“Women, you know that women they are very easy to deceive … ”
Understandings of women's role in witchcraft-related violence among community groups and social workers in southern Nigeria and handling of such violence.

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Abstract

This study aims to explore how social workers and community groups in southern Nigeria understand and interpret women's roles in witchcraft related violence and the implications those views have on the handling of such violence. This topic is of relevance for social work since knowledge about this problem can increase the awareness of violence and its implications when meeting clients that are exposed to it.

The study was conducted with an ethnographical approach using a combination of participant observations, semi structured and un-structured forms of interviews’ and seven focus group discussions. Four of the focus groups consisted of social workers who work with empowerment and advocacy for women and girls in Edo-state. The other three were made up of locals in a suburb of Benin City. In this study, I used Clifford Geertz (1973) interpretive anthropology as a comprehensive theory in analysing the results and the theoretical concepts from Mann Huyng Hurs (2006) theory on stages of Empowerment; an existing social disturbance, Conscientizing, Mobilizing, Maximizing and creating a new order.

The results of this study show that understandings and interpretations of women’s role in witchcraft-related violence by the participating social workers and community members influences their views on what is to be considered violence and who are to be considered victims. Their views also influence their containment strategies and approaches on how to handle this violence.

Keywords: Social workers, community groups, women, witchcraft, violence, understanding, containment strategies.
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1. Introduction

It has been suggested that the area of witchcraft-related violence has been neglected by government and not many Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) work with this problem in Nigeria (Secker, 2013; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 2009). The beliefs in the supernatural is central and deeply rooted in Nigerian culture; although beliefs do not necessary lead to violence, there is a high prevalence of such violence in the southern part of Nigeria (Adedotun, 2016). This makes conducting field studies within in the Minor Field Studies program in Edo-state relevant. The idea to try to assess understandings on how women are interpreted in relation to this violence in Edo-state came from reading about the strong traditions and systems that make women more vulnerable to violence in Edo-state; Edo-women traditionally do not have inheritance rights and are surrounded by taboos and traditional regulations (Nagle & Owasanoye, 2016). The patriarchal system is deeply rooted in Edo-culture and personified in the male king called Oba who is believed to have unshakable magical and supernatural powers (ibid.).

This study deals with a subject that might appear not related to social work or strange, to a person not familiar to the idea of witchcraft and violence connected to it. Therefore I will try to – as far as the limitation of the range in this project – present a clarifying background to the subject of the thesis and the context of this study. First I will present the subjects relation to social work, problem statement and research questions and terms central to this thesis.

1.1 Problem statement and relation to social work

This study does not aim to focus on the existence of witches; from an interpretive anthropology perspective witchcraft is real for the people who believe in it and these beliefs have implications both on thinking and actions. Hence, the beliefs of social workers as well as their clients affect the practice of social work. Earlier research provides a background to the understanding of how this violence often has gender discriminating features (see Adinkrah, 2004; Chadhuri, 2012; Foxcroft, 2014; Nagle & Owasanoye, 2016; UNHCR, 2009). Persecution based on witchcraft beliefs and/or threats of witchcraft as a form of psychological violence can be used as means of control against women and can play a crucial part on other violence against women, such as intimate partner violence, trafficking or domestic abuse. All of these problems are relevant to social work, especially work that focus on empowerment and advocacy for women.

The fear and use of witchcraft may seem strange or surprising to a person unfamiliar with these beliefs, but as Dirk Kohnert (1996) points out, most religions and belief systems have been or are being used as means of power and control. Knowledge about this topic is not only relevant to the contexts where the beliefs are more common; social workers that are not familiar with these beliefs in other contexts might miss this aspect of psychological/physical violence and its implications when meeting clients that are exposed to it.

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1.2 Purpose
The purpose of this thesis is to explore how social workers and community groups in southern Nigeria understand and interpret women’s roles in witchcraft related violence and the implications those views have on their handling of such violence.

1.3 Research questions
Which understandings do social workers and community/kinships groups in Edo State have of witchcraft-related violence? What is their view on women’s role in such violence? What does this mean for community and social work practices containment strategies of witchcraft-related violence?

1.4 Terms

1.4.1 Witchcraft
Since the term “witchcraft” might cause many associations I think it is necessary to clarify already at the beginning what I mean by referring to the term in this study. My interpretation does not include all the aspects of paranormal, mystic abilities or invocation of supernatural powers. By using the term “witchcraft” I am referring to exercises and rituals involving magic or sorcery to control, get benefits over others and/or do harm; practices associated with wickedness, the devil, demons and other evil forces – so called black magic, voodoo or juju. The Witchcraft and Human Rights Information Network (WHRIN, 2014), a non-governmental organization devoted to bringing awareness to the problem of human rights violations due to the belief in witchcraft, suggests an understanding of the term witchcraft as: “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.” (2014, p. 4). It is this definition I use when referring to ‘witchcraft’.

1.4.2 Violence
When referring violence I use a definition of violence similar to that of World Health Organization (WHO, 2002, p.5) which states: “The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation.”, this definition should also be seen as including forms of violence that is not only physical. “…‘the use of physical force or power’ should be understood to include neglect and all types of physical, sexual and psychological abuse, as well as suicide and other self-abusive acts.”.

With witchcraft-related violence, I mean both violence that is a consequence of persecutions or accusations of witchcraft, both physical and psychological violence, including neglect and stigmatization. I also refer to violence that includes witchcraft – a psychological or ritualistic violence.

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1 West-African term for witchcraft.
2. Background
Here follows an introduction to the Nigerian context; social work, women’s situation and witchcraft.

2.1 The Nigerian context

2.1.1 Nigeria, a brief introduction
Nigeria, sometimes called “the giant of Africa”, is a federal republic with 36 states and one federal capital territory (Svenska FN-förbundet, 2015). It is the most populous country in Africa with about 177,5 million people (ibid.). Nigeria is a very diverse and multifold country with over 250 ethnical groups and above 500 languages; the largest groups are Hausa, Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo (ibid.). There are a lot of divisions and differences between these states – battles and strife between different religious or ethnic groups is common, sometimes with hundreds of deaths as a result (ibid.). Since 2009 the Islamic terror group Boko Haram became a serious threat to the security in Nigeria, mainly to people in the north (ibid.).

The country is rich in natural resources and is one of the world’s largest oil producers, but due to corruption and instabilities there are still large economic differences (Svenska FN-förbundet, 2015). Nigeria was independent from colonial rule from the United Kingdom 1960. After this the country was a military regime until 1999. The current president Muhammadu Buhari’s election marked Nigeria’s first civilian-to-civilian transfer of power shift to an opposing party and was notably peaceful (ibid.). Since democratization there have been improvements in the protection and respect of human rights, but the country is still considered authoritarian and much-influenced by corruption (ibid.). There is also still a lot of instabilities an uncertainties; police and military are often guilty of murder, torture, rape and summary executions (Utrikespolitiska Institutet: Landguiden (UI-Landguiden), 2016).

This study was conducted in a local community, part of an eastern suburb of Benin City in Edo State; a semi-agricultural community under development. The houses, bungalows in different stages of construction, are situated in-between plantain, corn, yam, coco and cassava plantations. There are different groups of ethnicities in this area, but according to the local social worker (personal communication, mars 8, 2017) most of the people are from different Edo ethnicities, many are blue collar workers, small scale traders, pipeline-workers, farmers or unemployed. In Edo State the minimum salary is 20 000 Naira per month (65 USD), but a lot of the people in this area are self-employed and may earn less than 5000 Naira per month (16 USD) (ibid.). Therefore many of the houses are built with money from relatives abroad (ibid.). There are also some Hausas and Fulanis in this community, northerners that mainly make their living as herdsmen or hunters (ibid.). Many have come as refugees and live under poor conditions hunting wild animals to survive (ibid.).
2.1.2 Social work in Nigeria

Although having the potential of a global superpower with its’ large population and natural resources, Nigeria tackles many social- and health difficulties with limited possibilities to meet them (UI-Landguiden, 2016). There are large differences in income, some people are extremely wealthy from the oil-industry and at the same time about half of the population lives in poverty (ibid.). According to the Human Development Index (HDI), a summary measure for education, equality, standard of living, life expectancy and health, Nigeria’s value for 2015 is 0.527 – this puts the country in the low human development category and ranked 152 out of 188 countries and territories (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2017).

Social work as a profession is relatively new in Nigeria, but Ayodele Ogundipe and Patrick A. Edewor (2012) highlights that informal social work has a long tradition in Nigeria, within kinship groups, clans and local communities. Pre-colonial Nigeria had solid institutions in kinship, family and marriage systems, these systems met and took care of responsibilities within the group concerning economy, recreation, legal matters and care for the sick and elderly (ibid.). They functioned as social security systems and welfare agents. Nigerian Social structure made a sense of solidarity and closeness that expressed itself through mutual support and assistance “making everybody his brother’s keeper” (Ogundipe & Edewor, 2012, p.47). Life in Nigeria is still lived corporately to a large extent; the individual does not exist on its own but is subject to duties and responsibilities to the larger group, very unlike the Western idea of the nuclear family but a complex system of aunts and uncles and so on (Ogundipe & A. Edewor, 2012).

The earliest formal social work practices in Nigeria were introduced by western missionaries in the middle of the 1800s, mainly as a way to get converts to Christianity (Ogundipe & Edewor, 2012). Nigeria’s own first formal social work practices and education was modelled on these missionary schools and centres. The practice was based on British colonialists’ ideas about social work, where focus was mainly on the individual or the family. The Canadian-based social work Professor Uzo Anucha (2008) has criticized this form of social work as not suitable for Nigerian conditions and as a form of reinforcing colonial hegemony. To be able to be successful, the practical social work in Nigeria is dependent on the strong family ties and cooperate living, therefore social work to a large extent has to be performed as group work or community work (Ibiezugbe, 1996).

Nigeria’s first formal social work education was formed in 1976 and currently there are many universities in Nigeria that provide education and training in social work, with most of them consisting of one or two year courses (Ibiezugbe, 1996). However, since 1986 there have been degree- and post-graduate programs. Although very few universities have an independent Social Work institution, the education is often under sociology or anthropology institutions (ibid.). There is no federal social work law, but the social work policies lie under the Federal Ministry of Health and Social Services and the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development (Federal Government Of Nigeria, 2017). There are also many voluntary groups and organizations all over Nigeria formed to fill the gap of
social services that the government does not provide (Ogundipe & Edewor, 2012). There is not much governmental funding in Nigeria, no resource system to draw from and no functioning social security system (Metz, 1992).

