

ARTICLE

Exploring the Magnitude, Characteristics and Socio-economic Contexts of Witchcraft-Related Eldercides in Kenya

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Abstract

Many eldercides in African societies are motivated by witchcraft beliefs. Yet, witchcraft-related eldercide remains an understudied criminological subject. The present study explores the scale, features and socio-cultural and economic contexts of witchcraft-related elder homicide in Kenya. A total of 94 media articles reporting the witchcraft-related killings of 136 older people in Kenya between January 2012 and December 2021 were perused. Key information about the victims and perpetrators and the circumstances surrounding each event/eldercide was collected and critically analysed. The data suggest that approximately 75% of witchcraft-related homicide victims in Kenya are 60 years old and above. Most victims were females (mainly widows) of low socio-economic backgrounds. All the cases occurred in rural communities, and the perpetrators were largely young adult males. Arson, slashing with a machete and clubbing/beating were the dominant methods used to kill alleged witches. Most killings were motivated by the belief that the victims caused misfortunes/calamities by witchcraft. However, witchcraft allegations and concomitant killings were sometimes weaponized to obtain the victims' property/land. Because witchcraft beliefs are deeply entrenched in the culture and philosophy of the Kenyan people, the use of a multifaceted approach may be the most appropriate way of curtailing the problem.

Keywords eldercide; witches; witchcraft beliefs; witchcraft-related eldercide; older adults; Kenya

INTRODUCTION

Studies show that eldercide, the most severe form of elder abuse, is not uncommon in African societies (Adinkrah 2020; Buthelezi, Swart, and Seedat 2017; Ferreira 2004; Swart, Buthelezi, and Seedat 2019). However, presently, there are no reliable data on the exact scale of eldercide (also known as geronticide, senicide, senilicide or elder homicide) in Africa, as killings involving elderly victims are not officially and properly recorded as a separate category of homicide in many African countries.

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Findings of various research on elder homicide in regions such as North America and Europe indicate that among the dominant motives for elder homicide are: “felony-related [(e.g., theft, burglary, etc.)]; fight or argument-related; money-related; revenge; sexual assault; sexual jealousy; self-defence; [and] mercy killings” (Rogers and Storey 2019:145; see also Fox and Levin 1991; Roberts and Willits 2011). Mental illness, alcohol use and substance misuse also provide a rationale for eldericide in those regions (Rogers and Storey 2019). However, the extant literature and reports on elder mistreatment in several African communities suggest that a sizable proportion of eldericides on the continent is motivated by belief in witchcraft and the fear of bewitchment (Adinkrah 2004, 2020; Federici 2010; HelpAge International 2011, 2021; Niehaus 2001b; Ter Haar 2007).

One African country where killings of older adults, mostly women, accused of being witches have been persistently reported during the last couple of decades is Kenya (HelpAge International 2021; Miguel 2005; Ogembo 2006; Ongala 2022; Owusu 2023). However, despite the perceived high prevalence of witchcraft-related eldericide in the country, the phenomenon remains an understudied criminological subject and public health and social problem. To address the significant knowledge gap in the literature, the present study establishes the scale and principal characteristics of and the real motivations for witchcraft-related eldericides and explores the socio-cultural and economic contexts of this crime in Kenya. The study also looks at how the criminal justice system has been ineffective in responding to this type of homicide in the country. Since most studies on eldericide focus on the USA and Europe (see, for instance, Addington 2013; Block 2013; Fox and Levin 1991; Orimo et al. 2006; Roberts and Willits 2011; Rogers and Storey 2019), the current research will offer scholars and researchers the opportunity to understand the phenomenon in different socio-cultural and geographical contexts. It is hoped that investigating the witchcraft-related eldericide phenomenon and identifying potential victims, the environments in which such crimes are likely to occur, and key risk factors will facilitate the development of appropriate and effective preventive strategies.

It must be mentioned at the outset that a generally agreed-upon definition of the phrases “older people” and “elderly people” (which are used interchangeably in this study) does not currently exist. Thus, within criminology and homicide research, there are different definitions and ways of measuring “elderly”. The boundary of what is considered to be “elderly” or “older” can begin at 50, 60, 65 or 70 years, depending on the age range utilized by a given State, regional body or author (Addington 2013; Orimo et al. 2006; Rogers and Storey 2019). In this study, “elderly people” and “older people” refer to persons aged 60 years and over. This is consistent with the definition of the Kenyan Constitution (see Kenya National Bureau of Statistics 2022a). The term “eldericide” is used here to denote the unjustifiable killing of a person aged 60 years and above or “the death of a person aged ≥ 60 years due to intentional injuries inflicted by another person” (Swart et al. 2019:437).

A BRIEF PROFILE OF KENYA: THE RESEARCH SETTING

Kenya, a country “famed for its scenic landscapes and vast wildlife preserves” (Ominde, Ingham, and Ntarangwi 2023), is situated on the eastern coast of Africa, bordered by five nations – Tanzania to the south, Uganda to the west, South Sudan to the northwest,

Ethiopia to the north, and Somalia to the northeast – as well as the Indian Ocean to the east. Administratively, the country is divided into 47 semi-autonomous counties. As of 2019, Kenya had an estimated population of 47.6 million – 49.5% male and 50.5% female (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics 2022a). Surprisingly, the country's estimated population of older people was only 2.7 million (5.7%). Of this figure, 1.5 million (54.6%) were females and 1.2 million (45.4%) were males (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics 2022a). The life expectancy at birth for males and females is 60.6 and 66.5 years, respectively (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics 2022c). The estimated literacy rate among people aged 15 years and above is 83% (World Bank 2022).

As a multi-ethnic society, Kenya comprises numerous ethnic groups with diverse languages; however, the five most populous ethnic affiliations are Kikuyu, Luhya, Kalenjin, Luo and Kamba (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics 2019). Other notable groups are Pokot, Samburu and Maasai (Cattell 2021). Even though there are many indigenous languages, Kenya has only two official languages – English and Swahili. Most (85.5%) of the Kenyan population identify themselves as Christians, with Protestants, Catholics and evangelical churches accounting for approximately 33.4, 20.6 and 20.4%, respectively. Muslims comprise 11% of the population (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics 2019). Kenya's population is largely rural. Thus, an estimated 68.8% (about 32.7 million) of the population live in villages or small communities, where small-scale farming/agriculture is the major occupation (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics 2022a, 2022c).

