

**CULTURAL BELIEFS AND PRACTICES TOWARDS THE  
EDUCATION OF MENTALLY RETARDED IN AGUTHI  
ZONE, NYERI DISTRICT KENYA**

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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF OPEN AND  
DISTANCE STUDIES IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT  
FOR THE AWARD OF BACHELOR OF EDUCATION SPECIAL NEEDS OF  
KAMPALA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

**APRIL 2008**

**DECLARATION**

I, the undersigned, declare that this project is my original work and has never been presented to any other university for award of any academic certificate or anything similar to such.

Signature 

KARUGA W. CECILIA

DATE: 01/5/08

**APPROVAL**

This Report has been under my supervision as a university supervisor.

**SIGNATURE**



.....

**MR. FRED SSEMUGENYI**

**DATE:** ..... 02/05/2028 .....

## DEDICATION

This work is affectionately dedicated to my beloved husband Joseph Karuga and our dear children Ester, Joyce, Beatrice, Moses and Margaret for their support patience and understanding during this period of study not forgetting all those who constantly wished me success.

## **AKNOWLEDGEMENT**

My gratitude first goes to God who has given me the strength and courage to undertake this research

I also owe a lot of appreciation to all those who assisted me in carrying out this research. I am grateful to my supervisor Mr. Fred Semugenyi who tirelessly went through my work and inspired me to dig deeper into the core of the matter. This kind criticism, patience and understanding assisted me a great deal.

I am indebted too, to my friends who gave me encouragement in time of difficulties. Thanks also go to all those lecturers in education Department who impacted professionalism into my work.

I wish to thank my family for their love, financial support and inspiration during my stay in Kampala International University.

Finally, I would like to thank all my respondents and those within a short notice without which this work would not have been possible.

**GOD BLESS YOU ALL**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study examined the role of culture beliefs and practices towards the education of mentally retarded children in Nyeri District, Kenya.

The objectives of the study were identify and analyze the attitudes of the community to the mentally retarded people in Aguthi Zone; and to analyze the community Tolerance and acceptance of the mentally disabled persons in Aguthi zone.

Qualitative and quantitative designs were employed where convenient sampling was applied to select the five primary schools used for the study.

The main instruments used in the data collection were the questionnaires; the data collected was analyzed manually were the researcher used descriptive and quantitative analysis, which included percentages and frequencies.

The findings of the study included among others the fact that there are negative attitudes of the community to the mentally retarded people and that there is no community torelence and acceptance of the mentally disabled persons in Aguthi zone

This research recommended among others a policy that should be a strategy towards the teaching of students with disabilities with attention to what, where and how they are going to live and work as adults



## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of the study

The concept of mental retardation in the world is continually changing and these changes can be seen as a reflection of a change in the perspective of individuals with mental retardation based both on research and a clearer understanding of the issues involved in defining the concept. For example the American Association on Mental Retardation, a professional organization founded in 1876, recently drafted a new definition of mental retardation, which not only maintains a functional perspective on retardation but also focuses on the relations among capabilities, environments, and functioning (Luckasson, Coultier, Polloway, Reiss, Schalock, Snell, Spitalnik, & Stark, 1992).

Under IDEA mental retardation is defined as significantly sub-average general intellectual functioning existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period (Grossman, 1983 p.11) that adversely affects a child's educational performance. Significantly sub-average intellectual functioning is defined as a score that is at least two standard deviations below the mean on a test of intelligence. Based on the American

Adaptive behavior is an indication of independence and social

competence. It refers to an individual's ability to meet the social requirements of his or her community that are appropriate for his/her chronological age. Standardized tests such as the American Association on Mental Retardation Adaptive Behavior Scale (Lambert, Nihira, & Leland, 1993) and the Vineland Adaptive Scales are used to determine an individual's adaptive skills. Using the sub-average intellectual functioning and the adaptive behavior skills deficits an individual would only be identified as having mental retardation if their IQ scores and their adaptive behavior skills scores were below average.

In Kenya a mentally handicapped child is one who has a limited level of intelligence and deficits in adaptive behavior. This condition usually arises between conception and 18 years of age (Ministry of Education, 1995).

The Kenya Ministry of Education, in its handbook on how to handle children with special needs goes on to note that mentally handicapped children are usually categorized according to severity of mental impairments as mildly, moderately, severely, or profoundly handicapped; or as educable, trainable, severe, and profound in terms of their measured intelligence scores on IQ tests. The classifications of educable and trainable are referred to by other authors (e.g., Bernie-Smith, et. al., 1998). It would appear that the definition of mental retardation used in

Kenya has some parallels with the IDEA definition used in the United States.

