ABSTRACT

Background: Epilepsy is estimated to affect 50 million people globally, with 80% living in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Children with epilepsy (CWE) in SSA are often socially isolated, and many do not get access to school. This study aimed to explore the barriers hindering accessibility to formal education among CWE in Mahenge, Tanzania. **Methods:** The study was conducted in June 2022 in four villages (Mdindo, Msogezi, Mzelezi and Sali) using quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative included 203 persons with epilepsy (PWE), while the qualitative involved six focus group discussions and 17 in-depth interviews. Quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed using Stata and Nvivo software, respectively. **Results:** Of the 203 PWE, 62 (30.5%) had never enrolled in school, while 77 (54.6%) of those enrolled dropped-out before completing it. The perceived barriers to accessing education were categorized as individual barriers (such as frequent seizures, learning difficulties, anti-seizure medication side effects and perceived stigma), Community barriers (such as stigma and discrimination, negative beliefs and misconceptions, relocation to farms and poor socio-economic status), and Institutional barriers (including lack of knowledge about epilepsy among stake-holders, topography and distance to schools). **Conclusion:** There is a high rate of dropouts and non-enrolment of CWE in schools within the Mahenge area. Negative beliefs and low awareness of the community about epilepsy and formal education contribute to this issue. This calls for more advocacy to raise community awareness on epilepsy. The government should enforce an inclusive education policy and provide free and uninterrupted anti-seizure medication for seizure control.