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### The Stigma of Epilepsy among Patients attending The Epilepsy Clinic at Connaught Hospital, Sierra Leone

#### *La Stigmatisation de l'Épilepsie chez les Patients Fréquentant la Clinique de l'Épilepsie à l'Hôpital Connaught, Sierra Leone*

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#### ABSTRACT

**BACKGROUND:** Epilepsy is one of the world's most common neurological disorders with about eighty percent of cases living in low and middle-income countries. Due to superstitious cultural and traditional beliefs in Sub-Saharan Africa, the stigma associated with epilepsy is particularly disabling. Stigma negatively affects the psychosocial well-being of people with epilepsy (PWE) and their acceptance of medical treatment. Very limited studies have been done on the types and extent of stigma in PWE in Sierra Leone.

**OBJECTIVE:** This study will assess the extent and correlates of perceived and enacted stigma among patients attending the epilepsy clinic at Connaught hospital in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

**METHODS:** Using a semi-structured questionnaire to identify both perceived and enacted stigma, a cross-sectional descriptive study was conducted among patients attending the epilepsy clinic at Connaught hospital aged ten years and above with no major psychiatric co-morbidity. Frequency of stigma and socio-demographic and clinical correlates of stigma were determined.

**RESULTS:** Of the 128 patients, (9 below 18 years) 57.8% were males. Participants had a mean age of 32.9 years. 53.9% and 79.9% of participants reported experiencing perceived and enacted stigma, respectively. Longer duration of illness and being single correlated with perceived stigma, while lower educational achievement and early age of onset of seizure correlated with enacted stigma. A seizure frequency of more than two attacks a month was significantly related to both forms of stigma.

**CONCLUSION:** The level of epilepsy-related social stigma is high in Sierra Leone. This is likely due to poor community education, leading to misconceptions and biases. An appropriate educational intervention coupled with effective clinical management of cases is needed to mitigate epilepsy-related stigma. **WAJM 2023; 40(11) : 1209 - 1215**

**Keywords:** Epilepsy, Enacted, Perceived, Stigma, Sierra Leone

#### RÉSUMÉ

**CONTEXTE:** L'épilepsie est l'un des troubles neurologiques les plus courants dans le monde, avec environ quatre-vingts pour cent des cas vivant dans des pays à revenu faible et intermédiaire. En raison des croyances culturelles et traditionnelles superstitieuses en Afrique subsaharienne, la stigmatisation associée à l'épilepsie est particulièrement handicapante. La stigmatisation affecte négativement le bien-être psychosocial des personnes épileptiques (PWE) et leur acceptation du traitement médical. Très peu d'études ont été menées sur les types et l'étendue de la stigmatisation chez les PWE en Sierra Leone.

**OBJECTIF:** Cette étude évaluera l'étendue et les corrélats de la stigmatisation perçue et manifeste chez les patients fréquentant la clinique de l'épilepsie à l'hôpital Connaught à Freetown, Sierra Leone.

**MÉTHODES:** À l'aide d'un questionnaire semi-structuré pour identifier la stigmatisation perçue et manifeste, une étude descriptive transversale a été menée chez des patients fréquentant la clinique de l'épilepsie à l'hôpital Connaught, âgés de dix ans et plus, sans co-morbidité psychiatrique majeure. La fréquence de la stigmatisation et les corrélats socio-démographiques et cliniques de la stigmatisation ont été déterminés.

**RÉSULTATS:** Sur les 128 patients (9 de moins de 18 ans), 57,8% étaient des hommes. Les participants avaient un âge moyen de 32,9 ans. 53,9% et 79,9% des participants ont signalé avoir éprouvé une stigmatisation perçue et manifeste, respectivement. Une durée plus longue de la maladie et le fait d'être célibataire étaient corrélés à la stigmatisation perçue, tandis qu'un niveau d'éducation inférieur et un jeune âge de début des crises étaient corrélés à la stigmatisation manifeste. Une fréquence de crises de plus de deux attaques par mois était significativement liée aux deux formes de stigmatisation.

**CONCLUSION:** Le niveau de stigmatisation sociale liée à l'épilepsie est élevé en Sierra Leone. Cela est probablement dû à une éducation communautaire insuffisante, conduisant à des idées fausses et des préjugés. Une intervention éducative appropriée couplée à une gestion clinique efficace des cas est nécessaire pour atténuer la stigmatisation liée à l'épilepsie. **WAJM 2023; 40(11) : 1209 - 1215**

**Mots-clés:** Épilepsie, Manifeste, Perçue, Stigmatisation, Sierra Leone

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**Abbreviations:** LMIC: Low- and middle-income countries; PWE: People with epilepsy; SSA: Sub-Saharan Africa