



UNDERSTANDING WITCHCRAFT, SPIRIT POSSESSION & RITUALISTIC ABUSE

Witchcraft, spirit possession and ritualistic abuse refer to forms of sexual abuse, harm, mistreatment or exploitation inflicted on individuals – both children and adults – within the context of structured belief systems, rituals or practices that attribute supernatural significance to the abuse. These may involve coercion, violence, psychological manipulation or exploitation, often justified by beliefs in spiritual forces, purification or supernatural intervention. **(NPCC, 2025)**

Witchcraft:

a child or adult who is able to use evil forces to harm others

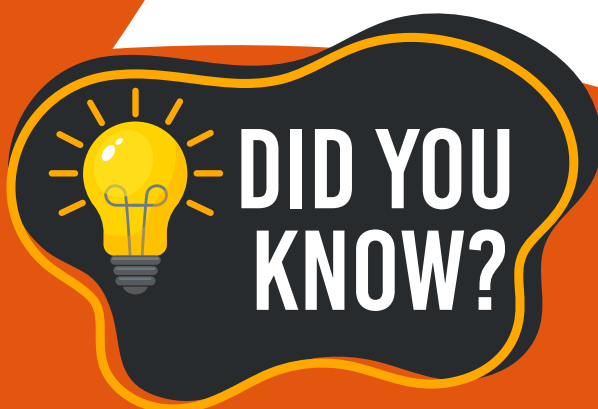
Spirit possession:

where an evil force has entered a child or adult and is controlling him or her

Harmful Ritual Practices:

structured or symbolic acts of violence believed to yield supernatural benefit

NOTE: Spiritual and religious beliefs are not inherently harmful. Abuse occurs when belief systems are exploited to justify coercion, control or harm.



In July 2021, the UN Human Rights Council passed Resolution 47/8, calling for action to stop harmful practices linked to witchcraft accusations and ritual attacks. The resolution recognises that these accusations often lead to serious abuse, and urges countries to protect those at risk and prevent such harm.

What steps can you take to recognise, respond to, and raise awareness of this issue?

What to do if you think someone is at risk:

- If someone is in immediate danger, contact 999
- Remember the four RRRR's: recognise, respond, record, refer
- Take and keep detailed and accurate notes: Who? What? Where? When? How?
- Use clear and simple language; do not use abbreviations
- Be clear about what actions have been taken
- Do not delay!