

# **RITUAL BANISHMENT AND STIGMATIZATION OF PERSONS WITH ALBINISM IN GHANA**



**A Contextual Analysis Report  
(May 2019)**

**Ghana Association of Persons with Albinism (GAPA)**

**A Research Project of the Ghana Association of Persons with Albinism (GAPA).  
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## **Abbreviations and Acronyms**

CHRAJ: Commission for Human Rights and Administrative Justice

DSW: Depart of Social Welfare

GAPA: Ghana Association of Persons with Albinism

GFDO: Ghana Federation of the Disability Organizations

GSS: Ghana Statistical Service

MLGRD: Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development

NCPD: National Council for Persons with Disabilities (NCPD)

NGOs: Non-Government Organizations

OSIWA: Open Society for West Africa

PWDs: Persons with Disability

UNCRPD: United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

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## Executive Summary

This report is based on a qualitative study in three communities, namely, Kwahu Burukwa (in the Kwahu East District), Akwamufie (Asuogyaman District), and Abease (Pru West/East). The core objective of the study was to ascertain the veracity of the prevalence of the ritual banishment of persons with albinism in the three localities, and identify the beliefs in which the practise is rooted. This report captures the background and context of the phenomenon, the research design and methodology adopted for the study, elaborations of the findings, and the recommendations drawn from the conclusions of the study. The primary data was generated through personal interviews and focus group discussions. This was complemented by an extensive review of legal documents such as the National Disability Act (715 of (2006), United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (UNCRPD), the 1992 Republican Constitution, and other scholarly publications related to the subject. A number of media reports were also reviewed. In sum, the findings for the study indicate that the spiritual worldview of the inhabitants account for the origin of the custom. The findings for instance indicate that the origin of the practice in Kwahu Burukuwa can be traced to the goddess *Oku Abena*, the principal deity of the land, whereas that of Akwamufie originated from from the prescriptions of *Tutu Abu*, the principal god of Akwamu. In the case of Abease, Ajokrofi, the principal goddess of the area is responsible for the origination of the taboo in the locality. It is relevant to emphasize that due to a relative a higher solidarity and acceptance of the taboo by the indigenes, there was deliberate attempt by the majority of the interviewees from Abease to deny the prevalence of the custom, whereas the traditional authorities in the three areas appeared defensive of their culture, persons with albinism who participated in the study conceived the custom as an infringement on their fundamental human right to existence. The data analysis indicated that whereas about 77.2 percent of the research participants confirm the prevalence of the customary banishment of persons with albinism in the target communities, 93.3 percent of the participants at Abease denied the prevalence of the custom in the Abease township. However, a follow up research in three neighboring towns, namely, Adaprase, Yeji and Prang, showed that the denial from the residents of Abease was deliberate attempt on the part of the community to conceal the custom. Furthermore, the National Headquarters of the Ghana Police Service had no report of any case relating to the violations of the rights of persons with albinism. It is equally relevant to note that, while the members of the Abease traditional council denied the prevalence of the custom, there was a willingness on the part of the traditional authorities in Burukuwa and Akwamufie to cooperate with government toward its abolishment. On the basis of the findings, a number of recommendations have been made in (section 4.2) the concluding section. It is expected that the findings from the study could provide insights that could guide the advocacy strategy for cultural reforms.

## **SECTION 1.0: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background and Context**

Even though the mystification of albinism is a global phenomenon, in current times, unscientific notions about persons with albinism has been more intense in Africa. While the beliefs are known to have existed over centuries, the ritual killings of persons with albinism in African countries such as Tanzania, Rwanda, Malawi, Uganda etc., have contributed to the recent prominence of the issue in the public sphere. In the case of Ghana, local beliefs about persons with albinism include perceptions that; they do not die but vanish at the time of death; that their bodies are most powerful sacrifice that enhances success of rituals for good fortune; that spiritual sacrifice with the body of persons with albinism enhance the effectiveness of money rituals because the color of their hair is akin to the color of gold; that they do not “excrete” on Fridays; that a person will have a bad dream if one share the same bed with them etc.

In May 2009, Sheikh Rashid Salawatia, a former Imam of the Ghana Army and Leader of the Salawatia Muslim Mission (a mystical Islamic sect), issued a press release indicating that persons with albinism in Ghana are murdered as part of spiritual rituals by elites, for political power (Ghanaweb 2009). In 2010 various media reports indicated that cultural banishment of persons with albinism has been part of the taboo and traditions of Burukuwa, a community in the Kwahu East District, in the Eastern Region. Following the media reports, a delegation of the Ghana Federation of the Disability Organizations (GFDO) paid an official visit to the Burukuwa traditional council to ascertain the veracity of the media reports. It emerged that indeed the taboo has been part of the culture of town. Since then the GAPA has taken on the advocacy in the public sphere albeit with minimal impact. This is the background against which the elaborations in this report could be understood.

### **1.2 Problem Statement**

Ghana’s current democratic dispensation is underpin by a rule of law which provides for the fundamental human rights of the populace. The 1992 Constitution for instance guarantees the rights and liberties of all Ghanaians. Besides, Article 29 of the constitution makes provisions for extra protection for persons with disabilities (PWDs). Furthermore the National Disability Law (Act 715 of 2006) and the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) which Ghana ratified in 2012, make further stipulations that are supposed to ensure a comprehensive mainstreaming of disability aspects into all national laws and development policies. However, due to institutional decoupling or lack of compliance to the formal rules, these legislations have not not seen any meaningful implementation.

