

'Superstitious Beliefs' and Human Security in Tabora Region of Tanzania

By

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to determine how superstitious beliefs influenced people's perceptions of security and their general health status. Its main objective was to investigate how supernatural beliefs impacted the advancement of human security in the Tabora Region. Social Learning Theory and Welsh Security Theory were used to explore how cultural beliefs shaped personal and community security patterns. The study adopted an explanatory sequential design to assess the effects of superstitious beliefs on human security in the region. A total of 204 participants were selected through a combination of simple random sampling and purposive sampling to ensure demographic representation. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and semi-structured interview guides. Thematic analysis was employed to interpret qualitative data, while quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The study yielded valuable insights for policymakers, community leaders, and health practitioners by revealing how superstitious beliefs influenced human security, thus supporting the design of more culturally sensitive and effective interventions. The findings indicated that superstitious beliefs were deeply entrenched in Tabora, with witchcraft being the most dominant. These beliefs negatively affected human security by fostering fear, violence, social exclusion, and limited access to modern healthcare. The study recommended the implementation of educational programs aimed at promoting critical thinking to reduce superstition in rural communities. It also called for stronger legal protections against witchcraft-related violence, improved community policing, and the integration of modern healthcare with traditional medical practices.

Keywords: Superstition, Human Security, Traditional Beliefs, Social Learning, Tabora, Tanzania

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Introduction

Throughout history, superstitious beliefs have shaped human behavior and societal norms. Across the globe, such beliefs remain embedded within cultural traditions, often intertwined with local customs and values. People use superstitions to make sense of both natural and human-made phenomena, influencing critical aspects of life such as healthcare, conflict resolution, and communal safety (Geschiere, 2013). These beliefs manifest differently across regions, rooted in diverse historical and cultural contexts. In Sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, belief in witchcraft is widespread and frequently invoked to explain misfortunes, illnesses, or unexplained events (Ashforth, 2005). Such beliefs can have harmful consequences, particularly when individuals often women, children, and the elderly are accused of sorcery. These accusations lead to social exclusion, violence, and, in extreme cases, death, thereby fracturing community cohesion and perpetuating fear.

In the Mediterranean region, the concept of the "evil eye" illustrates how superstition can shape behavior and relationships. Seen as a source of misfortune often driven by envy, this belief prompts protective rituals and charms. Although seemingly benign, such practices can cause paranoia, tension, and mistrust within communities (Pappas, 2014). Superstitions also significantly impact health behaviors. In many African societies, individuals prefer traditional healers over modern medical care due to beliefs that illnesses are caused by curses or witchcraft. For example, in some communities, people seek traditional treatment for conditions like HIV/AIDS, attributing them to supernatural causes (Kunda, 2019). This often results in delayed treatment, deterioration in health, and preventable deaths.

Governance and law enforcement are affected by superstition. In many Sub-Saharan countries, traditional beliefs operate alongside formal legal systems, sometimes creating tensions. Leaders may exploit witchcraft fears to consolidate power or eliminate opposition, embedding these beliefs into political processes (Ellis & Ter Haar, 2004). Legislative efforts to protect alleged witchcraft victims often meet resistance from communities that see such laws as threats to cultural norms (Rasmussen, 2000). The Tabora Region of Tanzania offers a compelling context for studying these dynamics. Deeply rooted beliefs in witchcraft shape how residents interpret illness, death, and hardship. As Mesaki (2009) notes, heightened suspicion in the community particularly during times of crisis often leads to the scapegoating of marginalized individuals, especially elderly women.

Given these dynamics, Tabora is a valuable case study for examining how superstitions affect human security. Witchcraft-related accusations, resistance to medical interventions, and community mistrust underscore the importance of culturally grounded solutions (Mosha & Msuya, 2021). The region's rural demographics and limited access to healthcare and education further reinforce traditional belief systems (URT, 2020).

Statement of the Problem

Despite efforts by government and non-governmental organizations to modernize healthcare and enforce legal protections, superstitious beliefs particularly those related to witchcraft remain deeply entrenched in the Tabora Region of Tanzania. These superstitions have disproportionately targeted vulnerable groups especially elderly women who suffer physical violence, social exclusion, and in some cases, death. While previous studies such as those by

Mesaki (2009) and Green (2015) have explored the origins of witchcraft and its health implications, they fall short of addressing the broader implications for human security, law enforcement, and community development in specific contexts like Tabora.

