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Ritual Child Homicides in Ghana and Kenya: A Criminological Analysis

Abstract

Child homicide is a frequent occurrence in many African communities, and juju beliefs trigger a sizable proportion of this crime. Yet a systematic and critical analysis of juju's impact on homicides is lacking in the literature. The sparse extant studies on juju-driven homicide or ritual murder mainly offer historical perspectives rather than criminological analysis of the phenomenon. The present study explores the magnitude, characteristics, and motivations, as well as the socio-cultural and economic contexts of ritual child homicide or juju-driven pedicide (i.e., the killing of children for ritual or occult purposes) in Ghana and Kenya. This aim is achieved by conducting an in-depth analysis of ritual murder reports publicized on the websites of eight major news/media outlets between 2012 and 2021. The content analysis results are complemented by semi-structured interviews involving 28 academics and experts. The data show that ritual child homicide usually involves multiple offenders, primarily unemployed young adult males aged between 20 and 39 years. Most perpetrators are motivated by pecuniary gain and the desire to protect themselves against perceived spiritual attacks. The body parts primarily extracted from victims for rituals are the head, limbs, private parts, and blood. The major factors contributing to the persistence of ritual homicides are obsession with juju, economic hardship, illiteracy, inefficient criminal justice system, authorities' failure to bring juju practitioners under closer scrutiny, and the emergence of a new consumerist ethos—the unrestrained quest for luxurious effects.

Keywords

Kenya, Ghana, ritual pedicide, juju, ritual murder, human body parts, superstition, crime, children

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**RITUAL CHILD HOMICIDES IN GHANA AND KENYA:
A CRIMINOLOGICAL ANALYSIS****Emmanuel Sarpong Owusu***Aberystwyth University, Wales and Arden University, England* [0000-0003-2492-6767](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2492-6767)**ABSTRACT**

Child homicide is a frequent occurrence in many African communities, and juju beliefs trigger a sizable proportion of this crime. Yet a systematic and critical analysis of juju's impact on pediticides is lacking in the literature. The sparse extant studies on juju-driven homicide or ritual murder mainly offer historical perspectives rather than criminological analysis of the phenomenon. The present study explores the magnitude, characteristics, and motivations, as well as the socio-cultural and economic contexts of ritual child homicide or juju-driven pediticide (i.e., the killing of children for ritual or occult purposes) in Ghana and Kenya. This aim is achieved by conducting an in-depth analysis of ritual murder reports publicized on the websites of eight major news/media outlets between 2012 and 2021. The content analysis results are complemented by semi-structured interviews involving 28 academics and experts. The data show that ritual child homicide usually involves multiple offenders, primarily unemployed young adult males aged between 20 and 39 years. Most perpetrators are motivated by pecuniary gain and the desire to protect themselves against perceived spiritual attacks. The body parts primarily extracted from victims for rituals are the head, limbs, private parts, and blood. The major factors contributing to the persistence of ritual pediticides are obsession with juju, economic hardship, illiteracy, inefficient criminal justice system, authorities' failure to bring juju practitioners under closer scrutiny, and the emergence of a new consumerist ethos—the unrestrained quest for luxurious effects.

KEYWORDS

Kenya, Ghana, ritual pediticide, juju, ritual murder, human body parts, superstition, crime, children

A STUDY PRODUCED BY THE UNITED NATIONS OFFICE ON DRUGS AND CRIME (UNODC) in 2023 suggests that approximately 71,600 homicide victims in 2021 were children—i.e., under the age of 18 years (UNODC, 2023). It has also been reported that in 2017, about 21,540 children aged 0 to 14 years were murdered globally. Over the same period, an estimated total of 182,778 adolescents and young adults aged 15 to 29 years fell victim to intentional homicide (UNODC, 2019). A study conducted by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) in 2014 also indicates that about 95,000 young people below 20 years are murdered each year worldwide (UNICEF, 2014). Several studies and reports establish that about 90% of child homicide victims live in low-income countries such as those in sub-Saharan Africa (Krug et al., 2002; Mathews et al., 2013; Pinheiro, 2006; Stöckl et al., 2017; UNICEF, 2014). Disturbingly, many child homicides in African communities result from certain superstitious beliefs and practices (Agazue & Gavin, 2015; Denham et al., 2010; Kajiru & Nyimbi, 2020; Owusu, 2022).

Superstition, an irrational belief in paranormal influences or a false conception of causation, is an age-old phenomenon found in probably all human societies or cultures (Griffiths et al., 2019; Irwin, 1993; Sobal & Eamons, 1982). The reality, however, is that the concept of superstition encompasses a wide range of beliefs, practices, and behaviors, some of which, unfortunately, have deleterious and lethal consequences. One such harmful and potentially lethal superstitious belief prevalent in most African communities is juju—an African belief system and religious practice that involves the use of incantations and/or objects to mystically control events or alter people’s destiny (Neal, 1966; Owusu, 2022). The terms “juju-driven child homicide” and “ritual pedicide” are defined as the killing of persons under the age of 18 years, usually to extract their body parts and/or blood, for ritual or occult purposes (Owusu, 2022).

Indeed, the media in Africa are replete with juju-driven homicide (or ritual murder) cases/reports. But surprisingly, little research has critically analyzed the juju belief’s impact on pedicides in African settings. To address this gap, the present research explores the magnitude, characteristics, and motivations, and the religious, socio-cultural, and economic contexts of ritual pedicide in Ghana and Kenya. The defined aim is achieved by embarking on an in-depth analysis of ritual homicide cases/reports publicized in the Ghanaian and Kenyan news/media outlets between January 2012 and December 2021 (a span of 10 years). Semi-structured interviews involving 28 participants were then conducted to gain additional insights into key aspects of the results obtained from the media content analysis.

Section two of this study attempts an exposition of the concept of juju and how it triggers homicide. Section three describes the methods utilized to gather and analyze data. Section four presents the results of an in-depth analysis of ritual murder cases/reports published on the websites of eight selected media outlets (i.e., four in each country) between 2012 and 2021. Section five offers a critical discussion of the results, taking into account and incorporating the views of 28 persons interviewed. This is followed by a conclusion.

JUJU BELIEFS AND RITUAL MURDER IN AFRICA

THE CONCEPT OF JUJU

The belief in juju is widespread in Ghana and Kenya as in other African countries (Appau & Bonsu, 2020; Max-Wirth, 2016; Owusu, 2022; Thatiah, 2017). Etymologically, the term juju stems from the French word *joujou*, meaning a “toy” or “plaything” (Changa, 2009; van der Watt & Kruger, 2017). Experts explain that the Europeans who arrived in West Africa around the 15th century “used the word for the locals’ pouches that contained small items, such as powder, plant, and animal substances. The local inhabitants wore these pouches around their bodies and believed that the contents brought them good luck and provided protection” (van der Watt & Kruger, 2017, p. 72). Today, the term juju is often employed as a synonym for voodoo, black magic, and occultism (Fellows, 2010; Max-Wirth, 2016; Taliani, 2012; Owusu, 2022; Van Dijk, 2001).

Juju, in contemporary usage, denotes a variety of concepts: (1) it could refer to the magical or supernatural power deliberately infused into a particular object or believed to be the cause of a given occurrence; (2) it could also refer to an object that has been purposely endowed or infused with magical/supernatural properties (e.g., talisman, amulet, protective ring, concoction, etc.); and (3) it may denote the practice of using incantations and/or objects to help or harm people psychically, or to control

events (Changa, 2009; see also Dunkerley, 2018; Neal, 1966; Ojo, 1981). This study focuses largely on the third connotation. Generally, juju describes the popular African belief that incantations and/or certain objects, such as eggs, leaves/plants, animals, and human blood and body parts, can be used to make medicines or perform rituals capable of manipulating events in life, including altering the destiny of people from bad to good and vice versa (Fellows, 2010; Ojo, 2081; Owusu, 2022).

Juju rituals are usually performed by specialists who claim to have attained the requisite spiritual enlightenment and/or training to manipulate things in the natural and supernatural world (Changa, 2009). Such individuals may be called different names in different communities in Africa. Figures such as fetish priests, medicine men, witchdoctors, diviners, soothsayers, occult capos, and traditional healers may all be classified as juju specialists/practitioners, depending on the means through which they realize their clients' requests/supplications (Owusu, 2022). In Ghana, a juju specialist may be called names such as *mallam* (a term for a spiritually powerful Islamic cleric), *odunsinii* (an Akan term for a traditional healer), or *juju-man/juju-woman*. In Kenya, juju specialists may be called *mganga* (a Kiswahili vocabulary) and *laibon* (a term popular among the Samburu and Maasai peoples), among others.

Aspects of the juju-related experiences of James Neal, a British settler who worked as Chief Investigations Officer in Ghana between 1952 and the early 1960s, are worth recounting in this discussion. Neal (1966) narrates an instance where a comparatively small tree which building constructors could not uproot, even with bulldozers and other mechanical means, was effortlessly felled with a rope by a few persons following the performance of a ritual involving three sheep, three bottles of liquor, and incantations by a fetish priest. He describes the ritual as follows:

The Fetish Priest killed the animals by cutting their throats in a ceremonial manner and then letting their blood trickle into the ground at the bottom of the tree. This done, he poured some of the gin around the base of the tree as a libation to the spirit [believed to be inhabiting the tree], and then entered into a semi-trance, talking in a chanting voice to the invisible spirit in the tree When he eventually finished his invocations and talked again with the spirit in the tree, he ... said ... "the spirit of this tree has agreed that he will leave his old tree and make his house in another and even better tree." (Neal, 1966, pp. 22-23)

He also describes an instance where the potency of a harmful black juju powder that had been deposited on the seat of his car, ostensibly to harm him, was dramatically rendered powerless after it came into contact with a protective amulet that had been given to him by a powerful juju-man. He explains the event in the following words:

I unlocked the [car] door and placed my amulet onto the black powder covering the whole of the seat. I hardly believed my eyes when I saw the black Ju-ju powder turned grey almost immediately, and a moment later into what looked like ash of burned paper, which was almost instantly blown away by the very slight breeze. I put the amulet back into my pocket. It was a very useful acquisition, a strange but effective life-saver (Neal, 1966, p. 95).

