



Impact of Christianity on Witchcraft Practice in Tivland, Benue State, Nigeria

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Article Info

ISSN (Online): 2582-7138

Impact Factor (RSIF): 8. 04

Volume: 07

Issue: 01

Received: 10-12-2025

Accepted: 11-01-2026

Published: 13-02-2026

Page No: 787-789

Abstract

The advent of Christianity in Tivland, Benue State, Nigeria, has significantly influenced the traditional practices and beliefs of the Tiv people, including witchcraft. This study explores the impact of Christianity on witchcraft practices in Tivland. Despite the spread of Christianity, witchcraft remains a prevalent phenomenon in Tivland, with many Christians still engaging in traditional witchcraft practices. This study investigates the extent to which Christianity has influenced witchcraft practices in Tivland. This study employed a qualitative approach, relying on participant observation and field experience of the phenomenon of witchcraft in Tivland. The researcher observed and recorded witchcraft-related practices and rituals in various Christian communities in Tivland. The study reveals that Christianity has had a significant impact on witchcraft practices in Tivland, with many Christians abandoning traditional witchcraft practices and embracing Christian teachings. However, some Christians still engage in traditional witchcraft practices, often as a means of coping with spiritual and economic challenges. The study recommends that Christian leaders in Tivland should continue to emphasize the incompatibility of witchcraft with Christian teachings and provide support for those seeking to abandon traditional witchcraft practices. The study concludes that Christianity has had a positive impact on reducing witchcraft practices in Tivland, but more efforts are needed to fully integrate Christian teachings into the daily lives of Tiv Christians.

Keywords: Christianity, Witchcraft, Tivland, Benue State, Nigeria

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of witchcraft is deeply ingrained in Tivland, Benue State, Nigeria, with far-reaching consequences for individuals and communities. Witchcraft is often associated with evil, misfortune, and harm, and is believed to be a major cause of illness, death, and poverty (Geschiere, 1997; Ashforth, 2005)^[4, 1]. In Tivland, witchcraft is often seen as a means of explaining and addressing the uncertainties of life. People may turn to witchcraft to seek power, protection, or revenge, or to explain unexpected events or outcomes. The pervasive nature of witchcraft beliefs has significant social, economic, and psychological impacts on individuals and communities.

Socially, witchcraft accusations can lead to conflict, division, and even violence within communities. Accused witches are often ostracised, stigmatised, and sometimes even killed. This can lead to social fragmentation and undermine community cohesion. Economically, witchcraft can have significant costs, including the cost of traditional healing practices, compensation for accused witches, and lost productivity due to fear and anxiety. Psychologically, the fear of witchcraft can lead to anxiety, stress, and trauma, particularly among vulnerable individuals such as women, children, and the elderly.

The advent of Christianity in Tivland has influenced traditional practices and beliefs, including witchcraft (Bohannon, 1957; 1958)^[2-3]. Christian teachings have provided an alternative worldview, emphasising the power of God and the importance of love, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Christianity has also brought education, healthcare, and economic opportunities to Tivland, which have helped to reduce the reliance on witchcraft and promote more positive and constructive worldviews.

This study explores the impact of Christianity on witchcraft practices in Tivland, examining the ways in which Christian teachings have influenced traditional practices and beliefs. The study highlights the complex and multifaceted nature of witchcraft in Tivland, and the need for a nuanced and contextualised approach to addressing the phenomenon. The study employed a qualitative approach, relying on participant observation and field experience of the phenomenon of witchcraft in Tivland. The researcher observed and recorded witchcraft-related practices and rituals in various Christian communities in Tivland. The study reveals that Christianity has had a significant impact on witchcraft practices in Tivland, with many Christians abandoning traditional witchcraft practices and embracing Christian teachings. However, some Christians still engage in traditional witchcraft practices, often as a means of coping with spiritual and economic challenges.

Statement of Problem

Despite the spread of Christianity, witchcraft remains a prevalent phenomenon in Tivland, with many Christians still engaging in traditional witchcraft practices (Tiv Traditional Council, 2020)^[5]. This study investigates the extent to which Christianity has influenced witchcraft practices in Tivland.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach, relying on participant observation and field experience of the phenomenon of witchcraft in Tivland. The researcher observed and recorded witchcraft-related practices and rituals in various Christian communities in Tivland over a period of 12 months, from January 2022 to December 2022. The researcher participated in community activities, attended church services, and engaged in informal conversations with community members to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of Christianity on witchcraft practices in Tivland. The observations and recordings were done in a non-intrusive manner, with the researcher taking notes and reflecting on the experiences to identify patterns and themes.

