



# Life History Study on Witchcraft Victims

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## Article History    Abstract

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*This study aimed to investigate the stories of witchcraft victims in depth. With the case study method in the form of a life history study, research data is reported using thematic analysis to answer research questions. The source of the research data is an informant who is domiciled in the city of Kupang and fits the criteria that have been established. Christian theology provides the primary basis for discussing the research results, while psychology contributes as a complementary viewpoint. The findings indicated that the informants are subjected to a physical ailment accompanied by psychological symptoms and that negative emotions prevail among the informants, leading to a diminished level of well-being. Despite the informant's unfavorable psychological condition, the interplay of appreciation with familial, social, and spiritual support can offer informants experiencing sickness a sense of positive significance. The informants sought deliverance through spiritual support, seeking exorcisms from servants of God, traditional messengers, and shamans. The study's findings demonstrated that the informants had a gradually positive psychological condition. Still, spiritual camouflage was automatically built to avoid repeating comparable paranormal issues. However, rare and speculative cases of witchcraft are experienced by church members. Therefore, specific assistance by pastors, Christian counselors, psychologists, and/or psychiatrists is highly required as a follow-up action so that victims achieve targeted release and minimize adverse consequences that may occur post-witchcraft.*

**Keywords:** deliverance ministry; life history; positive psychology; witchcraft

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## INTRODUCTION

Occult experiences are a part of the human experience. According to Taylor (Nurdin 2015), animism was the genesis of the evolution of religion into its current recognized form. Traditional belief systems are concerned with supernatural and mystical topics, such as

shamanism, magic, amulets, spiritism, myths, superstitions, sorcery, divination, etc. These practices are typically called esoteric or supernatural knowledge (Fitriyanto 2017). The practitioners are known as shamans.

According to Sianipar, Prakosajaya, and Widiyastuti (2020), the term shaman, which derives from the German word *schmane*, is



used in English to refer to a person revered for their remarkable abilities. In Indonesia, shamanism was a primordial healing and magic-based practice (Banoet 2021). Based on research facts, it is known that this belief in shamanism has existed since a long time ago (Fitriyanto 2017, Setyarini and Suprihatin 2021, Sianipar et al. 2020). In modern society, some still use this method daily and even intend to preserve it as a kind of cultural tradition. (Masfalinda, Fitri, Wilis et al. 2022, Qarima, Ismaiya and Raihanah 2023, Risma 2023).

In the minds of the general public, witchcraft is a disturbing and dangerous practice because it involves supernatural spirits that have an unseen impact on a person's life. According to the Muslim perspective, witchcraft is an act founded on an agreement between a sorcerer and the devil on the condition that the sorcerer does something forbidden or engages in polytheism (Jamhuri and Nopitasari 2018, Niswatul and Habdin 2022). In the meantime, from a Christian perspective, witchcraft is a form of occult practice, precisely the comprehension or teaching of hidden things, things that are unseen outside of God, or powers of darkness (Banoet 2021, Saragih and Timo 2020). People in the city of Kupang view witchcraft as a heinous and barbaric act that can destroy a person's existence through the use of the power of darkness. *Suanggi* refers to both the person/perpetrator of witchcraft and the practice of witchcraft. In the book *Perempuan Rote Meniti Tradisi*, Marwadi (2020) states that *suanggi* is the regional vernacular describing supernatural forces sent to harm others. The individual who performed *suanggi* was named the man *suanggi*. *Suanggi* or this shaman cannot typically be identified by the local community, even though they are suspected; however, no one dares to overtly identify this individual as *suanggi*. There have been numerous attempts from the legal sector to develop laws that establish witchcraft as a criminal offense so that the perpetrators can be punished by the state and present justice for

the losses of witchcraft victims (Eliana 2023, Satriadi 2020, Wahyu and Farrell Charlton 2022).

This study is not concerned with *suanggi* or witchcraft perpetrators but instead with the victim's experience of *suanggi* or witchcraft. The author will use the term 'witchcraft' in future writings to make a balanced comparison with local terminology. Some of the informants the author met during the preliminary research showed psychological conditions and feelings that tend to be negative, such as fear, confusion, and suffering, because it is difficult to endure the pain, sorrow, and despair if they must die. Some experience agony similar to those with mental disorders and are shunned by society. Those who experience negative stigma from society and are recommended for treatment in a mental facility are also present. In addition, other effects include academic (cognitive) factors closely related to psychological factors, such as protracted illness, school dropout, lack of discipline, and lack of concentration on study or work, resulting in poor learning outcomes. The condition of victims of witchcraft will be investigated in detail in this study. The author analyzes the narratives of the victims of witchcraft from two scientific perspectives, namely Christian theology and psychology. The psychological perspective is positioned as a supplement, while theology is the primary perspective.

Research on witchcraft victims has been carried out utilizing anthropological perspectives and Islamic law (Daruputra 2007, Nurdin 2015, Thabrani 2014), and even from a psychological standpoint (Deeley 2019). Christian theology, on the other hand, is primarily provided in literature reviews with relatively few field research (Beka 2020, Dilla 2015, Hutapea 2019, Juld and Enoh 2013, Soekahar 2002). The purpose of this study is to present a narrative that includes the experiences of witchcraft victims are explored in depth, beginning with the symptoms experienced, the victim's interpretation, and the psychological condition of the

phenomenon of witchcraft, and concluding with the process by which the victim is liberated from witchcraft. To attain this objective, the research question posed is: What symptoms do victims of witchcraft experience? What are the victims' psychological states, and how do they interpret the witchcraft experience? What coping mechanisms do the victims employ to clear themselves of witchcraft? It is anticipated that the findings of this study will serve as a resource for Christian-based information and ideas regarding witchcraft, particularly discussions of occult practices. In addition, this study adopts a positive psychology perspective to broaden the scope of the discussion concerning the condition of witchcraft victims. In addition, it can be used as a point of departure for Christian counselors and priests as they devise relief services to assist victims of witchcraft biblically, taking into account the psychological condition of victims due to its incidents.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Historical studies of Witchcraft

According to research conducted by Setyarini and Suprihatin (2021), this belief in shamanism dates back to the colonial era, when 11,000 shamans served as physicians on the islands of Java and Madura. There are massage healers, traditional birth attendants, and witchcraft healers in the shamanic world (Fitriyanto 2017). Each is practiced in his expertise, including magical rituals, witchcraft, or necromancy.

