

Ritual Killings: The dark allure of quick money

In the shadows of our society, a sinister trend has emerged, luring vulnerable individuals with promises of quick wealth and power. Ritual killings, often fueled by superstition and greed, have claimed countless lives, leaving families shattered and communities traumatized. Almost on daily basis, social and conventional media are replete with stories and videos of gruesome murders in the name of rituals for money. These killings are not just isolated crimes; they represent a deeper rot within the societal fabric, where desperation, ignorance, and misinformation collide with terrifying consequences. The perpetrators are not always the stereotypical cultists portrayed in folklore; they can be neighbours, acquaintances, or even respected members of society who have fallen prey to the dangerous allure of quick success.

Experts warn that the pursuit of easy riches, often glamorized in popular culture and social media, can be as deadly as it is illusory. Victims of ritual killings span across age, gender, and socioeconomic backgrounds; some are kidnapped, while others are deceived under the guise of help, love, or employment. According to Mr Barnabas Itoyo, a psychologist, the desire for quick money and power can becloud judgment, leading individuals to engage in harmful activities. Itoyo said that people in emotionally unstable or economically deprived states were especially susceptible to manipulation by ritualistic groups or self-proclaimed spiritualists. "The belief in supernatural wealth and invincibility through sacrifice stems from a potent mix of fear, cultural indoctrination, and the human craving for control over destiny. "In these cases, individuals feel a sense of urgency to change their lives fast; that urgency becomes a fertile ground for dangerous decisions. "Mental health education and counseling should be woven into community development programmes to curb this psychological vulnerability," Itoyo said. A Guidance Counsellor, Mrs Ngohemba Akighir, highlights the correlation between poverty and the rise in ritual killings, explaining that when legitimate paths to wealth seem blocked or too slow, individuals become more likely to explore dubious alternatives.



"With youth unemployment at alarming levels, many young people begin to feel disillusioned about their future. "When the economic system fails, superstition and shortcuts become more appealing. "Entrepreneurship support, vocational training, and micro-loans could provide alternatives to ritualistic get-rich-quick schemes," Akighir said. A communications expert, Mr Edward Himin, points to the dangerous role social media plays in spreading narratives around ritual killings. "Social media platforms do amplify the reach of ritualistic groups, making it easier for them to recruit vulnerable individuals. "Stories of so-called 'yahoo boys' who gained sudden wealth are frequently shared online, often accompanied by unverified claims of ritual practices. "There is the need for media literacy programmes in schools to teach young people how to question and analyze the content they consume online. "The internet should not become a portal to destruction; instead, it must be reclaimed as a space for learning and progress. "The effects of ritual killings on communities are devastating, creating a climate of fear and paranoia that disrupts everyday life," Himin said. Mr James Adaga, a community leader in Makurdi, says when communities are hit by a wave of ritual killings, it created a climate of fear and mistrust. Adaga stated that parents will begin to keep their children indoors after school, and communal activities dwindled due to anxiety over safety. "We need to come together to support each other and find ways to prevent further incidents. "In some areas, neighbourhood patrols and town meetings are initiated as a grassroots response to insecurity," Adaga said. Retired security personnel, Mr Valentine Afia, suggests a range of interventions to address this growing menace, with prevention being at the core. Afia said that job creation and small business support could reduce the desperation that drives people toward criminality. "Public campaigns can debunk myths surrounding ritualistic wealth and promote critical thinking.

"Strong communities with shared values and mutual trust are less likely to harbour such crimes. "Proper investigation, prosecution, and deterrent penalties are necessary to send a strong message to offenders. "Ritual killings are a

symptom of deeper societal issues, including poverty, inequality, and lack of access to education and job opportunities. Relatedly, a social crusader, Mr Vincent Ipavwua, said that the prevention started with giving people hope and showing them that they do not need to destroy lives to improve theirs. Ipavwua stated that communities must come together to support each other and reject the allure of quick money, echoing a common sentiment among grassroots activists. "Ritual killings are not merely criminal acts; they are a mirror reflecting the dysfunctions in society such as economic decay, moral erosion, and cultural confusion. "These crimes rob the nation of its youth, tear families apart, and perpetuate a cycle of fear and mistrust that is difficult to break. "A holistic approach is necessary combining law enforcement with education, economic reform, mental health support, and cultural dialogue. "Governments and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) should prioritize economic empowerment programmes targeted at youth and unemployed adults. "Educational institutions must incorporate critical thinking, ethics, and digital literacy into their curricula to combat misinformation. "Religious and traditional leaders should be mobilized to openly condemn ritual practices and promote value based teachings. "Ultimately, citizens must unite to protect the sanctity of life and demand accountability from those who peddle death in the name of wealth," Ipavwua said. More so, a security expert, Mr Seyi Babaeko, said urgent measures to address the trend. Babaeko, the Managing Director of Absolute Security and Advance Protocol Ltd.

According to Babaeko, the rise in ritual killings in Nigeria is a disturbing trend that reflects deeper socio-economic, cultural, and security challenges. He said that the growing desperation for wealth, widespread belief in supernatural influences on success, and the erosion of moral values had fueled the menace. "Economic hardship, high unemployment rates, and the glamorization of sudden wealth in society have pushed many, especially young people into desperate and criminal actions. "The responsibility for the increase

is multifaceted; while individuals who perpetrate these crimes are primarily to blame, societal values and institutional failures also contribute," he said. According to him, the media, particularly social media, often amplifies stories of young people acquiring wealth mysteriously, indirectly encouraging others to seek similar paths. The expert said that some traditional and religious leaders, who should condemn such acts, remain silent or complicit. He said that the law enforcement agencies, which should deter such crimes through swift investigations and punishments, had not been proactive enough in tackling the issue. "The failure of law enforcement to track and punish offenders effectively contributes to the increase." "The government should strengthen the criminal justice system to ensure swift prosecution of offenders is critical. "Security agencies must intensify intelligence gathering and surveillance to dismantle networks involved in ritual killings. "Public enlightenment campaigns should be launched to counter the belief that human sacrifice leads to wealth. "Additionally, economic policies should prioritize job creation, as financial stability will reduce the desperation that drives some individuals toward such crimes."

According to him, a coordinated effort among stakeholders is necessary to curb the menace and restore security across the country. "Community and religious leaders must play a more active role in addressing the root causes of ritual killings. "Traditional institutions should publicly denounce these practices, while faith-based organizations should emphasize ethical means of achieving success. "Schools must incorporate moral education into their curricula to instill strong values in young people. "Parents also have a role to play in guiding their children away from negative influences. "Tackling ritual killings requires a holistic approach that combines strong law enforcement, economic empowerment, community engagement, and a reorientation of societal values," he said Stakeholders say it has become imperative for the Federal Government to declare a state of emergency on the rising incidence of ritual killings in the country. They say there is need for security agents to step up surveillance and intelligence gathering in order to stamp out ritual killings in Nigeria.