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Popular public perception of witchcraft practices, witchcraft wealth, recruitment and herbalism in Bo City Southern Sierra Leone

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Abstract

The study examined popular public perception and witchcraft practices in Bo City in the Southern Province of Sierra Leone. Specifically, public perception regarding the principles of witchcraft practices, witchcraft wealth, recruitment/initiation process and inheritance were examined. Exploratory and anthropological research designs were used. Through a structured questionnaire, data were collected from a sample of 150 participants involving 50 individuals each from the three main ethnic groups in Sierra Leone; Mende, Temne and Limba. The researchers first got close to community members from an emic perspective, then held discussions and interviews in the communities based on age, status, gender, and other factors that reflected the differences within the various communities. The findings revealed that the majority (76%) agreed that witchcraft can be acquired through family lineage, with 60% of such recruitment initiated by stepmothers/fathers 62%, and that 66% of respondents agreed that herbalists primarily draw from witchcraft practices to cure sick people. It was concluded that witchcraft recruitment mainly occurs within families and that herbalists primarily draw from witchcraft practices to cure sick people in Bo City.

Keywords: perception, recruitment, rituals, witchcraft practice, witchcraft wealth

Public Interest Statement

Many individuals have opinions regarding witchcraft practices in Africa, especially in Bo City, Sierra Leone. These opinions largely influence how these people conduct their lives and hold the belief that some of the wealth in Sierra Leone is the result of witchcraft. They also think that traditional healers' use of herbs and the recruitment of new members into the witchcraft community are important factors in Sierra Leone. Although there are many academic studies on the traditional practices of Sierra Leone, there was little information accessible on the belief system of how people in Bo City conceive their fears and myths. Moreover, there is a gap between what is described in the literature and what the people of Sierra Leone currently know and believe. This study aimed to close this gap and serve as the foundation for more investigation in this field.

1.0 Introduction

Witchcraft has been an age-old practice globally (Nwatu, Ebue, Iwuagwu, Ene, Odo 2020; Eboiyehi, 2017; Mitchell, 2011). However, the reasons people engage in witchcraft and the benefits they derive from it are still clouded in mystery. Eboiyehi (2017) asserts that though witchcraft is a part of widespread historical knowledge, little scholarly attention has been paid to the phenomenon and accusations of older women, particularly in Nigeria. Some scholars like Smith (2021) and Stanmore (2021) consider witchcraft practices to be beneficial, while Agyapong (2020), Cordoso (2014) and Taylor, Bradbury-Jones and Lund (2019) tend to associate witchcraft with criminality, prostitution and derision, yet others consider witchcraft as the remnant of pagan religion and its prosecution (Agyapong, 2020; Levack, 2012), precisely an expression of social tension. Traditionally, witchcraft is discussed as the invocation of supernatural powers to control people or events; such practices typically involve sorcery or magic (Noonan, 2019; Moro, 2018).

Scholars like Brock, Raiswell and Winter (2019) consider witchcraft mystical and harm others. Abusch (2020) similarly associates witches with demons, wizards and sorcerers. Different perspectives hold that witches can sometimes use their powers for positive benefits. For instance, Leistner (2014) asserts benefits to witchcraft practices, particularly in bolstering urbanisation in most African societies. Middleton and Winter (2013) clarify that some regard ancestral spirits as elements of witchcraft, believing that ancestral spirits are morally good. If the need ever is, would only be found inflicting punishment for misdeeds and making just demands. In a sense, what some anthropologists like Emma (2018) call witchcraft in Africa is essentially the use of supposed spiritual powers for antisocial purposes.

