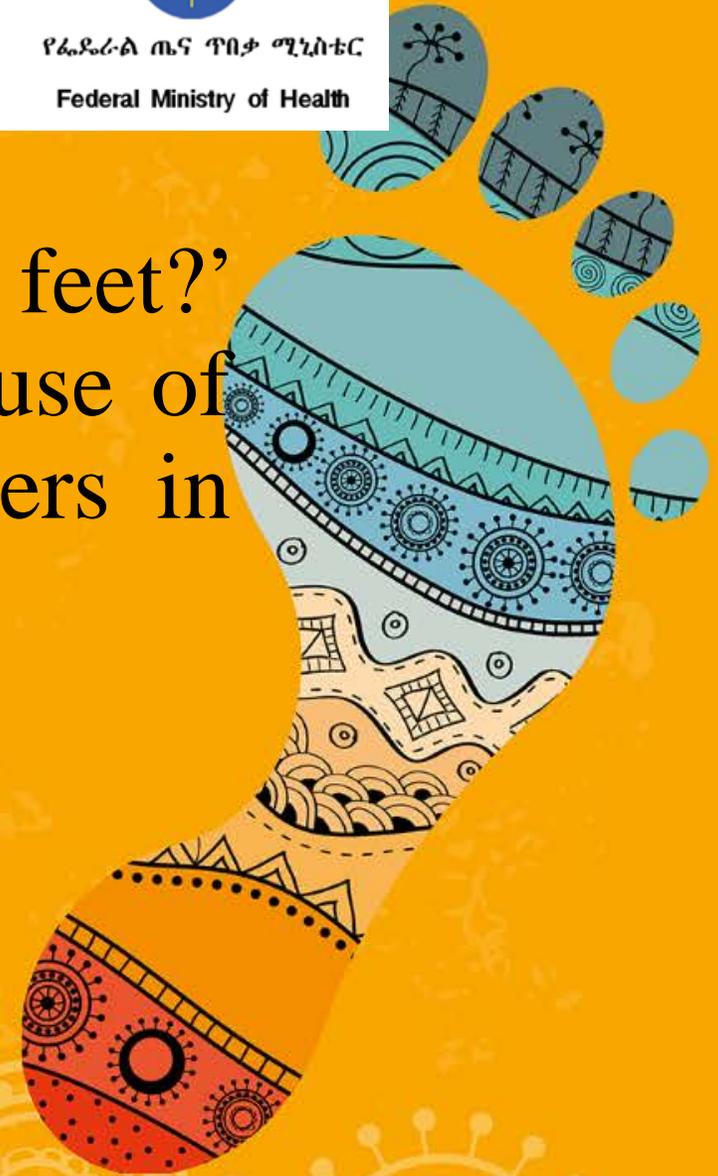


‘Why should I worry, since I have healthy feet?’
A qualitative study exploring barriers to use of
footwear among rural community members in
northern Ethiopia

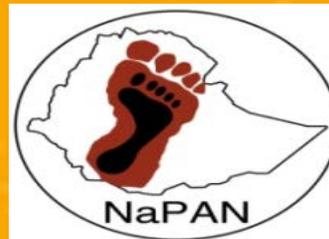
Abebe Kelemework(M.Sc)



footwork

The International Podoconiosis Initiative

brighton and sussex
medical school



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Federal Ministry of Health

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Research

BMJ Open 'Why should I worry, since I have healthy feet?' A qualitative study exploring barriers to use of footwear among rural community members in northern Ethiopia

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INTRODUCTION

- Walking barefoot has long been considered risk factor for pododermatitis.
- People living in areas endemic for pododermatitis hold misconceptions about the causes of pododermatitis.
- Pododermatitis is preventable if individuals consistently use footwear and begin doing so early in life.
- Footwear can provide considerable health benefits in reducing the incidence of a range of neglected tropical diseases (NTDs).
- A considerable proportion of rural communities do not use footwear.



OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

General objective:-

✓ aimed to explore the influence of personal, cultural and socioeconomic factors related to footwear use and non-use in northern Ethiopia.

Specific objectives :-

- ✓ to identify the misconceptions about pododermatitis and inaccurate risk perceptions in the community;
- ✓ to examine the perceived importance of shoes wear in the community;
- ✓ to explore gender inequality and perceived poverty in shoe wearing practice in the community;



METHODS

Study area

- ✓ The study was conducted in East and West Gojjam Zones, Amhara region.
- ✓ According to the 2007 census, East and West Gojjam Zones have a population of 4,260,533 people with an annual growth rate of 2.5%.
- ✓ Subsistence agriculture is the main economic activity
- ✓ The point prevalence of podoconiosis in East and West Gojjam Zones was estimated to be 3.4% in 2012.



