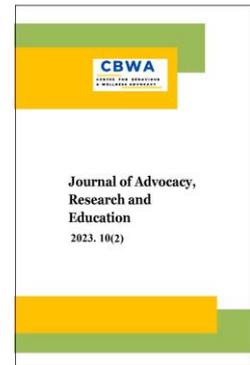




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Spirit World and Wealth Creation: Theological Reflections on Pastoral Care for Sakawa Victims at the Patmos Prayer and Retreat Center, Ghana

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Abstract

The study was structured to understand internet fraud cult practices, popularly called *sakawa* among young people in Ghana, with a particular focus on pastoral care offered at the Patmos Prayer and Retreat Centre, Akropong. The study relied mainly on the use of qualitative research methods. The purposive sampling technique was used to select all the respondents: pastoral caregivers and a former *sakawa* victim. Content analysis was used to analyse the data collected from the respondents. The study found that *sakawa* generally involves engagement in occultic practices for wealth, influence, power, fame and favour. The root cause of involvement in *Sakawa* is the insatiable desire or quest for wealth. Most of the victims are normally lured in by their peers and friends. As a result of unemployment, financial constraints are also a major cause of involvement in *sakawa*. Victims make certain sacrifices to become partakers of the 'blessings' of *sakawa*. There are dire spiritual consequences for breaching *sakawa* instructions. Participants of *sakawa* only seek help when they realise they are in danger or when it turns out that they cannot meet certain demands being placed on them. Post-deliverance counselling for victims of *sakawa* is the only way their faith in Christ can be sustained. These activities must include referrals to other specialists to seek medical, psychological, vocational and financial assistance. The study recommends that Churches educate their young people to use the internet and other modern technology for godly purposes.

Keywords: Akropong-Akuapem, pastoral care, Patmos Prayer and Retreat Center, Sakawa, spirit world, wealth creation.

1. Introduction

In 1964, the Canadian Communication theorist Marshall McLuhan coined the expression 'global village' to describe the increasing interconnectedness of societies fueled by electronic communication. The world construed as a "global village" is now a cliché. Since then, there has been an upsurge in the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), especially internet service activities across the globe. This phenomenon has undoubtedly brought rapid development to many nations. Despite the positives, the upsurge of internet connectivity and access has also brought with it an evolution of a phenomenon which constitutes not just a threat to the security of many nations but also has huge implications for other sectors of society, including the church (Sinrod, Reilly, 2000). In Ghana, the phenomenon is called *Sakawa* (Boateng et al., 2011).

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Sakawa is also referred to as '419' in Nigeria (Armstrong, 2011). It is a Hausa Language which means 'put inside'. In Nigeria, it came to the limelight in the 1990s. Initially, it was more of an internet fraud activity involving using credit cards for online shopping. Since then, its scope has widened with the aid of a computer to include identity theft, fake security software, credit card fraud, click fraud, cyber-squatting and stock schemes (Black, Hawk, 2010). Internet crime is committed when the perpetrator develops a scheme using the internet to deprive someone of property, estate or right by a false representation or concealing information. Most people engaged in the act claim that ordinary internet fraud no longer yields the desired result, so they seek the help of spiritualists to use charm to hypnotise their clients (Jaap-Henk, Bart, 2007).

Most of the *Sakawa* victims cannot own properties or any permanent fixed assets, but if they defy the rules and own landed properties, they can only enter the building walking backwards. The consequences of violating these rules include losing all the wealth, developing a mental problem or dying. These rituals endow *Sakawa* boys with the spiritual power to possess the minds of foreign fraud victims to extract quick and easy money by browsing the internet (Danquah, Longe, 2011; Mohammed et al., 2019). Its presence was first reported in Ghana between 1999 and 2000, primarily related to credit card fraud, just as in Nigeria.

Ghana has recently come to be recognised as a central hub for internet fraud activities, being one of the top ten cybercrime-generating states worldwide, along with Anglophone African neighbours Nigeria and Cameroon. The major internet fraud activities in Ghana include false identity, where criminals use social network sites like Facebook and internet dating sites to defraud their victims, fake gold dealers, and estate fraud. The recent trend is using spiritual powers to defraud victims in cyberspace. Spiritual and magical powers are consistently being used to perpetuate false wealth. They closely collaborate with indigenous spiritual knowers, such as herbalists or "native doctors" (Danquah, Longe, 2011). The process for acquiring the powers to defraud is often dangerous, not for the faint-hearted, since the instructions must be followed to the last detail; the powers can fail and destroy the would-be wealthy person. Many strange instructions will be given to the seeker of wealth, which must be carefully followed, no matter how strange they sound (Danquah, Longe, 2011).

The youth in every society is of great importance and concern because they are considered the leaders of tomorrow. They are considered investments, the bedrock on which society develops and future leaders with the potential to stimulate economic, social and national transformation. A sizeable number of cyber criminals or fraudsters in Ghana fall within the youthful age. Most who browse the internet are adolescents and constitute the perpetrators of internet crimes. Internet crime is on the increase in Ghana as the youth are engaged in it. The Ghana Police Service indicates that internet crime suspects are mostly youth aged between 20 and 25. The youth supposed to be in school are instead engaged in internet fraud, locally termed *sakawa* (Oduro-Frimpong, 2011).