According to the Indonesian Dictionary, occult practices are associated with witchcraft and black magic (Badan Pengembang Bahasa n.d.). The terminology can vary depending on the locale, including *teluh* (West Java), *tenung* (Central Java), *santet* (East Java), *pulung* (West Kalimantan), *doti* (South Sulawesi), *suanggi* (East Nusa Tenggara), and many others (Satriadi 2020). In practice, witchcraft can employ a wide range of mediums, including hair, photographs, dolls, incense, various flowers, etc.; it typically attempts to cause

disability or even death (Herniti 2012). It is difficult to explain logically or medically (Daruputra 2007, Fitriyanto 2017) that witchcraft is an act that uses occult knowledge and is carried out in secret, even from a great distance, to cause visible damage to the victim.

Research conducted by Herniti (2012) on the Using Banyuwangi tribe shows that magic, usually known by only two colors, has other colors, namely black, red, yellow, and white. Jamhuri and Nopitasari (2018) researched the causes of witchcraft, and their findings included jealousy, distaste for other people's happiness, an attempt to bring the victim down or embarrass him, deliberately sending him sick so that the victim's property is spent on treatment, paralyzing victims so they can no longer try, and economic concerns.

Then, Abdul Mukti Thabrani (2014) conducted interdisciplinary research on witchcraft victims from an anthropological and Islamic legal perspective. The findings indicate that witchcraft is one of many social phenomena that affect society, particularly in terms of health. Thabrani also asserts that every mystical act, whether sorcery, magic, or witchcraft, is always performed for a specific purpose and never out of light malice. In other words, the subjective aspect of vengeance can lead to unbridled rage, resulting in a person using shortcuts to harm and ruin his opponent. This research endeavors to contribute to the study of witchcraft, particularly by employing a rare Christian theological perspective. In addition, the author uses a psychological perspective to enhance this paper's comprehension of the condition of survivors of witchcraft by referencing the narrative content obtained from in-depth interviews.

### The Psychological Perspective of Witchcraft

Bever (2016) from a historical and psychological standpoint, the phenomenon of *santet* (Witchcraft), which occurred in pre-modern Western culture, has several parallels with adult harassing behavior in the present day. Bullying can cause illness and encourage

victims to commit suicide, but its primary objective is to humiliate and dominate the victim. Similarly, *santet* asserts power over others and focuses on causing physical harm or death to the victim. To investigate the phenomenon of *santet* (Witchcraft) realistically in the modern era, Bever (Bever 2016) Suggests that critical multidisciplinary knowledge (particularly neuropsychological disciplines) is required.

The main reason the author chose to focus on exploring the psychological experience of victims of witchcraft is that based on the results of the initial preliminary study, it was found that the psychological condition and feelings of the victim, as well as the negative stigma from the community that accompanies every process the subject faces, can affect the healing process from the witchcraft incident. The results of Amalia, Mahardika, & Kusdaryono (2020) found that lack of public knowledge of mental disorders has led to the presence of stigma and wrong myths among the community, so that, as a result, many cases of mental disorders are not appropriately handled.

The preliminary study also found that the dominant negative feelings (emotions) that arose in the four subjects when experiencing witchcraft were fear, confusion, suffering because it was difficult to endure the pain, feeling helpless/unable to carry out various daily activities, including the primary job, to surrender and despair if they had to die. This is in line with Mbogo (2017), which found that witchcraft cases can have a wide range of effects on individuals from physical, socio-economic, psychological, and spiritual aspects. It even impacts academic (cognitive) factors, closely related to psychological aspects, such as prolonged illness, dropout from school, lack of discipline, and lack of concentration in learning or working, to show low learning (work) results. Therefore, the case of witchcraft victims is crucial to be studied from various related disciplines, specifically from a psychological perspective.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### Occultism in Christian Perspective

Christian theology's discussion of witchcraft is included in the study of occult practices. The occult is derived from the Latin *occultus*, which means hidden, secret, unlucky, wretched, mysterious, dark, and mysterious. Occultism is the involvement with power, darkness, and the occult to experience secret, strange, and mysterious things (Soekahar 2002), which implies understanding or belief in dark powers, supernatural powers beyond God's power (Takaliung and Takaliung 2000). Occult beliefs rely on spirits in nature and are viewed as possessing powers equal to or even surpassing those of God. These spirits manifest in various forms and are believed to be able to aid, bless, harm, and instill dread (Banoet 2021).

In general, occult practices can be divided into two distinct categories: soft and hard occultism (Beka 2020). The soft occult consists of superstitions or myths and all forms of divination, whereas the hard occult comprises all forms of sorcery. Witchcraft is a form of occult practice because it is a form of witchcraft that relies on demonic power and opposes God. Several biblical passages state unequivocally that witchcraft is an act that displeases God; for instance, Exodus 22:18 designates witchcraft as a heinous sin for which the perpetrators are not permitted to live. In Isaiah 2:6, it is also stated that God exiled the Israelites because they practiced sorcery and sorcery following the conduct of the Gentiles. There is also a letter in Galatians 5:20 and the book of Revelation 21:8 that specifies groups that do not have a part in God's kingdom, stating unequivocally that one of these groups is involved in witchcraft. The impacts experienced due to being involved with occult practices include: physical, psychological, and spiritual. The effect on the offspring is that the offspring will become cursed, such as inheriting various difficulties and diseases and suffering. The impact on eternity is not getting a part of the kingdom of God (Hutapea 2019).