After reflecting on all his terrifying experiences and adventures in what he calls "juju-ridden" Ghana, Neal makes the following interesting conclusion:

[W]hatever the answers may be, whatever theories may be put forward, all I know is that in ten years in Ghana I was both victim to and observer of the inexplicable effects of a strange and frightening force. I have my own eyes and ears to believe, my own intelligence to depend on, my injuries to confront me every waking hour of my life. There is not a shred of doubt in my mind today that the African, in his own mysterious ways, has harnessed one of the strangest powers of all—the thing they call Juju (Neal, 1966, p. 191).

As recently as May 2021, the Kirinyaga Council of Elders conducted a special ritual to appease Agikuyu gods (Agikuyu is a major ethnic group in the Kirinyaga County situated in the south-central part of Kenya) to allow the felling of sacred *mugumo* trees (fig trees) that were believed to be impeding the work of contractors constructing an 84-kilometer dual carriage road. The pacification ritual became necessary after the Chinese contractor sought the elders' intervention, claiming that every attempt to uproot the trees in the area had failed—and this had gone on for nearly two months (Mwangi, 2021). According to one eyewitness, an employee of the construction company, all the heavy machines they had engaged to work on that section of the road “developed problems under mysterious and illogical circumstances” (cited in Mwangi, 2021). What baffled them was that the machines worked in other different sites. Some of the local folks then advised the contractor to seek the spiritual assistance of the elders and ritualists in the community.

According to the elders consulted, *mugumo* trees in the area have a sacred significance among the Agikuyu community, and the area in question was recognized as a place of worship—a sacred site that has existed for over 600 years. The only way the constructors could continue work on that stretch of land unhindered was for the gods inhabiting the *mugumo* trees in the area to be appeased and relocated. As part of the pacification ritual, the lead ritualist slaughtered two “unblemished” rams, one of which was burned and the other consumed by the elders. The ritualist sprinkled the area several times with the blood drained from the slaughtered animals. The elders finally planted three trees a few meters from the construction area as a replacement dwelling for the gods (or the ancestral spirits). After the ritual had been performed, it was declared that the gods had accepted the sacrifice and that the contractor could proceed with the construction work. It was not clear from the report if the constructors encountered further problems after the ritual (Mwangi, 2021).

It must be accentuated here that the question of whether juju works or whether there is credibility in its supposed protective and destructive power is beyond the scope of this study. James Neal's juju-related experiences in Ghana and the Chinese road constructor's predicaments in Kenya have been recounted here merely to portray a more vivid picture of juju and some of the ways of performing juju rituals.

JUJU AND RITUAL MURDER

As already indicated, various objects can be used for juju medicines or rituals. However, human blood and body parts seem to have become some of the frequently used ingredients/objects for such rituals in Africa (Adinkrah, 2005; Labuschagne, 2004; Lyncaster, 2014; Owusu, 2022). Indeed, there is a general belief throughout sub-Saharan Africa that using human body parts for a ritual or juju medicine can guarantee good luck, wealth, enhancement of social life, political or sporting success, and good health; ensure protection against diseases, misfortunes, and the activities of “instruments of darkness”; and cause the destruction or manipulation of enemies and other people. This unfounded notion has elicited an increase in murders committed

by persons seeking the immediate realization of their dreams and ambitions (Adinkrah, 2005, 2017; Bukuluki et al., 2017; Fellows, 2013; Owusu, 2022). Thus, juju practitioners usually seek human blood and body parts to use as purported remedies to address their clients' problems and needs (Fellows, 2010; Kajilwa, 2018; Owusu, 2022). Sadly, children, unarguably the most vulnerable group in society, are often targeted for such ritualistic killings (Kajilwa, 2018; Owusu, 2022).

The term "ritual murder" has been defined as "a type of criminal homicide in which the slayers excise the vital organs of the victims for use in 'sacred' rites" (Igbinovia, 1988, p. 37), or a homicide "carried out to use the victim's blood and body parts to make a powerful medicine for an immediate objective" (Gocking, 2000, p. 198). Ritual pedicide, as already noted, denotes the killing of children aged below 18 years to use their blood and/or specific body parts for ritual purposes. However, body parts may not be extracted in certain instances, e.g., where the prescribed juju ritual only requires perpetrators to have sexual intercourse with victims or obtain their body fluids (Oluwaleye & Adefisoye, 2021; Owusu, 2022).

It must be clarified that even though juju practitioners are believed to have the power to protect (enhance the well-being of people) and to destroy (harm or kill clients' adversaries), the general notion is that the majority of them use their powers for only a good cause—the protection of people in society and the improvement of human wellbeing, and also employ a more acceptable method such as the use of leaves/plants and other non-human objects for the relevant rituals and medicines (Owusu, 2022; see Neal, 1966). There is currently scanty information on the rate and characteristics of ritual murders, particularly ritual pedicides, in Ghana and Kenya. Therefore, conducting a dynamic media content analysis was considered extremely useful in establishing the magnitude and identifying the features and religious, cultural, and socio-economic contexts of the ritual pedicide phenomenon in the two countries.

METHODS

This study utilized the mixed methods approach. Data were drawn from reports retrieved from the websites of eight leading media outlets in Ghana and Kenya and semi-structured interviews involving 28 participants. A diligent review of the literature suggests that very few empirical studies on ritual pedicide in African settings exist. Two important extant empirical studies on the ritual pedicide phenomenon are Fellows (2013) and Bukuluki et al. (2017). The prime aim of these two studies was to establish whether ritually motivated child homicide is a myth or a reality in Uganda. To realize this aim, the studies used the exploratory qualitative approach where data was drawn from individuals in 25 communities believed to be eyewitnesses to incidents of ritually motivated homicide. This approach was deemed unsuitable for the present study because it does not facilitate an appreciation of the magnitude, motivations, and characteristics of the ritual pedicide phenomenon in an entire country.

The media content analysis approach was considered more appropriate for this study due to the dearth of national data sets on the ritual pedicide phenomenon and the paucity of empirical research in the two countries. Utilizing news media reports to study homicide is not an unproven method. Experts such as Adinkrah (2005, 2014), Chimbos (1998), and Websdale and Alvarez (1997) have all effectively employed this technique to understand homicides in different societies. Relying on media reports for data on ritual pedicide is almost unavoidable in developing countries such as Ghana and Kenya, where homicide data are generally poorly documented or non-existent (Adinkrah, 2005; Owusu, 2022; Stöckl et al., 2017). Since media reports are the

primary means through which ritual murder cases come to the attention of the public in African settings (Adinkrah, 2005; Owusu, 2022), it would be extremely difficult presently to ascertain the magnitude, motivations, and characteristics of ritual pedicide in Ghana and Kenya without recourse to media publications.

The websites of eight popular local media outlets (4 in Ghana and 4 in Kenya) were perused for reports/articles on ritual murders that occurred between January 2012 and December 2021 (a 10-year span). The relevant reports/articles retrieved were then thoroughly analyzed for pertinent information. The selected local Ghanaian media/news outlets were: *Daily Graphic* (state-owned)—the largest newspaper in the country in terms of circulation and readership; *Daily Guide* (privately-owned)—second-largest newspaper; *Ghanaian Times* (state-owned)—third biggest newspaper; and *MyJoyOnline* (privately-owned)—one of the largest and most widely patronized online news outlets in the country. The local Kenyan media outlets selected for this study were three privately-owned newspapers—*Daily Nation*, *The Standard*, and *The Star*—these are believed to be the largest English-language newspapers by daily circulation and readership in the country (Nyabuga & Booker, 2013), and the *Kenyan News Agency* (a state-owned news organization) which has been a leading national news and information source since the last six decades. These outlets were selected as a data source because they are the largest media houses in circulation and readership and are among the most credible news/media outlets in the respective countries.

Adinkrah (2005) adopts the content analysis or newspaper surveillance technique in his study on ritual murder in Ghana. However, the major problem with Adinkrah's (2005) study is that the findings are based on analyzing just 24 cases extracted from the print version of just one newspaper—the state-owned *Daily Graphic*. The small sample size (regarding the number of media outlets involved and the number of reports/cases found and analyzed) thus limits his findings' credibility and generalizability. The media content analysis conducted in the present study improves upon Adinkrah's approach in many respects: (1) two countries are involved, (2) the media sample size is bigger (i.e., 4 in each country), (3) the number of reports and cases analyzed is also significantly larger, (4) the media forms are varied, and (5) the mode of searching for relevant reports/cases is more advanced and effective (i.e., done electronically).

A homicide case was classified as ritual or juju-involved murder if: (1) body parts were extracted; (2) blood was drained from the body; and/or (3) there was evidence that a ritual had been performed on the body or at the scene of the crime or location of the body; and in addition to one or more of the three listed elements/criteria, law enforcement agencies or the community members believed that the said murder was ritually motivated. A homicide was also classified as ritual murder if suspects confessed that they committed it for ritual purposes, irrespective of the condition of the victim's body at the time that it was discovered. Ritual murder was also assumed in instances where persons found in possession of fresh human body parts could not explain away how they obtained them, and there was no indication that they had been dug out from a grave.

To find the relevant reports/articles on ritual murder, a thorough search was conducted on the websites of the eight selected media outlets, using the following key phrases/terms: "juju ritual," "juju medicine," "occult ritual," "ritual murder," "ritual killing," "ritual homicide," "devil worship," "occultism and murder," and "human body parts." It must be stressed here that every relevant case/report was counted just once. Where a pertinent case was reported by more than one of the selected media, the report that seemed more coherent and detailed was adopted, and the corresponding

media outlet was credited for the publication. Where a selected report on a case was still not detailed or intelligible enough, reports on the same episode published or broadcast by reputable media platforms other than the selected ones were reviewed for a clearer and more detailed description.