The youth have discovered different ways of using the internet for different types of criminal activities. The incident can rightly be said to be increasing in the country. Although some people's knowledge of the internet is observably just for chatting with their friends and getting information, most of them may be unable to protect their data, information, and computers from malicious programmers. These young people can benefit their families, churches and society if their potential is developed or empowered for national development. Therefore, any country that ignores the welfare, socioeconomic values and development of the youth in technology could jeopardise their future and survival (Oduro-Frimpong, 2011; Wall, 2010). One of the realities prevailing among most Africans, including Ghanaians, is the belief that the spirit world is the true source of material wealth. In particular, many people believe that no one can succeed in their career, whether in crime or legitimate professions, without securing divine blessings, first and foremost, from spiritual beings (Duah, Kwabena, 2015). Hence, the practice of *sakawa* seems legitimate in the minds of many young people involved.

In *sakawa*, the victims deploy offline spiritual beliefs and practices to acquire wealth through online channels. They use the internet to deprive another person of property, estate or right by a false representation or concealing information. Most of them claim that ordinary internet fraud no longer yields the desired result, so they seek the help of spiritualists to use charm to hypnotise their clients. They use magical powers to defraud foreign victims or possess their minds to extract quick and easy money. The spirits also serve as "spiritual insurance" so that no harm may befall them while carrying out their activities (Oduro-Frimpong, 2011).

The upsurge of internet activities has certainly negatively affected participants, homes and families, society and the world. Christian youth are also riding on the back of economic depression to engage in these illegal and spiritually unsafe activities to boost their economic fortunes. The churches' lack of sound teaching on money, acquisition of wealth, prosperity gospel, get-rich-quick-schemes, and internet fraud have all contributed to the increased engagement in *sakawa*. While these people come back to pay their fat tithes and still remain active members of our churches, it has crippled the churches' voice on this menace. While there is a dearth of empirical studies on this topic, most have focused on social, economic, religious and educational implications. While some of these studies have implicitly observed the spiritual dimension of cyber-fraud, there is currently not much theological reflection on the subject, thus, the pastoral care for *Sakawa* victims.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- Why do young people enter into *sakawa*?
- What is the process for acquiring and sustaining wealth through *sakawa*?
- What are the effects of engaging in *sakawa*?
- What pastoral care strategies are used at the Patmos Centre for *sakawa* victims (before, during and after)?

2. Methods

The research design used was a case study that relied mostly on qualitative research methods. The population and unit of analysis were Pastoral Caregivers (Deliverance Workers) and a former *sakawa* victim who was once a client at the Patmos Prayer and Retreat Centre, Akropong Akwapem. The purposive sampling technique was used to select the Pastoral Caregivers (Deliverance workers) at the Patmos Prayer and Retreat Centre, especially those directly involved as caregivers for the *sakawa* victims. Since this is a sensitive issue, we used the snowballing sampling method to sample a *sakawa* victim who used to be involved, two caregivers who were also Prayer Directors, and the Founder/Director of the Centre (Sarfo et al., 2021). Also, critical observations and notes were taken during visits to the Centre and how deliverances of clients were performed. Content analysis was used to analyse the data collected from the primary respondents. Interpretation of the data was done in line with the research objectives. Themes were generated based on the frequency of appearance in the data and information obtained from the respondents.

3. Results

The analysis yielded seven themes: the definition of *sakawa*, root causes of *sakawa*, *sakawa* membership acquisition processes, *sakawa* wealth sustenance strategies, consequences of breaching *sakawa* instructions, help-seeking behaviour, and the caregiving at the Patmos Prayer and Retreat Centre.

Definition of Sakawa

The researcher needed to understand what *sakawa* was. According to the respondents, *sakawa* generally involves engagement in occultic practices through the internet for wealth, influence, power, fame and favour. The occultic rituals include activities such as consulting an evil transcendent being (such as dwarfs, dead people, and evil spirits) who can work for the seeker's satisfaction. One of the respondents had this to say, "... From my experience, you engage them, and you realise that for some, it is about soliciting for some special powers to become influential and powerful. This is in a sense that, if you are the managing director of a firm, you get approached by them for a particular position. The moment you see such people, you must fulfil whatever request they bring. So this is not just the case that they always come for money. They can say that most of them seek money, but there are also aspects where they go for powers to become powerful and influential. There are aspects of "sakawa" that you can call "for girls".

Root Causes of Sakawa

From the respondents, the first root cause of involvement in *sakawa* is the insatiable desire or quest for wealth; "it is a quest for supremacy, wealth, riches, favour and fame. Other aspects could be external factors like enticement, allurements, and peer pressure, but we are talking about

the quest for supremacy, riches, and favour, among others". Most of the victims are typically lured in by their peers and friends.

Furthermore, most people got involved in *sakawa* due to unemployment and financial constraints. It is a truism that participants of the *sakawa* subculture are primarily unemployed, low-income young men living in low-income areas. Unemployment is a major undeniable factor which has lured many youth into these fraudulent activities. Most of the youth that indulge in these activities are viable from deprived areas and slums, hence low level of education and skills. Therefore, they resort to it as a means of improving their standard of living. The drive for money can destroy relationships, resulting in immoral decisions and compromise. It can also bring spiritual ruin.