Christianity teaches that involvement with demonic powers such as witchcraft and necromancy can only be determined by relying on God's power. In contrast to the more prevalent practice of exorcism, the deliverance ministry is patterned after the ministry of the Lord Jesus. Jesus' ministry of deliverance is always associated with the excavation of sins, and a commitment to abandon sins so that the miracle of deliverance from demonic powers can occur (John 5:14). Inadequate comprehension and knowledge of biblical deliverance ministry leads to improper execution of this ministry. People frequently believe that the manifestations that occur when they are prayed for indicate that they have been freed from the shackles of evil spirits, even though such conditions indicate attachment to hostile powers (Kendra 2022). Therefore, the deliverance ministry cannot be accomplished in a single round, and the servant and the served must be dedicated.

The process of deliverance must commence with preparation and genuine commitment from the servant and the one being served. According to Takaliung and Takaliung (2000) The process of deliverance consists of two interrelated components: firstly, a renewal of understanding that service of deliverance is a grace of God, which enables human beings to respond with faith, thereby leading to total deliverance. One can be delivered from occult practices through the work of God the Father, which manifests itself through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, who died to atone for the crimes of humanity but rose again as evidence of victory over the forces of darkness. The Bible must be a flawless witness, and the Holy Spirit must finish the clearance work; angels must also engage in spiritual warfare to win the soul of servitude. This extraordinary grace of God enables occultists to meet with His servants to obtain salvation through the ministry of deliverance.

The second element regarding the actions of faith that the served one must perform among others *First*, Observations on occult involvement (1 John 4:1-2). In this

section, the Holy Spirit's guidance is required to diagnose the extent of involvement with the occult. *Second*, Conduct an exhaustive exposure of offenses (Deu 18:9-14). This stage can be accomplished in two ways: through God's word and the life tale of the served. On the other hand, it is essential to be on the lookout for enemy assaults, such as intimidation through shame or fear. *Third*, Confess your transgressions with care and sincerity (Acts 19:18-19). At this juncture, the served must be carefully guided and prayed for, as the dark power's counterattack will be highly active. Every sin must be confessed in detail before God to obtain absolution. *Fourth*, Keep the message of redemption of sins (Col 1:13-14, Heb 2:14-15, 1 Corinthians 3:9). At this level, the release supplication is conducted. There is no standard format for this prayer; allow the Holy Spirit to direct the disciple in prayer. The minister decides regarding all confessed offenses and declares forgiveness (John 20:23, Matthew 16:19, 18:18-20). *Fifth*, It is maintaining a ministry to receive the Lord Jesus. This signifies the new birth (Colossians 2:6-8; John 1:12; compare Ezekiel 36:25-27). *Sixth*, Surrender entirely to God and submit to Him (Romans 6:13; James 4:7).

### **Positive Psychology Approach**

In this paper, positive psychology is used to refine and expand the analysis of Christian perspectives regarding the informant's experience with witchcraft. The primary reason for selecting this approach is based on the findings of Day's study (2009), which demonstrates that religion and spiritual development have contributed to the positive psychology approach in psychology. Positive psychology is related to positive theology and theological psychology (Charry 2011). The research of Charry and Kosits (2016) confirms that, with proper comprehension, Christian theology literature can also learn much from the positive psychology approach's findings. In contrast, positive psychology also receives benefits and input from Christian theology to strengthen this approach. The interests of

psychological well-being (well-being) and Christian theology are fundamentally similar, so positive psychology and Christian theology can complement each other.

Psychological researchers have demonstrated an interest in investigating the interrelationships between religious beliefs and practices (such as prayer, worship, praise, devotion to God, practices of holy living, etc.) and their relationship to psychological well-being, psychological health, social well-being, and human behavior in general. Also, the interest of psychological researchers is the impact of positive emotions (happiness, awe, and pleasure) that are generated when an individual engages in various religious activities and adheres to his beliefs (Day 2009). The positive psychology approach seeks to shift the focus from problems and disorders to an individual or group's positive characteristics (resilience, adaptability, positive emotions, etc.). By investigating and enhancing these positive attributes, it is possible to prevent a variety of social problems and cases (Aulia 2015).

Abraham Maslow argued that psychology tends to concentrate on explaining the negative side of humans rather than the positive side; it explores too much about human deficiencies, disorders, and sins and too little about human potential, talents, aspirations that can be achieved, or their highest psychological state (Aulia 2015). Through positive psychology, the science of psychology shifted from focusing on the powerlessness (negative things, mental problems, and emotions) of humans to examining the strength and wisdom of humans in the face of issues, challenges, and pressures (Charry 2011). Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi define positive psychology as the scientific study of positive and developing human functioning at multiple levels, including the biological, personal, relational, institutional, cultural, and global dimensions of life (Aulia 2015). Its purpose is to identify and promote human strengths and virtues that enable individuals and society to flourish and lead to a decent existence. Positive psychology has three

pillars: positive life experiences in individuals through the exploration of positive emotions; positive physical properties of individuals through the exploration of positive personality traits, talents, and individual strengths; and positive society and positive social institutions, such as families, schools, and others. Aulia highlighted and summarized several widely-discussed topic variables in positive psychology, including welfare (wellbeing), hope (hope), optimism, life satisfaction, attachment (engagement), prosocial behavior, positive self-concept, gratitude (gratitude), and others (Aulia 2015). Therefore, the research findings and discussion will focus on these themes in this study.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

The research method adopted is one component of the case study type, namely the study of life history. Life history research is a study that investigates a problem with detailed boundaries, includes extensive data collection, and utilizes multiple information sources. This research is restricted by time and location, and the cases examined are programs, events, or individuals (Kouritzin 2000). This form of research was chosen because the author desired a thorough comprehension of the situation and the significance of the object under investigation. In other words, the data that will be disclosed through this study are narratives of life experiences (Bungin 2010). Purposive selection of data sources entails meeting specific criteria based on research requirements. This study's criteria for informants are as follows: (1) Informants who have encountered witchcraft and are aware of what they are experiencing; (2) The informant has made endeavors to recover and has gone through the process until he has recovered; and (3) Informants were willing to discuss their experiences.