## **1.2 Statement of the problem**

Although the problem of handicapped children has existed for a very long time, it has only recently begun to receive significant attention in Kenya. Parents of handicapped children tended to feel ashamed so that such children were hidden away from the rest of society. This was especially true in the case of children with mental handicap, which were recognized early in life. Mentally retarded children whose handicaps were only recognized at a later stage were seen more often but this did not mean that their handicaps were more prevalent. As more and more attention is drawn to the plight of handicapped children, society is becoming increasingly concerned about the cultural attitudes of some people towards these people especially in Nyeri district. Hence the need for this study.

## **1.3 Objectives of the study**

### **1.3.1 General objective**

The general objective of the study is to investigate the role of cultural beliefs and practices towards the education of mentally retarded children in Nyeri District, Kenya.

### **1.3.2 Specific objectives were to;**

1. Determine the Attitudes of the community to the Mentally retarded People in Aguthi zone
2. To determine the Community Tolerance and Acceptance of the Mentally Disabled Persons in Aguthi zone.
3. To show how the problems of cultural beliefs and practices of the community towards the mentally disabled persons can be over come.

### **1.4 Research questions**

1. What are the Attitudes of the community to the mentally retarded People in Aguthi zone?
2. What is the Community Tolerance and Acceptance of the mentally retarded Persons in Aguthi zone?
3. How can the problems of cultural beliefs and practices of the community towards the mentally disabled persons be over come?

### **1.5 scope of the study**

The study was conducted in the southern region of Nyeri District called Aguthi zone. The study will be limited to the objectives of the study. Any other aspect of the topic apart from that mentioned in the objectives not investigated because of resource and time constraints.

### **1.6 Significance of the study**

The research is of help to the government so that sees the need of supporting education for children with special needs in Kenya.

Informed decisions in policy formulations and in the building of the institutions aimed at establishing conditions for special needs education might be made basing on the findings from research.

The research intends to help researchers and academicians to increase on the available literature for further studies

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

#### 2.0 Introduction

This chapter reviews literature as an account of the knowledge and ideas that have been established by accredited scholars and experts in the field of study. It is guided by the objectives of the study outlined in chapter one

#### 2.1 Attitudes to Mentally retarded People in Non-Western Cultures

There is ample evidence that all cultures - western and non-western - exhibit reactions to disability and disabled people, which form a continuum (Ingstad, 1990). Yet much literature on non-western cultures is dominated by descriptions of negative attitudes. O'Toole (1988) has summarised these descriptions thus: In the West the disabled have been stereotyped as being dependent, isolated, depressed and emotionally unstable...Such negative feelings are amplified in LDCs [Least Developed Countries] where the overwhelming impression, from published literature, is of attitudes towards the disabled which are very negative.

Ingstad (1990) argues against this stereotyping of non-western cultures and describes it as a recently created "north-south myth". In order to raise money, create awareness..., a picture of the situation for disabled people has often been painted as negatively as possible, emphasising shame, hiding, killing, etc.

Particular caution must be exercised when reviewing western literature on attitudes or literature that has been written by, or on behalf of, a charitable organisation. However, regional, country and community-specific initiatives which are aimed at developing relevant strategies for changing negative public attitudes in favour of disabled persons are indeed laudable. The study carried out in Pakistan following the International Year of Disabled Persons (IYDP) in 1981 provides an excellent example of a country-specific action-oriented attitude consideration, whatever the researchers' initial assumptions (Miles, 1983).

Kisanji (1993) and Walker (1986) have similarly provided an overview of the situation in Africa. There are also a number of studies on attitudes at community level (Bickford and Wickham, 1986; Muya and Owino, 1986; O'Toole, (1988). Most of these published and unpublished works reveal a mixed pattern of attitudes which are a mirror image of the worldwide situation. Hence it is misleading to argue that attitudes in non-western cultures are very negative.

An examination of the published materials on non-western cultures shows that most of them are impressionistic, anecdotal (Miles, 1983) and written for a western audience often by westerners. Although the studies which are reported in literature are sometimes carried out with or in

consultation with local professionals, the interpretation of data cannot escape the inevitable influence of western culture.

o

Each culture has its own unique characteristics, which usually are best understood by indigenous people. However some of the local professionals, products of non-indigenised western education, may not understand their own culture (Thairu, 1985; Thiong'o, 1986). Misinterpretations of practices, therefore, may be made by both local and foreign researchers and caution needs to be exercised when reviewing findings on attitudes in non-western cultures.

