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## **Social Consequences of Witchcraft Accusations: Marriage, Divorce, and Community Exclusion in Zanzibar**

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### **Abstract**

This study examines the social consequences of witchcraft accusations in Zanzibar with reference to how such accusations affected marriage, family (Divorce) and community cohesion. The study intends to learn the functioning of beliefs in witchcraft as a mechanism of stigma and social control and symbolic domination in the current Islamic and Swahili cultural systems. Depending on the analysis of secondary data and using only the qualitative exploratory design, the study relied on academic sources, ethnographies, nongovernmental organizations report, and policy documents on witchcraft beliefs and family dynamics in Africa. The analysis of data was performed thematically with references to the theory of stigma by Goffman and Bourdieu, notions of habitus and symbolic power. Findings show that witchcraft accusations divide marriages, promotes divorce, leads to gender inequality, intergenerational exclusion, and poverty. They also erode the social welfare systems on the basis of kinship and reciprocity, as well as undermine communal trust. The paper has made contributions to the sociological and policy discussions by the conceptualization of witchcraft as a form of socially organized phenomenon and offers policy-based interventions that are culturally grounded to enhance the inclusion, gender equity, and resilience of the communities in Zanzibar.

**Keywords:** Witchcraft accusations, marriage, divorce, community exclusion, Zanzibar

### **Introduction**

Witchcraft is among the most enduring and compelling social facts in most African communities that determine the way individuals relate, the cultural activities of such communities, and their general existence. The beliefs do not conform to spiritual or religious lines but rather they are ingrained in moral, social, and even economical systems of communities. The beliefs of witchcraft as applied in the context of Zanzibar are quite intertwined with the daily life operation and play a major role in the establishment of identity, trust, and morality. They are not limited to the metaphysical explanation of misfortune but have

developed to be the systems of social control, moral judgment, and boundary enforcement (Adolfsson et al., 2024).

The accusations of witchcraft in Zanzibar, like in other African contexts, are not metaphorical representations of the conflicts or misfortunes; they are very concrete social occurrences that can ruin reputation, sever family ties, and introduce the long-term social marginalization. In the case of the accused, such accusations carry a literal consequence, such as marriage breakdowns, loss of community connections, and access to economic activities (Tshoane, 2023). The accused and their families are stigmatized and lack of social inclusion is common because witchcraft identification has become a permanent mark that has changed generations (Uche et al., 2025). This labelling and marginalization process shows how the traditional belief systems still have strong sway on social relations, even though there are formal religious institutions and modernization processes.

The social life of Zanzibar is characterized by the collision of Islam, Swahili traditions, and African cosmologies, which is why witchcraft accusations are used not only as the means of moral regulation but also as the means of social tension (Kananoja & Hokkanen, 2024). In this sense, the family is the foundation of the societal self and economic existence. However, the false claims of witchcraft are a destabilizing factor to this foundation as they lead to a lack of trust amongst married couples and, in most cases, it ends in a divorce or the alienating of a generation.

The research problem of this research is based on the lack of knowledge in the academic field regarding the impact of witchcraft accusations in Zanzibar on the most fundamental institution, marriage and family, and the establishment of social exclusion patterns. Although there is extensive research on other African cases including Ghana, Nigeria, and South Africa, research on the cultural and religious hybridity of Zanzibar is rare (Fay, 2022). This paper thus aims at comprehending the manner in which the perception of witchcraft remains a reality in contemporary Islamic systems and the way in which it impacts on gender relations, social well-being and cohesion.

The topicality of this study is explained by the fact that the accusations of witchcraft and the subsequent consequences of the social issue remain widespread and even normalized. Most targeted women are widows, old women and those that are infertile, devoid of fertility and thus stigmatized, divorced and marginalized economically. Such allegations undermine trust and destroy the basis of social solidarity in the community. This would only be done in a sensitive sociological reasoning that guides culturally sensitive policies, education and social welfare interventions that are inclusive in order to safeguard the vulnerable people and build communal harmony in Zanzibar.

