

**A SOCIO-CULTURAL ENQUIRY INTO *CHUCHURU*: THE ‘SPIRIT CHILD’
PHENOMENON AMONG KASENA-NANKANA PEOPLE IN THE UPPER EAST
REGION OF GHANA**

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ABSTRACT: *The Chuchuru (spirit child) is a socio-cultural practice among the Kasena-Nankana people in the Upper East Region of Ghana. The practice is based on the belief that bush spirits take over unborn children whose mothers breach particular taboos during their conception. They are believed to deliberately inflict disabilities on the born child who is given a duty to punish the mother. Such children are forcefully killed to prevent them from bringing untold calamity on their parents and the entire community. A qualitative study with descriptive research method was carried out to investigate into the socio-cultural practice to enlighten the general public on it. The data for the study were collected from a 100 purposively sampled respondents via personal and focus group discussions as well as direct observations. The qualitative data analysis method was used for analyzing the solicited data. The study revealed that the Chuchuru socio-cultural practice is believed to be used by the people in preventing and appeasing the anger of their deities and ancestors. This negative socio-cultural practice results in the high toll of deaths of innocent children with physical abnormalities who could have been saved medically. The study recommends that there should be stringent measures put in place by the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, the Ministry of Health as well as the National Commission on Civic Education to educate the people on the need to shun this inhumane socio-cultural practice while prosecuting culprits of the Chuchuru socio-cultural practice.*

KEYWORDS:

Socio-Cultural Practices, *Chuchuru*, Child Disability, Cultural Beliefs, Spirit Child

INTRODUCTION

Cultural practices are the cultural performance or observances that are carried out within a given ethnic group (Daly & Wilson, 2001). Cultural practices can vary from one place to another and thus express a lot of meaning and significance to those who practice them (World Health Organization, 2009; Pitta, Hung-Gay & Isberg, 1999). Some of the cultural practices performed in Ghana include festivals, marriage, widowhood rites, scarification (tribal marks), pouring of libation, female genital mutilation, funerals, among others. They also explained socio-cultural practices as all the distinctive spiritual material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or a social group. The cultural practices and traditions are usually manifested in our daily mode of life including decisions regarding the use of the resources in the environment, fundamental human rights, values, and the arts (Adom, 2017).

It is true that cultural practices, traditions and symbols offer a lot of beneficial lessons that improve the state of our life. For instance, Adom, Asante and Kquofi (2016) and Asante,

Kquofi and Larbi (2015) contend that the Adinkra cultural symbols which is part of the lived cultural instruments of the Asantes, gives us an insight into the history of the Asante people as well as the philosophical precepts that showed the accepted behavioral code expected of all the Asantes. Unfortunately, some of the cultural practices are counter-productive (Osei, 2006). The World Health Organization (2009) outlines some of the counter-productive socio-cultural practices that even encourage violence. The organization mentioned some socio-cultural practices such as those that incite people to maltreat children (Genital Mutilation in Nigeria; Child Marriages in Sudan), and encouraging intimate partner violence (Reporting intimate partner violence is a taboo in South Africa; Reporting sexual abuse is seen as being disrespectful in Nigeria). This study unearths a similar counter-productive socio-cultural practice among the Kassenas and Nankanas ethnic societies in the Upper East Region of Ghana called *Chuchuru*.

In the Kassenas culture, the name *Chuchuru* is believed to be bush spirits born into families to harm parents, or possibly kill them. According to oral tradition, pregnant women who go to the bush for fire woods are usually advised to be wary of careless drinking of water, eating of fruits and the breaking or cutting of branches of certain trees in order not to get possessed by the deities inhabiting the water bodies and trees. It is believed that the spirits take control of the unborn baby in the womb of the woman. This often results in physical abnormalities in the born child such as being born with teeth, born with facial hair, born without sex organs or other secondary sex characteristics, born with broken limbs, and having a variety of physical disabilities, excessive crying have their right to live taken away from them (Anas, 2013). It is believed by the people that such children are curses to such parents. To free parents of this curse, parents are instructed to take the lives of these innocent children! Every year, an unknown number of children, most of them disabled in some way are murdered in Northern Ghana (Anas, 2013). A lot of children are still accused of being possessed and causing harm and misfortunes to family members and neighbors in the community. Allotey and Reidpath (2001) assert that 15% deaths of babies less than three months age in Ghana is due to the practice of *Chuchuru*.

This debased socio-cultural practice is against the constitution of the Republic of Ghana. For instance, the constitution of the Republic of Ghana, article 13 clause 1 states that, ‘No person shall be deprived of his life intentionally except in the exercise of the execution of a sentence of a court in respect of a criminal offence under the laws of Ghana of which he has been convicted.’ Also, the *Chuchuru* socio-cultural practice promotes violence against children, thereby infringing fundamental rights of the child as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (adopted by the General Assembly on 20 November 1989). These include, for example the inherent right to life (Article 6, Paragraph 1); protection against all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of the beliefs of the child’s parents (Article 2, Paragraph 2); and such protection and care as necessary for his or her well-being (Article 3, Paragraph 2). The practice of *Chuchuru* among the Kassenas and Nankanas in the Upper East Region of Ghana continue to be a worrying situation which requiring urgent education and attention of human rights activists because such children are often stigmatized, discriminated and abandoned. In light of this, the study aimed at examining the *Chuchuru* socio-cultural practice in the Upper East Region of Ghana. It is driven by two research questions namely:

1. What is the *Chuchuru* socio-cultural practice about?
2. How does the *Chuchuru* socio-cultural practice negatively affect the socio-cultural lives of the people of Navrongo?