With regards to the issue of cultural banishment of persons with albinism in Kwahu Burukuwa, Akwamufie and Abease townships, it is imperative to note that, even though Article 26 of the 1992

Constitution supports the promotion of different cultures, language, beliefs etc., it emphasizes that "all cultural practices which dehumanize or are injurious to the physical and mental wellbeing of a person are prohibited" (Government of Ghana 1992: 20). The prevalence of the cultural banishment of persons with albinism in the three communities is therefore an infringement of the 1992 constitution and poses severe human rights challenges for the albinism community. As a consequence it also cast a slur on the human rights credibility of the Ghanaian state. Even though GAPA has raised the issue in their previous advocacy engagements, the phenomenon is still prevalent. It is therefore an obligation of the state to ensure that the traditional authorities in the target communities comply with article 26 of the 1992 constitution.

### **1.3 Objective of the Study**

The objective of the study was to ascertain the veracity of the perceptions that persons with albinism are not permitted to live in certain Ghanaian communities. In accordance with this broad objective the study specifically sought (i) to generate evidence or counter evidence concerning the alleged cultural banishment of persons with albinism in Burukuwa, Akwamufie, and Abease, (ii) to identify the cultural values or beliefs on which the phenomenon is rooted, and (iii) to unearth potential mechanisms through which the quest for cultural reforms could be attained. The overall objective of the study was therefore to generate evidence on which the advocacy engagements of GAPA could be based.

### **1.4. Research Design and Methodology**

A qualitative research design was adopted for the study. This approach was considered more appropriate because of its potential to facilitate a relatively more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon in focus. The preference for a qualitative case study is due to its potential usefulness in serving both descriptive and explanatory purposes. There is a relative scholarly consensus that qualitative studies is more effective in unearthing multiple dimensions of a phenomenon while capturing the specific context within which a phenomenon emerges (Mabry 2008). Even though qualitative studies are not generally intended to be used as basis for generalization, it can be used as such, when several studies accumulates significant evidence that point towards a specific direction. Besides, it is arguable that qualitative approach to social research is in harmony with the principle of social justice. This is primarily because a pure quantitative approach "excludes stakeholders from dialogue and active participation in the research process, which "weakens its democratic and dialogical dimensions and decreases the likelihood that the previously silences voices will be heard" (Denzin 2009:18).

The above proposition is very relevant in the sphere of disability research. Barnes, Oliver and Barton (2002:4) for example contends that the "challenge to orthodox views about disability came not from within academy but from disabled people themselves". As a result, there exists a relative scholarly consensus that the voice of PWDs must feature in any disability related research. This premise forms the basis on which



qualitative case study was chosen for the research. In accordance with the general standards of social research, the reasons for choosing certain methods have been elaborated in the following sections. These include the study location, the target population, the sampling, the data collection strategies, the mode of data analysis etc.

#### 1.4.1 Study Location

The study targets three geographical locations in three districts across two regions. These include Kwahu Burukuwa, a suburb of Kwahu East District in the Eastern Region, Akwamufie (a suburb of Asuogyaman District, in the Eastern Region) and Abease, in the Pru West District of the Brong Ahafo Region. These locations were chosen because preliminary investigation indicates that the banishment of persons with albinism remain part of their culture. Additional data were collected from key informants based in Accra and Yeji, Prang and Adaprase in the Pru East District. In the case of Kwahu East, besides the Brukuwa township, field work was conducted in Abetifi and Tafo because of their proximity to the target community. In a similar vein, even though Akwamufie was the main target geographical area, Mangoase and Atimpoku became relevant because as pertained to Abetifi, the Assuogyaman District Assembly (Local government administration) is located there.

#### 1.4.2 Target Population

To a significant extent, each of the three townships have a population with relative ethnic homogeneity (mostly ethnic Akans). This is primarily due to the rural and peri-urban status of the localities and the pattern of rural-urban migration in Ghana. The primary target population for the study therefore comprises of the traditional authorities in the target communities. Also included in the study were ordinary residents within the target communities and persons with albinism in surrounding townships as well as district offices of the department of social welfare.

#### 1.4.3 Sampling and Sample Size

As indicated in table 1.0 a total number of 66 research participants were involved in the study. These comprise of traditional authorities, district social welfare officers, persons with albinism, and residents/inhabitants within the target localities and surrounding communities. In view of the need to authenticate the narratives of the inhabitants of the target communities, residents of the most closest neighboring communities were included in the study. This is partly due to the probability of denial as occurred in the case of Abease. Furthermore, due to the redemarcation of the former Pru District into Pru East and Pru West District, as part of the decentralization initiatives of the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MLGRD), Abease currently falls within the Pru West District. Furthermore, the district assemblies which host the social welfare departments were located in the district capitals. Overall, a total of 31 participants were interviewed in Pru (East and West) Districts. These include residents of Abease,

Adaprase, Prang and Yeji. Whereas 14 interviews were conducted in Kwahu East (Kwahu Burukuwa, Tafo, and Abetifi), 16 interviews were conducted in the Asuogyaman District (Akwamufie, Mangoase and Atimpoku), and 5 from Accra. About 6.6 percent of the research participants were persons with albinism, whereas social welfare officers comprised 4.6 percent were social welfare officers, with 7.0 percent of the being traditional authorities. About 5.3 percent of the participants were family members of persons with albinism. Thus, the majority (78.5) percent of the participants were ordinary residents. The choice of the study participants were based on the need for informants who were likely to know more about the phenomenon.