## **Literature Review**

Scholarship on witchcraft in Africa has captured its function as a cultural account of misfortune, illness, and poverty, and work on Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa, and mainland Tanzania underscores the social penalties of these accusations (Owusu, 2020). In Ghana, witch

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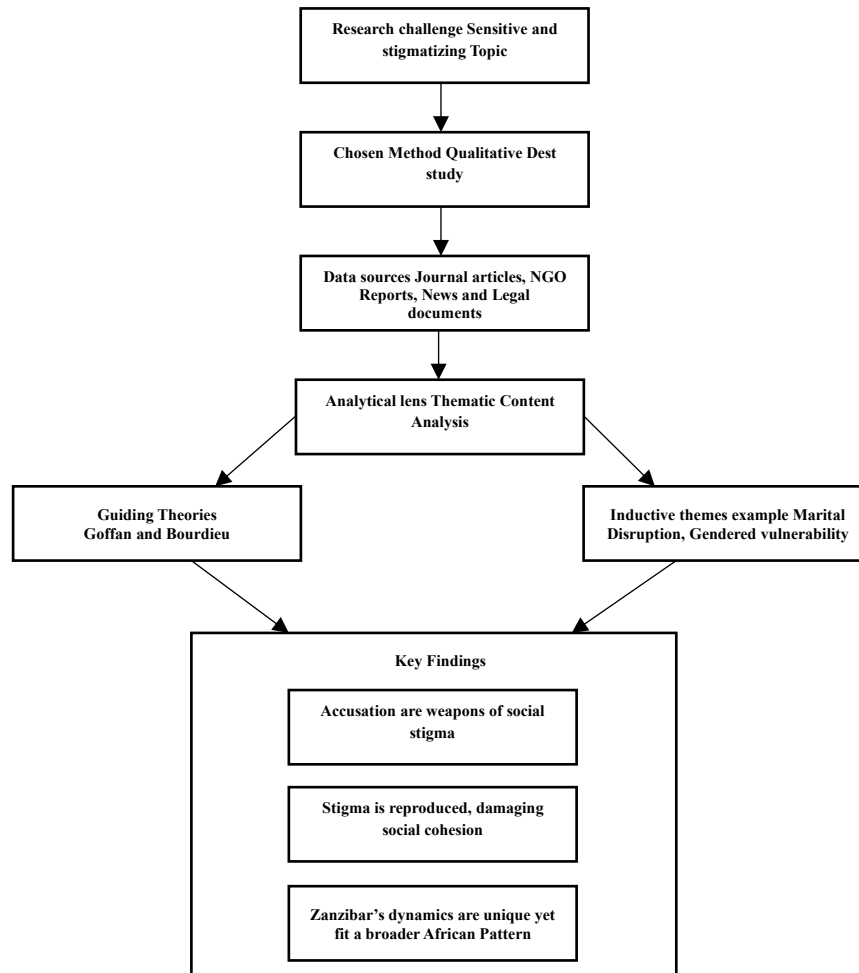
camps have become places of banishment among accused women, echoing forms of systematic exclusion. In Nigeria, accusations tend to converge with Pentecostal religious discourses portraying witchcraft as the basis of evil, additionally validating forms of exclusion (Mutaru & Sekyi, 2023). In South Africa, witch killings illustrate the extremes of violence these beliefs can reach when conjoined by poverty and social insecurity. In mainland Tanzania, especially in Mwanza and Shinyanga, aged women have typically been accused of witchcraft, and accompanied by physical assault or forced evictions (Hove, 2024). Together, these studies illustrate witchcraft accusations cannot be regarded as isolated forms of culture but instead deeply ingrained social practices carrying important consequences for human rights, gender relations, and family and community welfare (Finlay et al., 2025). Still, there remains relatively few studies of the Zanzibari context, especially in understanding the ways witchcraft accusation affects these most intimate of realms, marriage formation, marital stability, and family bonds. Although there remain certain ethnographic studies of Zanzibar referencing the prevalence of witch beliefs, there remains small-scale systematic investigation of the ways these beliefs accrue in family breakup or in divorce, or contribute more generally toward longer-scale forms of community exclusion. Leaving these unexamined is the role of witchcraft accusation toward maintaining forms of social stigma, toward disrupting intergenerational continuity, and toward eroding social welfare at broader household and community scales (Awortwe et al., 2025).

