to cases of child abuse linked to faith or belief. AFRUCA delivers training courses to practitioners on child protection and safeguarding children, which has gained national recognition in the UK, and VCF is directly involved in casework in partnership with statutory agencies, the community and the legal system (Briggs et al., 2011).

There is emerging evidence of improved communication and collaboration between statutory agencies and community groups. One example is the work of the VCF, which delivers training to professionals to help them better understand the contexts and practices of this type of abuse. A second example is the work of the Congolese Family Centre, whose relationships with schools have contributed to increased confidence and trust between teachers and parents (Briggs et al., 2011).

Developing partnerships with communities

As set out in *Safeguarding Children from Abuse Linked to Belief in Spirit Possession* (HMSO, 2007), it is an expectation that Local Safeguarding Children's Boards should engage with faith communities to ensure children are safeguarded. This is an active area of practice with many agencies and organisations working together to strengthen the capacity of both communities and statutory agencies to prevent child abuse linked to faith or belief.

Given the wider context in which child abuse linked to faith or belief can occur, non-governmental and faith based organisations are well positioned to identify early stages of this type of abuse. For example, Briggs et al. (2011) argue that 'faith organisations have a critical role in many African communities' and as such can be an important source of advice and support' (p.8). In particular, 'faith leaders have a pivotal role to play in developing children's rights within African communities' (Briggs et al., 2011: 9). Pull (2009) also argues that 'engagement, education and training of church leaders, workers and opinion forums', are by far the best and most effective means of safeguarding children from abuse in the context of exorcism and deliverance' (p.187).

Stobart (2006) argues that because such organisations are often involved in supporting families with issues such as housing, immigration status and illness, they see struggling families at an early stage and are therefore best placed to pick up on early signals of child abuse linked to faith or belief. Stobart (2006) argues that by intervening at an early stage, it may be possible to change the carer's response to the child by helping them to view the issue in the wider context rather than simply as a problem of 'possession' or 'witchcraft'.

The evaluation of the Safeguarding Children's Rights special initiative reported that some organisations experience 'significant barriers' in engaging with sections of the faith community, particularly religious/faith leaders and churches.

Notable examples of developing partnerships with communities include:

- Project Violet: set up by the Metropolitan Police following cases of child abuse linked to faith or belief to (amongst other things) develop an effective education and prevention programme in partnership with faith communities;
- The African Family Service: London borough of Tower Hamlets, which was rated by Ofsted as performing excellently in 2009;
- The VCF community engagement model: facilitates direct discussions

- between community groups and statutory services.
- CCPAS Communities Consultant: working with the African Diaspora in London to reach churches and provide training.

Working with places of worship and faith communities

Places of worship and faith communities are often at the forefront of providing support and advice to families in their communities and are therefore an important factor in the prevention of child abuse linked to faith or belief. Examples of working with places of worship and faith communities include the African Family Service in Tower Hamlets. This service is sensitive in its approach to raising community awareness of safeguarding issues, and supports statutory services in the borough to understand the needs of African communities. It facilitates group meetings for pastors and acts as a forum for raising awareness of how issues of this type of abuse can be integrated within child protection.

The CCPAS are also actively involved in raising awareness of children protection issues in the community. A strand of their work involves training members of church organisations, including religious/faith leaders. Evaluating the work of the CCPAS as part of the Safeguarding Children's Rights special initiative, Briggs et al (2011) reported that CCPAS have organised events through which approximately over 3000 people – including church child protection officers, bishops and other religious/faith leaders - have received training in UK law and broad child safeguarding policies. CCPAS also work with individual churches and groups to produce good practice guidelines on safeguarding children.

Professional development

Furness and Gilligan (2010) argue that it is not easy for practitioners to appreciate and engage with matters relating to religion and belief. However, they argue that professionals 'have a responsibility to be very mindful of how these beliefs can influence judgments and actions' (p. 14). They point to the growing body of literature written predominantly for health professionals (but more recently social workers) about the 'importance of developing and incorporating cultural and spiritual sensitivity and awareness in their work and others' (p.3).

Gilligan (2009) points to 'elements of a consensus' on how professionals should respond to issues of religion, belief and child abuse that are emerging from the literature. These 'elements' of good practice include:

- The inclusion of religion and belief into routine assessment processes. This will require professionals to avoid making unwarranted assumptions and to ask questions in an open, non-intrusive and non-judgmental way. This in turn will provide the service users with the opportunity to express what is significant to them. It should be understood that both the positive and negative impacts of beliefs, practices and relevant institutions will differ between individuals.
- It may be that professionals with strong religious beliefs are better placed to support such service users.