| <b>Table 1.0 List of Participants Disaggregated By Locality and Gender</b> |             |                  |              |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|------------------|--------------|
| <b>Pru East/West District</b>                                              | <b>Male</b> | <b>Female</b>    | <b>Total</b> |
| Abease                                                                     | 16          | 0                | <b>16</b>    |
| Adaprase                                                                   | 0           | 3                | <b>3</b>     |
| Prang                                                                      | 5           | 0                | <b>5</b>     |
| Yeji                                                                       | 4           | 3                | <b>7</b>     |
|                                                                            |             | <b>Sub-Total</b> | <b>31</b>    |
| <b>Kwahu East District</b>                                                 |             |                  |              |
| Brukuwa                                                                    | 4           | 3                | <b>7</b>     |
| Tafo                                                                       | 2           | 2                | <b>4</b>     |
| Abetifi                                                                    | 1           | 2                | <b>3</b>     |
|                                                                            |             | <b>Sub-Total</b> | <b>14</b>    |
| <b>Asuogyaman District</b>                                                 |             |                  |              |
| Akwamufie                                                                  | 3           | 3                | <b>6</b>     |
| Mangoase                                                                   | 4           | 1                | <b>5</b>     |
| Atimpoku                                                                   | 3           | 2                | <b>5</b>     |
|                                                                            |             | <b>Sub-Total</b> | <b>16</b>    |
| <b>Accra</b>                                                               | 2           | 3                | <b>5</b>     |
|                                                                            |             | <b>TOTAL</b>     | <b>66</b>    |

#### 1.4.4 Data Collection Strategy

The data collection strategy include personal interviews and focus group discussions which were compensated with follow up telephone calls (particularly in the case of Abease). Three focus group discussions were conducted in Abetifi, Tafo, and Atimpoku, respectively. Two (Abeifi and Atimpoku) of the focus groups discussions involved district social welfare officers (3 personel for each district), whereas the focus group discussion in Tafo included a person with albinism and his mother and grandmother. The choice

of personal interviews and focus group discussion as a mode of data collection was considered compatible with the qualitative orientation of the study. The primary data was complemented with review of legal and policy documents as well as media reports and scholarly publications related to the study.

#### 1.4.5 Data Analysis

The data analyses include the transcription of the audio recordings, reading of the transcripts, and field notes and memos. This was followed by the coding and identification of themes. The research questions were used as a guide to categorize the data into primary descriptive codes from which subsequent secondary (analytic) codes were obtained. With the aid of a matrix and files generated with Microsoft-Word computer program, the repeated reading of the transcribed data, field memos and the official documents, the in-vivo codes i.e. the key terminologies and concepts that emerged from the data were utilized to facilitate the disaggregation of the initial primary codes into detailed sub-categories. Distinctions were made between the narratives of the various actors (the traditional authorities, social welfare officers, persons with albinism and their family, and the ordinary residents). Besides, note was taken concerning antecedents and consequents. For instance, attention was paid to the discernment historical narratives and the dynamics over time. This for instance revealed the relative flexibility of compliance between at Akwamufie where a person with albinism in neighboring community (Mangoase) could go to work in certain parts of the town, and the intensity of the strictness of compliance at Abease where the sight of persons with albinism is rigidly not tolerated. It is also imperative to emphasize that, the data was examined for alternative explanations.

#### 1.4.6 Ethical Considerations

In accordance with the ethical standards of social research, various steps were taken to ensure that principles such as; the respect for privacy of participants, confidentiality, anonymity and informed consent were not compromised. The ethical principles also obligate researchers to disclose potential risk, the benefits of the study to the participants, the limits of confidentiality, and the opportunity to ask questions. In line with these principles, all the research participants were adequately briefed about the objectives of the study. It was also explained to the participants that while the information they share shall be kept confidential, there are no extraneous motivation behind the study, apart from the stated purpose. The choice of venues for the interviews were decided by the participants to provide an assurance that their privacy was respected. Likewise the consent of the research participants were sought prior to the audio recording of the interviews.

#### 1.4.7 Constraints

Lack of gender balance among the study participants and difficulty in identifying persons with albinism were among major constraints encountered during the field work. Thus, only 21 percent of the 66 research participants were females. Even though the study was not meant to provide any specified gender dimension, having a significant proportion of females might provide further insights. For instance the

interview with a mother of a person with albinism revealed how certain fathers denied paternity following the birth of children with albinism. It is also relevant to note that, about 12 percent of those approached declined to be interviewed, whereas about 15 percent of the interviewees did not give consent for their identity and narratives and identity to be recorded. Despite these constraints, the findings and conclusions in this report are based on an objective analysis and interpretation of the empirical data obtained from the field work that was conducted in April 2019.

## **Section 2.0 Findings and Analysis**

This section presents the findings from the study alongside the analysis of the empirical evidence. The first sub-section highlights the commonalities or cultural convergence between Kwahu Burukuwa, Akwamufie and Abease in relations to their treatment of persons with albinism., whereas the second make differentiations in the cultural patterns and dynamics. The subsequent subsections elaborate on the perspectives of the major actors, namely the beliefs of traditional authorities who are the custodians of the local culture, the perspectives of persons with albinism and their families, and the responses of the state agencies responsible for social protection, human rights and law enforcement (the Department of Social Welfare, CHRAJ and the Police Service).

The findings show that the spiritual beliefs of the inhabitants account for the origin of the practice of ritual banishment of persons with albinism. The findings for instance indicate that the origin of the practice in Kwahu Burukuwa can be traced to the goddess *Abena Oku*, the principal deity of the land, whereas that of Akwamufie originated from the rites of *Tutu Abu*, the principal god of Akwamu. On the other hand, Ajokrofi, the principal goddess of Abease is responsible for the origination of the taboo in the locality. It is imperative to note that due to a relative higher intensity of solidarity and acceptance of the taboo, there was deliberate attempt by the majority of the interviewees from Abease to deny its prevalence. Whereas the traditional authorities conceive their custom from the perspective of tradition and cultural diversity, persons with albinism conceived the practice as an infringement on their fundamental human right to existence. The officials of the social welfare department held a similar view. However, the district social welfare officer for Asuogyaman District expressed a concern over the tension between cultural freedom of the communities and the liberties of persons with albinism. With regards to the prospects of cultural change, the majority of the study participants were optimistic. There was a consensus that while change is possible it would require a collaboration between the state and traditional authorities.