This study is relevant because it would help readers in knowing the extent to which the *Chuchuru* socio-cultural practice affects the child, parents and the extended family members. This research work would also play a very significant role of providing information to scholars, students, policy makers, historians' human and child rights activists, as well as NGOs interested in women and children welfare. The findings contained in this study could be adopted and integrated in the implementation and enforcement of child rights policies of Ghana.

LITERATURE/THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

Socio-Cultural Practice and the Spirit Child Phenomenon

Socio-cultural practice generally refers to the manifestation of a culture or sub-culture, especially in regard to the traditional and customary practices of a particular ethnic or other cultural group. In the broadest sense, this term can apply to any person manifesting any aspect of any culture at any time. (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2010). One of such socio-cultural practice is the spirit child phenomenon which the Chuchuru practice. Amenga-Etego (2008) stated that a *Chinchirigo* (the Spirit-Child) is a mischievous wild spirit or creature. As a wild spirit, it is believed to live in the wild space. This includes the bush, groves, hills and riversides. It is neither evil nor good. Although similarities can be drawn from the Akan concept of the Motiah, the Nankani are not particularly interested in describing the features of a *Chinchirigo*. Perhaps this has to do with the multifaceted ways in which the phenomenon is perceived and applied to real life situations. She argued that, although perceived as non-human and mischievous, there are interactions between *Chinchirisi* and humans. However, these relationships with humans vary, depending on the circumstances; hence, there are diverse forms of relationships between *Chinchirisi* and human beings. Amenga-Etego in her definition of the spirit child stated that the human *Chinchirigo* is the link between the mischievous wild spirit and the domestic human-child emanates from two premises. For the lack of adequate identifications, we will refer to these respective descriptions as the spiritual and biological premises. From the spiritual dimension, a child identified as a *Chinchirigo* immediately falls into a special category of life form that is not entirely human; hence, not carved out for the normal human domestic life system. In this regard, it is a misplaced spirit. It is a belief that if such a spirit should feel trapped in the wrong environment, it has the potential to cause havoc for those among whom it is found. The basis for this line of thought comes from, the belief that the ancestors are not responsible for bringing *Chinchirisi* into their families.

It is argued that even though ancestors punish their descendants with some forms of misfortunes, these are disciplinary measures. In that respect, they do not invite other spiritual entities who possess the ability of obliterating their families. As well stated by Idehen (2007) it is essential to have an idea about cultural practices of some communities because the practices a community adopts fulfill certain purposes for the culture bearers. Spirit child in the olden days is believed to be a spirit that looks like a little human being in the bush. From the perspective of the Kasena-Nankana, spirit children are bush spirits born into a family in human form. Although they appear human, such children are not human beings and are not regarded as persons. The spirit child is not a child possessed by an offending spirit subject to exorcism; rather, their entire being is that of a spirit, and the only way to remove such a child from the family is through death (Awedoba, 2000). Denham, Adongo, Fregberg and Hodgson (2010) describe the common physical characteristics that are used to describe a child to be harboring

evil spirit. These include: Hydrocephalus (large head), being born with teeth, facial hair, white hair on the head or other secondary sex characteristics. Such children are also identified as being born with misshapen or broken limbs, and may have a variety of physical disabilities. Thus, the child's behavior is subject to proper scrutiny. They identify excessive crying as the most commonly cited indication of such children. Families regard excessive crying as disruptive and indicative that the child wants to kill the parents and destroy the family. Families interpret a child's failure to make eye contact as its fear of being looked at, as evidence that the child is hiding something. Other authors describe similar characteristics (Allotey & Reidpath, 2001; Awedoba, 2000; Howell, 1997).

The easiest way for a spirit to accomplish its goal of passing from the bush into domestic space is to enter a woman through taboo sexual activity. Intercourse outside of the home or in the bush can attract a spirit, sex outside of the house attract a spirit to enter the woman. It is believed that if a spirit is passing by while you are having sex outside of the house (it can enter you) immediately when you finish, or just before you start. That is why it's advisable for men not to have intercourse with a woman outside the house. The location and method used to urinate is also of concern. Women are discouraged from relieving themselves in prohibited places, such as where spirit children are buried, and in other locations identified as spiritually dangerous, liminal, or ambiguous. Community members also describe that eating while walking is a common way for a woman to attract a spirit child. There is the danger that the woman will drop the food, both men and woman explained. If so, a bush spirit may be watching her, and, thinking that the woman likes it (the spirit) and will follow her home and have intercourse with her (Daly & Wilson, 2001).

