

The Right to Education of Children and Young People Living with Podoconiosis: The Case Study in Wolaita Zone, Southern Ethiopia

Enguday Meskele*

* School of Law, Wolaita Sodo University

1. Background

Podoconiosis has an enormous impact on the enjoyment of human rights. However, this aspect of the disease has been given little attention by law and policy makers in Ethiopia. The right to education is among fundamental human rights that could be affected by disease related complications and discrimination.

2. Objective of study

To assess the realisation of the right to education among children and young people with podoconiosis, based on the reports of patients and stakeholders.

3. Methods

A qualitative study was conducted by employing methods such as focus group discussions, in-depth interviews and key informant interviews. 107 study subjects were selected, using purposive and convenient sampling techniques.

5. Conclusion

There is a gap between commitment and practice in the realisation of educational rights of children and young patients, who remain the majority among those who are left behind and excluded from educational facilities.



Contact: meskelea@gmail.com

4. Results and Discussions

Impact of disease related acute pain and illness on education:

- ❖ A majority of students with the disease could not attend school regularly due to frequent pain associated with the disease.
- ❖ Frequent pain related to podoconiosis also negatively affects school performance and educational outcomes of learners with the disease.
- ❖ An overwhelming majority of informants (33 out of 48) indicated that the disease hampers their chances of school enrollment, attendance and completion.

Lack of available, accessible, acceptable and adaptable educational institutions to children and young people with podoconiosis:

- ❖ School facilities are not sufficiently available in rural disease endemic Kebeles.
- ❖ Existing educational institutions are not located in nearby villages. Hence, children and young people are supposed to walk long distances to attend school.
- ❖ Families of students with podoconiosis cannot afford school related expenses like buying pens or books, registration fees, school maintenance levies and others.
- ❖ Students with the disease are often maltreated and abused by their peers and others within educational settings.
- ❖ Students with podoconiosis are forced to adapt to the schooling system put in place.
- ❖ Disease related illness and stigma are causes of absenteeism, poor educational performance, repetition and complete drop-out of school among learners with the disease.
- ❖ In disease endemic Kebeles of Wolaita Zone, schools are not available, accessible, acceptable and adaptable to school-age children and young people living with podoconiosis.
- ❖ Widespread stigma and discrimination against patients, misconceptions about the cause of the disease, financial constraints and unfriendly school environments are major barriers to enjoyment of the right to education.

6. Recommendations

- ❖ The government should promote health education and information about the cause, communicability, prevention of podoconiosis in Wolaita zone.
- ❖ Bearing in mind that the government has a principal obligation to realise the right of education, they should make schools physically accessible, available, acceptable and adaptable in disease endemic rural areas.
- ❖ The government should encourage mass media involvement in awareness-raising and education programs about the disease.

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