All the relevant reports/articles on ritual murder were systematically analyzed. The following information was collected from each of the reports: (1) the number of victims reported, (2) the number of child victims involved, (3) the number of perpetrators/prime suspects arrested, prosecuted, and/or convicted, (4) the body parts extracted from victims (5) age of victims and perpetrators/prime suspects (6) gender of victims and perpetrators/prime suspects, (7) victims and perpetrators/prime suspects' community, (8) socio-economic backgrounds of victims and offenders, (9) victim-offender relationship, (10) location of victims' remains, (11) motivations for the homicides, and (12) perpetrators level of education. This information was recorded on an Excel spreadsheet and later tabulated.

To gain further insights into the information or statistics gathered from the media content analysis, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 28 educated persons (14 males and 14 females—20 from Ghana and eight from Kenya). Thus, the role/task of the participants was to help flesh out the findings from the media content analysis by offering their views on aspects related to their areas of expertise. The interviewees were selected using the purposeful sampling method, as the study required participants with a reasonable level of knowledge and understanding of the ritual murder phenomenon, African religions, African customs and traditions, child and family welfare and social protection, homicides, and criminal justice in Africa. Many participants were thus selected due to their acclaimed expertise/knowledge in the disciplines mentioned above or areas. The questions posed to interviewees were, therefore, informed by the outcome of the content analysis. A summary of the findings from the analysis of media reports was shared with the participants prior to the interviews. Most of the interviews were conducted by phone or web conferencing, and a few were conducted face-to-face.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The ethical issues that arose in the present research were confidentiality and the issue of transcript validation and ratification by participants. Some interviewees consented to having their real names included in the written report/manuscript; others did not give the researcher permission to use or identify their real names. However, to respect and protect the confidentiality of the participants who did not want their identity to be revealed and to ensure uniformity, a decision was taken to avoid using the names of participants, including those who consented to have their real names mentioned in the written report. After the interviews, transcripts were sent to the respective participants for further examination, amendment (if necessary), validation, and/or ratification of content. The rationale was to ensure and preserve the validity and accuracy of what the participants said during the interviews and ultimately facilitate the quality of the research and the credibility of the findings.

RESULTS

THE MAGNITUDE OF RITUAL MURDER IN GHANA AND KENYA

A thorough search of the four selected local Ghanaian media websites for reports on juju-related homicides, spanning the period 2012–2021, yielded the following results: In all, 136 different reports on ritual murder were identified, 76 of which involved child victims. This information is summarized in Table 1. It must be clarified that a single report/article may concern two or more victims. The 136 reports/articles retrieved from the four media outlets thus involved approximately 160 victims, about 94 (about 58.8%) of whom were children.

Table 1: The Number of Relevant Reports/Articles Found in Each of the Selected Media in Ghana

Media type	Total number of reports found	Reports on child victims only	Reports on child and adult victims	Reports on adult victims only
<i>Daily Graphic</i>	44	22	5	17
<i>Ghanaian Times</i>	30	13	3	14
<i>Daily Guide</i>	41	22	0	19
<i>MyJoyOnline</i>	21	11	0	10
Total	136	68	8	60
Percentage	100	50	5.9	44.1

A diligent perusal of the websites of the four selected Kenyan media outlets for reports on ritual murder, spanning the period 2012–2021, also produced the following results: A total of 83 different reports on ritual murder cases met the defined criteria, 49 of which involved child victims. The 83 reports/articles involved 102 victims, about 66 (approximately 64.7) of whom were children. This information is summarized in Table 2.

It is evident from the information provided above that ritual murder is a quite frequent crime in Ghana and Kenya and that children are the most targeted victims. It is deemed important to now focus attention specifically on the data relating to ritual pedicide, which is the subject matter of this study. In the subsequent sections, effort is made not only to highlight the primary characteristics of ritual pedicide but also to establish the motivations, as well as the religious, socio-cultural, and economic contexts of this crime in the two countries.

Table 2: The Number of Relevant Reports Found in Each of the Selected Media in Kenya

Media type	Total number of reports found	Reports on child victims only	Reports on both child and adult victims	Reports on adult victims only
<i>Daily Nation</i>	34	18	4	12
<i>The Standard</i>	32	15	5	12
<i>The Star</i>	9	4	0	5
<i>Kenya News Agency</i>	8	3	0	5
Total	83	40	9	34
Percentage	100	48.2	10.8	41

VICTIM CHARACTERISTICS

The 94 and 66 ritual pedicide victims identified in Ghana and Kenya, respectively, were aged between 1 and 17 years. In Ghana, there were no significant gender differences regarding the ritual pedicide rates. However, in Kenya, there was a minute difference in the number of boys and girls ritually murdered—the rate for girls was slightly higher. In both countries, most of the victims (about 80%) were from rural and semi-rural communities, and almost all the victims were of low socio-economic backgrounds.

Seeming poor parental supervision was the major cause of the abduction and eventual murder of the victims. Thus, in both countries, more than 70% of the victims under 10 years old were kidnaped and murdered while going to school or to fetch water from a stream unaccompanied, playing outside their homes unsupervised, or running errands by themselves for relatives or members of their community. None of the parents or caregivers whose apparent poor supervision resulted in the abduction and murder of their children/wards was charged or prosecuted. Aside from the draining of blood, the body parts mostly extracted from victims were the head, limbs, genitalia/private parts, and tongue. In Ghana, the head was the most sought-after human organ; in Kenya, the limbs were the body parts mostly removed from the victims. The extraction of the private parts (specifically the penis and vagina) was common in both countries. Tables 3 and 4 provide relevant general information on ritual pedicide victims in the two countries.

Table 3: Information on 94 Victims of Ritual Pesticide in Ghana

Variable	Number	Percentage
Gender		
Male	46	48.9
Female	43	45.7
Unknown	5	5.3
Age		
0 – 5	15	16.0
6 – 10	36	38.3
11 – 17	34	36.2
Unknown	9	9.6
Socio-economic background		
Victims from poor/low-income families	69	73.4
Victims from affluent families	2	2.1
Unknown	23	24.5
Victim's community		
Rural community	52	55.3
Semi-rural community	23	24.5
City or Urban Centre	13	13.8
Unknown	6	6.4
Location of victim's remains		
Remote woodland/farm/cemetery	52	55.3
Victims' backyard/perpetrator's home	18	19.1
River/riverbank/beach	11	11.7
Uncompleted building	7	7.4
Other places	3	3.2
Unknown	4	4.3

Table 4: Information on 66 Victims of Ritual Pesticide in Kenya

Variable	Number	Percentage
Gender		
Male	26	39.4
Female	32	48.5
Unknown	8	12.1
Age		
0 - 5	6	9.1
6 - 10	19	28.8
11 - 17	25	37.9
Unknown	16	24.2
Socio-economic background		
Victims from poor/low-income families	48	72.7
Victims from affluent families	2	3.0
Unknown	16	24.2
Victim's community		
Rural community	35	53
Semi-rural community	15	22.7
City or Urban Centre	9	13.6
Unknown	7	10.6
Location of victim's remains		
Remote woodland/farm/cemetery	29	43.9
Victims' backyard/perpetrator's home	15	22.7
Riverside/riverbank/beach	10	15.2
Other places	6	9.1
Unknown	6	9.1

ARREST RATES AND PERPETRATOR CHARACTERISTICS

Most of the perpetrators were not apprehended or identified. It must be clarified here that law enforcement authorities initially picked up several people for questioning in connection with some of the ritual pesticides reported. However, many of them were released without charge. The arrestees discussed in this study were thus the ones classified as “perpetrators” or “prime suspects.” The phrases/terms “perpetrators,” “prime suspects,” and “arrestees” are used interchangeably in this study to refer to suspects who (1) were convicted, (2) confessed, (3) were implicated by their accomplices, or (4) were caught red-handed (i.e., apprehended while in possession of fresh human body parts, or in the process of selling human body parts or using them for rituals). On average, there were more arrests in Ghana than in Kenya.

In Ghana, 68 of the people picked up by law enforcement authorities for questioning were classified as perpetrators or prime suspects. Of the 68 perpetrators or prime suspects, 51 were arrested and charged based on self-confession or the offenders being caught red-handed or being implicated by co-offenders. Only four convictions were reported. In the case of Kenya, merely 16 of those picked up and interrogated were classified as perpetrators or prime suspects. Eleven arrests and charges were based on self-confession or the confession of co-offenders. Just one conviction was reported in Kenya. There are certain vital information about ritual murderers that could be obtained only when they are arrested, prosecuted, and/or convicted or when

they confess. Unfortunately, in Kenya, most perpetrators of ritual murder (over 90%) are never caught, and many of the few who get apprehended do not confess. Consequently, information such as perpetrators' motivations, the victim-offender relationship, level of education, occupation, and socio-economic status/background, among others, could not be conclusively established among perpetrators in Kenya.

Almost all the offenders were males. In Ghana, only eight prime suspects were female, and in Kenya, none of the perpetrators was female. In both Ghana and Kenya, most of the perpetrators (approximately 60%) were aged between 20 and 39 years, and over 85% were unemployed and/or financially handicapped. Most of the murders involved multiple culprits, particularly in Ghana. The data show that, unlike other types of homicide, ritual pedicide involves strangers nearly as often as it involves family members and acquaintances. In Ghana, fathers, uncles, and stepfathers were the dominant offenders in cases where victims and perpetrators were known to be related. However, the involvement of close relatives in the perpetration of ritual pedicide was seemingly rare in Kenya.