Commentators have affectionately described Kenya as “the star of the East” due partly to its fairly strong economic and democratic position in the East African region (Mwakikagile 2007:186). The working-age population (people aged 15–64 years) is 19.8 million. Of this figure, 2.7 million are unemployed, and those aged between 20 and 29 years account for approximately 21.75% of the unemployed. The underemployment rate within the employed population is 19.8%. However, the underemployment rate is higher (23.5%) in rural areas compared to urban areas (12.2%) (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics 2022b; see also Institute of Economic Affairs 2020). Though Kenya is ranked as a middle-income country, 36% of the population were believed to be under the national poverty line in 2015–2016 (World Bank 2018). However, as of 2020, the proportion of the population living on less than \$2.15 (the international poverty line) a day was 27.7%; this fell to 25.3% in 2023 (World Bank 2023). The agricultural sector is the backbone of the Kenyan economy, contributing about 33% of the country's gross domestic product (United States Agency for International Development 2023). More than half (56%) of the employed population is in farming/agriculture (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics 2022b). It is estimated that two-thirds of the Kenyan people live in poverty, earning less than \$3.20 daily. There is, thus, a significant gap between the rich and poor (United States Agency for International Development 2023).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Status of Older People in Kenya

About 84% of older adults live in rural communities (Cattell 2021; Kenya National Bureau of Statistics 2022a). In Kenya, old age is traditionally associated with wisdom, integrity, care, guidance and uprightness. Older adults are thus supposed to

be respected, revered and honoured (Cattell 1994, 2021; Kabole, Kioli, and Onkware 2013; McIntosh 2017). The principle of seniority is paramount in most Kenyan societies. “The rule is simple: those senior in age and generation should be listened to, respected and obeyed” (Cattell 1994:31). In the olden days, elderly people in Kenyan communities were a crucial segment of the society, “playing an important role of socialising young family members and brokering of peace during conflicts” (Kabole et al. 2013:78). It was thus commonly the responsibility of the family and the community to take care of older people. Writing about the Samia of Kenya, Maria Cattell (1994:31) writes: “Parents and grandparents are responsible for young children; in turn, older and adult children are expected to respect their elders, work for them, assist in other ways . . . , and ultimately care for elderly parents and grandparents.” Atetwe Lydiah Kabole et al. (2013:78) also note that among the Abaluhya of Kenya, people “counted on their children [and the extended family] for security in old age”.

Unfortunately, today, “[t]he changing social conditions have left elderly people disadvantaged and vulnerable to mistreatment”; they are largely “devalued, rejected, stereotyped and isolated” (Kabole et al. 2013:78; see also Cattell 2021; McIntosh 2017). Thus, today, most elderly people are treated in a way that does not conform to traditional expectations in most Kenyan societies. It is therefore not surprising that in a study that sought elderly people’s perspective on old age in Samia communities, the majority (63%) of the 416 respondents “saw ‘no goodness’ in old age” (Cattell 1994:31). This revelation may be a pointer to the weakened traditional support of elderly people – a situation that negatively affects their financial condition, health, image and self-esteem (Kabole et al. 2013). Cattell (2021) blames the current development – families’ failure or inability to care for elders – on the disruptions of colonialism, modernization and globalization, and poverty, among others. Today, many people, particularly young adults, perceive elderly folks not as the sages, counsellors and trustworthy people that they traditionally are known to be but as the embodiment of witchcraft or evil and the cause of their predicaments. Elderly people are consequently persecuted (HelpAge International 2011, 2021; Ogembo 2006). Witchcraft imputations often lead to severe consequences (such as physical abuse, torture and murder) for the accused.

Meaning and Concept of Witchcraft

The meaning of the term “witchcraft” derives from a particular period and society or culture and thus cannot be meaningfully transferred to another society – it should be contextualized and situated within a specific ethnographic and historical setting (Moore and Sanders 2001). In other words, understanding witchcraft-related eldercide in an African society requires reasonable familiarity with that society’s concept of witchcraft. Hence, it is considered useful to briefly describe the most striking features of witchcraft in Kenya. This general background will enable an understanding of why some witchcraft believers kill alleged witches and a better appreciation of the present study’s findings. Witchcraft is one of the most widespread beliefs in Kenya (see Middleton and Winter 2004; Miguel 2005; Ndisya 2015; Ogembo 2006; Owusu 2023). Indeed, witchcraft beliefs vary among Kenya’s

different indigenous cultures and groups. Therefore, it is difficult to provide a single definition reflecting all the perceptions or notions that the various communities/groups in Kenya hold of witchcraft and witches. However, although the notions of witchcraft vary among Kenya's diverse cultures, many similarities exist. It is, therefore, important to describe some of the witchcraft features that are dominant in most Kenyan communities.

Witchcraft has been defined by several academics and researchers as the use of innate, inherited supernatural powers to manipulate people and to cause harm or death (Luongo 2006; Middleton and Winter 2004; Ogembo 2006; Owusu 2023). Writing about gender and witchcraft among the Meru, Catherine Dolan (2002:666) notes that “[f]or the Meru, witchcraft is a premeditated act, based on the manipulation of spiritual entities and substances by malicious individuals with the intent to cause harm”. According to Nelson Tebbe (2007:190), witchcraft is “the practice of secretly using supernatural power for evil – to harm others or to help oneself at the expense of others”. Boris Gershman (2022:1) defines it as “an ability of certain people to cause harm via supernatural means intentionally”. The term “witch” or “wizard” (male witch) has been described by Robert LeVine (2004:225) as “a person with an incorrigible, conscious tendency to kill or disable others by magical means”. Tebbe (2007:190) defines it as “a human being who secretly uses supernatural power for nefarious purposes”. To Pieter Carstens (2004:315), witches are persons who “through sheer malice, either consciously or subconsciously, employ magical means to inflict all manner of evil on their fellow human beings”. The above individual descriptions and definitions reflect the witchcraft notions held by most ethnic groups in Kenya. Thus, most communities in Kenya perceive witchcraft as the propensity and ability of certain human beings to harm or kill others using supernatural powers covertly. The witch, thus, embodies this wicked persona, driven to commit evil deeds through the magical force of witchcraft.

Witches are generally believed to be the embodiment of evil. In many Kenyan communities, witches are perceived to be cannibals who, in an invisible form, carry out their malevolent activities in strange places at night (Middleton and Winter 2004; Ogembo 2006; Owusu 2023). For most groups, witches eat the flesh and blood of their victims in the spiritual realm while the victims are still alive; the effect of this act of spiritual cannibalism is then manifested in the physical world. Thus, victims physically die as soon as the witches eat away their life essence or vital force in the spiritual realm (Luongo 2006; Mbiti 1991; Ndisya 2015; Owusu 2023). However, among other groups, such as the Gusii, witches eat only human cadavers. They dig up recently buried dead bodies and dissect them; they then keep some of the parts (usually the skulls and arms) and eat the rest, mainly the intestines (LeVine 2004).

Among some groups/communities, witches bewitch or attack only family members and acquaintances. However, for other ethnic groups, a witch can attack anyone (see Luongo 2006; Middleton and Winter 2004; Ndisya 2015; Ogembo 2006). As the archetype of evil, accused witches are blamed for all kinds of misfortunes or unpleasant occurrences, including unexplained deaths, inexplicable illnesses, financial or economic predicaments, road accidents, barrenness or infertility, crop failure, mental disorder and alcoholism, among others (Dolan 2002; Miguel 2005; Owusu 2023). Witchcraft allegations are generally based on mere

suspicion, generating rumours and gossip that spread within the community. Such fears are usually triggered by misfortunes such as an unexpected death, a serious illness, or even a bad dream (Middleton and Winter 2004; Ter Haar 2007). In brief, the Kenyan witchcraft concept largely centres on malevolent entities with an unquenchable propensity to cause harm or death.