Nonetheless, the Gusii people believe that people with incurable and conscious tendencies kill or disable others by magical means, using magic poisons and parts of corpses taken from graves. The Ganda society, for example, has used witchcraft to harm other people (Middleton & Winter, 2013). Miguel (2005) reveals that economic conditions are the driving force behind witchcraft killing and witch-hunting. A majority of the victims in rural Tanzania are older women killed frequently by their relatives. Rapley (2007) states that witch hunts are the products of intense fear and paranoia, and the results are often terrible. The older people are disadvantaged and vulnerable to the dangerous hysteria of witchcraft beliefs in Africa (Mkhonto and Hanssen 2018). In West Africa, such as Ghana, Owusu (2020) reports that witchcraft-fuelled abuse is endemic. In specific communities in Sierra Leone, accusations of witchcraft could engulf a whole community and beyond once set in motion. Broadly speaking and primarily unconfirmed, these ideas do not explain witchcraft and herbalism, procedures in witchcraft recruitment, succession, inheritance, witchcraft health and wealth, and other related problems in many African societies. In Sierra Leone, these concerns are further polluted by

religious sects' perceived need for moral boundaries. Detailed explanations and understandings of these phenomena have therefore been sacrificed.

The study's objectives were to a) to probe the public perception of witchcraft and its practices in Bo City in Sierra Leone, b) to probe the perception of witchcraft regarding witchcraft wealth, c) to probe the perception of the public regarding witchcraft recruitment, succession and inheritance, and d) to examine the perception regarding the relationship between witchcraft and herbalism in Bo City.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 *Witchcraft as a metaphysical phenomenon*

A wealth of research on the witchcraft issue exists in Africa. Results from the study have been derived from several angles, including traditional, psychological, sociological, anthropological, and religious orientations. The linkage of people and supernatural entities is age-old. It is believed that individuals with spiritual and metaphysical endowments may use the potency of their mystical powers to aid or harm people in society. The evils that magical powers can inflict on their victims are more well-known than their ability to elicit goodwill. The first thing that comes to mind when a tragedy or calamity affects a person or group is 'who, not what is the source of the calamity.' People who are accused of possessing spiritual abilities become the object of humiliation when such information is considered. According to Achu and Ajima (2019), witchcraft is a worldwide issue that affects people of all sexes and ages. This view contradicts Machangu's (2015) opinion, which states that witchcraft is predominantly found among females. Achu and Ajima further reveal that witchcraft is an act that is shrouded in secrecy and mysticism. As a result, many scholars, including Achu and Ajima, state that witchcraft poses both metaphysical and epistemological challenges in African cosmology. Oti and Onah (as cited by Achu and Ajima, 2019) reveal that witches are classified into two categories in African cosmology; the black witch that causes pain or harm and the white witch that is endowed with wisdom.

Willis (2018) claims that witches were women because women are mothers and that witchcraft beliefs encode fantasies of maternal persecution. She argues that readers of Shakespeare's criticism and psychoanalytic commentary would not find this surprising. Shakespeare portrayed this in much of his works, and his legendary drama entitled 'Macbeth' is prominent. Besides that, men could be active members of witchcraft activities, and women are much more vulnerable to witchcraft accusations than men (Pitt, 2013). Rex (2019) also divulges that even though witchcraft may not be scientifically justified, the concept is popular in Africa and among Africans. This state makes it possible for a majority of Africans to acknowledge the existence and actuality of witchcraft. Rex also states that witchcraft is a two-way street, a help and a hurt in Africa. Witchcraft is typically seen as antisocial, malicious, and detrimental to any society's well-being and ability to coexist (Achu and Ajima, 2019). Witches are accused of using their mystical powers to divide the community rather than uniting society. Witchcraft practices are strongly condemned in African cultures. In unlucky times, witches are forced to face severe consequences for indulging in witchcraft practices. However, the exploits of witches are still prominent today. Family Guardian Fellowship (2020) makes an instance of what befalls persons accused of being witches. It states that once a person confessed to being a witch, they were usually burned in a very public way to terrorise the rest of the population. The witch's bodies were burned to believe that the spirit of a witch could only be defeated if it were burned.