The author employs extensive interviews and documentation methods. The interview was semi-structured, and observations were made by observing the informant's facial

expressions and behavior that occurred during the interview. This investigation employs thematic analysis (thematic analysis) to analyze its data. Braun and Clarke define thematic analysis as a qualitative data analysis method that requires searching the entire data set and then identifying, analyzing, and reporting recurring patterns or themes (Kiger and Varpio 2020). This analysis can characterize the data but also requires interpretation for code selection and theme development. According to Kiger and Varpio (2020), thematic analysis is a viable method for comprehending experiences, thoughts, or behaviors across multiple data sets. Themes are patterns actively (or meaningfully) constructed from datasets that answer research questions; they are not merely coded summaries or categorizations.

### **The Profile of Figures**

This study focuses on eight informants who fulfill the criteria for witchcraft victims. Each informant is identified using a pseudonym, and several descriptions in this profile are presented with the informant's consent to present research data and scientific publications.

Ami is the first informant. Ami is married, a Christian, and has Timorese ancestry. The incident involving witchcraft that Ami encountered occurred in 2017. Ami's initial symptoms included body pains and a nodule in her neck. Ami went to the doctor but declared there was no illness. Ami believes that this pain is witchcraft because she had two magical visions before her illness worsened and caused her to miscarry. In 2018, Ami decided to follow the path of deliverance from witchcraft by praying with God's servant, which lasted one month.

Beni is the second informant. Beni resides in Alor, is married, and is Christian. Beni experienced what he believed to be witchcraft through cuisine in February 2010. During Beni's nap, he is said to have had a magical hallucination that continued the witchcraft attack. Beni's body felt stiff upon

awakening; he could not move or walk and only rest in bed. Beni and his wife seek assistance from various sources, including taking herbal remedies, praying for church personnel, and receiving massages from skilled massage therapists. Roots emerged from Beni's body during the massage, which was quite peculiar. Beni's condition improved after receiving massages two to three weeks after the witchcraft incident began.

Cindy is the third informed participant. Cindy, a Christian woman from the Sabu tribe, is married. In 2006, Cindy encountered witchcraft in the form of a growth that extended from the back of her left knee to her calf. Cindy believed that this illness was witchcraft due to several odd occurrences at the time, including the discovery of strange objects that were thought to be mediums for carrying witchcraft, snakes frequently entering the home, and lizards making a crying sound. In addition, the swollen mass on Cindy's leg had a consistent recurrence time between 12 and 1 p.m., 6 and 7 p.m., and 12 and 5 a.m. Cindy sought assistance from a Church Servant, who expressly traveled to her residence to pray and expel the evil force. After a month, her illness of witchcraft was effectively eliminated, according to Cindy.

The fourth informant is Dedi, a single Catholic member of the Timor ethnic group. In April 2019, Dedi experienced his first possession, followed by two additional instances of possession with greater intensity. After each possession, Dedi has trouble inhaling to the point where he appears confused. Dedi had checked himself into the Puskesmas, but a minor ailment was diagnosed, and he was prescribed medication. In addition, Dedi consistently exhibited odd behavior at specific times, namely 6 a.m., 12 p.m., and 3 p.m. Dedi's condition, which continues to cause him to be confused, causes his family and those around him to suspect he has a mental disorder. Romo from the Seminary prayed for Dedi four times around August 2020, and Dedi was granted respite.

Eman is the fifth informant. Eman is unmarried, of Timorese descent, and a Christian. In November 2016, Eman experienced witchcraft in the guise of sudden, symptomless body pain. During his illness, Eman experienced subjectively odd occurrences, such as snakes, rats, and centipedes, that seemed to follow him wherever he went. Eman experienced agony every evening between 8 p.m. and dawn. Eman tried everything to discover a release method, beginning with traditional healers, massage therapists, prayer teams, and medical examinations in *Naketi*. In December 2018, Eman had no complaints.

Frans, a male from the Alor tribe who is Christian and unmarried, is the sixth informant. In March of 2019, Frans was afflicted with an ailment that he deemed unnatural and which always occurred at 6 p.m. His body felt rigid, and he required assistance from another person to move. Frans is confident that his condition results from *suanggi* or witchcraft sent by a rival. Frans seeks assistance by praying to the servant of God. In April 2019, Frans experienced a respite from the scourge of witchcraft.

The seventh informant is a woman named Gina, who is Catholic and from Flores. In November 2019, Gina discovered a cursed object sent to her house and experienced a supernatural occurrence in the middle of the night. After the incident, Gina began to experience knee discomfort every day from 3 p.m. until midnight. Gina stated that the agony was so intense that it felt as if someone had severed her body into pieces. Gina met the servant of God to receive a month of prayer and massage with oil. Gina felt relief in February of 2020.

Heri is the last informant. Heri is a Christian of Timorese descent. Heri encountered an unusual occurrence while returning from the fields in October 2020. Heri heard a voice calling his name even though he was alone. Condemned objects typically used to send witchcraft were also discovered in his house. After this bizarre occurrence, Heri began to experience discomfort at midnight and had trouble breathing. Heri met the massage therapist, and the Servant of God prayed for Heri's alleviation in December 2020.