METHODS

Sampling and data collection

- Six of thirteen IOCC treatment sites were selected purposively based on their geographic representation and history of treatment services.
- A total of 91 individuals from four target groups participated:
 1. non-affected community leaders
 2. affected men and women;
 3. non-affected men and women not in leadership positions; and
 4. school children (both male and female).



METHODS

Sampling and data collection

- Six focus group discussions (FGDs) and 17 individual in-depth interviews (IDIs) were carried out.
- Semistructured interview guides adapted from those used in a similar study in southern Ethiopia were used to collect data.
- Data collection continued until saturation was reached.
- All interviews were conducted in Amharic and recorded with consent.
- Interviews lasted on average 1 h for IDIs and 2 h for FGDs.



METHODS

Data coding and analysis

- Amharic language expert and native speaker transcribed the data and collaborated with the team members during translation.
- The team members coded the data by themes predefined in the interview guides and emerging during analysis, using a grounded theory approach.
- Reconciliation of coding by team members through frequent discussions on deviations and common themes.
- Team members were involved in draft organization of codes and corresponding quotes to identify consistencies and contradictions in the data and interpretation.



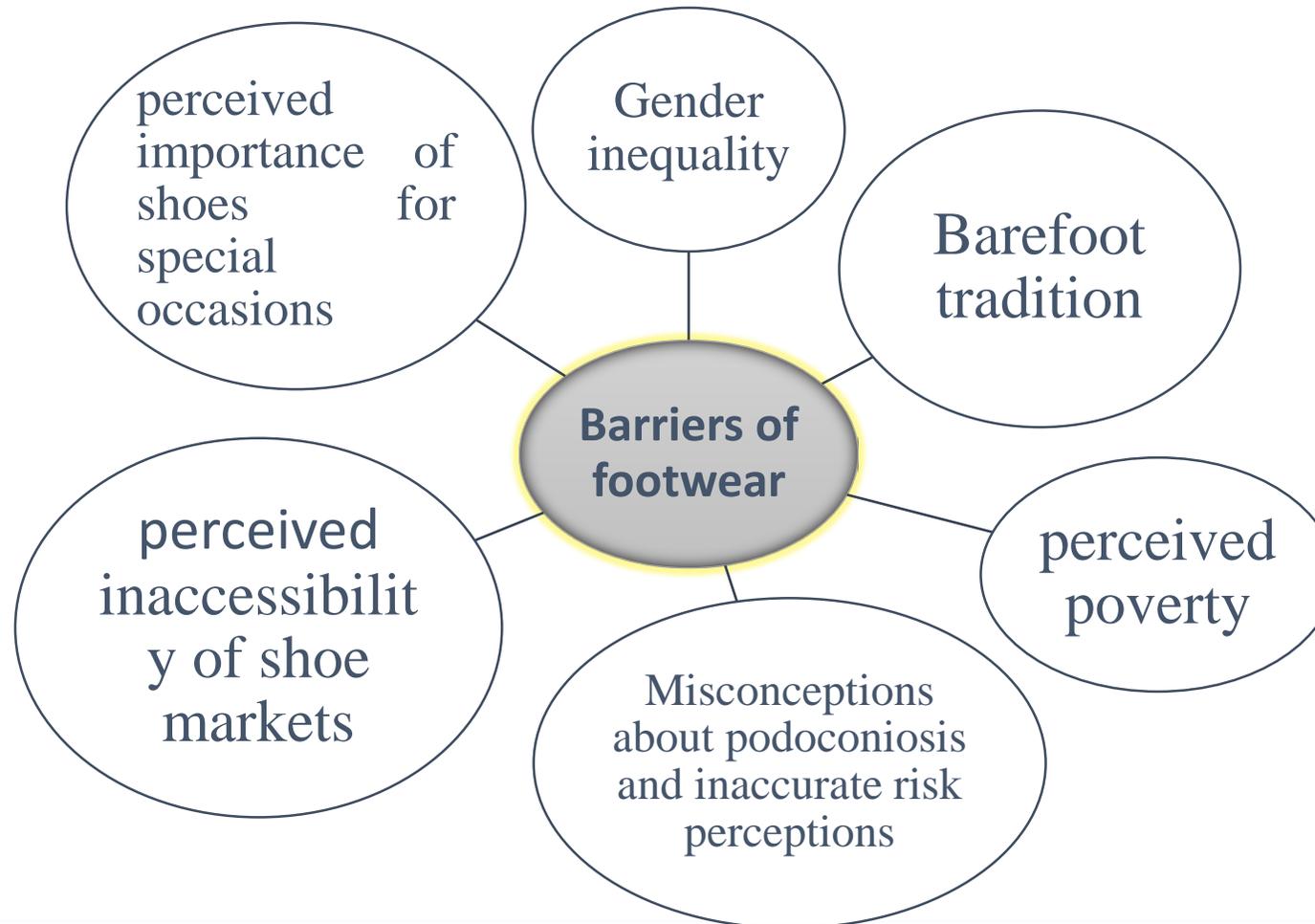
METHODS

Ethical statement

- Amhara Regional state health bureau research ethical committees were approved.
- Introductory letters were obtained from East and West Gojam Zonal Health Departments and Woreda Health Offices.
- Oral informed consent was obtained from each study participant: participation in the study was voluntary and any information provided was kept confidential.
- Quoted information was anonymised during the analysis and reporting.

RESULTS

➤ Identified barriers related to footwear were:



Misconceptions about podoconiosis and inaccurate risk perceptions

Cause of the disease	Example of Interviewees response
Spiritual factors as a cause	I got the disease when I was crossing the river. It was after four years of marriage. When I was crossing the river, I stepped on tetracycline that was put in a small scarf and tied together with ‘injera’ [a kind of pancake made from a grain, ‘teff’]. My feet began swelling after that and gradually advanced. (Affected FGD female, age 35 years)
Overlooking barefoot exposure to soil as a cause	I know some people with swollen feet. But, I don’t exactly know the cause. They usually mention exposure to cold weather as a cause. (Unaffected IDI Male, age 21 years)
Inaccurate perception of hereditary risk of podoconiosis	It was at the time of DERG regime. I bought ‘Keskis chamma’ from someone. I started wearing the shoes. Just after a month, my feet began swelling. I was shocked and said ‘wa, what is this?’ My parents said, ‘please throw away this shoes into the river’. I didn’t throw it away, but left it in the house. My younger brother wore the shoes unknowingly. As a result, his feet also started to swell. (Affected FGD male, age 60 years)

Barefoot tradition

- Majority of community members, barefoot walking was easier than using shoes.
- perceptions that shoes are heavy, weaken the feet.