In a related submission by Denham *et al.* (2010) there is broad consensus about a spirit child's intentions when it enters the family. Community members' discourse describes the spirit child as a "destroyer" that acts out its destructive tendencies by instigating conflict, causing misfortunes or sickness in the house, and killing family members. A spirit child may cause the mother and father to fall ill frequently, may cause infertility, or may not allow the mother to recover fully from childbirth.

Effects of Socio-Cultural Practices in Societal Development

Socio-cultural practices exert great influence in societal development. However, the researchers would discuss the effects of the socio-cultural practices on the development of children and discrimination against children.

Child Development

According to a World Health Organization (2007) report, child development is a dynamic process through which children progress from dependency on caregivers in all areas of functioning during infancy, towards growing independence in the later childhood (primary school age), adolescence and adulthood periods. It spans the pre-natal period to eight years of age. It is the most intensive period of brain development throughout the lifespan and therefore is the most critical stage of human development (World Bank Report, 2009). What happens before birth and in the first few years of life plays a vital role in health and social outcomes. While genetic factors play a role in shaping children's development, evidence indicates that the environment has a major influence during early childhood (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2012). Children can also suffer developmental delays caused by poor birth outcomes, malnutrition, chronic ill health and other organic problems, psychological or other environmental factors.

While developmental delay may not be permanent, it can provide a basis for identifying children who may experience a disability (World Health Organization, 2007; Durkin, 2002).

Children's development is influenced by a wide range of biological and environmental factors, some of which protect and enhance their development while others compromise their developmental outcomes. Children who experience disability early in life can be disproportionately exposed to risk factors such as poverty, stigma and discrimination, poor caregiver interaction, violence, abuse and neglect and limited access to programmes and services, all of which can have a significant effect on their survival and development (Simeonsson, 2000; Skelton & Rosenbaum, 2010).

Discrimination against Children

The first year of life is a particularly vulnerable period for children. They are not only at risk of infectious diseases and other health conditions, but also at risk of violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect. The United Nations Study on Violence Against Children highlights that in some OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries, infants under one year of age are at around three times the risk of homicide than children aged one to four and at twice the risk of those aged five to fourteen (Pinheiro, 2006).

However, the true extent of violence during the early childhood period is unknown given that it mainly occurs in private settings such as homes and institutional environments, and that social and cultural norms may influence the hiding and/or condoning of certain violent behaviours. Children with disabilities are more vulnerable to physical, sexual and psychological abuse and exploitation than non-disabled children. Social isolation, powerlessness and stigma faced by children with disabilities make them vulnerable to violence and exploitation in their own homes and in other environments such as care centers or institutions (UN, 2006). Research shows that children with disabilities are three to four times more likely to experience violence than their non-disabled peers. Data for fifteen (15) countries showed that in seven (7) countries, parents of children with disabilities were significantly more likely to report hitting them. Children with disabilities are at an increased risk of violence for a number of reasons including cultural prejudices and the increased demands that disability may place on their families (UN, 2007). Children with disabilities are often perceived to be easy targets: powerlessness and social isolation may make it difficult for them to defend themselves and report abuse. Exposure to violence, neglect or abuse can lead to developmental delays and behaviour problems in childhood and later life (UN, 2010).

METHODOLOGY

Ethnographic Background of the Study Area

Peter Wedjong, an elder of Navrongo interviewed by the researchers narrated the story of Navrongo which began with the travels of three brothers from Zecco: Butto (oldest), Zakato, and Sule (youngest). From the town of Zecco the three brothers set out to find better hunting. After traveling for a few days they came across a new small village called Telania (NW of present day Navrongo). The three brothers from Zecco were Nankani speakers while the Telania people were Kasem speakers. Today both languages are used in the Navrongo area. The Telania people originated from the village of Tielebe which is now in Burkina Faso, twenty miles to the North. The three brothers befriended the Telania people and stayed with them for

some time. They exchanged their expertise with one another: Butto and his brothers taking farming techniques and the Telania people taking architecture.

The Kassena Nankana Municipal in North Eastern Ghana borders Burkina Faso and is sub Sahelian, that is, dry and hot except during the single annual rainy season from June to October. The KNM is explained by Mensch, et al (1998), as a semi-arid, sub-Saharan guinea savannah with one annual rainy season. The primary occupation in the municipality is subsistence farming. Due to the dependence on a single growing season, food insecurity, periods of famine and seasonal malnutrition are a persistent threat. Childhood within the KNM is a precarious time, both in terms of encountering illness and in the presence of spiritual dangers (Adongo et al., 1997). The people also engage themselves in diverse kinds of occupations, including traditional smock making, round-hut construction and thatch weaving, the sale of small scale provisions, and the sale of meat (the famous dog and poke) with *pito* at every available space by the road sides. The inhabitants are mostly subsistent mixed farmers. Perennial crops grown include cereals, and legumes-guinea corn, millet, sweet potatoes and vegetables especially okra. The legumes are white beans and Bambara beans and groundnuts. The main focus of the research has been limited to seven communities in the Navrongo traditional area such as Manyoro, Vunania, Biu, Kologo, Wuru, Pugu and Naga.