In some cases, the government confiscated the lands and properties of executed witches and used them to enrich public servants. Witchcraft is seemingly a never-ending epistemological and metaphysical phenomenon. Witchcraft is a powerful concept in the daily life of people living in African

communities, and its existence and practices are prevailing. Discussions about witches and witchcraft practices cannot be exhausted in sociological and academic contexts. Grimassi (2011) maintains that more traditional ways have remained largely hidden from our understanding of witchcraft. As such, it fosters the need for research on a concept that has attracted so much more.

2.2 Witchcraft wealth

Wealth and witchcraft have been innumerable in Africa. Alexander (2018) claims that witchcraft significantly enhances family money and property and the legacy of inherited resources, such as good health, intelligence, and cultural benefits. According to Khoza (2015), witchcraft exists to the point that you believe it and not the other way you do not think it exists. He further states that it is complicated to tell that witchcraft is at play when a person is poor, for witchcraft has exciting benefits (Gardner, 2021). Achu and Ajima (2019) believe that money-making witchcraft has to do with human sacrifices. Though it is dreaded as a typical individual practice, money-making rituals have become family fortunes.

Consequently, many Africans believe that certain unexplained wealth can only be owned by people who possess witchcraft powers (Achu and Ajima, 2019). The social and economic status of West African shrine priests and their clients can only be attributed to witchcraft wealth accumulation (Parish, 2011). This type of wealth epitomised is no longer seen by shrine clients as a desired symbol of success but as a sign of moral decay. Lindhardt (2015) distinguishes between a kind of witchcraft that is mainly used to obstruct the happiness of others and the newer mysticism of wealth that can be used for personal enrichment. The latter type of witchcraft can, among other things, be used to attract customers to a shop or a stall; extract money from people's pockets or purses; increase a harvest by mysteriously draining the crops from a neighbouring plot, and protect wealth acquired through corruption.

2.3 Witchcraft recruitments, succession, and inheritance

The biological continuity of any group or institution is of great significance, and witchcraft is no exception. Diverse perceptions have been held about the processes and procedures involved in witchcraft recruitments, succession and inheritance. There are several ways of installing witchcraft legacy within a family or group. To become a witch, the person must have the internal curiosity from childhood that different people can recognise until it takes the formal process (Courtenay, Merriam & Baumgartner, 2003). According to Sulemana (2018), witchcraft is acquired in three ways: 1) through family lineage, either through inheriting it from a deceased relative or obtaining it from a relative who is living; 2) by purchasing it from a practising witch, buying the powers with a bit of amount of money from a spiritualist to use it to protect their children or for evil purposes through friendship; and 3) somebody may acquire the witchcraft substance from a friend who is a practising witch. In presenting a step-by-step guide to starting the path of magical knowledge and witchcraft, Brown (2016) states that to be a witch, one has to know the ways of the old, see beyond the barriers, and follow the moon. One can become a witch through dreams, in which the person may feel constrained, or may find themselves making love and eating in the dream, waking up and seeing marks like razor blades cut all over their body (Gbule & Odili, 2015). The Wiccans believe that one can get generically initiated by reading books about witches and practising what they read in the books (Sabin, 2010).

2.4 Witchcraft practice(s) and herbalism

The treatise on witchcraft also belongs to the broader discourse on medicines. Most people in rural

areas have a vast knowledge of plants, their medicinal properties and other usages. Ozioma and Chinwe (2019) assert that self-medication is practised widely in many villages. There are specialists for various treatments, including bone setting, diseases affecting women and children, swellings, snake bites, and impotence, to name a few. According to Ameh, Obodozie, Babalola and Gamaniel (2011), such practices are called herbalism.