The core aim of this research is to explore the social impacts of witchcraft accusations in Zanzibar, and marriage, family, and community relationships, in particular. It attempts to understand the ways in which these accusations inhibit the creation of marriages, destabilize marriages, and lead to divorce. It also attempts to explore the ways in which suspects of witchcraft, and their families, suffer exclusion from community life and deprived of the social and economic networks necessary for survival and development (Mabefam, 2023). Towards these ends, the study is framed by the questions below: How do witchcraft accusations impact marriage formation and stability? How do they lead to family breakup and divorce? What are the community-level ramifications of social exclusion resulting from these accusations? By posing these questions, the study gives credence not only to the experiential qualitative accounts of those affected, but also to structural aspects of stigma and exclusionality explained in sociological schools of thought.

This study's novel contribution is bringing into focus a culturally troubled but socially corrosive phenomenon, witchcraft accusations, which have attracted insufficient scholarly attention in Zanzibar. By conceptualizing witchcraft accusations through the frameworks of Goffman's concept of stigma (2016) and Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and symbolic power, the paper demonstrates how religious and ethnic beliefs shape social labelling processes whose outcomes have real-life consequences on marriage, divorce, and social solidarity (Sharlamanov et al., 2024). It contributes to international discourses on tradition, stigma, and social welfare by demonstrating, through the example of witchcraft accusations functioning as instruments of social control, the ways in which exclusion and marginality get reproduced. At the same time, highlights the need for policy interventions, awareness programs amongst the population, and culturally nuanced solutions which counter the malevolent outcomes of witchcraft accusations without condemning region's ordinary traditions. By so doing, the work not only produces new

knowledges for the academy but, equally, facilitates social policy, developmental practice, and inter-communal deliberation in Zanzibar and other contexts.

## Research Method



**Figure 1.1** Researcher Own Constructs, 2025

Qualitative exploratory study design in the form of entirely secondary data analysis was used in this study to investigate social consequences of accusations of witchcraft in Zanzibar. Sensitivities and stigmas surrounding subject matter rendered primary data collection potentially damaging to those who participated and, as a consequence, too, a desk study preferable. The study used a rich documentary base of sources, such as peer-reviewed journal articles, ethnographies, NGO reports, news reporting, and policy and legal sources on belief in witchcraft, family relations, and community life in Zanzibar and other similar African societies.

Data were subject to thematic content analysis, inductively and deductively guided by categories ranging from marital disruption to drivers of divorce, gendered vulnerability, and social exclusion from one's community. These were both theory-informed borrowing Goffman's theory of stigma and Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and symbolic power yet inductively reached based on dominant patterns through the literature. This enabled the study

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to trace the means through which witchcraft accusations act as weapons of social stigma, continue to reproduce stigma, and undermine family and community cohesion. Comparative analysis across cases in Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa, and mainland Tanzania added value in placing Zanzibar in a broader continental framework while still bringing out distinctive socio-cultural dynamics.

Ethical issues were at the core of study design. The use of secondary data prevented face-to face contact with vulnerable people, and appropriate choice of sources prevented sensationalism and sensitivity to local contexts. By bringing together varied documentary evidence through intensive thematic analysis, the study presents an evidence-informed and ethically justifiable picture of social outcomes of allegations of witchcraft in Zanzibar.

