



WHRIN

THE WITCHCRAFT & HUMAN RIGHTS
INFORMATION NETWORK

Awareness.
Understanding.
Solutions.

Understanding Abuse Linked to Belief in Witchcraft, Juju and Spirit Possession:

A Professional Development and Reflective Learning Course
for Frontline Practitioners





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Organisational Background

The Witchcraft and Human Rights Information Network (WHRIN) is the leading international agency working to raise awareness and understanding of human rights violations that take place due to the beliefs in witchcraft and spirit possession. We are a small, UK-based, not-for-profit organisation with a passion for working to uphold the rights of the most vulnerable and oppressed members of society. Our team is made up of respected experts from the fields of academia, human rights activism, child protection, social work, law and advocacy. All have significant direct experience of working with victims of witchcraft accusations in the UK and around the world.

The Challenge

“The support and protection of children cannot be achieved by a single agency. Every service has to play its part. All staff must have placed upon them the clear expectation that their primary responsibility is to the child and his or her family.”

Lord Laming in the Victoria Climbié Inquiry Report, January 2003

In the UK horrific cases such as Victoria Climbié, Naila Mumtaz and, more recently, Kristy Bamu have highlighted the need for greater understanding of the issues involved for frontline practitioners such as social workers, teachers, mental health workers, police, lawyers, and judges. Such practitioners often lack confidence and struggle to understand the complex issues and terminology involved with working on such cases. This may lead to them failing to see the role that beliefs in witchcraft, juju or spirit possession may play in abuse cases. Ultimately this lack of awareness negatively impacts on practitioner’s ability to carry out effective assessments and interventions.

In addition to this, there exists a perception that such forms of abuse may be confined to the London area. However, research has concluded that this “... should not be considered a London problem.” (Stobart, 2006) and cases have also been identified in the South, the North and in the Midlands.

The problem of abuse linked to beliefs in witchcraft, juju and spirit possession has been recognised by the Department of Education’s National Action Plan to Tackle Child Abuse Linked to Faith or Belief. WHRIN’s professional development and reflective learning course for frontline practitioners seeks to implement some of the key recommendations in this plan in order to ensure that further gross violations of human rights do not take place.

WHRIN provides a number of services that support the work of frontline practitioners and victims of abuse:

- **Information and Advice** - We provide a comprehensive information service and on-line resource centre via our website.

We are also able to offer free advice to organisations wishing to engage with the UN consultative process.

- **Research** - Through encouraging and supporting practitioners to carry out research our work helps to find solutions to often complex problems.
- **Networking** - Promoting networks and information exchange between key individuals and organisations is a core component of our working philosophy.
- **Advocacy** - We develop, support and promote advocacy campaigns that aim to prevent people suffering violations of their human rights due to the beliefs in witchcraft and spirit possession.
- **Training** - Our professional development and reflective learning course for frontline practitioners is delivered across the UK and Ireland to help them understand belief systems, recognise signs of abuse, and provide better support to victims.
- **Consultancy** - From providing expert witness statements to drafting child safeguarding policies – our team of experts are able to tailor our services to meet your organisational needs.

For further details of our work please see www.whrin.org



Course Details

Aims

The course aims to help frontline safeguarding workers, and those working in wider services, become better equipped to understand and respond well to situations where abuse linked to beliefs in witchcraft, juju or spirit possession is anticipated or occurs. With greater understanding will come reduced anxiety about carrying out safeguarding roles in the context of different belief systems. This in turn will improve the quality of assessments and interventions; and ultimately lead to greater protection, access to justice and enjoyment of their wider human rights for those who may be at risk or have suffered abuse due to the beliefs in witchcraft, juju or spirit possession.

Target audience

All frontline staff working with children, families, vulnerable adults and/or community and faith groups. This includes but is not limited to social workers, teachers, police, children's centre staff, child safeguarding officers, medical practitioners, mental health practitioners, lawyers, judges, magistrates, probation officers, midwives, GPs and local safeguarding children board members and associates.

Course Overview

WHRIN believes that this course is the most comprehensive learning resource available today. It has been carefully designed to enable, empower and support frontline practitioners working closely with groups that have suffered or are vulnerable to suffering abuses of their rights due to beliefs in witchcraft, juju and spirit possession. With its focus on specific kinds of abuse with particular characteristics, it seeks to help practitioners to be more effective within the real professional, organisational and financial contexts in which they work.

Using a variety of learning tools, participants will:

- **Explore** the different belief systems behind these forms of human rights abuses.
- **Examine** the role that different faiths may play in promoting beliefs in witchcraft, juju and spirit possession.
- **Work** to identify strategies to promote better safeguarding and positive interventions in cases where there are concerns due to the influence of beliefs in witchcraft, juju and spirit possession.
- **Reflect** on how their own personal perspectives and beliefs may affect their approach when responding to allegations relating to these types of abuse.