Sakawa Membership Acquisition Processes

Most people are lured into it by their friends; they are usually ignorant about the actual processes involved. In describing the process involved, the former *sakawa* victim said, *"...victims are people who lust for money and often end up in situations where they least expected to be. Victims don't know the type of sacrifices sakawa demands. Unexpectedly, you will be told to sacrifice pigeons and chickens, and later, demands level up to sacrifice sheep, then cattle and finally human sacrifice. Such sacrifices may go an extra mile to demand for your loved ones, which will be hard to offer. Before we became rich, we once had a covenant with an evil spirit, "Maame Water"[Queen of Marine Spirits]. Sometimes, we engage directly with dwarfs where we communicate directly with them; when they talk, it echoes, but our response to them sounds normal. We could be instructed to have a smoking challenge with them whereby the person who smokes more straws of cigarettes than the dwarf wins."*

The former *sakawa* victims also had a few words of advice for young people engaged in *sakawa*, *"these are some things happening in this country currently. I happen to have experienced such an act before, so I am at this moment using this platform to advise the youth and everyone to desist from such acts or anyone associated with such acts because evil forces back there, and there's nothing good that comes from such acts. I'm revealing all these secrets to caution everyone out there. There's no one out there to help you without consequences. Everyone should be vigilant that "Not all that glitters is gold"; there are always consequences. So, everyone should be very careful in their day-to-day activities and wait on the Lord, and there is time for everything and everyone, so no one should engage in acts that will shorten their lives."*

Sakawa Wealth Sustenance Strategies

In order to sustain the wealth they are given through *sakawa*, practitioners are barred from eating certain foods (e.g. mudfish, pork, crab) and doing certain things like not getting closer to a lady in her menstrual period, passing behind somebody taking his/her bath, not having sex with a woman on certain days and not applying soap on the head when bathing. Some victims may even be told not to marry.

The former *sakawa* victim continued to explain the process: *"There was a time we were stripped naked, and we had sex with these dwarfs. The dwarf could even demand bread and Lucozade (energy drink) and some requests for bananas. When the dwarfs realise they can't render any help to you, they tell you to go and return later; thus, if you are unfortunate, you could even be told to bring humans for sacrifice and could be deprived of eating certain foods like mudfish, pork, and crab, and doing certain things like not getting closer to a lady in her period or pass behind somebody taking their bath, not having sex with a woman on certain days, not to apply soap on your head when taking your bath, some may even tell you not to marry and other devastating instructions. And trust me, you there not breach any of these directions. And mind you, I'm not narrating from a hear-say but from a personal encounter with these things. Sakawa people can be identified by looking at their little finger; you realise it is always standing, or some also have rings on their little toes or fingers. Some could even have rotten bodies while alive till they die. Some people extract the blood of others, including children, by giving out money or other gifts to them. These gifts have consequences and spiritual backings; the moment you use or spend them, you fall sick and can die."*

Some people are asked to extract the blood of others, including children, by giving out money or other gifts to them. For a person who is involved in activities such as these they could be classified as demonised. They have gone so far in the way of sin that they and their works are

identified with evil. It is, in other words, a very serious state of sin. Not only does such a person sin like any other sinner but also is sin so prominent in their life that Satan is recognised in them.

Consequences of Breaching Sakawa Instructions

There are dire consequences for breaching such instructions. The former *sakawa* victim said, *"...mental problems, miserable life or even death could be examples of punishments, and these happen when one fouls any of the rules or directions given; many friends of mine died premature deaths along the line. This is because some of the demands requested cannot be met by the victims, like bringing your mother for a sacrifice to the gods or a very close relative. This happens when one is given a knife and pot and is directed to stab inside the pot; whoever picture is stabbed during the process will end up dying, or another alternative is to kill yourself. Most of the time, all these rosaries and talismans hang in people's cars or not just any object, but these are somehow connected to the shrine, and they are used to identify the people in the car by the fetish priest. In this case, if anyone with a strong soul is in the car, there would be any form of accident. Still, suppose all the people in the car have a weak soul. In that case, accidents are likely to happen". This may be unrelated. Still, the case can be established that evil spirits can cause sicknesses and infirmities. Jesus Christ described a woman with the issue of blood for eighteen years as a "daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years" (Luke 13: 16, [King James Bible](#)). The expression "crippled by a spirit" or having a spirit of illness is a strong affirmation that evil spirits can be the cause of certain sicknesses and infirmities.*

Help-Seeking Behaviour

Participants of *sakawa* only seek help when they realise they are in danger or when it turns out that they cannot meet certain demands being placed on them. Some also have encounters with God where they hear a voice speaking to them to repent. In describing the event that culminated in his conversion, the former *sakawa* victim said, *"I got delivered from this situation on one Wednesday when my friends gave me a drink that contained "weed". When I drank this drink, it heightened my spirit, and I was on my way to the hospital when a voice spoke to me that this is the time, I have to do the Lord's work. That was when I came to my senses".* This experience can be likened to the experience of the Apostle Paul as he neared Damascus on his journey. A light from heaven flashed around him, and he fell to the ground and heard a voice speaking to him. A man named Ananias was asked to see Paul so that he might receive his and be filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 9, [King James Bible](#)). There is no question but that Ananias was the agent through whom the Lord restored Saul's sight (Acts 22:16, [King James Bible](#)).