2.1.3 Women in Nigeria and violence against women
Nigeria ranks 125 out of 145 countries in the global gender-gap index 2015 by World Economic Forum (2015). This index measures economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival and political empowerment. Women in Nigeria face a tough situation; child marriages, harmful widowhood practices and gross discrimination against childless women are all still common, although forbidden by law (UI-Landguiden, 2016). Genital mutilation is also forbidden, but still about every fourth woman is calculated to have been exposed to some kind of mutilation (ibid.). Women also do not have inheritance rights in many states (ibid.). Nigeria has signed several international resolutions and agreements to attain gender equality; among these is the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discriminations Against Women (CEDAW, 2008). In CEDAWs latest report (2008) the committee is positive towards Nigeria’s general assembly’s efforts in taking on programs and policies to promote gender equality and women empowerment. CEDAW also acknowledges and appreciates the state’s collaboration with the civil society in working for women’s rights. But at the same time the report is very critical when it comes to discriminating laws at both state and federal level (CEDAW, 2008). Some of these laws are referred to and justified as cultural, such as the practice of Sharia Laws parallel to national law in the northern states that for example accepts rape within marriage (United Nations Women (UN Women), 2017).

2.1.4 Witchcraft beliefs and their linkage to violence
The belief that people can gain and access occult powers and magic is central in most Sub-Saharan African societies, especially in western Africa (Kohnert, 1996). As stated in the introduction the beliefs in witchcraft is central in Nigeria, especially in the southern states (Adedotun, 2016). These beliefs do not necessarily lead to violence, but the idea of linking witchcraft to the devil was promoted by authorities, such as Christian missionaries and colonial rulers; the colonial system condoned rituals to find and persecute witches as scapegoats of misfortunes and devil worshipers – as it increased the colonial power and at the same weakened traditional systems and religions (Stewart & Strathern, 2004). In Nigerian politics violence linked to witchcraft was used as a means of power and control by colonial administration as they introduced artificial leaders and chiefs with connection to cults that secretly supported colonial leaders, violence connected to cults still plays an important role in Nigerian politics (Adedotun, 2016). Contemporary African beliefs has however taken on new forms, new cults have formed bringing new types of violence, such as a market for sacrifices and commercial distribution of human body parts used in rituals (ibid.). The fear of witches is not an irrational notion, it has reasons; the market mentioned above and trafficking of people to obtain magical ingredients has resulted in many reported cases of murder and molestation (ibid.). There is also a market for what is
perceived as protection or deliverance from witchcraft, such as hiring “witch hunters”, often Pentecostal or charismatic church leaders (WHRIN, 2014). These same witch hunters may also suggest and perform exorcism on accused witches. These are often violent and harmful practices that may lead to lethal consequences (ibid.). Powerful political and religious leader’s benefit from these beliefs, in the market of witchcraft/witchcraft-deliverance and accusation or by using cult-violence and the occult as means of power – therefore it’s not a risk-free task to stand up against witchcraft-accusations; human sacrifice and ritual murders (UNHCR, 2009).

People who identify themselves as witches, or are accused of being witches, are often persecuted and rejected by society (UNHCR, 2009). Accusations and persecution of people dealing with the occult are usually targeted towards vulnerable groups in the society: women (in particular elderly women) and children (ibid.). Accusations typically spring from individual misfortunes or series of misfortunes. Fear and accusations also thrives on a community level; especially where there are political tensions, conflicts, ecological changes or disease (Stewart & Strathern, 2004). Witchcraft beliefs help to provide answers to why something happened not just how; it makes difficulties easier to deal with because it opens up to the possibility to fight against hardship (Stewart & Strathern, 2004).

Witchcraft is a punishable crime in Nigeria (Criminal Code Act, Chapter 20). Because witchcraft is a crime punishable by law; police usually do not interfere in persecutions or accusations of alleged witches, although these accusations many times lead to violence or even deaths (UNHCR, 2009).
3. Method

In this chapter I will present my methodological choices, the trustworthiness and authenticity, selection and literature searches of this study, as well as the ethical considerations and my own pre-understandings.

3.1 Methodology

This thesis has an abductive qualitative approach. The term abduction has to do with the relation between theory and empirics (Patel & Davidson, 2011). This means a combination or pending between an inductive and deductive approach (ibid.). In this study it means that theory has been involved in the different stages of research; both the process of forming questions and in the analysis. The study is conducted as a form of micro-ethnography. Ethnography is described as a form of craft that often takes long time to master; it is also a type of research that ideally is conducted over a long time period (Fife, 2005). This method requires that you take time to understand the larger social and historical context (ibid.). As a beginner at academic writing and research with limited time for field studies, this choice of method was quite difficult. However, I found it most appropriate since the purpose of this thesis is to explore meaning in a context where I am seen as an outsider and possibly met with suspicion or with social desirability in a face-to-face interview situation; especially as a white European woman in a former British colony such as Nigeria. Ethnography is described as a way to access people’s views, to learn how to solve problems by understanding the common sense within the culture – to absorb how people think from people who grew up in the milieu where the study is conducted (Fife, 2005). This is a process that is described almost like an art form which takes empathy and willingness to participate in people’s everyday life and thinking (ibid.). Even though you might not agree with everything, the aim is to not only take part in thought process but also feelings, to gain understanding on how it is to live in that particular place (ibid.). This is also the vulnerability of this method, as it is very much dependent on the researcher’s skill to make these constructions of meaning accessible to the reader (Geertz, 1973).

In this study I have used interviews (semi-structured and focus groups) to relate and strengthen understandings of observations and participant observations from my approximately two months stay in Benin, Edo State. For the interviews I used a guide (see appendix 2) that was formed with the help of Håkan Jönsson’s (2010) “problem perspective”. I found his schedule of problem components a useful tool compatible with the interpretive anthropology, since it can be used as a tool to access meanings and understandings. However, this guide was not strictly followed since I did not want to steer discussions too much. The focus groups consisted of three focus group discussions with community members and four focus group discussions with professional social workers. The idea is not to reach consensus on the subject but this form of interview is an appropriate choice for when you are interested in how meaning is collectively made (Billinger, 2005; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014). The
setting can also make it easier to express emotions and thoughts on more sensitive matters (ibid.). Group discussions also have its limitations, because the researcher do not have the same control on the subject as in one-on-one interviews and also the recordings can become very difficult and time-consuming to transcribe (ibid.). I also performed unstructured forms of interview in my participating observations in the community; Wayne Fife (2005) describes this form of interviews as taking a chance to talk about subjects as they occur naturally in everyday settings. The focus groups consisted of three focus group discussions with community members where two groups had three participants each and one with five. The focus groups with professional social workers consisted of four groups, one with two participants, two with three, and one with six participants. There were also participants that are part of the study in other ways through the observations and unstructured interviews.

3.2 Trustworthiness and authenticity

In qualitative research the criteria for good quality is not usually measured in the concepts of validity and credibility (Bryman, 2011). Alan Bryman points to how the ideas of trustworthiness and authenticity could function as alternative criteria’s for qualitative research. Trustworthiness can be seen as consisting of four concepts; *credibility, transferability, dependability* and *confirmability* (Bryman, 2011, p.354). Credibility has to do with plausibility in the interpretations done by the researcher (ibid.). Qualitative studies are often criticized for being too subjective (ibid.). This might especially be true in this study since I aim to understand meanings of other people’s views. In order to still ensure credibility I have tried to be transparent and remain reflexive throughout the study by being transparent and critical towards my own pre-understandings and ideas, as they might also affect the confirmability of this study. When it comes to transferability – that is if the results are applicable to other contexts – I did not aim in this study to be able to make any overall truth claims about the problem of witchcraft-related violence, but rather perspectives on how this problem can be understood and the possible consequences for social work practice.

Dependability has to do with skilfulness and transparency in conducts and choice of methods (Bryman, 2011). Since this study is quite small and I was new to the context, the method and the form of writing makes the desired skilfulness a weak part of my study, I although hope that stubbornness and curiosity helped me to some extent. Marete Watt Boolsen (2007) refers to George Gaskell (2000, in Watt Boolsen 2007, p.188) who suggests seven steps to control the quality of qualitative research; *triangulation, critical thinking, documenting, transparency, broad descriptions of results, establish new knowledge and to be confident in your own interpretations*. In my own study I might lack some of that confidence in my interpretations since (as mentioned earlier) I am new to both the research process itself and in particular the method of ethnography. However I have done my best to ensure my results by first using different types of methods to collect data, to find complexity and different ideas on the subject. When it comes to transparency I am aware that this study is a bit too small to fit all the empirical material collected in this short period, with this I have to admit that my own curiosity might
have carried me away to collect more data than I could process, or at least present, in this limited study. Also I could not fully use the thick descriptions described by Geertz (1973) since the form of the bachelor thesis in social work does not really allow it. Still, I have tried to add observations and descriptions to bring life to the interview material and done my best to shed light on different perspectives from my participants. This helped me in my aim to be truthful and fair in my descriptions of the result. I have also been careful in documenting both observations and interviews, by transcribing and always carry my notebook for field notes. I also kept a daily dairy during the field studies. By considering these steps I at least could ensure some dependability, truthfulness and also to some extent the possibility to strengthening and confirming the results – the confirmability of this study.

3.3 Selection

I used a form of strategically selected sample to find formal social work practitioners. A purposive sampling and snowball technique was used to find experts in the field of social work in Edo state who would guide me to relevant social workers for this study. This form of sampling might not be considered as representative for a whole population, it is still described as an acceptable way to find relevant participant specific for the subject (Neuman, 2003). I still found it most appropriate since I had limited knowledge and was in the country for a relatively short period of time. When I arrived in Benin I started off by conducting interviews around the theme of social work in Nigeria and aspects of violence with stakeholders, to guide me to the subject and important key professionals in the field. I first visited the University of Benin (UniBen); I had already been in contact with Professor Kokunre Eghafona-Agbontaen from the Department of Social Work at UniBen before traveling to Nigeria. At the university I was introduced to the staff at the department and a student representative. At UniBen they suggested that I visit The Federal Department of Women Affairs in Benin and the National Agency for Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP). The staff at Women’s Affairs helped me to connect with social workers working on the field. According to them limited funding results in very few governmental field workers, therefore they are dependent on the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), NGOs and Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) in the practical social work. The social workers participating in this study came from three NGOs suggested as important key-players to me by both Women’s Affairs and Uniben and one group of governmental employed social workers. The above social workers all work with empowerment and advocacy for women and girls. I will not mention names of these workplaces to protect the identities of participants due to the sensitive subject and as some of these organizations has very few employees. I also did interviews with one FBO, but these were removed from the study after being asked to contribute with funds during the data-collection. The community participants were chosen from the community where I stayed as a form of snowball technique. In this thesis I will refer to this community as “Ise” to protect my participants. At first I was very careful about whom I approached with the question of participation due to the sensitive subject,
but it soon became clear that people were very interested in participating and giving their own views, this also gave me the complicated task of sorting through amounts of field notes.