Current interventions have largely failed to address the cultural foundations that sustain these beliefs, leading to persistent social instability and human rights violations. There remains a significant research gap in understanding how superstitions directly affect human security in the region. This study, therefore, seeks to assess the prevalence and impact of superstitious beliefs on human security in Tabora Region, with the goal of generating culturally sensitive insights that can inform effective policy, governance, and community-based development strategies.

Literature Review

Superstitious beliefs continue to influence human behavior and societal structures across the globe, often with profound implications for human security. In many communities, these beliefs manifest through practices such as witchcraft accusations, ritual violence, and the marginalization of vulnerable individuals, resulting in insecurity, economic disruption, and health risks.

In South Asia, witchcraft accusations especially in rural India and Nepal have led to violent attacks, mainly targeting women (Banerjee, 2015). These acts disrupt social cohesion and threaten individual safety. Similarly, in Papua New Guinea, sorcery-related violence destabilizes communities, particularly affecting women and the elderly (Forsyth & Eves, 2015). In these contexts, superstitions generate fear, inhibit social trust, and jeopardize mental well-being. Economically, superstitions affect productivity and livelihoods. For example, South Asian farmers often delay planting due to beliefs in ill omens, reducing agricultural output and intensifying food insecurity (Singh & Yadav, 2016). Business investments may also be postponed due to fears of curses or supernatural retribution (Eboiyehi, 2017).

Despite this growing body of literature, most research focuses on social and cultural aspects, with limited analysis of broader human security dimensions such as economic stability and public health. Superstitious beliefs often delay medical treatment, increase reliance on traditional healers, and reduce access to healthcare services, particularly in rural and marginalized areas (Banerjee, 2015).

In Sub-Saharan Africa, superstitions significantly impact human security. Witchcraft beliefs often emerge in times of hardship such as illness, death, or crop failure and frequently target women, children, and the elderly (Geschiere, 2013; Onyinjo et al., 2017). In the Niger Delta, the belief in “child witches” has resulted in widespread abuse, stigmatization, and deprivation of rights (Cimpric, 2010).

In the Tabora Region of Tanzania, deeply rooted superstitions significantly undermine human well-being by influencing economic stability, healthcare access, and social cohesion. Mwanri et al. (2020) explored how such beliefs shape healthcare decisions, revealing that individuals accused of witchcraft often face severe social isolation. These victims are cut off from community support, denied access to health services, and frequently subjected to physical violence. This exclusion erodes social trust and unity, fostering widespread fear that weakens communal bonds.

A case from Igunga District illustrates this impact: a woman accused of witchcraft was socially ostracized, losing access to medical care and her means of income. Such instances demonstrate how superstition-driven stigma not only endangers individual safety but also hinders economic development and social progress. However, Mwanri et al. (2020) did not quantify the financial repercussions—such as lost income or increased healthcare

costs due to delayed treatment limiting the study's assessment of the broader economic burden.

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored in Social Learning Theory, developed by Albert Bandura (1977), which posits that individuals adopt behaviors and beliefs by observing others within their social environment rather than solely through direct experiences. Role models such as parents, elders, and community leaders play a central role in shaping belief systems. In the context of Tabora, Tanzania, this theory effectively explains how superstitious beliefs particularly those involving witchcraft are transmitted across generations. Elders and traditional healers serve as key influencers, often holding more sway than modern healthcare providers. Through observation, storytelling, rituals, and communal practices, children and youth internalize these beliefs, reinforcing harmful behaviors such as witchcraft accusations, social exclusion, and distrust in formal health systems (Bandura, 1986)

Methodology

This study adopted a mixed methods explanatory sequential design to examine the impact of superstitious beliefs on human security in Tabora Region, Tanzania. The approach began with quantitative data collection, followed by qualitative inquiry, in line with Plano Clark (2011), to provide a deeper understanding of the statistical findings. Quantitative data offered a broad overview of the research problem, while qualitative insights clarified and expanded on these results. This combination enhanced both the validity and reliability of the findings, supporting the development of culturally appropriate intervention strategies.