Further problems in attitudinal research include difficulties with sampling procedures, attitudinal measurement and attitudinal biases (Gajar, 1983). A recent computer search on attitudes towards disability and disabled people, with Disability, Attitudes, Disabled People as the keywords, gave 133 entries which included both rigorous studies and non-empirical descriptions of attitudes. The studies focused on perceived causes of disability, parental reaction immediately following the identification and confirmation of the impairment in the child or family member, educability and employability of disabled persons. Child rearing practices, despite their importance in showing action oriented attitudes, were not covered.



Studies of attitudes in orate cultures are bound to face even more problems. Ethnographic research takes a long time to complete. Mastery of the local language to a native speaker level would take many years. It is no wonder, therefore, that there have been so few studies on attitudes in non-western cultures. Local professionals have largely been content with impressionistic descriptions, which may express mainly personal perceptions rather than genuine community attitudes.

However, community attitudes are an expression of a people's culture. A study of some aspects of culture ought to reveal generally held views about disability and disabled people. These aspects may include customs, paintings, drawings, carvings, and the folklore and language used in relation to disability and disabled persons and folklore.

Ingstad (1990) provides a hint in this direction when she writes that in the old days in Europe a disabled family member was considered a shame, a sign of God's punishment and thus someone to be hidden, killed, etc. This may have been true to some extent, but if we go to what is probably our best source, folktales and literature, we get a different picture

## **2.2 Community Tolerance and Acceptance of Disabled Persons:**

In many communities in Tanzania disabled people are, as among the Maasai in Kenya and Tanzania, "as far as possible integrated in the

normal routine of the homestead and the community" (Talle, 1990). Disability is, therefore, taken as a fact of life. Parents and the community are expected to take care of their disabled children and adults. This explains the reluctance of some parents to send their children to schools and programmes located away from their localities (Kisanji, 1993).

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter explains the methods that the researcher used to select the geographical areas, from which research was carried out and methods of selection of respondents. It also explains the methods that were used to collect process and analyze data.

#### **3.1 Research design**

The study used a case study as a research design. Given the duration of the study, the researcher felt that there was a deeper penetration of the problem if a case study was used. This is because a case study examined one area which is Aguthi zone.

#### **3.2 Study population**

The study was carried out in Aguthi zone in the primary schools of Gititu primary school; Kiaigi primary school; Karo primary school; Gathugo primary school and Kiaraho primary school

#### **3.3 sample size and selection**

The respondents were drawn from the teachers of all the primary schools under study in the area. Using convenient sampling a total of 100 teachers were selected for this study.

### **3.4 sources of data and data collection methods**

This study used both primary and secondary data. Primary data was collected using questionnaires, which were given to all the teachers who participated in this study.

In carrying out research the researcher first got a release letter from the faculty administrators which she took to the schools under study. she was then given permission by the authority to access information from the organization in which she visited.

Document analysis was also done. Reports, training manual, newspapers, and journals for the period under study were read and the required data collected from them.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

#### 4.0 Introduction

This chapter is a presentation, interpretation and discussion of the field results. Results are presented in tables and in form of frequency counts and percentages.

#### 4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

##### 4.1.1 Sex of Respondents

During the survey 60 male respondents (60%) were given the instruments, while 40 female respondents (40%) were given the instruments. Because of the close links of the researcher with these teachers in the division, all of them helped her fill and return all the questionnaires, which is 100% response. This is illustrated in the tables below:

**Table I: Distribution of the Respondents by Sex**

Sex	Respondents	Percentage
Males	60	60%
Females	40	40%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Fieldwork Aguthi Zone (2008)

Table I shows that most respondents were male (60%). This was because they were more willing to spend some time for me to answer the questionnaire as opposed to the females who were 40%

**Table II: Age of Respondents**

Age	Respondents	Percentage
20-24	20	20%
25-29	30	30%
30- 34	40	40%
35- above	10	10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Fieldwork Aguthi Zone. (2008)

Results from the table II show that most respondents come from the young teachers who had more time to answer the questionnaires as the older ones did not give me any assurance that they would return the questionnaires

