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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# METAPHOR AND DISABILITY: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE INEQUALITIES IN KURIA METAPHORICAL REFERENCE TO PHYSICAL DISABILITY

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### ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to examine metaphorical references of disability in Kuria language, spoken in Kenya. Particularly to explore how language usage in relation to disability creates hierarchies in the society by positioning the disabled below the 'normal' non-disabled language users. The paper will make use of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as its theoretical framework. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a form of analysis that seeks to explain how unequal power relationships can be established, reproduced and maintained in social and political contexts. It also clarifies elements of the marginalisation, exclusion and domination of some people by others through ideological processes, and the effect this can have on social relationships. CDA uncovers visible as well as hidden inequalities in social relationships by examining ways in which language works in specific discourses to perpetuate these inequalities. The paper makes use of primary data in form of metaphors and reference words. These were collected ethnographically through day to day interaction with the disabled and their families. Six families with members who are categorised as physically challenged were involved in the study. Interviewing and note taking were used as data collection instruments. Data was analysed thematically basing on CDA principles. The findings revealed that both male and female disabled persons are labelled negatively and referred to using demeaning metaphors. Physically challenged people are placed lowly as opposed to those who are viewed to be normal people in Kuria. The paper suggests that this view be challenged and demystified and disabled people be placed on the same lane as 'normal' ones. It further suggests that ways of challenging such discursive inequalities and ultimately realising a just and equitable society be sought for. This paper will be of importance to physical education teachers, human rights activists and organisations dealing with the physically challenged members of the society.

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## INTRODUCTION

She sits outside her grass thatched building in the remote Kwigena village in the deepest of Kuria East Sub County, Migori County, Kenya. She has a name, *Mogesi*, 'one who harvests', as she was born during the harvesting season, but she has another title, *irigata* 'the disabled'. Although her parents strictly call her by the former, most of the villagers consciously or unconsciously settle for the latter reference, something that does not augur well with her parents. 'Juts call her Mogesi,' her mom admonishes one of the naughty girls in the neighbourhood. I ask her why she insists on Mogesi. 'That is her original identity', she says. This is not an isolated case. Many disabled people have acquired other names which describe their disability. In most cases these are negative and refer to their misfortune.

The way in which disability is defined and referred to, is important to a discourse analyst because the language people use to describe individuals with disabilities influences their perceptions and expectations of them and ultimately how they interact with them (Barton, 2009).

**Disability, a world-wide challenge:** The World Health Organisation defines a disability as 'any condition of the body or mind (impairment) that makes it more difficult for the person with the condition to do certain activities (activity limitation) and interact with the world around them (participation restrictions)' (WHO, 2001). WHO (2020) further categorises disabilities into those related to Vision, Movement, Thinking, Remembering, Learning, Communicating, Hearing, Mental health and Social relationships. These can be perceived from three major dimensions: first, impairment in a person's body structure or function, or mental functioning; examples of this kind of impairment include loss of a limb, loss of vision or memory loss. Second, activity limitation, such as difficulty seeing, hearing, walking, or problem solving, and thirdly,

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participation restrictions in normal daily activities, such as working, engaging in social and recreational activities, and obtaining health care and preventive services. Disability is considered to be a result of impairment of body functions and structures, including the mind (Haegele and Hodge, 2016) and globally, people who are disabled are politically, economically and socially discriminated against. Of focus, in this paper, will be physical disability: disability related to hearing, seeing, walking, problem solving while the rest of the categorised disabilities will be referred to only when they contribute towards a clear understanding of the stated physical disability. WHO (2011) notes that about 15% of the world's population lives with some form of disability, of whom 2-4% experience significant difficulties in functioning. The global disability prevalence is higher than previous WHO estimates, which date from the 1970s and suggested a figure of around 10%. This global estimate for disability is on the rise due to population ageing and the rapid spread of chronic diseases, as well as improvements in the methodologies used to measure disability. Disability can be caused by disease, injury or health conditions. Disability should not be viewed negatively since almost all persons face temporary or permanent disability in the course of their lives due to natural causes such as ageing, or as a result of shocks and crises at any point across one's lifetime (Disability in Kenya, 2018).