- Professional education and training needs to prepare practitioners to engage with people for whom religion and belief are significant. Opportunities to learn about beliefs and their impact directly from service users can help practitioners to avoid imposing stereotypical and irrelevant preconceptions.

These examples demonstrate that there is already considerable effort invested by expert organisations in working with professionals to help them understand more about this type of abuse and the communities in which it take place. However, what is lacking is the systematic documentation and evaluation of this work so as to allow a body of evidence of good practice to build up.

Q4: What are the gaps in the research?

Although an evidence base is slowly emerging, child abuse linked to faith or belief remains a relatively new area of research in the field of child protection. It is therefore less appropriate to speak of ‘gaps’ in the research and more appropriate to speak of ‘priorities’ for research and practice.

Priority areas for practice should include:

- The systematic recording of child abuse linked to faith or belief by social workers and other professionals. Studies on incidences of this type of abuse have noted the paucity of data as professionals do not yet routinely record data in such cases (La Fontaine, 2009; Stobart, 2006, 2009). The literature suggests that more needs to be done to support frontline professionals (such as police and social workers) in the task of recording and collecting data that serves to identify cases of ‘witchcraft’, ‘spirit possession’, ‘ritual child abuse’ and ‘satanic child abuse’. It also remains a priority to document the type of abuse (e.g. physical, emotional, sexual or neglect);
- Practitioners will need support (perhaps through training) on how to recognise the various types of child abuse that can be linked to a faith or belief. Expert NGOs are actively working with professionals to help them identify cases of abuse at an early stage, and help them understand the wider context in which such child abuse occurs. However such practices need to be recorded and evaluated if they are to form part of a robust evidence base;
- More work needs to be done on unpacking the variety and complexity of the principal abuse and faith-related concepts discussed in this report, so as to help practitioners identify relevant cases and to record information about them. The term ‘child abuse linked to faith or belief’ has been used here (and other places) as a generic term. However, not all child abuse linked to faith or belief is the same and work has begun in distinguishing different types of abuse in this area. This work needs to be continued.

Priority areas for research should include:

- The growing body of literature in this area is increasingly calling for practitioners to take account of the religion and beliefs of those they are working with (Gilligan and Furness, 2006). However, little of this work has focused specifically on the need to understand and respond appropriately to issues arising from interactions of religion, belief and child abuse. Research is needed to explore attitudes and responses of child protection professionals in relation to religion and child abuse.
- With the exception of one evaluation (the Safeguarding Children's Rights special initiative by Briggs et al., 2011), there have been very few evaluations of initiatives operating in this field, though the number of initiatives is increasing. Much of what is known to date about lessons to be learned and good practice stems mainly from the work of a small number of non-government organisations, including Africans Unite Against Child Abuse (AFRUCA), Churches' Child Protection Advisory Service (CCPAS), the Congolese Family Centre (CFC) and the Victoria Climbié Foundation (VCF). More research is needed to evaluate local initiatives.

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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the selected experts in the field who gave their time for free to speak with us about key literature that would be important to include in this review: Professor Jean La Fontaine, Dr Amanda van Eck, Deputy Director of INFORM, Professor Eileen Barker, Director of INFORM, and also the rest of the staff at INFORM who spent time showing us the wealth of data in their electronic and library collections. Also to Rachael Takens-Milne (Trust for London) for suggesting some key documents for us to consider. We are especially grateful to Professor Jean La Fontaine for giving us permission to refer to her recent (as yet unpublished) analysis (2012). The forthcoming published version of La Fontaine's work (2012) will be more detailed than the early version we had access to. Also thanks to the Metropolitan Police for sharing with us their unpublished summary of data held by them on incidents between 2002 and 2012 in which child abuse linked to faith or belief is alleged or known. We would also like to thank the National Working Group for their helpful comments on the earlier version of this report.

Appendix 1

Results of the searching

Peer-reviewed databases

Since we were not able to search all electronic peer-review databases we agreed with the DfE that we would search only two peer-reviewed databases: ERIC and Social Services Extracts. Searching of these databases produced 22,613 'hits', which increased to 22,754 'hits' when we included the word 'cult'. Of these, less than one per cent of those screened on title and abstract were identified as possibly appropriate for inclusion. After screening at full text, a total of four peer review papers were included, some of which had already been identified by the DfE.