Discoveries

The study reveals that Christianity has had a significant impact on witchcraft practices in Tivland, with many Christians abandoning traditional witchcraft practices and embracing Christian teachings. However, some Christians still engage in traditional witchcraft practices, often as a means of coping with spiritual and economic challenges. The study also found that some Christian leaders in Tivland are tolerant of traditional witchcraft practices, often incorporating elements of traditional spirituality into their teachings.

Recommendations

The paper has the following recommendations: Christian leaders in Tivland should continue to preach and teach that witchcraft is incompatible with Christian beliefs and values. This can be done through sermons, Bible studies, and other forms of Christian education. The leaders should clearly explain the biblical perspective on witchcraft, highlighting the dangers of witchcraft and the importance of living a life that is pleasing to God. Christian leaders should provide support and care for individuals who are seeking to abandon traditional witchcraft practices. This can include counseling, prayer, and spiritual

guidance. The leaders should also provide a safe and supportive community for those who are seeking to break free from the bondage of witchcraft.

Additionally, Christian leaders can establish programs and ministries that cater to the needs of individuals who are seeking to abandon witchcraft practices. For example, they can establish deliverance ministries, healing services, and counseling programs.

Christian leaders should engage in dialogue with traditional leaders to promote a deeper understanding of Christian teachings and to address the spiritual and economic needs of the community. This can involve meeting with traditional leaders, attending cultural events, and participating in community activities.

Through dialogue, Christian leaders can share the gospel message with traditional leaders and encourage them to support the Christian community. They can also learn from traditional leaders about the cultural context and the needs of the community.

Christian leaders should address the spiritual and economic needs of the community by establishing programs and ministries that cater to these needs. For example, they can establish healthcare programs, education initiatives, and economic empowerment projects.

By addressing the spiritual and economic needs of the community, Christian leaders can demonstrate the love and compassion of God, which can help to win the hearts of the people and promote the spread of the gospel.

Christian leaders should collaborate and partner with traditional leaders, government agencies, and other stakeholders to address the needs of the community. This can involve working together to establish community development projects, providing aid to the needy, and promoting peace and reconciliation.

Challenges and Opportunities

1. The study highlights several challenges and opportunities for integrating Christian teachings into daily life in Tivland. One of the main challenges is the persistence of cultural and traditional practices that are incompatible with Christian teachings.
2. However, this also presents an opportunity for Christian leaders to engage with traditional leaders and cultural influencers, promoting a deeper understanding of Christian teachings and encouraging cultural practices that are consistent with biblical principles.
3. Overall, the study concludes that Christianity has had a positive impact on reducing witchcraft practices in Tivland, but more efforts are needed to fully integrate Christian teachings into the daily lives of Tiv Christians.

Conclusion

The study reveals that Christianity has had a significant positive impact on reducing witchcraft practices in Tivland. Many Tiv Christians have abandoned traditional witchcraft practices and have embraced Christian teachings. This is a testament to the power of the gospel and the effectiveness of Christian evangelism in Tivland. The study attributes this positive impact to several factors, including the efforts of Christian leaders, the influence of Christian communities, and the transformative power of the gospel. Christian leaders have played a crucial role in promoting Christian teachings and encouraging Tiv Christians to abandon witchcraft practices.

Despite the positive impact of Christianity, the study notes that more efforts are needed to fully integrate Christian teachings into the daily lives of Tiv Christians. Many Tiv Christians still engage in traditional witchcraft practices, often due to cultural or social pressures. To address this challenge, Christian leaders need to intensify their efforts to teach and preach the gospel, emphasizing the incompatibility of witchcraft with Christian teachings. They also need to provide ongoing support and care for Tiv Christians, helping them to grow in their faith and to resist the temptation of witchcraft.

To fully integrate Christian teachings into daily life, Tiv Christians need to apply biblical principles to all areas of their lives. This includes their relationships, work, and cultural practices. Christian leaders can help facilitate this process by providing teaching and guidance on how to live a Christian life in the context of Tiv culture. For example, Christian leaders can teach on the importance of forgiveness, love, and reconciliation, and how these values can be applied in the context of Tiv culture. They can also provide guidance on how to navigate cultural practices that may be incompatible with Christian teachings.

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How to Cite This Article

Katuka H, Terhembafan AJ. Impact of Christianity on witchcraft practice in Tivland, Benue State, Nigeria. *Int J Multidiscip Res Growth Eval.* 2026;7(1):787–789.

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