- The barefoot tradition results in shoes being given lower priority than clothes.

People feel at ease when they walk barefoot. Some consider shoes to be heavy particularly in the mud. They think walking barefoot speeds up performance of any activity including running. **(Affected, FGD male, age 55 years)**

There is an old story. Two persons were talking each other. One was wearing shoes while the other was not. The one with shoes asked the other one, “my brother, why didn’t you wear shoes?” The other one replied “why should I weaken my foot which will serve me in bad days?” You know, wearing shoes was not common in our tradition. **(Affected, male FGD participant, age 60 years)**

I give priority to clothes. It depends on where you live. It is rare to see people using shoes in our community. People decorate themselves with clothes not shoes. Hence, if you want to be equal with others, you need to have clothes. It does not matter if you don’t have shoes. And, if you appear with shoes all the time, people say ‘he is boastful’. People will laugh at you if they see you working in the farm with shoes. I never saw a person wearing shoes while plowing or cultivating the land. **(Unaffected IDI male, age 21 years)**



Perceived importance of shoes for special occasions

- Several local terms are available for different types of shoes. For instance, ‘barbasso’, ‘yegebere chama’ (farmer’s shoes), ‘ekedeke’, ‘gelet’, ‘Gomma chamma’, ‘kofkuafie’ etc.
- Participants relate different types of shoes to different activities and seasons. They adapt their use of shoes according to the situation.

I have three types of shoes. I use ‘yegebere chamma’ [shoes made from tyres] whenever I travel far away or for working on the farm in the dry season, to protect my feet from injuries. Compared to other shoes, they withstand hardships and can be used for about 7 to 8 years. **(Unaffected IDI male, age 21 years)**

Gender inequality

Gender inequality

Example of Interviewees response

If the road is muddy, men take off their shoes, hang them on their stick and carry them across their shoulders. But, as women already carry things on their back, they cannot handle shoes. They are physically weak compared to males. While carrying things on their back, they cannot walk wearing shoes in the muddy and bumpy roads. The shoe adds weights to the heavy things they carry on their back. (**Affected FGD male, age 55 years**)

It is men who frequently wear shoes. We carry many things when we go to market or other places. Men do not carry anything when they go to distant places. We carry 'tela' [local beverage], bread, 'injera', etc. Since shoes are heavy, we take them off and walk barefoot. (**Unaffected FGD female, age 50 years**)

if the girl appears with shoes during a wedding ceremony, people say "her feet are deformed due to 'mujale'" or suspect other problems. They say, "Why does she wear shoes if her feet are clean?" There are also other conditions; those women who wear shoes regularly are demeaned. (**Affected IDI female, age 25 years**)



Perceived poverty

- Most participants said that poverty was a major deterrent to ownership and use of footwear.
- They admitted that shortage of money meant they did not always own or wear shoes, often saving them for special occasions rather than wearing them out in everyday activities.