Google-searching

A search of 'Google' and 'Google-Scholar' was carried out using the search terms: "Child abuse" OR "Neglect" AND "Belief" OR "Religio*" OR "Faith" OR "Spirit Possession" OR "Cult".

Google recorded about 155,000,000 results. We screened the first 10 pages. Many of the hits related to child abuse allegations in relation to Catholic or Muslim preachers – that is, abuse that takes places within faith settings by faith leaders. Of the rest, four publications were identified on title and abstract as having the potential to be included in the review. All of these were accepted; although one of the papers overlaps with a source identified from our search of INFORM archives.

Google scholar recorded 188,000 hits of articles published between 1995 and 2012. The first ten pages were screened and no papers were included.

Personal correspondence

Consulting experts in the field was useful for exploring and refining the definitions of key terms and the scope of the review, and for drawing attention to significant sources, such as La Fontaine (2009, 2012).

Information Network Focus on Religious Movements (INFORM)

INFORM have the only UK library collection dedicated to literature related to religions of the world. Two searches were run on INFORM's endnote database of electronically held references. The first search used the terms 'Child Abuse or Neglect' and produced 116 'hits'. These were screened on title and abstract for possible inclusion into the review. Three of these publications were finally included in the review at the point of full-text screening. The second search, using the terms 'Faith or Spirit Possession or

Witchcraft' produced a further 848 'hits'. Three publications from this search were finally included in the review at the point of full-text screening.

We also searched the library holdings at INFORM for peer reviewed material and grey literature – which produced a further three items as possibly appropriate for inclusion. Two of these papers (on ritual child abuse) were included in the review, since they mentioned faith/religion/belief and child abuse. The remaining two were on 'Faith-Based Medical Neglect' and were excluded at full-text screening for not meeting the inclusion criteria.

In total, eight pieces of literature from our searching at INFORM were included for addressing the specific questions. A further piece of literature (van Eck Duymaer van Twist, 2010) was used for contextual information.

Methodology

Initial search strategy

The review was designed at the outset to be flexible and responsive to the nature and amount of data that emerged. This meant that the definitions of what should be included within 'child abuse linked to faith or belief' changed over the course of the review, in response to some of the literature identified.

The review set out to first identify key UK literature or guidance about abuse related to belief and spirit possession. From this, any papers or articles cited in these sources (including case studies) were retrieved for further examination. This 'snowball approach' was used to identify papers on abuse related to belief and spirit possession. The initial key literature/guidance used for the snowball searching included:

1. Child abuse linked to accusations of 'possession' and 'witchcraft' (Stobart, 2006).
2. Safeguarding Children's Rights: exploring issues of witchcraft and spirit possession in London's African communities (Briggs et al., 2011).
3. The extent and nature of organised and ritual abuse, research findings (La Fontaine, 1994).
4. Safeguarding Children from Abuse Linked to a Belief in Spirit Possession: Non-statutory, good-practice guidance for practitioners applying 'Working Together' to cases of abuse linked to belief (DfE, 2007).
5. Good practice for working with faith communities and places of worship – spirit possession and abuse (Churches' Child Protection Advisory Service 2009); The London Culture and Faith LSCB Strategy, Training Toolkit and

Practice Guidance (London Safeguarding Children Board (see: http://www.londonscb.gov.uk/culture_and_faith/⁹).

Scoping exercise

Following our inception meeting with DfE in March 2012, it was agreed that the research team would spend a few days scoping out the search terms that would provide the most fruitful results from selected peer-reviewed literature databases. In particular, it was of interest to DfE for the research team to consider broadening the focus from 'witchcraft' and 'spirit possession' to child abuse linked to a belief or faith. The initial scoping exercise would therefore ascertain the number of 'hits' for the search-term 'faith', the likely relevance of those hits, and the implications for the review if the scope were to be broadened accordingly.

For this scoping exercise, we conducted a brief search of both ERIC and Social Services Extracts databases. We began with the search term: (Abuse OR "emotional abuse" OR "physical abuse" OR "sexual abuse" OR "emotional abuse" OR neglect OR safeguarding OR child* OR rights) AND (Belief OR religio* OR faith OR witchcraft OR "spirit possession" OR "evil spirits" OR voodoo OR "black magic" OR demons OR devil OR "child sorcerers" OR jinn OR "evil eye"). We then expanded the search so as to include 'Belief' OR 'Religion' OR 'Faith'. We also tested out different combinations of string terms using the key search terms.

