

Research Article

Exploring the Barriers to Accessing Formal Education by Children in the Alleged Witches' Camps in Ghana

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Abstract

This study explored the barriers to accessing formal education by children in witch camps in Ghana. This is an area neglected by both research and policy in Ghana. This study was conducted in the Gambaga Witches Camp, one of the oldest and most notorious witch camps in Africa. The study employed socio-anthropological methods of data, including interviews, key informant interviews, focus group discussions and observations. Data were gathered from various categories of respondents, such as children in the witches' camp, the alleged witches, the custodians of the witch camp, headteachers and teachers, Ghana Education Services Municipal Directorate officers, the East Mamprusi Municipal Assembly officer, the Presbyterian Church in Gambaga, Islamic Clerics, NGOs and members of the community in which the camp is located. The study found that the children are in the camp to serve their mothers or grandmothers who have been accused of witchcraft and brought to the camp. The study further found that for those children who are attending school, their education is seriously challenged by poor conditions at the camp, poverty, isolation and depression. At the school level, they face abuse from their colleagues, such as name-calling and stigmatisation, unprovoked attacks, and isolation. This situation makes the school environment unattractive, intimidating, and unfriendly to children coming from the witches' camp. Children in the witches' camp frequently avoid school, resulting in frequent absenteeism, tardiness, and poor academic performance. The paper recommends that the government take measures to improve the conditions at the camp. Other students and teachers must be educated to see children from the witches' camp as victims of circumstances, and must not be discriminated against. They must be supported, encouraged, and fully integrated into the school system.

Keywords

Children in Witches Camp, Access to Basic Education, Stereotype, Poverty, Gambaga, Ghana

1. Introduction

This study was conducted in the Gambaga Witches Camp, in the North East Region. The camp is known in the local parlance as *pu'a kru fong* or *soobu fong* (old women's quarters or witches' quarters). With 85 inmates, plus 56 children

below the age of 18 years, the Gambaga Witches camp is located to the south of Gambaga town. It is not the only witch camp in Ghana, there are also five others located at Gnani, Kpatinga, Kukuo, Nabuli, and Bonyase, all in the northern

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region [24, 17]. Kahn [17], reports that there are witch camps in other West African countries, such as Burkina Faso and Benin, but those in Ghana have gained international notoriety. The children are found in the camps to provide support to their mothers or grandmothers, while others came with their mothers who were banished from their communities or escaped from being lynched and sought refuge in the camps [23]. These camps are known as “sanctuaries, prisons, witches camps, witches’ homes or *Pu’a kura fong*” [18].

Belief in witchcraft is ubiquitous and universal in many African countries. In Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), there are reports on child witches and how they are maltreated [30]. However, the belief in what witches can do to society differs from place to place. This influences how society treats them. According to Nukunya [20] witches are believed to possess inherent supernatural powers which they use to harm others or benefit themselves. Most Ghanaians believe that witches and wizards are evil people and are blamed for all kinds of misfortunes, such as sicknesses, barrenness, accidents, destruction of property, deaths, and madness of people [20]. Even community-level misfortunes such as floods, droughts, and outbreaks of diseases are associated with witchcraft [20]. In Northern Ghana, alleged witches faced all forms of abuse, including insults, neglect, excommunication, avoidance, beatings, torture, banishment, and lynching, sometimes from their family members. Those who manage to escape banishment and lynching run to Witches’ camps or are forced to seek refuge in the camps [29]. At the camps, or other shrines, they are tried by ordeal, by witch doctors or priests, and if confirmed that they are witches, they are fined, and those with weak family support are incarcerated at the witches’ camps. They are prevented from going back to their societies, where it is believed, they will continue to cause harm or death to people.