## **4.2 The Attitudes of the community to the mentally retarded People**

### **4.2.1 Mentally retarded people being of no use to the society**

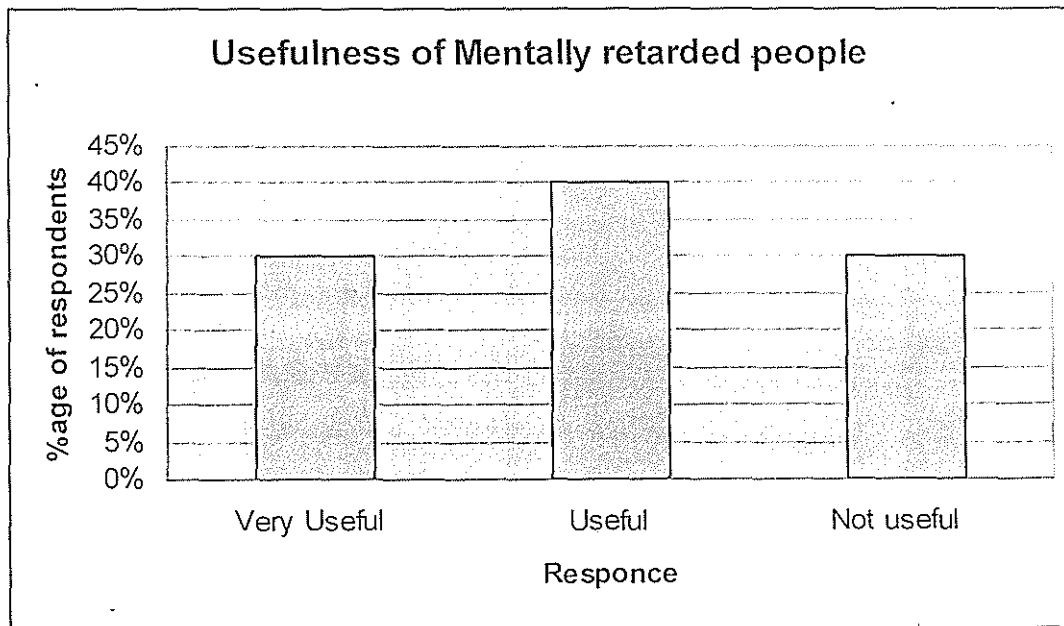
The findings of the study are presented in the table III and Chart I below;

**Table III: Response on the usefulness of mentally retarded people to the community**

Response	Respondents	Percentage
Very Useful	30	30%
Useful	40	40%
Not useful	30	30%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Fieldwork Aguthi Zone (2008)

**Chart I: Response on the usefulness of mentally retarded people to the community**



Source: Fieldwork Aguthi Zone (2008)

Although most respondents (30% and 40%) were of the view that mentally retarded people are useful to the society, a big number of people

still possess the cultural belief that mentally retarded people (30%) are of no use to the society. One teacher said;

“In our village some families with mentally retarded children do not want to acknowledge that they actually have these children” (teacher, Kiaigi primary school)

“It’s almost impossible to convince community members in our village that mental handicapped children can be of any use. They think these are people who are almost dead” (teacher, Karo primary school)

#### 4.2.2 Mentally retarded people being hidden away from the society

The findings of the study are presented in the table IV and Chart below;

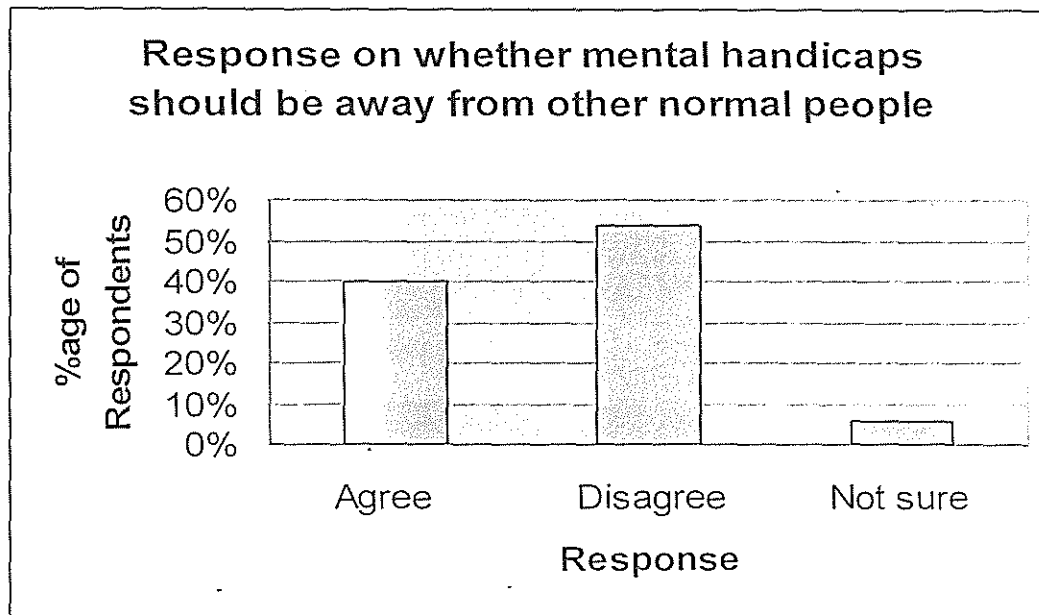
**Table IV: Response on whether mental hand caps should be hidden away**

Response	Respondents	Percentage
Agree	40	40%
Disagree	54	54%
Not sure	6	6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>



Source: Fieldwork Aguthi Zone (2008)

**Chart II: Response on whether mental handicaps should be hidden away**



Source: Fieldwork Aguthi Zone (2008)

The results from the statement above indicate that most peoples' cultural beliefs are changing positively towards the direction of recognizing the importance incorporating the mentally handicap in the normal people's society. However, there is still a big number of people whose culture does not recognize the importance of the mentally handicapped.