### **Results and Discussions**

Marriage in Zanzibar is universally understood as a foundation of social order, granting legitimacy, security, and inclusion. It is not just a personal union between two people; it is an act of public law, joyfully commemorated through elaborate ritual, sanctioned by religious and legal institutions, and imbued through sheer force of social opinion with great moral demands. In Swahili culture, as throughout most of Africa, marriage is the confluence of kinship, religion, and social reproduction (Blanchy, 2022). It provides for the continuation of family lineages, provides the context in which childbearing happens, and incorporates people into webs of reciprocal relations. Marriage is especially important for women, as it often provides their social identity and decides access to resources, protection, and decent respectability. Marriage for men signifies maturity, responsibility, and standing in both religion and community life (Dakowicz & Dakowicz, 2022). In this kind of setting, anything that destabilizes or departs from marriage has spillover impacts far beyond the couple themselves. Witchcraft accusations cause one of the most destabilizing and disrupting influences in this highly frangible system.

The very centrality of marriage in Zanzibar makes it a vulnerable site for the intrusion of witchcraft accusations. Young men and women seeking to marry often find that their own reputations are less significant than the reputation of their families (Tundui & Tundui, 2021). Kinship in Swahili society is collective, and individuals are understood not as isolated actors but as extensions of their family's moral standing. Thus, when a family is tainted by rumors of witchcraft, the stigma adheres not only to the alleged perpetrator but to the entire lineage. A young woman from a family associated with witchcraft may discover that suitors quietly withdraw their interest, fearing that marriage to her will invite social disapproval, misfortune, or spiritual danger (Birlie et al., 2023). Similarly, a young man may be denied approval by prospective in-laws if his family's name has been mentioned in association with sorcery. Therefore, consequences of such reputational damage are profound, for marriage is not merely a personal aspiration but a prerequisite for full participation in adult social life.

This process echoes what Erving Goffman (2016) refers to as "courtesy stigma" the process by which stigma is not just transmitted to those directly accused but to those socially related to those accused as well. Courtesy stigma functions in Zanzibar in a particularly

efficacious fashion, since contamination by association results in entire family groups being barred from potential marriage alliances. This barring often becomes set in place across generations if one grandmother was once suspected of witchcraft, the rumor endures long after she is dead, coming to life whenever her descendants seek to marry. Therefore, family bears a kind of "moral scar," burned into the communal memory and revived time and time again to legitimate social avoidance. The fear of scandalous damage thereby turns witchcraft accusations into not merely personal barriers but entire lineal barriers, engendering long-term configurations of isolation and marginality (Adam et al., 2023).

Even if marriage does occur, allegations of witchcraft commonly interfere in the fragile balance of trust in married life. Marriages in Zanzibar, as elsewhere, continue to remain vulnerable to tension over frustrated expectations, economic pressures, and split loyalties between natal and conjugal family (Omar, 2022). However, in contexts in which belief in witchcraft provides a culturally convenient idiom for understanding misfortune, common grievances come to be reexplained in terms of the paranormal. An infertile marriage, for example, can rarely be explained in terms of biomedicine alone. While medical understanding can account for infertility, the underlying question commonly posed instead is "who is restraining conception?" Husbands blame their wives for using sorcery to withhold conception or to divert their husband's attentions from his family duties. Miscarriages, stillbirths, or ongoing infirmity in offspring are similarly interpreted as evidence of occult agency (Chatterjee & Choudhury, 2024).

For men, financial setbacks like a loss of fishing hauls, business collapses, or loss of employment also provide rich soil for suspicion. In Zanzibar's competitive economic climate, in which survival may rest on precarious markets and scarce resources, loss can be publicly shameful (Giustozzi, 2022). Instead of framing such setbacks in terms of economic or structural causality, men might see them as evidence of spiritual sabotage. Wives, particularly those who are seen as strong or "difficult," become an easy target for blame. The accusation of witchcraft against a wife offers an culturally reasonable account of personal reversals while at the same time reestablishing male dominance (Das Gupta et al., 2023).

