

Title: Autism in Cameroon: Need for Awareness in rural communities

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Some families in Cameroon are in search of an explanation for their children's developmental disorders and have looked toward their social and cultural beliefs associated with witchcraft. Medically, autism is not well known in the country, according to medical personnel, beliefs about autism in Cameroon have made it difficult to handle those suffering from the disorder since it must be treated within the context of the family as opposed to in isolation. Most children with autism in Cameroon are abandoned and neglected, and some are even left to die. People with autism in Cameroon sometimes wander the streets as others flee from them in fear. Shunned, defenseless, and terrified, autistic people in Cameroon commonly live in appalling conditions. Sometimes they are subject to attack as the people around them attempt to drive away the demons which they believe possess the autistic. For this reason, Cameroonian people with autism may be poisoned, drowned, hacked to death, or buried alive. In the cradle of our ancestors, Cameroon, autism is an unappreciated reality when it is not kept in the drawers of the sorcerer or witchcraft. The need for awareness proves urgent given the veils of witchcraft and "evil" which are tagged on people suffering from this disease. Witchcraft and bad luck In Cameroon, autism is attributed to nothing other than something mysterious and paranormal. Here, people suffering from this disorder witness great social adversity and discrimination and walk with big social rejection stamps on their foreheads the same way AIDS patients do. In an attempt to create awareness on this disease, the United Nations established a World Autism Awareness Day. According to the UN, autism is a lifelong developmental disability that manifests itself during the first three years of life and is the result of

a neurological dysfunction compromising the functioning of the brain. It mainly affects children regardless of race or socioeconomic status in many countries and is often characterized by impaired social interactions and verbal or nonverbal communication as well as restricted, repetitive or stereotyped behavior.

Biography

Njikem John is a holder of B.Ed. and M. Ed degree(s) in Special Education from the University of Buea, Cameroon and currently a doctorate research student in Special Education at the same University. 34 years old, and a resource teacher at the St. Rita inclusive school in Buea. Njikem is also the project director at the St. Maria Divine foundation a non-governmental organization for children with disabilities in the South west region of Cameroon. He has written two research projects and currently writing his Ph.D dissertation in Autism Spectrum Disorders, he intends to create awareness on the existence of this disorder especially in must rural communities in Cameroon.