#### **4.2.2 Families with mentally retarded people believed to be cursed**

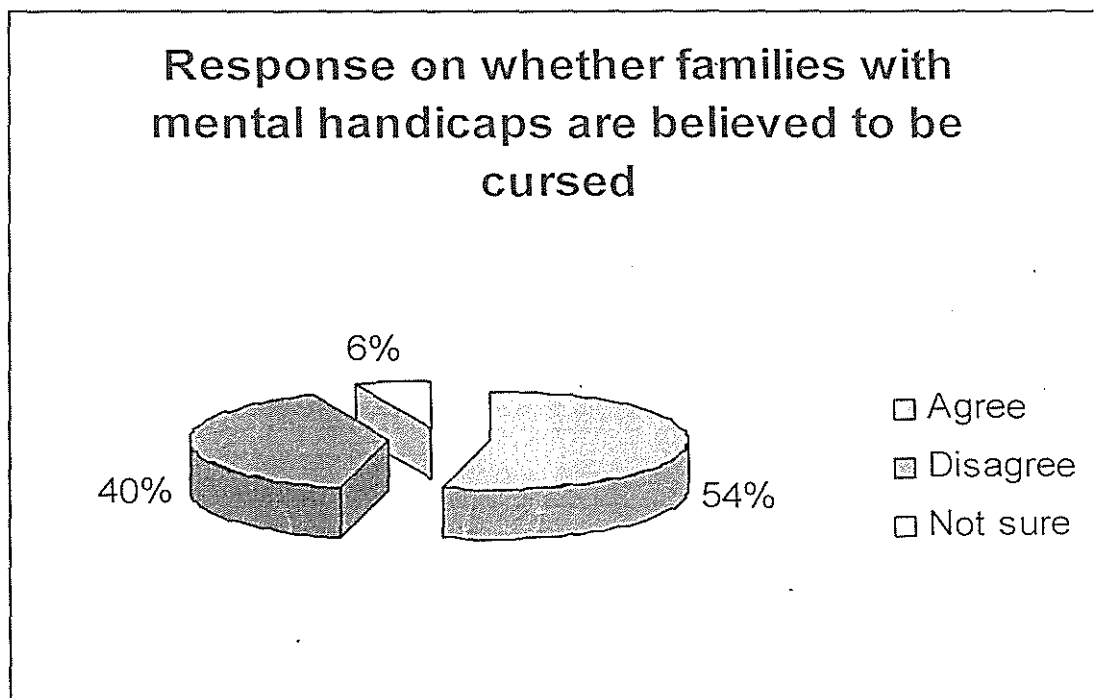
The findings of the study are presented in the table V and Chart III below;

**Table V: Response on whether Families with mentally retarded people are believed to be cursed**

Response	Respondents	Percentage
Agree	54	54%
Disagree	40	40%
Not sure	6	6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Fieldwork Aguthi Zone (2008)

**Chart III: Response on whether Families with mentally retarded people are believed to be cursed**



Source: Fieldwork Aguthi Zone (2008)

The results from the table V and chart III show that most people still believe that families with a mental handicap are a sign of a curse (54%). However a great number of people's views on this are gradually changing (40%). This is a positive step in the right direction.