In Kenya, there is a high prevalence of disability in rural areas than in urban areas. The proportion of people experiencing hearing, physical, mental and self-care impairments is also higher in rural areas most of which are females. A study by DIK (2018) revealed that the prevalence of disability increases with age, and is highest amongst older women of 60 years and above. However, the same study revealed that among populations of disabled people, the highest numbers constitute children and young people. This is attributed to the young Kenyan population which is described as very young. Even though there are government institutions working with the disabled in Kenya, these are only mandated to promote and protect the equalisation of opportunities and realisation of human rights for people with disabilities. They are not concerned with curbing naming, labelling and stigmatisation directed at people living with disabilities, hence the need for this study. Disability discourse studies have aimed at exposing the reproduction of disability as an oppressive category. For instance, the discourse of normal/abnormal that classifies disabled people against the nondisabled presents the disabled as monstrous or deeply pathological (Grue, 2011) and needs to be challenged.

### **Metaphorical discourse**

A Metaphor is a linguistic way in which one entity is conceptualised in terms of another (Lakoff & Johnson 1980). Charteris-Black (2005:19) defines a metaphor as a figure of speech in which, in some sense, 'meanings are transferred'. In metaphor, one thing is given a name that belongs to something else in a particular context. Context is important and helpful in metaphor identification and interpretation. Use of metaphorical language is perceived to be a strategy for coping with the expectations embodied by life. Metaphors help frame social situations in various ways usually by allowing one distinct domain of experience to be conceptualised in terms of another (Lakoff & Johnson 1999). Conceptualisation can be highly specific or more general. A special character of metaphor is the transference of a name, and by extension behaviour, of one

object to another and in extension transfer of meaning from the original concept (the source domain or vehicle) to the target domain or topic (Charteris-Black 2005). Through this process, the structure and meaning associated with the source domain shapes the target domain. This means that the choice of the source domain affects how the target domain is interpreted (either positively or negatively depending on the shared beliefs and assumptions of the members of a social group). For instance, in Kuria, in the saying 'a man is a lion', meaning is transferred from a lion (source domain) to a man (target domain) and this creates images of fear, strength, respect and destruction (in this context), the reverse is true in saying a woman is an egg' (see Wambura, 2018).

Metaphors are rarely neutral because they highlight some aspects of the target domain and conceal others. However, metaphors help speakers understand abstract concepts by talking about them in terms of concrete, easily identifiable and understandable concepts/objects (Lakoff & Johnson 1980). They function to highlight and make coherent certain aspects of human experience and create social realities. Structurally, metaphors are lexical items with metaphorical meanings (Halliday 1994), which extend beyond everyday universal meaning. All metaphors, therefore, have lexical meanings and relations but only a lexeme that has meaning which is distinct from the literal meaning can be regarded as metaphorical. For instance, the word dog that refers to a four legged domesticated animal (lexical meaning) carries other meanings like non-human, non-identified, useless person who wanders anyhowly, in the Kuria context (see Wambura, 2018).

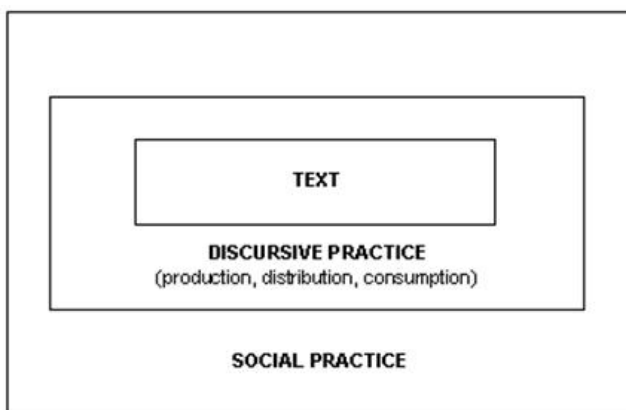
Kittay (1987) argues that metaphors are linguistic means by which ideological perceptions of the world are formed. This argument is supported by Fairclough (1992:194) who states that when 'we signify things through one metaphor rather than another; we are constructing our reality in one way rather than another'. Fairclough emphasises that the choice of the metaphor is important to critical analysts because 'different metaphors have different ideological attachments' (2001:100). Metaphor is central to critical discourse analysis due to its role in forming what is taken to be a coherent view of reality but which may constitute hidden subtleties. Metaphors perform ideological work by privileging one understanding of reality over others. They also contribute to or constitute an ideologically vested discourse (Koller 2004) and produce distinct representations of the world (Fairclough 2003). Deignan (2005) states that a discourse approach to metaphor research entails showing how metaphors have been used to present particular messages or ideologies and this is in line with CDA's main goals. Metaphors, therefore, form a potent way of ideologically presenting the in-group (the 'normal') as good and the out-group (the disabled) as bad by naming, describing and defining. Positive metaphors are used for the in-group and negative ones for the out-group. In this paper, I analyse metaphors as linguistic features which act as cues/traces of negative disability discourses in Kuria language. I do this by tracing their patterns in every day conversations and linking these to the wider Kuria society in which the discourses are produced and consumed. Just like all other forms of discourse, are constitutive of sociocultural relations and clearest manifestations of power and hierarchies because of their ability to highlight some features of reality and hide others (Lakoff & Johnson 1980; Koller 2004), metaphors form and influence human beliefs, attitudes and actions (Charteris-Black 2005). CDA is concerned with making explicit ideological motivations that would, otherwise, be implicit and concealed.