### **2.1 Similarities in Spiritual Beliefs**

The most fundamental point of convergence about the origin and prevalence of the ritual banishment of persons with albinism in the three study areas, is the reference to the practice as a taboo and the spiritual beliefs of the indigenes. The main explanation given by the traditional authorities and the indigenes was that the culture is rooted in the beliefs of their ancestors which has been passed on to the current generation. Whereas the traditional authorities in Burukuwa and Akwamufie portrayed the phenomenon as a tradition, the data analysis showed a connection between the custom and the spiritual laws of the principal deities in the localities. For instance, the Kontihene of Kwahu Burukuwa, and the Okyeame (Chief's Linguist) of Akwamufie confirmed the central role of the principal deities. In this regard, the origin of the taboo is linked

to three deities, namely, *Oku Abena* a river goddess and the principal deity of Kwahu Burukuwa, and her counterparts, *Tutu Abu*, a principal male deity of Akwamu, and *Ajokrofi*, the principal goddess of Abease;

In the past, persons with albinism were used for sacrifice to cleanse the town of taboos. But during the reign of the past chief he abolished the act of human sacrifice. After then, they were banned from going to the Chief's Palace to avoid being used for sacrifice. (Personal Interview, Linguist, Akwamufie 09 April 2019).

In the case of Kwahu Burukuwa, the Kontihene (Deputy Chief) of the town admitted that:

In the olden days, the people of Brukuwa do not entertain persons with albinism in their area. Simply because they considered their presence as a taboo [...]. Surprisingly, there has been no record of birth of children with albinism in the area. There may be instances where indigenes would secretly sneak out to settle in other towns to deliver children with albinism and cannot come back since the children are not accepted in the community. You may make further enquiries from other people in the town (Personal Interview, Kontihene, Kwahu Burukuwa, 02 April 2019).

As a retired public prosecutor and law enforcement officer (a retired policeman), the Kontihene of Kwahu Burukuwa bemoaned the tensions between the liberty of the community to have its own culture and the infringement of the rights of persons with albinism. Nevertheless, as the next in command to the chief of the town and a custodian of the local culture he has no option than to follow the rituals of his ancestors. Yet, he admitted that when the need arises for a cultural reforms the traditional council would be willing to collaborate with the state.

## **2.2 Permissibility of Partial Movement of Persons with Albinism in Kwahu Brukuwa and Akwamufie**

Another similarity in the prevalence of the taboo, is the permissibility of temporal movement of persons with albinism, particularly in the case of Akwamufie and Kwahu Brukuwa: Persons with albinism could transit or come and transact business and leave but would not be allowed to settle there" (Kontihene, Kwahu Burukuwa, 02 April 2019). Two persons with albinism living closer to the vicinity of the two towns confirmed the above assertion. A male youth at Kwahu Tafo confirmed going to Burukuwa to ascertain what could have happen to him, however he remained in a car throughout the visit and return safely. The other person with albinism at Mangoase also confirmed going for a temporal jobs at Akwamufie but could not enter to the areas closer to the chief's palace which host the shrine of the deity *Tutu Abu*:

In Asuogyaman district, persons with albinism are not chased out or prohibited from living in any of the communities in the districts. I have lived all my life in this district, but I am only restricted from going to the Chief's palace. I was told that in the past, Persons with albinism do not live in Akwamufie, but now we go there but are restricted from entering the chief palace (Personal Interview, Person with Albinism at Mangoase, 09 April 2019).



Figure 1. Kontihene of Kwahu Burukuwa (middle) in a pose with members of the Research team, Dr. Emmanuel Sackey (left), and Charlotte Appiah (Right).

## 2.6 Denial of Prevalence and Severity of Taboo at Abease

| Table 2<br>Summary data on the confirmation and denial of the prevalence<br>of the taboo |           |           |           |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Pru East/West District                                                                   |           |           |           |
| Name of Town                                                                             | Agree     | Disagree  | Total     |
| Abease                                                                                   | 1         | 15        | <b>16</b> |
| Adaprase                                                                                 | 3         | 0         | <b>3</b>  |
| Prang                                                                                    | 4         | 1         | <b>5</b>  |
| Yeji                                                                                     | 7         | 0         | <b>7</b>  |
| TOTAL                                                                                    | <b>15</b> | <b>16</b> | <b>31</b> |
| Kwahu East District                                                                      |           |           |           |
| Name of Town                                                                             | Agree     | Disagree  | Total     |
| Kwahu Brukukwa                                                                           | 6         | 1         | 7         |
|                                                                                          |           |           |           |
| Asuogyaman District                                                                      |           |           |           |
| Name of Town                                                                             | Agree     | Disagree  | Total     |
| Akwamufie/<br>Mangoase                                                                   | 7         | 5         | 12        |

It is important to emphasize that the majority of the interviewees (15 out of 16) at Abease denied the prevalence of the taboo in the area. Subsequent probings and interviews with 3 residents of the community, a management staff of a local secondary School and residents of the neighboring towns (Adaprase, Prang, and Yeji) confirmed the prevalence of the custom in Abease. As deduced from a follow up calls to two of the participants, the attempt to deny is attributable to the intense solidarity among the indigenes and the presence of the Assmeblyman of Abease who introduced the research assistant to the indigenes. When compared with kwahu Burukuwa and Akwamufie, it was revealed that the taboo is more intense in Abease.