Witchcraft-Related Eldercide in Kenya: Characteristics and Motivations

In a study conducted among the Gusii of Kenya, Justus Ogembo (2006:107) found that killers of alleged witches “were unmarried males aged 18–38 years while the victims were females aged 50–90 years and who had no grown sons”. The study further notes that “any man who died because of witchcraft suffered because of his association with a woman who was, herself, so accused, or because his enemy avenged himself for a past grudge” (Ogembo 2006:21). The assertion that most accused witches are older women is consistent with recent studies and reports in Kenya and other parts of Africa (see, for example, Gari 2021; HelpAge International 2021; Owusu 2020). The relevant extant studies show that almost all witchcraft-related eldercides occur in rural communities (Miguel 2005; Ogembo 2006; Owusu 2023).

According to Edward Miguel (2005:1158–9), “the most common stated explanations for witch murders are causing the death of an individual at 95.1% of respondents, causing poor health to another individual at 36.3%, and causing livestock to die (14.3%), while only 4.9% of respondents named causing drought and ... 7.7% named causing crop failure”.¹ However, some academics suggest that the root of many witchcraft accusations and concomitant killings are two interrelated socio-economic factors – the government’s implementation of bad economic policies and inheritance litigations within families (Federici 2008; Ogembo 2006). They argue that bad economic policies and difficult economic environments throw households into such deprivation and despair that many Kenyan people believe that they are the victims of evil conspiracies orchestrated and carried out by supernatural means (Federici 2008; Ogembo 2006).

Indeed, when unemployment reaches unprecedented levels, millions of people in rural and urban areas begin to find

themselves with their backs against the wall, unable to provide for their families and communities and with no hope for the future. Rising mortality rates, especially among children, due to the collapse of the healthcare system, growing malnutrition, and the spread of AIDS, ... [contribute] to fuel suspicions of foul play (Federici 2008:24).

For instance, between 1992 and 1994, groups of young men in Gusii communities who believed that their socio-economic predicaments were caused by witches in their villages initiated a witch-hunting campaign during which at least 57 older

¹He clarifies that “[t]he sum of these percentages is greater than one since respondents were allowed to name multiple “crimes” that commonly lead to witch murders. The survey was conducted among 182 respondents in a representative sample of 12 villages in the study district.”

people, mostly women, were burned alive. Describing this distressing event, Ogembo (2006) writes:

Villagers rounded up and “arrested” suspects in their houses at night or chased and caught them like prey by day, bound their hands and feet with sisal ropes, torched them – after dousing them in gasoline purchased earlier or after placing them under grass-thatched roofs – and then drew back to watch the victims agonise and perish in the flames (Ogembo 2006:1).

According to Dolan (2002:666), in Kenya, “witchcraft is more frequently viewed as a means to redress interpersonal hostilities and jealousies stemming from economic differentiation”. She explains, “[i]n an area of high population growth driven by competition for resources, witchcraft acts as a powerful weapon to settle the score against potential rivals for economic gain”. This view is shared by several academics and commentators who contend that some people use witchcraft beliefs and witch accusations as a weapon to kill innocent family members to take over their land (Federici 2008; HelpAge International 2021; Maichuhie 2022; Ongala 2022). As Silvia Federici (2010:16) asserts, “Many accusations are manufactured to rob people of their property and particularly of their land. Indeed, land plays such a key role in the witch-hunts that it is tempting to hypothesise that they are primarily a means of land grabbing.”

A 2021 publication by *The Star* newspaper recounts the disturbing ordeal of several older people who were nearly lynched by members of their own family on witchcraft allegations in the Kenya Coast region, forcing them to abandon their acres of land and houses to stay at a rescue centre established by a non-governmental organization (NGO) to protect older people from extrajudicial killings. The report further indicates that the rescue centre had been home to over 100 accused witches whose families had attempted to lynch them to take over their land (Gari 2021). Almost all, if not all, the sparse extant studies on witchcraft-related eldercide in Kenya focus on small communities. It was thus considered useful to explore and understand the phenomenon from a broader (nationwide) perspective.

METHODOLOGY

The current study employs the media content analysis approach. Data were drawn from articles retrieved from the websites of three major news/media outlets in Kenya. This approach was deemed suitable for this study due to the unavailability of reliable national data sets on the witchcraft-related eldercide phenomenon and the lack of empirical research on the subject in Kenya. Besides, due to the strangeness and superstitious nature of witchcraft-related elder homicides, they are usually regarded as newsworthy occurrences in Kenya. Leading media organizations in the country thus give extensive coverage to superstition-driven homicide cases and usually report all the details of such crimes.

Using data from newspaper or news media surveillance to study homicide is not an unproven approach. Several academics and researchers have effectively utilized this technique to understand various types of homicides in multiple environments

(e.g., Adinkrah 2004, 2020; Owusu 2022; Warren-Gordon et al. 2010; Yoon, Yu, and Lee 2022). This approach is particularly necessary, if not inescapable, in developing countries such as Kenya, where homicide data are usually poorly documented or unavailable. Since media reports are the primary means through which murder incidents come to the public's attention in many African countries, it is almost impossible to adequately explore the magnitude, motivations and principal characteristics of witchcraft-related eldercide in Kenya without recourse to media publications.

The study focused on witchcraft-related homicide reports/articles published on the websites of three of Kenya's largest and most popular English-language media outlets between January 2012 and December 2021. The study period of 10 years was deemed to be appropriate and reasonable. The selected media outlets were the *Daily Nation*, *The Standard* (privately owned newspapers) and *Kenya News Agency* (State-owned). The largest newspaper in daily circulation in Kenya is the *Daily Nation*, followed by *The Standard* (Nyabuga and Booker 2013). The *Kenya News Agency*, on the other hand, has been a leading national news and information source since 1963. The three news/media outlets were thus selected as a data source because they are arguably the largest in Kenya in terms of circulation and readership. They have well-trained journalists who generally file accurate and reliable reports.

To locate the relevant articles, a search was conducted on the websites of the three selected media outlets, using the following key terms: "witch murders in Kenya"; "witch killings in Kenya"; "witchcraft-related killings"; "witchcraft and violence"; "persecution of witches"; "lynching of witches"; "witch murders"; "witch killings"; and "witch killers". Attention was paid to only cases that occurred and were reported in the selected media during the study period – between January 2012 and December 2021. Where a case was reported by more than one of the chosen media, the report considered more detailed and coherent was selected. Where a chosen article on a case was not detailed or comprehensible enough, information on the same incident published or broadcast by renowned media outlets other than the three selected ones was examined for a clearer and more comprehensive description.

All the relevant articles retrieved were systematically analysed and, where available, the following information was collected from each of them: (1) the number of victims reported; (2) the number of elderly victims involved; (3) the number of perpetrators or prime suspects arrested, prosecuted or convicted; (4) age of victims and perpetrators; (5) gender of victims and perpetrators; (6) victims' and perpetrators' physical environment or community and the location of the crime; (7) socio-economic status of victims and offenders;²

²The phrase "socio-economic status" is used in this study to refer to the differences between groups of people caused primarily by their financial situation. Hence, low and high socio-economic status/background are synonyms for poor or low-income earners and affluent or high-income earners, respectively. It must also be clarified that in rural Kenya, as in many rural African communities, many older adults may own acres of farmland/land but still be categorized as low-income earners because the majority are peasant farmers (or do not farm on a commercial basis) and thus do not accrue or receive sufficient income from their lands or farming activities.

(8) victim–perpetrator relationship; (9) perpetrators’ educational background;³ and (10) motivations for the eldercides. This 10-point information was recorded on an Excel spreadsheet and later tabulated.