2. The Context and the Problem

The history of human development is linked to education because it plays a significant role in equipping individuals with the necessary skills and knowledge to define and apply goals in life [19]. The level of education of the people determines their level of development, infrastructure, business, jobs, life expectancy, and general quality of life. It enhances self-actualization, promotes human dignity, and opens an individual’s unique talents and opportunities. It is in line with this that education is considered a human right and must be accessible to all. Witches’ camps are characterized by poverty and poor infrastructure, dominated by old women and children, who are condemned to these camps, only waiting for their deaths. Old women without jobs or skills for jobs seem to have lost hope in life and are emotionally, mentally, and psychologically traumatised. Their daily subsistence depends on the benevolence of NGOs and other philanthropists, whose assistants are not regular [1, 2]. Witch camps are isolated and lack basic infrastructure such as water, schools, and health

facilities [27]. Consequently, the absence of sufficient high-quality education hinders the comprehensive growth of individuals and society as a whole and violates fundamental human rights as enshrined in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (UN-DHR, 1948). Arguably, the provision of education to every child is the most significant investment that Ghana can make for the future. Hence, education has become indispensable. The correlation between modern education and poverty reduction is in its ability to offer individuals the means to forge a more promising future for themselves and enhance the well-being of their communities. It is often argued that those in the witches’ camps are poor women who not only lack education but also lack reliable sources of income, they lack family support and have no social capital. Most of the individuals banished from the camps are more likely to be uneducated rather than educated, and they are usually from more rural communities than urban ones [28]. To break the vicious cycle of poverty, discrimination, dehumanisation, and violation of fundamental human rights, providing quality education to children in the witches’ camp is the way forward [26].

However, there are insufficient or no empirical studies on how children in the Witches’ camps access quality basic education, despite the strides by the government of Ghana to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4: ‘Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’. Social science researchers seem to neglect studies on the children in the camps, especially their access to formal education, and the challenges confronting them.

In fact, the literature has been overwhelmingly focused on the plight of the witches in the camps, and on the human rights abuse of the inmates [21, 26, 5]. Others focus on how witches are identified and accused, while others investigate the social, mental, and psychological effects on the inmates [33]. This paper uses socio-anthropological methods, basically interviews, observations, focus group discussions, and documentary reviews, to investigate the challenges faced by children in the witches’ camps regarding their access to quality basic education. The paper addresses the key questions: How did the Gambaga Witches camp come about? Do children in the camp have access to quality basic education? How are they coping in school? Is there special support for them? What are the challenges confronting those children in school?

3. Analytical Frame: Stigmatization, Rejection, and Social Distance

An analysis of the work about sociological labelling theory provides substantial evidence in favor of the perspective that negative or deviant labels create unfavourable expectations. This specific topic was examined in several studies, with some focusing more explicitly than others. Many studies indicate that children classified as marginalized suffer from

mental and physical isolation as a result [22, 25]. In an experiment to prove the negative effects of labeling on children's learning ability conducted by [9], two students, one labeled learning disabled and the other not. Students gave a considerably lower rating to the one identified as having learning disabilities on 12 out of 15 items compared to the one who was labelled as "non-handicapped." While the child who was labeled as marginalized was assessed as having a decreased likelihood of mistreating other children, pupils nevertheless showed a reduced desire to develop a friendship with him [25].

Though this study was in educational psychology, it has many significance in this study. The ideas of expectation and stereotyping exhibit interconnected and recurring associations with stigmatization, rejection, and social detachment [25]. Children from the witches' camp are labeled as evil, and as such, their colleagues disassociate themselves from them. Other students pull out from them, and they feel isolated and rejected [11].

The social distancing phenomena that come with such division is also a source of concern. Even labeled kids who see the learning disability diagnosis as a relief or welcome explanation for previously unexplained "differences" report that physical isolation from non-labelled peers is discouraging and potentially stigmatizing [8]. It is important to reduce social and physical differences, especially in schools to promote inclusion and participation of marginalized children.

4. Research Methods

The study adopted an ethnographic approach to data collection. The research work involved the collection of primary data from the field, mainly interviews, observations, and secondary data from relevant institutions in Gambaga, Ghana