Once suspicion sets in, it erodes the intimacy of married life. Daily squabbles over domestic labor, financial support, or childcare come to be reinterpreted as evidence of latent malevolence (Weigel & Shrout, 2021). The suspect spouse, usually the wife, can do little to defend against such accusations, as witchcraft being by definition invisible and uncontrollable, can neither be proven nor disproven. Leao (2021) becomes proof of guilt, as it reinforces the suspicion instead of alleviating it. This politics of suspicion reproduces, in Bourdieu's terms, the functioning of symbolic power, the ability to impose modes of significance, which in turn structure reality itself. Attributing marital problems to evidence of witchcraft, husbands and their kin reframe the wife's identity, in this way converting an intimate partner into an emanation of danger (Moyer, 2022).

In-laws, especially mothers-in-law, often take it upon themselves to act as guardians of family honor and stability. When tragedy occurs, they can frame events in terms of witchcraft discourse, cautioning their sons to watch out for wives who may be weakening the line (Cook, 2021). Brothers, sisters, and cousins join in this process of interpretation, spreading rumors and

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solidifying suspicions. In most instances, conflicts between co-wives in polygamous relationships become hotspots for allegations. Competition over access to resources, inheritance, or affection from the husband can cause one wife to accuse another of utilizing witchcraft to destroy her children or gain increased control (Tyszka, 2024). These allegations do not remain in private; instead, they have reverberations throughout the community, eliciting participation from religious leaders, neighbors, and elders, until the marriage becomes untenable.

Divorce emerges in this context as both a personal and collective resolution. While divorce is generally discouraged in Islamic teaching, it is nonetheless socially tolerated when framed as a protective measure (Wan et al., 2025). By divorcing a wife accused of witchcraft, a husband symbolically purifies himself and his lineage, distancing them from the stain of sorcery. Divorce thus functions not merely as the dissolution of a marital contract but as a ritual of purification, reaffirming the family's honor within the wider community (Majawa, 2025). For the accused wife, however, the consequences are devastating. She loses not only her marital home but also her social standing and economic security. Divorced women in Zanzibar often struggle to remarry, particularly if they carry the stigma of witchcraft. Without a husband's support, they may face poverty, social isolation, and diminished protection from their natal families, who themselves fear association with her tainted reputation (Adinkrah & Cody, 2024). The gendered aspects of these allegations are noteworthy. Women are over-represented, and allegations often mirror deeper patriarchal inequalities.

In Zanzibari culture, as in most African societies, women's value tends to be described in terms of biological capability, domestic submission, and allegiance to their husband's family (Salehe et al., 2025). When they fail to live up to these ideals through infertility, assertiveness, or resistance to in-laws they become particularly subject to suspicion. Widow's and elderly women also feature highly as targets. Without husbands to protect, their social roles become unclear, and they come to be alleged by younger kin who desire their land or property. This mirrors what Bourdieu refers to as symbolic violence: those subtle, often imperceptible means through which domination is enacted and sanctioned (Ariftha & Azhar, 2023). Witchcraft allegations coerce women into submission, penalizing those who don't conform to assigned roles while enforcing male dominance.

Comparative evidence from other African contexts supports this reading. In Ghana, accusations often involve older women, who are exiled to so-called "witch camps" and thereby divested of kin relations and social identity (Issahaku, 2024). In Nigeria, Pentecostal churches publicly exorcize women and young children accused of witchcraft, inserting stigma in a religious idiom (Princess Ayelotan, 2022). In South Africa, accusations often lead to mob lynching, in which accused persons are beaten or murdered by neighbors. Zanzibar does not share to an equal degree in this violence or institutionalized exile, but in more subtle modes of excluding people divorce, reputational destruction, avoidance, and gossip it has identical effects of ostracism. What links these varied contexts is the fact that witchcraft accusations superimpose themselves upon pre-existing inequalities of gender, age, and kinship and transform them into moral warrants for excluding people (Kelkar et al., 2022). Their consequences for marital stability run very deep. Accusations of witchcraft destabilize

marriages not just by promoting divorce but also by undermining trust, which underlies conjugal relations. Marriages that survive under suspicion exist in an environment of strain and insecurity in which all misfortune can reprise accusations. The fact that there are children does not necessarily serve to weaken these interactions; indeed, children can themselves become targets of suspicion, as long as they often fall ill or have strange comportments (Khalil et al., 2020). Therefore, marital relations in these situations remain in an ongoing state of fragility, in danger of being snapped under the strain of cultural discourses which label misfortune as stemming from malignant design.