RESULTS

Magnitude of Witchcraft-Related Homicide and Eldercide in Kenya

A meticulous perusal of the websites of the three selected news/media outlets for articles on witchcraft-related homicide, spanning January 2012–December 2021, produced the following results: a total of 122 articles on witchcraft-related homicide were found. Of the 122 articles on witchcraft-related homicide identified, 94 concerned elderly victims. This information is summarized in Table 1. It must be emphasized that several individual pieces reported multiple witchcraft-related homicides and eldercides. The 122 articles retrieved from the three media outlets thus involved approximately 182 victims, about 136 (74.7%) of whom were older adults. In other words, 136 older victims were identified in the 94 articles that reported the killings of older people. It is evident from the information provided above that witchcraft-related homicides are not rare in Kenya and that older adults are the most targeted victims. This study, as already indicated, focuses on the data concerning the 94 articles on elder homicide and the 136 eldercide victims.

Principal Characteristics of Witchcraft-Related Eldercide

All the witchcraft-related eldercides reported in the selected media occurred in rural and semi-rural areas of Kenya. Three of Kenya’s 47 counties, Kisii, Kilifi and Kwale, emerged as the epicentres of witchcraft-related elder homicide – close to a quarter of the 136 witchcraft-related eldercides were perpetrated in those three counties. The weapons or tools typically used to commit the murders were panga/machete, club or stick, and fire. Approximately 40% of the victims were burned alive or burned after being killed, making arson one of the most frequent methods to kill older adults accused of being witches in Kenya. In some cases, the victims’ huts were also set ablaze. The arson was to ensure that every witchcraft article belonging to the alleged witches was dismantled. Other means frequently used to commit the eldercides were slashing with a machete and beating or clubbing.

At least 65% of the witchcraft-related eldercide cases involved multiple perpetrators, typically groups of young men. There were several episodes where unknown gangs raided houses and killed older people accused of being witches. The dominant motivation for the killings was the “genuine” belief that the victims had caused the death, illness or economic predicaments of someone or some people in the community by witchcraft. However, in some of the articles analysed, senior police officers and investigators interviewed by reporters suggested that some people deliberately used some of the witch allegations as a ploy to incite the youth to lynch the victims so that the accusers could take possession of their “property” (parcels of land/farmland), or to end land-related litigations between them and the victims.

³In this study, “low level of education” refers to people whose highest level of education is a secondary qualification or below, and “high level of education” refers to people with a tertiary qualification.

Table 1. Number of Relevant Articles Found in Each of the Selected Media

Media Type	Total Number of Reports Found	Reports on Elderly Victims Only	Information on Both Elderly and Non-Elderly Victims	Reports on Non-Elderly Victims Only
<i>Daily Nation</i>	48	26	12	10
<i>The Standard</i>	42	23	9	10
<i>Kenya News Agency</i>	32	18	6	8
Total	122	67	27	28
Percentage	100	55	22	23

Victim Characteristics

Approximately 85% of the victims were aged between 70 and 90 years, indicating that people within this age group are the most likely elderly to be killed on witchcraft allegations in Kenya. At least 74% of the victims were killed in their homes or other residential settings, and approximately 60% were females. About 98% of the victims whose socio-economic status could be established were of low socio-economic backgrounds, mainly peasant farmers whose only property/assets were farmlands and grass-thatched huts. About 80% of the victims whose marital status could be ascertained were widows or lived alone. Table 2 presents key statistical information about the 136 victims.

Offender Characteristics

A total of 63 perpetrators and prime suspects were arrested. The arrest rate is extremely low considering that over half of the 136 killings were committed not by individuals but by a lynch mob – sometimes a group of 10 or more people. The overwhelming majority of the arrestees (about 89%) were males. The ages of just 46 of the arrestees could be established, and of the arrestees whose ages could be determined, about 85% were aged between 20 and 49 years. Almost all the arrestees whose socio-economic backgrounds could be ascertained were low-income peasant farmers. The vast majority had a low level of education. Table 3 presents key information on the arrestees/perpetrators. Some authorities and heads of human rights groups interviewed by reporters suggested that the persecution of older adults was partly caused by the youths' misconception of the elderly or senior age.

Victim–Offender Relationship

All the perpetrators and prime suspects arrested were from the victims' community. Concerning cases where the relationship between victims and perpetrators was known, approximately 89% of the perpetrators were related to or acquainted with the victims. However, most victims and offenders did not share a common residence. There was no evidence that victims depended on the perpetrators/prime

Table 2. Information on 136 Victims of Witchcraft-Related Eldercide

Variable	Number	Percentage
Gender		
Male	55	40.4
Female	81	59.6
Age (years)		
60–69	20	14.7
70–79	41	30.1
80–89	39	28.7
≥90	36	26.5
Marital status		
Married/in a relationship	18	13.2
Unmarried/widow	73	53.7
Unknown	45	33.1
Socio-economic background		
Low socio-economic status	105	77.2
High socio-economic status	2	1.5
Unknown	29	21.3
Victim's community		
Rural community	122	89.7
Semi-rural community	14	10.3
Location of eldercide		
Home/residential setting	101	74.3
Outside the home	24	17.6
Unknown	11	8.1

suspects for socio-economic and physical support. According to some of the law enforcement authorities, investigators and human rights activists interviewed by reporters, many of the accusers of victims who were widows tended to belong to the families of the widows' deceased husbands. They further claimed that, in some cases, the victims had disputes over land inheritance/ownership with their accusers before the witch allegations and eventual killings.

Criminal Justice Response to the Eldercides

The police were notified of many mob attacks just when the assaults started, yet they mostly arrived at the crime scenes only after the victims had been murdered and the mob had disappeared. As already mentioned, 63 persons were arrested/prosecuted.

Table 3. Information on 63 Prime Suspects/Perpetrators and their Relationship with Victims

Variable	Number	Percentage
Gender		
Male	56	88.9
Female	7	11.1
Age (years)		
20–29	13	20.6
30–39	15	23.8
40–49	11	17.5
50–59	7	11.1
Unknown	17	27.0
Socio-economic background		
Low socio-economic status	41	65.1
Unknown	22	34.9
Level of education		
Low level of education	42	66.7
High level of education	1	1.6
Unknown	20	31.7
Victim–offender/arrestee relationship		
Related/acquainted	41	65.1
Non-related/non-acquainted	5	7.9
Unknown	17	27.0

Surprisingly, most cases involving mob attacks or so-called mob justice were not solved. Of the few mob-perpetrated eldercides solved, only the gang leaders were prosecuted and convicted – the rest were not pursued. Only 16 cases appeared to have been solved, and many lasted three to eight years in court. The police claimed that the low conviction rate was down to the failure of witnesses to come forward or give evidence in court for fear of reprisal.

A Summary Description of 15 Reports/Articles

Below is a summary of 15 of the 94 witchcraft-related eldercide reports/articles analysed. To ensure that the article is brief, it has not been possible to summarize all 94 reports/papers. Each of the 15 reports/articles selected for illustration is unique in one way or another: hence the selection. The carefully chosen articles constitute a fair representation of the various circumstances under which the witchcraft-related eldercides occurred – varied motives, varied murder locations and geographical environments, varied methods used for the eldercides, multiple ages of victims and perpetrators, etc. Thus, the selected cases collectively offer a clearer picture of the

nature and multidimensional characteristics of witchcraft-related eldercide in Kenya. For ethical reasons, the names of victims and offenders have been omitted even though this information was provided in the analysed articles. However, for clarity, the names of certain characters have been mentioned in number 9 of the 15 reports selected for illustration.