Education Service District Directorate, Basic schools in Gambaga, the Presbyterian Church at Gambaga, and Gambarana's chief palace. The first phase of the research work, which involved a review of existing literature on witchcraft, was carried out between August and September 2022. Fieldwork was carried out in October-November 2022 and again in February and March 2023, from eleven places in Gambaga. These include the children between the ages of 8 and 15 years living in the witch camp and attending school or having dropped out, their guardians (the witches), Gambarana's Palace, the Presbyterian Church in Gambaga, the Presbyterian Basic Schools in Gambaga, Zobzia Primary, Sunnia English and Arabic School, Ghana Education Service District Directorate, the District Assembly, the Chief Imam of Gambaga and his elders, Gambaga township, which doubles as the district capital and NGOs working to support the witches. Unstructured interviews and data collection were gathered from key informants in the Gambaga township, where the witch camp is located. Several officers were contacted at the District Assembly (including the Chief Executive, Planning Officer, the District Education Planning Team, etc.), the GES Gambaga (The Director and Deputies, Heads of Presbyterian and Islamic Education Unit, Circuit Supervisor (now known as School Improvement Support Officer (SISO), Headteachers, and teachers at Presbyterian Basic Schools, Zobzia Basic Schools and Sunnia. These are the schools where children from the witch camp attend, Non-governmental Organizations, and Action Aid Ghana (Programme Officers and Field Staff). These were complemented with observations, focus group discussions, and informal interviews with the witches and the children in the witch camp and members of the community closer to the witch camp. While in Gambaga, discussions were held with the traditional leaders, the Assemblyman, headteachers, teachers, and pupils.

Table 1. Categories of non-student interviewees.

SN	Category of People interviewed	Male	Female	Total
1.	Alleged Witches	0	15	15
2	Presbyterian Church officers in Gambaga	3	1	4
3	Ghana Education Service Municipal Directorate	5	1	6
4	Teachers	10	4	14
5	Islamic Clerics	3	0	3
6	Gambarana's Palace	3	0	3
7	Municipal Assembly	4	1	5
8	NGOs	2	0	2
9	Community members at Sooba fongu	8	3	11
	Total	38	25	63

In all, data was collected from five schools: Presbyterian Primary and Junior High School (JHS), Zobzia Primary and JHS and Sunnia Primary. The schools were selected because children from the witch camp attended them. We reviewed school records, attendance registers, and examination records of children from the witch camp and compared them with those of other children interviewed by teachers and pupils.

Data Analysis

A qualitative content analysis was conducted on the transcribed recorded interviews [13]. We conducted a detailed comparison analysis of the interviews and transcripts and the recorded interviews. To obtain a full understanding of the entire data, we reviewed the interviews severally to establish the unit of analysis and themes. The relevant meaning units, which were statements that provided information relevant to the purpose, were identified, retrieved from the text, and copied into separate Microsoft Word documents. Once each meaning was extracted, it was assigned a code and added to the rest with detailed explanations relating to it. We also categorized the various subthemes into main themes after subjecting them to debate and finally agreeing on the appropriate themes.

5. Key Findings and Discussions

5.1. The Origin of the Gambaga Witches Camp

The Witches' Camp in Gambaga is said to have existed about 294 years ago, long before colonialism. It is believed to have been established by the 1730s, during the reign of Naa Apiisi, Sulemana Atabia (1712 to 1737), the king of Mamprugu at that time. Prior to the establishment of the camp, the Mamprusi used to execute individuals who were accused of practising witchcraft. According to oral history, the death penalty was carried out on individuals found guilty of practising witchcraft among the Mamprusi, the Dagombas, and the Gonjas. Similarly, horrific public executions of witches in Gonjaland are documented by [15]. Susan Druker-Brown also notes that the Mamprusi historically had multiple locations designated for the execution of witches. In addition, she added that additional prototypical capital offences linked to graphic public executions and torture included adultery committed against the wife of the king or prince [10].

This was the prescribed penalty for witches, until one day, one Imam Baba, a Hausa Islamic cleric from Nigeria, after paying homage to the Nayiri (the overlord of the Mamprusi) at Nalerigu and returning to Gamabaga, saw a group of men escorting a woman carrying a baby on her back, to the hillside to be executed for practising witchcraft. Imam Baba implored them to stop executing her. He informed them that he would administer some concoctions to the suspected witch that would render her witchcraft ineffective, thus preventing her from causing harm to anyone. The woman and her baby were handed over to Imam Baba, who sent them home. After pre-

paring some concoctions from the Quran for the alleged witch to drink, he accommodated her in his residence. Swiftly, news spread across the entire Mamprusi territory, and beyond that, there existed a Malam with the ability to exterminate the supernatural powers of witches. Rather than executing the accused witches, individuals instead referred their suspected witches to Imam Baba in Gambaga, who would provide them with the necessary remedies and shelter them at his residence.

