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Assessment of community perceptions, beliefs and societal-traditional practices toward disability that inhibit Occupational Therapy intervention and rehabilitation for children with Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus in Northern Uganda

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Introduction: Spina Bifida and/or Hydrocephalus are potentially life-threatening defects affecting between one-to- three per 1000 infants globally, often resulting in severe disabilities. Occupational therapy interventions are hampered by societal-traditional practices due to inadequate information. The Northern Uganda, Agago district is known for societal-traditional delinquencies. These myths and cultural beliefs impede OT practice which is tailored towards empowering individuals with physical dysfunction to realize their potential.

Study objectives are to:

- a) Understand traditional cultural practices within local communities to influence a desired change in beliefs and attitudes
- b) Discover common issues and related resources available to address these community-identified negative traditional practices
- c) Uncover resource persons with transformative leadership abilities and skills to dispel cultural myths about disability and scale up awareness of community rehabilitation based programming .

Methods: Qualitative methodologies in this study include open-ended interviews with a) mothers during clinic visits; b) clients in the community and c) local leaders during a community dialogue .

Results: Fourteen children with Spina Bifida/or Hydrocephalus and their families participated in the study. The author will present the results of interviews and dialogue with community leaders organized for sharing ideas to reach a common understanding and workable solution related to children and adults with disabilities.

Conclusion: Community members and leaders believe children with physical disabilities are bad omens. They are kept in isolation, and are drawn in water streams. Three major implications for occupational therapy practice in this setting include: renaissance of OT in community, facilitate support groups and community dialogue.