The participants in this study are not representative for the whole population of Nigeria or Edo state, community members in the study are all from larger group of low income and with not much, if any formal education, whereas the social workers all have university degrees – although all are not, or not only, in social work. I also did not focus on groups of different ethnicities. This might also present a limitation due to cultural differences in how witchcraft is interpreted. I presented the social workers here as representatives of the professional social work rather than their organizations, this also might be a limitation due to the different motives of their organizations.

3.4 Literature searches

Before traveling to Benin I did a literature search to gain background understanding. This is considered as an important first step in all ethnography and usually a process that takes months (Fife, 2005). This did take quite a lot of time, but not months as recommended by Fife. With consideration to the small scale of this study I still aimed to be thorough in my process to gain understanding on the subject and context.

I used the university's library catalogue, LIBRIS, SocINDEX, Academic Search Complete and Google Scholar to find previous research. Search terms used were: witchcraft, juju, violence, ritual violence, religion and spirituality, social work and women. I also combined these with results from Nigeria, Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa.

3.5 Ethical considerations

In consideration of the respondents I followed the four ethical principles in the humanities and social sciences research from the Swedish Scientific Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002). These include confidentiality, information, consent and utilization (ibid.). I used a written statement (see Appendix 1) when contacting my participants and their organizations. In this I gathered essential information for them: including an introduction of me as a student, purpose of study, guarantee of disguise of identifying information and that information will be handled with care and confidentiality. They were also informed that they could chose to end an interview any time they wanted, or withdraw their participation and also their right to read the final result. However when talking to people in Ise, the choice of a letter to inform participants was not the best option, due to limited literacy levels among the participants. I therefore used Pidgin English or an interpreter to translate to Edo language to explain and seek informed consent. The ethnographical approach with the aim to understand by participating is also a “nosey” approach; to stay in the same community where I conducted my studies also presented problems to limitations of relationships. In this I have done my best to be clear about my role as a student on field studies. I have a relation to the Benin City before, since this is the hometown of my husband and his family. Although this thesis was conducted in a part of Benin that none of us had been to before, being married to an Edo-man created even more problems with
limitations as I no longer was seen as a Swedish student but somewhat part of the community. I had to often re-inform my participants in Ise that I was not just a visitor but a student doing field research. I learned from Fife (2005) that one way to do this is to now and then take up my notebook and just quickly mention that I wanted to remember something said or happened for the thesis. I have also tried to be reflective to what was important and what could be left out. I did not want to fall into the pitfalls of sensationalizing the subject; therefore I have tried not to document all the stories of witchcraft-horror and remain critical of my own writing.

Since the subject is somewhat sensitive and I did not want myself or my participants (or the organizations they are working under) to be at risk of accusations or rumours that might be harmful to them. At the same time, I think this is a very relevant subject to gain knowledge about. Therefore I did my best to keep a low profile, use discernment and to be responsive and humble and also carefully protect identities. My aim was to understand and not judge people – this is something that was necessary to keep in mind both in relation to what kind of questions I was presenting and how I asked these questions. In this it was very helpful that I understand pidgin and have some cultural competence through my family in Benin. I had also great help from these people and their knowledge in testing my questions and approach.

3.6 Pre-understanding

I have an interest in understanding violence against women, it is this interest that led me into studying social work and it is from that angle the idea of this thesis came. I first stumbled upon the theme of witchcraft-related violence in a case of domestic violence involving a person close to me in Edo-state. This woman was almost driven from her home by the family of her abusive man; the family accused her of using juju to tie the man to her. This made me think about cases of intimate partner violence that I have encountered in Sweden when women that often are accused of being sick or evil as a part of, or explanation to, abuse by the abusive partner. In Sweden we would probably call this psychological violence, but it can also be seen as a way of demonizing similar to witchcraft accusations. My original idea was therefore to write about intimate partner violence in southern Nigeria, but I later changed it to this aspect of violence after reading more on traditional systems and rituals in Edo state.

I think these pre-understandings, for good or bad, are visible in the way I have approached the subject. Due to this being a form of special interest I have also a lot of literature on violence against women and the ideas of gender-power structures in mind. I cannot remove these ideas and I am not sure that it would be desirable to do so even if I could. But I hope that I can use these understandings in a reflexive way so that I can also take in other perspectives.
4. Theoretical framework

In this section I will present the theories and the analytical framework that was used to analyse the results.

4.1 Theory

For this thesis I have used Clifford Geertz’s (1973) interpretive anthropological theory to get insight to the meaning of witchcraft beliefs and women’s role in connection to these beliefs. I have also used theory on empowerment-work to analyse the approaches to handling witchcraft-related violence, since all the social work participants’ work within organizations that works with this aspect of social work.

4.1.1 Clifford Geertz, Interpretive anthropology

From Geertz (1973) perspective culture is a context through which we can analyse and describe social events and not only an outside power to which those things can be attributed. Interpretive anthropology is a constructive view on culture in which it is understood as a set of rules or patterns that forms behaviour essential to how we make meaning out of life (ibid.). From this perspective examining culture is therefore a constructive search for meaning. Culture is a part of our thinking, thoughts formed by transmissions of significant symbols, embodiments of ideas, through which we orient ourselves – words, gestures, art, music, mechanical things etc. (ibid.). Culture as such, although not physical, does not only exist in cognitive functions – it is intertwined in our behaviour (ibid.). Also religion or spiritual beliefs and rituals are according to Geertz a symbolic of truth, these both reflects the world of believers and shapes it by providing meaning to the true reality of things. Religious rituals reflect back on the everyday understanding of things and thereby shape social life (ibid.). The beliefs make people endure and comprehend hardship and the reality of suffering in life, belief systems also shapes feelings and motivations; religion and beliefs gives meaning to motivations, actions, and are sources of moods (Geertz, 1973).

Geertz (1973) considers the research of cultures and meanings are best done by “thick descriptions”, a term the author borrowed from Gilbert Ryle. Thick descriptions refer to the aim of ethnography as not only presenting a set of actions or things, but rather the meaning and purpose of those actions and things. Geertz uses the imagery of a wink or a twitch, one is to be understood as a form of communication, it bears meaning - the other is just a physical movement. A lot of information between people is insinuated; it is up to the researcher to distinguish the twitch from the wink and the meaning of that certain wink. This second order of interpretation is what makes the unfamiliar familiar (Geertz, 1973). By doing so one can uncover those structures of ideas that forms behaviour (ibid.).

4.1.2 Empowerment

The participating social workers all work within organizations that do empowerment work and advocacy for exposed persons in Edo society – mainly women and children. The purpose of empowerment is to help people get control over their own lives (Payne, 2002). Advocacy that is
closely connected to empowerment means to represent the interests of clients to other powerful institutions and social structures in order to create social justice (Payne, 2002). However the power that social workers allocate to clients by the process of empowerment and advocacy also means that social workers are the ones in possession of power (ibid.). Social workers therefore have to organize their work so that it gives way to the possibility for clients to change these power structures (ibid.).

Empowerment has also been used as a way to disguise political interest to limit resources and costs by referring to the responsibility of individuals to handle their own needs (Payne, 2002). The work can also be criticized for not focusing on cooperation, community and causing conflict and division between groups of different interests (Hur, 2006).

Mann Huyng Hur (2006) has written an article on the components of empowerment by doing a synthesis of theories from different disciplines such as political science, social welfare, education and women’s studies, health studies, management and community psychology. Hur suggests that empowerment work is both a process and an outcome defined in five stages: 1. *An existing social disturbance*: there are inequalities, lack of voice and sense of powerlessness for disadvantaged groups. 2. *Conscientizing*: to make conscious and create a critical awareness about these inequalities to these groups on how social hierarchies and oppression affect the group and individuals, and also create a confidence in the ability to change the current situation. 3. *Mobilizing*: this third step is action, when people do things to take control over their situation. 4. *Maximizing*: to share with the public or surrounding community to create more consciousness, further mobilization and awareness. 5. *Creating a new order*: to achieve social change, to remove oppression and create social justice (Hur, 2006, p. 535).

### 4.2 Analytical framework

The analysis of this thesis was inspired by Håkan Jönnson’s (2010) *problem perspective*. Jönnson describes how his book can be used for problem analysis, to see how a problem is constructed and to find different versions of problems; so called *social problems frames* a term borrowed from Snow & Benford (1988, referred to in Jönnson, 2010, p.25). This instrument is in form of a schedule, the same schedule I also used in making my interview questions. The themes are *character of the problem, reasons, consequences, magnitude, history and development, solutions, actors and illustrations and examples* (Jönnson, 2010, p.26-27). By sorting out these components Jönssson (2010) suggests that one can find different versions of problems and also reveal those perspectives that becomes invisible by the way the problem is constructed. The author shows how one can use the tool and shape it as it fits your own study. For this thesis his book was a ground for inspiration and it helped me to sort the empirical material. Although I did not strictly follow Jönsson’s schedule, it helped to identify different components of the views on women’s role in witchcraft related violence, which also resulted in different containment strategies.
5. Previous research

In this section I present studies that I found most relevant to this thesis. I have chosen studies that both present ideas on women’s role in witchcraft-related violence, studies that focus on containment strategies and also research on the role of culture and faith in social work.

To start with, there are some studies that show how witchcraft accusations can be understood as a product and means for male control in patriarchal systems. Among these is one gender-analysis with data from the Ghanaian newspaper Daily Graphics on 13 reported cases of women accused of witchcraft and murdered during 1995-2001 by Mensah Adinkrah (2004). This study is limited to a few cases, although there were probably more cases during this period that were not reported or investigated. Since the data comes from media that might focus on the more sensational aspects of witchcraft accusations the study might not be representative of an everyday understanding of this violence, but is still relevant to an understanding of the more extreme forms of violence. Adinkrah (2004) points to how witchcraft accusations bare likeness with other gender-based violence: men were the perpetrators and women victims in all cases, apart from one where a mother killed her daughter in law. The murderers were mainly family or close-kin apart from four mob-murders (ibid.). The author describes how the Ghanaian society is generally very patriarchal with strong gender roles, the persecution of women as witches can be related to women’s position in this society. Accusations can occur if women excel in typical male-coded areas or have children that are healthy or perform well in work or academics, although poverty is also presented as a risk-factor (ibid.). Women with disabilities or eccentric behaviours, or who are perceived as quarrelsome, might also be at risk to be labelled as witches (ibid.). The author suggests solutions such as introducing public service campaigns to educate people on the fallacy of witchcraft beliefs and accusations. Further, she proposes increased literacy as a means of reducing beliefs and thereby accusations. The author also emphasizes that better access to healthcare and shelters and more economic opportunities for women as a means to reduce the violence and its effects. She also argues that there should be legislation that criminalizes witchcraft accusations (Andrikah, 2004).