The dominant motivation mentioned by the offenders who confessed in Ghana was pecuniary gain. Some were promised money in exchange for the supply of specific human body parts. Others, erroneously believing that every juju practitioner would be interested in buying human body parts, first murdered their victims before searching for prospective buyers such as juju practitioners. Some offenders had consulted juju specialists for some assistance or favors and had been instructed to provide specific body parts to be used for potent medicines capable of producing the desired effect. However, in Kenya, some of the few killers apprehended confessed that they killed in fulfillment of their obligations as members of devil worship or occult sects. Thus, the primary motivation was not pecuniary gain per se but the perceived general benefits that come with being zealous members of occult groups or devil-worshipping sects. Many of the residents in the Kenyan communities where the ritual pedicides occurred strongly believed that devil worship or occultism was the underlying cause of the murders. Tables 5 and 6 provide important general information on ritual pedicide perpetrators in the two countries.

Table 5: Information on 68 Perpetrators/Prime Suspects in Ghana

Variable	Number	Percentage
Gender		
Male	60	88.2
Female	8	11.8
Age		
Under 20	2	2.9
20 - 39	39	57.4
40 - 59	16	23.5
60+	7	10.3
Unknown	4	5.9
Victim-offender/arrestee relationship		
Related/acquainted	30	44.1
Non-related/non-acquainted	32	47.1
Unknown	6	8.8
Socio-economic background		
Unemployed and on low income	40	58.8
Employed/self-employed but on low income	20	29.4
Unknown	8	11.8
Level of education		
Illiterate	48	70.6
Educated	1	1.5
Unknown	19	27.9
Motivation for the pedicide		
Quick wealth	44	64.7
Power/protection against enemies	5	7.4
Others	2	3.0
Unknown	17	25.0

Table 6: Information on 16 Perpetrators/Prime Suspects in Kenya

Variable	Number	Percentage
Gender		
Male	16	100
Female	0	0
Age		
Under 20	2	12.5
20 - 39	7	43.8
40 - 59	3	18.8
60+	1	6.3
Unknown	3	18.8
Victim-offender/arrestee relationship		
Related/acquainted	8	50.0
Non-related/non-acquainted	5	31.3
Unknown	3	18.8
Socio-economic background		
Unemployed and on low income	9	56.3
Employed/self-employed but on low income	3	18.8
Unknown	4	25.0
Level of education		
Illiterate	13	81.3
Educated	1	6.3
Unknown	2	12.5
Motivation for the pedicide		
Quick wealth	1	6.3
Power/protection against enemies	2	12.5
Occult related	8	50.0
Unknown	5	31.3

OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION

The data also show that law enforcement agencies arrived at many of the crime scenes several hours after the discovery of the bodies had been reported to them. In some of the reports, enraged residents assaulted suspects or set their property ablaze out of frustration and lack of trust in law enforcement agencies. Episodes of ritual pedicide often resulted in protests by members of the affected communities who criticized the police and blamed the murders on their laxity and failure to investigate previous cases and apprehend perpetrators. In some cases, both in Ghana and Kenya, suspects who were caught red-handed by members of the community or confessed their involvement to residents were beaten up mercilessly. At least two suspects (one in Ghana and one in Kenya) were lynched by the mob before the police could intervene. Ritual pedicide cases were more prevalent in the western part of Ghana than in other areas of the country. In the case of Kenya, Kakamega County, also in the western part of the country, emerged as the epicenter of ritual pedicide.

LIST AND SUMMARY DESCRIPTION OF 30 REPORTS

Table 7 shows the captions of 17 of the 76 juju-driven child homicide reports/articles identified on the websites of the four local Ghanaian news outlets perused. Table 8 also provides the captions of 13 of the 49 ritual pedicide reports/articles retrieved from the selected local Kenyan media outlets. A summary of the selected reports/stories follows each table. To ensure that the article is not excessively lengthy, it has not been possible to present summaries of all the 125 reports/articles retrieved. Each of the 30 reports selected for illustration is unique in one way or another, hence the selection. The carefully selected reports together constitute a fair representation of the various circumstances under which the ritual pedicides occurred. Thus, the selected reports provide a clearer picture and a more comprehensive understanding of the nature of ritual pedicides in Ghana and Kenya. Most of the selected reports are ones in which arrests and confessions were made. For ethical reasons, the names of victims and arrestees have been excluded from the summaries even though this information was provided in the original reports. The summaries of the 30 selected reports have been presented chronologically. It must be mentioned that where a story was published more than once in the same selected media outlet, the caption of the newest/latest publication was used.

Table 7: Captions of 17 Ritual Pedicide Reports Publicized in the Ghanaian Media

Report number	Date published	Name of media	Headline/caption	Gender & age of victim (years)	Body part extracted
1	14/05/2012	<i>MyJoyOnline</i>	"10 held for suspected ritual murder"	Girl, 1	Vagina
2	11/09/2013	<i>Daily Graphic</i>	"Man kills nephew for rituals"	Boy, 15	Head
3	10/10/2013	<i>Daily Graphic</i>	"Gory: father beheads stepdaughter for ritual purposes"	Girl, 4	Head
4	25/04/2014	<i>MyJoyOnline</i>	"Dansoman police detain security man over ritual murder of 8-year-old-boy"	Boy, 8	Head and penis
5	10/01/2015	<i>MyJoyOnline</i>	"Wa police interrogate 5 over ritual murder"	Boy, 10	Head, right arm and both feet
6	20/05/2015	<i>Ghanaian Times</i>	"Sefwi rocked by ritual murders"	Girl, 8	Various body parts
7	03/11/2016	<i>Daily Graphic</i>	"Three arrested for alleged ritual murder"	Boy, 10	Penis, left arm, and kneecap
8	29/03/2017	<i>Daily Graphic</i>	"Dzita-Anyanui communities up against ritual murders in the area"	Boys & Girls, 7 - 13	Various body parts
9	26/04/2017	<i>Daily Graphic</i>	"Father kills son for rituals in Asankrangwa"	Boy, 6	Head and left leg
10	08/02/2018	<i>Daily Guide</i>	"Man Severs Boy's Head"	Boy, 12	Head
11	18/01/2019	<i>Daily Guide</i>	"4 arrested for murder"	Girl, 14	Draining of blood
12	28/06/2019	<i>Ghanaian Times</i>	"Irate youth set ablaze juju man's house over murder of girl"	Girl, 15	Limbs, vagina, and hair
13	17/09/2019	<i>Ghanaian Times</i>	"I killed my son for rituals - father confesses"	Boy, 6	Head
14	04/04/2021	<i>Daily Graphic</i>	"Kasoa: 2 teenagers arrested for alleged 'money ritual' murder"	Boy, 10	N/A
15	05/05/2021	<i>Daily Guide</i>	"4-year-old girl found dead; body parts missing at Ofinso."	Girl, 4	Head and other parts
16	26/06/2021	<i>Daily Graphic</i>	"Seven arrested over murder of 12-year-old boy"	Boy, 12	Head, penis, heart, kidney and intestines
17	31/08/2021	<i>Daily Guide</i>	"Three arrested over boy's ritual murder in Volta"	Boy, 12	Head

A SUMMARY DESCRIPTION OF THE ABOVE 17 REPORTS IN GHANA

Report/article number 1 concerned a one-and-a-half-year-old baby girl found in a manhole four days after her disappearance in a rural community in Ashanti Region. It is reported that the victim's mother went to take a bath, leaving the child alone in the bedroom. When she returned, the little girl was nowhere to be found. Four days after the baby's disappearance, her body was found floating in a manhole near her house. Ten people had been arrested and/or questioned in connection with the little girl's murder at the time the report was filed (MyJoyOnline, 2012).

In report number 2, a 22-year-old man was arrested in the Western Region for beheading his 15-year-old nephew to use the head for a ritual that would enable him to raise money to travel abroad. The suspect told law enforcement authorities that he invited the victim into his room, held him down, and beheaded him with the help of his (the suspect's) brother. The suspect, who initially denied any involvement in the murder, later confessed, stating that his nephew's spirit was haunting him. His accomplice was at large at the time of his arrest (Aklorbortu & Obuor, 2013).

Report number 3 concerned a four-year-old girl beheaded by his 45-year-old stepfather for a juju ritual in the Western Region. It is reported that after decapitating the girl, the suspect wrapped the head in a polythene (plastic) bag and headed for the bus station, apparently to send it to a juju-man for money rituals. A trail of blood led a passer-by to a room where the headless body of the victim was discovered. The individual immediately raised the alarm, resulting in neighbors chasing the suspect to the bus station and lynching him. (Aklorbortu & Arku, 2013; Owusu, 2022).

In report number 4, an eight-year-old boy was sent on an errand by his mother on Easter Sunday but he never returned. On the day the boy disappeared, he had been seen by some residents in the company of two strangers—a man and a woman. Two days after the child's disappearance, his mutilated body was found in a sewerage tank. The police arrested a security guard in the area where the child's body was found. They believed he had information crucial for their investigations (MyJoyOnline, 2014).

In report number 5, five men were arrested in the Upper West Region in connection with the murder of a 10-year-old boy. The victim went to the farm with his father and younger brother. While there, one of the suspects emerged from nowhere, snatched the victim's machete, and ran into the bush with it. In an effort to retrieve his cutlass, the youngster followed the assailant but never returned. A couple of days later, his dismembered body was discovered in the bush. Some of the arrestees had the victim's body parts in their possession at the time of their arrest (MyJoyOnline, 2015).

In report number 6, an irate youth in a town in the Western Region clashed with law enforcement authorities over the suspected ritual murders of an eight-year-old girl and two adult males in the area. The little girl is believed to have been murdered on her way to fetch water from a nearby stream. Irate youth in the community attempted to force their way into the chief's palace to lynch two suspects who were being given protection by the chief. Some residents attacked officers who had gone there to restore peace and order (Mohammed, 2015).

In report number 7, three persons, including a 65-year-old grandmother, were arrested in connection with the suspected ritual murder of a 10-year-old boy in the Eastern Region. The woman reported to the police that her grandson, with whom she lived in a rented bedroom, was missing. Suspiciously, the report was lodged three days after

the child's disappearance. A few days later, the victim's mutilated body was found in a bush. The woman was subjected to rigorous interrogation, leading to the arrest of two other persons. Authorities believed that the boy's grandmother sold him to unknown persons who killed him for rituals (Abbey, 2016).

