

// A STUDY OF KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES
RELATING TO VISCERAL LEISHMANIASIS (KALA-AZAR)
IN TSEIKURU LOCATION, KITUI DISTRICT, KENYA //

by

KAENDI J. MUNGUTI

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ABSTRACT

In the last few years, there has been growing interest and research in the area of social medicine. Today, more research is being conducted in this area in an attempt to understand how social and cultural factors impact on the health of people. However, for most diseases and especially tropical diseases these studies are in their initial stages. This study was an attempt to identify possible social and cultural factors related to visceral Leishmaniasis (Kala-azar) among the people of Tseikuru.

The study was designed to elicit as much information on Kala-azar as the people of Tseikuru know. This was possible through the use of a standardized questionnaire which was administered to a random sample of 200 heads of households. First, an attempt was made to identify the peoples knowledge on the cause, mode of transmission and symptoms of the disease. Second, the peoples attitudes on the disease as it relates to treatment and fatality were also elicited. Of particular interest was ways in which the disease could be treated. Third, social practices of the people which may expose them to the disease vector and which may impede control measures were addressed.

Analysis of the findings show that, on these three aspects while the disease is well known by name

to the people of Tseikuru a large number of those interviewed (88.5 percent) did not know what causes the disease. Paradoxically, all the people interviewed knew at least one or more correct symptoms of the disease. Also majority of the respondents (91 percent) expressed positive attitudes towards modern forms of treatment. The analysis further show that there are certain practices (though unknown to the people of Tseikuru) which may expose them to higher chances of contacting the disease. Of the 200 households interviewed 70.5 percent had termite hills less than 200 metres from the household. This coupled with the fact that 83 percent of the respondents did not know the association between termites hills and chances of contacting the disease could be seen as a contributory factor in exposing the people to the disease.

Given the findings in this study, it is clear that while the people of Tseikuru feel that Kala-azar is a fatal disease which needs to be addressed to, majority of them do not know what causes the disease nor do they know of some of the practices which continuously expose them to the disease vector.