Imam Baba handed over the witches in the camp to Gamba-Rana (the chief of Gambaga), who is an earth priest, and thereafter returned to the Hausaland. The Gamba-rana, in his capacity as earth priest (*Tindana*) and traditional leader, who was not familiar with the Quran, resorted to the shrine to determine whether the accused was a witch or not and to either expel or accept them into the camp [7]. Instead of facing legal action or being sent to roam out in the wilderness, the Gamba-Rana shelters them, and reciprocally, the witches labour for him on his farms [7].

The Camp was located on the outskirts of town, about a kilometre south of Gamabaga. Now, the city has expanded to engulf it. Over the years, alleged witches from northern Ghana, Togo, and Burkina Faso were brought there for safety. According to Gamba -Rana's son, some of the witches in the camp escaped persecution and came on their own [34].

The alleged witches fend for themselves and their dependents by working on people's farms in exchange for foodstuffs and by gleaning on farms after harvesting. Some of them get support from their relatives. They are also getting support from the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, NGOs such as Action Aid Ghana, Sogtaba, and the government. Due to their frailty and old age, most of them cannot embark on any active farming or do business. At the time this research was conducted, there were 85 witches in the camp, and all but 1 were male. There were also 32 children of school-going age in the camp.

5.2. Characteristics of the Camp

This section deals with the characteristics of the study population, particularly the witches and the children in the witch camp. In the local parlance, witches are *sooba* (plural) or *sonya* (singular), others pejoratively refer to them as *po'a kura* (literally means old women). The people call the witches *Sooba*, plural, and *Sonya*, singular.

Regarding education, none of them had ever received any formal schooling. While all of them described themselves as farmers, only seven of them cultivated crops during the previous cropping season. Their advanced age prevents them from engaging in farming. Collectively, they help the Gamba-rana in his farming activities, particularly in the areas of planting, harvesting, and transporting the farm produce to his residence. The industrious ones also provide their services to farmers in need, particularly in activities like seed sowing, millet winnowing, groundnut picking, and maize dehiscing,

in exchange for monetary compensation or a portion of the agricultural yield.

Furthermore, the ladies sustain themselves by engaging in gleaning, harvesting shea nuts, and dawadawa. Some of them engage in visiting the Gambaga market to collect fallen grains in the process of rebagging or bursting bags [6]. ‘At times, I get two to three bowls of grains on a good market day’. Stated

by one of the witches. Additionally, they receive aid in the form of donations of food and second-hand clothing from the Presbyterian Church. Furthermore, the Church provided financial support and enrolled them in the National Health Insurance. In addition, some individuals receive support from their family members and sympathizers who occasionally pay them visits.

Table 2. Ethnic Composition of the Witches and the Children.

Ethnic groups	Witches in the camp		Total	Children in the camp		Total
	M	F		M	F	
Mamprusi	1	26	27	6	16	22
Konkomba	0	22	22	2	11	13
Dagomba	0	18	18	1	8	9
Bimoba	0	10	10	1	6	7
Kusasi	0	4	4	0	2	2
Frafra	0	4	4	0	3	3
Total	1	84	85	10	46	56

There were 85 witches in the camp *-Po’a kura fong* (old women’s quarters) at the time of this study. Most of the alleged witches were Mamprusi (27), followed by Konkomba (22) and Dagomba (18). All but one was a male. These people came from various communities and villages, especially from the Northern and Upper East Regions¹. However, an interview with the chief priest, and the putative owner of the camp, who doubled as the chief of Gambaga, Gambarana Yahaya Wuni revealed that there were witches from Togo and Burkina Faso in the past [17, 28].

5.3. Education of Children in the Witches’ Camp

The witches’ camp is called *Po’a kura fong*, which means aged women section or *Sooba fong*, blankly put as witches’ section. There were 56 (10 boys and 46 girls) children in the camp, and 32 of them were of school-going age. Out of this number, 19 were in school, while 13 had dropped out. Out of the 13 who dropped out, 7 discontinued after coming to the camp, but 6 dropped out while in the camp.

The majority, 82% (46) of the children in the witch camp were girls, while 17.85% (10) were boys. These children were of two categories. The first category found themselves in the camps because they came along with their mothers, while the

second category came to serve or assist their mothers and grandmothers banished to the camp. The last category of children was mainly girls. These children might not be witches themselves. Of the 19 still in school, 8 attended Presby Primary School, 4 were in Zobzia Primary School, 3 were in Sunnia Primary, and 4 were in Awalia Primary. However, out of the 19 schools, we interviewed only 12 (8 girls and 4 boys).