Report number 8 highlighted a series of suspected ritual murders that hit one municipality in the Volta Region, sparking a massive demonstration by residents. Between September 2016 and March 2017, about six people in the area were found dead with missing body parts. The victims included children aged seven to 13 years. Some of the murders were blamed on fishermen who allegedly used the body parts for rituals that would guarantee bumper harvests in their fishing activities. The relentless killings and failure of the police to conduct serious investigations and arrest culprits triggered a massive demonstration (Anane, 2017).

In report number 9, a woman reported to the elders of the community that her six-year-old son had gone missing. Residents subsequently conducted a massive search, which yielded no positive results. A couple of days later, the boy's remains were found without the head and left leg. The victim's father, whom residents suspected of having a hand in the boy's murder, was invited to the Police Station. Upon rigorous interrogation, he confessed that he murdered the boy to send his body parts to a juju specialist for money rituals (Ghana News Agency, 2017; Opoku, 2017).

In report number 10, a 23-year-old man was arrested for being in possession of a fresh human head, which turned out to be that of a 12-year-old boy from a nearby town in the western part of Ghana. The victim was returning home from school when the perpetrator lured him with money to a nearby bush and beheaded him. He attempted to sell the human head to a juju-man, but the spiritualist raised the alarm, leading to the suspect's arrest. Upon interrogation, he named two other accomplices who were at large (Opoku, 2018).

In report number 11, a 14-year-old girl in the Central Region left home in the morning to visit friends but never returned. A search party later discovered her lifeless body in a nearby cemetery. The father advised the police to interrogate a 35-year-old man he suspected of abducting and killing his daughter. The suspect was apprehended at his hideout following a tipoff. Upon interrogation, he confessed that he committed the crime with three other persons for money rituals. He then led investigators to the residence of his accomplices, aged between 28 and 36, who were also arrested (Opoku, 2019; Gobah, 2019).

Report number 12 concerned a 15-year-old girl murdered in a ritualistic fashion during a short school vacation in the Ashanti Region. The victim, who was in boarding school had returned home for a short vacation when she disappeared. Approximately a week later, her mutilated body was found near an uncompleted building. It is reported that prior to this case, three females had been murdered in a similar fashion, and the police had done little to find the perpetrators. The house of a known juju-man, suspected of having a hand in the murders, was burned by some irate youth (Hope, 2019).

In report number 13, a tipoff led authorities to a cocoa farm where the decapitated body of a six-year-old boy was discovered. The victim's biological father was named as the perpetrator. The suspect was immediately arrested and, upon interrogation, confessed that he and other persons had been contracted to kill three boys for rituals and that he had had two 10-year-olds abducted and kept at the residence of an accomplice. The plan was thus to murder the two boys after killing his son. He then led

authorities to the accomplice's residence, where the two kidnapped boys were rescued (Boye, 2019; Daily Guide, 2019).

Report number 14 concerned two teenage boys, aged 16 and 17 years, who lured a 10-year-old boy in their community into an uncompleted building and killed him, intending to use his body parts for money rituals. The teenagers reportedly conceived the idea of killing someone for rituals after watching programs on various Ghana television channels that allowed spiritualists to advertise their trade and prowess in making people instant millionaires. The teenagers had a phone conversation with one spiritualist who supposedly instructed them to bring human body parts if they wanted the medicine to be effective (Frimpong, 2021; Bonney, 2021; Bampoe, 2021).

Report number 15 concerned a four-year-old girl whose lifeless body was found at a refuse dump in a semi-rural community in Ashanti Region. It was reported that the little girl was playing with her friends on 27th April 2021 when she disappeared. Approximately a week after the girl's disappearance, her mutilated body was discovered. A young man in his 20s, believed to be a *Sakawa Boy* (Internet fraudster), was charged with the murder. The accused was nearly lynched by some of the hundreds of angry residents who thronged the court premises when he appeared in court for the first time (Yorke, 2021; Daily Mail, 2021).

In report number 16, seven young men were arrested by the police in a farming community in the Volta Region over the ritual murder of a 12-year-old boy. Following the disappearance of the boy, authorities interrogated several suspects. One of the suspects confessed that he and several accomplices killed the victim for a ritual meant to fortify a fetish shrine that had been built for a new deity. They reportedly lured the unsuspecting young boy into the forest, where they wrestled him to the ground and murdered him. Five of the seven arrestees admitted their involvement in the crime (Achivors, 2021; Duodu, 2021a).

Case number 17 concerned a man in his mid-20s who decapitated a 12-year-old boy and dumped his headless body in a river in Volta Region. A trail of blood on the ground led some curious residents to the prayer camp of a 52-year-old prophetess. When they forced the door of the structure open, they found the suspect. Upon interrogation, the suspect confessed that the prophetess hired him to provide the head of a child for rituals. The suspect first incapacitated the victim by submerging him in the river before decapitating him. The self-styled prophetess and another female accomplice in her 60s were later arrested by the police (Duodu, 2021b; Daily Graphic, 2021).

Table 8: Captions of 13 Ritual Pesticide Reports Publicized in the Kenyan Media

Report number	Date published	Name of media	Headline/caption	Gender & age of victim (years)	Body parts extracted
1	18/08/2014	<i>The Standard</i>	"7-year-old boy killed, private parts removed"	Boy, 7	Private parts
2	2014	<i>The Standard</i>	"Satanists' target school kids in ritual murders"	Girl, 6 and 3 others	Undisclosed
3	01/11/2016	<i>Daily Nation</i>	"Naivasha residents fear emergence of cultism after killings of two minors"	2 Girls, 3	Right hand & others
4	2017	<i>The Standard</i>	"Ritual killings? Residents in shock as bodies of two people found with missing body parts"	Boy, 12	Left hand & front teeth
5	09/02/2018	<i>The Standard</i>	"RITUAL KILLING: Missing student's body found without heart, tongue and genitals"	Boy, Teenager	Heart, tongue, and penis
6	21/02/2018	<i>The Standard</i>	"Villagers lynch suspected ritual killer of two pupils"	Boy, 7 Girl, 6	Blood, eyes & other parts
7	05/04/2020	<i>Daily Nation</i>	"Girl, 13, found dead in Kisumu in suspected ritual killing"	Girl, 13	Undisclosed
8	07/04/2020	<i>The Star</i>	"Reprieve for man on death sentence for killing 4-year-old boy"	Boy, 4	Limbs (hands & feet)
9	14/01/2021	<i>Daily Nation</i>	"Angry residents burn Embu trader's house after missing boy found dead"	Boy, 4	Tongue, blood & other parts
10	19/01/2021	<i>Daily Nation</i>	"Tharaka Nithi girl's head severed in suspected ritual killing"	Girl, 9	Head
11	02/03/2021	<i>The Standard</i>	"Murang'a: Girl, 8, found dumped with missing body parts hours after she disappeared"	Girl, 8	Private parts and skin
12	16/06/2021	<i>Kenya News Agency</i>	"Governor condemns abduction, killing of a 13-year-old girl"	Girl, 13	Undisclosed
13	14/07/2021	<i>The Star</i>	"Witchcraft? Three bodies recovered after man confesses to killing 12"	2 Boys, 12 & 13, and 10 others	Ear and other parts

A SUMMARY DESCRIPTION OF THE ABOVE 13 REPORTS IN KENYA

Report/article number 1 concerned a seven-year-old boy whose body was found dumped in a nearby river in Laikipia County. The boy is said to have disappeared from home a few days before his body was found in and retrieved from the river. A post-mortem examination conducted showed that some sexual organs, specifically the penis and scrotum, were missing and that the boy died as a result of trauma caused by a blunt object on the left side of the head. No arrests had been made when the report was filed (Weru, 2014).

Report number 2 highlighted a series of child abduction and murder cases (at least four cases between March and September 2014) that residents and authorities believed bore the hallmarks of ritual homicide in Kakamega County. One of the victims, a six-year-old girl, was playing with her friends when an unknown man abducted and killed her. Another victim was a 12-year-old girl whose mutilated body was found dumped at the entrance of a church. Prior to these two murders, similar ritualistic murders involving a nine-year-old girl and a six-year-old boy had occurred in the same community. These murders led to several protests by residents (Wekesa, 2014; Inyanji, 2018).

Report number 3 described two separate cases involving two three-year-old girls who were abducted on separate dates within the same rural community in Nakuru County and murdered in a ritualistic fashion. In the first incident, the little girl was believed to have been abducted from her homestead by a stranger while her mother's attention was focused elsewhere. In the second incident, the girl disappeared after accompanying her grandmother to church. The grannie left her in the company of her (the victim's) cousin while she worshiped in the church building. It was during this period that the child slipped away. The two girls' dismembered bodies were found at a dumpsite (Mwangi & Wanja, 2016).

Report number 4 was about two separate incidents of suspected ritual murder in Nandi County. The victims were a 12-year-old boy and a 60-year-old man whose murders threw their villages into a state of extreme panic and shock. The 12-year-old victim vanished from home one Monday. A week after the boy's disappearance, his dismembered body was found dumped in a maize plantation near his father's homestead. His face had also been perforated several times with a blunt object (Jelimo & Inyanji, 2017; Kajilwa, 2018).

In report number 5, a teenager (a form four student) in boarding school was sent home for school fees in a town in Nandi County but never arrived home. A couple of days later, his dismembered body was found dumped in a tea plantation near his house. Since he was in boarding school, his parents did not notice his disappearance for two days. The school authorities who sent him home for school fees had also presumed that he had arrived home safely and had thus not made any effort to look for him (Jelimo, 2018).