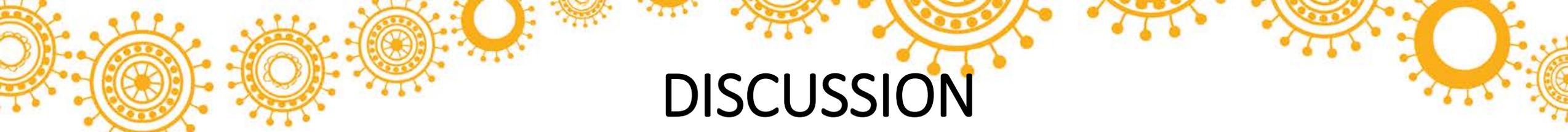
In fact, shoes are very expensive for poor people. Those who don't have assets, find it so difficult to buy shoes. These days, the cost of shoes is 300 to 400 [Birr, US\$15–20] even for canvas shoes, let alone leather shoes. Life is very expensive nowadays. (**Affected FGD male, age 52 years**)



Inaccessibility of shoe market

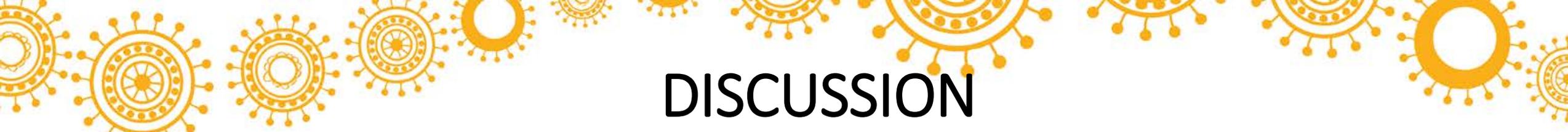
- Shoes are often unavailable in smaller village markets.
- Traders supply better quality shoes to the larger markets, usually in towns.
- Rural residents, particularly those in remote villages, may have to either walk for several hours on foot or use a vehicle to get to market, which may also limit their motivation to purchase shoes

We go to Debremarkos [the Zonal capital] to buy shoes. There is a small market in Robit, very near, but shoes are not supplied there. We usually walk on foot to go to Debremarkos. We find a vehicle once in a week that is on Saturday. Saturday is the largest market day so that many people go to Debremarkos. Other times, we walk on foot. On average, it takes 3 to 4 hours to walk. (Unaffected IDI male, age 21 years)



DISCUSSION

- individual behaviors and structural factors that influence individuals' decisions on footwear ownership and use.
- Underestimating the importance of barefoot exposure (due to misconceptions about pododermatitis and inaccurate risk perceptions) was found to be an important barrier to the use of footwear
- Existing barefoot traditions were other reasons that individuals avoided wearing shoes
- Beliefs that being barefoot is advantageous and that wearing shoes is potentially dangerous still prevail in the community
- This finding is congruent with a study in southern Ethiopia, but quite different to those of studies investigating other health commodities such as bed nets.



DISCUSSION

- It is also considered taboo to wear shoes while threshing crops
- Gender inequality is the most important determinant of optimum use of shoes.
- Men are relatively advantaged due to a lower burden of day-to-day tasks, meaning that they are able to wear shoes more frequently than women.
- Unlike males, females usually go to market barefoot, since they think that shoes will be difficult to carry in addition to their other burdens.



CONCLUSION

- this qualitative study may limit its generalisability to other contexts, it reveals information that is likely to be helpful in guiding further research and interventions to prevent podoconiosis.
- Using footwear optimally to prevent multiple NTDs is contingent on addressing these barriers.
- Increasing community awareness about the causes of NTDs, social transformation to diminish barefoot traditions
- increasing access to affordable footwear and addressing broader gender inequalities.
- The Ethiopian government may also consider adopting a policy of footwear use in schools.



Acknowledgment

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First
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Addis Ababa
Ethiopia

Thank you