The study targeted a diverse population comprising local residents who shared their personal experiences with superstitions and security-related issues. Key participants included community leaders—such as village chiefs and elders who shaped local religious and cultural practices (Mabula, 2021). Traditional healers played a central role as transmitters of superstitious beliefs, thereby influencing perceptions of health and security. Religious leaders from various faiths contributed counter-narratives that helped shape community responses to superstition. Local law enforcement personnel were included due to their involvement in managing conflicts arising from superstitious practices. Additionally, educators, NGO representatives, and youth were engaged to explore generational shifts in belief systems and their societal impact (Ng'wandu, 2023).

The study involved 400 participants, selected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the effects of superstitions on human security in Tabora Region. A combination of simple random sampling and purposive sampling was employed. Simple random sampling was used to select local residents, ensuring equal participation opportunities and minimizing bias (Adeyemi & Adeyemo, 2021). Purposive sampling was applied to identify specific stakeholders such as traditional healers, religious leaders, elders, NGO coordinators, and law enforcement officers whose insights were crucial for understanding the cultural and security dynamics of the region (Mwita, 2022).

The study used a representative participant number for exact data acquisition to determine its sample size. The Yamane formula functions well for social science research to determine sample sizes. The Tabora Region has a total population which numbers at 3.4 million people (Tanzania National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). The formula $n = \frac{N}{1 + (e^2)}$ was used for sample size calculation where n was the sample size, N was the total population and e was the margin of error. The study employed the Yamane formula to determine its

sample size so the results would accurately represent Tabora Region conditions which would contribute valuable insights to human security and superstitious belief studies.

The formula for determining sample size is:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + (e^2)N}$$

Where by:

n = sample size

N = total target population

e = margin of error (typically set at 0.05)

$$n = \frac{3400000}{1 + (0.07^2)3400000}$$

$$n = \frac{3400000}{1 + (0.0049)3400000}$$

$$n = \frac{3400000}{1 + 16660}$$

$$n = 204.07 = 204$$

Therefore, the sample size for this research study is **204** respondents as demonstrated in Table 1 below;

Table 1: Target Population and Sample Size

Category	Target Population	Sample Size Calculation	Sample Size	Sampling Procedure
Local Population (male)	1,700,000	$(1,700,000/3,400,000) \times 204$	102	Simple Random Sampling
Local Population (female)	1,700,000	$(1,700,000/3,400,000) \times 204$	102	Simple Random Sampling
TOTAL	3,400,000		204	

Source: Research Study, 2024

Results of the Study

The study examined the impact of supernatural beliefs on human security, explored conflict dynamics associated with superstitions, and analysed the social, health, and security development implications of these beliefs in Tabora Region.

The impact of supernatural beliefs on human security

The established the effect of supernatural perceptions on human security in Tabora region. The results are as demonstrated in table 2 below;

Table 2: Impact of Supernatural Perceptions on Aspects of Human Security

Aspect	Mean Score
Personal safety and protection	2.0
Community cohesion and trust	2.2
Access to healthcare and treatment	2.5

Source: Field Data, 2025

The survey results show that personal safety ranked as "significant" for most participants (mean = 2.0) because they feared witchcraft-related attacks and curses. The results have significant effects on both personal and community safety. Many participants showed fear of witchcraft-related attacks because accusations of sorcery frequently resulted in violent attacks against the accused. This fear has led to extrajudicial punishments, social exclusion, and even fatal mob violence, weakening legal institutions and fostering vigilantism.

A traditional healer (Interviewee No.9) in one of the villages elaborated:

I often feel unsafe walking alone at night, not because of thieves but because I fear someone might cast a spell on me. In my village, people accused of witchcraft have been attacked. Even elders are not spared” (Interviewee No.9)

Similarly, a religious leader (Interviewee No.4) shared how fear of witchcraft influences behavior in the community:

Children grow up hearing stories about witchcraft, and they internalize these fears. Even adults hesitate to challenge those accused of supernatural powers because they fear retaliation. It creates an environment where suspicion and fear dominate everyday interactions." (Interview No. 4)

A salt vendor youth also described how accusations of witchcraft affect economic and social interactions:

If someone succeeds in business, people start whispering that they use witchcraft to attract customers. This causes jealousy and sometimes even violence. I've seen business owners attacked because others believe they are using supernatural means to outcompete them (Interview No. 7).

Mgumia & Nyamasyo (2020) highlight how belief in witchcraft leads to vigilantism and mob justice in rural Tanzania, increasing the likelihood of extrajudicial punishments. People accused of witchcraft experience exile as well as physical attacks and death according to

Mesaki (2019), which establishes an atmosphere of fear and insecurity. The practice of self-justice by communities weakens both personal safety and legal institutions, because people choose to handle justice outside of official legal systems.