There are also two Indian articles that focus on the branding of women as witches relevant to this study. The first one, written by Soma Chaudhuri (2012), is a qualitative study with interviews from locals who have experiences of witch-hunts in Jalpaigur; a district where many women have been branded witches. Although limited by the difficulties to get people to talk about these matters, it aimed to examine why these accusations have gender specific features. Chaudhuri describes how poverty, misfortunes and beliefs work together with gender discrimination when people seek meaning to their circumstances. Strong or “odd” women then becomes scapegoats, often accused by men and supported by rumours (ibid.). Solutions suggested by the author is more funds for NGOs working in the area and laws against witch-hunts. The other article by Puja Roy (1998) is a case-study of four cases of violent witchcraft persecutions in south Sihar. Roy emphasizes how the accusations become ways of keeping
women powerless and with no control over resources, while securing male dominance. In Roy’s (1998) study the accusations of witchcraft were often planned, also by male perpetrators, to gain control over property or for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Roy suggests that the solution lays in intervention from the angle of violence against women, to empower women through support groups and to make police, government and NGOs sensitized to this issue. Roy also suggests other ways to decrease patriarchal control as a solution, such as more women in administration and programs focusing on gender as a part of developmental work, to increase women’s access to healthcare and education (Roy, 1998).

One article by Emilie Secker (2013) focused on implementation of children's rights in Nigeria and the need for governmental and civil society’s strategies to work against witchcraft accusation. The article describes the labelling of children as witches in Nigeria and the problems of securing children's rights, especially in the Niger Delta region. Secker (2013) presents these alleged child witches as a relatively new phenomenon in which churches play an important role by spreading the beliefs that children can be possessed by evil spirit seeking to harm the family or community. Police corruption and lack of efficiency in the legal system is a hindrance to the work against the abuse related to witchcraft accusations (ibid.). According to Secker there is also an “historical attitude of denial” (p.30) that contributes to the lack of domestic data on witchcraft-related violence in Nigeria. Secker maintains that there is reluctance from police and government to deal with these matters since they are culturally sensitive. The tradition of handling problems within the family or kinship groups also makes it difficult for the state to interfere in abuse within the family or community (ibid.). The author emphasizes how many of the CSOs working with these problems are foreign-driven; this presents a risk for the values they stand for to be branded as western in contrast to local tradition. Secker’s suggestion is that solutions have to come from within the society to be accepted – through education and empowerment. Other researchers such as Gary Foxcroft (2014) write about how churches play a vital part in accusations and spreading of fears, he concludes that solution mainly lies in challenging the preaching’s in some Pentecostal churches that fuel patriarchal human rights abuses.

There are articles that focus mainly on the use of fear of the occult as a means of controlling victims of trafficking. Many researchers bring up these fears as a crucial part of trafficking networks procedures in Nigeria and Edo State in particular (see for example Osezua, 2013; Mancuso, 2014). Luz E. Nagles and Bolaji Owasanoye (2016) provide insight to the cultural context of Edo state, the way fears are exploited by traffickers and the duty of the state in these cases. In Edo state the opportunity of migration - sometimes knowingly for sexual purposes - has given women in this traditionally very patriarchal society an opportunity to change their status, by becoming the main bread-winners of their families. The oaths taken by the women before being trafficked are made to conceal and confirm the victim’s obedience and loyalty to the traffickers and also to repay loans for migration, often much higher than the actual costs (ibid.). The rituals are highly symbolic and may include blood, removal of pubic hair and cuttings (Nagles & Owasanoye, 2016). Women are often
traditionally forbidden in the shrines where oaths are taken, which make these rituals even more intimidating (*ibid*.). The breaking of oaths is associated with sickness, death and the invocation of spirits to do harm in their soul. In a very cynical and highly effective way traffickers use the victim’s fear of the retributive juju, keeping them under control at many times even after being rescued from the trafficking networks (*ibid*.). The solutions suggested by the authors are education to prevent the fear of witchcraft, equal gender relations and poverty reduction to prevent vulnerability to exploitation.

In Kohnert’s (1996) article about witchcraft beliefs implication on democratization and development work, the author argues that witchcraft beliefs are the result of social injustice, unreliable systems and lack of openness of society. But that the western attitudes towards it has been ignorant and intolerant, referring it to education or intelligence and ignoring the importance and influence of these beliefs on the actual work for development and improvement of human conditions (*ibid*.).

Relevant literature on how to handle witchcraft-related violence also includes an ethnographic study by Khaukanani Mavhungu, (2012) comparing Cameroonian and South African strategies. The author highlight how traditional leaders and healers play an important role in containing fears and handling accusations, they are both perceived as protectors and play an important role in handling accusations. Although these same leaders and healers may trigger fears; the way they handle witchcraft plays a role in the prevalence of accusations and fears. Mavhungu (2012) underlines how neither laws against witchcraft nor ignoring the beliefs are successful strategies to handle the fears and reality of witchcraft beliefs.

There are also research that focuses on the role of spirituality and culture in social work; among these are Mel Gray, John Coates and Michael Birds (2008) anthology on the need of culturally relevant social work education and practice. Most of the ideas and theories for social work are made in cultures that developed their high standard of living at the cost of the devastation of other systems and cultures (*ibid*.). Traditional western, individualistic, social work might not be the best approach in tackling problems with people who have Afrocentric life views that emphasize dependability, spirituality, family and responsibility (*ibid*.). The authors therefore points to a form of responsiveness to culture in social work (Gray et. al, 2008). Phillip Gilligan and Sheila Furness (2006) article on how social workers and students of social work handle religious beliefs and spirituality also portrays as a form of responsiveness. The authors argue the importance of social workers to recognize this aspect in their work or when it comes to resolving problems arising from such beliefs. According to Gilligan & Furness research shows unwillingness from social workers and social work students to utilize the role of religious or spiritual beliefs or dimensions of client’s lives’, they might be viewed as irrelevant or outdated or too sensitive and personal to bring up (*ibid*.). This religion-blind or spiritual-blind practice is often viewed as anti-oppressive (*ibid*.). However, to not recognize cultural, spiritual and religious diversity and the importance of these in a person’s life can also be viewed as incompetence or insensitivity to the needs of clients (*ibid*.).
6. Results

The results that follow this introduction are presented thematically for the purpose of clarity. With the help of interpretive anthropology and inspired by Jönsson’s (2010) problem perspective I identified three main themes on the understanding of women’s role in witchcraft-related violence. The theory and the analytical framework were used to try to identify patterns of beliefs and how they affect the views on containment strategies, I call these themes: *Witchcraft-related violence, a general problem of violence, Women and the violence of witches and Witchcraft as gender based-violence.*

The containment strategies have been categorized in themes taken from Huns theory on empowerment, I looked also at how they work with empowerment regarding these issues: *an existing social disturbance, Conscientizing, Mobilizing, Maximizing and creating a new order.*

In quotes I have removed pauses, repetitions of words and sounds like “eh”, “ah” and such. However I have kept the Nigerian accent or pidgin in cases of such, therefore the sentences might seem grammatically strange to someone unfamiliar with the language. But I choose to do so to keep the authenticity to the quotes when using such and also for the reader to get the feeling of the expressions used when talking about this subject.

Social workers are presented with their names and groups, which are both fictitious. The groups are called: SA, SB, SC and SD.

Community participants are in the same way presented with (fictitious) names as well as their respective focus group: CA, CB and CC + other community participants: CX.

Below I will present the different perspectives on women’s role in witchcraft-related violence followed by the containment strategies.

6.1 Character of witchcraft related violence

The notion of witches and their possible threat was present and expressed by both social workers and community members alike. When participating in a staff meeting at SC all staff was asked to say something astonishing that happened to them during the last week. One social worker told about how she had taken a bus from a bridge when one very attractive young man entered the bus. As rain started to fall the man had threatened that he would kill the driver and set fire to the bus if one drop of water should fall on him. He had even brought out spray and matches to fulfil his threat, but luckily nobody was injured. After telling about her experience, one of her co-workers gave the advice to no longer take buses from that riverside, since one cannot be sure enters the bus from there, “it can even be someone coming from inside that river” – meaning spirits from the river. Only a few of the participants expressed some doubt to if there is really such a thing as witches or witchcraft, in fact, almost everybody I talked to had experiences of meeting accused witches and black magic of some sort, weather it was old men or women falling from the sky (mentioned in both social work groups and community groups) or experience of close family members eating children in their family. I want to emphasize that even from the gender-violence perspective and the general violence-perspective, the
threat of witches was still acknowledged, as Josephine SA remarked: “Even though both men and women are witches, it’s the part of the woman that is condemned.”.

6.1.1 Witchcraft-related violence, a general problem of violence
It was emphasized by some of the participants that this form of violence is an expression of general problems in the society, where women do not play any particular role. Such as witchcraft-persecution, where religious leaders, coincidence in the family, health, age, deviation from norms and communities as a whole was seen as playing important roles in the prevalence of violence.

In all the community groups and social work groups they talked about traditional ways of finding out if someone is a witch. Some described drinking water that would make someone either confess or die if guilty, others, such as Gideon (CA) talked about “a special kind of beating” that the accused person would go through. Although most community members discussed these forms of confession-making as necessary, it was sometimes viewed as involving other devilish powers targeting innocent persons.

If someone would be found guilty of witchcraft the mildest form of violence was described as exclusion from the community, either as a ban from ever entering the community, or as a ban against association with that particular family. This form of stigma was understood by both social workers and Ise groups as something that in many cases eventually would lead to death, especially for those in need of care and support such as the sick, elderly and children, since nobody will visit the stigmatized family or trade with them. This stigmatization was described in group CB, CC, SB and SC as not only affecting the accused person but the whole family, as long as anyone remembers the witchcraft in that family nobody will want to associate with them as a group or marry anyone from that family. Rowlins (SB):

If someone told me I cannot marry from a family because they are witch or wizard, then why would I want the person to be in my home? That is this critical part of me, that would avoid, because the witch they don’t like good things. So why would I want this person to be in my home? Why would I want to be a friend with the person? Why would I want to marry the person? Why would I even want to be close to that person? That is the stigma you are talking about. So it means it goes into your family, goes into your work place, your peer group, your school.

Diana (SB) described how this stigma made her not want to visit her father’s village and that she could never marry a man from that place “My dad’s older brother is a witch. That is at least what my dad told me. So because of my surname, any guy from my community knows that I am from that family, they wouldn’t like to marry me …”. In this way stigmatization or witch-labelling can be understood as violence which affects generations.