### 2.4. Paternal Rejection of Children With Albinism

Three (3) of the participants in the Kwahu East District indicated two scenarios of denial of paternity because the children were born with albinism. The first narrative was given by the District Social Welfare Officer at Abetifi, and corroborated by a mother of a person with albinism at Tafo:



I was supposed to go for a DNA test to determine my son's father since he denied him when he was born and to confirm the presence of the albinism gene in my blood. Due to lack of funds I couldn't take any of the test. I see my son to be a normal like myself and like any other young person with no abnormality (personal interview, Mother of a boy with albinism, 02 April 2019, Kwahu Tafo).

On the basis of the above revelation it is arguable that the denial of paternity due to albinism could be prevalent in other communities. It is therefore ideal for future research projects to focus on such emerging themes.



Figure 2. The Chief (middle below) and Traditional Council of Abease in pose with reasearch assistant John Gayibor (far right).

## 2.5. Comparison between Ritual Banishment of Persons with Albinism and Trokosi

In his attempt to downplay the severity of the human right implications of ritual banishment of persons with albinism, the Kontihene of Kwahu Burukuwa compared the taboo with *trokosi*, cultural practice more prevalent in the Volta Region, that involved ritual servitude by young females at certain shrines to atone for the crimes committed their relatives:

The issue with persons with albinism is not like the *trokosi* system in the Volta Region where a person undergoes servitude and sacrifices are performed to liberate that person.<sup>1</sup> Here, only the presence of

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<sup>1</sup> A study conducted by Ammah et al (2013: 146) observed that “according to oral tradition supported by Trokosi priests and elders in some parts of Ghana, the origin of the Trokosi system could be traced to the practice of paying deities for services rendered. According to this view, clients who consulted deities for one reason or the other were made to pay for the services in cash and kind. Those who were satisfied with the work of these deities started to offer their children, usually, girls to serve the gods in appreciation for the work done. On other occasions, people who were about to undertake very important ventures or needed something very badly would promise to offer their daughters to the deities if they were successful”.

Persons with albinism are considered as a taboo and not accepted to settle and live in the Brukuwa community. And because they are not accepted here, they do not come here for permanent residence (Personal Interview, Kontihene, Kwahu Burukuwa, 02<sup>nd</sup> April 2019).

By comparing the ritual banishment of persons with albinism and the *trokosi* ritual servitude, the Kontihene implied that custom is a lesser evil, when compared to those of other traditional communities:

In Ghana, I have come to realized there are some stool areas where some objects or characters are not accepted in those area. In some communities, they do not rear goat, some do not allow some color of animals or things to exist in the stool areas. I heard in the olden days, the people of Brukuwa do not entertain persons with albinism in their area because they considered their presence as a taboo. PWAs could transit or come and transact business and leave but would not be allowed to settle there. They felt, your present is not accepted and that is a tradition I came to meet this tradition (Personal Interview, Kontihene, Kwahu Burukuwa, 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2019).

The comparison between the ritual banishment of persons with albinism and *trokosi* was considered very relevant not only because of the similarity but also because both have human right implications. More importantly, the some of the strategies adopted by other Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) for the liberation of *trokosi* women could be adapted by GAPA in the quest for cultural reforms in areas where the presence of persons with albinism are not tolerated.



Figure 3. Photo of person with Albinism (KJA) and mother, Grandma, and member of the research team.

### Section 3.0 Lived Experience of Persons with Albinism, and the State and Societal Response

This section provides empirical accounts of the lived experience of persons with albinism in the target communities and surrounding areas. Also included in the section are the responses of the state actors, namely the social welfare department, the Ghana Police Service and the Commission for Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ). The perspectives of these stakeholders were considered relevant because their mandate or functional jurisdiction makes them inevitable actors in the quest for law enforcement and cultural reforms.

#### 3.1 Lived Experience of Persons with Albinism

Four cases of lived experience of persons with albinism living within the proximity of the study locations are elaborated below to highlight the extent to which their rights are infringed upon. The scenarios involved three male youth at Adaprase, Kwahu Burukuwa and Tafo, as well as one adult female at Adaprase.

##### The Case of Jack of Adaprase



Figure 4. Jack being held by his granda and senior brother.



Jack hails from a Adaprase a suburb of Abease. Due to the prevalence of the taboo that forbids the residence of persons with albinism at Abease, they are scared of going to the locality. One day Jack disappeared. After a long search he was found by the youth of the town who were deployed to search for him. The youth refused to reveal the actual place they found Jack. Subsequently he developed a mental illness, as a result of which he is always kept indoors. This is because when he comes out of seclusion he sometimes gets violent and disappears. Figure 5 is a photo of Jack with his grandma and senior brother.

#### The Lived Experience of Lady JSA at Adaprase

In accordance with the ethical principles of research which contravenes the disclosure of the identity of participants, a 35 year old lady with albinism in this case shall be referred as JSA. She was convinced that being born with albinism is natural phenomenon. She opined that the taboo in Abease and surrounding area is due to the culture, tradition and beliefs of the local people. Lady JSA stressed that the chiefs must shun the custom of ritual banishment and desist from harming persons with albinism because they are humans as any other social group. She recounted the following narrative:

I was told by a late grandparents not to go to Abease. My grandparents warned me and advised that if for any reason I find myself there, I should not dare go close to the chief's palace else I will be used for sacrifice for their stool god. Because of that, sometimes I go to Abease during the day time but do not spend time there at all. The former paramount chief of Abease who was succeeded by the present chief conceived a girl with albinism who grew up but later disappeared. Up till today, no one knows her whereabouts (Personal Interview, Princess 05 April, 2019).