The practices described in Tabora occur throughout sub-Saharan Africa, because supernatural beliefs maintain strong roots in this region. The fear of mystical punishment keeps people from reporting injustices (Mesaki, 2019), which creates an environment of silence that allows human rights violations to continue without intervention. The absence of accountability creates distrust toward law enforcement agencies, which prevents them from stopping witchcraft-related violence and maintains ongoing insecurity. According to Welsh Security Theory insecurity exists as a combination of physical threats alongside psychological and relational elements.

This also aligns with Social Learning Theory, which suggests that fear-driven behaviors are often learned through observation and social reinforcement. In this case, stories and lived experiences perpetuate fear of supernatural harm (Bandura, 1977). Further, McKee (2021) emphasizes that superstitions shape social interactions by reinforcing behavioral patterns dictated by fear rather than rational decision-making.

A mean score of 2.2 highlights the erosion of trust and community cohesion due to witchcraft accusations. Communities in Tabora often experience mistrust when supernatural explanations are linked to misfortunes. Respondents reported that accusations of witchcraft often result in deep divisions within families and communities. Mistrust grows when supernatural explanations are used to justify misfortunes such as illnesses or economic struggles, leading to increased suspicion and hostility.

During an interview a religious leader (Interview No. 4) shared that:

When people suspect each other of witchcraft, it divides families. You cannot trust your neighbour anymore. Even close relatives become distant because of these accusations (Interview No. 4).

Similarly, a village chief explained how these suspicions disrupt daily life:

People are afraid to even help each other because they fear being accused of using witchcraft. If someone is too successful, others assume they are using supernatural powers, and this breeds jealousy and tension (Interview No. 11).

A study conducted by Geschiere (2018), demonstrates how witchcraft beliefs in African societies create social divisions because, people start to fear their neighbors and even their family members. The existing community tensions become worse because of these divisions, which frequently result in violent conflicts during economic crises and health pandemics. The Tanzanian Commission for Human Rights and Good Governance (CHRAGG) documented in their 2021 report that, witchcraft accusations led to rising community tensions which primarily targeted women and elderly people.

Superstitious beliefs significantly hinder healthcare access (mean = 2.5), as noted by most of the respondents. Many respondents admitted to prioritizing traditional healers over modern medical practitioners due to their belief in spiritual causes of illness. This delay in seeking professional medical help often results in preventable health complications and higher mortality rates. Many residents prioritize traditional healers over medical professionals, delaying critical interventions.

A woman recounted:

When my child was sick, my husband insisted we visit the local mfumu/mganga(traditional healer) first. It was only after three days that we went to the clinic, but by then, the situation had worsened. We almost lost him (Interview No.12).

Similarly, an adult woman participant shared:

My mother suffered from persistent headaches, and our family believed she was bewitched. We spent money on cleansing rituals before taking her to the hospital, where doctors diagnosed high blood pressure. She could have received treatment earlier (Interview No.8).

Studies show that in many African communities, traditional medicine is often preferred due to cultural familiarity and spiritual reassurance, even when modern medical alternatives are available (Golooba-Mutebi, 2020). However, reliance on spiritual healers contributes to preventable deaths, particularly in cases of malaria and childbirth complications. Larsen (2021) notes that, superstitions surrounding illness often attribute diseases to supernatural causes, leading individuals to seek exorcisms or rituals instead of scientific medical treatment.

Similar findings were reported by Langwick (2019), who observed that delays in seeking professional healthcare due to spiritual beliefs often lead to worsened medical outcomes. Research conducted in Uganda and Tanzania shows that, supernatural beliefs about pregnancy complications lead women to delay hospital visits which results in high maternal mortality rates (Nuwaha, 2020).

The research shows supernatural beliefs affect three aspects of human security in Tabora: personal safety, social cohesion and healthcare access. The solution to these problems needs a comprehensive strategy which unites educational programs with policy changes and community outreach to develop critical thinking skills and eliminate dangerous superstitions.