Report/article 1 concerned a 95-year-old woman and her daughter who were burnt alive by villagers over witchcraft claims in Nyamira County. The nonagenarian's daughter left her matrimonial home to assist her mother in harvesting maize. During her stay with her mother, some locals announced that they had discovered a book by the roadside containing the names of several witches, the people they (the witches) had killed by witchcraft, and those they had targeted. The assailants claimed that the two victims were among the supposed witches listed in the said book of witches. They consequently attacked the two women and burned them and their houses (Nyarora and Araka 2017).

In report number 2, law enforcement authorities in Makueni County arrested two young men on suspicion of hacking a 70-year-old man to death and burning his body after accusing him of practising witchcraft. It is reported that before the murder, one of the suspects had been labelling some older adults in the community witches and threatening to kill them. On that fateful day, the septuagenarian was at home with his wife when the perpetrators forced their way into the house and fatally attacked him. They then set his property on fire. This was the second witchcraft-related murder incident in Makueni County in two weeks. The first case concerned a 65-year-old woman beaten to death and her body set on fire by a mob (Nzioka 2017).

Report number 3 concerned a 60-year-old woman lynched by locals in a rural community in Kirinyaga County after accusing her of bewitching four relatives who died in a road crash. According to reports, there was a land dispute between the victim and a certain family. The family tried to forcibly evict the victim from the land, prompting her to say something to the effect that members of that family who were trying to deny her of her property would die one after the other. Less than 12 hours after this threat, six members of that family were involved in a car accident that killed four of them. Believing that the sexagenarian had used witchcraft to cause the accident, some irate villagers stormed her house at 2 a.m. with clubs, sticks and machetes, beating her to death (Komu 2018).

In report number 4, three suspects were arrested concerning the murder of a 90-year-old man accused of practising witchcraft in Taita-Taveta County. Before the murder, some villagers had suspected the nonagenarian of being a wizard because he allegedly chanted incantations. It is claimed that he had been seen dancing naked around the house of one of the suspects in the early morning hours. The suspect then alerted some locals, who tortured and killed him before burning his body. It was rumoured that the three suspects were gang members murdering older people suspected of being witches in the area. A human rights group confirmed that since 2014, more than 20 older adults accused of witchcraft in the area have been killed by gangs (Mnyamwezi 2018).

In report number 5, a young man pleaded guilty to the murder of an 80-year-old man accused of witchcraft in Kilifi County. Before the killing, the victim had been accused of witchcraft by his brother, with whom he disputed land inheritance.

In October 2018, the octogenarian with a huge farm and several acres of land was in his house when a gang of young men wielding machetes stormed the house in broad daylight and fatally attacked him. Later, three of the gang members were arrested. At their arraignment, one of them pleaded guilty to the murder charge. He confessed that he had been sent to commit the offence by the victim's brother, who had accused him (the victim) of being a witch (Daily Nation 2018c).

Report number 6 touched on the rising levels of witchcraft-related eldercide in Kwale County. It provided details of an incident concerning an older adult whose manhood was severed after he was violently killed on witchcraft allegations by an unknown mob in 2015. According to the victim's wife, she and the deceased, a peasant farmer, were in their house one night when unknown people raided it and killed him as she watched helplessly. The perpetrators cut off the victim's penis and dropped it beside his body before fleeing. Law enforcement authorities stated that due to fear of reprisal, eyewitnesses usually refused to give evidence, and, as a result, most such cases had not been solved (Muchai 2018).

Report number 7 concerned an 88-year-old woman killed by unknown assailants as her granddaughter watched helplessly in Kwale County. The victim was having a meal with her granddaughter at home when three young men forced their way into the house and hacked her to death with machetes, claiming that she was an evil witch. The perpetrators then escaped before the police arrived. In an interview with reporters, the police mentioned that eldercides linked to witchcraft were frequently reported in the area, which compelled some older people to go into hiding. They noted that such killings were sometimes orchestrated by young men who wanted to inherit their parents' property through unorthodox means (Omar and Muchai 2018).

Report number 8 concerned a 74-year-old woman killed by a mob on suspicion of bewitching members of a community in Vihiga County. Before the attack, a woman from the village had died in a car accident, and some locals suspected the septuagenarian of causing the death by witchcraft. On the day of the assault, a 45-year-old woman had visited the older woman, and the two were making their way to the marketplace. A mob who claimed that the women had witchcraft-related herbal concoctions attacked them with sticks and other crude weapons, resulting in the death of the septuagenarian. The 45-year-old woman was sent to hospital in a critical condition (Amadala 2019).

Report number 9 was about a family dispute, which ended in one faction accusing the other of witchcraft and multiple murders in Migori County. In 2018, Omondi, the son of one Mr Dwallo, attacked an extended family member, Joel, with a machete following a protracted family dispute. Joel reported the matter to the police, resulting in the prosecution, conviction and 12-year incarceration of Omondi. Mr Dwallo, whose octogenarian mother was a known witch doctor, threatened to kill Joel for causing the imprisonment of his son. Coincidentally, Joel died shortly after Mr Dwallo's threat. When a traditional spiritualist confirmed that Mr Dwallo's mother had bewitched Joel, angry villagers attacked Mr Dwallo's family and set their houses on fire. Mr Dwallo escaped unhurt, but his mother, wife and three children were all burned beyond recognition (Nandiemo 2019).

In report number 10, an older woman was killed and four of her relatives injured in Kwale County by a mob on suspicion that she was casting spells on people she

disliked. Before the incident, some residents had baselessly branded the deceased an evil witch casting devastating spells on people she did not like. Then, in September 2019, a mob armed with crude weapons, including machetes and sticks, broke into the deceased's house in the wee hours of the morning and savagely attacked her. The deceased's husband and their three sons, who tried to intervene, sustained serious injuries. According to authorities interviewed by reporters, such witchcraft-related mob attacks have become commonplace in the area (Omar and Abdullahi 2019).

In report number 11, three people, including two females, had their death sentences for killing a couple over witchcraft allegations commuted to 30 years' imprisonment in Homa Bay County. Before the murder, the elderly couple had been accused of practising witchcraft by some of the community members, including the convicts. In July 2012, the accused killed the couple because they believed the victims had bewitched their (the perpetrators') neighbour's son. In December 2013, all three were convicted of murder and sentenced to death. However, they appealed against both the conviction and sentence. In 2019, the Court of Appeal set aside the punishment of death and substituted it with 30 years' imprisonment (Karanja 2019).

In report number 12, three men were convicted and sentenced to 45 years' imprisonment each for leading a group of villagers to murder an older man on suspicion of practising witchcraft in Kilifi County. The facts of the case are that in January 2017, a group of men, including the accused persons, went to the deceased's house to tell him that the village chief wanted him to meet with them at the palace. On their way, a gang armed with various weapons accosted and tortured him before burning him alive on suspicion of being an evil wizard. According to eyewitnesses, the elderly victim initially tried to flee when he saw the mob charging at him but was restrained by the three convicts who had planned the attack (Muyanga 2020).