Unlike the experience of the two persons with albinism highlighted in the next section, JSA has never been to *Abease* because of the possibility of being sacrificed to *Ajokrofi*, the principal deity of the land. The narrative of JSA also contravenes the case of Akwamufie where the Queen mother recounted that no child with albinism has ever been born in the area.



Figure 5. Lady JSA in a pose with his brother.

### Lived Experience of DSG at Akwamufie

DSG is a 53 year old male with albinism who lives at Mangoase, near Atimpoku, in the Asuogyaman District. Unlike the other persons with albinism who participated in the study DSG was blind. As a secondary school graduate DSG was aware that albinism was a natural occurrence due to genetic factors. He engaged in small scale stone quarrying for living following a previous career in teaching which ended due to lack of professional qualification. Concerning his relations with other members of the community, he stressed that he encountered stigmatization and discrimination regularly:

Recently there has been a heavy down pour and some dug a pit on the path I use in my jurisdiction to trap me since I have problem with my eye sight. To my best of knowledge, holes as traps were used to hunt for animals in the ancient days and should not be used on me. Recently, I was passing and some people who were gossiping about me. These some of the things I experience in this community. (Personal Interview, DSG, 11, April 2019, Mangoase).

In response to whether he was aware that the presence of persons with albinism was forbidden in certain Ghanaian communities, he mentioned his awareness of the prevalence of the taboo at Akwamufie. However, he clarified that persons with albinism are not prohibited from living in any of the communities in the Asuogyaman district but only restricted from going to the Akwamufie Chief's palace:

I have lived all my life in this district, but I am only restricted from going to the Chief's palace. I was told that in the past, those with albinism do not live in Akwamufie, but now we go there but are restricted from entering the chief palace (Personal Interview, DSG, 11, April 2019, Mangoase).

The narratives of the DSG indicated that the degree of strictness or rigidity of the enforcement of the taboo in Akwamufie differs from that of Brukuwa and Abease where the custom appears to be the most intense.

### The Lived Experience of KJA and Mother at Kwahu Tafo and Burukuwa

KJA a 20 year old male who did not know the cause of his albinism. He has a stressful experience of being rejected by his biological father because of his albinism. KJA's story is akin to one narrated by the Kwahu East District Social welfare Officer. According to his mother there was no trace of albinism in her family:

I was supposed to go for a DNA test because his father denied him paternity when he was born. But due to lack of funds I couldn't take the test. I see my son to be a normal like myself and like any other person. I understand the stool god of the land forbids persons with albinism. If a goat delivers young ones and there is/are white goat(s) among the offspring, the odd ones which is the white goat will be killed or will not be left to be reared in the town. I don't think it can be changed. This is because it's a practice that has been taking place for centuries (Personal Interview, Adjoa, Mother of person with Albinism, 03 April 2019).

With regards to the reaction of people towards him, KJA observed that He recounted his experience in both the community and at school that where some people stigmatize him, whereas other were friendly towards him.



Figure 6. DSG (second from right) in a pose with family members and the leader of the research team.

### 3.2 Societal Response

Among the residents who were interviewed, there was a general consensus that ritual banishment of persons with albinism was inhuman and an outmoded culture that must be eliminated. However, they emphasized that in view of the spiritual beliefs associated with the taboo, it would be difficult to eliminate it without a collaboration between government and the traditional authorities. Yet, there was an expression of pessimism from about 10 percent of the respondents.

### **3.3 Response of State Agencies**

The study involved various state institutions, namely, the Ministry of Social Welfare, the Ghana police Service, CHRAJ, and the National Parliament. The position of CHRAJ shall be captured in the subsequent revised draft of this report because the Commission scheduled has schedule d a meeting with representatives of GAPA on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2019, while the report was expected to be completed in May.

#### Social Welfare Department

The Departments of Social Welfare (DSW) in the three districts unanimously held that the custom is inhuman and emphasized the neccesity for its abolishment. A concern was however raised by the Social welfare officer for Asuogyaman District, concerning the tension between the communities right to cultural diversity and the rights of persons with albinism, and the need for the advocates of cultural change to thread cautiously. Nevertheless, it is imperative to note that this intension has been resolved by article 26 of the 1992 constitution which stipulates that whereas cultural diversity is permitted, any custom that is injurious or dehumanizes people is prohibited.

It is also significant to note that the phenomenon of biological father denying paternity of children born with albinism was initially raised by the social welfare officer for Kwahu East District who narrated a case he handled about eleven years ago. As the state institution mandated for the social protection of vulnerable social groups, the DSW in the three districts expressed their commitment to collaborate with other stakeholders in civil society and the traditional authorities in the target communities in the quest to eliminate the customary babishment of persons with albinism in the country.

#### Ghana Police Service

An interaction with the Public Affairs Directorate at the National Police Headquarters Service in Cantonment, Accra, indicated that they have not received any report on violations against persons with albinism in the country. However, they confirmed hearing about the information about the taboo in Abease and Atebubu area on radio and urged that further information be sought from district police commands in the suspected communities.<sup>2</sup> The public affairs directorate of the police emphasized that, to get the specific information, they have to send signals to all police stations in the country to feed the head office with any report of attack on persons with albinism. They urge GAPA to be proactive in the identification of all communities with such cultural practices. The police service also urged GAPA to undertake consistent public

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<sup>2</sup>The public directorate of the Ghana Police service mentioned a river in Agogo which is believed that any pregnant woman who drink from it would give birth to a child with albinism.



education and sensitization as part of the efforts to end the custom. The public relations unit of the police also declared their commitment to collaborate with other stakeholders to check the menace.

### Parliament

As the highest law making body of the Ghanaian state, the interaction with Parliament was considered very relevant component of the project. Following a 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2019 interaction between a delegation of GAPA and the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs, Honorable Osei Kyei Mensah-Bonsu, resolved to present the issue of customary banishment of persons with albinism to parliament for deliberation.