Conflict Dynamics Linked to Superstitions

The findings revealed that 60% of participants thought superstitions played a major role in community conflicts, because of witchcraft accusations. Such beliefs lead to social exclusion and occasionally result in violent behavior. Different clans in Tabora region maintain opposing beliefs which strengthen their social differences, and create more tension when one clan's beliefs are considered dangerous or unreasonable by another clan. A 2018 study by Kijo-Bisimba & Ndyetabula identified 2,500 cases of mob violence linked to witchcraft accusations across Tanzania between 2015 and 2018, demonstrating the extent of the problem.

An NGO coordinator detailed that:

A young boy fell sick in a neighbour village, and people claimed an elderly woman cursed him. The next morning, her house was burned down, and she fled. Nobody knows where she is now (Interview No. 6).

A community elder recounted another case of mob violence driven by superstition:

A man in our village was accused of using dark magic to make himself rich. One night, an angry group stormed his house, demanding that he undo the spell. When he couldn't, they set his house on fire. He survived, but he had to leave the village (Interview No. 2).

The role of superstitions in fueling conflict is well-documented in African societies where mystical explanations are often attributed to misfortunes such as illness, death, and economic hardship. Mesaki (2009) explains that accusations of witchcraft often arise in moments of crisis when individuals seek explanations beyond natural causes. These accusations frequently target vulnerable members of society, particularly elderly women, who are often viewed with suspicion due to their perceived mystical knowledge. In many communities, older women living alone are disproportionately accused of witchcraft, leading to stigmatization, social exclusion, and in extreme cases, extrajudicial killings (Migiro, 2011).

The above case illustrates how deeply ingrained supernatural perceptions can trigger violent actions, forcing accused individuals to flee or face physical harm. The incident aligns with Social Learning Theory's concept of imitation, where witnessing mob violence reinforces the belief that such actions are acceptable responses to perceived supernatural threats. The theory of Bandura (1977) indicates that, people acquire behaviors by observing and emulating others and children, young and adults who experience witchcraft-related violence in their lives, may adopt it as a valid tool for addressing conflicts.

The broader societal consequences of conflicts that stem from superstition are substantial. Kohnert (2003) shows that, when people believe in supernatural powers, social cohesion deteriorates through the development of mistrust and suspicion between community members. People who believe their neighbors use witchcraft to harm others will damage their personal relationships and destroy traditional social support systems which will increase communal conflict. Rural areas which rely on collective cooperation suffer most from this trust breakdown, since economic activities like farming and trade need local community collaboration.

Ashforth (2005) conducted research in sub-Saharan Africa which shows that political and economic elites use supernatural beliefs to justify violent actions or seize power. Some political elites use witchcraft fears to get rid of their opponents and silence opposition voices. Traditional leaders and village elders use witchcraft accusations against political opponents to banish them from their communities. Superstitious beliefs are used strategically to deepen social divisions which leads to ongoing cycles of violence and retaliation.

The legal framework to handle witchcraft-related violence remains weak across many African nations including Tanzania. Law enforcement agencies find it challenging to intervene in such cases because cultural beliefs, run deep despite formal laws that ban mob justice and extrajudicial killings (Forsyth, 2016). The legal system fails to provide justice to victims of witchcraft accusations because authorities either treat these cases as neighborhood conflicts, or lack sufficient capacity to enforce legal protection effectively. The failure of law enforcement to prosecute perpetrators of mob violence, creates an environment of impunity that leads to more incidents of violence.

The participants were asked to assess how superstitious beliefs obstructed community progress toward security and development through a rating system from 1 (Very Much) to 5 (Not at All). The results appear in Table 3 below;

Table 3: Perceived Hindrance of Superstitious Beliefs

Statement	Mean Score
Fear and suspicion among community members	1.8
Exclusion of individuals accused of witchcraft	2.0
Discouragement from seeking professional medical help	2.3

Source: Field Data, 2025

The study findings reveal that, superstitious beliefs generate extensive consequences which affect community social cohesion and security, while hindering development within communities. Community members experience the most substantial consequence as fear and suspicion reaches a mean score of 1.8. This demonstrates that, community interactions are characterized by deep mistrust, which produces social fragmentation. Social avoidance expresses itself through a government official's statement during the interview:

The community members demonstrate excessive distrust and hostility because they believe in witchcraft curses. Social avoidance emerges as a manifestation of this fear because people stay away from neighbors suspected of supernatural practices. (Interview No. 5).