In the community groups’ witchcraft as violence was regarded as something affecting the whole family just as stigmatization, either because someone bound themselves to a covenant or oath that they did not fulfil, or because of the wrongdoings of forefathers. In group CC they also discussed how this wickedness could be inherited due to traditional beliefs, that some children or even villages are baptized into satanic spirits. Ike (CC):
They call am white religion, then they have local religion. When you have born in a family those particular ancient time, there are some traditions our forefathers used to follow, the deity they worship, they don’t know that it is not real gods, they call it god but they never know of god, they don’t know that it’s satanic communication. Then they carry their children go to that deity… Present the child, give am name. Do anything, they even sacrifice! Killing cow, dog, killing this, killing that for sacrifice, because of the new come new born. That baby is now initiated. You see to that? If that spirit on that day is a rough spirit, whatever that child will receive.

In SB they discussed how this idea of witchcraft coming from within the family is often upheld by pastors and religious leaders. Catherine (SB): “… When mishaps are happened in your family they always want to narrow it down to that someone is doing this to you, even pastors”. In this way participants portray witchcraft as often being understood as involving the whole family.

In SB they talked about how the lack of understanding of mental problems or senility often made people to be singled out as witches thus suffering abuse and neglect, at times out of frustration from family members that cannot or do not want take care of the needs of their old or disabled relatives. Catherine (SB) suggested that frustration and lack of understanding of certain disabilities or ageing could be a way for children to seek revenge on their parents for their own wrongdoings. “… They say you are reaping the consequences of your own wickedness. Many times, these people just wander off and they are being called that witch.”. Also the cooperative living and lack of efficient healthcare and resources were viewed among participants as reasons that make the sick and elderly more vulnerable to accusations. I observed how people feared the believed supernatural power of people with psychological disabilities in Ise; for more than one occasion I saw confused and distressed people walking down the street naked, one time even in the vivid centre of Benin City. I was at the market together with Mama Osman (CA), Papa Osman (CX) and Mama Destiny (CA) when suddenly a naked man rushed through the stalls; his hair and beard was hanging in long dreads, he was holding a rat in his hand and his whole body was covered in dust. Quite shocked at the sight I turned to my company and asked why police did not take the man to a hospital since he was obviously in need of mental care. Papa Osman said that police would not dare to arrest him due to the fear of powers the man was thought to have, Mama Osman and Mama Destiny agreed. Mama Destiny also laughed and asked even if anyone dared to take him to hospital, “would they pay for his treatment?”.

The consequences of this violence were seen in CA, CB, CC and SB as insecurity and persecution against anything or anyone who differs from the norm. In SB for example, they talked about rascality as a form of recognition on the manifestation of witchcraft:

Osaso: In the situation when a child is in age four to five and normally it is in that age that people will start saying that a witch manifests itself. But I would say it is in that age that the child starts showing stubbornness, and that moment if you, situation that really happens is this; in that age, before he really starts showing he is a witch, he first of all will be named in their coven. That’s when you first see the abnormality in that child. I’m not talking live, in the physical appearance. I am talking psychologically. Situation where by you see him not being normal as a child, in such situation you can suspect that child to be a witch. So, that’s the situation regarding this. I don't know if you get me?

2 Pronoun in Nigerian Pidgin meaning “him”, ”her” and sometimes “it”
Me: I guess so, you said that if a child is not developing as you would expect, maybe shows some characteristics that is not in line with what is expected at that age, you can suspect that child to be a witch?
Osaso: Yes, exactly
Me: But can it be for good? It couldn’t be that that child is super intelligent? Or just super different?
Osaso: You know in the context of this, what we are talking about is African beliefs. Your own beliefs are quite different from our own beliefs, right?
Rowlins: We are tend to look at the negative. Especially when the person is in the same community, the community setting, when the child starts showing some differentness to what his mates or her mates normally doing, we see it negative, as a witch or a wizard. I find that for us, witchcraft, if we are discussing it as the social problem. Some persons wouldn’t even want to discuss it, or near such discussion.

This idea of being able to identify witches as someone deviating from the norm was also discussed in CA, CB and CC. When they described how one can know if someone is a witch they talked about people that are "doing things you can’t do", "doing things differently" or just "being strange". Mama Success (CB) for example suggested that you can know if someone has left their body to join a coven by observing their sleeping position.

6.1.2 Women and the violence by witches

From this view women play a key role as both handling witchcraft-attacks and being victims of such attack. Women are also more likely to be witches, from this perspective.

In the community groups, women - particularly elderly women and children (younger girls) – were considered most likely as witches. However, Peter and Ike (CC) objected insisting that anyone can be a witch but most of the time one will inherit the witchcraft power. Either ways, they also said that women are more engaged in taking care of the home and children, therefore also being more vulnerable to witchcraft activities. Generally, this violence (witchcraft-attacks) was described by participants in the community groups as domestic violence done by others, often close to the family, focusing on the weakest link in the family – women and children – to destroy the family from within. Mama Destiny (CA) described a typical witchcraft experience with her uncle that allegedly had eaten (in the supernatural realm) two of her younger brothers in the coven. After sharing her experience she said that it had later been revealed to them through a prophet that it was the uncle’s wife who was the first witch in her family. These kinds of experiences, often with women as a key actor, were also shared in the social work groups, for example by Osaso (SB):

My community is very small and the base is Islamic. And there, my grandfather, you know as a Muslim you can get married to as many wives as you can, so it's like this polygamous family. So it was this wife, the third wife was accused witch. So there were a lot of things that was happening within the family. And what they thought she would do was, she would give birth to children and the children they would not last up to a year, they would die. So at one point my grandfather did an al hajj and he went abroad, and he did a consultation. And he found out that she was the one eating the children and not even making my grandmother, which happened to be the first, some of her children were not really doing well also, due to her activities within the family.

These stories was shared with me like something normal, showing how deeply rooted these beliefs are in the way participants view their world.

The reasons why women particularly would be the ones to use witchcraft was described as weakness in group CA and CB, Godwin (CA):

The reasons why women particularly would be the ones to use witchcraft was described as weakness in group CA and CB, Godwin (CA):
Women, you know that women they are very easy to deceive. But men we are very activity. We have agility. You can't just come and say this or that. No no no, we don't do that. But women are very easy to convince.

Participants in these groups agreed that woman were easier to lure into witchcraft activities and therefore more vulnerable to acts of witchcraft but also more likely to become witches themselves. Other reasons why women particularly would use witchcraft were described in CA and CB as jealousy or prosperity; Mama Success (CB) insisted that they use magic to make their children to prosper and in group CA it was discussed how jealousy would make women to use other people’s children to destroy homes.

In group CA and CB witchcraft was also discussed as something often coming from children eating something or taking something outside of the home, such as biscuits or sweets. In this case the participants emphasized how women have to teach their children not to take anything from anyone without their parent’s approval. During a community meeting in Ise it was also decided that no children were allowed to bring any food, biscuits or sweets to share in school, due to the risk of someone putting juju in the food.

Many of the experiences the participants shared about witchcraft-attacks were related to sickness and/or death. The very unreliable healthcare made witchcraft and spiritual attacks as enigmatic as the medicine doctors would give. It was not unusual that participants would be given hospital treatment with injections without names and unmarked bags with medicine. When it came to sickness, women were often responsible to handle and care for the sick. Women also had most knowledge when it came to remedies, especially elderly women. For example; when one of the participant’s daughters was sick with swollen glands an elderly lady soon came over with three year old corn that was chewed and rubbed on the throat of the girl together with prayer.

When it came to protecting the family from the violence of witches, women also played a key role according to some participants: Mama Osman’s (CA) comes from Calabar, while her husband and mine come from the same village in Auchi. I had often asked my husband if we could visit Auchi with no avail. I therefore asked Mama Osman if she had ever visited that village, but she replied no, saying her husband never agreed because many witches was believed to live in that village. Mama Osman said that before, in her own village in Calabar, all the young ones that return home would die, the witches in her village would eat them at night. She said all the women in that community had gathered naked and sworn that nobody should eat any young person again. Since then the youths returning to the village had been safe, but she thought the women in the Auchi-village had not done anything similar and that this was probably the reason why no one liked to go back to that particular village again. Also Mama Destiny (CA) described how women gathering naked to swear over the uncle’s house had been part of breaking the evil force from that family.

6.1.3 Witchcraft as gender-violence
This perspective interpreted witchcraft-related violence as a part of gender-power structures.
Witchcraft or witches were not understood as a gendered phenomenon to any of the participants, social workers and community members alike. All of them would say anyone: man, woman, young or old can be witches. Even so, most of the social workers maintained that women are mostly accused and also the ones being suspected of witchcraft, especially when it comes to the death of a spouse. Among the Ise-participants it was only Blessing (CX) that on one occasion, while discussing a witchcraft-drama, expressed such concern saying that; “That is Nigeria for you. Any small thing and they be like; na that witch. For what? For being a woman.”.

Social workers in all groups however described specifically how widows often have to go through rituals to prove that they were not responsible for the death of their husbands. In SA these widowhood practices were referred to as the most acute social problem in Edo state, next to trafficking of women and girls. The described traditions involved taking oaths or drinking the bathwater from the corps, or to sit on the floor and mourn on her knees for seven days without moving even to take a bath. In SA, SB and SC participants reflected on how women always are looked upon with suspicion when their husbands die, whereas men are never suspected, not even in the cases that it was known to all that the man was very abusive, “Her wickedness killed her, that’s what they will say” remarked Mama Oghosa (SC). In SB and SA the participants laughed at the question “what would happen if a wife dies before her husband?” Josephine (SA) said bitterly that the husband will be brought small girls to comfort him and Rowlins (SB) that the man can not wait until the corpse is cold to bring his girlfriend from outside.

According to Asheto (SA) accusations of witchcraft are also common when couples have difficulties to conceive or when women have miscarriages. In SA, they said that widowhood practices and other witchcraft-related violence were often upheld by women, sometimes as a form of revenge for the violence they themselves had gone through, other times as a way to distance themselves from any accusations on their own part.

In SA they talked about this oath taking as something many women had to go through when meeting a boyfriend or wanting to get married. For these oaths they swear not to harm their boyfriends, that they should always be faithful and never leave him. If they ever break that oath they and their whole family should be visited by evil, death or insanity. These oaths were described as very similar to oaths women victims of trafficking swear, these types of oaths was also mentioned in all social work groups. The oaths or covenants were also discussed in Ise groups CB and CC, as at times involving sacrifice or exchange of blood. In CB and CC these oaths were more discussed as something normal, something you go into with consciousness of what it means if you break such. The threat of being visited by evil spirits was therefore not considered as violence, but mere consequences of disobedience. Whereas in SA, SD and SB when they talked about these oaths they viewed them as a form of very effective psychological or spiritual violence and a way to make women subdue to other violence. Josephine (SA) stated, ”they use that one to gag her, so she cannot talk when the man is

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3 It is
oppressing her”, Asheto (SA) commented, “yes, she lives in fear” Josephine (SA) concluded, “she lives in fear, she cannot defend herself”. This emphasizes fears impacts on gender power-struggles.

