

CHILD ABUSE LINKED TO FAITH OR BELIEF

(E.G. WITCHCRAFT ABUSE)

What is faith/belief based abuse?

There is a variety of definitions associated with abuse linked to faith or belief. Faith based abuse is often linked to when families experience some kind of misfortune such as a child with a disability, parental mental health, or exclusion due to poverty.

The families will try and make sense of what they are experiencing through their beliefs that there is a spiritual realm and what happens there has an impact on what happens here. Children are then often used as a scapegoat for that misfortune that they are experiencing.

Beliefs include:

- witchcraft and spirit possession, demons or the devil acting through children or leading them astray (traditionally seen in some Christian beliefs)
- the evil eye or djinns (traditionally known in some Islamic faith contexts) and dakini (in the Hindu context);
- ritual or muti murders where the killing of children is believed to bring supernatural benefits or the use of their body parts is believed to produce potent magical remedies;
- use of belief in magic or witchcraft to create fear in children to make them more compliant when they are being trafficked for domestic slavery or sexual exploitation.

A number of faith groups have beliefs that affect how they use health services. A number of church's and faith groups believe in the power of prayer and may refuse medical treatment.

'Belief in spirit possession' is the belief that an evil force has entered a child and is controlling him or her. Sometimes the word 'witch' is used as is the belief that a child is able to use an evil force to harm others. The belief in 'possession' or 'witchcraft' is widespread. It is not confined to particular countries, cultures or religions, nor is it confined to new immigrant communities

Known cases of child abuse linked to 'possession' or 'witchcraft' is small, but children involved can suffer damage to their physical and mental health. Such abuse generally occurs when a carer views a child as being 'different.' Families and children can be deeply worried by the evil that they believe is threatening them, and abuse often occurs when an attempt is made to 'exorcise', or 'deliver' the child. Exorcism is the attempt to expel evil spirits from a child.

Some examples of children who may be at risk include:

- Children who have challenging behaviour
- Children with disabilities including autism, epilepsy, down's syndrome, dyslexia.
- Left-handed children
- Children whose parents have been branded as witches
- Children living away from home in private fostering situations

Signs a child maybe experiencing abuse linked to faith or belief include:

- Reports that they are or have been accused of being evil
- Personal care deteriorates or has body marks, such as bruises or burns
- Is seen as the scapegoat for a change in family circumstances for the worse
- Irregular attendance

For any concerns about abuse linked to belief in spirit possession speak to your DSL and a referral to ICRT should be made.

Safeguarding

In case of an immediate referral contact Integrated Contact Referral team (ICRT)

Children's Safeguarding	8.30am to 5.15pm Monday to Thursday, and 8.30am to 4.45pm Friday	0191 561 7007
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The Out of Hours Team	Available Monday-Thursday 5.15-8.30am and from Friday 4.45pm - until Monday 8.30am. 24 hours Saturday and Sunday	0191 520 5552
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A written referral must be sent within one working day to
safeguarding.children@togetherforchildren.org.uk

In the case of an Allegation

Designated Officer (LADO)	lado@togetherforchildren.org.uk	0191 561 3901
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Early Help

Early Help Advice and Allocations Team	Early Help Together for Children	0191 561 4084
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For more information

SSCP Sunderland Safeguarding Children Partnership - Home Page
(safeguardingchildrensunderland.com)

togetherforchildren.org.uk/professionals/integrated-contact-referral-team

proceduresonline.com/nesubregion/p_faith_belief.html

[Child Abuse Linked to Faith or Belief – National FGM Centre](#)

[What-is-Witchcraft-Booklet-2017.pdf \(afuca.org\)](#)

Brought to you by the Childcare Team:

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