Caregiving at the Patmos Prayer and Retreat Centre The case must be firmly established that the caregivers or deliverance workers at the Patmos Centre were very well grounded in exorcism [the exercise of deliverance over negative spiritual forces and activities]. The deliverance cases of *sakawa* will not differ from the activities they normally carry out at the Centre. At Patmos Centre, *"What we basically do here is we use the word of God and prayer to get people back into the society or to the nod because sometimes there is a deviation from the nod. I normally provide a recommendation by referring them to a psychologist".*

Pastoral caregivers at the centre need to be always prepared for battles. It has been heard in many places that deliverance ministers are attacked spiritually because of their work. The battle to engage evil spirits on a daily basis is somewhat of a difficult thing to do. The caregivers at the Patmos Centre claimed they are always fortified, so they do not have spiritual attacks after delivering. One indicated, *"The Bible has always been my source of refuge. Jesus said; You will know the truth, and the truth shall set you free. They have to understand the knowledge of the word of God, and they will be delivered. It is definite, and that is the word of God. So, the level of deliberation of the word of God will give you knowledge and put you at the top. They know something but are shallow in the word of God, which is why they go to the extent of doing certain things. So by educating them on the knowledge of the word of God and going for the truth."*

Before (Preparation for Deliverance)

It was revealed that there are *sakawa* victims who refuse to go through deliverance in order to be free from its consequences. Because of this, the team at the Patmos Centre prepare their clients before they minister deliverance to them. They hold preparatory prayer meetings. Deliverance ministers basically depend on the Word of God through prayer to prepare themselves to engage in spiritual warfare. Victims have to understand the knowledge of the Word of God and they will be delivered. This time of preparation is expected to put the minister and the one to be

delivered in positions that are favourable for deliverance to take place and to forestall any spiritual consequences. As indicated by one of the respondents; *“We deem them special because of just the name “sakawa” attached. You mention sakawa and it raises an “alarm”. We deem them special because in dealing with it calls for special attention and they approach applied to other cases will not be the same approach. Because “sakawa” is an issue that has a bearing on both the person and spirituality. Also, is special because extra time will be needed to engage the spirit involved”*. Special care is given to *sakawa* victims.

During the process of Deliverance

At the Patmos Centre, there is a vivid procedure on how to conduct deliverance for anyone seeking help. *Sakawa* cases are peculiar from other spiritual cases because of just the name *sakawa* attached. Anytime it is mentioned anywhere, it raises an “alarm”. It is also deemed special because in dealing with it, it calls for special attention, and the approach applied to other cases will not be the same approach applied to this one. This is because *sakawa* is an issue that could have a serious bearing on both the person and his or her spirituality. Also, it is special because extra time will be needed to engage the spirit(s) involved. The emphasis at the Centre is to exhaust those processes, such as taking them through the word of God and praying with them. Basically, it is constant prayer and Bible studies. The Bible is prominent in dealing with *sakawa* cases. In the ministry of Jesus Christ, he confronted demons and evil spirits vigorously and cast them out of people they were possessing and hindering. It appears clearly that He saw this as a vital part of His mission to free the captive people for His Kingdom. The Gospel records are replete with verifications of this ministry.

After (Post Deliverance Activities)

It is necessary to engage in post-deliverance activities for victims of *sakawa*. At the Patmos Centre, *“What we call referral is done. Referral is placed on two notes. The first is when the person has to seek counselling from a professional or a Christian counsellor, and the second is by referring them to churches. Due to the links, we have all over the country. We can direct the person to churches or our partners around them so we can follow up. At times, we organise an orientation by training them. And there are some that we secure vocation for, depending on the person’s ability”*. The deliverance can be sustained through faith in Christ alone.

5. Discussion

We sought to provide theological reflections on pastoral care for *sakawa* victims at the Patmos Prayer and Retreat Center in Ghana. Scholars generally agree with this definition of *sakawa*. For instance, Armstrong (2011) defines *sakawa* as the use of evil occult powers to commit successful internet fraud, possessing the mind of the foreign cyber target. Oduro-Frimpong (2011) also agrees with this assertion that participants of *sakawa* manipulate others by the use of occult religious rituals to obtain fast money through the internet. Generally, there is a strong case of manipulation of victims. The practitioners use evil spirits to get their victims. The victims are hypnotised, so they are usually not aware of what is happening to them. They see things as if they are on the right path. Once they are under the spell, they act in accordance with the instructions of the practitioner. Mainly, they only realise they have been ‘fooled’ after executing the act.

The case under investigation focused on the insatiable quest for ungodly wealth. There are two forms of this practice; one is solely blood ritual (someone has to die before one can acquire their wealth), and the other is when objects, properties or pictures of people are used as bait to scam people falsely. In these two cases, one person wants to be rich at the expense of the other. In reality, the practice of *sakawa* usually goes beyond internet fraud. Also, it involves ‘witchcraft, ‘blood money’ (known as *sika duro* amongst the Akan), *ju-ju* or ‘magic’ and most commonly, a combination of them all. All these, no matter the intention, are embedded with evil manifestations. Once another person is deprived of their wealth in a way they are unaware of, *sakawa* has taken place or is in operation. The idea behind *sakawa* makes it a menace to be dealt with.

Furthermore, Leviticus 19:31, 20:6 warn against all these practices: the consultation of mediums for whatever purposes (King James Bible, 2017). In spiritualism, a medium is a person who conveys spiritual messages or is an intermediary who stands in the gap between the living and spirits to communicate messages seen, felt or heard regarding the past, the present or the future. These mediums might even offer supposed prophecy in their function. Biblically, mediums partake in occult practices, which include necromancy, magic, and fortune-telling, all of which are

abominations to the Lord. People who engage in “divination, soothsaying, augury, sorcery, the use of charms, mediums, wizardry or necromancy” are doing so to gain power over destiny and control people and events to their liking.

