

Exploring Wellbeing Among People Affected by Skin Diseases in Liberia

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Summary of Project

- Skin-related tropical diseases (skin NTDs) have significant psychosocial and physical impacts in Liberia.
- Qualitative methods were used to explore wellbeing, in order to develop psychosocial support for skin NTDs.
- Findings showed that intervention is needed in stigma reduction, psychological and financial support, and access to care.
- The study meets a knowledge gap in understanding community and person affected perspectives on NTDs in Liberia.

What are skin NTDs?

A group of infective skin conditions, found commonly in tropical climates, especially in areas of poverty. Leprosy is the most well-known.



Why is this research needed?

Previous research shows high burden of skin NTDs in Liberia, with significant associated psychological distress. Very little support is available.

REDRESS is a research programme working with the Liberian government to implement a holistic care package for skin NTDs.

My research provided a baseline and informed the REDRESS psychosocial intervention to ensure it meets the needs of affected people.

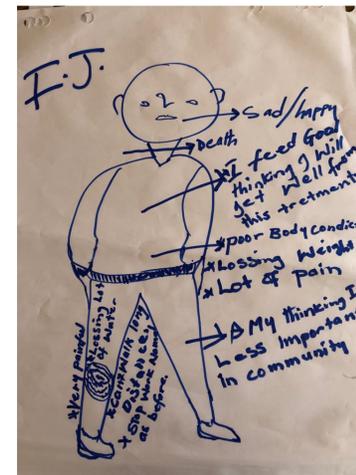
Data collection was undertaken by two REDRESS co-researchers and myself in Liberia in June 2022.

Methods

Qualitative research methods were used, including body-mapping and focus group discussion. The research used the naturalistic paradigm.

	No. of participants
Body-Mapping with Affected Persons	24 (4 groups, 2 male/2 female)
Focus Group Discussion with Community Members	25 (4 groups, 2 male/2 female)

Body-Mapping is a creative participatory method which brings a new perspective to NTD research.



Thematic analysis was done through NVivo 12.

RESULTS

The Affected Persons' Perspective

High Psychosocial Burden: Most participants experienced **low mood, anxiety** and **suicidal ideation**.

Contributing Factors:

Many participants described **stigma, poor access to care**, and **financial difficulties** as negative influences on their wellbeing. **Uncertainty** due to the nature of disease and poverty, was also common.

Finding **new purpose, faith** and **companionship** had a positive influence on wellbeing.

The Community Members' Perspective

Many community members had **poor understanding** of skin NTDs and **inaccurate cultural beliefs**. Information is often spread by **word-of-mouth** and sometimes **gossip**. Together these factors contribute to high levels of **stigma**.

The use of **traditional medicine** is common and must be considered in interventions for skin NTDs.



Conclusion

Stigma and misunderstanding of skin NTDs → social isolation and poor access to healthcare → delayed treatment → poor physical & psychosocial wellbeing.

Recommendations, based on participants' responses: psychosocial support, stigma reduction, financial support, and improved medical care.

REDRESS interventions will support these priorities:

- Peer support groups
- Psychological first aid training
- Community health education and training
- Working alongside community health workers, traditional healers and local researchers

These strategies will allow sustainable improvement in psychosocial support for persons affected by skin NTDs in Liberia and other endemic areas.