Analysis of metaphors is one way through which this could be achieved. Fairclough (1989; 1995) observes that metaphors need to be analysed as part of textual (linguistic) analyses.

## METHODOLOGY

Charteris-Black (2004) states that metaphor analysis involves three steps (identification, interpretation and explanation) which are similar to Fairclough's (1995) three stages that comprise CDA methodology. While studying metaphors, Deignan (2005) argues, an analyst identifies linguistic items that function as metaphors and describes them, then examines their literal meaning and social use. One has to bear in mind that metaphors do not directly reflect reality; they filter it such that 'metaphorical choices made by speakers present a biased viewpoint' (Deignan 2005:124). She adds that public perceptions of social issues are strongly shaped by the dominant metaphors because such metaphors encode ideological positions through the relationships they suggest between entities and through their entailments. A CDA approach to metaphor analysis makes explicit the ideological bias of metaphors and reveals their relation to discourse and power. Fairclough (1992) states that in analysing metaphor the objective is to characterise the metaphor used in the discourse and determine what factors (cultural, ideological) determine the choice of metaphor, then consider the effect of metaphors upon thinking and practice of the discourse producers. I make use of both Deignan's and Fairclough's approaches when analysing metaphor in this paper to enable conceptualisation of difficult concepts and reveal different ways in which the abled and the disabled are perceived in Kuria society.

In analysis, the focus is on linguistic items – such as vocabulary (in this case metaphors) and how social actors (in this case the disabled) have been represented. These linguistic items can act as cues and traces in the identification and interpretation of discourses that promote the unequal power structures and the hierarchical positioning of members of the social group in question. The cues are the surface manifestations of the underlying beliefs, ideologies and structures of the language of the culture in relation to disability and the disabled. CDA mostly embodies a three layered method of analysis: analysis of the text (at micro level), analysis of discursive practices (at meso level) and analysis of social practices (at macro level (Fairclough 2015)). This is summarised in Fairclough's illustration as shown in Figure 1.



Source: Fairclough (2015:58)

**Figure 1. Three-layered conception of discourse**

Micro analysis entails exploring the linguistic and close textual representations within discourse at the text level. It is descriptive in nature (Fairclough 1992; Wodak 2001). This level of analysis is important since it depicts ideologies and/or discriminatory practices. According to Fairclough (1992) and Baker (2008), analysis at textual level focuses on vocabulary, grammar, cohesion and text structures. The researcher, however, does not have to investigate all of these but can 'make choices and select structures for closer analysis that are relevant for the study of a social issue' (van Dijk 2001: 99). Selection requires the knowledge of text-context relationship. The analyst identifies how persons are named and/or referred to linguistically, traits, characteristics and features attributed to them and the perspectives from which these attributions are made. My focus will be on metaphors used in reference to the disabled. I select metaphors because they are valuable due to their ideological underpinnings and role in legitimising and normalising unequal positions. Fairclough (2010) stresses that words are not neutral, choices can be used to normalise the power of a particular group over another and to advance certain ideologies. Macro analysis focuses on the wider sociocultural practices where discourse is produced and consumed. In this case focus is on how the text reflects and affects the society; this is where discourse analysis becomes critical discourse analysis. The analyst identifies the 'social and cultural goings-on which the communicative event is part of' (Fairclough 1995:57) while asking questions such as what does this text say about the society in which it was produced? What impact does the text have on social relations? Is it replicating existing unequal power and social relations or is it challenging them (Fairclough 2015). An analysis of the Kuria Disability metaphors (discourses) examines how representations of disability shape, affect or influence existing social relations in Kuria.