In report number 13, a group of rural folks in Kisii County lynched a 70-year-old woman over claims that she had used witchcraft to cause the death of her stepson's children. The stepson had long suspected the septuagenarian of bewitching his family and being the cause of the death of three of his children, including his six-year-old daughter, whom he had buried the previous week. The little girl had apparently died shortly after catching the flu. The older woman was beaten to death after she was reportedly found dropping some leaves believed to be associated with witchcraft at the home of her stepson and admitting to the witch allegation when confronted. Her house was burnt to ashes (Mbula 2020).

In report number 14, a mob invaded a village in Meru County late at night, killed three older people aged between 60 and 72 years, and burned their bodies for allegedly engaging in witchcraft. The gang apparently attacked a fourth victim in a nearby village, but the victim survived. According to the local police, the mob, armed with clubs, machetes and other crude weapons, stormed the town, moving from one house to another, looking for suspected witches. They overpowered the victims and inflicted fatal machete wounds on their bodies before setting them and their homes ablaze. When the police arrived, the victims were dead, and the perpetrators had vanished (Mireri 2021).

In report number 15, angry residents of a rural community in Kisii County lynched four older women aged between 57 and 83 years and burned their bodies on suspicion of having bewitched a 17-year-old form-four student. The facts of this case are that the student who had briefly disappeared was found unable to speak.

When he regained his speech following a so-called cleansing ritual, he named the elderly victims as the persons who had supposedly kidnapped him and caused his muteness by witchcraft. Some angry locals then marched to the victims' homes, dragged them out, and lynched them before setting their bodies on fire (Nyaberi 2021).

DISCUSSION

Scale of Witchcraft-Related Eldercides in Kenya

The results show that an average of 18.2 witchcraft-related homicides, involving 13.6 elderly victims, occurred in Kenya each year between January 2012 and December 2021. A crime report spanning the period 2016–2018, released by the Kenya Police Service, indicates that approximately 1,986 murder cases (including pediticides and infanticides) are chronicled in the country each year (Kenya National Police Service 2018). This, to a certain extent, suggests that witchcraft-related eldercides make up roughly 0.68% of all the murders reported in the country each year. One may be tempted to presume that this figure is insignificant. However, the phenomenon should be deemed a worrying development considering that the estimated population of older people in the country is only 2.7 million, just 5.7% of the total national population of 47.6 million (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics 2022a). The figure is also significant given that, globally, older adults are among the least at-risk groups for homicide generally (Krug 2002; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2013, 2019).

The number of witchcraft-related eldercide cases extracted from the selected media outlets may be a gross underestimation, as many such homicide cases are never uncovered or reported. The chosen media outlets may not have publicized all witchcraft-related eldercides in the country during the study period. Besides, some witchcraft-related eldercides may have been registered under captions that do not have the search terms, making it difficult to find them during the search for relevant cases. If unconfirmed or estimated figures reported in various counties by journalists and NGOs are collated, the witchcraft-related eldercides that have occurred in the country since the last decade could be in the thousands. For instance, it has been reported that about 500 suspected witches, mostly middle-aged and elderly people, have been lynched in Kilifi County over the past six years (Blomfield n.d., but published after 2016). According to the Kilifi County police, an estimated 145 residents, mostly elderly people, were killed on witchcraft allegations between January 2019 and December 2021 (Okwembah and Beja 2022; Ongala 2022). It has also been reported that approximately 400 elderly people are killed each year on suspicion of being witches in the Kenya Coast region, which consists of about six of the country's 47 counties (Gari 2021).

Why are Elderly People Targeted? Socio-Cultural and Economic Perspectives

The data support the findings of relevant extant studies that people accused of being witches and mistreated or murdered in African settings typically are older people

(mostly women), and accusers and attackers are mostly young adult males (Adinkrah 2004, 2020; Ludsins 2003; Miguel 2005; Niehaus 2012; Ogembo 2006). The present data suggest that most perpetrators killed their victims because they genuinely believed that the victims caused some misfortune through the alleged powers of witchcraft. However, the big questions that must be addressed are: Why are victims of witchcraft allegations and concomitant murders predominantly older people? And why do perpetrators largely target females? Several theories and propositions have been put forward to explain these trends/developments. Some of the interrelated factors are: (1) the contemporary African misconception of old age or older adults; (2) the weaponization of witchcraft allegations and concomitant killings in pursuit of obtaining the property of the vulnerable, particularly widows; and (3) patrilineal and patriarchal systems.

Niehaus (2001a:136) has theorized that “[t]he association of elders with witchcraft is based on the perception that their active power of adulthood slips away into infertility and infirmity and that their status rests purely on their control of esoteric knowledge”. Geoffrey Parrinder (1963:196) also asserts that elderly persons are targeted because they are feared, as people cannot comprehend why they have lived so long. Offenders thus presume that they “must have obtained new soul- vitality, most likely from devouring the soul of a tender child” or other young people in the community. Additionally, older adults may be targeted because they are physically frail and unable to repel physical attacks and because ageing (old age) makes them develop certain physical features that are deemed odd and associated with witchcraft/evil, e.g., reddish or yellowish eyes, toothless in the mouth, facial hair in the case of females, etc. (Adinkrah 2015, 2020; Mba 2007; Ogembo 2006).

In many Kenyan societies, men are supposed to be the breadwinners and a man’s usefulness is often judged by how well he financially supports his family. Men who fail to fulfil this responsibility are commonly ridiculed, disrespected and demeaned by their partners and community members. For this reason, when men become jobless and start to experience financial problems, the culture of scapegoating or the claim that other people are responsible for their predicaments becomes a useful defensive tool and means to avoid the scorn and embarrassment associated with not being a “responsible” man (Ogembo 2006; Owusu 2020). Witchcraft usually explains their financial and economic woes and absolves them perfectly. It is, therefore, not surprising that most of the men who accused older people of being witches and killed them in the cases analysed in this study had lower incomes.

However, as already noted, law enforcement agencies and various human rights groups interviewed by reporters believe that witchcraft accusations are sometimes used as a weapon in disputes over land inheritance among family members or land-related litigations between two parties from different families. Thus, witchcraft accusations may be deliberately used as a tool by one party/litigant to induce anti-witch locals or gangs to kill the other litigant so that the surviving party gains access to the property (Odit and Mutahi 2021; Okwembah and Beja 2022). This finding is consistent with the views of several academics and researchers. For instance, citing Ogembo (2006), Federici (2008:22) states that many attackers of alleged witches are “well-organised groups of young men, acting under the directives of relatives of the

victims or other interested parties”. Even though victims of witchcraft accusations and killings motivated by land inheritance or litigation are said to be both males and females, authorities and human rights groups believe that women are more likely to be targeted than men (Federici 2008; HelpAge International 2021; Kenya Human Rights Commission 2021; Maichuhie 2022).