Report number 6 concerned a six-year-old girl and a seven-year-old boy killed in a ritualistic fashion in the same community in Meru County. The six-year-old pupil had left her classroom sometime in the afternoon to get mangoes from the school farm when he was murdered. The second victim had been sent together with his three siblings by his mother to fetch water from a nearby stream when he was attacked. His siblings managed to identify the perpetrator as their cousin. The suspect, who allegedly confessed to killing the two children to use their blood for occult purposes, was lynched by irate residents (Manyara, 2018).

Report number 7 was about a 13-year-old girl ritualistically murdered in Kisumu County. The victim delivered water to her mother, who was ploughing her farmland a few hundred meters away from their house but never returned home. Her mother was alarmed when she returned home from the farm at 6 pm to find out that her daughter had not arrived home. Early the following morning, her badly mutilated body was found lying by the roadside. According to residents of the town, such ritualistic murders were on the rise in the area. They claimed the current case was the eighth in the area since 2010 (Raballa, 2020).

In report number 8, a four-year-old boy was taken to his nursery school by his auntie because his father, with whom he was living at the time, had left home early in the morning to work on his farmland. The father returned from the farm only to realize that his son was neither at home nor in school. The boy was later found murdered in a ritualistic fashion on 5 March 2012. A man, believed to be a member of a devil worship sect, was convicted of the murder and sentenced to death in 2015. However, capital punishment was substituted with a 30-year jail sentence on appeal in 2020 (Kubwa, 2020).

In report number 9, a four-year-old boy was ritually murdered and dumped in a river in Embu County. Approximately three weeks after his disappearance in December 2020, a 16-year-old boy believed to be the victim's cousin, confessed to the police that the boy was killed by a local businessman and other accomplices for rituals. He further mentioned that he was promised a monetary reward to lure the victim to the riverside, where he was killed. He led investigators to the crime scene, where the victim's remains were retrieved. The businessman was arrested, and angry residents set his houses ablaze. This was the second ritual pedicide victim to be retrieved from the same area in three months (Munene, 2021; Mugo, 2021).

Report number 10 concerned a nine-year-old victim who used to deliver fresh milk to a 94-year-old witch doctor every morning for a fee in Tharaka Nithi County. The girl was in church for a Sunday service when the witch doctor went to call her to collect a milk bottle, but she never returned. Suspecting foul play, church members called the police, who conducted a search on the juju-man's residence, during which the missing girl's mutilated body and several juju-related objects were found. It emerged that the head was to be used for a purported potent medicine that would protect a 32-year-old client against witch attacks (Njeru, 2021a, 2021b).

Report number 11 concerned an eight-year-old girl whose dismembered body was found dumped in a tea plantation in Murang'a County. The girl's mother had traveled, leaving her in the care of her (the victim's) father. The father left her alone in their shop located in front of their house as he went inside the main compound to prepare dinner. When he returned, his daughter was nowhere to be found. Some residents conducted a house-to-house search during which one of the victim's pair of socks was found in the bedroom of a 34-year-old man. Later that evening, the girl's mutilated body was discovered, and the 34-year-old man was arrested (Gachane, 2021).

In report number 12, the dismembered body of a 13-year-old girl, who had gone missing about three days earlier in Kakamega County, was discovered. The victim, who lived with her grandmother, had gone to do her hair but never returned. Her maimed body was found dumped in a remote location following a three-day search. Prior to this murder case, about eight children had been killed under similar circumstances in one year.irate residents held massive demonstrations against law enforcement agencies in the area for failing to protect the community (Cherono, 2021).

In report number 13, a young man confessed to murdering 12 children and sucking the blood out of some of his victims in a five-year killing spree within Nairobi and its environs. According to reports, the perpetrator was arrested in Nairobi following the discovery of the mutilated remains of two boys aged 12 and 13 years in a thicket. During interrogation, the suspect confessed to killing the two children and at least 10 others in a five-year killing spree for ritual/occult purposes. The suspect led investigators to some of the locations where the other children were supposedly murdered and dumped—at least two bodies had been retrieved at the time the report was filed (Ombati, 2021; Lewis, 2021).

THE PERSPECTIVES OF INTERVIEWEES

As mentioned, the interviews primarily sought to flesh out the findings or piece together the missing links. They focused on issues such as: (1) why the majority of victims are children or why children are generally targeted; (2) why a ritual pedicide usually involves multiple culprits; (3) why perpetrators are mostly young adult males aged 20 to 39; (4) why most ritual pedicides are committed in rural areas; (5) why both victims and perpetrators tend to have low socio-economic backgrounds; (6) whether parents whose children get murdered as a result of their apparent poor supervision should be prosecuted; (7) why the majority of perpetrators are not apprehended; (8) the possible factors contributing to the persistence of juju-driven child homicide in Ghana and Kenya; (9) the extent of the effectiveness of the justice system in dealing with ritual pedicide cases; and (10) the steps that must be taken to combat the problem. It is worth reiterating that a summary of the data gathered from the analysis of the media reports was shared with the participants prior to the interviews.

It must be emphasized that the interviewees' views are incorporated into the discussion. Again, participants' voices or direct quotes from interviewees have not been integrated into the discussion to avoid producing an excessively lengthy paper. This is considered reasonable as the media content analysis was the main approach, and the interviews were only meant to provide the missing links and facilitate a better appreciation of the findings from the media content analysis.

DISCUSSION

RITUAL PEDICIDE RATES

The data suggest that an average of 9.4 children fell victim to ritual pedicide in Ghana each year between 2012 and 2021. A report on violent crime statistics in Ghana between 2012 and 2018 indicates that an average of 548 intentional homicides were recorded annually in the country within that period (see Tankebe & Boakye, 2019; Statistics & Information Technology Unit, 2018). If it is assumed that all the ritual pedicide cases reported in the media were captured in the police official report, then it would be reasonable to assume that ritual pedicide formed approximately 1.7% of all homicides committed annually in the country between 2012 and 2018. In the case of Kenya, the data indicate that an average rate of 6.6 ritual pedicides occurred annually during the study period. A police crime report spanning the period 2016–2018 suggests that an average of 1,986 intentional homicide cases (including pedicides and infanticides) were recorded in the country each year (Kenya National Police Service, 2018). This, in a way, means that ritual pedicide formed approximately 0.33% of all the murders that were reported in the country each year.

It is tempting to presume that these figures are insignificant. Still, considering that these data are drawn from just four electronic media outlets in each country, it would

be premature to make such a presumption. It must be reiterated that the number of ritual pedicide cases identified in the media and analyzed in this study could be just the thin end of the wedge. Thus, because ritual murders are typically well-planned, not all incidents come to the attention of the media and the public (Adinkrah, 2005). It is therefore possible, as some of the interviewees pointed out, that the selected media outlets may not have reported all the episodes that occurred in the two countries within the study period. Some victims may have been covertly buried by their attackers after harvesting the desired body parts, and the incidents may have been classified as missing child cases. Other juju-involved murders may have been mistakenly classified as normal murders or just accidents. Besides, some ritual pedicide cases may have been reported by the selected news outlets under captions that did not contain any of the search words/terms and may have been missed during the search process. Other relevant pedicide cases may have been reported in print editions only.

WHY ARE CHILDREN TARGETED?

Some interviewees expressed various views as to why most ritual murder victims are children—approximately 58.8% in Ghana and 64.7% in Kenya. According to many interviewees, one important reason is that children are easy prey. Indeed, academics such as Daigle (2017) and Hough (1987) have established that crime targets are usually those who are already vulnerable. Therefore, the fact that children, generally, are unable to physically repel physical assaults makes them perfect targets. There is also the notion that some types of rituals or juju medicines are more potent and effective if the body parts of young persons are used. As Adinkrah (2005, p. 48) notes, “the flesh and blood of young sacrificial victims [are believed to] have the greatest potency and purity and that the vitality, strength, and age of youth create a more powerful medicine.” This perception, perhaps, stems from the Ghanaian and Kenyan and, indeed, the African concept of virginity (Owusu, 2022). Thus, there is a widespread belief among various communities in Africa that virgins are pure or magical human beings (Leclerc-Madlala, 2002; Owusu, 2022), and for this reason, a juju ritual or medicine is more likely to produce the desired effect if a virgin or an item directly linked to a virgin is involved or engaged (Owusu, 2022). Children, as some of the interviewees noted, may thus be targeted for juju rituals because they are perceived to be sexually inactive and, therefore, more likely to be virgins than adults.

THE ENVIRONMENT OF RITUAL PEDICIDE

The majority of ritual pedicide victims are of low socio-economic background (i.e., from poor families). Explaining the reasons for this trend, almost all the interviewees mentioned that children from affluent families usually have better protection and security, as they generally live in secured, usually gated, environments in urban communities. Parents or guardians often drive them to and from their school premises. Others use school buses, usually picking them up and dropping them off in front of their houses. They are, therefore, less exposed to ritually motivated attacks. Besides, most ritual pediticides occur in rural communities where the majority of the people are financially handicapped. Consequently, victims are more likely to have poor or low socio-economic backgrounds. This raises the question as to why ritual pediticides occur mostly in rural and semi-rural communities.

It has been noted by several academics and researchers that, unlike other forms of murder, ritual murder is always perpetrated clandestinely (Adinkrah, 2005; Owusu, 2022). Additionally, it requires a significant amount of time to complete the procedure—trailing the target, overpowering and incapacitating the victim, meticulously

harvesting the needed body parts, disposing of the rest of the remains, and fleeing the scene unnoticed (Owusu 2022). Therefore, according to the interviewees, committing such a crime in crowded places significantly increases the chances of being detected and apprehended. This makes urban centers, which usually have large populations, constant movements, and visible police presence, unattractive locations for offenders to carry out such attacks. Rural areas thus become an ideal location for the commission of ritual pedicides as they offer the amount of time required to commit the deed, an appropriate place to easily dispose of the remains of victims, and sufficient time to leave the scene without being detected (Owusu, 2022).