Udelhoven (2017) also claims that traditional medicines are often understood pragmatically. However, concepts of medicine often go far beyond this level. Umar, Jimoh, Adamu, Adamu and Yunusa (2016) state that traditional medicines relate to the substances hidden in them and the healing forces and specific powers tied to plants and animals they seek to appropriate. The administering of medicines through drink, inhalation, or rubbing into the body is often accompanied by ritually dramatised gestures performed at significant places. According to Peters (2021), traditional healers are mediators between the spirits and the living and can answer many of the illnesses associated with witchcraft. Further, traditional healers have saved the lives of a family cursed by witches by offering sacrificial blood to the accused witch in exchange for the victims' lives (Silva, 2017).

3.0 Research Designs and Methods

Exploratory and anthropological research designs were used to determine the various conceptual distinctions underlying the phenomenon of witchcraft. The methods enabled the researchers to acquire novel insights into the concept and practices of witchcraft in southern Sierra Leone. The approach was a careful investigation of public perception of witchcraft practices using simplified traditional anthropological methods, such as observations, which allowed the researchers to gain valuable information without much intruding on the privacy of the group and interviews and questionnaires, which focused on community interaction through its language (Bernard, 2017). The three major ethnic groups in the south were targeted: Mende, Temne, and Limba. The structured questionnaire was designed to survey a sample of 150 participants, including 50 individuals from each ethnic group) purposefully selected within the Southern Province. The study provided clarity into various concepts of witchcraft, its art and practices. Individual and focus group interviews within the community were conducted. The snowballing method was used to choose a small number of participants, who then chose other participants based on their age, status, gender, and other criteria that contributed to varying beliefs within the communities.

4.0 Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

Objective 1: Probed public perception regarding witchcraft as a metaphysical phenomenon.

Table 1 below shows that 96.7% of the respondents said they believed in the existence of witchcraft. Only 3.3 % said they did not believe in the presence of witchcraft.

TABLE 1: Do you think witchcraft exists?

	<i>f</i>	%
No	5	3.3
Yes	145	96.7
Total	150	100

60% of respondents said the activities of witches were strongly encouraged in society. 40% of the respondents said the actions of witches were strongly condemned in the community (see Figure 2).

TABLE 2: If no, why do you think so?

	<i>f</i>	%
I don't believe in witchcraft.	2	1.3
I have never seen a witch.	1	0.7
Their spiritual powers deceive them	1	0.7
Total	4	2.7

Table 2 above displays the reason respondents answered no to the responses in Table 1 above. 1.3% of them said they did not think witchcraft existed because they did not believe in it, and 0.7% said they had never seen a witch and so did not think they existed.

TABLE 3: In your opinion, why do people become witches/wizards?

	<i>f</i>	%
Fear of intimidation	141	94
Family protection	141	94
Personal power	144	96
To get rich	1	0.67

Table 3 above shows that 94% of the respondents said people became witches/wizards because of fear of intimidation, 94% said for family protection, and 96% said for personal power. A participant aged 55, responded as follows:

People make for witchcraft and wizardry what they could not get in real life. I tell most of them to use their powers to secure themselves and escape the intimidation of the world. If they are not respected here because of their wretched condition, they make for it in the underworld.

TABLE 4: Is the practice of witchcraft strongly condemned in this society?

	<i>f</i>	%
No	60	40.0
Yes	90	60.0
Total	150	100

The table above shows that 60.0% of respondents said witchcraft was condemned in their society, 40.0% of the respondents, however, said the practice of witchcraft was not strongly condemned in their society.