Control of women’s bodies such as genital mutilation was also brought up in SA and SB as a practice that often is motivated by protecting the juju of the family. In SA they argued that the above is possible because women in Edo-society are socialized into violence from a young age; they learn to subdue to male family members and endure discrimination and violence. This view was shared by participants in SB, SC and SD, they all talked about how endurance to violence is considered a virtue for women, often upheld by religious leaders that will encourage women be submissive and obedient to their husbands or male head of the family and also to value their sons over their daughters. In SA they also meant that women in Edo society do not have any influence in decision making, neither in the community nor in the family, making these harmful practices to survive:

Josephine: Because, the men have the voice. The whole village council, not one woman! So the men are always the visible and in decision making. It is also an issue of son preference, the life of the son is more important, even though a woman will subject her daughter to go to widowhood practice, she will protect her son! The life of a son, that is more dear to her. So the women don't have voice. So the people who should decide whether, you know, it is bad, it is the men. And they get support of the, of the women in the family, because those ones "yes sir, yes sir, yes sir". Because it's what they are told, whatever they are told they do. And they serve because “I don't want to be seen with that woman so let a man go and do it”.

In this quote one can also see how the participants also view women as partakers and upholders of violence, as a way of not themselves being associated with the accused witch or to show their obedience to the men in the family.

6.2 Containment strategies of witchcraft related violence

6.2.1 An existing social disturbance: inequalities and powerlessness

In SA their view on women’s role in connection to witchcraft-related violence resulted in a strategy to focus on changing the status of women. The recognition of inequalities and powerlessness, would involve accessing key stakeholders and important persons in the community to make them “champions of change”. By coming to the communities together with these people they could overcome the view of them being against the culture and thus influencing the community practice; by creating a voice for the powerless groups from within. Josephine (SA):

Sometimes they see you they say, you are from that village, they won't listen to you. But if they see that I am coming with somebody from the community, yes! They are ok, it is not because she hates us, it is not because she wants to spoil our juju * laughter *, because that is the way they see it. You want to pollute our god that is why you are bringing those strange ideas to our community. But if you bring somebody of their own that was born and bred in that community and say "no no that thing, we don't do that again! It’s bad, it's dangerous, it's harmful! We are in a new era!” They will say” oh, okay, we believe you because of what our son or our daughter says”

This illustrates how participants sees a need to work with the community as a whole and not, or not only with individual cases, to create change.
According to participants in the previous section accused witches suffers discrimination, stigma and brutal violence. However, some social workers were unwilling to represent accused witches as a discriminated group. SB’s strategy when meeting this kind of violence was to quickly remove that person from the violent environment. They said that when handling these cases they preferred to separate violence from beliefs. One of the participants in this group said that the topic itself is so sensitive; that most social workers, civil society or state would not want to even discuss it and even less have it as its official mission in Edo state, Catherine (SB) said that they would tread very carefully in cases of such cultural sensitive matter:

In this act of being labelled a witch, it's an act of violence against the person in itself, violence against person, violence in his being, violence against children. It's also an act of violence. But we also emphasize it's not one of our core thematic focus. But if we agree that violence is part of our thematic focus, then we agree that issues related to witchcraft is part of our work. We may not come out and say; you know this is what we are fighting for, because they call you a witch. But we are fighting for you because you have been so brutalized and all of that ...

The participants in SB did not generally see a gender dimension to this problem and they also did not have the same approach as groups which did. They did recognize inequalities and the exposed situation of victims of witchcraft-related violence, but were also reluctant to see work against witchcraft-related violence as part of their core activities as an organization with focus on women and girls.

In SC and SD they did not talk about handling witchcraft accusations as a part of their main work. Their focus were more on how to empower women and girls perceived as voiceless and oppressed in Edo-society – so that these would not be as vulnerable to ritual violence, such as oath taking.

6.2.2 Who is to be empowered?

The work becomes complicated when viewing witchcraft-related violence as an act of supernatural violence, in this case the witch is perceived as a strong power creating fear and disturbance in the community and family.

There was recognition in all community groups of the government’s inability to handle witchcraft-related violence and also the conflict between human rights and the need to take care of the threat of witches, Ike (CC):

That sanction you know, government don’t like it, its human right. How can you push away somebody from his own land or home? Government don’t use that system, it's where the government always comes. If such a person now have money he have access, he have awareness, he can go to court against the community that accused him of witch. It’s like if the thief is there they catch him, carry am go police, he have stand now to go to court deny the allegation. But if the thief is death, or they burn am or kill am, there is no issue.

From this point of view the powerless people are the community members or families exposed to the wickedness of witches.
6.2.3 Conscientizing: to make conscious and create a critical awareness

In SA they described a strategy of pointing to how things that has changed and inconsistencies in the beliefs systems:

> You must be able to cite examples of what has changed in the culture to protect your advocacy for further change. So this has been the kind of work we have been doing with the people. And we also tell them that if there is a juju that affects everybody in this culture, how come in that family where the husband of the mother died, is an educated woman, is a working class, is a rich business woman, why did she not sit down on the floor? She did not sit down on the floor and she is not dead! So, when you are able to site such case in which case, the culture is discriminating! It discriminates in favor of the rich! And against the poor!

In this way the social workers could not only show how culture is dynamic but also remove the supernatural part when pointing to these discriminatory aspects, giving the possibility of further change.

Education as a way to create awareness of women’s exposure to violence was said to be used in SA, SC and SD. Although they work with education programs and community information actions in SB, they did not consider creating awareness of witchcraft-related violence and its implications as a part of their work.

6.2.4 Mobilizing: do things to take control over the situation

In SA, SC and SD education was also said to be used as a tool to change structures that makes women vulnerable to violence. These organizations all had school information programs and worked with young girls as an early intervention strategy. Josephine (SA) said that working to make girls part of school democracy is a way of getting women into positions of decision-making at a young age and thereby changing their traditional position in Edo society. Malcom Payne (2002) describes this as an important component of empowerment work; that is allocation of power from social workers to clients.

Social workers in SA, SB, SC and SD did also reflect upon the government’s lack of ability to handle these issues, leaving the NGOs best suited to advocate and work towards social change – also because they were considered by participants to have more knowledge on the field. Even by those participants that were governmental employees. It also came up in SA that governmental employees are seen as representatives of ruling political parties and therefore might have difficulties to create change in some communities:

*Josephine* - Government is not a game changer, a change agent, because, to start with, government is seen as a political party. So a community, who is not support of that particular government, will not receive unless the government starts doing some certain things there. So, government on their own they are high up. Though they are supposed to have community desk officers, they don’t visit communities.

*Asheto* – Because they don’t work with the grassroots, we work with the grassroots. We know. And you know, before the democracy thing international agencies used to use us as the hands on to deliver democracy and human rights to the community. But now they say we have democracy * laughs * but democracy is on the table, but it is not. So it is the CSOs and the grassroots that are... you can see the lot of work we are doing, without government support. Without government support! We now, we are now even trying to advocate to government to change, to put a place.
Although there were descriptions of insufficient governmental work, one should remember that the above quotes are from an NGO with lots of influence in Edo state that might create incentives for them to keep their position and funds by pointing out governmental failures.

SD participants tended to see government as part of the change process, but that lack of finance makes them dependent on the NGOs. In SA and SC they also expressed that there is a need of cooperation between government and civil society, especially when it comes to legal reforms. Laws also came up as a part of the solution and mobilizing process in SB:

**Favor:** In other way of contain it, there should be legal reform, such that the issue of witchcraft should be decriminalized, the accused person should not be treated like a criminal.
**Me:** You find it's like that now?
**Favor:** There are some, it happens, it happens.
**Rowlings:** The law does not accept, they don’t take it as, the police would not really arrest. The law should have backing to make an arrest to detain the person that is accused. Now they can just tell the person to go home and the public will handle it. But I think police should be given such authority to which they can keep this person for a while so the person cannot. Because they kill, they go fast to kill them when they hear that witchcraft accusation. They kill, they kill. So why allow the person to be killed? Some people believe it doesn't exist, some believe it exist. The ones that believe it exist kill the child, kill the man, kill the woman and the police will be helpless though they can accuse them of murder. But it's nothing like when there is a law that says you can't accuse someone of witchcraft.

Although these participants discussed law and police as part of the solution, they also acknowledged the fact that police does not normally interfere in cases of violence that are considered family matters.

6.2.5 Taking control in Ise

The lack of support from government in battling witchcraft was described in CA, CB and CC as a reason to contain it within the community, if they cannot kill the person the community will decide to take that person to the Oba of Benin (the traditional king). These groups described how the Oba’s priests will make the person confess if guilty. In CA and CB this was also viewed as protection from any governmental interference in the handling of the witch, since the Oba was considered more powerful and his decision rules over any governmental laws or regulations. They said in the community groups that if the person was found guilty they would now be free to deal with the witch. Since this violence is not recognized by state this was described as having to be handled within the community. In CB, CC and SA they all talked about “jungle justice”, such as the practice of putting a tire around the accused, pouring fuel on him/ her and burning the person. Some participants, even in the social work groups, viewed violence against witches as retributive to the violence done by the witches themselves. James (SB):

My own view on violence regarding this issue. Like in my place, when a person is accused if not passing to those processes and it's confirmed that he is a witch, if the person has confess after going through those processes, and he has not really done any witchcraft or anything harm to the people. That violence unnecessary or not occur, the best they will do is to send the person off the community. If the person with the witchcraft thing is a key important in the community in the family, that big man that was supposed to be responsible for our youths, he killed them. So the youths they attack villainy, because even the family they are grieved because of the violence of this person, this person has no reason to live. For killing somebody, that is where the violence comes in.
Here one can see how violence was sometimes justified, since the witch is understood as capable of or has committed acts of horrible violence which otherwise would go unpunished.

According to the participants in CA, CB and CC witchcraft-accusations must first be handled in a community meeting before any decision of taking the person to the Oba can be made. In Ise there were community meetings every other week, these meetings were not exclusively for men, but it was men that were expected to go. If the man was not available his brother or brother-in-law could go in his stead, very seldom would women attend these meetings. Papa Osman (CX) said “You know in this place, they believe that man is first. Woman can attend, if she wants’ to, if the man is not around. But man is head”. In these meetings community matters where discussed and resolved, such as fights between landlords and tenants, problems with road and electricity and such. During such meetings it was decided to drive out all the Fulani hunters from Ise, due to alleged rape cases and fear of how they openly carry weapons (cutlass, bow and arrow). It was in such meetings the decision of food-sharing in schools was forbidden. These meetings also provided social help for members; for example the roof of a house blew off due to intensive rainfall, a meeting was held to help collect money for new roofing for the family. There were also exclusive meetings for landladies; however no major decisions affecting the community where taken in these meeting and not many of the women participants in this study had permission from their husbands to attend. Papa Emeka (CA) for example told me that “I cannot let my wife attend; she can come back and talk to me anyhow. That’s why many of the men don’t like their women to attend”. To “talk anyhow” is an expression referring to rude or disrespectful manners. These all-women meetings in Ise can thus be seen as threatening to the men’s authority.