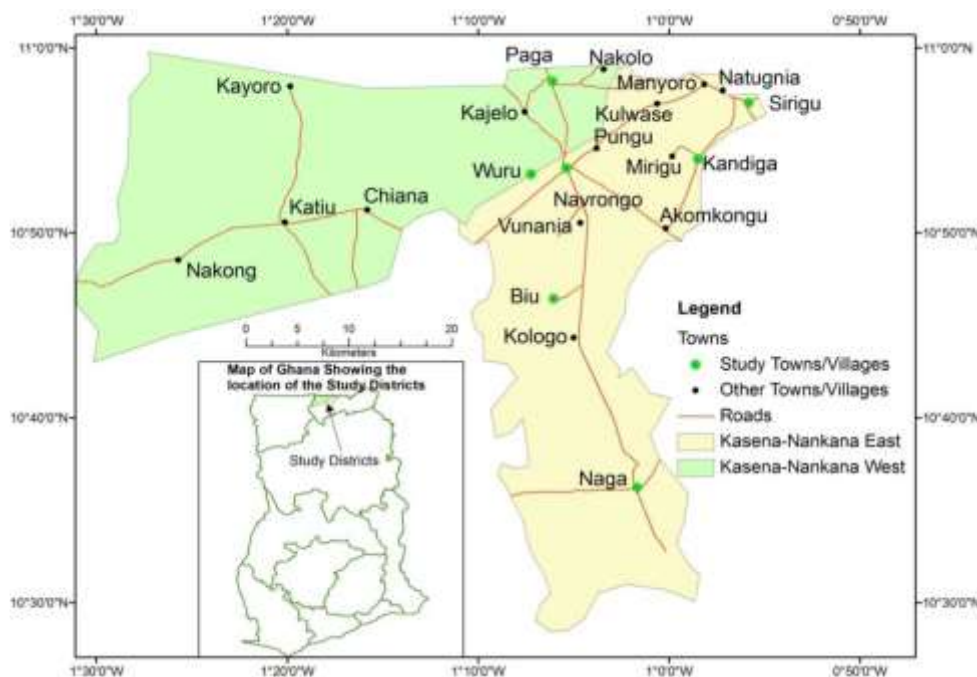


Figure1: Map of Navrongo Traditional Area. The green and yellow shows the study area

Source: www.google.com.gh/maps/place/Kasena+Nankana.org. Accessed on 21st April 2017

The researchers implemented the qualitative research design for this study because they wanted to construct interpretive narrative about the *Chuchuru* socio-cultural practice to describe the complexities of the rituals associated with them (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). The descriptive research method was used in describing the *Chuchuru* socio-cultural practice through careful observation (Koh & Owen, 2008). The respondents were intentionally selected because they were seen as more knowledgeable ((Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2012) in the histories and rituals in connection with the *Chuchuru* practice. These respondents were basically Kasem and Nakani

people who are natives from Navrongo and are currently working and residing in the traditional area (Table 1). Face-to-face personal interviews and focus group discussions were conducted by the researchers. This data collection instrument was more productive because the respondents were more willing to talk in order to express their views rather than talking. The personal interview with the medicine men lasted between 30-45 minutes. Arrangement was made at their convenience. The researchers sought their consent on the use of audio tape for the interview. The interview went on accordingly as stipulated in the interview guide, except on few occasions where the researchers probed further for clarification and additional information. The Data Analysis Spiral was used for analyzing the data through the process of coding the field notes from the interviews and observation, identifying relationships in the data, while forming patterns and generalizations (Scott & Usher, 2011).

Table 1: Categorization of Population and Number of Respondents

TARGET POPULATION	ACCESSIBLE POPULATION
Chiefs, queen mothers and elders	20
Medicine men and fetish priests of various shrines	10
Parents and children	50
Pastors, senior citizens and NGOs	20
TOTAL	100

Researchers' Construct from the Field Survey, 2017

Observation is a highly skilled activity that involves extensive background knowledge and understanding as well as the capacity of using all the senses in understanding significant events (Kumekpor, 2002). Without observatory participation, the researchers would not have been able to ascertain the authenticity of the data gathered from the respondents. It furthermore gave the researchers the opportunity in observing the behavior of accused surviving *chuchuru*. Most of the observations took place in Namolo, Yangua and pungu in the Navrongo traditional area. A digital camera was used to take photographs to visually illustrate and throw more light on the text. The Focus Group Discussions were conducted with parents in the seven selected areas. This was aimed at gathering opinions, beliefs and attitudes about issues of interest (Biklen & Bogdan, 2007). Like the interview guide, questions were generally straight forward and open-ended. This session lasted between 50-60 minutes. The number of participants in the group interviewed was ten. Each member of the group was asked the same question. In order to give everyone a chance to be heard, everyone answered the question before anyone else could add additional comments.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The following section presents and discusses the data accrued from the study. It is discussed based on the two research questions that drive the study.