The village chief explained how social and economic activities suffer because of mistrust:

The fear of curses makes people refuse to purchase products from particular vendors. The marketplace has become fragmented because certain traders face complete exclusion due to these suspicions. (Interview No. 3).

The study by Munyaradzi (2022) indicates that, witchcraft accusations produce enduring patterns of blame which damage social cohesion. The deterioration of relationships between neighbors becomes more pronounced, when people believe their neighbors perform supernatural activities, which leads to decreased cooperation and intensified hostility.

Kohnert (2003) demonstrates that, communities which strongly believe in witchcraft develop increased social tensions because, their members become excessively suspicious toward each other. Unexplained misfortunes such as illness, crop failure or economic struggles become attributed to supernatural causes, which leads to an environment where accusations transform into conflicts. The deterioration of trust between community members blocks both personal relationships, and hinders development projects which need collective trust for successful implementation (Ashforth, 2005).

A Police Officer from Sikonge District described how social fragmentation affects the community.

The residents of the area choose to stay away from each other because they fear curses and witchcraft. Such actions dismantle the unity which exists between people. (Interview No.11).

Another community development officer emphasized how mistrust affects collective problem-solving:

Whenever there is a community meeting, some people hesitate to participate because they believe others have bad intentions or use witchcraft. This weakens our ability to work together on projects that benefit everyone (Interview No. 9).

A youth also detailed that:

Children who believed to be belonging to witchcraft families are not only feared by students, but also even by teachers. It becomes hard for a teacher to punish such children when commit offences fearing a bad revenge from their parents (Interview No. 7).

This sentiment underscores how fear overrides rationality and mutual support, limiting the ability of communities to address pressing issues such as crime prevention, economic development, and disaster response. Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) further explains how these fears are reinforced through observational learning when individuals witness accusations leading to exclusion or violence, they internalize these behaviors as acceptable, perpetuating cycles of suspicion and avoidance.

Implications for Social, Health and Security Development

The exclusion of individuals accused of witchcraft, which received a mean score of 2.0, highlights another critical consequence of superstition-driven conflict. Accusations often lead to forced displacement, family estrangement, and the severing of personal ties. The fear of being targeted results in many individuals withdrawing from community interactions, further weakening social cohesion.

A woman described the impact of ostracization on their family:

My aunt was accused of bringing bad luck to the village. She was forced to leave, and now we rarely visit her. It feels as if we've lost a part of our family (Interview No. 12).

The community elder described how these accusations result in enduring social divisions.

People who receive witchcraft accusations experience permanent changes in their lives. The refusal of people to interact with them leads to suffering for their children. These beliefs have caused complete breakdowns of families according to my observations (Interview No.11).

Migiro (2011) and Kijo-Bisimba & Ndyetabula (2018) discovered that, elderly women bear the brunt of these accusations because they often experience forced exile and physical harm. The research of Evans-Pritchard (1976) shows that, witchcraft beliefs establish social networks which become disrupted. Many African communities base their social organization on kinship structures which function as their foundation in economic and social support. When individuals are accused of witchcraft, they often lose access to these networks, increasing their vulnerability to poverty and insecurity (Forsyth, 2016). The resulting

isolation not only affects the accused individuals but also weakens the broader community, as mutual assistance mechanisms are disrupted.

The study also found that superstitious beliefs discourage individuals from seeking professional medical help, with a mean score of 2.3. This suggests that while not as pronounced as fear or exclusion, superstitions still significantly impact health-seeking behaviors. This reluctance to seek professional medical care can have severe consequences, particularly for conditions that require urgent intervention.

A healthcare professional interviewed for this study observed that many patients only seek medical attention after traditional remedies fail:

Many patients delay coming to the hospital, and by the time they do, their conditions have worsened. Superstitions make people believe their illnesses are caused by supernatural forces, so they first seek help from spiritual healers rather than doctors (Interview 8).

A worker at a NGO (Tabora League for Children) indicated the preference for traditional remedies over modern medicine:

In our community, when someone falls sick, we first go to the local herbalist. People believe modern medicine only works when spiritual cleansing has been done first. That's why many people delay going to the hospital (Interview No. 6).

Kaijage (2020) explains that reliance on traditional healers remains prevalent in many rural communities, as supernatural explanations for illness often take precedence over scientific medical diagnoses. Good (1994) studied how cultural illness perceptions affect medical choices in his research which supports this discovery. In numerous African communities, people believe that illnesses stem from spiritual elements instead of physical medical reasons. People tend to begin their medical search with traditional healers and religious rituals, before they will visit modern medical facilities. People who delay seeking professional medical help face deteriorating health results, particularly when they have infectious diseases or chronic illnesses or maternal health concerns (Ngubane, 2010).