It happens that most of them are not told the actual demands that would be made on them by the medium they consult. They only get entangled in it and afterwards realise that they cannot bear it. It is the love for money that the Apostle Paul warns Timothy about 1 Timothy 6:6-10 (King James Bible, 2017). This is because it is a trap with inherent dangers. Satan uses it to control and rule the world and even to destroy many Christians. Jesus Christ taught that the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of riches tend to choke God’s Word and keep people from ever producing fruit in Matthew 13:22 (King James Bible, 2017). The problem with wealth is that one tends to idolise it and put their trust in it. The Bible not only warns against the dangers of loving money but also gives many tragic examples of those who loved it. For instance, Lot’s love for wealth led him to Sodom, where he lost not only his wealth but his family, for his wife turned to a pillar of salt, and his daughters raped him in Genesis 13-14; 19 (King James Bible, 2017). Achan’s love for money brought Israel defeat and his family’s death in Joshua 22:20 (King James Bible, 2017). Judas betrayed Christ for silver (Luke 22), and Demas left Paul because he loved this present world, possibly referring to the wealth of it [2 Tim. 4:10] (King James Bible, 2017). Paul says that the love of money has made some even wander away from the faith [1 Tim. 6:9-10] (King James Bible, 2017).

One cannot love God and money - only one can be the master (King James Bible, 2017). No doubt, it is for this reason that Satan constantly tries to draw people after it through the TV, commercials, social pressure and examples of success in society. One must learn contentment to be free from the love of wealth, as indicated in 1 Timothy 6:6 (King James Bible, 2017). To be free from the love of wealth, one must develop an eternal perspective which considers that we brought nothing into this world, and so one poses things after life on earth has ended (King James Bible, 2017). To be free from the love of wealth, we must recognise the dangers of desiring it, as indicated in 1 Timothy 6:9-10 (King James Bible, 2017).

Today, the entire culture is built upon the accumulation of wealth and material possessions. It is the foundation of free enterprise, the principle behind the system of credit cards and debt, banking and loans. It is what drives the advertising, music, entertainment and sports industries. It is easy to put Christian ministry, personal godliness, acts of justice and charity and sacrificial giving on the peripheries of life to see no connection between these Christian “ideals” and life as one experiences it. The truth is that there is no compatibility. Even so, one is forced to decide which offers truth and illusions, which brings contentment and peace and leads to frustration and emptiness. The Apostle Paul was not against the drive to accomplish or the ambition to make a difference in the world or on the job. The Bible clearly states that one must work hard to be a model employee or employer. But money should not be the driving force. It should be God’s glory that pushes every believer, love of people and the mission of the church (1 Cor. 10:31, King James Bible).

Most people are lured into it by their friends; they are usually ignorant about the actual processes involved. Most of the time, they are told nice things about it. The dangerous sacrifices are hidden from them. However good the description of the activities of *sakawa* may be to a seeker, the reality when later engaged is never good. In Matthew 24:4, Jesus warned against the spirit of deception (King James Bible, 2017). If people could come in the name of Christ to deceive many, Christians must always be alert against deceptive vices, be it from friends, family members, colleagues at work, or even church members. Whether those actions include human sacrifice or merely playing around on the fringes of spiritualism, every inclination to the deed (*sakawa*) is evil. It is an act of rebellion rooted in deception, taking us back to the garden where the devil tempted Eve by saying they would not undoubtedly die (Genesis 3:4, King James Bible).

To gain the wealth promised by the spirits, *sakawa* wealth seekers are made to make many sacrifices. Some sacrifice their body; hence, one will observe that some have their fingers or toes with rings, cut or in some strange positions (always standing erect). Some sacrifice animals such as fowl, lambs or humans. The human sacrifice demands mostly the use of close friends or relatives. The crux of the matter is that money is never for anything but always in exchange for a living human being, preferably a blood relative or spouse. Moreover, there is the possibility of becoming infertile, which means the sacrifice of future offspring. All cases thus deal in principle with human fertility being exchanged for money. The capacity to procreate or its products and its relations have to be sacrificed. All these must be done for a person to acquire the wealth. It is rumoured that

sakawa boys sleep in coffins or do not bathe for weeks; some even kill a small girl and eat her like *fufu* (A Ghanaian dish). They do whatever their leaders tell them, and then they have the *ju-ju* power to do their evil tricks. Then their spirit can enter the internet, possessing the *obroni* (white person) to get their money. The respondents at the Patmos Centre confirmed all these rumours.

There are grave spiritual effects when one is engaged in *sakawa*. Some hear strange voices at night and feel restless. They also have weird dreams. Some cannot eat well, which greatly affects their health. An evil spirit (dwarf) is believed to work on individuals who have encounters with certain spirits. When the spirits work on the individual, the person begins to hallucinate, which results in schizophrenia and bipolar disorders. Scripture affirms these effects: physical symptoms like blindness, deafness and dumbness (Mark 9:17, 25, [King James Bible](#)); foaming at the mouth (Mark 9:18, [King James Bible](#)); convulsions, gnashing of the teeth, falling and rolling on the ground and psychological symptoms such as self-infliction of injury (Mark 5:5, [King James Bible](#)); suicidal tendencies (Mark 9:22, [King James Bible](#)); screaming (Mark 1:22, [King James Bible](#)); tearing off clothes (Mark 1:34). Saul's condition recorded in 1 Samuel 16:14, 18:10, 19:9, [King James Bible](#) probably prompts the issue that when an "evil spirit" enters into a person, it produces certain mental and emotional sicknesses, which may well have been diagnosed today as schizophrenia. In addition, involvement with evil forces makes irresistible desires to commit immoral deeds, use drugs, exploit neighbours for personal benefits and yield to any sinful or destructive impulses. Whether one believes in the devil or not, all these things happen when one identifies himself with evil things and gives them top priority. The suicidal tendencies after engaging in *sakawa* are real. Because of the spiritual torture people go through, they feel like ending their lives so that they will not suffer anymore. A similar case could be that of Judas, who scripture says he was involved in "blood money". On the night of betrayal, it was indicated Satan had entered into Judas (Luke 22:1-8, [King James Bible](#)), put the idea into his heart and used him for his sinister purposes. According to Matthew 27:1-10, after learning that Jesus was to be crucified, Judas attempted to return "the blood money" he had been paid for his betrayal to the chief priests and committed suicide by hanging. Eventually, he hanged himself.