6.2.6 Maximizing: share with the public or surrounding community to create awareness
In SA where they worked with community groups, they described how they start up these groups which later on would function as self-sufficient action groups within its community; spreading their knowledge and experience to other women in that community. SC worked in a similar way with educating women and girls that would also get “missions” to spread ideas and thoughts within their school, homes, workplaces or peer-groups. This can also be identified as a form of power shift between social workers and clients pointed out by Payne (2002) as important to empowerment.

In SD and SC it was also suggested to access beliefs as a strategy for containing witchcraft-related violence, such as Christian or Muslim beliefs that would forbid certain practices and also might be held as greater powers than the juju. Among all the participants many where dedicated Muslims or Christians, in this they would express their faith freely, for example most of the group-interviews started with a prayer by the suggestion of the participants. Emanuel (SD) suggested one way to lessen the fear of witchcraft was to arrest herbalists and give them the option to work together with social workers to prevent for example oath-taking. Emanuel meant that by arresting herbalists they could also prove how their powers are not as strong as the victims of oath-taking or rituals think they are.
Emanuel said that this had been done in the case of trafficking-rituals and that there were now certain shrines that are working together with social workers and governmental institutions against trafficking. The tradition of keeping things in the family or kinship groups was recognized in SC, their solution was to mobilize religious leaders in the community to help people talk about witchcraft-related violence, as they otherwise found it difficult to make families/communities talk about such violence with people considered outsiders.

Mobilization of powerful pastors as part of the struggle against witchcraft-related violence was suggested by participants in CA, CB and CC. Also Diane (SB) said that any accused witch should be taken for intercession before anything else. Although traditional priests or herbalists would be described as the ones generally handling accusations in CA, CB and CC, but they were also feared because of their powers. The contradiction in both fearing the supernatural powers of traditionalists and at the same time using those powers as protection was also discussed in SB, they referred to these priests as “bigger witches” and at the same time saw them as a part of the solution for handling accusation. Rituals were frequently used in Ise among the participants in times of sickness; many of the participants showed me tattoos on their or their children’s bodies that were made as protection from evil powers. Still, this was also a somewhat secret practice; although services of magicians and shrines were commercialized with big colourful signs next to the road leading to Ise, they were also avoided. I went to the market one day with Blessing (CX) and Mama Success (CA), this particular market is big and labyrinth-like with both inside and outside stalls. We walked from the indoor part of the market to the outside through a curtain made of black plastic bags, when stepping out I almost put my foot in a pile of monkey heads staring up on me. Surrounding them was chalk, different dried animals, living tortoises and traditional pots. First I thought the monkey heads was rats so I jumped off into the gutter only to see Mama Success and Blessing run to the indoor market again. When I caught up with them I asked why they rushed. They said that what we had passed through was the part where they sell those ingredients for rituals and they do not want to be in such a place – although these same women earlier showed me tattoos on their breasts and recommended ritual markings to get rid of asthma.

6.2.7 Creating a new order: to achieve social change, remove oppression and create social justice
All the participants in SA, SB, SC and SD regarded witchcraft-related violence as being on the decline (although still a big problem). They related this to the modern times with information available and also the possibility of doing autopsies and tests to reveal alternative causes and explanations for sickness or death. But there were also social workers in SA, SB and SC that described a hindrance in modernity and maintained that their work in the villages was often easier; villagers are more likely to reason and listen, whereas the educated and aware city-people would be armed with their own arguments making them not ready to change.
In the community groups they also opened up to the possibility of change by simply not believing in witchcraft. Participants in these groups discussed how those who do not believe in the oaths are immune to the evil spirits, and likewise the stigma of having an accused witch in the family can disappear when someone no longer believes in witchcraft. Participants in these groups expressed a hope that this would be the case for the younger generation and also suggested that this is why people in some parts of the world do not seem to be as afflicted by the wickedness of witches. Although the traditionalists and shrines were often seen as providing solutions, community members also expressed some doubts on believing in them, creating the space for change. Peter (CC):

Some thinking that as it always cause confusion in the community. When somebody has died they say it's this person who killed him, he be witch. So they believe that the shrine, they don't say the truth, he accuse! So maybe the person they put for them to control, because normally they have somebody they put inside the shrine that is working there, they call am priest. So it's the one that anything the shrine speak to him, he is the one that will interpret it, that this is what he speak. So now, many people now don't believe that the priest is saying the truth!

Although the authority of the priests might be questioned I think it is also important to keep in mind that the Nigerian society is very religious were pastors and religious leaders have a lot of influence. Just within the small community Ise there were one or two small churches on every street, often preaching about the threat of evil forces that might be dwelling in the mist.

6.3 Summarizing analysis

In the following I will present how the perspectives on women’s role in witchcraft-related violence can be understood and related to earlier research. I will also analyse the consequences of views on witchcraft and containment strategies and empowerment.

As a general problem of violence: For the group of social workers that did not see women as more likely to be victims of witchcraft-related violence, their work did not focus on preventing or reducing this violence and they were reluctant to discuss it as a part of their work. In this, I think it is important to remember that the participating social workers all works within organizations that are said to work with advocacy and empowerment for women and girls. If these social workers did not see women’s role in witchcraft-related violence as central, they may also conclude that it is not a part of their work – although they may still handle separate cases of witchcraft-related violence. This can be interpreted in line with Secker’s (2013) view on witchcraft as an avoided subject. Their containment strategies can be seen as limited to individual cases which many times might not even involve the close family or kinship group. Similar to Gilligan and Furnes’s (2006) conclusions these social workers also seemed reluctant to handle the part of the problem that is related to supernatural beliefs, since it was considered too sensitive.

The violence of witches: From this perspective women were more likely to be witches. In Ise women did not have so much say in the collective decision making where accusations of witchcraft and other social issues would be handled. The reason was because the meetings were considered an
activity for the male head of family. Male participants in Ise also expressed reluctance to let women participate in the all-women meetings due to the fear of losing their authority. This shows patriarchy structures, similar to those described by in previous research, which can make women more vulnerable to violence (Andrikah, 2004; Chaudhuri, 2012; Roy, 1998).

Most of the community members viewed women as more likely to be witches, women was seen as both possible powerful witches and at the same time weaker and therefore more likely to be lured into witchcraft. Still, they were also viewed as being in possession of certain supernatural abilities as a characteristic of their gender. These characteristics would be seen both as a key in prevention and as controllers of the juju, many women were also skilled in traditional medicine and women’s collective nakedness seems to be seen by some participants as able to protect communities. Rumour and jealousy seems to play a role in the fears and accusations as seen in previous research (Andrikah, 2004; Stewart & Strathern, 2000). This was expressed by community members in the idea of how women will use witchcraft to make their children to prosper, or would use other children or family members to infiltrate families by destroying them from within. Rumours of such can be seen as the reason why it was decided that children could not share food in the school.

As a gender-violence: From the perspective of most of the social workers in this study women are more likely to be accused of witchcraft. As seen in earlier research (Andrikah, 2004; Chaudhuri, 2012; Foxcroft, 2014; Nagle & Owasanoye, 2016; Roy, 1998) accusations, methods of confessing, persecutions of suspected witches and ritual-violence was understood by the main part of social workers in the current study as a form of gender-violence and means to control women. The social workers that had this understanding therefore aimed at empowering women, through education programs and community work. They also worked towards changing structures in the society that would give women a voice, as suggested by Roy (1998). By highlighting witchcraft-related violence as atrocities against women they could thereby remove the supernatural aspects of violence. In this strategy they use examples of the women in the midst that did not go through gender mutilation or widowhood-practices and still was not punished by the spirits. This was described as a way to make the communities more accessible to change. Some of the social workers with this perspective had a strategy to use voices from the same community to influence the community practice from within, as suggested in previous research by Secker (2013). Thereby, these social workers also show a form of sensitivity to the culture, as recommended by Gray et al (2008).

Both the strategy to treat violence as “only” violence or to “only” point to the gender-discriminatory aspects of this form of violence also can be seen as neglect of the very real experience of witchcraft that participants express. As presented in earlier research this form of approach is sometimes viewed as anti-oppressive practice (Gilligan & Furness, 2006). This could also be seen as a form of abandonment or lack of responsiveness (Gray et. al, 2008). This is similar to how the government was perceived to handle the question of witchcraft in the CA, CC and CB groups; an approach that leaves communities without sufficient support to deal with the threat of witchcraft. This
view can be supported by Mavhungus (2012) research results of how neither laws against witchcraft nor ignoring beliefs are efficient ways to handle fears and accusations. Many of the social workers, including those governmental employed, recognized the inability of dealing with witchcraft-related violence within the government. Some of them seem to share the view of Andrikah (2004) and Chadhuri (2012) that laws are a part of the solution. Social workers in this study suggested both laws against accusations and to decriminalize witchcraft. Although there are laws forbidding witchcraft in Nigeria, community participants recognizes that government do not formally believe in witchcraft and therefore you cannot, for example, bring your accusations to court, since it is not considered a reality. Some of the participants expressed how the inability of government to contain the witchcraft is part of the reason why lethal-violence and stigmatization becomes solutions – although recognized by some as not optimal.

Similar to previous research (Foxcroft, 2014; Mavhungu, 2012) religious leaders in this current study seems to play an important role in both accusations and handling of witches, although some are also regarded with fear or suspicion. It might seem perplexing that some people, or “higher witches”, can exist freely while others with magical powers are considered too dangerous to live. From the perspective of interpretive anthropology this can be seen as embodied in the participants’ everyday understanding; I think it is important to remember that powers can be considered both good and evil. The priest in the shrine is not necessarily interpreted by participants as synonymous with a wicked witch – but just like most persons with power of some sort, the traditionalist priests are regarded with respect and sometimes fear.

Some of the social workers suggested the strategy to access religious beliefs and religious leaders as a way to handle violence. Sometimes as a way to get around the tradition of keeping things in the family or kinship groups, this is also described as a hindrance by Secker (2012). For the social workers in Benin, referring to beliefs and higher powers as part of their work may come naturally since beliefs do not seem to be considered a private matter, as in some parts of the world, but expressed freely. Since witchcraft is a spiritual problem, to access good spiritual powers as a way to concur evil might reduce the need of violence – if you view yourself as protected. As seen from the interpretive anthropological perspective, beliefs shape behaviour and perceptions of reality (Geertz, 1973). As participants in Ise pointed to; if you do not believe in magic then it will not work. There also seems to be a possible positive female-force described in community groups that can be utilized in the spiritual struggle between good and evil. For some hard core-traditional families, this might be a way to change the view on women and juju.