The problem becomes worse because traditional and modern healthcare systems remain poorly integrated (Kaijage, 2020). People tend to avoid hospitals until traditional treatments prove ineffective. The extended time before medical treatment starts results in higher death rates, while putting extra pressure on healthcare facilities. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2018) suggests integration methods between traditional and modern medical practices, to enhance healthcare results in areas where cultural beliefs dominate medical choices.

The UNDP Human Development Report (1994) establishes a direct relationship between human security and human development. Progress in one enhances the other, while failure in one increases the risk of failure in the other. Limited human development manifesting as poverty, hunger, disease, and social disparities can lead to violence and instability.

Findings from this study revealed that 73% of respondents agreed that superstitious beliefs contribute to fear and exclusion, which in turn weaken community security. Additionally,

61% of respondents indicated that accusations of witchcraft had led to forced displacements within their communities, further exacerbating social fragmentation.

A former community leader expressed this concern:

Once someone is labeled a witch, they are not only feared but completely shunned. People stop visiting their homes, refuse to trade with them, and in some cases, they are even attacked or expelled from the village." (Interview No. 10)

Another woman in the interview explained that:

If village members realize someone is witching others, an ultimatum notice is put in front of house door ordering him/her to leave the village at a given date otherwise will be killed. In case of any resistance to leave after the indicated date, the house is set ablaze (Interview No. 12).

These findings align with Ashforth (2005), who argues that superstition-driven fear erodes collective security efforts, making individuals less likely to cooperate with local authorities or participate in community safety initiatives.

The study also found that 48% of respondents acknowledged that fear of witchcraft accusations discouraged them from seeking medical treatment at hospitals, a situation that leads to deteriorating health outcomes and reduced economic productivity.

A healthcare worker explained:

Many patients arrive at the clinic in critical condition because they first tried traditional rituals out of fear of being labeled as cursed if they sought modern treatment too soon." (Interview No. 9)

A village chief also mentioned that:

Communities resist to vaccines especially for children and women believing that are intended to cause infertility and cancer making them vulnerable to diseases which are preventable (Interview No. 1).

The reluctance to seek medical attention because of superstitious fears leads to poorer health indicators which in turn undermines overall productivity and economic growth. According to Mesaki (2009), sustainable development requires not only economic investment, but also the dismantling of harmful cultural beliefs that hinder social progress. These issues will require community education programs, awareness campaigns, and legal protections for individuals accused of witchcraft. The findings indicate that superstitious beliefs hinder community security and development by creating fear, exclusion and health-related challenges. The high levels of mistrust and social avoidance weaken communal ties, while ostracization of accused individuals leads to social fragmentation.

Conclusion

The study concludes that, Tabora Region residents maintain superstitious beliefs which remain deeply embedded in their social environment especially in rural areas. People in older generations maintain strong beliefs about witchcraft and omens, which affect their success

and misfortune outcomes, yet these beliefs show diminishing popularity among younger people, because of their access to education and media. The persistent impact of superstition on personal freedom together with healthcare access and social interactions, requires ongoing education-based initiatives, policy interventions and media campaigns, to develop critical thinking skills and decrease superstitious explanations about natural events and societal challenges.

Recommendations

The study recommends that the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training in collaboration with local government authorities and NGOs should implement targeted education programs, to promote critical thinking and scientific reasoning so as to address superstitious beliefs in relation to human security in Tabora Region. Media houses and community radio stations should launch awareness campaigns, particularly in rural areas where these beliefs are most deeply entrenched, to challenge misconceptions surrounding witchcraft, while promoting rational decision-making. The Tanzanian Parliament and Judiciary to enact and enforce stronger legal frameworks, protecting individuals accused of witchcraft from mob justice and extrajudicial killings. The Tanzanian Police Force and Human Rights Organizations should enhance community policing, as well as establish vigilance committees at the village level to report and prevent superstition-related violence. The Ministry of Health, in collaboration with local healthcare providers and traditional healers, should promote the integration of modern medical practices with acceptable traditional healing approaches, to encourage communities to seek professional healthcare.

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