#### **3.4 The Implication of the Myth of Non-Albinism Birth and Disappearance**

The data analysis raised a puzzle concerning the traditional authorities declaration that no child with albinism had ever been born in Burukuwa and Akwamufie. In a similar vein a tension emerged about the local belief that persons with albinism never die but vanish at the point of death. On the contrary, a critical analysis of the data indicated that due to stigmatization and fear of being murdered for ritual sacrifice women who gave birth to children with albinism leaved the “danger zones” to neighboring communities:

“There may be instances where indigenes would secretly sneak out to settle in other towns to deliver children with albinism and cannot come back since the children are not accepted in the community” (Personal Interview, Kontihene, Kwahu Burukuwa, 2nd April 2019).

Similarly the belief that persons with albinism never die but disappears seems to have no scientific basis and therefore seemed to be based on superstition. A significant proportion of the narratives indicated that the custodians of the local culture created the myth of disappearance as self-defense mechanism to conceal the practice of ritual murder:

In the past, persons with albinism were used for spiritual (sacrifice) cleansing of the town. But during the reign of a former chief, the custom was abolished. Subsequently, they were banned from going to the Chief’s Palace to avoid being used for sacrifice (personal Interview, Chief’s Linguist, Akwamufie, 10, April 2019).

From a sociological perspective, it is logical to posit that while a cultural change or reform is possible in the near future, its connection with the spiritual beliefs of the indigenes, would the quest for a cultural change a tedious one.

## **Section 4.0 Conclusion and Recommendations Towards Cultural Reforms**

This concluding section summarizes the key outcomes of the study, highlights the implications of the findings, and makes recommendations for cultural reforms as well as suggestions for further research.

### **4.1 Summary of Key Outcomes**

The following constitute the key outcomes from the study;

- 4.1.1 About 77.2 percent of the participants confirm the prevalence of the customary banishment of persons with albinism in the target communities, whereas 93.3 percent (15 out of 16 residents) of the research participants at Abease denied the prevalence of the custom in the community,
- 4.1.2 A follow up research in three neighboring towns, namely, Adaprase, Yeji and Prang, showed that the denial from the residents of Abease was a deliberate attempt on the part of the community to conceal the custom,
- 4.1.3 The National Headquarters of the Ghana Police Service has no report of any case relating to the violations of the rights of persons with albinism,
- 4.1.4 Whereas the members of the Abease traditional council denied the prevalence of the custom, there was a willingness on the part of the traditional authorities in Burukuwa and Akwamufie to cooperate with government should there be any initiatives toward its abolishment.

### **4.2 Recommendations for Cultural Reforms**

The following recommendations are based on the objective analysis of the findings from the study.

- 4.2.1 GAPA must submit a copy of this report to all stakeholders, especially the NCPD, the Ghana Police Service, Social Welfare Department, Parliament, United Nations Development Project (UNDP) office in Accra, the office of the president etc. to serve as empirical evidence for its advocacy.
- 4.2.2 The Ghana Police Service should establish a disability violation unit or integrate with gender unit to enhance the disaggregation of its data by disability.
- 4.2.3 Police must initiate special hotlines for residents of the suspected communities and general public report any cases of missing persons with albinism and other human rights abuses against persons with albinism.
- 4.2.4 GAPA must ensure that the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs submit the Association's petition to Parliament for deliberation as promised.
- 4.2.5 Parliament and other relevant state institutions must ensure the enforcement of the relevant laws that protect the rights of persons with albinism and the entire disabled population in Ghana.

- 4.2.6 The National house of chiefs through its various stakeholders called for customary reforms in all communities and traditional areas as part of the mechanisms towards inclusive society for all PWDs.
- 4.2.7 An alternative approach to cultural change should be adopted. This may involve a collaboration with the traditional councils to grant permission to their priests/priestess to invoke the deities, *Ajokrokrofi*, *Oku Abena* and *Tutu-Abu*, for consultation for negotiation and pacification of the gods as a mechanism towards the abolition of the custom.
- 4.2.8 GAPA must institute a date to commemorate the annual celebration of the ablishment of the custom, should that become a possibility.
- 4.2.9 Further research must be conducted in other areas and database of all problematic districts compiled to guide the future advocacy engagement of GAPA.
- 4.2.10 The Government through the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) and in collaboration with the NCPD must support the research and advocacy projects of GAPA, and logistics to carry out its mandate.
- 4.2.11 It would be ideal for GAPA seek allies from civil society beyond the disability movement. This should comprise of both national and international organizations with expererience in cultural change projects and albinism related project in particular.

### 4.3 Suggestions for Future Research

- (a) In order to enhance the impetus for generalization, future research relating to the objective of this study must adopt a mixed research methodology. This could facilatte the generation of a relatively larger sample size to enhance quantitative analysis.
- (b) This study has led to a discovery of new communities/towns with similar custom that violate the rights of persons with albinism. These include ;
- Akango, in the Ellembele District (Western Region),
  - Dawu, in the Okere District (Eastern Region),
  - Larteh Akonedi Shrine and parts of Akropong, in the Akuapim North District (Eastern Region),
  - Kani, a town in the Upper West Region etc.

As a result, future research must therefore be conducted in all Ghanaian communities in which the custom is known or susepcted to be prevalent.

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## Appendices.