**Table 1. List of analyzed words**

No.	Kuria Disabled Terminology	English Translation
1	<i>irigata</i>	The lame
2	<i>umukiro</i>	The deaf
3	<i>umuhukuru</i>	The blind
4	<i>umumuumu</i>	The dumb
5	<i>omorenchege</i>	The physically unstable
6	<i>omotentegeru</i>	Clumsy
7	<i>umuchuru</i>	The schizophrenic
8	<i>iritatura</i>	The stammerer/ stutterer
9	<i>endori</i>	The epileptic

The wider social context is also examined - the Kuria people and their beliefs and norms about disability as an example of Kenyan/African culture in general. Fairclough states that in CDA it is impossible to isolate text analysis from the wider societal, cultural, political and ideological perspectives and practices. Focus is on ideology, power and hegemony which frame the investigation of discourse as a social practice (Fairclough 1992). The manifestation of power, ideology and hegemony within discourse practices are investigated through different perspectives with the focus being on critical and social issues handled by discourse analysts. This is the *explanation* stage. I argue that there are unequal hierarchical power positions between different groups of social actors (the disabled vis a vis the abled) in the Kuria context and that these are reflected (and constructed) in discourse which in turn legitimise the unequal positions in the society while maintaining the status quo. By subjecting the metaphors to CDA, I aim to expose and critique underlying ideologies which

perpetuate these 'dis/ability' inequalities with an aim of initiating resistance towards them. It is important to note that discussions of language and disability are essential because 'disabled people experience discrimination daily and are denied the same rights and opportunities as the rest of the population' (Barnes 1993:8).

## DISCUSSION

### Metaphorical representations of disability in Kuria

**Language: A critical analysis:** Language use among Kuria speakers denies the disabled an opportunity to be treated as fully autonomous and active members of the Kuria community. Despite the fact that every disabled person has a name, given at birth, community members continue to refer to them using their disability references alone or would always add a disability reference to their usual names. For instance, Nchagwa *muhukuru* (Nchagwa, the blind). With time, in some cases, the regular names disappear or are only known to family members as the disability references take preference. In worse case scenarios the disabled is addressed using their disability reference a case that causes alienation and disorientation and ultimately trauma. The word *irigata* is derived from the Kuria noun *engata* which is an instrument made from dry banana leaves that have been folded and tied with a dry sisal string a rounded gadget with a hole in the middle (the shape of a doughnut) and it is used by girls and women by placing on the head before a water pot is carried. It aids in balancing the pot on the head. The process of making *engata* is a long and tiresome one because if poorly made it means the pot cannot balance on the head. Once the banana leaves are folded and tied together they remain so forever, it is assumed that *engata* cannot be undone. It remains in that shape for a long time. The word *irigata* used for the lame literally means a big and shapeless *engata*. It has a negative connotation because when used for a disabled person it means they are folded and tied to the same shape and size forever. In this way, anyone who is *irigata* is perceived to be helpless and hopeless therefore of no importance in the community. They are neglected and not counted among the members of the family. In fact, when I was doing this study I asked one of the respondents how many children they had, the response was that, *ntoona abhana banei si owa ghatano nirigata* "we have four children and the fifth one is *irigata/lame*" This metaphor is used to describe both men and women who are lame, meaning that gender is not a controversial issue when describing the lame. Through the *irigata* metaphor, the lame in Kuria are constructed as unable to fend for themselves or for others, they are not taken to school or equipped with any skill to make them independent even though it is only their legs which are affected with the other parts of the body working normally.

The word *umukiro* (the deaf) is derived from the Kuria verb *kira* (to be quiet) which is used to refer to those cannot hear. Historically, it was believed, among the Kuria, that those who cannot hear. Could not hear could not answer back, it was assumed that because they could not answer back they were 'quiet'. Up until the early 80s, it was assumed that every dumb person is naturally deaf which is not the case. The Kuria believed that the deaf and dumb were a cursed lot and one could only be born with these two forms of disability if their parents or a member of the family had committed a crime warranting a curse. To date, those with these disabilities continue to be abhorred as a result of these beliefs and treated as the 'other' members of the community. It is worth noting