TABLE 5: Descriptive Statistics on the Opinions of participants

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Witchcraft is associated with criminality.	3.55	0.848
Witchcraft is associated with prostitution.	3.11	1.075
Witchcraft is the remnant of a pagan religion	3.73	0.672
Witchcraft prosecution is an expression of social tension.	3.62	0.692
Witches use supernatural powers to control people or events.	3.67	0.629
Witchcraft in Africa is essentially the use of supposed spiritual powers	3.65	0.696
Witches use magic poisons and parts of corpses taken from graves.	3.68	0.754
Spiritually gifted persons use mystical abilities that have the potential to benefit or harm members of society.	3.74	0.584
People who are accused of possessing spiritual powers are sought after because when a tragedy strikes an individual or a group, the first question that comes into one's mind is 'who did this,' not 'what caused it.'	3.63	0.807
Witchcraft is a phenomenon that is predominantly found among females.	3.21	1.162
Witchcraft practice cuts across gender and age.	3.92	0.410
Witchcraft is a practice that is shrouded in secrecy and mysticism.	3.70	0.653
Witchcraft poses a challenge in Africa.	3.85	0.454
Witchcraft helps and hurts in Africa.	3.51	0.880
The activities of witches/wizards turn to divide society instead	3.91	0.292

Table 5 above shows descriptive statistics which indicates that M - 3.33 (SD- 0.848) of the respondent said witchcraft is associated with criminality, M -3.11 (SD 1.075) said witchcraft is associated with prostitution, M - 3.73 (SD - 0.672) said witchcraft is the remnant of pagan religion, M - 3.62 (SD - 0.692) said witchcraft prosecution is an expression of social tension, M - 3.67 (SD - 0.629) said witches use supernatural powers to control people or events, M - 3.65 (SD - 0.696) said witchcraft in Africa is essentially the use of supposed spiritual powers, M - 3.68 (SD - 0.754) claimed that witches utilize magic poisons and body parts dug up from tombs, M - 3.74 (SD - 0.584) thought spiritually talented individuals used mystical talents that may benefit or harm members of society, M - 3.63 (SD - 0.807) said when a disaster strikes an individual or a society, people immediately wonder who is to blame rather than what caused it. As a result, those who are suspected of possessing supernatural abilities are hunted down, M- 3.21 (SD - 1.162) witchcraft is a phenomenon that is predominantly found among females, M - 3.92 (SD - 0.410) said witchcraft practice cuts across gender and ages, M - 3.70 (SD - 0.653) said witchcraft is a practice that is shrouded in secrecy and mysticism, M - 3.85 (SD - 0.454) said witchcraft poses a challenge in Africa, M - 3.51 (SD - 0.880) said witchcraft helps and hurts in Africa and M - 3.91 (SD - 0.292)

OBJECTIVE 2: Probed public perception regarding witchcraft wealth.

TABLE 6: Descriptive Statistics on Witchcraft Wealth

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Money making witchcraft has to do with human sacrifices.	3.69	0.696
Money making rituals have been known to be a family fortune.	3.46	0.917
Certain unexplained wealth can only be acquired by people who possess	3.28	0.935
The social and economic status of West African shrine priests and their clients can only be related to witchcraft wealth accumulation.	3.63	0.814

Because people want to advance themselves socially and financially, urban 'witch doctors' advocate for practices that harm, mutilate, or kill children and adults with disabilities as part of rituals or sacrifices in order to help people and families succeed	3.65	0.715
People use witchcraft to attract customers and make more money	3.77	0.595
They use witchcraft to attract voters to win elections and make more money.	3.55	0.824
Thieves use witchcraft to steal people's money or properties.	3.51	0.903
Witchcraft money is the easiest way to get rich.	3.27	1.048
Witchcraft/rituals can be used to increase the harvest for farmers.	3.77	0.557
Witchcraft/rituals can be used to go into politics or get a political appointment.	3.72	0.696

