

**SOCIETAL DISCRIMINATION ON FAMILY ESTEEM OF EPILEPTIC CHILDREN
IN SELECTED KAWA CENTERS IN NAIROBI COUNTY, KENYA**

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ABSTRACT

In Kenya families of persons living with mental illness are highly discriminated against by the community. In this study epilepsy is seen as a mental illness making it vulnerable discrimination. This has led to this research study on the effects of discrimination on the esteem of epileptic families in Nairobi County. The Social Cognitive Theory has been used to show how individuals perceive this discrimination. Societies described it as a kind of witchcraft, insanity, supernatural force, hysteria, madness, or possession by the devil, which has led to discrimination of individuals with epilepsy. Epilepsy has psychosocial consequences such as a higher rate of psychiatric disorders, mood disturbances, suicide, social isolation, perception of shame and guilt, low self-esteem, anxiety, and a pessimistic feeling about life. It also imposes restrictions and problems on family life, employment, education, and marital status. Most of the studies done on epilepsy have focused on the medical side of epilepsy. This study focused on the influence of societal discrimination on the esteem of epileptic family members. The general objective of the study was to find out the societal stigma on the epileptic family members self-esteem. The study was guided by the following objectives; influence of discrimination, societal discrimination, societal sensitization and the intervening strategies. The research adopted a descriptive survey design which described possible behavior, values and characteristics of the patients. Stratified random sampling was used to pick 10% of the target population of 1500 members of epilepsy patients from Mathare, Riruta and Karen Health Centre in Nairobi County. The sample size was 150 members' epileptic patients in Nairobi County. The instruments used for the research were questionnaires and interview guides. The interview schedules were used because some of the relatives had difficulties in understanding the questions on the questionnaire. The data collected was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 21). Interactional processes of labeling, stereotyping, separation, discrimination and lack of social support have relevance to the social experiences of people with disabilities and their families. Findings indicated that the seriousness of these consequences varies among the components of societal discrimination and esteem. In addition, it was found that family members of epileptic's patients often feel rejected and isolated and that schools and day care programmes refuse to administer epileptic patients. The study concluded that the wider society is less concerned with patients suffering from epilepsy. The fact that family members distance themselves in response to fears about epilepsy indicates that societal discrimination on epileptic families is high among various communities. The study further concluded that interventions were necessary which would include setting up health units closer to the community. Society's sensitization and guided policies to safe guard the rights of persons with disabilities and their families be put in place which would act as indicators of high esteem.