In Kenya, most groups follow/practise the patriarchal and patrilineal inheritance systems, which largely marginalize and discriminate against women and “[s]trengthen male control over female labor and productivity” (Kimani and Maina 2010:259). In such societies, it is generally considered unacceptable for females to own lands and other property (HelpAge International 2021; Kabole et al. 2013; Kenya Human Rights Commission 2021; Kimani and Maina 2010). Thus, in many Kenyan communities, “women have access rights to land through marriage. Upon marriage, they move to their husband’s home” (Kimani and Maina 2010:259). However, when their husbands die, land-grabbing relatives of the deceased often employ all manner of tactics to expel them from occupying, or deny them the right to inherit, their deceased husbands’ property/land (Cattell 2021; Kimani and Maina 2010). The situation becomes even more worrying if the husband dies intestate. Many law enforcement agencies and human rights organizations in various counties of Kenya assert that many older women have been killed not because their accusers and attackers genuinely believed that they were witches and had caused calamities in their families or communities but because the assailants wanted to disinherit the victims (HelpAge International 2021; Maichuhie 2022; Ongala 2022). The following statement by a consortium of 22 human rights organizations, including Kenya Human Rights Commission and HelpAge International, is noteworthy:

Even where there was no conflict in the husbands’ lifetime, the accusations arose immediately upon the death of their husbands, with families ganging up against the widows and accusing them of witchcraft, encouraged by the community attitude and social stigma associated with witchcraft. Once these widows are labelled and isolated, they become easy prey. As soon as the witchcraft accusation is levelled at them, it is only a matter of time before a “victim” of their witchcraft is identified, and they are lynched (Kenya Human Rights Commission 2021).

Some government agencies and NGOs even suspect that members of many witch-lynching gangs are sometimes hired by relatives of the victims’ deceased husbands to perpetrate eldercide after witchcraft accusations have been made (Maichuhie 2022; Ongala 2022).

Extent of the Criminal Justice System’s Ineffectiveness

Given that it is the role of the criminal justice system to bring justice to the victims of witchcraft-related geronticide by apprehending, prosecuting and punishing perpetrators, it is important to take a brief look at the state of the Kenyan criminal justice system and understand why most eldercide cases are not solved. The data

show that most perpetrators were not apprehended and that there was usually a considerable lapse between the initial arrest of suspects and the final disposition of the cases. Of course, there may have been other positive outcomes (in terms of arrests and convictions) that did not come to the attention of the selected media outlets and thus could not be published. Even with this admission, the relevant extant studies and reports indicate that most crimes reported to the police in Kenya still need to be solved or professionally handled (Andvig and Barasa 2011; National Council on the Administration of Justice 2016; Owusu 2022).

Existing government reports suggest that approximately 25% of all criminal cases reported to the police in Kenya each year are prosecuted, and only about 7% of the cases reported are likely to end in conviction (National Council on the Administration of Justice 2016). It has been established that the main factors that account for the low arrests, prosecution and conviction rates in the country are: (1) incompetence, inexperience and lack of ingenuity on the part of law enforcement agencies; (2) the extremely slow and corrupt judicial process; and (3) lack of resources (Andvig and Barasa 2011; National Council on the Administration of Justice 2016; Overseas Security Advisory Council 2020; Owusu 2022). A report released by the National Council on the Administration of Justice (2016:74) notes that the Kenyan police's "lack of knowledge of the law, lack of prosecution skills, poor coordination and lack of supervision by the Office of the Directorate of Public Prosecutions contribute to delays in case flow management". Besides, crime scenes are usually poorly managed by the relevant authorities. It has been observed that in most murder cases in the country, the victims' remains are "removed by law enforcement authorities and taken to the morgue without any diligent forensic examination of the body or of the crime scene" (Owusu 2022).

Moreover, the judicial system is not as effective as it should be. Thus, there are reports of serious judicial corruption, and the pace of justice delivery in courts is exceptionally slow. According to reports, by the close of 2016, the number of cases pending for more than five years in the country's High Courts had reached 48,173 (Daily Nation 2018a, 2018b; Ndirangu 2018). It is therefore not surprising that in 2018, the Chief Justice took a bold decision to probe and dismiss several judges, magistrates and support staff within the judiciary over corruption and integrity issues (Ndirangu 2018). Additionally, the criminal justice system's weaknesses are aggravated by a lack of resources such as vehicles, forensic laboratories and modern crime investigation equipment (Owusu 2022). The unavailability of these resources or facilities partly explains why most witchcraft-related eldercide cases are not promptly handled or solved. Evidently, such inefficient and ineffective responses from criminal justice agencies may not deter perpetrators and potential offenders.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There is no question that witchcraft-related eldercide is a serious health and social problem in contemporary Kenyan societies. It cannot be disputed that combating this despicable phenomenon requires a comprehensive understanding of how eldercide manifests itself. Against this backdrop, this study has sought to establish

the magnitude, characteristics and socio-cultural and economic contexts of witchcraft-related eldercide, one of the most understudied categories of elder abuse and homicide. This goal has been achieved by diligently analysing the contents of relevant media reports. The study has established that most accusations and killings were motivated by the genuine belief that the victims caused misfortunes or calamities through the alleged powers of witchcraft. However, there are killings in which the allegations of witchcraft are essentially weaponized to obtain the victims' property (usually land). It is, therefore, imperative that all efforts are made by concerned individuals as well as governmental and non-governmental bodies to channel resources into confronting the phenomenon.

To curtail witchcraft-related eldercide in Kenya, there is a need to strengthen the criminal justice system. Well-trained officers and investigators are needed to promote the rapid intervention of law enforcement agencies in homicide cases and their effective investigations into such unlawful conduct. It is crucial that personnel within the police service are made to undertake regular training programmes relating to good crime scene management practices and homicide investigations. The State should also provide law enforcement authorities with modern tools and facilities needed for the successful execution of their duties. It is imperative that the relevant leaders in rural communities create an atmosphere where older people can report unlawful witchcraft accusations easily, confidentially and safely. There should also be systems that encourage eyewitnesses to report an eldercide and give evidence in court, guaranteeing their safety and well-being. Because witchcraft beliefs are deeply entrenched in the culture and philosophy of the Kenyan people, effort to curtail witchcraft-related eldercide cannot be realized through the strengthening of the criminal justice system alone but would entail a multifaceted approach – the promotion of formal education, economic improvement and extensive nationwide education campaigns among others.

Given that economic hardship among the young population is an important risk factor for witchcraft accusations and concomitant eldercides, the Kenya government should embark on skills development programmes to encourage vocational and technical skills for self-employment. Through counselling and mentoring, young persons, particularly those in rural communities, will discover and explore their full potential and learn the skills to help them be more efficient and productive. Since law enforcement authorities believe, and it is becoming increasingly evident, that land disputes are at the root of some witchcraft-related homicides or eldercides, the National Land Commission of Kenya should, as a matter of urgency, investigate and resolve all land dispute cases, particularly where one or more of the parties are older adults. As the consortium of 22 human rights organizations recommends, the National Land Commission of Kenya and the National Gender and Equality Commission should “jointly work together to ensure the realization of girls’ and women’s land and property rights through legitimate succession and inheritance processes, as stipulated in the 2010 Constitution of Kenya” (Kenya Human Rights Commission 2021).

Limitations

The study's major shortcoming is the reliance on reports of witchcraft-related eldercides in just three electronic media outlets as a data source. The amount of relevant information and cases extracted and analysed probably represents a gross underestimation of the scale of witchcraft-related eldercides for the period studied. The small sample size (i.e., 94 reports/articles and 136 victims) may also limit the results' generalizability. Notwithstanding the shortcomings, the study provides significant insights into witchcraft-related elder homicide in an African setting. Further research into the weaponization of witchcraft accusations to obtain widows' or victims' property/farmlands is recommended.