Description of the *Chuchuru* Socio-Cultural Practice

The focus group discussion with the medicine men revealed that the *Chuchuru* practice came about when a hunter went hunting in the bush and chanced on some human-like beings in the

bush discussing how they would stop thieves from stealing from their farm (referring to fruit bearing plants in the bush). He stated that the hunter hid himself from being seen by these human-like beings to listen to the discussion. These strange beings were discussing how they could use certain herbs as charms to stop anybody from stealing from their farm. That charm would make anyone who stole from their farm go back home carrying the spirit of their nature and would give birth to a child who will look just like them to prevent people from stealing from their farm. One of the elderly medicine men continued the oral tradition that one of the human-like beings asked their chief how they could bring back their spirit which had followed the thieves to their homes. In answering the question, their chief pointed to a tree and said they could always use the herbs from it to get back their spirit from the homes of the thieves. Later, people who actually went to the bush to gather or collect wild fruits had some of them returning home and in later life gave birth to children who did not look like normal human beings whom they named *Chuchuru* (something strange and abnormal). The hunter upon hearing and seeing the nature of the children that were born knew it was the spirit of these human-like beings he had seen and heard discussing in the bush. He quickly went to the bush and brought home herbs from the tree that was talked about by the human-like beings, with which he used to send back these strange and abnormally born children to the bush. The people then named him *Chuchuru kwanu* (the taker of the *Chuchuru*). The *Chuchuru* in the olden days was believed to be a spirit that looks like a little human being in the bush. From the perspective of the Kasena-Nankana, *Chuchuru* children are bush spirits born into a family in human form. Although they appear human, such children are believed as not being human beings and are not regarded as persons, he added.

One of the traditional chiefs interviewed further maintained that, even today before taking a human form, the *Chuchuru* dwells within the bush actively searching for a possible way to enter a family. The spirit wants to enter the house to gain access to the “good things” a family provides, such as food and care. Once born, the ‘*Chuchuru*’ will take over the house and destroy the family, breaking it apart through conflict, sickness, and death, only returning to the bush when satisfied. This corroborates with the assertion of Amenga-Etego (2008) about the *Chinchirigo* (*Chuchuru*). He contends that the *Chuchuru* is a mischievous wild spirit or creature. As a wild spirit, it is believed to live in the wild space such as in the bush, groves, hills and riversides. It is neither evil nor good. Although similarities can be drawn from the Akan concept of the *Motiah*, the Nankani are not particularly interested in describing the features of a *Chinchirigo*. Perhaps this has to do with the multifaceted ways in which the phenomenon is perceived and applied to real life situations. This notwithstanding, there is a notion that a *Chinchirigo* is a short looking human-like being with wide-spread toes, whose footsteps presents features of a person walking backwards. The belief in the manifestation of these sorts of spirits is prevalent in many African communities (Mbiti, 1990).

How Chuchuru is born into Homes

One of the fetish priests elucidated that there is a mountain in the community which is referred to as *Chuchuru pio* (mountain of *Chuchuru*) (Figure 1). This mountain is the place where children who were declared as *Chuchuru* were taken to and left to die by pressing them with huge rocks or buried either on the mountain or inside the *Kikantuoa* (shrub or grove) (Figure 2) if it was killed by the *Chuchuru Kwanu*. He said that because the *Chuchuru* is taken and left in such places the spirits of these *Chuchuru* resided in the mountain and the shrubs, hence women were forbidden to pass by it or to climb on top of it to fetch firewood. Also, women were not to cut fire wood from the *Kikantuoa* (Shrubs). If they did, they came back to the house

carrying with them the *Chuchuru* spirit, and when they became pregnant gave birth to a *Chuchuru*. This is because some of the *Chuchuru* were buried in these shrubs and is believed their spirits lived there. Also, some people had a certain medicine or “juju” which had the *Chuchuru* spirit behind it which they used to protect their farms from thieves. As such, if anyone whether a man or a woman happens to steal from the farm would carry home the spirit of *Chuchuru* and eventually give birth to a *Chuchuru*.

Another fetish priest pointed out that, some other ways the *Chuchuru* could enter a house included the following: eating while walking in the bush, having sex in the bush, women standing to urinate and also easing one’s self in certain places not allowed as buttressed by Daly and Wilson (2001). The easiest way for a spirit to accomplish its goal of passing from the bush into domestic space is to enter a woman through sexual activity. Sex outside of the house would attract a *Chuchuru* spirit to enter the woman. It is believed that if a spirit is passing by while you are having sex outside of the house (it can enter you) immediately when you finish, or just before you start. That is why it’s advisable for men not to have intercourse with a woman outside the house. The location and method used to urinate is also of concern. Women are discouraged from relieving themselves in prohibited places, such as where spirit children are buried, and in other locations identified as spiritually dangerous, liminal, or ambiguous. Community members also describe that eating while walking is a common way for a woman to attract a spirit of *Chuchuru*.