that during family meeting these two categories of people are not invited; they are assumed to have no ability to contribute since they cannot hear and consequently cannot answer back, due to this hierarchical positioning, they are subordinated and classified at the lowest level in the hierarchy. *Omorenchege* (the physically unstable) is characteristically one who does stand still without support. They are always supported with a walking stick or leaning on something. This kind of disability is viewed with contempt among the Kuria people. Victims are viewed as too dependent to the discomfort of their families and friends. The metaphor *omorenchege* is borrowed from the word *renchegere* which relates to the wheel/ tyre of a bicycle or something that is round and cannot stand still. Something that keeps moving and is unstoppable. A person suffering from this disability, though able to perform most duties and be independent, is not given an opportunity to do so among the Kuria people because it is believed they may not stop working on the activity, if unsupervised. One of the interviewees informed the researcher that 'if *omorenchege* starts walking they don't stop, and if they stop they don't walk again, if they sit down they can't stand again and once they stand they cannot sit down' meaning they don't have the ability to control their physical activities, thus calling for support and supervision every time to the discomfort of those taking care of them. It is worth noting that in Kenya the disabled are only catered for by their family members, unlike in the developed countries such as Britain where the disabled, of any kind, are taken care of through social protection policies. In Kuria, for instance, the disabled have no government support in terms of finance, social or even moral protection. They are vulnerable and exposed to many dangers. If family members do not step up to care for one of their own, they are left to fate.

And since most family members have to work in the farms or herd cattle to provide food for the family the disabled are left in the company of young children or the very old members of the society thus exposing them, together with the old people, to danger.

While the word *omorenchege* is associated with inability to control one's legs and general physical instability, *omotentegeru* has to do with hands. The word *omotentegeru* (clumsy) is used in reference to disability of the hands; the literal Kuria meaning is 'weak on the arms/hands'. A person described as having this disability is unable to hold an object of any weight firmly, they drop it down or keep shaking it until it falls off. Among the Kuria people the origin of this word was in the inability to hold the *egesencho* 'guard' firmly and drink from it (a guard/*egesencho* is a container from which drinks of any nature are taken but mostly used to drink *obhosara* and *ikirunguri* 'gruel and porridge'). Inability to hold the guard firmly and drink from means that the disabled has to be supported/be fed, this ultimately means they are helpless and cannot be independent, they require daily support. It is worth remembering that feeding an adult is viewed as a demeaning and embarrassing exercise, thus family members prefer to do it indoors where no one is likely to see them and 'laugh at them'. An adult who cannot feed themselves is grouped in the same category as children (or babies) who are normally fed until the age of two to three years. They are subordinated and looked down upon because of their inability to do what adults are socially expected to do, albeit as 'simple as feeding oneself'. This leads to their deprivation of rights such as right to choose what to eat since they cannot fend for themselves, they are therefore at the mercy of those who provide for their needs.

*Omotentegeru* is metaphorically constructed as a weak human being who requires support from those on whom he/she depends. Therefore, not only does such a person need a strong pillar to support him, he needs this at all times, especially at meal time. This is why anyone who is *omotentegeru* is always ridiculed and described as useless to himself and to the community. Physical strength among the Kuria is an expected attribute for both men and women, men are expected to be strong enough to go hunting and bring home a kill, to build houses, farm lands and fight enemies, while women are to be strong enough to nurture babies, and perform all house chores. Anyone one who is unable to do these socially stratified duties is considered to be a lesser person in the society and is consequently neglected. This is why most of the disabled people are unkempt and always hidden from the public.

*Umuchuuru* (schizophrenic) is a word used for people who are considered mad. A mad person according to Kuria beliefs, walks around the villages aimlessly collecting and throwing stones, they carry bags full of paraphernalia and chase people around for no reason. Mad people are tied with ropes and given food by force. According to one of the respondents, a mad person is a 'useless being in the society, but there is nothing you can do about them, you just let them wander about until when they drop dead'. When mad people die, they are normally buried outside the compound as a symbol of their not being 'normal'. In worst case scenario their bodies are tied with dry banana leaves (and not in animal hides as is the norm), signifying their lesser position in society, and transported to the deepest of the farthest forest in *ikwabe* (near the Masaai). It is abandoned there to rot or be mauled by wild animals.