**Table 1.** Results from a theological and psychological perspective

Themes from a Theological Perspective (Occultism)	Themes from a Psychological Perspective
1) Types of witchcraft and witchcraft mechanisms	1) Psychological conditions and feelings of victims when experiencing witchcraft
2) Suspected witchcraft perpetrators and witchcraft motives	2) Social support and family support when experiencing witchcraft
3) The path of release from witchcraft	3) The victim's gratitude and forgiveness during the recovery process
4) The victim's condition after witchcraft	

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Result

To enhance comprehension of the research material, the author organized it into a thematic analysis framework, categorizing it into two distinct perspectives: theology and psychology. This study aims to investigate the impact of witchcraft on individuals, specifically focusing on the viewpoint of Christian theology and psychological viewpoints. The themes identified are derived from the condensation of interview material collected from the eight victims of witchcraft (Table 1).

### Types of witchcraft and witchcraft mechanisms

Based on the results of interviews with all data sources, it is known that the type of witchcraft experienced by the research informants is in the form of pain in the body.

The pain felt by the informants cannot be diagnosed medically. Additionally, the mechanism of witchcraft experienced is unique to this case. Ami had two occult dreams before experiencing pain in her body that resulted in a miscarriage and a lump around her neck. Beni also had a dream and believed that the witchcraft he experienced used food as a medium. Cindy found strange objects suspected of being a medium for witchcraft around her house, in addition to snakes often entering the house and lizards that sounded like they were crying. Dedi experienced 3 phases of possession, whose severity increased with each phase. The second phase resulted in pain in the body, and the third phase led to the stigma of being mentally ill. Furthermore, Eman mentioned some strange events that could only be seen subjectively during her illness, such as snakes, rats, and centipedes that seemed to follow her wherever she went. Only other people could assist Frans because he felt stiff in his body. Gina mentioned that there was a cursed object sent to her house by the perpetrator, and also, before experiencing pain in her body, Gina felt 'supernaturally touched' on her back in the middle of the night. Meanwhile, Heri heard a magical voice when he returned from the garden and was sent a cursed object believed to be a mediator of witchcraft. The following are the narratives of the witchcraft victim subjects. The following are excerpts from the subjects' narratives:

“I started to feel that there was something wrong with me, and eventually it affected my womb. I went to the hospital, and the doctor said that my womb was fine.” (Ami-transcript).

“When I woke up and got up at that time, I felt as if all the bones that supported me to be able to stand and walk had been released. According to the examination results with the doctor, I did not experience any illness.” (Beni-transcript)

### **Suspected witchcraft perpetrators and witchcraft motives**

The second theme obtained from the results of interviews with the subjects of witchcraft victims is the presumed perpetrator of witchcraft and the motive for witchcraft. All informants claimed to know the alleged perpetrator who caused the suffering they experienced. The presumed perpetrator in question is a person who is close to or has a relationship with the informants in some way. The motive for witchcraft is envy, and all informants submitted unanimously to this motive. The knowledge about the alleged perpetrator and the motive is also known to the informants from a spiritual intermediary known as the Servant of God, which is an intriguing fact from the victims' narratives. The following are the narratives of the research informants regarding this second theme:

“I know from the shamans who come to do mantras and massages. It was because of jealousy and competition among drivers.” (Eman-transcript)

“I told my parents to pray to a servant of God. In the prayer, a servant of God explained that I was affected by witchcraft, and the person who cursed me was a person from my own village.” (Frans-transcript)

### **The path of release from witchcraft**

An essential part of this research is about the ways or methods taken by the informants as victims of witchcraft to escape the suffering they experience. Based on the data, it can be seen that the informants took all paths to escape the suffering caused by witchcraft. Ami and Eman still took the time to seek medical help but did not get certainty about the pain they experienced. The visible pattern is that when the informant's pain cannot be predicted medically, help from the spiritual side is the way to go. The presence of helpers, referred to as Servants of God and “masseurs,” is the best option to escape witchcraft. There are two Catholic informants (Dedi and Gina), so the way of release is done

**Table 2.** Verbatim summary: Psychological condition and feelings of the victim

Subjects	Types of feelings when experiencing witchcraft	Psychological conditions when experiencing witchcraft
Ami	Fear, confusion, anxiety, and suspicion of people who are jealous of her to do witchcraft on her.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feeling like a crazy person</li> <li>• Unable to work</li> <li>• Poor sleep</li> <li>• Loss of appetite</li> <li>• Experience weight loss</li> </ul>
Beni	Feeling difficulty, confusion, a sense of suffering, helplessness, stress, feeling very mentally tormented, uncertain, desperate, feeling that someone is jealous of him to do witchcraft on him.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having nightmares</li> <li>• Unable to perform usual activities (unable to be seated, can only lie weakly in bed)</li> <li>• Desperate</li> <li>• Thinking about dying</li> </ul>
Cindy	Suffering from holding back the pain, feels unable to cope because the pain exceeds the pain in childbirth, feeling that there are people who are jealous of her to do witchcraft on her.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crying to the point of screaming because she cannot bear the pain</li> <li>• Thinking about dying</li> <li>• Desperate</li> </ul>
Dedi	Feeling uncomfortable and unhappy because his illness is talked about by many people, feeling pain as if he was beaten by someone but no marks and wounds were found, feeling stressed	<p>Headache to the point of inability to work            Family pressures to be examined at a psychiatric hospital            Difficulty breathing            Experiencing a trance            Experienced stress in life due to thoughts with sick parents and had conflicts with family over land ownership            Feeling disappointed about the land conflict            Alienated by neighbors because he is considered a person with a mental disorder (stigma from neighbors)</p>
Eman	Highly sensitive and angry with people at home (except for his mother), feeling weak, weak to do activities and work, unpleasant and uncomfortable seeing many people around him, feeling that someone is jealous of him to do witchcraft on him.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a tendency for hallucinatory symptoms (he sees various animals in his house but he is the only one who sees them)</li> <li>• Desperate</li> <li>• Blames others</li> <li>• Unable to work so feels frustrated</li> </ul>
Frans	Feeling weak because the whole body is hard to move, unable to do normal activities, feeling troublesome, feeling that someone is jealous of him to do witchcraft on him.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feeling helpless, stressed and frustrated because unable to carry out activities and study as usual</li> <li>• Unable to concentrate and focus on studying, doing college assignments</li> </ul>
Gina	Feeling uncomfortable as if being watched and followed by someone, feeling hardship and pain, feeling that someone is jealous of her to do witchcraft on her.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restlessness to the point of having trouble sleeping at night</li> <li>• At certain times, the body feels stiff and cannot perform any activities</li> </ul>
Heri	Fear because of the first time experience like this, feeling pain, feeling that there are people who are jealous of him to do witchcraft on him.	<p>There is a tendency for auditory hallucinations, where the person hears a voice calling his name but does not see the person calling.            Struggling to breathe            It is challenging to do his job, which is working in the plantation</p>