#### **4.2.3 Parents not wasting money on mentally retarded children's school fees**

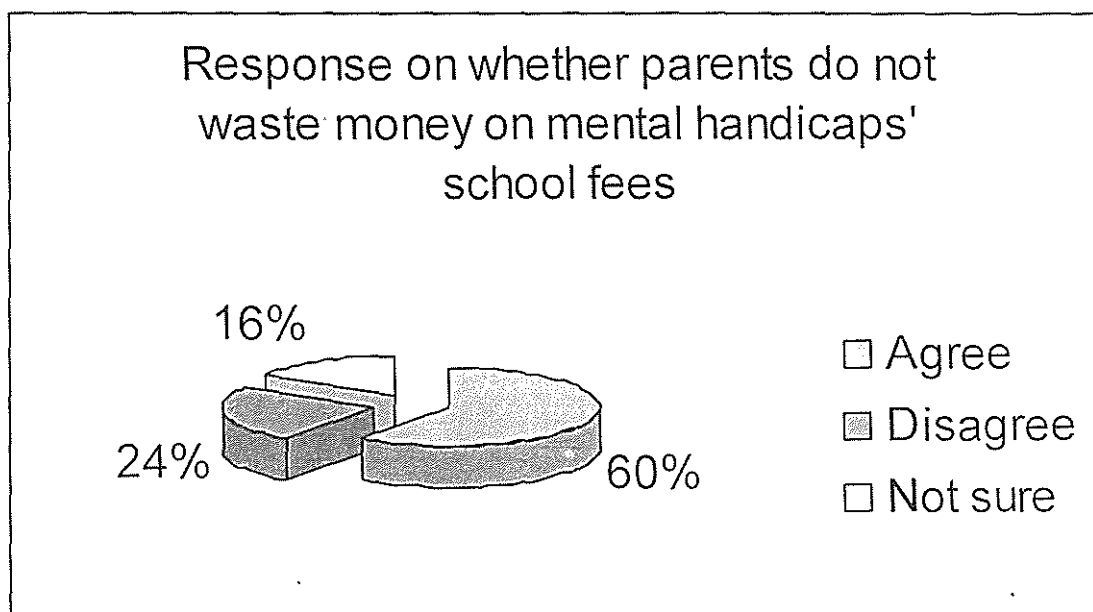
The findings of the study are presented in the table VI and Chart IV below;

**Table VI: Response on whether Parents do not waste money on mentally retarded children's school fees**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Agree	60	60%
Disagree	24	24%
Not sure	16	16%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Fieldwork Aguthi Zone (2008)

**Chart IV: Response on whether Parents do not waste money on mentally retarded children's school fees**



Source: Fieldwork Aguthi Zone (2008)

#### **4.3 Community Tolerance and Acceptance of the Mental Hand Caps**

##### **4.3.1 Mentally retarded people being integrated in all the normal routine of all the society**

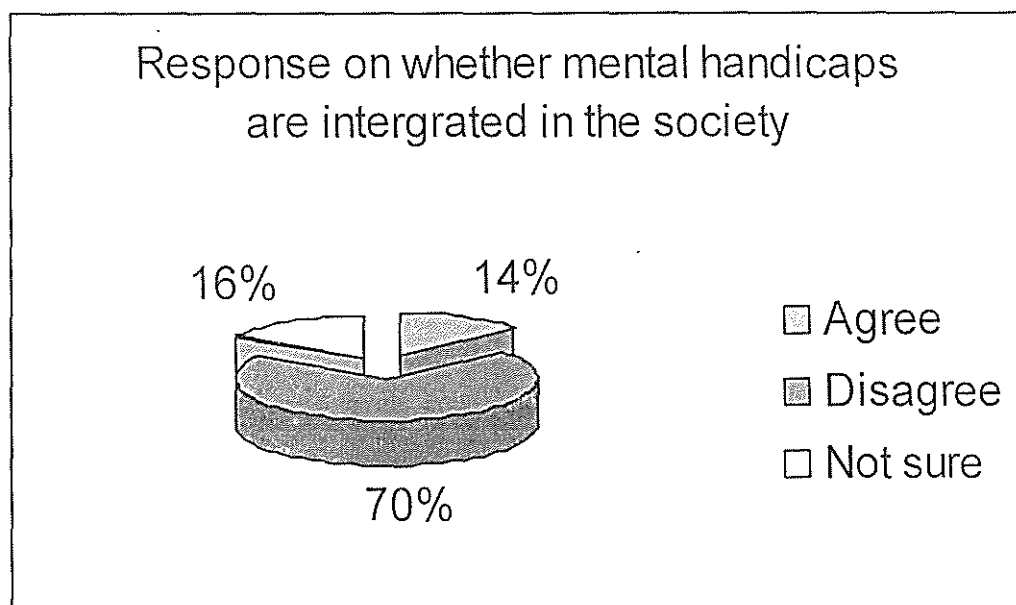
The findings of the study are presented in the table VII and Chart V below;

**Table VI: Response on whether mentally retarded people are integrated in all the normal routine of all the society**

Response	Respondents	Percentage
Agree	14	14%
Disagree	70	70%
Not sure	16	16%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Fieldwork Aguthi Zone (2008)

**Chart V: Response on whether mentally retarded people are integrated in all the normal routine of all the society**



Source: Fieldwork Aguthi Zone (2008)