Regarding the perception that money-making witchcraft has to do with human sacrifices, Table 6 above shows a descriptive statistics on witchcraft and wealth in which M - 3.69 (SD - 0.696) said money making witchcraft has to do with human sacrifices, M - 3.46 (SD - 0.917) said money making rituals have been known to be a family fortune, M - 3.28 (SD - 0.935) said certain unexplained wealth can only be got by people who possess, M - 3.63 (SD - 0.814) said the social and economic status of West African shrine priests and their clients can only be related to witchcraft wealth accumulation, M - 3.65 (SD - 0.715) said because people want to advance themselves socially and financially, urban 'witch doctors' advocate for practices that harm, mutilate, or kill children and adults with disabilities as part of rituals or sacrifices in order to help people and families succeed, M - 3.77 (SD - 0.595) said people use witchcraft to attract customers and make more money, M - 3.55 (SD - 0.824) said they use witchcraft to attract voters to win elections and make more money, M - 3.51 (SD - 0.903) said thieves use witchcraft to steal people's money or properties, M - 3.27 (SD - 1.048) said witchcraft money is the easiest way to get rich, M - 3.77 (SD - 0.557) said witchcraft/rituals can be used to increase a harvest for farmers and M - 3.72 (SD - 0.696) believed witchcraft/rituals can be used to go into politics or get political appointment. A female participant, aged 55, revealed that:

Most of the unexplained wealth of some people nowadays can be traced to witchcraft. We have been told of strange happening at cemetery yards where beautiful cars have been spotted late in the night. What do you think they go there for? To commune with the dead and take body parts for their dirty dealings.

OBJECTIVE 3: Probed into public perception regarding witchcraft recruitment, succession and inheritance Respondents' public perception regarding witchcraft recruitment, succession and inheritance. Table 7 below displays the responses to the various questions.

Table 7: Descriptive Statistics on Witchcraft Recruitments, Succession, and Inheritance

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
To become a witch/wizard, one must have the internal curiosity from childhood that different people can recognise until it takes the formal process.	3.45	1.027
Someone can be physically initiated into witchcraft.	2.77	1.243
Someone can be spiritually initiated into witchcraft.	3.73	0.501

Witchcraft is acquired through family lineage, either through inheriting it from a deceased relative or obtaining it from a living relative.	3.71	0.736
One can be initiated into witchcraft by stepmothers/fathers.	3.45	0.901
Witchcraft is acquired by purchasing it from a practising witch/wizard, buying the powers with a bit of money from a spiritualist.	3.49	0.968
Witchcraft is acquired by purchasing it from a practising witch/wizard, buying the powers with a little amount of money from a spiritualist.	3.32	0.944
One can become a witch/wizard through dreams.	3.37	0.938
One can get generically initiated by reading books about witches/wizards and practising what they read in the books.	2.93	1.235
One can become a witch/wizard by having sex with a witch/wizard.	2.27	1.251

Table 7 shows the responses regarding witchcraft recruitments, succession, and inheritance in which M - 3.45 (SD - 1.027) said for one to become a witch/wizard one must have the internal curiosity from childhood that can be recognised by different people until it takes the formal process, M - 2.77 (SD - 1.243) said someone can be physically initiated into witchcraft, M - 3.73 (SD - 0.501) said someone can be spiritually initiated into witchcraft, M - 3.71 (SD - 0.736) said witchcraft is acquired through family lineage, either through inheriting it from deceased relative or obtaining it from a relative who is living, M - 3.45 (SD - 0.901) said one can be initiated into witchcraft by step mothers/fathers, M - 3.49 (SD - 0.968) said witchcraft is acquired by purchasing it from a practicing witch/wizard, buying the powers with a bit of amount of money from a spiritualist, M - 3.32 (SD - 0.944) said witchcraft is acquired by purchasing it from a practicing witch/wizard, buying the powers with a bit of amount of money from a spiritualist, M - 3.37 (SD - 0.938) said one can become a witch/wizard through dreams, M - 2.93 (SD - 1.235) said one can get generically initiated by reading books about witches/wizards, and practicing what they read in the books and M - 2.27 (1.251) said One can become a witch/wizard by having sex with a witch/wizard. An elderly participant stated that:

Our town is full of children who have been recruited by their parent or relatives. Just yesterday, my neighbour's child was recruited through a dream but for the intervention of our witch doctor, she should have stayed in the underworld permanently. Again, some people buy witchcraft ornaments from witches and wizards; they use them to do their evil deeds.