Its effect upon social welfare is extensive and long-lasting, and far outreaches even temporary family and marriage dislocation. Individuals barred from family, marriage, and community support arrangements experience added poverty, mental anguish, and vulnerability to future abuse (Marinucci & Riva, 2021). Charges of witchcraft do not only sully reputations; they structurally eliminate social safety nets by which people live in security and to which they have recourse in times of hardship. In Zanzibar as in most of Africa, in the absence of formal state-provided systems of welfare, social protection overwhelmingly operates through kin, marriage, and community reciprocity. To be excluded from these arrangements is therefore to be deprived of one's own sources of security and feeling of belonging (Camargo, 2023).

Women who have been divorced on suspicion of witchcraft experience this vulnerability most severely. Marriage offers not just emotional support, but material security as well, to most women. Husbands owe men their spouses emotional support, as well as material support in terms of providing food, shelter, and protection (Rouamba, 2025). Marital families also serve as buffers during economic setbacks. When the divorce arises out of suspicion of witchcraft, these rights and privileges cease to exist for these women. The stigma of being suspected of witchcraft makes it extremely difficult to remarry, as potential husband's fear inheriting the stigma of being witches themselves. These women often find themselves reverting to their family of origin, but this reabsorption comes under strain. The family might not want to take back daughters whose reputation can destroy sisters' or cousins' marriage potential. The consequence is having most women in vulnerable economic circumstances, whereby they have to survive through casual labor, begging, or small-scale trade (Calabrò et al., 2024).

Older women, and especially widows, experience double jeopardy. Already ostracized through privileges of age and falling economic contributions, they become vulnerable targets for accusations of witchcraft to justify their ostracism (de Jong & Ka Menziwa, 2022). Without remaining social roles as wife or mother, and without access to social support, numerous older women slide into poverty. The lack of pensions or social security in Zanzibar contributes to this vulnerability, and widows accused of witchcraft have limited livelihood options. Secondary materials out of Tanzania and Ghana illustrate comparable patterns, in which older women accused of sorcery have been dispossessed of property and ostracized from community life (Mutaru, 2022). In Ghana, for instance, such women have been exiled to "witch camps," also in poverty, outside family and social relations. Zanzibar has not formalized exile in this fashion, but social ostracism has comparable damaging results, creating situations of tacit abandonment instead of explicit removal.

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Accused family members' children also suffer, inheriting stigma limiting their potential for education and marriage. Teachers, classmates, and neighbors can shy away from identifying with them, tagging them as "witches' children". This stigma reduces the self-esteem of children, excludes them socially, and often restricts their future potential to join cooperative work necessary for training in livelihoods or apprenticeships (An et al., 2020). The long-term consequence runs across generations as stigma persists in adult life, limiting people's likelihood of securing alliances in marriage and entrenching regimes of exclusion (Hearst et al., 2022). This practice fits Goffman's concept of the "spoiled identity," whereby people, and through generations, bear an indelible social blot marking every aspect of their interactions.

In addition to material deprivation, there are also equally devastating psychological impacts. The accused suffer from depression, anxiety, and loss of identity, as their social value is systematically erased. To be accused of being a witch means not only to be morally condemned but also to have one's personality denied (Kąkolewski, 2020). The accused are ostracized beyond the limits of moral community, suffering from what anthropologists have termed "social death" being biologically alive but robbed of recognition and inclusion. This state of social death leads to acute psychological distress. Many of the accused internalize the stigma and doubt themselves, whereas others live in ongoing fear of harassment, assault, or new accusations. For women, there is an added layer of mental distress due to the dismantling of marital security, child rejection, and loss of female support networks without which social survival is otherwise not possible (Baraka et al., 2022).