**4.3.2 Mentally retarded people are helped when ever possible during the course of their studies at school**

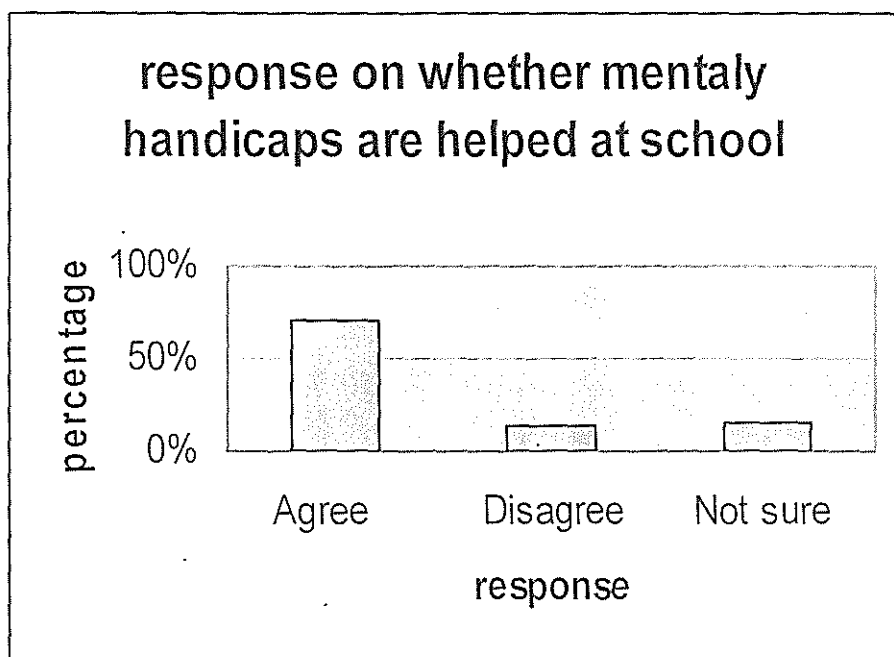
The findings of the study are presented in the table VI and Chart IV below;

**Table VII: Response on whether mentally retarded people are helped when ever possible during the course of their studies at school**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Agree	70	70%
Disagree	14	14%
Not sure	16	16%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Fieldwork Aguthi Zone (2008)

**Chart VI: Response on whether mentally retarded people are helped when ever possible during the course of their studies at school**



Source: Fieldwork Aguthi Zone (2008)

The results from the table and chart show that at least most schools do take care of the mentally handicapped (70%). The researcher found out that most schools had a very good supportive policy on the way to handle mentally handicapped pupils.

#### 4.3.4 Pupils who are mental handicaps are not mistreated at school by their fellow normal students

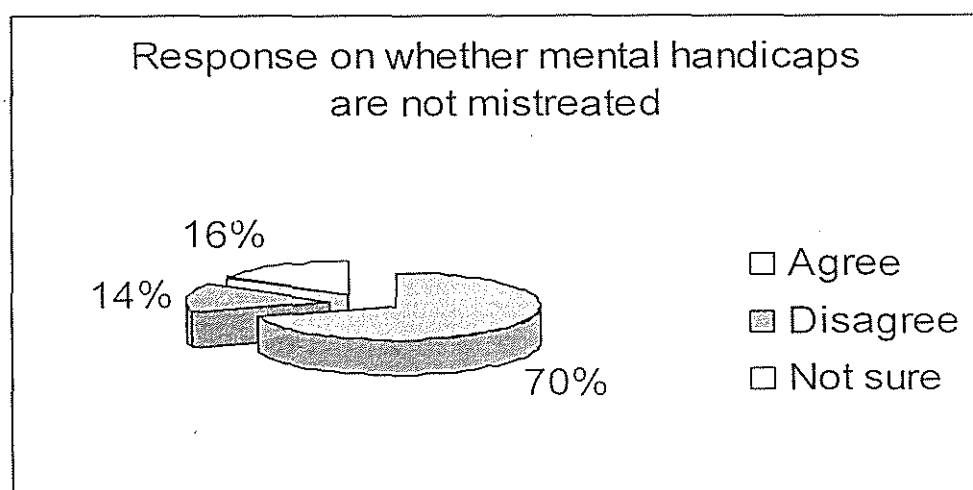
The findings of the study are presented in the table VIII and Chart VI below;

**Table VIII: Response on whether mental handicaps are not mistreated at school by their fellow normal students**

Response	Respondents	Percentage
Agree	70	70%
Disagree	14	14%
Not sure	16	16%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Fieldwork Aguthi Zone (2008)

**Chart VII: Response on whether mental handicaps are not mistreated at school by their fellow normal students**



Source: Fieldwork Aguthi Zone (2008)



The tables VIII and chart VII show that because of the strict policy of discipline in most schools the mistreatment of most hand caps in these schools is so minimal

**4.3.4 How the problems of cultural beliefs and practices of the community towards the mentally disabled persons can be over come**

The findings of the study are presented in the table VIII and Chart VI below;

**Table IX: How the problems of cultural beliefs and practices of the community towards the mentally disabled persons can be over come**

Response	Respondents	Percentage
Community sensitization	70	70%
Training more teachers for the special needs learners	30	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Fieldwork Aguthi Zone (2008)

The results from the study show that respondents thought there should be more community sensitization to the public about the negative attitudes towards the mentally handicapped.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.0 Introduction

In this chapter, the conclusions from the study and the recommendations made are presented. The study used both qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis.