Figure 1: *Chuchuru Pio* (Mountain of *Chuchuru*)

Source: Photographed by the researchers



Figure 2: Kikantuoa (The Chuchuru Shrub or Grove)
Source: Photographed by the researchers

Identification of a Child as a *Chuchuru*

One of the fathers of the *Chuchuru* victims, Nabiri Sedii is an unfortunate father who lost his son as a *Chuchuru*. Finding out from him how his son was identified or declared to be a *Chuchuru*, he responded by saying that as a husband, it was his responsibility to consult a soothsayer as soon as his wife became pregnant as custom demands. He mentioned that it was during that period of investigating about the pregnancy that the suspicion was established about the unborn baby not being a human being. So when the baby was eventually born, he discovered certain things about him which made him to further seek answers to questions he as the father could not answer about the boy. Some of these questions include the child's refusal to eat, sleep and his constant crying at night. He stated that he sought the answers to these questions by consulting a soothsayer (Figure 3) since he was the man and the head of the family. He maintained that it was during that time that it was confirmed to him that his son was not a human being but a bush thing. Nabari was then advised by the soothsayer to take steps immediately to get rid of the child before evil starts visiting his home. That is to say the child was a *Chuchuru* and not a human being.

In the Kasena-Nankana district, children who are described as spirit children are called *Chuchuru* or *Kinkiriko*. They were described by one soothsayer as a child 'not meant for this world'. They were spirits who occasionally managed to come to this world for a short time, causing distress to the communities to which they belonged. The *Chinchirisi* phenomenon thus lies within a specific conceptual frame of thought which is embedded in their worldview. The belief that *Chinchirisi* are undomesticated spiritual entities who have crossed their boundaries is the first aspect of the phenomenon. The second aspect then defines such an action as an anomaly which represents a socio-cultural danger to the family and community (Amenga-Etego, 2008:19).



Figure 3: A community soothsayer (Vooru)
Source: Photographed by the researchers

When the researchers inquired to know from this soothsayer how he was able to confirm that a particular child was not a human but a *Chuchuru*, he replied by saying the gods never lie.

In another incident, it was recounted to the researchers by a pastor of the Fountain Gate Chapel in Navrongo, Rev. Eric Afrifa. He narrated how a new convert of the church, Madam Atipoka Akologo relayed to him about how she had a four year old son who could not talk and walk. Her husband had consulted a soothsayer who had declared her son to be *Chuchuru*. He was advised to dispose off the child. He said that the church tried to intervene but they were told by the people that, it was an old tradition handed to them, hence, they the church had no locus in the matter. In a related study on the spirit child, Denham *et al.* (2010) stated that, common physical characteristics that were identified by community members as indicative of a spirit child include hydrocephalus, or being born with teeth, facial hair, or other secondary sex characteristics. Spirit children are also identified as being born with mishappenings or broken limbs, and may have a variety of physical disabilities. They added that, community members define the spirit child primarily upon its physical appearance, its behaviors, and the misfortunes it is perceived to cause.

Disposal of *Chuchuru*

The disposal of the *Chuchuru* is mainly carried out by the *Chuchuru Kwanu* according to community members. They mentioned that parents go to seek the services of the *Chuchuru Kwanu* after visiting the soothsayer to confirm their suspicion, after they had visited several of the soothsayers to establish some consistence. They maintained that after a soothsayer's verification that a child was indeed an evil child they could go ahead and kill such a child, claiming that the soothsayer is the only person with the authority and powers to declare a child as a *Chuchuru* (Figure 4). Awedoba (2000) also noted that such neonates when detected were disposed off as soon as possible, often within 24 hours of birth, as it was in the best interest of the family.



Figure 4: A father with a Chuchuru child consulting the soothsayer.
Source: Photographed by the researchers

Mba Adabilsa Saah is a 64 year old man who is believed to have the medicine and work as the *Chuchuru Kwanu*. Adabilsa stated that he grew up to meet the medicine in the house which was used to assist parents who gave birth to *Chuchuru* to get rid of them. Dandaga Abasuei is another 57 year *Chuchuru Kwanu* who renders services to parents who contacted him for assistance. When asked how he got the medicine to become the *Chuchuru Kwanu*, he answered that the medicine was passed to him from his father. He recounted how his father gave birth to ten children but all of them died few months after each of them were born. He said this got his father to want to find out what the problem was and if it was the hand work of his enemies, who were they? It was when he set out on the facts finding mission that it was revealed to him that it was the *Chuchuru* spirit that had entered his house. According to Dandaga, the pain of losing ten children compelled his father to get the medicine that could make him remove the *Chuchuru* spirit in his house and so eventually got the medicine and also became a *Chuchuru Kwanu* for his community.

Both Adabilsa and Dandaga maintained that they don't wake up on their own volition to enter suspected houses with *Chuchuru* to take them out. Both stated that the father of a *chuchuru* approached the *Chuchuru Kwanu* for assistance after he had visited the soothsayer and it is confirmed to him that the child is a *Chuchuru*. Dandaga pointed that after he had been contacted to take a *Chuchuru*, he too will first visit and consult soothsayers to ascertain the strength of the *Chuchuru* to inform him how to prepare himself otherwise you get there and be overpowered by the *Chuchuru*. He stated that the *Chuchuru* fights the *Chuchuru Kwanu* both physically and spiritually hence, the need to know him/her as your opponent. After collecting the necessary evidence and confirmation that a child is indeed a *Chuchuru*, the next step to take is the preparation of the poisonous concoction (*Teeini*). It is the ritual and medicinal object used by *Chuchuru Kwanu* to send a *Chuchuru* back to the bush. The term *Teeini* signifies the black medicine used to kill the *Chuchuru*, he added. He said the *Teeni* is either put in food for the child to eat or in water for the child to drink and the work is done. He further explained that the concoction is prepared with herbs from seven different trees or plants and kept in a horn. It is only when after eating or drinking the *Teeni* and the child refuses to die that I then go to kill the child physically in the *Dinia* (Figure 5a & 5b) where the child will be kept awaiting my arrival he added. The *Dinia and Diyuu* is simply a type of chamber and hall without windows. People don't sleep there, it is mostly used for ritual purposes, like funerals, widowhood rites etc.