However it can be a difficult task for social workers to work in the realm of the supernatural, they might be seen as favouring certain traditions/religions over others. To work with this violence as a spiritual issue also somehow involves admitting witchcraft as real. This can be a slippery slope towards finding themselves in the position of having to determine who is a real witch and who is not, and if so to having to defend the rights of witches (witches right not to be subdued to violence). This
already can present a problem, although not articulated, since most of the social workers acknowledge the existence of witchcraft and witches.

For those social workers who for example believe that differences can be signs of a person being a witch it becomes essential for clients not to fall into this category of suspected witches. If clients do show these signs, there are social workers who are at the risk of condone or even contribute to violence (such as neglect), since the person might not be interpreted as a victim. However, most of the social workers seemed to view the main part of accusations against people differing from the norm as having other explanations, such as psychological problems or old age.

As noted in the background of this study, witchcraft beliefs are connected to seeking meaning for misfortunes and are often escalating in times of tension (Stewart & Strathern, 2004). In the background I showed how Nigeria is a “tough society”, the lack of sufficient institutions combined with poverty makes people who are much depended on others very vulnerable. Uncertainties, disease and lack of both funds and healthcare seem to play a part in the understanding of witchcraft-accusations and fears among participants in this study. Participants from both social work and community groups express how psychological disabilities, sickness, old age and differences can be interpreted as witchcraft thus resulting in abuse, such as neglect and stigmatization – resulting in the problem of witchcraft-related violence to not only stand out as a problem of violence against women.

Finally, there is suggestion in earlier research on increased literacy as means of reducing witchcraft beliefs and thereby reducing violence (Andrikha, 2004). In this study however the well-educated social workers – all of them with degrees and some of them with more than one post-degree – all recognizes the threat of wicked powers. Like Geertz (1973) emphasizes; this is a part of how they view the world. This does not mean that they would condone violence or that education cannot be a key to reduce violence, however it is important to remember that beliefs themselves are not the same as ignorance. Some of the participants also points to how modernity and education offers alternative understandings of things that can even make some educated people less likely to change. The results of this study seem more in line with Kohnerts (1996) conclusion that beliefs themselves are often ignored as to how they affect practices. One should also remember that policemen afraid to handle psychiatric disabled persons, politicians and people in the legal system as well as the social worker are all a part of the culture they live in, as the problem lies in all these areas.
7. Conclusions and discussion

In this chapter I will present the conclusions of this study and a discussion including suggestion on further research.

7.1 conclusions

The different views on women’s role in witchcraft-related violence can be seen as affecting participants understanding on what is to be considered violence and who the victims and perpetrators are. This also influences their view on containment strategies and approaches on how to handle this violence.

In this thesis three main perspectives on women’s role in witchcraft-related violence was identified; The first theme is that women do not have any particular role in witchcraft related violence, Witchcraft-related violence, a general problem of violence. This understanding sees men, women and children as equally likely to be both perpetrators and victims. The second theme is the understanding of women as having a central role in the supernatural-violence of witches; they are more likely to be witches but also considered to have certain powers to control the juju of the community. I called this theme Women and the violence of witches. The third theme is the understanding of witchcraft-related violence as gender-violence, Witchcraft as gender based-violence, where women are viewed as both victims of violence springing from patriarchal systems but also as helpers to uphold violent practices, since they are socialized into violence. I think it is important to state that neither specific social workers nor community members were consistent to one perspective, but these were the main ideas that I could see.

These perspectives resulted in different views on handling of such violence and different empowerment work. The group that mainly understood it as a general problem of violence did not seem to view preventing this violence as part of their work; as an organization focusing on women and girls. However, they would still handle individual cases of such violence, which they treated like other cases of domestic-violence. The group that viewed it as a problem of gender based-violence worked with empowerment and interventions to increase equality. For the community groups, the lack of other sufficient means to handle the wickedness of witches led often to participants viewing violence and/or social exclusion (which in itself are violence) as the solution of the problem of witchcraft.

There were recognition from both community participants and social workers that the state does not have adequate resources and knowledge to contain violence and fears, for some of the social workers it meant that they were advocating for law changes, such as forbidding witchcraft accusations, and also that they consider the field work more suitable for NGOs than for governmental social workers. For the communities however, they express awareness that the law or government officials do not operate in the realm of the supernatural. Therefor traditional leaders – who also in some cases are viewed as superior to official law – were seen as more trustworthy with these issues. These traditional leaders
seemed to play a key role in both accusations and protection against the attacks of witchcraft, although sometimes feared and viewed with suspicion due to their powers.

The main part of the social workers in this study expressed beliefs in witchcraft or witches, I cannot draw any definite conclusions as to what extent this affects their actual practice. However, this can present some problems when handling witchcraft-related violence if there are doubts to the innocence of the person exposed to violence. From this study one can conclude on how witchcraft beliefs are deeply rooted in how many people in Edo State interpret their world and it can therefore hardly be removed by education. This does not mean that education cannot be used to prevent violence, such as knowledge about differences, disabilities and sickness and to empower women/other groups at the risk of accusations.

Conditions such as psychological disabilities, sickness, old age or deviation from norm combined with lack of resources to take care of needs are also described in this study as factors that can make a person being singled out as a witch thereby suffering abuse and/or neglect. Since these are all areas of social work, knowledge about and sensitivity to witchcraft-related violence and its implication is of great value to any social worker in this context. It is also important for social workers in other contexts to be aware of this, since witchcraft-related violence is not a isolated phenomenon only concerning Edo-state or Nigeria.

7.2 Discussion
Geertz (1973) suggest how beliefs and culture are intertwined in how we understand the world and in our social interactions. In this thesis the views on women in connection to witchcraft-related violence can be seen to reflect the practices, in both communities and official social work. The views also reflect who is included and excluded as victims and perpetrators.

There are many traditional practices in Edo state that makes women more vulnerable to violence, witchcraft-related violence just like other violence (see UN Women, 2017; Nagle & Owasanoye, 2016). One should therefore not neglect the views of those social workers in this study that perceive witchcraft-related violence as atrocities against women. For most of the community members in this study, women are often interpreted as being more likely to be witches and women in this community also have a limited access to the collective decision making. The community meetings were the central of important decision in Ise; these meetings could present an important ground for change. The perceived weakness of women might play a part in why they are not seen as reliable in the decision making. By strengthening women through education and encouragement to take part in these meetings can also change the view on women as less active and gullible, possibly leading to fewer accusations against women. This strategy has been suggested by both social workers in this study and also emphasized by Roy (1998) as a way to contain a crucial part of witchcraft-related violence.

However this study also shows that witchcraft and occult violence, such as neglect and stigmatization, can be seen as targeting many groups in Edo-state. What these groups mainly seem to
have in common is probably not gender but their vulnerability. A part of the work against this violence would therefore be better healthcare access, access to autopsies and access to treatment for psychological disabilities.

As stated in the background of this thesis, there are many social needs in Nigeria with limited resources to draw from. Both earlier research (Secker, 2012) and participants in this study has pointed to the inability of official institutions to handle the problem of witchcraft-related violence. I therefore want to emphasize the need of organizations in Edo State that would dare to make the problem of witchcraft-related violence their core mission, to protect and shelter accused witches and also help communities to find solutions that does not neglect the fears behind accusations.

Foxcroft (2014) argues the need to challenge the preaching in Pentecostal churches, I would also suggest to challenge and advocate to the traditional leaders, such as the highly respected Oba of Benin, to also become a “champion of change” as the social worker Josephine called it, to officially renounce the harmful traditional practices, witchcraft persecution and accusations.

Since all participants in this study communicated beliefs in witchcraft I once more would like to emphasize how these beliefs do not necessary lead to acts of violence. Gilligan and Furness (2006) present the need of practice that acknowledges beliefs. As I see it, these beliefs are so deeply entwined with perception of reality to the extent that if social work aims to work for client’s best, as well as to improve client’s quality life – then the awareness of these beliefs and their implications on social work practices is definitely essential. As Kohnert (1996) points out, from a western world-view these beliefs are often associated with ignorance and as seen in earlier research (Andrikah, 2004; Secker, 2013), schooling often comes up as solution to lessen beliefs. This I find to be a bias and inefficient way to view solutions, as the problem is not, or at least not only, grounded in lack of education. This can be seen in this study shows how educated social workers share the notion of some people (even children) as witches. This presents many possible problems to social work, such as fear of clients or avoidance to handle certain cases and also challenges in how to work against witchcraft-related violence.

This study is of course very limited, partly because I am a beginner at academic writing who used a complicated methodological approach, but also because of the small scale of this study. However I still hope that these perspectives on women’s role in witchcraft related violence and the different groups ideas on how to handle such violence can inspire further research.

Lastly, some social workers in this study expressed beliefs that such things as rascality can be signs of being a witch; it would therefore be interesting with further research that focuses on the experiences people exposed to witchcraft-related violence have from professional social support/help. This way, more knowledge on how social workers beliefs affect their clients can be gained or achieved.
8. References


Neuman, W. L. (2003). *Social Research Methods, Qualitative and Quantitative approaches*. (5th ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon


9. Appendix 1

Letter of presentation,

My name is Faith Mark and I am a student of Social Work from Ersta Sköndal Bräcke University College in Stockholm, Sweden. I am here in Nigeria to do Minor Field Studies for my bachelor thesis with the purpose to gain understanding on views of witchcraft-related violence and solutions to such violence.

I wish to inform you that:
- Information will be handled with care and confidentiality after the study is written, all interview material will be destroyed.
- You will be anonymous in the study and all personal information will be disguised as far as possible.
- Participation is voluntary and you can chose to end an interview any time you want, or withdraw your participation at any time.
- You have the right to read/have someone read for you the final results.

Thank you for your help and time!
Faith Mark

If you have any questions please contact me at:

[Email and number has been removed]
10. Appendix 2

Interview schedule, **themes and questions:**

**Character:** Do you have experiences in encountering witchcraft-related violence? Can you describe such situations? Do you think these are typical situations? If not, what would be a typical situation in your understanding? Does witchcraft-based violence have connection to other problems? Would you say it's different from other violence? How? Do you think your own view is different from others? If so, in what way?

**Key players:** Who do you think is typically exposed to these situations? Who are the perpetrators? (Does this effect how you handle this violence?)

**Reasons:** Why do you think this problem occurs? What reasons are there? Where do you think this problem comes from?

**Consequences:** What consequences does this problem have? Do you think it's a big or small problem?

**Solutions:** What kind of solutions do you find appropriate to this problem? (For social workers: how do you work with these problems? For community groups: do you have a way to handle these problems in the community?) Who do you think should be responsible for providing solutions? Who (professions, organizations and such) are most suitable in your opinion to carry out these solutions?