

# Language and Terminology Guide



Developing excellence  
in response to FGM and  
other harmful practices

## Child Abuse Linked to Faith or Belief

This document contains terminology that may be used in accusations against children and some local examples (this is not an exhaustive list).

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### Black Magic

Black magic is the branch of magic (paranormal power) dealing in death, destruction, manipulation and spells.

Examples:

- **Zadutona** (Bengali/Hindi/Urdu) black magic that may or may not be with the help of a jinn/ evil spirit
  - **Sihr** (Arabic) - An act which brings one closer to, with the help of Shaytaan (the devil). The basic meaning of sihr is to make something appear in a form other than its real form.
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### Juju

A West African term for the use of black magic. That is, magic that is used for a negative end. Some human traffickers may use the belief system to coerce victims and ensure that they do as they are told and do not report the exploitation experienced and/or the traffickers to authorities. Belief in the power of juju is deeply held by the majority of people West Africa.

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### Muti

A word used in across Southern Africa (Zimbabwe, South Africa, Botswana, Swaziland, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia) to refer to magic that enables people to gain power or wealth. The most extreme form uses human body parts and people may be killed to provide them.

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### Sorcery

Belief in magical spells that harness occult forces or evil spirits to produce unnatural effects in the world

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### Djinns

Djinns are beings much like humans, possessing the ability to be good and bad and believed in some cases to be able to possess a person. According to many Islamic scholars, the devil was a djinn, although

others stress the difference between djinn and qareen, the latter being an evil spirit intent on tricking people into committing sins. *Alternative spellings: Jinn or Jinni from which genie is derived.*

## Evil Eye

The Arabic word al-‘ayn (translated as the evil eye) refers to when a person harms another with his eye/look/gaze whether intentionally or not.

Alternative names: nozor/ najar/ nazar on Indian sub-continent; Arab world.

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## Ritual Abuse

The term ritual abuse was used to refer to the abuse or killing of children as part of rituals usually thought of as directed to the worship of Satan. The original idea was derived from the early modern belief in witches meeting (the Witches Sabbath) to worship Satan in ceremonies in which children were abused, or killed and eaten. No evidence, then or now, has been discovered that these meetings actually took place.

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## Possession

The belief that a benign (positive) or malignant (negative) force has, whether the person wills it or not, entered their body and is controlling him or her. Such beliefs are held across all faith groups and can lead to a number of positive or negative outcomes for those who are thought to be possessed by such spirits.

Examples:

- In the centre of Mozambique, the name of healing spirits and their practitioners is dzoca; the dzoca is a set of ancestral spirits that for generations have possessed the living through agnate inheritance to exercise their healing powers. Dzoca spirits possess only individuals of families with a healing genealogy
  - Christianity: Holy Spirit or Spirit possession
  - Judaism: Shedim = demons/ spirits
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## Wicca

Wicca is a nature-oriented (not nature-worshipping), initiatory, pagan mystery religion based on the traditions and beliefs of tribal Europe, with significant influence from Western magical traditions and a ritual structure based on the writings and practices of Gerald Gardner in the 1940 and the covens of the New Forest region.

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## Witchcraft

The belief that a child is able to use an evil force to harm others. There is no universally accepted definition of witchcraft and the term means different things to different people in different places. Primarily, witchcraft can be seen as a negative, malevolent force which is used by people – witches – in the spirit realm to bring about harm in the physical realm. It is the art of doing evil.

Examples:

- Feitcaria in Portuguese
- Kindoki in Western Africa (please see below)- Lingala term from the Democratic Republic of Congo now used in Europe to mean witchcraft generally
- Wicca, a neo-pagan religion. Mainly in Europe and USA. People may identify as 'witches'

## Witch

For the majority of people, a witch is an evil person who has the ability to bring about all manner of harm. Characteristics include, but are not limited to:

- psychic cannibalism,
- being able to fly,
- being able to take animal form in order to bring about harm.

It is often believed that the soul of the suspected witch leaves the physical body during the night and enters into the spirit or "witchcraft" world.

Here, along with other witches, they cause all manner of harm such as, but not exclusively:

- road accidents,
- spreading illness,
- eat human flesh,
- joblessness,
- inability to save money,
- impotence,
- infertility,
- mental health problems etc.

Children are very vulnerable and voiceless. They have therefore become recent targets of witchcraft accusations. The belief that they can be witches was more recently noted in the Democratic Republic of Congo in the late 1990's.

It is thought that this may have stemmed from a changing perception of children brought about by the

use of child soldiers in conflicts, widespread viewing of certain Nigerian “Nollywood” films, and the increased socio-economic position of children in some societies. This belief has spread to many new parts of Africa and is especially noted in Angola, Nigeria, Liberia, Sierra Leone and DRC.

*Recommended further reading – [The Invention of Child Witches in DRC](#).*

### ***Obeah (alternative spelling Obi)***

A form of religious belief of African origin, practiced in some parts of the Caribbean and nearby tropical America, involving “sorcery” and often understood in the same way as Black Magic.

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### **Voodoo**

The term Voodoo is applied to the branches of a West African ancestor-based Theist-Animist religious tradition. Its primary roots are among the Fon-Ewe peoples of West Africa, in the country now known as Benin. The word vodun is the Fon-Ewe word for spirit. Versions of Voodoo have travelled to other areas with the movement of people.

Alternative spelling: Vodun, Voudoun, Vudu, Vodou

For more information and advice on Child Abuse linked to Faith or Belief you can contact us or visit our website at [www.nationalfgmcentre.org.uk](http://www.nationalfgmcentre.org.uk)