OBJECTIVE 4: Examined public perception regarding the relationship between witchcraft and herbalism.

TABLE 8: Descriptive Statistics on the Opinions of participants

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
People, especially in rural areas, have a vast knowledge of plants and their medicinal properties and uses.	3.79	0.559
Herbalists draw from witchcraft practices to heal sick people.	3.57	0.755
There are specialists (herbalists) in many African villages for various treatment fields (For bone setting, women's diseases, children's diseases, treating swelling, snake bites, and impotence.	3.84	0.506

Traditional medicine is the alternative or non-conventional mode of treatment to Western medicine.	3.59	0.829
When looking for a cure for many illnesses, people visit herbalists, priests, witch doctors, medicine men, and other local deities.	3.75	0.590
Traditional medicine includes herbal medicine, bone setting, spiritual healing, circumcision, maternity care, and psychiatric care.	3.75	0.579
Traditional medicine relates to the healing forces and specific powers that are tied to plants and animals.	3.75	0.716
Most people still rely on traditional healers.	3.66	0.713
Particularly in settings with limited resources and rural locations, the role of traditional healers is crucial for the promotion of health.	3.73	0.609

Table 8 shows descriptive statistics on participants’ opinions on herbalism and witchcraft; M - 3.79 (SD - 0.559) said that people, especially in rural areas, have a vast knowledge of plants and their medicinal properties and uses. M - 3.57 (SD - 0.755) said herbalists draw from witchcraft practices to heal sick people, M - 3.84 (SD -0.506) said In many African villages, there are specialists (herbalists) for various fields of treatment (For bone setting, women’s diseases, children’s diseases, treating swelling, snake bites, impotence. M - 3.59 (SD - 0.829) said traditional medicine is the alternative or non-conventional mode of treatment to Western medicine. M - 3.75 (SD - 0.590) said when looking for a cure for many illnesses, people visit herbalists, priests, witch doctors, medicine men, and other local deities, M- 3.75 (SD - 0.579) said traditional medicine includes herbal medicine, bone setting, spiritual healing, circumcision, maternity care, psychiatric care. M - 3.75 (SD - 0.716) said traditional medicine relates to the healing forces and specific powers that are tied to plants and animals, M - 3.66 (0.713) said most people still rely on traditional healers, and M -3.73 (SD - 0.609) said, particularly in settings with limited resources and rural locations, the role of traditional healers is crucial for the promotion of health.

TABLE 9: Statistics that Describe Why People Still Turn to Traditional Healers

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Because they are not expensive.	3.86	0.434
They use cultural, religious, and moral means that their patients are familiar with.	3.86	0.531
They are typically more readily available and accepted as health care.	3.66	0.758
In some cases, healing techniques are efficient and less painful.	3.83	0.561
The cure is permanent.	3.71	0.763

Table 9 shows descriptive statistics on why people still rely on traditional healers, in which M - 3.86 (SD - 0.434) said they are not expensive. M - 3.86 (SD - 0.531) said they use cultural, religious, and moral means that their patients are familiar with, M - 3.66 (SD - 0.758) said they are typically more readily available and accepted as health care, M - 3.83 (SD - 0.561) said, in some cases, healing techniques are efficient and less painful and M - 3.71 (0.763) said the cure is permanent.

