

The Case of Podoconiosis in Ethiopia

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Background

- There is a growing body of evidence that calls for expanding people's knowledge of GxE contributors to disease to reduce
 - health impairing behaviors; and
 - stigmatizing attitudes against patients.
- Designing such efforts requires preparing health education messages specific to target population.
- We employed a survey method to explore messages to enhance rural youth's literacy about GxE influences of health conditions using the context of podoconiosis, a non-filarial elephantiasis prevalent in rural highlands of Ethiopia.
- Podoconiosis is a health condition that develops due to prolonged contact with a red clay soil in those with a background of genetic susceptibility.



Objectives

- The objectives of the study were twofold:
 - a) Exploring the prevalent accurate and inaccurate understandings of podoconiosis among rural youth.
 - b) Assessing the factors associated with accurate understandings of podoconiosis.

Methods

- A household survey was conducted with 377 youth in two rural communities of Wolaita Zone in southern Ethiopia
- Indicators were developed and used to measure youth's knowledge of GxE influence on podoconiosis, preventive actions and misconceptions.
 - Analyses were executed to identify prevalent understandings and determinants of accurate perceptions about podoconiosis using a statistical software (SPSS version 23).

Findings

A. Youth's accurate GxE knowledge and preventive actions

The findings showed that a number of youths were well informed about the joint contribution of gene and environment to podoconiosis.



The youths also had accurate understanding about preventive mechanisms such as wearing protective shoes (70%) and foot hygiene (86%).

B. Major misconceptions

The study revealed the prevalence of misconceptions about podoconiosis such as attributing bacteria (90.7%) and contagion (50%) with cause of the disease.

Vaccinations (85.4%) and avoiding personal contact with patients (34%) were also wrongly associated with preventive actions.

C. Determinants of youth's accurate understanding about podoconiosis

There are indications that youth's knowledge about podoconiosis is to a large extent influenced by

- ❖ Podoconiosis affected status,
- ❖ Level of education,
- ❖ Involvement in extracurricular activities;
- ❖ Contact with Health Extension Workers.



Conclusions and Implications

- ❖ Misconceptions and misunderstandings can adversely affect preventive actions and foster stigmatizing behaviour.
- ❖ Health literacy building activities should focus on dispelling the extant misconceptions and reinforcing accurate perceptions.
- ❖ Such interventions must include education components aimed at addressing categories of the youth with higher misconceptions.

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