This scoping exercise revealed that:

a) Long search strings that included the terms 'Belief OR religion OR faith' produced several thousand hits – far too many to screen carefully (that is, a full reading of at least the abstract) for relevance in the resources available for this project. Screening the titles of such strings showed that fewer than five per cent were relevant for answering the research questions – the relevance of most titles was borderline.

b) The word 'belief' alone has several meanings and produces many irrelevant hits. For example, it includes strong beliefs about the necessity of physical punishment used as discipline; cultural factors/beliefs predictive of parenting behaviours; and beliefs of victims of child abuse. Even when 'belief' is combined with 'child abuse' (or variants of the term 'abuse'), the results were borderline relevant for answering the research questions.

c) 'Religion' and variants of the word 'religion' (such as 'religiosity' or 'religiousness' or 'Religio*') resulted in more relevant hits (compared with the term 'belief') in terms of capturing papers that provided information about the characteristics of this abuse and the situations in which it takes place. On the databases we explored, 'Religion' encompasses all variants, suggesting that there was possibly no need to separately list all the different religious groups and types.

⁹ Training Toolkit for professionals engaging with minority ethnic culture and faith (often socially excluded) communities, groups and families to safeguard their children, LSCB 2011.

d) There is very little peer-reviewed literature on this subject in the UK – especially on research question one, about the incidence of abuse in the UK where belief in witchcraft (or related concepts) is a factor. What little there is tends to be reporting on the US context and the African context (e.g. cases in Ghana or the Democratic Republic of Congo).

e) A number of publications discussed the use of 'Faith' or 'Religion' in social work practice. These papers discuss how the religious beliefs of social workers informed or influenced how they responded and dealt with families in which religion played an important role; whether social workers were adequately trained to respond to such families; and how this training may have helped them to be sensitive to the needs of children in families where religion and/or belief is a major focus. While these papers were not directly relevant to the main focus of the proposed review, we decided that they would be useful for providing a context for answering review questions three and four, about lessons to be learned and good practice, and about questions that could benefit from further research.

f) Following initial consultation with Professor Jean La Fontaine, we would include 'cults', as these would be more likely to produce examples of abuse related to families from a 'white' ethnic background.

Final search terms and agreed inclusion criteria

The results of the scoping exercise led to the development of the final search terms:

Key Word = ("Child abuse" OR Neglect) AND (Belief" OR "Religio*" OR "Faith" OR "Spirit Possession" OR "Witchcraft" OR "Cult").

DfE preferred a broad definition of child abuse linked to faith or belief so as to avoid obvious sources of bias (e.g. by reporting on cases of child abuse related only to children/families of African origin). At the same time, the review needed to make use of some demarcation in order to determine what would be included in the 'review pool' (papers to be read and possibly included in the synthesis and write-up). The following list details the screening criteria agreed with DfE, and that were also used to review the literature obtained through the electronic database searches and the grey literature:

a) Focus on papers from UK - but include some papers from some OECD countries (particularly the US, France and Belgium) for providing contextual information for the review (ultimately give a higher ranking to literature relating to the UK situation/ UK cases).

b) Include papers dating from 1995 upwards.

c) Include papers that deal with incidents of abuse, as opposed to incidence of witchcraft belief. Abuse (of children) would need to be explicitly referred to in the papers.

d) Include all variants of child abuse – including: physical, emotional, sexual abuse and neglect.

e) Include religious belief of families (but also the religious beliefs of social workers – for providing context for review questions 3 and 4).

f) Include papers that focus on child abuse linked to any religious groups, or related to 'witchcraft' or 'spirit possession'. This can include child abuse that occurs as part of a cult or satanic ritual. However, the review would not include any child abuse committed directly by religious leaders or cult leaders themselves. (Although, we acknowledge that religious leaders may be involved in some way by confirming or instigating accusations of spirit possession and witchcraft).

Second stage searching

Following the outcome of the scoping exercise, the review then identified literature using the following methods:

a) A search of selected electronic databases – ERIC and Social Services Extracts, using CSA Illumina, which is a search engine gateway for some UK literature databases;

b) a (brief) internet web-search of www.google.com; www.scholar.google.com and www.scie-socialcareonline.org.uk;

c) Consultation with selected specialist organisations: AFRUCA - www.afruca.org ; The Victoria Climbié Foundation - <http://vcf-uk.org/>; Trust for London - www.trustforlondon.org.uk) and some key academic experts in the field (Professor Jean La Fontaine and Dr Amanda van Eck, Deputy Director of the Information Network Focus on Religious Movements (INFORM)).

d) Time spent at the offices of INFORM at the London School of Economics. INFORM is an independent charity that was founded in 1988 with the support of the British Home Office and the mainstream Churches with the aim of obtaining and making available objective and up-to-date information about new religious movements or 'cults'. They have the only UK library collection dedicated to literature related to religions of the world, including literature specifically about spirit possession and witchcraft. INFORM ran a search for us of their endnote database of electronically held references using our search terms. We then screened this literature on title and abstract to ascertain if it met our criteria for inclusion. We also searched the library holdings at INFORM for their books and gray literature using the same search criteria.