by saying Novena prayers according to the direction of the priest who leads the healing path.

Some other media also mentioned in the informants' narratives regarding the media used in the healing process include traditional

leaves, massage oil, prayer oil, traditional drinking water, and blessing water. These healing media were mentioned by Beni, Dedi, Eman, Gina, and Heri, whereas Ami, Cindy, and Frans did not mention any other media other than prayer. The time taken in the

healing process varies, and not all informants mentioned it, but it can be estimated that between 1 and 6 months, the healing process occurs until recovery.

### **The victim's condition after witchcraft**

Another interesting theme from the informants' narratives as victims of witchcraft is their post-witchcraft self-condition. Ami mentioned that minor disturbances are still experienced but did not want to explain further. Beni, Dedi, Eman, and Frans became more alert to the things around them. Cindy mentioned that the physical endurance that changed after the witchcraft was that she could no longer work for too long, especially if she had to be exposed to heat. The informant would faint. Gina stated that the pain is still recurring. Heri said that his health has declined since the witchcraft incident. The following is a narration from the subjects regarding their condition after the witchcraft:

“It's been almost four years since I could live my days as usual, although there are often small disturbances. Even though I believe God's power can overcome everything.”  
(Ami-transcript)

### **Psychological conditions and feelings of victims when experiencing witchcraft**

From these eight informants, it can be concluded that each informant experiences a variety of pain intensity, frequency, and period of pain, resulting in emotional reactions and psychological conditions that also vary. In general, the feelings that arise in each informant are fear, pain, feelings of suffering, depression, and feeling the trigger of their illness due to feelings of envy from others. In general, the psychological condition of each informant is helpless and unable to carry out everyday activities as usual. Specifically, Beni and Cindy felt hopeless to the point of thinking about death. Eman and Heri experienced a tendency for visual and auditory hallucinations. Ami and Dedi experienced and were treated like people with mental disorders.

### **Social support and family support when experiencing witchcraft**

From the results of interviews with eight informants, it can be concluded that the collaboration of internal support from the closest environment, namely the family (spouse, parents, and children) and external support, such as servants of God and medical personnel, can provide significant meaning for each informant in facing and going through the process of illness until experiencing recovery.

The internal environment's tasks and roles are guarding, accompanying, and caring with full-time totality for victims from various aspects and physical, psychological, and spiritual needs. In a situation of illness, the resilience of the spouse plays a massive role in giving hope to the informant to recover. Then, external parties also support one to two aspects simultaneously. For example, the doctor focuses more on helping the informant's physical health, and the servant of God focuses more on spiritual and psychological needs. It is interesting to find that none of the informants consulted a psychiatrist or psychologist when the victim was in an unstable psychological condition. Instead, it was found in Dedi that religious leaders, namely the Romo, carried out the counseling process.

“My wife helped take care of me, prayed for my recovery, found a servant of God to support me in prayer, my wife's strong resilience in accompanying me when I was sick, my wife empathized with my illness.”  
(Beni-transcript)

“God's servant came to visit the house to worship, pray and provide strengthening of faith through God's words (Jeremiah 33: 6).”  
(Heri-transcript)

### **The victim's gratitude and forgiveness during the recovery process**

After recovery, all eight victims showed gratitude, a positive mindset, and a heightened religious disposition characterized by increased devotion to prayer and a deeper connection to God. The sole distinction lies in

the varying degrees of intensity with which each person exhibits their expression of gratitude. Ami, Beni, and Cindy, who were previously experiencing profound despair to the extent of contemplating dying, exhibited a heightened manifestation of appreciation. Also, Ami, Beni, Cindy, Frans, and Heri experienced alterations in their behavior that demonstrated a heightened level of religiosity compared to their pre-illness state. Previously, these individuals hardly engaged in prayer, neglected worship at home, and failed to attend church. However, after their recovery, they developed a stronger connection with God. Participants are more capable of experiencing gratitude and expressing improvements in their religious beliefs and actions. Initially, the informant primarily blamed others, mainly due to a sense of jealousy from others. However, as they eventually recovered their strength, they also acquired the ability to forgive and offer prayers for those who were regarded as the perpetrators of witchcraft.

“What I feel now is just gratitude. I feel grateful that everything has happened in life, and I accept it as a lesson from God that it is God's trial to test our faith.” (Beni-transcript)

“I am the most grateful person to have a God who is amazingly great, to have a husband who is faithful even when I fall, and to have a family that is so supportive of me and to live amid a church of God that cares so much about each of its members. (occasionally speaking while crying out of gratitude).” (Cindy-transcript)

## **Discussion**

In the context of systematic Christian theology, all evil deeds originating from the devil are discussed under the demonological theme (Banoet 2021). His study consists primarily of discussions of esoteric practices. In human civilization, occultism has various forms of practice, including witchcraft (Banoet 2021). The findings will be addressed from two perspectives: theology (occult studies) and positive psychology. Both perspectives will be explained sequentially, beginning with the

theme of the main findings and other essential findings to complement the results of this study, following what is obtained from the informants' narratives.