Figure 5 (a)

Figure 5 (b)

Figure 5 (a) The Dinia to the left and the Diyu to the right There is only one entrance to the twin rooms of Dinia and Di-yuu and lower wall is built inside the Dinia leading into the Di-yuu (Figure 5b)

Source: Photographed by the researchers

He said before going, prior information is sent to the women in the house to remove the grinding stone (*Namini*) from the quern (*Nongo*) and to close the small window through the roof (*Natooni*) before the child is sent in so as not to indirectly put weapons directly into the hands of the *Chuchuru* and also not to be able to escape through the *Natooni*. He said the *Chuchuru* upon realizing that its life was in danger, in self-defense could attack the *Chuchuru* kwanu by using the grinding stone (*Namini*) to throw back at the *Chuchuru* Kwanu or vanish through the *Natooni* (Figure 6). This is because the process takes place in the *dinia* where these things are. He said upon entering the room (*Dinia*) he used the *Teeini* or the concoctions which he had kept in the horn of a cow to hit the head of the *Chuchuru* after which some of the concoction is forced in the nose and the mouth to weaken or kill the *Chuchuru*.



Figure 6(a)

Figure 6(a): *Natooni* (small window or outlet in the roof of the *Dinia*) which they believe the *chuchuru* is able to escape through and must be closed



Figure 6(b)

Figure 6 (b) *Nongo* inside the *Dinia* (stone used for grinding millet into flour as can be observed from right)

Source: Photographed by the researchers

According to Amenga-Etego (2008), once the presence of a *Chinchirigo* is acknowledged in a family, he/she (it) is viewed as a temporary visitor. Consequently, the notion of seeing this child off (or sending this child home) is an ultimate conclusion. The human *Chinchirigo*, the disguised wild dwelling *Chinchirigo* that has either missed its way (to the wild space) or has intentionally changed paths so as to cause trouble, can be appropriately led out of the human environment to facilitate its return home. The process, however, requires a re-transformation, the shedding-off of the current human form. To help with the transformatory process, since he/she (it) is a child, the people go through a series of practices and this is carried out by the appropriate male ritual authorities. Dandaga, the fetish priest, further added that once the *Chuchuru* is taken (killed) the family does not mourn, or perform the funeral; this is because it is believed the *Chuchuru* spirit will return to the house or family from which it was taken.

As shown in Figure 7, the *Chuchuru* is then carried in a *Sambora* (old local mat), to the *Chuchuru pio* (*Chuchuru* Mountain) to be buried or to be pressed down with huge rocks while it is wrapped in the *Saara* (mat) or may be buried in the *Kikantuoa* (shrubs or groves). He stated that they carry along in a calabash a mixture of all types of grains. On their way back home, he said they will be casting the grains behind them while no one looks back. The reason he said is because the *Chuchuru* does not die and will wake up to follow them back home. But upon seeing the grains will want to pick them first, but will not be able to do so within reasonable time and thus get confused with the way back to the house.



Figure 7: The Saara (local mat) hang to the right used to carry Chuchuru for burial
Source: Photographed by the researchers

The *Chuchuru* Socio-Cultural Practice and its Negative Influence in the Socio-Cultural Lives of the Kasena-Nankana People in the Upper East Region of Ghana

The second objective of the study was to examine the effects of the *Chuchuru* cultural practice on the socio-cultural life of the people. The researchers observed that the cultural practices of the Kasena-Nankana people does not only affect their health but also affect all aspects of life including social relationships, contribution to societal functioning and disease condition. Lisa, Farrah and Raymond (2009) explains that people of diverse cultural backgrounds often make different attributions of illness, health, disease, symptoms and treatment. Cultural differences in health attributions have major implications for medical professionals because over time, attributions play an essential role in the formation of beliefs concerning health and illness. One of the most serious consequences of *Chuchuru* accusations against children is violence. Whether it is psychological (humiliation, contempt, disdain, insolence,) or physical, violence against children violates children's fundamental rights as defined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 19 paragraph 1: "States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child." It was time to interact with parents who had indicated they lost their children to the practice, so I put them in groups to facilitate effective interaction. These occasions served as an opportunity for the groups to make contributions to the on-going issue under discussion.