5.0 Discussion

The findings regarding witchcraft as a metaphysical phenomenon indicated that most respondents (97%) agreed that though strongly condemned in most communities in Bo City, witchcraft existed in their communities. The majority (72%) believed that witchcraft was used primarily by people with supernatural powers for antisocial activities and harmed people (79%). Equally so, the majority (69%) of respondents agreed that witchcraft was associated with criminality, prostitution (81%) and paganism (60%). However, slightly above 50% of the respondents agreed that witchcraft was predominantly found among females, with 94% believing that witchcraft cut across gender and ages. This result agrees with several studies by anthropologies. Fosu (2020), for instance, stated that witchcraft is a metaphysical phenomenon, and Achu and Ajima (2019) indicated witchcraft is a worldwide issue that affects people of all sexes and ages. Emma (2018) stated that witches and wizards used spiritual powers for antisocial purposes. Miguel (2005) revealed that most of the victims in rural Tanzania are older women killed frequently by their relatives. However, Willis (2018) claimed that witches were women because women are mothers and that witchcraft beliefs encode fantasies of maternal persecution.

The findings regarding the public perception of witchcraft wealth, 60% of respondents agreed that witchcraft money is the easiest way to get rich in their communities, and 76% of respondents strongly agreed that sacrifices had been used for wealth in their communities. The majority of people with unexplained wealth had used witchcraft sacrifices to gain such wealth in their communities. Also, 90% of respondents agreed that traders had used witchcraft to attract customers, and over 70% agreed that politicians had used it to attract votes and win elections in Bo City. Alexander (2017) discovered that witchcraft could help boast family money and property. Further, Achu and Ajima (2019) stated that money-making witchcraft has to do with human sacrifices, and people with supernatural powers can only own that unexplained wealth.

The findings on the public perception regarding witchcraft recruitment, succession and inheritance, 65% of respondents agreed that internal curiosity is a prerequisite for witchcraft recruitment in their communities. Slightly above 50% agreed that people could be initiated spiritually, not physically (37%) into witchcraft. Also, 76% agreed that witchcraft could be acquired through family lineage, with 60% of such recruitment initiated by stepmothers/fathers, 62% through dreams, and 58% through friends. Only 17% agreed that witchcraft could be acquired by reading psychic books. The findings agree with those of Sulemana (2018), who discovered that witchcraft could be obtained through family lineage and a practising witch friend.

The findings on the public perception regarding the relationship between witchcraft and herbalism, most respondents (82%) agreed that herbalism and witchcraft in rural areas are strongly related. Similarly, 66% of respondents agreed that herbalists primarily draw from witchcraft practices to cure sick people. Seventy-three per cent agreed that traditional medicine is the alternative or non-conventional mode of treatment to western medicine. These findings agree with several anthropologists. Peters (2021) stated that traditional healers are mediators between the spirits and the living and can answer many of the illnesses associated with witchcraft. Borokini and Lawal (2014) discovered that an alternative or non-conventional mode of treatment involves using herbs and consulting herbalists in a non-orthodox manner.

6.0 Conclusion

In summary, the study set out to examine the popular public perception of witchcraft practices in Bo City in the Southern Province of Sierra Leone. Specifically, public perception regarding the principles

of witchcraft practices and witchcraft wealth was examined. The study's objectives were to a) to probe the public perception of witchcraft and its practices in Bo City in Sierra Leone, b) to probe the perception of witchcraft regarding witchcraft wealth, c) to probe the perception of the public regarding witchcraft recruitments, succession and inheritance, and d) to examine the perception regarding the relationship between witchcraft and herbalism in Bo City. The study was conducted in Bo, Southern Sierra Leone, using an experimental and anthropological research design to determine the various conceptual distinctions underlying the phenomenon of witchcraft. One hundred fifty participants, including 50 individuals from each ethnic group, were purposefully selected. The findings have five reliable conclusions, viz:

1. That respondents believed witchcraft exists in Bo City, even though most communities condemn the practice.
2. Most respondents (60%) believed witchcraft money is the easiest way to get rich in Bo.
3. That money ritual (76% of respondents) is done for people to get rich.
4. That witchcraft recruitment mainly occurs within families, dreams and friends.
5. That herbalists primarily draw from witchcraft practices to cure sick people in Bo City.

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Authorship and Level of Contribution

The authors equally contributed to the conceptualization, research and writing of the paper.

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