A mad person is not named after, because, it is believed, once a child is named after a mad person, they will also turn mad at some point in the course of their lives. Once an individual starts showing signs of madness, for instance laughing without control, staring at others for long and losing concentration, they are taken to a herbalist. At this point they are not described as mad but as sick! They live with the herbalist undergoing treatment for 14 days, if they recover, they are reintegrated back to society. But when their situation worsens the family is asked to slaughter a white chicken or animal to ward off evil spirits controlling the mad person's brain and quicken his recovery. If nothing changes, the 'sick' person now graduates to being referred to as mad and they are separated from normal people, the family erects a cubicle where the mad person is caged. He lives here alone except for meal hours when the whole family (in most cases the strongest members of the family) gather to tie, hold him down and feed him. It is believed that mad people are wild and violent even though some of them may have not attacked anyone. At some point the mad person breaks free and wanders in the community freely causing havoc. At this point, no medication is administered, he/she is left to fate.

Among the Kuria, mad people are categorised as lesser members of the society, even when they have names, given at birth, their reference permanently changes to *umuchuru ora* 'that mad one'. Sometimes they acquire new nicknames which are equally derogative and demeaning, including *mogeka* 'the mat' meaning the person is always on the mat, *nyabirandi* 'the one with guards' meaning they are always carrying baggage. Their position in the society changes from 'so and so' to 'that one' and they are not counted among family members nor considered for inheritance.

Once they die, they are forgotten. *Iritatura* (stammerer/stutterer) is a disability associated with speech. A person with *iritatura* is characteristically unable to speak fluently. They produce troubled speech with repeated initial sounds especially consonant sounds. Among the Kuria people this disability is hereditary, it runs in the family line and there are families of stutterers and those without this hereditary feature. Despite the fact that a stammerer is despised, the family where he/she comes from is looked down upon. People hesitate to interact with them or make serious friendships that would lead to marriage, for fear of ridicule. A stammerer is always laughed at especially when they cannot state with ease what they need. The listener, if not patient enough, can walk away leaving the stammering addresser in utter shame. A woman who is being wooed by a stammerer is abhorred by her friends and pressured to turn him down. One of the respondents informed me that the family could not allow their only sister be married into a stammering family because they would 'have trouble negotiating for dowry and may end up getting less than what they deserve'.

Even though a person with this disability can perform all duties like any other person, they are in most cases denied the opportunity to do so thus being deprived of a chance to achieve their potential. This leads to their continued discrimination and stigmatisation.

*Endori* (the epileptic) is a disability associated with occasional seizures, unusual behaviour or lack of awareness. It is a neurological disorder which is maintained by use of daily medication, with no known treatment. Among the Kuria people the word *endori* is literally used to mean 'continuous illness'. A person suffering from this disability is believed to be perpetually ill and untreatable. They can never heal and are only assisted to manage their condition.

Victims are believed to be unaware of their condition. They may have seizures unknowingly and only those around them will be able to tell once they come around. Because of their inability to control themselves, the epileptic are neglected out of the belief that 'if you touch an epileptic while they are under a seizure attack you will be infected'. Therefore, in critical circumstances such as during preparation of a meal, if an attack occurs people would run out of the house leaving the epileptic alone. 'Some victims have fallen into fire during an attack suffering severe burns', said one of the respondents. Those suffering this disability, though able to perform most of the normal daily duties, are not 'to be left alone and independent since they can be attacked any time'. They therefore need supervision which is in most cases viewed to be a burden to the family. It is believed among the Kuria that epilepsy is not natural, it is a result of a curse cast on a family since time immemorial; this is why an epileptic should not be touched during an attack. Instead, of seeking medication for the condition most Kuria family opt to offer sacrifices to the ancestors to ward off what is believed to be the 'spirit of falling'. This should be demystified through awareness that the condition is medically manageable.

## Conclusion

Ideological representations of the disabled as 'others' is a socially constructed approach to discriminate against them and place them in the lowest cadre of the social hierarchy. This emphasises the importance of what is considered 'normal' in

society which is not always right. This is a form of dehumanisation and subordination of the disabled. This kind of positioning leads to their alienation and stigmatisation which are detrimental to their wellbeing.

### Recommendations

#### From the findings, it is recommended that:

The negative view of the disabled be challenged and demystified and disabled people be placed on the same lane as 'normal' ones. It is further suggested that ways of challenging metaphorical discursive inequalities be sought for as an initial step that would ultimately lead to a just and equitable society.

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