Pain on the victim's body is the type of sorcery revealed by the accounts of the informants. The mediums of witchcraft are mystical dreams and frequently enter trances. Based on the informants' accounts, it was also determined that the illness caused by witchcraft could not be medically diagnosed. In addition, the victims only felt pain at specific periods, such as from afternoon to evening or midnight to dawn. In his ministry tabloid, Simon Sampe Randan lists several characteristics of diseases induced by evil spirits, one of which is that they cannot be detected medically, with unstable and sensitive mental symptoms (Juld and Enoh 2013). In a book containing the recollections of a former sorcerer, it is stated that the most active period for sorcerers who disseminate curses and diseases is from late afternoon until midnight (Mukendi 1990). This narrative verifies the condition of the informants as victims of witchcraft who experience pain at specific times, mainly when it is dark.

In addition, the accounts of the informants revealed a similar initial mechanism for witchcraft occurrences, such as having magical dreams, hearing supernatural voices, or seeing supernatural apparitions. The Bible mentions several instances of illness caused by evil forces, as recorded in Job 2:6-7 regarding severe illnesses and in 1 Samuel 16:14-16 regarding maladies that cause bodily harm. More incidents are recorded in the New Testament, such as Mark 1:23 on possession, Luke 12:11 on the hunchback, and Matthew 12:22 on deaf-mute disease. This passage of verses indicates that evil forces are the source of suffering. According to Pranjana, the workings of dark powers can be divided into two categories: directly as possession or causing bodily suffering, and indirectly as riding the desires of human flesh, as described in Galatians 5:19-21 (Pranjana 2009). Thus, it can be determined that the witchcraft

experienced by the informants is a conduit for the direct torment of the victim's body by evil forces.

The second theme is individuals suspected of witchcraft and the motivation behind the witchcraft. All informants claimed to be intimately familiar with the perpetrator and have the same motivations: envy and malice. In his book, Takaliung and Takaliung (2000) asserts that the work of malevolent forces is limited to deceiving and trapping humans in sin. In the context of the research informants, it is affirmed that the informants and the perpetrator are trapped in a dark game of deception. According to Pranjana (2009), sin is the entrance for dark powers to operate, so witchcraft can only be active and functional if an open entrance exists. Mukendi's (1990) narrative confirms that people who live in sin appear naked in the spiritual sphere and become highly susceptible to attacks by magic, such as witchcraft. Therefore, rather than blaming specific individuals and their motivations, conducting a thorough self-examination and closing all entry points for evil forces to attack the victim's faith and physical existence is preferable.

The path taken by victims of witchcraft to find relief from their distress becomes the research question's central theme. According to the accounts of the research informants, the presence of one (or more) Servants of God is essential to the process of deliverance from witchcraft. Even though there was a presumption regarding the perpetrator, it was further confirmed by the Servant of God's declaration. There is no other direction that can be used as the premise for the deliverance ministry than that which the Lord Jesus Himself has exemplified (Saragih and Timo 2020). In his book, Takaliung and Takaliung (2000) compares divine healing and healing performed by the demon. The relevant comparison is shown in the following Table 3.

Cleansing the bewitched person's transgressions is crucial to God's healing process. The Old Testament (Deuteronomy 28:15–22, Isaiah 59:1-2, etc.) and the New

Testament (John 5:14, James 5:15, etc.) make it abundantly plain that sin is the primary cause of human suffering. In the ministry of Jesus, there is a distinct pattern in which God warns those who have been healed not to sin again. In addition, a strong faith in God is a genuine response that supports the miracle of healing (Matthew 9:22, Mark 5:34, and Luke 18:42). The goal of the way of deliverance found in the good news of God's Word must be made crystal clear. The ultimate purpose is to glorify God (John 9:3-4; 11:4).

This final theme relates to the previous theme, which was the informants' condition as a victim of witchcraft after the event was effectively completed. Beginning with the belief that witchcraft is a form of black magic, its primary purpose is to harm people (Thabrani 2014). In actuality, however, some individuals have succeeded in becoming survivors, such as the informants of this study. The effects of occult practices (including witchcraft),

**Table 3.** Differences in healing from God and dark powers

Healing from God	Healing from dark forces
There is cleaning up of sins or asking about the cause of the disease.	Instantly cured
Healing from God is not bound by methods, but the principle remains: faith in Christ and obedience to God's word.	Specific methods or times should not be violated.
Healing from God is for the glory of God.	The goal is patient pleasure.
Total and brings joy.	The disease is only transferred to another part of the body so that the previous illness heals, but another disease arises.
Believers have no problem with death because the goal is clear, namely Heaven.	Stay away from and reject spiritual things from the Lord; be very afraid of death.

Source: (Takaliung and Takaliung 2000)

according to Hutapea (2019), are felt physically, psychologically, and spiritually. It was evident from the informants' accounts that they were unwilling to describe the post-witchcraft conditions. The impact on physical conditions was acknowledged by Ami, who had mentioned other disturbances but was reticent to elaborate. In contrast, other informants were unwilling to discuss their conditions after becoming survivors. This research collaborates with the field of psychology to clarify this portion of the theme's meaning. Based on the psychological findings, it was determined that the informants' mental states gave rise to various negative feelings or emotions, and it was even inferred that the informants were not at a prosperous level due to their experience with witchcraft. This section will be discussed separately from a positive psychology standpoint.