#### 5.1 Summary

Chapter one gives a background to the study and problem statement, three objectives and three research questions were given

Chapter two is a review of related literature, and the literature was reviewed under four themes and linked to the problem under study.

Chapter three explains the method and procedures used in the study which included the research techniques and design, population and sample size; sampling method and procedure; sources and types of data collection methods; data collection instruments and procedures.

Chapter four is a presentation, interpretation and discussion of the field results. Hence data was analyzed, interpreted and discussed in line with the study objectives and research questions. While linking to the existing literature, Results included demographic characteristics, frequency counts and percentages.

Chapter five presents the summary conclusions and recommendations to the study.

## **5.2 Conclusion**

### **5.2.1 The Attitudes of the community to the mentally retarded People**

The findings from the study indicated that generally although the attitudes of the society towards the mentally handicap is still negative there is some positive steps towards the reduction of this problems as most people are increasingly becoming aware of the importance to treat mentally handicapped with respect and also ensuring that their rights are granted.

### **5.2 Community Tolerance and Acceptance of the Mental Hand Caps**

The findings indicate that despite the problem of intolerance by the members of the community about the mentally hand cap people there is some positive results as regards this problems as more and more people are starting to tolerate handicapped people and starting to see them as normal people.

In view of the above and other barriers quite evident in the education of students with disabilities in Kenya, it is safe to say that although a lot remains to be done, Kenya is making steps in the right direction with regard to services for students with disabilities. With awareness of the

rights of individuals with disabilities being raised by the most recent act, the Persons with Disabilities Act passed in 2003, it is reasonable to expect that services for children, youth, and adults with disabilities in Kenya will continue to improve, albeit very gradually.

### **5.3 How the problems of cultural beliefs and practices of the community towards the mentally disabled persons can be overcome**

The findings from the study indicated that the respondents were in for community sensitization as a tool for averting the negative cultural beliefs of the people against the mentally handicapped learners.

### **5.4 Recommendations**

In the education of students with disabilities a law is needed to provide and enforce services for this population. Without laws and national mandates, and ways for ensuring that schools abide by these laws, many students with disabilities are likely to be locked out of the educational arena. Development of a transition-based service provision model is vital especially for students with severe mental retardation

Students with disabilities need to be taught with attention to what, where, and how they are going to live and work as adults. This aspect is lacking in the education of students with disabilities in Kenya.

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## QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TEACHERS

### Dear respondent,

I am a student of Kampala International University carrying out an academic research on the topic “the role of cultural beliefs and practices towards the education of mentally retarded children in Nyeri District.” You have been randomly selected to participate in the study and are therefore kindly requested to provide an appropriate answer by either ticking the best option or give explanation where applicable. The answers provided will only be used for academic purposes and will be treated with utmost confidentiality.

NB: do not write your name anywhere on this paper.

### A) Personal Information

#### 1. GENDER

Male

Female

#### 2. AGE

14-18

19-25

25-30

30 and above



**(b) Community Tolerance and Acceptance of the Mentally Disabled Persons**

1	Mentally retarded people are integrated in all the normal routine of all our society	
2	Mentally retarded people are helped when ever possible during the course of their studies at school	
3	Families with mentally people are not mistreated at school by their fellow normal students	
4	Parents support their mentally retarded children both by paying their school fees and Transporting them to school	

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**c. How the problems of cultural beliefs and practices of the community towards the mentally disabled persons can be over come**

Community sensitization	
Training more teachers for the special needs learners	

## TIME FRAME OF THE STUDY

Activity	Time In Months			
	1	2	3	4
Proposal writing				
Data collection				
Data analysis				
Submission				

### BUDGET OF THE STUDY

<b>Item</b>	<b>Amount (U.shs)</b>
Stationery – Papers - Pens	50,000/=
Transport	100,000/=
Phone calls	100,000
Internet Usage	30,000/=
Typing and printing	50,000/=
Miscellaneous	200,000/=
<b>Total</b>	<b>530,000/=</b>