5.4. Challenges Confronting Children in School

The study found three categories of challenges confronting the education of children. These are home or camp-level problems, school-level challenges and individual-level challenges.

5.4.1. Camp/Home Environment: What Is the Situation at Pu’a Kura Fong

The study found that poverty and deprivation are serious challenges in the camp. All the witches are not employed and have no employable skills apart from seasonal selling of their labour, especially during the farming season. They also glean and re-winnow millet, rice, and soya beans after harvesting. The little they get is what they use to feed on. As Mma Agu (pseudonym), one of the witches with three children, explains:

I do not have a farm, but I sometimes go to people’s farms and get paid wages. I plant, weed, and harvest as well. If it is harvesting groundnuts, beans, soya beans or Bambara beans,

¹ The witches in the camp were mainly from the Mole-Dagbani, Konkomba, Kusasi and Bimoba ethnic groups.

instead of money, I accept a portion of the harvest as my compensation. When I was strong, I used to go and weed and get paid. Now, things have changed. I am not as strong as I used to be. Also, due to agricultural mechanization, involving tractors, weedicides, harvesters, etc., there is little manual farm work for us.

Asked about their means of survival, Mma Agu and others clarified that they rely on the generosity of benefactors, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and occasionally compassion from family members [2]. Since every one of them possesses National Insurance Cards, a portion of their modest medical requirements are covered. When it comes to access to health care, their sole concern is to transport themselves to the health facility.

Poverty and deprivation, resulting from the lack of regular income and reliance on others for support, pose significant obstacles to the education of the children in the camp. According to Azua (pseudonym), a fourth-grade student at Zobzia Primary, one of the daughters of Mma Agu, she does not attend school consistently due to sometimes inadequate access to food. The school does not provide meals for its students. 'I lack the financial means to purchase food.' According to another schoolgirl named Kuku (pseudonym), she refrains from attending school whenever she is in her menstrual cycle. I am unable to afford to purchase pads. According to her, an NGO provided them with some pads, but they have now run out.

One more concern faced at home is the problem of child labour [23]. The primary objective of their presence in the camp is to provide support to their mother/grandmothers housed there. Their priority does not lie in attaining education. Within the camp, they perform various tasks such as running errands, cooking, collecting water and firewood, washing, sweeping, and occasionally assisting market women in selling their products and receiving payment. And also engage in agricultural labor on farms. 'My decision to withdraw from school was based on my inability to maintain focus during class. I was constantly preoccupied with domestic matters, such as issues of food, clothing, and how to attend to my mother.' Azara, a caretaker at the Camp.

Ignorance or illiteracy among parents or guardians in the camp also hampers the education of the youngsters. Not a single alleged witch in the camp had received any formal education [2]. School-going children in the camp often express that they do not receive assistance at home when they return home with their homework. Their guardians cannot inspire them.

5.4.2. School Environment

In the schools. The children face a number of challenges, especially from their colleagues. This includes stigmatization -name-calling. Goffman defines stigma as a characteristic that undermines and diminishes an individual "from a complete and typical person to a contaminated, devalued one" [14]. The

study revealed that there is considerable anguish associated with being labeled a "witch" and an equivalent, if not more, anguish is experienced when being referred to as a "witch." To be labeled a "witch" indicates that one belongs to a stigmatized out-group, someone who is seen as undeserving of respect. The designation has detrimental repercussions on the youngsters, including depression [3]. The experience of feeling disheartened, unhappy, and alienated has a detrimental impact on our ability to concentrate and pay attention in school. The following are the statements made by a selection of youngsters at the witch camp. Frequently, their colleagues engage in verbal abuses and actively shun their presence.

These attitudes can demoralize and rationalize disparities in social standing, therefore maintaining the stigmatized individual in a lower position and fostering a feeling of insignificance. The behavioural reactions to the term "witch" as reported by the individual alleged witches and their offspring indicate a possible risk in the situation, particularly for the children. They started using pejorative terms to describe themselves and others. Essentially, they seized the moniker from those who aimed to denigrate them, transforming a stigmatizing phrase into a symbol of timidity, seclusion, and lack of self-assurance [12].