These results show weakness in policy interventions based on legal prohibition. In most parts of Africa, as in Tanzania, laws have been enacted to criminalize practice or accusation of witchcraft. It has, nevertheless, failed to keep it out of practice. The fact that allegations continue to run through informal rumor and gossip chains makes law enforcement an uphill task, as few, if any, allegations ever run through formal court cases but instead find their way through casual conversations. Moreover, communities do not trust state institutions, and instead, would rather have accusations resolved through customary or religious channels. As such, prohibitions exist on paper but witchcraft accusations remain unabated in practice (Sanga et al., 2024).

Effective interventions must therefore also address cultural and social dimensions of allegations of witchcraft and not solely in relation to legal proceedings. One potential strategy consists in involving cultural and religious authorities in reinterpretation of harmful practice. In Zanzibar, where Islamic studies and Swahili culture exist side by side, imams and local sheikhs have extensive authority over moral exegesis (Alsaawi, 2022). If these authorities can be brought to denounce allegations of witchcraft and promote instead other explanations of misfortune, communities themselves will be more likely to adapt their practice (Princess Ayelotan, 2023). Sermons to the effect that hardship is part of divine plan, or due to economic and health suffering rather than malevolent occult agency, can denature moral force of allegations.

Education campaigns also have potential in dismantling stereotypes and re-framing community discourses. Schools, community centers, and local newspapers can communicate

messages in favor of more rational explanations of suffering (Giaretton et al., 2020). Taking, for example, an explanation of infertility in terms of biomedicine, or an explanation of disease in childhood as due to preventable disease rather than witchcraft, can enable communities to reinterpret suffering in less life-threatening terms not involving scapegoating. Campaigns of this type, however, must be sensitively targeted to local circumstances. Very confrontational messages excluding belief in spirits as "irrational" can alienate populations, as these can view such interventions as cultural imperialism. Education approaches, instead, should work within cultural terms, providing reinterpretations rather than positive rejections of prevailing systems of belief.

Women's empowerment programs offer still another critical entry point for intervention. Ensuring economic empowerment to women, these programs diminish susceptibility to accusation based on dependence and inequality (Adu et al., 2024). Programs giving credit, skills training, and cooperative businesses to women can raise their bargaining position within households and in communities. When women visibly contribute to household income and to community welfare, accusations of witchcraft have less strength, for the targeted can refer to concrete contributions as proof of their utility (Chance & Sardi Abdoul, 2025). In another way, empowerment programs can bring forth webs of support between women, creating support systems to counteract stigma's isolating impact.

Family-based programs also come to mind, as most accusations have their genesis in family circles or wider circles of kinship. Conflict resolution and dialogue programs in domestic circles can lower the tendency to convert suspicions into overt accusations. Local mediators, for example, Tedla (2023) stated that can be utilized to intervene in controversy over inheritance, infertility, or polygynous marriage, and lead family members to non-accusatory resolutions. Such programs involve training local leaders to resolve conflict and equipping these leaders with culturally valid models of comprehending misfortune.

Crucially, interventions have to be participatory, engaging communities in reinterpreting traditions in a way that safeguards individuals but maintains cultural identity intact. This participatory ethic follows Robert Chambers' paradigm of "putting the last first," whereby empowerment of marginalized communities to control the interventions operating in their life becomes central (Ganjeh et al., 2025). Community workshops reframing bad fortune in terms of health and economic setbacks instead of witchcraft interdiction can slowly transform collective understandings. Engagement of traditional healers in such programs can also be efficacious, as healer figures tend to have dual roles reinforcing belief in witchcraft and providing cures for bad fortune. By involving them in awareness programs, instead of excluding, programs can broker an intermediate position between cultural belief and protective practice. Further comparative lessons from other African settings brighten these approaches too (Sundararajan et al., 2020).

