

The Health Care System in a Village of Ex–Leprosy Patients in Zambia

2nd year student

Nepal Field School

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KYO Akie

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Background and objective of my research

Leprosy has almost been eliminated in most endemic countries. However, an estimated 20 to 25 per cent of people affected by leprosy (ex-leprosy patients) have significant impairments leading deformity and disability¹. Little attention has been paid for ex-leprosy patients in African countries, due to limited medical facilities and the social segregation. Leprosy patients used to be forced to attend specialized hospitals far away from their villages, and some of them had never returned to their home. As the result, communities of ex-leprosy patients were founded in many countries including Zambia. Although they do not suffer from leprosy itself anymore, they face difficulty in the daily living because of physical impairments, aging and severe stigmatization.

I have studied the local health care system of a village of ex-leprosy patients in Zambia. The village was established by ex-leprosy patients who had been cut off from social relationships in their home villages. People living here do not receive regular medical, economic or social support from the government or NGOs. Under the circumstance, they have built appropriate cooperative relationship to support their own livelihoods. For example, food distribution is common between ex-leprosy patients. Inter-generational support is also common. On the other hand, there is no cooperative activity to provide medical treatment, although many of them have symptom of physical impairments by the disease, and it often brings severer damage to their body and their daily living eventually. Although the existing social network in the villages is important to ensure subsistence of ex-leprosy patients, it is not sufficient to keep their health condition.

¹ Frist, T. 2003. *Don't treat me like I have leprosy*. London: ILEP



Fig.1. A Leprosy sanatorium of A Christian missionary hospital in the Eastern province, Zambia



Fig.2. A village established by ex-leprosy patients in the Eastern Province, Zambia



Fig.3. Volunteer work for ex-leprosy patients by women's group of local Christian church