"At times, I experience a sense of vulnerability within the school environment." On occasion, our colleagues would unprovokedly denounce you as a witch and caution you against attempting to enchant them. "Forming and maintaining friendships with our colleagues is a challenging task. Some individuals believe that by forming friendships with them, one may exploit the situation to harm them. Descriptors, whether assigned by oneself or by others, provide insight into the formation, preservation, and modification of social identity [12].

This phenomenon has significant implications for the self-esteem of both groups and their members. The use of labels and their associated meanings enables the social observer to conveniently analyse the social surroundings, therefore functioning as a tool for processing and incorporating social information related to our social identities [12]. Merely being assigned a group label can trigger the activation of stereotypical information about the group [31]. Information that aligns with these activated connotative meanings of labels is more readily encoded, absorbed, and stored in memory, hence increasing the likelihood of future retrieval [32]. Labels and their corresponding categories function as guiding themes and organizing principles, enabling us to comprehend the significance of social information as well as psychological and emotional dimensions.

5.5. School Attendance

The school attendance for the third term of the 2023/2024 academic year for 12 of the students revealed the following. The details are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Attendance at School.

Number of Student	Attendance at school	Percentage
1	50 out of 60 days	8.33
3	41-49 out of 60 days	25.0
2	30- 40 out of 60 days	16.66
4	20 -29 out of 60 days	33.33
2	Below 20 out of 60 days	16.66
Total =12		

An examination of the school registers revealed that only 8.33% of the children in the witches' camp attend school up to 50 days out of 60 days in a term. Those who attended between 41 and 49 days out of 60 days were only 3 or 25%, while 2 or 16.66% attended between 30 to 40 days.

Apart from the frequent absenteeism, interviews with teachers revealed that they also come late to school. Three of the schools these children attend, Zobzia, Presby, and Asalia primary schools, are about one kilometer from the camp through Gambaga town. They are not the only children who commute to Gambaga town to their schools. Other children also do. Their lateness, according to them, is a result of domestic chores.

5.6. Stereotyping and Discrimination

As a town, Gambaga is somewhat small and uniform. There exists a significant degree of interpersonal relationships, where individuals engage in close interaction and are familiar with one another. By virtue of this, the pupils are acquainted with one another's backgrounds. Their tight interaction precludes any possibility of anonymity. They possess knowledge of their colleagues, their place of residence, and their cultural origins. Thus, children originating from the witches' camp are universally recognized. Children from the witches' camp encounter prejudice and preconceived notions from their peers, who frequently avoid their presence and practice discrimination against them. Most other pupils interviewed in the school held the belief that children whose parents are practitioners of witchcraft are more likely to become practitioners of witchcraft themselves. 'They are also practitioners of witchcraft as their moms retain the ability to transmit it to them.' 'Non-conformists are unable to coexist with the witches.' 'While they may not pose a threat at this young age, they have the potential to cause fatalities when they mature.' These were some perspectives articulated by other students in the educational institutions. Such perspectives shape their interaction with youngsters originating from the camp. The veracity of their perceptions notwithstanding, it is an undeniable reality that these convictions have a profound impact on their conduct, demeanor, and interaction with the children

residing in the witch camp. Furthermore, the literature has elucidated that there exist two distinct methods of obtaining witchcraft powers: voluntary and forcible. Regarding the former scenario, the individual makes a deliberate choice and proceeds to undertake the essential measures to obtain the powers associated with witchcraft. In the latter scenario, the involuntary possession of witchcraft powers arises when parents, who are practitioners of witchcraft, provide the ritualistic substance to others without obtaining their permission [20].

Student participants at the camp reported experiencing emotional and psychological distress due to verbal mistreatment by their peers, who frequently belittle them without any apparent reason. They mentioned that the teachers do not behave that way towards them. They claimed that teachers sometimes punish those who despise them and run them down.

5.7. Withdrawing from School Activities

All twelve participants indicated that they sometimes withdraw from school activities, especially extracurricular ones, to avoid interacting or competing physically with their colleagues. "There are some guys in our class, even when you beat them in exams, they say you use witchcraft," says Azaaratu. They explained that the school environment is sometimes intimidating as they feel bad, self-pity, low self-esteem, rejected, and low confidence.

They further explained that, due to poverty, they look different from their colleagues in appearance. One of them further elucidates, "We were given school uniforms, sandals, bags and books. We find it difficult to always get soap to wash our uniforms, iron them neatly, and look nice in them. In the dry season like this, our uniforms always get dirty."