At each group level, one of the first and serious issues discussed was the *Chuchuru* socio-cultural practice. Others equally important to them which was mentioned by the respondents included witchcraft, female genital mutilation (FGM), marriage and bride wealth, funeral and widowhood rites which were discussed within short periods of time. Members of the groups,

both men and women expressed their misgivings and ill feeling about these cultural practices and how they are affecting them especially the *Chuchuru* practice, noting that these practices are injurious to health. As the researchers observed the level of anger with which majority of the people discussed the *Chuchuru* practice. Mbiti (1990) reported that to be human is to belong to the whole community, and to do so involve participating in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals and festivals of that community. The exact influences of the *Chuchuru* practice in the lives of the Kasena-Nankana people included the effects on parents of the *Chuchuru* child, stigmatization and discrimination of *Chuchuru* victims as well as the neglect of the health needs of the *Chuchuru* victim.

The Negative Impacts of the Death of an accused *Chuchuru* child on Parents

The researchers noticed from the responses of the parents interviewed that they felt deep pain and regret on how the *Chuchuru* practice has resulted in the death of their children who they held the view that, they did not deserve to have died. They maintained strongly the belief that most of these children may not necessarily be what they claimed they were. This got a passionate mother on her feet who related to the researchers how her husband and relatives took her son away and never brought him back. According to the woman, she had a five year old boy who could not walk and so was declared a *Chuchuru*. She said her husband brought the *Chuchuru Kwanu* who attempted a first concoction assault on the boy but he did not die. She said they left and came back again another time. She noted that two weeks after the first attempt, the boy had held a wall and was attempting to make some few moves which to show a sign of hope. But this hope was short lived when they took the son away and never brought him back which I knew they had gone to kill him. She maintained that anytime a first attempt proves unsuccessful, the second attempt is always by force death through any of the following processes; by drowning the child in a river or basin full of water in the house, other times by breaking the neck or hitting the head with an object. This is a violation of children's fundamental rights as defined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 6, paragraph 1 of the convention states that 'parties must recognize that every child has the inherent right to life.' Paragraph 2 of article 6 states that 'parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child.' In addition, Article 37 clause (a) 'No child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Neither capital punishment nor life imprisonment without possibility of release shall be imposed for offences committed by persons below eighteen years of age.'

Mbiti (1990) on a related issue of twins, observed that the people concerned experienced them as a threat to their whole existence, as a sign that something wrong had happened to cause the births, and that something worse still would happen to the whole community if the 'evil' were not removed. So they killed the children for the sake of the larger community to cleanse, to save and to protect the rest of the people.

The Negative Impacts of Stigmatization and Discrimination on *Chuchuru* Victims

Stigmatization and discrimination affect parents and families of children accused and killed as *Chuchuru*, most of which indicated that their social stigmatization is probably due to the fear they inspire within the society. For example, they are accepted with difficulty in their communities, especially relating to marriage and are considered undesirable and have to put up with this stigmatization and discrimination for the rest of their lives. They even alluded to the fact that when their children attend schools, other students who are aware of such practices sometime refer to them as *Chuchuru* especially if they find on them features they do not like.

The child is stigmatized within his family, neighborhood, village or community. All these are in violation of Article 2, paragraph 2 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which clearly states that “States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of the status, activities, expressed opinions, or beliefs of the child's parents, legal guardians, or family members.” Stigmatization and discrimination lead to traumas, psychological and emotional suffering. They also make more difficult any attempt to reintegrate the children in family and social life.

Neglect of the health needs of the *Chuchuru* child

From the discussion, it has been clearly established that the health needs of the *Chuchuru* child are never an issue for consideration once the soothsayer says the child is not a human being. The economic condition and state of the *Chuchuru* parents coupled with poor infrastructural development, low level of education and poor access to health care especially makes the women more vulnerable when they are pregnant. In this case, the conception of *Chuchuru* as a source of punishment and suffering to families can be explained from a socio-economic perspective, where the notion of suffering is linked to the underlying problems of poverty and underdevelopment rather than the child who is also a victim of the unfortunate circumstance of the state of the family.

During this study, it became clear that due to the rate of poverty and level of illiteracy in these communities, parent turn to neglect the health needs of their children who are born with some abnormalities and would rather see them as *Chuchuru* who have come to worsen their already bad condition, and so would do everything humanly possible to get rid of them, which is an infringement of Article 2, paragraph 1 and 2 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which clearly states that:

1. States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.
2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of the status, activities, expressed opinions, or beliefs of the child's parents, legal guardians, or family members.

CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed the *Chuchuru* socio-cultural practice in the Kasena-Nankana people in the Upper East Region of Ghana. The belief in the *Chuchuru* practice and what characterizes it has various speculative implications not only for parents but also for government who are burdened with the difficult task of planning and implementing health intervention programs in the study area. We can never be able to provide sensible answers to the overwhelming questions that unavoidably arise from the *Chuchuru* practice, but one thing stands clear: the belief in the practice has deep effects on parents' responses to childhood diseases and their responses toward modern preventive actions, as well as their behavior. Some of the deaths that are associated with the practice could have been easily prevented if parents especially mothers were educated to engage in simple personal hygiene and take advantage of the advances in medical knowledge aimed at curbing child anomalies.

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