There are prayer Centres and camps littered all over the country. Africans or Ghanaians generally love religion and strongly believe in God and gods. Since people are continuously seeking solutions to their ailing problems, the place of spiritual camps can never be outmoded, especially in Ghana. These Centres have served as places for healing, deliverance, and prophecies. Key mention can be made of the Abasua Mountain, where thousands of people troop yearly for spiritual nourishment ([Asamoah-Gyadu, 2013](#); [Omenyo, 2006](#)). It is, therefore, not out of place to have a Centre like the Patmos Prayer and Retreat Centre specialised in deliverance issues. With over a decade of experience in the deliverance ministry, *sakawa* victims will surely be assisted to receive their breakthrough if they visit the Centre. The personnel at the Centre have the knowledge, skill and spiritual gifts necessary for undertaking such exercises.

At the Patmos Centre, they believe that deliverance has to do with the general idea of setting people free from the bondage of Satan and not just demons. It is the setting free or releasing from spiritual or physical bondage or imprisonment (of a person, place or situation, including setting free from demonic influence). It is the rescuing or being rescued, release from captivity, slavery, oppression, or any restraint, rescue from danger or any evil. They also believe that it is synonymous with terms such as, "Salvation", "Redemption", "Forgiveness", "Liberation" and "Release" (Matthew 26:2, Luke 24:47, Acts 13:18) ([Abboah-Offei, 2021](#)). Other theologians have given their definitions of deliverance. According to Martey (1997), deliverance is "the process of casting out demons to set people, demonised objects and places free from different bondages in the name of Jesus Christ". Also, according to Asamoah-Gyadu (2007), deliverance is liberating someone from the power, influence and bondage of an evil source through prayer in the power of the Holy Spirit. When deliverance is explained as salvation, it is the type of deliverance where God, through an individual, brings deliverance to individuals, the whole community and the nation. It also involves protection and safety (Judges 15:18; 2 Kings 5:1, 13:17; 1 Chronicles 11:14, [King James Bible](#)). In deliverance, one is entitled to salvation, liberation, and recovery. (Heb. 11:35, [King James Bible](#)), involves forgiveness, pardoning people, setting them at liberty and giving remission of sins (Luke 4:18, [King James Bible](#)). Ghanaian independent Pentecostals pay considerable attention to healing and deliverance because they are considered part of the vital visible signs of the outpouring of God's Spirit. Healing and deliverance also fit into the indigenous views of religion as a survival strategy.

The Africans have long practised “deliverance” or exorcism. Our ancestors practised religion as a way to “ward off evil”. This was necessary because when anyone consciously or unconsciously offended the gods, they needed to appease or be cleansed so that evil did not befall them. The use of terms in the local dialect that resonate with the concept of deliverance is another evidence that deliverance was common in Africa, Ghana. Local practices such as *akraguare*, *musukpamo*, *aweréba*, *ahodwira/odwira*, *kunaye*, *kyiribra*, *twa asuo*, *sasaduro/sesapam* born out of the Ghanaian idea of deliverance are well documented. They mostly involve the ritual cleansing of an individual who has gone through some form of trauma and committed mischief and evil so that their soul is restored. This view is reflected in such Ghanaian sayings as “*se rotwe adze fi sor na omba a, nna biribi dze mu*”, a theme of a popular song by Ghanaian highlife musician A.B Crentsil. The literal meaning of this Akan saying is that “if efforts towards an endeavour continually prove elusive, it probably means that the venture is being hampered by forces beyond one’s control.” Concerning the present discussion, healing and deliverance provide the ritual context for articulating a response to the inevitable shortfalls existing in the ‘redemptive uplift’ expected to accompany new life in Christ (Abboah-Offei, 2021).

The following Biblical passages also enforce the African idea of deliverance as an escape, to slip out, carry away to safety for refugee safety (Genesis 45:7; 2 Chronicles 12:7; Psa. 32:7; Joel 2:23; Obad. 1:17. It also involves the ceremonial cleansing from guilt, sanctification, and consecration. In Esther 4:14 (King James Bible), deliverance means to snatch away, pluck or recover. It also stands for saving someone from a situation or taking someone out of danger. This type of deliverance is a life-and-death affair. Widowhood rites performed to separate a living and dead spouse also fall into the category of deliverance. The removal of pain, the banishment of criminals to prevent evil from befalling a town or society or rituals performed for someone who is haunted by a ghost or spirit resonate with the Christian idea of deliverance (Abboah-Offei, 2021).