Excluded literature

Discussions of the available literature with experts in the field suggested that the scope of the review might have adopted a much wider focus than that taken here. For example, there is a wealth of literature in INFORM about a wide range of new religions and cults where alleged abuse of children has occurred. This evidence largely presents case study descriptions from child trauma teams or psychologists. These can be obtained from online websites that collate evidence of this type of information (and form part of the resource collection at INFORM) - for example, as published online through the International Cultic Studies Association (ICSA) newsletters

(http://www.icsahome.com/idx_icsa.eneews.htm). ICSA is a global network of people concerned about psychological manipulation and abuse in cultic groups, alternative movements, and other environments. There is also information in books and other documents at INFORM about alleged child abuse within religious groups and other organisations, including: the gurukula ashram schools, popularly known as the Hare Krishna movement, run by the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) in India and the USA, the Children of God (now The Family International), a community of the Fundamentalist Latter Day Saints' Church in Texas, USA (see van Eck Duymaer van Twist, 2010). Examples of child abuse linked to a belief or faith within religious groups or organisations can be found in the UK, US and a range of European countries such as Belgium and France (e.g. fears of sexual abuse within Catholic churches in Belgium). Accounts are interesting for providing background information about the context in which some child abuse linked to faith or belief takes place and the origins of child abuse that takes as part of a cult or satanic ritual. However, these types of literature were not directly relevant for addressing the research questions; child abuse from religious leaders for example, is not part of our inclusion criteria. This type of grey material was therefore omitted.

Another area discussed with experts included cases where being part of in cults or strict religious groups might impact on children by isolating them from participating in wider society. For example, Amanda van Eck Duymaer van Twist (deputy director at INFORM) examined in her PhD the impact of second generation sectarian movements on "segregated childhoods". However, it is not clear whether isolation or a segregated childhood could be considered as abuse per se. As it did not obviously fall within the working definition of child abuse we decided to exclude this and related literature from the review. Similarly, we decided to exclude literature dealing with corporal punishment and 'faith-based medical neglect' (case where families deny their children help from medical professionals because they consider this to be against their religious belief, as in the case of the practices of Jehovah Witnesses).

We also decided to exclude literature that presented data purely about child abuse linked to faith or belief that had occurred in African countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo – unless it referred to cases where the child had subsequently moved to the UK. This was because the national context of other countries, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, is very different to that of the UK.

Much of the literature on child abuse that occurs as part of a cult or ritual originates from the US. The review did include six pieces literature of this type from the US but we excluded any which did not explicitly referred to both child abuse and religion or faith/belief.

Master dissertations and PhD theses were also excluded.

Appendix 2: Table of included studies – studies used to address the specific research questions of the review

	Title	Authors	Date	Country	How identified	Comments
1	An introduction to The Devil's Children, p.1-11	Barker, E.	2009	UK literature	DfE INFORM	Chapter in published book: The Devil's Children. From Spirit Possession to Witchcraft: New Allegations that Affect Children, J. La Fontaine, Editor. 2009, Ashgate: Farnham.
2	An analysis of ritualistic and religion-related child abuse allegations	Bottoms, BL., Shaver, PR., and Goodman, GS.	1996	US. literature	INFORM and Google searching	Published article in 'Law and Human Behaviour', Volume 20(1): pp. 1-34.
3	Religion-Related Child Physical Abuse: Characteristics and Psychological Outcomes	Bottoms, BL., Nielsen, M., Murray, R., and Filipas, H.	2004	US. literature	Peer-review database searching	Published article in: journal of 'Aggression, Maltreatment and Trauma', 8 (1-2): 87-114.
4	Safeguarding Children's Rights: exploring issues of witchcraft and spirit possession in London's African communities.	Briggs, S., Whittaker, A., Linford, H., Bryan, A., Ryan, E., and Ludick, D.	2011	UK literature	DfE	Published report.
5	Social Work, Religion and Belief: Developing a Framework for Practice	Furness, S. And Gilligan, P.	2010	UK literature	Snowball from 2009 Gilligan reference Peer-review database	Published article in the 'British Journal of Social Work', Volume 40: pp. 2185-2202.