WHY PARENTS ARE NOT PROSECUTED FOR CHILD NEGLECT

The data suggest that most of the ritual pedicide victims (particularly those aged below 10 years) were abducted and murdered while playing outside their houses unsupervised, running errands for family members and neighbors, or going to or returning home from school unaccompanied. This suggests that poor supervision or “child neglect” is a significant contributing factor for juju-driven child homicides. It thus seems surprising that parents and caregivers whose apparent poor supervision resulted in their children/wards’ abduction and murder were not prosecuted by the relevant authorities in the two countries. However, during the interview, various experts and academics argued that the question as to whether or not the practice of letting children under 10 years move about in the community “unsupervised” is tantamount to child neglect should be considered within the context of the community or environment in which it occurs. They further maintained that in a society known or considered by its members to be peaceful and safe, such a practice may be acceptable even if inadvisable. In fact, in a recent study that sought to establish parents’ or caregivers’ perception of child neglect in Ghana, Manful and Abdullah (2021) reported that none of the participants mentioned that allowing young children to move about in the community unsupervised or by themselves was a form of child neglect.

THE MOST FREQUENT PERPETRATORS OF RITUAL PEDICIDE AND WHY

Research shows that relatives and acquaintances perpetrate most child homicides (Stöckl et al., 2017; UNICEF, 2014; UNODC, 2019). However, the present data show that unlike other major categories of homicide where victims and offenders are usually related or acquainted, ritual pedicides involve nearly equal numbers of strangers and relatives (and acquaintances). Addressing the question of why the most frequent perpetrators are young adult males aged 20 to 39, many of the interviewees noted that this disturbing development is prompted, to a significant extent, by the increasing population of young adults in Ghana and Kenya, and the unending socio-economic adversities such as widespread unemployment and concomitant low-income among the youth. Thus, the considerable economic hardship among Ghanaian and Kenyan youth may have induced more young people than middle-aged and older persons to engage in the human body parts and money ritual business to guarantee economic success.

Even though the data suggest that ritual pedicides are almost always committed by unemployed, poor, and/or uneducated folks, many of the interviewees suggested that the extent of the involvement of wealthy or educated people could be significant. They argued that the body hunters (those who do the killing) who happen to be the ones usually apprehended are many a time not the real brain behind the killing, but rather greedy wealthy businesspeople, politicians, and other people in positions of authority who tend to hire poor young men. This view reinforces Bukuluki’s (2014, p.

2) claim that perpetrators of ritual child homicide “include the person intending to sacrifice, an agent hired to execute the kidnapping or trafficking of a child to be sacrificed, and a “ritual facilitator” or “a fraudulent traditional healer.”

RITUAL PEDICIDE AS A MULTIPLE OFFENDER CRIME

The data support the findings of existing studies that a ritual murder typically involves multiple perpetrators (Adinkrah, 2005; Bukuluki, 2014; Labuschagne, 2004; Owusu, 2022). In most of the cases where perpetrators or prime suspects were apprehended, the killings were carried out by two or more persons working as a team. The interviewees proposed various theories to explain why a single ritual pedicide usually involves co-conspirators or multiple offenders. One of the major theories is that the amount of energy and physicality involved in kidnapping, constraining, and extracting body parts or draining the blood of victims may necessarily require a team effort. It is also suggested that co-offending ensures a division of labor and may provide some degree of comfort to perpetrators, knowing they will not have to endure punishment and shame alone should they be arrested (Adinkrah, 2005; Owusu, 2022). The fact that ritual pedicide, most of the time, involves co-conspirators reinforces the extent of deliberation or planning that goes into the commission of the crime. This, according to some of the experts interviewed, may explain why ritual murder cases are difficult to solve in Africa.

DOMINANT MOTIVATIONS AND DRIVING FORCES FOR RITUAL PEDICIDE

There is no question that different factors may account for the commission and persistence of ritual homicide in Ghana and Kenya. This part of the discussion focuses on some of the elements that the interviewees believed are the motivations and driving forces for ritual murder in general and ritual pedicide in particular in African settings.

Economic Hardship or Poverty

Economic hardship, mainly caused by unemployment and low wages (particularly among the youth), was identified by most of the participants as one of the significant triggers of ritual pedicide, particularly in Ghana. The unemployment and poverty elements are bolstered by the fact that almost all the perpetrators or prime suspects were unemployed and/or on a low income. Many young adults in Africa are jobless or on a low income. Various reports on youth unemployment and underemployment in Ghana suggest that about 12% of young adults are unemployed, and more than 50% are underemployed (Dadzie et al., 2020; Ghana Statistical Service, 2017). A report released by the Institute of Economic Affairs (2020) also indicates that Kenya's youth unemployment and underemployment rates are high. It further notes that the unemployment rates among persons aged between 20–24, 25–29, and 30–34 years, are 19%, 9%, and 4.6% respectively.

However, the even bigger problem, according to some of the interviewees, is that the wages received by most of the people in employment are nothing to write home about. Thus, wages for most jobs are exceedingly low. These mass unemployment and low wage phenomena and associated economic adversities have driven some economically deprived youth, particularly in Ghana, “to engage in the nefarious activity of killing and procuring body parts for sale” (Adinkrah, 2005, p. 49). Thus, with no hope of realizing their aspiration of being financially or economically successful through legitimate employment, many young adults engage in ritual murders with the hope of alleviating their socio-economic hardships.

The New Consumerist Ethos

Various academics and commentators have linked the persistence of ritual pedicides, particularly in Ghana, to a new consumerist ethos (Adinkrah, 2005; Darko, 2015; Parish, 2001, 2011; Meyer, 1998, 2001). This ethos “is marked by the unbridled quest for material success and the ostentatious display of opulence in the form of handsomely furnished mansions, luxury automobiles, electronics, clothes, jewelry, and other material trappings” (Adinkrah, 2005, p. 50). This burning desire has encouraged greed and the acceptance of reprehensible means of wealth procurement. This social context, where wealth or material success is pursued by any possible means, “intersects with traditional religious belief systems where it is widely believed that supernatural entities have an interest in, and influence upon, human affairs, including material prosperity” (Adinkrah, 2005, p. 50).

The consumerist ethos phenomenon is reinforced or boosted by the emerging norm in most African societies, where wealth is associated with respect, admiration, power, and authority. Thus, an affluent person is viewed as a “Big Man” and a respectable person, no matter how he obtains his possessions (Neal, 1966; Owusu, 2022). Besides, in most African societies, people hardly question whether a wealthy person is honest or not or investigate how individuals become rich overnight. Therefore, a “Big Man,” regardless of whether or not he is educated, intelligent, or honest, is automatically accepted as a leader. It is, therefore, not surprising that today’s young adults try to obtain vast sums of money by any means they know of, including juju and ritual pedicide.

Preoccupation with Juju

Obsession with juju and occultism and the constant promotion of these beliefs on local television and radio stations have also been identified as a significant trigger for ritual pedicide in both Ghana and Kenya. In both countries, there are countless posters/billboards and constant TV and radio advertisements or programs about the activities of people claiming to have the mystical power to solve virtually every problem afflicting potential clients and to change their destiny from bad to good (Appau & Bonsu, 2020; Okwaro, 2010). Posters/billboards usually display the mobile phone numbers and locations of the relevant spiritualists, and a long list of the various magical services they offer. Such posters and TV/radio programs promote the propagation of the juju belief and its associated violence against vulnerable groups such as children.

The persistence of ritual pedicides has also been blamed, to some extent, on the massive portrayal of juju or occultism and associated rituals as an efficient wealth-guaranteeing religious practice in African movies. Thus, such movies often present rituals involving human body parts “as a way of obtaining wealth and status when all other routes to fulfilling such desires have become impossible” (Warner, 2011, p. 745). Some interviewees noted that many young adults on the continent are widely exposed to such movies.

The “Sakawa Boys” (Cybercriminals) and Ritual Pesticide

In Ghana, the increasing activities of a group of cybercriminals, popularly known as *Sakawa Boys*, are viewed by many of the interviewees and several academics and researchers as a significant factor for the persistence and escalation of ritual pedicides. The *Sakawa Boys*’ cyber fraud is “associated with occult religious rituals believed to compel victims to accede to the perpetrators’ requests” (Oduro-Frimpong, 2014, p. 132; see also Quartey, 2019; Warner, 2011). *Sakawa Boys*, who are mostly

below 35 years old and unemployed, are very popular in Ghana. They are known for their lavish lifestyle, including driving expensive vehicles and living in luxurious houses (Darko, 2015; Owusu, 2022). Many *Sakawa Boys* believe that consulting juju practitioners for rituals and potent medicines can speed up and enhance their success in the internet fraud business (Oduro-Frimpong, 2014; Warner, 2011). According to Oduro-Frimpong (2014) and Warner (2011), such rituals may involve sleeping in coffins at cemeteries, carrying coffins during the night to remote places, and producing human body parts for powerful medicine, among others.

In a five-minute video documentary/report on *Sakawa Boys* in Offinso (a popular town in Ghana), produced by a *Joy News* reporter, an interviewee mentioned that he once saw a group of six young men carrying a white coffin in one of the town's cemeteries in the dead of night. According to the eyewitness, all six men were wearing only boxer shorts and nothing else. The documentary also captures a group of *Sakawa Boys* showing off in a convoy of luxurious modern vehicles (of course, by Ghanaian standards). One of them was heard making the following statement in the Akan language: "*Offinso na yewo no-oo; wontumi nnom mogya a, wontumi nni yen akyi*" (We are in Offinso; you can't follow/join us (i.e., you can't become a member of our group) if you are unable/unwilling to drink blood) (MyJoyOnline, 2021).

