

Workstream 2 Culture and Faith
Convenor: Dr Mor Dioum,
VCF Director

The focus of the **B-MAG Culture, Faith or Beliefs** workstream is the safeguarding of children and young people, including, though not limited to those impacted by mental health, language, domestic abuse, disabilities, exploitation and trafficking, in addition to safeguarding priorities affecting BME and migrant communities such as FGM, witchcraft & spirit possession, and radicalisation.

Child Abuse Linked to Faith or Belief (CALFB) has become an emerging theme for UK government and statutory agencies, and we welcome its recent inclusion as an assessment category in the children in need census for 2016-17.

Witchcraft and Spirit Possession is the sole focus for the current UK definition of child abuse linked to faith or belief, with previous calls for legislation to stop branding children as witches, largely catered for within the Children Act 1989 & 2004. The need for a global – and UK – definition has been demonstrated following a special resolution ‘witchcraft and human rights’ workshop at the UN summit in Geneva (Sep 2017). This has led to UK foreign office interest in seeking contributors for future related initiatives.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) has its roots in cultural beliefs and traditions, though long established as an abuse within UK law and compartmentalised within UK policy; the Prohibition of Female Circumcision Act 1985 extended in the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003 and within the Serious Crime Act 2015. To-date, FGM remains the only form of abuse subject to mandatory reporting, increasing statistics largely as a result of victims/survivors of non-recent practice identified through health settings. The legislative changes have resulted in zero prosecutions to-date, and the learning for government and statutory agencies is to effectively engage with impacted communities, if we are to eradicate harmful practice.

Radicalisation has emerged within child protection cases, often linked to alleged counter-terrorism acts by one of the parents, predominantly the father, leading to radicalisation, and thus safeguarding concerns for children and young people. Such cases have further identified a lack of practitioner confidence in assessing risk of cultural or faith-based harmful practices within Section 17 (child in need) and Section 47 (child protection) processes.

How we address culture, faith or beliefs within the wider child safeguarding agenda led by the Department for Education (DfE) is increasingly influenced by the Home Office and to a lesser degree the Department of Health (DH) where some of the factors for children are located.

Strategic links include the DfE-supported National Working Group on Child Abuse Linked to Faith or Belief, the cross-party Victims Forum, and UNESCO Chair for the integration of refugees through language and arts.

During 2018, the group will continue to communicate, research and campaign on matters of culture, faith or beliefs, in all its forms, to ensure that the relevant aspects pertaining to culture and faith are embedded within child protection policy and practice, and that the rights, care and protection of BME and migrant children are assured.

In conclusion, various individuals/organisations have contributed to the group's work streams related to culture, faith or beliefs. Activities to-date, listed below, have included dialogue within communities, with professionals and practitioners and victims/survivors.

Seminars and Presentations

Individual/Organisation	Type	Description	Date
Amma Anane-Agyei & Sheila Leighton (African Families Service)	PAGE EU consortium meeting, <i>Centre for Social Work Research</i>	International multi-agency training; Safeguarding Black African Children and Families. PAGE, EU Erasmus Plus Project	Mar 2017
Dr Prospera Tadam	Book Launch & B-MAG Seminar <i>Centre for Social Work Research</i>	The W-Word: Witchcraft labelling and child safeguarding in social work practice	Oct 2017
Dr Stephanie Yorath (VCF)	Open Workshop; Multilingual children in foster care <i>ESRC Science Festival</i>	Practitioner Day: The Importance of the Native Language <i>Partnership work with Mothertongue to address language matters/linguistic heritage in child protection</i>	Nov 2017

Research

Fatuma Farah (UEL)	PhD Studies <i>Centre for Social Work Research</i>	Examining differing perspectives on FGM, from affected communities	Ongoing
Laura Hamblin-Opaluwa (UEL)	PhD Studies <i>Centre for Social Work Research</i>	An investigation of the abuse of children and young people arising from the practice of faith-based beliefs relating to witchcraft or spirit possession in the UK	Ongoing

Dr Mor Dioum (VCF)	Research Project <i>In collaboration with Dr Lisa Oakley (MMU)</i>	Exploration of practitioner knowledge of child abuse linked to faith or belief; in search of effective intervention	Mar 2017
Stephen Briggs & Andrew Whittaker (UEL)	Published article in British Journal of Social Work	“Protecting children from faith-based abuse through accusations of witchcraft and spirit possession; understanding contexts and informing practice	Jan 2018