					searching	
6	The nature and extent of known cases of organised child sexual abuse in England and Wales, p. 215-230.	Gallagher, B., Hughes, B. and Parker, H.	1998	UK literature	Snowball from 1994 Gallagher reference	Chapter in published book: Bibby, P. (Eds) Organised Abuse: The Current Debate, Aldershot: Arena.
7	Assessment and intervention in cases of suspected ritual child sexual abuse.	Gallagher, B.	2001	UK literature	Google search of Gallagher following identification of previous references for this author	Published article in 'Child Abuse Review', 10 (4). pp. 227-242. ISSN 0952-9136
8	Child abuse and spirit possession: not just an issue for African migrants.	Gilligan, P.	2008	UK literature	Google searching and snowball searching from other literature from P. Gilligan	Published in 'ChildRight' journal, 245, pp.28 -31
9	Considering religion and beliefs in child protection and safeguarding work: is any consensus emerging?	Gilligan, P.	2009	UK literature.	DfE Peer-review database searching	Published article in 'Child Abuse Review', Volume 18 (2): pp. 94-110
10	Characteristics and sources of allegations of ritualistic child abuse	Goodman, GS., Qin, J., Bottoms, BL., and Shaver, PR.	1995	US literature.	Google searching	Gray literature: Final report to the National Centre on Child Abuse and Neglect. Unpublished but available online.
11	Policing child sexual abuse: the view from police practitioners.	Hughes, B., Parker, H. and Gallagher, B.	1996	UK literature	Snowball from 1994 La Fontaine reference	Home Office Report. Cited in La Fontaine (1998) 'Speak to the Devil' and (1994) 'The extent and nature of organised and ritual abuse'. Not available online.
12	The extent and nature	La Fontaine, J.	1994	UK literature	DfE and personal	Published research report. London:

	of organised and ritual abuse				correspondence with author	HMSO.
13	Child witches in London: Tradition and Change in Religious Practice & Belief, p. 117-127	La Fontaine, J.	2009	UK literature	DfE INFORM	Chapter in a book: The Devil's Children. From Spirit Possession to Witchcraft: New Allegations that Affect Children, J. La Fontaine, Editor. 2009, Ashgate: Farnham.
14	Accusations of Witchcraft made against children	La Fontaine, J.	2012	UK literature	Personal correspondence with author	Gray literature: as yet unpublished research report.
15	Children and cults: a practical guide	Landa, S.	1991	US literature	INFORM	Published in the Journal of Family Law, Volume 29 (3): 1-28. Available online: http://www.icsahome.com/infoserv_article/s/landa_susan_childrenandcults.htm
16	Ritual Child Abuse: Understanding the controversies	Lloyd, DW.	1991	US literature	INFORM	Published in the Journal of Family Law, Volume 8 (2): 122-133.
17	Summary of data held by Metropolitan Police on incidents between 2002 and 2012 in which faith-based child abuse is alleged or known	Metropolitan Police	2012	UK literature	DfE	Gray literature: unpublished report.
18	Outstanding local authority children's services 2009	Ofsted	2010	UK literature.	DfE/working group	Published report.
19	'Project Violet': Addressing the Practice of Faith and/or Belief Based	Pull, R.	2009	UK literature	DfE INFORM	Chapter in a book: The Devil's Children. From Spirit Possession to Witchcraft: New Allegations that Affect Children, J. La Fontaine, Editor. 2009, Ashgate:

	Ritualistic Related Abuse of Children, p. 179-188.					Farnham.
20	Who spares the rod? Religious orientation, social conformity, and child abuse potential	Rodriguez, CM., and Henderson, RC.	2010	US. literature	Peer-review database searching	Published article in: journal of 'Child Abuse and Neglect', 34: 84–94.
21	Child Abuse Linked to Accusations of "Possession" and "Witchcraft"	Stobart, E.	2006	UK literature	DfE INFORM	Published research report to DfE.
22	Child Abuse Linked to Accusations of 'Possession' and 'Witchcraft', p. 151-172.	Stobart, E.	2009	UK literature	DfE INFORM	Chapter in a book: The Devil's Children. From Spirit Possession to Witchcraft: New Allegations that Affect Children, J. La Fontaine, Editor. 2009, Ashgate: Farnham.

Childhood Wellbeing Research Centre (CWRC)

Working Paper No. 15

A rapid literature review of evidence on child abuse linked to faith or belief

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