In South Africa, certain NGOs have collaborated with local chiefs in establishing bylaws against accusations of witchcraft, reinterpreting these as cases of violence against women. In Ghana, reintegration initiatives in home communities for those who have been in witch camps have included economic support and public reconciliation ceremonies (Mabefam, 2023). In Nigeria, Pentecostal churches once guilty of stoking accusations have in some

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instances been convinced to adopt models of pastoral ministry prioritizing healing over exorcism. These in themselves include potential for transformation, but only if interventions take local belief systems seriously, not making attempts to repress these in whole or in part (Adedibu, 2024).

Their long-term objective was to restore trust, recreate solidarities of inclusion, and engender social welfare as part of sustainable development. Social welfare, here, needs to be conceptualized not just as material support but as engendering an experience of inclusion, recognition, and dignity (Rakhmatullina et al., 2024). Sustainable development in Zanzibar, whose economy consists of tourism, fishing, and small-scale trading, depends upon strong, cohesive communities able to organize themselves communally. Accusations of witchcraft destroy this unity, splintering family and eroding trust. According to Siri (2020) to combat them, therefore, is not just to safeguard vulnerable people but to safeguard more generally the situations favorable to economic and social enhancement. In short, findings demonstrate that accusations of witchcraft in Zanzibar disturb marriage formation, destabilize married life, propel divorce, ostracize women, and erode social cohesion.

Though the patterns mirror larger African trends, Zanzibar's particular past and culture its conjoining of Swahili traditions, Islamic paradigms, and African cosmologies imbues accusations with specific shapes. Using stigma, symbolic power, scapegoating, and social control as frames, accusations of witchcraft appear not as anomalous outbursts of irrationality but as highly structured social practices (Bolton, 2024). Remediation of their impacts demands culturally attentive, community-centered initiatives, which acknowledge as much as they criticize both the injury of accusations and cultural paradigms in which they endure. Such initiatives would have to seek not only to safeguard vulnerable people but to transform collective histories of suffering, to bring into being social circumstances in which collective trust overcomes suspicion, and to promote social welfare as both foundation and prerequisite of durable Zanzibari and extra-Zanzibari development alike (Karreth, 2020).

## **Conclusion**

This study has mapped the social impacts of accusations of witchcraft in Zanzibar, and those of marriage, divorce, and social ostracism in particular. Through integration of secondary material, it has shown that allegations of witchcraft do not involve anything as simple as belief in the supernatural but serve as potent social tools of stigma, symbolic domination, and control. They define understandings of misfortune, affect blame assignments, and undermine central social institutions including marriage and kinship. In this, witchcraft accusations undermine intimate relations, promote divorce as a culturally appropriate means to maintaining family honor, and undermine wider social cohesion.

The research highlights the feminized aspect of this practice, whereby women in large numbers carry the load of suspicion, frequently leading to divorce, social exclusion, and long-term economic insecurity. Beyond individual short-term suffering, there are intergenerational impacts: offspring of suspected families inherit stigma, face diminished education and marriage

prospects, and face long-term exclusion. These processes entrench cycles of poverty and exclusion and directly connect witchcraft accusations to other social welfare and sustainable development challenges. The mental impacts expressed in terms of shame, anxiety, and loss of identity demonstrate additionally the scope of damage entailed in such imputations.

These challenges can be resolved through means other than legal prohibition and appeals to cultural systems of condemnation. Community, religious, and customary leaders' appropriate responses in culturally specific contexts can be pivotal in reframing bad luck in least damaging terms. Supplemental interventions educational programs, empowerment initiatives for girls and women, and community discussions can have potential in shifting social belief, reducing stigma, and reconstructing mutually supportive solidarities. In this case, witchcraft accusations in Zanzibar constitute an existential threat to family stability, social trust, and social welfare. Mitigating their effects demands holistic, community-centered, and culturally competent initiatives to safeguard vulnerable individuals while promoting social systems that are both inclusive and resilient.

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