### Appendix A

| Name                           | Town     | Gender | Phone Contact |
|--------------------------------|----------|--------|---------------|
| 1.Stephen Agbake               | Yeji     | Male   | 0548550231    |
| 2.Apam Lydia                   | Yeji     | Female | 0546461459    |
| 3.Nkansah Abraham              | Abease   | Male   | 0540668618    |
| 4.Anane Kofi<br>Thomas         | Yeji     | Male   | 0207672228    |
| 4.Gaeten B. Gbang              | Yeji     | Male   | 0546461459    |
| 5.Zainab Amidu                 | Yeji     | Female | 0207289803    |
| 6.Serwaa Joyce                 | Adaprase | Female | 0557481350    |
| 7.Rahanatu Mamud               | Yeji     | Female | 0207289803    |
| 8.Adwoa Kumah                  | Adaprase | Female | 0557481350    |
| 9.Mary Agyapomaa               | Adaprase | Female | 0557481350    |
| 10.Nana Sarfo Adu              | Abease   | Male   | 0543431607    |
| 11.Opong Kwaku II              | Abease   | Male   | 0541037143    |
| 12.Kwabena Kru II              | Abease   | Male   | 0541481868    |
| 13.Baffour Amaning<br>Amoah II | Abease   | Male   | 0242179171    |
| 14.Nana Frimpong<br>Anyinam    | Abease   | Male   | 0241342412    |
| 15.Addae Emmanuel              | Abease   | Male   | 0247714222    |
| 16.Acheampong<br>Kwaku William | Abease   | Male   | 0248748668    |
| 17.Ampsonah<br>Stephen         | Abease   | Male   | 0247714222    |
| 18.Nana Dapah<br>Johnson       | Abease   | Male   | 0247714222    |
| 19.Thomas Dane<br>Yaw          | Abease   | Male   | 0247714222    |
| 20.Ben K. Yeboah               | Abease   | Male   | 0247714222    |
| 21.Kwadwo Opa                  | Abease   | Male   | 0247714222    |
| 22.Kofi Ntem                   | Abease   | Male   | 0247714222    |
| 23.Nana Kwadwo<br>Osei         | Abease   | Male   | 0247714222    |
| 24.Yeboah Asiamah              | Abease   | Male   | 0549583335    |
| 25.Rafiu Ibrahim               | Prang    | Male   | 0249123268    |
| 26.Papa Kwesi                  | Prang    | Male   | 0249267418    |
| 27.Zulhairu Issah              | Prang    | Male   | 0558035403    |
| 28.Ibrahim Osuman              | Prang    | Male   | 0207613726    |
| 29.Aminu Bawa<br>Mohammed      | Prang    | Male   | 0546968545    |
| 30.Kofi Jagri                  | Yeji     | Male   | 0208556801    |

|                             |                                 |        |            |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|--------|------------|
| 31.Amoako Samuel            | Atimpoku (Asuogyaman District)  | Male   | 0244064061 |
| 32.Kofi Tei                 | Mangoase (Asuogyaman District)  | Male   |            |
| 33.Nana Afrakuma II         | Queen of Akwamufie (Asuogyaman) | Female | 0244769070 |
| 34.Social Welfare Officer   | Asougyaman District             | Female | 0244431863 |
| 35.Emelia Sogli             | Mangoase (Asuogyaman District)  | Female |            |
| 36.Regina Takyiwaa          | Akwamufie (Asuogyaman District) | Female |            |
| 37.Akoto Gyenti             | Akwamufie (Asuogyaman District) | Male   | 0541286922 |
| 38. Sammuell Afful          | Atimpoku (Asuogyaman District)  | Male   | 0249798815 |
| 39.David Sogli              | Mangoase                        | Male   | 0545795511 |
| 40. John Akomfo             | Mangoase                        | Male   |            |
| 41.Okyeame Asare            | Akwamufie                       | Male   | 0243066744 |
| 42.Social Welfare Officer   | Abetifi (Kwahu East)            | Male   | 0243559280 |
| 43.Nana Darfour Karikari IV | Kontihene, Kwahu Borukuwa       | Male   |            |
| 44.Adjoa Asatewaa           | Bokurwa                         | Male   | 0244793599 |
| Akua                        | Kwahu - Tafo                    | Female |            |
| 45.Elijah Antwi             | Kahu - Tafo                     | Female | 0545344533 |
| 46.Emmanuel Kojo Asante     | Kwahu - Tafo                    | Male   | 0545803527 |
|                             | Kwahu - Tafo                    | Male   | 0554728985 |

**Appendix B**

**BASLINE SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE**

**Contextual Analysis of the Prevalence of Ritual Banishment of Persons with Albinism in Ghana**

Personal Data of Participant

Name .....Age.....  
Gender.....Disability.....Location.....

Category of Actor

Person with Albinism  Traditional Authority  (position).....  
Government official  Ministry/Department ...../position.....  
Resident of problematic Town/Name.....  Herbalist/Spiritualist   
Other (Please specify).....

**SECTION A. QUANTITATIVE DATA**

1. Are you aware that albinism is a category of disability? A. No. B. Yes
2. Are you aware that persons with albinism encounter social stigmatization and discrimination? A. Yes. B. No
3. Are you aware that due to cultural beliefs persons with albinism are prohibited from living in certain Ghanaian communities? A. Yes B. No
4. Do you know any Ghanaian town in which this cultural practice currently exist? A. No. B. Yes (If yes) Name of Town.....
5. Are you aware of the prevalence of spiritual practices that involves the use of body parts of person with albinism? A. YES. B. NO

**SECTION B. QUALITATIVE DATA**

6. What do you perceive to be the cause of albinism?
7. What are your perceptions of persons with albinism?
8. What beliefs do you have about persons with albinism?
9. Persons with albinism are prohibited from living in certain Ghanaian communities? From your perspective, why is this cultural practice prevalent?
10. In your view, how can the situation be changed?

11. Do you have any other comments on this topic?