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TRANSLATED ABSTRACTS

Abstracto

Muchos asesinatos de ancianos en las sociedades africanas están motivados por creencias de brujería. Sin embargo, el homicidio de ancianos relacionado con la brujería sigue siendo un tema criminológico poco estudiado. El presente estudio explora la escala, las características y los contextos socioculturales y económicos del homicidio de ancianos relacionado con la brujería en Kenia. Se examinaron noventa y cuatro artículos de los medios de comunicación que informaban sobre los asesinatos relacionados con la brujería de 136 personas mayores en Kenia entre enero de 2012 y diciembre de 2021. Se recopiló y analizó críticamente información clave sobre las víctimas y los perpetradores y las circunstancias que rodearon cada evento/homicidio de ancianos. Los datos sugieren que aproximadamente el 75% de las víctimas de homicidios relacionados con la brujería en Kenia tienen 60 años o más. La mayoría de las víctimas eran mujeres (principalmente viudas) de entornos socioeconómicos bajos. Todos los casos ocurrieron en comunidades rurales y los perpetradores fueron en su mayoría hombres adultos jóvenes. El incendio provocado, el corte con machete y los golpes y palos fueron los métodos dominantes utilizados para matar a las supuestas brujas. La mayoría de los asesinatos fueron motivados por la creencia de que las víctimas causaban desgracias o calamidades mediante brujería. Sin embargo, las acusaciones de brujería y los asesinatos concomitantes a veces se utilizaron como armas para obtener las propiedades o tierras de las víctimas. Dado que las creencias sobre la brujería están profundamente arraigadas en la cultura y la filosofía del pueblo keniano, el uso de un enfoque multifacético puede ser la forma más apropiada de reducir el problema.

Palabras clave asesinato de ancianos; brujas; creencias en brujería; homicidio de ancianos relacionado con la brujería; adultos mayores; Kenia

Abstrait

De nombreux meurtres de personnes âgées dans les sociétés africaines sont motivés par des croyances en sorcellerie. Pourtant, le traitement des personnes âgées lié à la sorcellerie reste un sujet criminologique peu étudié. Le présente étude explore l'ampleur, les caractéristiques et les contextes socioculturels et économiques des homicides de personnes âgées liés à la sorcellerie au Kenya. Quatre-vingt-quatorze articles de presse faisant état des meurtres liés à la sorcellerie de 136 personnes âgées au Kenya entre janvier 2012 et décembre 2021 ont été consultés. Des informations clés sur les victimes et les auteurs ainsi que sur les circonstances entourant chaque événement/meurtre d'une personne âgée ont été collectées et analysées de manière critique. Les données suggèrent qu'environ 75% des victimes d'homicides liés à la sorcellerie au Kenya ont 60 ans et plus. La plupart des victimes étaient des femmes (principalement des veuves) issues de milieux socio-économiques défavorisés. Tous les cas se sont produits dans des communautés rurales et les auteurs étaient pour la plupart de jeunes adultes de sexe masculin. Les incendies criminels, les coups de machette et les matraques/battelements étaient les méthodes dominantes utilisées pour tuer les sorcières présumées. La plupart des meurtres étaient motivés par la conviction que les victimes causaient des malheurs/calamités par la sorcellerie. Cependant, les allégations de sorcellerie et les meurtres concomitants étaient parfois utilisés comme armes pour obtenir les biens/terres des victimes. Les croyances en matière de sorcellerie étant profondément ancrées dans la culture et la philosophie du peuple kenyan, le recours à une approche multidimensionnelle pourrait être le moyen le plus approprié de réduire le problème.

Mots-clés meurtre d'une personne âgée; sorcières; croyances en la sorcellerie; meurtre lié à la sorcellerie; personnes âgées; Kenya

抽象的

非洲社会许多杀害老年人的事件都是出于巫术信仰。然而,与巫术相关的杀长老行为仍然是一个未被充分研究的犯罪学课题。本研究探讨了肯尼亚与巫术相关的老年人凶杀案的规模、特征以及社会文化和经济背景。94篇媒体文章报道了2012年1月至2021年12月期间肯尼亚136名老年人因巫术被杀害的情况。收集并严格分析了有关受害者和肇事者的关键信息以及每起老年人事件/谋杀案的情况。数据显示,肯尼亚大约75%的巫术相关凶杀案受害者年龄在60岁及以上。大多数受害者是社会经济背景较低的女性(主要是寡妇)。所有案件都发生在农村社区,肇事者主要是年轻的成年男性。纵火、用砍刀砍伤和棍棒/殴打是杀害所谓女巫的主要方法。大多数杀戮的动机是相信受害者是通过巫术造成不幸/灾难的。然而,巫术指控和伴随的杀戮有时被武器化以获取受害者的财产/土地。由于巫术信仰在肯尼亚人民的文化和哲学中根深蒂固,因此采用多方面的方法可能是解决这个问题的最合适的方法。

关键词 杀长者; 女巫; 巫术信仰; 与巫术相关的杀长者; 老年人; 肯尼亚。

خلاصة

العديد من عمليات قتل كبار السن في المجتمعات الأفريقية تكون بدافع معتقدات السحر. ومع ذلك، لا يزال قتل المسنين المرتبط بالسحر موضوعاً إجرامياً غير مدروس جيداً. تستكشف هذه الدراسة النطاق والميزات والسياسات الاجتماعية والثقافية والاقتصادية لجرائم قتل المسنين المرتبطة بالسحر في كينيا. وتمت الاطلاع على 94 مقالاً إعلامياً تتحدث عن عمليات قتل مرتبطة بالسحر لـ 136 من كبار السن في كينيا في الفترة ما بين يناير 2012 وديسمبر 2021. تم جمع المعلومات الأساسية عن الضحايا والجناة والظروف المحيطة بكل حدث/جريمة قتل لشخص كبير السن وتحليلها بشكل نقدي. تشير البيانات إلى أن ما يقرب من 75% من ضحايا جرائم القتل المرتبطة بالسحر في كينيا يبلغون من العمر 60 عاماً فما فوق. وكان معظم الضحايا من الإناث (معظمهن أرامل) من خلفيات اجتماعية واقتصادية منخفضة. ووقعت جميع الحالات في المجتمعات الريفية، وكان الجناة إلى حد كبير من الشباب الذكور. كانت الحرق العمد والقطع بالمنجل والضرب بالهراوات هي الأساليب السائدة المستخدمة لقتل المسنة المزعومة. وكان الدافع وراء معظم عمليات القتل هو الاعتقاد بأن الضحايا تسببوا في مصائب/مضايقات عن طريق السحر. ومع ذلك، تم أحياناً استخدام مزاعم السحر وعمليات القتل المصاحبة كسلاح للحصول على مهملكات/أراضي الضحايا. ونظراً لأن معتقدات السحر متجذرة بعمق في ثقافة وفلسفة الشعب الكيني، فإن استخدام نهج متعدد الأوجه قد يكون الطريقة الأكثر فائدة للحد من المشكلة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: قتل المسنين؛ السحر؛ معتقدات السحر؛ قتل المسنين المرتبط بالسحر؛ كبار السن؛ كينيا

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