The African charismatic conceives deliverance in terms of freedom from sin, from one’s spiritual enemies (that is, the devil, evil spirits, witchcraft, and other such inimical forces) whose main duty is to ‘steal, kill and destroy’ the children of God (John 10:10). Proponents of healing and deliverance believe firmly in the causal relationship between sin, the work of demons and ill-health. This understanding partly explains why charismatic churches believe in and practice healing and deliverance as pastoral care for the flock of God. Regarding this demand, some churches run courses for their pastors to alert them of the need to integrate healing and deliverance into their pastoral responsibilities (Omenyo, 2006). A lot of Charismatic and Pentecostal Churches organise such training for their Pastors. This is rare in Historic Mission Churches such as The Methodist Church of Ghana, The Presbyterian Church of Ghana, and the Anglican Church.

The interactions with the team at the Patmos Centre revealed that some Pastors or Reverend Ministers refuse to engage in deliverance for people they know are into *sakawa*. Reasons attached to this case include the disbelief or ignorance in the deliverance ministry. Some are afraid of Satan and demons, and others do not have the gifts for it or are not committed to doing it. They indicated that although it is expected of every Pastor to be able to engage in deliverance for their congregants, not every Pastor can administer deliverance to their congregants. They believe there are people especially gifted in deliverance and exorcism for dealing with spiritual issues, including *sakawa*.

In the same way, God primarily used Ananias to help Apostle Paul after His encounter on the road to Damascus; the caregivers and deliverance workers at the Patmos Prayer and Retreat Centre are gifted and anointed to handle deliverance cases related to *sakawa*. The practice of healing and deliverance in African or Ghanaian settings also involves consultation with gifted experts to determine the cause of spiritual attacks and exercise spiritual authority. This could be the reason for setting up numerous prayer Centres in the country. This is because most people believe their needs can only be met when they meet a ‘powerful’ Pastor. They also believe that successful deliverance or healing processes depend on the practitioner’s ‘level of anointing’. The more anointed and gifted the practitioner, the more effective their practice of healing and deliverance on the victim or seeker. This form of pastoral care attracts more people to the practitioner’s churches. This is probably why not everyone can handle cases such as *sakawa*.

One of the characteristic features of prayer and retreat camps is that it is centred on one dominant person who is seen as the Prophet or Healer. Notable mention can be of Apostle Mintah of Okantah (Suhum), Prophetess Grace Adu of Edumfa (Cape Coast), Apostle Owusu Tabiri and Prophet Sampson Adum of Suhum. There has not been any significant change in this trend. Recent

Charismatic appeal to large numbers of seekers is the fact of their dominant gifts as ‘powerful’ preachers. They believe that it always takes a special man of God to diagnose a spiritual problem and follow it up with binding and casting out of the demon or evil spirit. This situation places a special role and demands on the deliverance ministers. They become special people of God with special God-given abilities to ‘deliver’ people from their problems (Omenyo, 2006). Just as it happens at the Patmos Centre, many of the healing and deliverance leaders have trained special teams of assistants who play various supplementary roles such as analysis of questionnaires, counselling, restraining of violent people and others. These are all done under the instructions and directions of the dominant deliverance minister. Deliverance is designed to eliminate the spiritual obstacles that impede progress. Deliverance makes the rough places smooth and the crooked places straight (Abboah-Offei, 2021).

It was revealed through the interview that, those who need deliverance are; those coming out of cults, witches and wizards, those who are sick (physically or spiritually), those who wet their bed even though they are old, oversleeping, insomnia, those under curses, those with evil covenants, mental cases which defy medical treatment, those who have suicidal tendencies, those who have the urge to murder, those with poor business growth, the oppressed, addicts, whoremongers and those who have had psychic experiences, those with compulsive behavior patterns, those with escapism problems, violent tendencies, those who hallucinate (visual and auditory), extreme unacceptable behaviors, those with serious disappointments in all endeavors, those with demonic incisions, those who experience absolute poverty, gluttons / those who cannot control their eating habits, those who hate the gospel / Christ, outlaws, stingy people, the rejected, self-opinionated and people who do not understand anything.

Deliverance leaves no room for compromises, hence, a self-preserving ingredient for the Church. Deliverance radicalises the challenge of pluralism and the damage of syncretism by stressing the traditional Christian attitude of seeing demons in other religions (Kwami, 1998). In like manner, the deliverance minister has to avail him or herself to the blood of Jesus Christ – the perfect and final sacrifice so that their conscience is cleansed and they or become sensitive to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. As the living Word of God begins to awaken the heart and cleanse the conscience, one is drawn by God’s love to serve Him faithfully again. The Word of God awakens and illuminates, and the blood of Jesus thoroughly cleanses (Ahinful, 2015). Deliverance is not something that can be formulated. Simply following a routine of saying this and doing that will not bring true deliverance. Jesus is the ultimate deliverer (Ahinful, 2015; Kwami, 1998).

As part of the preparatory processes for deliverance, Asamoah-Gyadu (2005) explains that candidates are prepared through confession of sin by the candidate and the renunciation and breaking of all covenants. The first goal is to help the victim understand that they do not need to go through the process to receive deliverance. Jesus is true to His Word, and anyone who seeks Him in the right spirit with the right “tools” will experience His freeing power. One tool we teach is a series of action steps for getting free: repent, renounce and break. This preparation also involves repentance. Repent means being “re-penitent” or “again humble.” One who is penitent expresses humble or regretful pain or sorrow for sins or offences. To repent means returning to that place of humility and sorrow over sin. If there is no genuine repentance, they continue to walk in darkness, deceived by the enemy. And if they continue to be deceived, they remain in bondage. They also need to renounce (give up, refuse, or resign by formal declaration). Whereas repenting is directed toward God, renouncing is directed toward the enemy. In this process, they renounce any words that contradict God’s Word and no longer align themselves with things that oppose God (Ahinful, 2015; Kwami, 1998).