5.8. How Are They Coping in School

The study found that ten out of the twelve students interviewed indicated that it is not easy for them because the tag being evil draws their colleagues away from them. Getting company and assistance to do classwork is an uphill task for

them. They indicated that they sometimes could not withstand the insinuations and attacked their colleagues who insulted them. They further indicated that fighting with their colleagues still compounds their plights as it serves to further expose them.

At times, we arrive at school late and skip lessons, then head home before closing time. This was expressed by 7 out of the 12 students. Usually, they carry clothes and veils in their bags, which they use to wear on top of their uniforms to disguise themselves and avoid school.

5.9. Support for Students in the Camp

The study found that there is various assistance, but these are mostly targeting alleviating the plight of the witches and not the children. For instance, the Presbyterian Church of Ghana is supporting them with food and sometimes used clothing. The Church has also constructed a common sitting place and furnished it with a television. Action Aid Ghana and Songtaba also provide them with food from time to time. The government of Ghana is giving those over 60 years of free health insurance. Another NGO also provided them with toilet facilities. The children, especially the students, benefit from the Free School Uniforms and the School Capitation Grants. However, these are generalized assistance to students and do not target the marginalized students.

6. Discussions

The study found that the Gambaga Witches Camp existed long before colonialism. I was founded by Imam Baba, who was probably touched by the barbaric capital punishment visited on innocent victims and used his ingenuity to prevent the killings of human beings. For nearly 300 years now, it is not conceivable to imagine the number of lives that have been saved by seeking refuge in the camp. However, others see the camps as prisons and sanctuaries for alleged witches [18], and places of violation of human rights [27].

The witches are mostly old women banished from their communities [16]. They have no formal education and, therefore, lack employable skills. They work to support the camp owner in return for their protection and safety in the camp. They live on the benevolence of others and NGOs.

The children in the camp are to provide help and take care of their mothers and grandmothers [23]. Their objective is not to attend school, but to provide help to their mothers. This explains why there are more girls than boys in the camp. Before joining the camp, some of the children were attending school, but stopped attending school because the conditions were not good in the camp. The social, psychological, and emotional trauma affects the children as well [4].

Children from the witches' camp silently face discrimination, stereotyping, and insults from their colleagues. These mostly happen on the blind side of the school authorities. The school environment does not engender inclusiveness for

marginalized children. This could explain why these children frequently miss school or attend school late. It would be necessary for these children to be treated as children with special needs and given special attention to encourage them to continue their education, in order not to end up like their mothers in the camp.

7. Conclusion

Despite the Free Compulsory Education in Ghana, the education for all policy, social and inclusive education being implemented in schools, access to basic quality education by children in the witch camp is ignored by both policy and research. Most of the children in the camps attend school, but due to challenges, they are not able to complete their basic education. If measures are not taken to educate them, they may end up in the shoes of their mothers and be accused of witchcraft in the future. The school environments are not inclusive enough to engender freedom from stereotyping, labeling, and insults from students. This makes it difficult for marginalized students to participate fully in teaching and learning.

If the government cannot close the witches' camps, it must set up special schools in the camps to take care of these children so that by the time they finish their basic education, they will be mature enough to withstand the stigma and continue their education. By establishing special schools for them, they will fulfil their right to have quality basic education, and the nation will also be achieving SDG 4.

8. Recommendations

A comprehensive plan to integrate and support children from the "Witches' Camp". To successfully improve the conditions for these children, a multi-faceted approach is required, targeting both the systemic environment of the school and the individual needs of the children. The goal is to move from mere tolerance to full inclusion and empowerment. There must be a comprehensive education and awareness campaign for the school community to dismantle prejudice and build a foundation of empathy. This must involve all teachers, administrative staff, and students. The sensitisation campaigns should include details of the socio-economic, cultural, and superstitious beliefs that lead to children being branded as "witches" and sent to the camp and should be framed as a human rights issue.

Creating a robust support system within the school. Provide regular, accessible sessions with trained school counsellors or child psychologists who specialise in trauma to support them. Many of these children will have missed a significant amount of schooling. Implement after-school tutoring, literacy and numeracy catch-up classes, and individualised learning plans to help them bridge the academic gap and experience success.

Abbreviations

GES	Ghana Education Service
JHS	Junior High School
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SISO	School Improvement Support Officer

Author Contributions

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no potential conflict of interest.

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