The course acknowledges that all participants bring with them a significant degree of expertise to each session and that building networks of mutual support amongst practitioners aids the process of continuing professional development. In order to facilitate this all participants are provided with free access to an online forum where they can share their ideas and experiences with other like-minded professionals. For those wishing to develop their skills and learning further, Virtual Action Learning is also offered as part of the course. A wide range of additional learning materials will be available freely or at reduced rates at each session for those wishing to expand their knowledge even further.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course participants will be able to:

- Better understand the terminology and differences between witchcraft, juju and different forms of spirit possession and how each of these beliefs are located within a human rights framework.
- Recognise the signs of different forms of abuse and identify vulnerable groups.
- Explore the role that different faiths, faith leaders and the media can play in both safeguarding and promoting these forms of abuse.
- Understand how people's need to reconcile misfortune can play a significant role in these forms of abuse.
- Develop an assessment framework and the necessary skills and confidence to assess risk and successfully intervene in cases of abuse where beliefs in witchcraft, juju and spirit possession may be a contributory factor.
- Conceptualise how their own personal belief systems may impact on their ability to carry out assessments.
- Count on the support of WHRIN and other professionals in the network to provide them with the advice and encouragement needed to continue with their professional development.



In-House Services for UK and Ireland

In addition to the sessions that we offer throughout the year, WHRIN is also able to offer a bespoke training programme for individual agencies wishing to support the continuing professional development of their staff. Our courses are developed by leading professionals and can be easily tailored to meet the needs of your organisation. Please contact us for more details.

Virtual Action Learning Opportunities for Course Participants

In order to encourage further reflective learning on the part of course participants, share knowledge and experiences, develop problem-solving skills, provide and receive support from others 'in the same boat', and help develop greater professional linkages, WHRIN offers introductory Virtual Action Learning (VAL) led by an experienced facilitator as part of our course.

Action learning is an accelerated learning tool which can be applied to any number of different workplace issues and challenges. It is based on the notion that people learn most effectively when working on real-world problems occurring in

their own work setting. Action learning groups meet regularly in order to explore ways of resolving real problems and decide on the actions they wish to take. As a means of enabling peers to learn from and with each other the process is second to none. Group members take on a higher level of responsibility for their learning and that of the other set members. This makes it more powerful and means it can have a greater impact than traditional directive training. Virtual Action Learning works in exactly the same way only instead of travelling to a face-to-face meeting our groups meet online.



Participants will gain the skills and confidence needed to carry out effective interventions

Course Developers and Facilitators

This course has been developed and is delivered by a small group of leading practitioners, all of whom have extensive experience working with children and adults accused of witchcraft in the UK and across the world. The team is made up of the following:

Gary Foxcroft is the Founder and Executive Director of WHRIN. He is also an award-winning human rights advocate with a wide range of skills and expertise that complement the development and delivery of this course. Through his work in Nigeria with the charity that he co-founded – Stepping Stones Nigeria – Gary has developed a keen interest and expertise in the field of witchcraft accusations against children. This has led to him being widely consulted on this subject by UN agencies, academics, media organisations and a number of civil society groups around the world.



Prof. Jean La Fontaine trained in Cambridge and taught at the LSE where she is Professor Emeritus. She has conducted research in Africa and the UK and has written extensively on ritual (especially initiation rituals), gender and kinship, witchcraft and satanism, child abuse and incest. Jean's most recent book is "The Devil's Children – From Spirit Possession to Witchcraft: New Allegations that affect Children"



Leethen Bartholemew is an experienced social worker with a background in probation and child protection. His area of expertise include child trafficking, 'honour' based violence, female genital mutilation and children abused through a belief in spirit possession and witchcraft. He is currently pursuing a PhD and his research topic focuses on the outcomes and support needs of children who reside within the same household as accused children.



Laurie Smith is an experienced trainer and facilitator specialising in Action Learning-based problem solving. He currently works for Lancaster University Management School and Swansea Business School and has a wide-range of experience of working with social enterprises and SMEs. Laurie is also a non-executive director of WHRIN and facilitates our Virtual Action Learning resource for practitioners.





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Contact Us:

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The Witchcraft and Human Rights Information Network (WHRIN) is a Community Interest Company (Company No.8281077), which means that we operate on a not-for-profit basis. Any profits that we make will be reinvested into developing WHRIN and supporting community level campaigns around the world to eradicate witchcraft accusations.