At the Patmos Centre, it can be observed that some of these deliverance sessions could be quite physical, with clients speaking under the influence of some demon and rushing around in the open space, sometimes pursued by a team of men and women who physically restrain the victims. In some instances, as the prayer goes on, the minister and his team members move among the people and lay hands on them. The ‘blood of Jesus’ and ‘the name of Jesus’ are repeatedly invoked to rebuke the spirits responsible for the various problems. The reactions include sobbing, groaning, shouting, roaring, falling and struggling on the ground. Although scripture does not specifically outline a procedure for confronting and expelling evil spirits from the lives of those so infected, notice can be made of several actions taken by those who confronted them in Biblical times. The common components in all references seem to be verbal commands to the evil spirit directly to

relinquish and leave the body of the victims (Matthew 8:16). In some circumstances, a touch by Jesus in the ears and on the tongue was necessary (Mark 9:25, 35; Matthew 17:18). Authority directly from Christ and a valid faith in Christ are essential in order for a disciple to be able to cast the evil spirits out (Matthew 10:1; Mark 9:19, 29; Matthew 17:20, 21; 15:28).

Faith healing is practised at the Patmos Centre. They believe that God is the ultimate source of healing, and there is no need to consult Him through any medium but to present their case to Him directly in church. God has a lot of ways to heal us based on the redemptive work of Christ. It is something Jesus paid for and something He suffered for. His wish for you to be healed and walk in divine health is why He endured so much pain and suffering. Therefore, He has made healing available to you through many avenues. At the Patmos Centre, this kind of healing or deliverance is done through the laying on of hands (Luke 4:40). *Sakawa* victims are plagued with generational demons of infirmity, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, certain heart conditions, and more. Asamoah-Gyadu (2007) confirms the Biblical examples and asserts that deliverance involves a person, often a deliverance minister, praying effectively for the victim by laying on their hands and speaking a word of command, sometimes applying anointing oil or water, thereby casting out the evil spirit, and inviting the Holy Spirit to take over the victim's life after they have accepted and committed themselves to Christ. This process also involves the burning of all emblems and materials associated with non-Christian religion.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

The Patmos Prayer and Retreat Centre has great credibility when it comes to the handling of *sakawa* victims. *Sakawa* generally involves the engagement in occultic practices for wealth, influence, power, fame and favour. The occultic practices include consulting an evil transcendent being (such as dwarfs, dead people, or evil spirits) who can work for the satisfaction of the seeker. The root cause of involvement in *Sakawa* is the insatiable desire or quest for wealth. Most of the victims are normally lured in by their peers and friends. As a result of unemployment, financial constraints are also a major cause of involvement in *sakawa*. There are lots of sacrifices for anyone who wants to engage in *sakawa*. The sacrifices include sacrificing one's body (fingers, toes, organs and other body parts), animals (fowls, lambs or humans), prohibition against the eating of certain foods (mudfish, pork, crab), restriction from certain relationships (no marriage, no sexual relations, restriction from activities on certain days, restriction from women in menstruating periods) and giving with ulterior motives. The spiritual effects of engaging in *sakawa* include the following: hallucinations, sleepless nights, weird dreams, ill-health, self-infliction of injury, drug abuse, sexual immorality, and suicidal tendencies. The consequences for breaching *sakawa* instructions include madness, a miserable life, and premature death.

Participants of *sakawa* only seek help when they realise they are in danger or when it turns out that they cannot meet certain demands being placed on them. At the Patmos Centre, *sakawa* victims are taken through certain spiritual processes to bring deliverance to their body, soul and spirit. They also have pre and post-counselling sessions focusing mostly on prayer and Biblical teachings. Deliverance workers are bound to suffer some forms of spiritual attacks due to their involvement with *sakawa* victims. However, if they fortify themselves with the whole armour of God, they are free from any attacks from the evil one. Post-deliverance counselling for victims of *sakawa* is the only way their faith in Christ can be sustained. Post counselling activities include referrals to other specialists to seek medical, psychological, vocational and financial assistance.

The Church must find a very appropriate means of positively helping young people use the internet and other modern technology. This can be through guided use by young people in the church's café or through proper education to be vigilant. Constant teaching must be done by Reverend Ministers of Churches to engage young people on the dangers of engaging in occultic practices and its repercussions on their wellbeing. The Church must take a keen interest in *sakawa*-related issues. This is because there are lots of Christian youth engaged in it. The Church needs to be informed correctly regarding the spiritual dimensions of this evil and not let the secular groups have the definitive answers. Christ really is the answer to combat this deluge. Most Christian counsellors who have 'stumbled' *sakawa* cases testify to having received very little if any, training in their respective seminaries or churches regarding it. This deficiency must be remedied. Theological Seminaries and Bible Schools must also show keen interest in developing a theology of wealth creation and a manual to teach its Ministers and members how to handle deliverance cases

related to *sakawa*. Psychiatrists, school counsellors, police agencies, and abuse Centres must heighten awareness levels in the country. Security agencies must be empowered to deal with participants and adherents.

6. Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Approval given by the Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon-Accra, Ghana and Patmos Prayer and Retreat Centre, Ghana.

Consent for publication

Not applicable.

Availability of data and materials

Available upon request.

Conflict of interest statement

The authors report no conflicts of interest.

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