Failure to Realize the Futility of Juju

One academic has rightly argued that juju rituals and medicines, even if they work, have a strikingly unimpressive success rate (Warner, 2011). Yet, juju beliefs and religious practices persist and seem to have intensified in Ghana and Kenya over the years. One thus wonders why, with experience, people still do not realize the futility and vainness of juju. Some of the interviewees' responses suggested that the reasons for the persistence of the belief in the protective and destructive power of juju are multifarious. Some of the outcomes aimed at by juju practitioners do occur, though this may just be a mere coincidence; people pay more attention to positive cases than negative ones. Other participants also suggested that humankind often ignores things that are not consistent with, or which run counter to, their theories and perceptions. There is also the tendency on the part of juju practitioners and the clients themselves to devise seemingly convincing explanations when a juju ritual or medicine fails to produce the desired effect. For instance, such magical miscarriages or fiascos are, as Sarpong (1974) notes, often attributed to the supplicant's failure to follow meticulously the practitioner's prescription or powerful hostile forces counteracting the ritual or medicine.

THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM'S RESPONSE

Most of the ritual pedicide cases retrieved and analyzed in this study were not solved. However, as one interviewee rightly cautioned, it is possible that more arrests were made and that suspects would be prosecuted/convicted in some of the relevant cases soon or sometime after the publication of those episodes. Notwithstanding this important caution, analysis of crime data shows most crimes reported to the police in Ghana and Kenya are not solved (Tankebe & Boakye, 2020; National Council on the Administration of Justice, 2016). This has been blamed, to a significant extent, on the negligence, unprofessionalism, and corruption within law enforcement agencies, the exceedingly slow pace and corrupt nature of the judicial process, and lack of resources (Appiahene-Gyamfi, 2009; Atuguba et al., 2006; Andvig & Barasa, 2011; Overseas Security Advisory Council, 2020). The reports/cases identified and analyzed (some of which were backed by audio-visual footage or recordings) show that in most cases,

the crime scenes were poorly managed by police officers and investigators, and victims' remains were removed and conveyed to the morgue without diligent forensic examination of the body or the crime scene for vital pieces of information and evidence such as murder weapons, fingerprints, and other DNA samples.

There is also overwhelming evidence of corruption within the Ghana and Kenya judiciary. Besides, justice delivery is exceedingly slow in the two countries (Atuguba et al., 2006; Ndirangu, 2018; Osse & Asiamah, 2020). For instance, in a quite recent study that sought to establish the efficiency and effectiveness of the Ghana criminal justice system in dealing with reported criminal cases, Tankebe and Boakye (2020) found that, on average, only about 15% of all crimes reported to the police are prosecuted in any given year. The study also suggests that most prosecutions initiated in court (approximately 63%) are not completed. In Kenya, between 2012 and 2013, the National Police Service recorded 221,478 criminal cases, 68,257 of which constituted serious crimes. However, just under a quarter (precisely 54,368) of the cases were prosecuted. Of the cases prosecuted, only about 14,905 ended in convictions (The Judiciary, 2013, p. 80; National Council on the Administration of Justice, 2016). This information suggests that only about 7% of all criminal cases reported to the police in Kenya each year is likely to end in conviction. It has been reported that by the close of 2016, the number of cases that had been pending for more than five years in Kenya High Courts alone had reached 48,173 (Daily Nation, 2018a, 2018b; Ndirangu, 2018).

It is therefore not surprising that in 2015, about 30 magistrates and judges in Ghana were suspended and/or dismissed by the Judicial Council (the regulatory body for judges in the country) after they were accused and found guilty of bribery and corruption following a diligent investigation by a seasoned undercover investigative journalist (see Owusu, 2022). In Kenya, it was announced by the Chief Justice in 2018 that a number of magistrates and support staff within the country's judiciary had been dismissed over corruption and integrity issues, and many more judges were being probed (Ndirangu, 2018).

A lack of resources exacerbates the justice system's weaknesses. It is undeniable that some of the essential contemporary tools for resolving puzzling crimes are deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) technology and other forensics. Sadly, only a few modern and reliable forensic laboratories and other modern crime investigation equipment exist within the Ghana and Kenya police services (Amankwaa et al., 2019; Baneseh, 2018; Nderitu, 2018). Potential offenders "are unlikely to be deterred if they perceive an inefficient and ineffective response from criminal justice agencies" (Tankebe & Boakye, 2020). There is, therefore, little doubt that the ineffectiveness of the heavily under-resourced Ghana and Kenya justice systems give potential ritual murderers the confidence to mutilate innocent children and repeat murderers the nerve to carry on with their killing escapades, knowing that there are extremely slim chances, if any, of being apprehended to face justice.

THE WAY FORWARD

Since the evidence shows that the juju belief and associated ritual pedicides are encouraged primarily by juju practitioners and occult capos, the activities and practices of traditional spiritualists and occult-related sects should be brought under closer scrutiny (Owusu, 2022). According to the interviewees, the police and other law enforcement agencies should be authorized to pay regular and unannounced visits to the shrines of traditional spiritualists and the meeting grounds of dubious religious sects. The public, particularly people in rural communities, should be encouraged and empowered, mainly through the media, churches, schools, and

hospitals/clinics, to report suspicious activities of persons claiming to be or known to be juju specialists and occult capos. Authorities must create an environment where people can report such suspicious activities in an easy, confidential, and safe way. Spiritualists and religious sects found to be engaging in unlawful activities should be severely punished through official legal proceedings to serve as a deterrent.

In the view of most of the interviewees, the promotion of formal education at both the primary and secondary levels could also be an essential tool in the fight against ritual murder (particularly ritual pedicide), as it facilitates and ensures the removal of ignorance, and provides people with a scientific view of the world and life. There is no doubt that some people will still hold juju beliefs regardless of their level of education. However, formal education, as the participants insisted, remains a vital weapon in the fight against ritual murder in Africa, as educated persons (even if they believe in the power of juju) may not be easily tempted to partake in the killing of people to harvest their body parts for rituals. This is because they tend to better appreciate the legislation, the rights and duties of individuals in society, and the repercussions for committing such crimes. In addition to the promotion of formal education, African governments must embark on intensive nationwide public education campaigns on the ills and vainness of juju or occultism. More significant part of the nationwide ritual murder awareness campaigns should target parents and caregivers. They should be made to realize how unsafe their environment could be for children and the need to ensure that children are adequately supervised at all times. Such campaigns may be conducted through the radio, which is the most accessible and reliable medium for distributing information in rural African communities, as well as local churches, schools, health facilities, and NGOs.

The effectiveness and efficiency of a nation's criminal justice system are essential for preventing or reducing crime in society. To ensure swift intervention of law enforcement authorities in criminal cases and effective investigations, personnel within relevant State agencies should undertake regular training programs relating to good crime scene management practices and homicide investigations. It is imperative that the State provide law enforcement agencies and the judiciary with modern tools and facilities needed for the effective execution of their duties. Another approach that may help prevent or reduce the rate of ritual pedicides in Africa is the creation of productive employment and decent jobs with sustainable earnings for young adults.

LIMITATIONS

The reliance on reports of ritual murder in just eight electronic news outlets as a data source limits the generalizability of the results. Thus, the cases retrieved may represent a gross underestimation of the scale of ritual pedicide in Africa, as the selected news outlets may not have reported all ritually motivated cases in the two countries during the study period. It is also possible that some of the murders categorized as ritual murder and analyzed in this study were not ritually motivated but deceptively executed with traits of a ritual killing. Thus, some calculating murderers may decide to remove certain body parts of their victims to deceive law enforcement authorities into believing that the murders were ritually motivated and, consequently, divert attention from themselves if they are not generally known to be people engaged in ritualistic activities.

Unfortunately, it is always going to be challenging to decisively determine whether a particular murder is ritualistic or juju-related in the absence of a confession from the offender. The interesting truth, however, is that the extraction of body parts in normal murder cases in both Ghana and Kenya is very rare. This makes the

“dismemberment” or “missing body parts” criterion for identifying ritual homicide cases a credible approach. Admittedly, not every juju-driven homicide or ritual murder involves the extraction of the victim’s blood and/or body parts (La Fontaine, 2012), and not every murder with missing body parts of the victim may necessarily be ritually motivated (Owusu, 2022). This notwithstanding, the criteria adopted in this study for determining or identifying juju-involved murders are those generally accepted and used in Ghana, Kenya, and other African countries.

CONCLUSION

Ritual pedicides are widespread, occurring not only in Ghana and Kenya but in many other parts of Africa. This crime is fueled by the African’s obsession or preoccupation with juju or occultism, burning desire for material prosperity and power, and overemphasis on supposed forces of darkness (Owusu, 2022). Thus, in their bid to acquire wealth overnight and realize other aspirations such as longevity and protection against witches and wizards, many African youth, particularly those in Ghana and Kenya, consult dubious juju practitioners or join dangerous religious sects. Disturbingly, one of the ultimate consequences of these obsessions and excessive ambitions and desires is ritual pedicide. Unfortunately, it would be very difficult to persuade certain Africans to disengage themselves from the juju belief, as freedom of religion remains a fundamental right in democratic societies. However, African governments have a duty to ensure the enforcement of laws that prohibit ritual murder and other forms of violence. Admittedly, since juju beliefs and the perceived power of juju rituals/medicines seem to be deeply ingrained in the Ghanaian and Kenyan culture, an attempt to combat ritual pedicide cannot be realized through legislative actions and the criminal justice system alone but entails a multifaceted approach by government, NGOs, and religious institutions.

Despite its shortcomings, this study offers important insights into juju-involved child homicide in Ghana and Kenya. It shows how the juju and homicide discourse manifests itself in African societies, as well as the various factors that contribute to the persistence of the juju belief and concomitant homicides. The study thus serves as a foundation for further informed engagement with the ritual pedicide or ritual murder subject. It also enhances awareness of this disturbing phenomenon and encourages support for the enactment and/or enforcement of children’s rights protection laws in Africa. By establishing the extent of ritual pedicide in Ghana and Kenya and indicating the circumstances under which such homicides are likely to be perpetrated, African States will be well-equipped to devise appropriate and effective preventive policies and strategies to combat the problem.

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