After the occult incident, all informants claimed to have become more religious, which is an intriguing observation. According to Takaliung and Takaliung (2000), everyone who has experienced renunciation must be disciplined and mature to participate in Christ-centered ministry as a witness. The experiences encountered during the deliverance can serve as a source of testimony to aid other spirits bound by the occult. Maintaining faith by enhancing the spiritual or religious aspect should not be used as a shield to prevent the recurrence of occult incidents. However, it becomes the fulfillment of obligations and responsibilities as a sinner saved to life. The author lacks sufficient evidence to assert that the informants' gratitude and increased religious activity were a form of self-defense (affirmative defense) against the negative stigma that could be attached to them because of the witchcraft or a preventative measure against the possibility of repeated witchcraft on the informant. This is only the author's supposition, based on the informants' reluctance to discuss post-witchcraft conditions, but the increase in their religious side after witchcraft is exaggerated. This theme

must be investigated further to be proven and become a suggestion for future research.

The findings of positive psychology indicate that the human side comprises various emotions and psychological conditions that affect it, as well as social beings who require support from their environment. Various dominant negative emotions (fear, anxiety, suffering, depression, sensitivity, irritability, discomfort, and torment) were reported by informants who experienced pain due to witchcraft: fear, anxiety, suffering, depression, sensitivity, irritability, discomfort, and torment. McColl-Kennedy et al. (2017) explained that it is essential to comprehend and control one's emotions because they can influence perceptions, future intentions, and individual behavior. Emotions are one of the domains (along with the physical, social, and psychological domains) that determine an individual's state of health, functioning, and prosperity (well-being).

In addition, each informant's psychological condition (well-being) is physically and psychologically depressed. Beni and Cindy experienced symptoms of hopelessness to the point of pondering mortality, as they were helpless against their illness and unable to perform everyday activities. Some participants believed that being bitten by a witchcraft was an extremely disagreeable experience due to the severity of the pain. According to research conducted by Shallcross et al. (2010), an individual's acceptance of negative (unpleasant) life experiences can protect him from developing depressive symptoms in the future and help him adapt or avoid similar situations. Psychologically, embracing this unpleasant experience can catalyze various positive emotional responses. Tugade et al. (2004) emphasized that positive emotions broadly benefit physical and psychological health. Positive emotions are strongly associated with the recovery rate in severe illness to promote healthy behavior. Even though ill people experience negative emotions, the healing

process can be expedited if they are resilient and experience positive emotions.

Findings from a psychological perspective also indicate that with connectedness, practical cooperation, and various forms of support, including family support, social support, and spiritual support, the healing process of each informant is meaningfully enhanced. These multiple forms of support and faith in God (spirituality) caused each informant to experience and feel gratitude for the painful experience of being a victim of witchcraft, even though two or three informants had considered suicide. This is consistent with Kwak's (2022) findings that religiosity and spirituality positively impact psychological health, physical health, and attitudes when coping with near-death experiences. Fincham and May (2020) prove that gratitude to God is associated with well-being, increasing hope, improving general well-being, and decreasing somatic pain symptoms. According to Gulliford and Morgan (2019), the motif of gratitude is a central component of the positive psychology approach due to its impact on both personal individuals and interpersonal relationships. By applying a positive psychological approach to the analysis of the experiences of victims who have become ill due to witchcraft, it is possible to find novelty in the phenomenon of witchcraft.

## CONCLUSION

The conclusion that can be drawn from the research and discussion results and the answer to the research question posed is that the research informants experienced a similar form of witchcraft, namely bodily agony. The symptoms of the actual mechanism of witchcraft are pain that cannot be detected or diagnosed medically, and the pain experienced by the victims is only repeated at specific times. Among other things, the mediums of witchcraft resemble recurring magical visions and trance states. As for the psychological condition of the informants when they experience pain as a

result of witchcraft, it elicits a variety of feelings that tend to be categorized as negative emotions and are at a less prosperous level (well-being) physically and psychologically; symptoms of hopelessness to the point of contemplating suicide are also observed. After the narration, the informants expressed gratitude for the positive impact of family support, social support, and spiritual support on victims of witchcraft. The path to freedom from witchcraft followed a consistent pattern: spiritual assistance after medical assistance failed to detect the phenomenon of witchcraft. Several informants carried out the deliverance method through prayer and the use of oil, water, and medicinal foliage. Exorcism is the method used by informants to evade witchcraft. Exorcism is limited to expelling malevolent spirits that cause human suffering. No additional process is designed to facilitate the maturation of faith, as should be the case in genuine deliverance ministry. In addition, some informants met God's servant, a deliverance figure who did not have the legal authority to carry out the deliverance ministry on behalf of the church. Thus, the narrative of gratitude for the informants, which is a psychological finding, demonstrates that the informants only attain mental well-being when suffering caused by witchcraft cases. The informants' reluctance and refusal to describe their post-witchcraft conditions, but the exaggeration of their spiritual condition, indicates an affirmative defense that can provide respite from the traumatic effects of witchcraft or the negative stigma of being an atheist. The author's claim in this section merits additional investigation.

In considering the findings and discussion, it is strongly recommended that victims receive specialized assistance, such as individual counseling, as part of post-deliverance efforts for informants. This counseling process must collaborate with experts and professionals, such as Christian counselors, psychologists, and psychiatrists, to make accurate diagnoses when victims display signs and symptoms of psychological

disorders. In addition, the church, particularly the Pastor or congregational Servant, should pay close attention to the ministry of deliverance as one of the services essential to the stewardship of the people. The phenomenon of witchcraft does exist and is experienced by church members, but it does not always occur.

The recommendations for future research are to develop post-witchcraft conditions and aspects of the psychological well-being of post-witchcraft victims related to the themes found but which cannot be adequately explained. In addition, future research can concentrate on the use of clinical diagnostic methods in collaboration with counselors, psychologists, and psychiatrists to detect and delineate the boundaries between psychiatric disorders and witchcraft.

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