

# Disability Stigma and the Pursuit of Inclusion: Children with Physical Disabilities in Ethiopia

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## Background

- Children with physical disabilities (CwPDs) in Ethiopia face exclusion from education and social life.
- Stigma is a major barrier to participation of CwPDs; It operates at multiple levels:
  - Micro (self/internalized),
  - Meso (family, school, community),
  - Macro (policy, culture)
- Cultural beliefs (e.g., disability as curse/divine punishment) intensify stigma.
- Limited research exists in low-income contexts like Ethiopia. Despite commitments to international frameworks (UNCRC, CRPD, ADP), CwPDs are excluded from schooling and treated as objects of charity rather than rights-holders.

## Aim & Research Questions

- **Aim:** To explore stigma experiences and coping strategies among CwPDs in Ethiopia.
- **Key Questions:** What are the lived experiences of stigma? How do children cope with stigma? How does stigma affect education?

## Methods

- **Approach:** Constructivist Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2014)
- **Setting:** 3 schools (urban, semi-urban, rural) in Northwest Ethiopia
- **Participants** (n=53) include children with disabilities (aged b/n 15–18 yrs), stakeholders (parents, teachers, peers, community), & key informants
- **Data Collection:** In-depth interviews, Observations, & Key informant interviews
- **Analysis:** Iterative coding + constant comparison (NVivo)

## Key Findings

CwPDs are misperceived, bullied, socially excluded, & blamed; they live in fear, isolation, low self-worth, & struggle with stigma, resulting in low participation in socio-educational activities. Yet, they are not passive victims; they show resilience & agency. They strive to overcome stigma and quest for promoting inclusion & equal treatment.



The picture resonates with stories of the CwPDs who are excluded from social interactions and games to be left alone (Adugna & Hanna, 2021).

## Implications

- **Policy and practice:** developing resource centers; cooperative learning, STEM courses, student clubs, redesigning curriculum, UDL, & “twin-track approach”
- **Advocacy:** Shift from charity model → rights-based approach; inform disability and education policy practice using lived experiences and stories of CwPDs to fostering networks & partnerships to improve awareness & empowerment
- **Further research:** Culturally competent measurements of intersectional stigma

## Conclusion

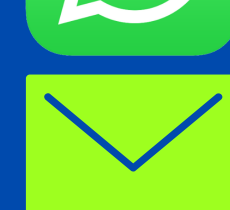
- CwPDs face deep-rooted stigma and exclusion, yet, they resist, adapt, and advocate.
- Inclusion requires: Awareness, policy reform, & collective action.
- Inclusion is both a means and an outcome of reducing stigma.

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