

Impact of Land Conflict on Child Health: A Case Report of a Child Injured at Chita Ward, Ifakara, Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

Background: Social conflicts is one of the global challenges leading to setback of development and flourishing of human societies. Children are the most vulnerable group whenever it happens. In sub-Saharan Africa societies the competition for land between farmers and pastoralists has been experienced in various areas, and children have been affected since in most pastoralist societies children are involved in cattle grazing and other domestic activities.

Case Report: Herein we have a case report of the eight years old boy who was injured by the neighbour due to land conflict. The child got penetrating head injury after being arrowed to right side of his head which resulted into permanent right eye blindness.

Conclusion: Harm to children during social conflicts is often caused by direct or indirect attacks. There is a need to have national approaches to stop conflict of all kinds in our societies for the sake of new generation. This can be done at local as well as national level by having clear and functional laws to stop land based conflicts.

Keywords: Land conflicts; eye injury; child; Chita.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Land conflicts have increased, subsequently threatening the socio-economic status of the local people and the political stability of states [1]. Land in many African countries is a primary asset for survival and a major source of income and livelihoods for the rural population. In sub-Saharan Africa, land conflicts have been increasing and are seriously affecting the wellbeing and safety of people and properties [2]. In Tanzania, there has been consistent land conflicts before and after 1961 and this was the reason for the establishment of the National Land Policy of 1995 and Land Act No. 4 and Village Land Act No. 5 of 1999, respectively [3-5]. About 80% of the entire population in Tanzania comprises farmers and pastoralists that live in rural areas in which their life depend on land for conducting different economic and social activities such as crop production and animal keeping. Due to increased population pressure and the diversification of rural land use patterns in Tanzania, such as expansion of ranching farming, national parks, towns and settlements, access to pasture and water for livestock has diminished thus prompting pastoralists to migrate to the central, eastern and southern parts of the country [6,7].

Numerous studies conducted in Tanzania examined factors contributing to the occurrence of Farmer-herd conflicts, pointing to policy deficiencies and contradictions, corruption practices, insecurity of land tenure, inadequate capacity in village land use planning, and lack of land information as major contributing factors [8]. Armed conflicts affects more than one in every ten children globally. While there is large literature on mental health, the effects of armed conflict on children's physical health and development are not well understood [9]. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to report impact of land use conflicts between farmers and pastoralists which resulted into eye injury of a child in Chita ward, Kilombero district, Morogoro region, Tanzania.

2. CASE REPORT

We report a case of a 9-years-old boy, a standard two pupil, from a pastoralist community in Chita who sustained a penetrating head injury after being arrowed on his right temporal region of the head during the evening hours (around 19:00 hours) when he was passing across a farm on his way home, a farm owner arrowed him when was on guard of the farm. Following an injury the boy lost consciousness for more than one hour and had bleeding from an arrow entry point. The patient was taken to Chita health center, after control of bleeding at the arrow entry point he was then referred to Saint Francis Referral Hospital for further management.

On arrival at St. Francis Referral Hospital the patient had Glasgow comma score of 9/15, tachycardia (Pulse rate of 110 bpm), Blood pressure of 106/69 mmHg and no associated systemic injuries were found. On local examination there was a penetrating metallic arrow on the right temporal region anterosuperior to the right tragus (4 cm superior and 1 cm anterior) as shown on Fig. 1.



Fig. 1. Penetrating arrow before surgical removal

On ophthalmologic examination of the right eye there was a severe periorbital edema as it appears in Fig. 2, matted eyelashes with mucoid discharge and conjunctival ecchymosis.



Fig. 2. Edematous right eye and its adjacent structures on retraction

Skull x-ray revealed a foreign body extending from the right temporal region into the right orbit as it appears in Fig. 3.



Fig. 3. Skull x-ray showing a foreign body in the right temporal region

Diagnosis reached was moderate traumatic brain injury and traumatic right eye injury secondary to penetrating head injury. After administration of intravenous fluids, intravenous empirical antibiotics and anti-pain, he underwent an emergency surgical intervention for foreign body removal. Under general anesthesia, the arrow was extracted successfully. After extraction, lavage done and gauze pack left in-situ for delayed primary wound closure.

On the next day he was fully conscious and headache reduced. CT scan done and revealed subluxation of lateral margin of the right lens, choroidal detachment, defect in lateral orbital wall extending into the right globe (pathway left by a removed foreign body) and there was no midline shift (CT scan film is not included in this document). Then conjunctival irrigation and tarsorrhaphy was done since eye was not salvageable. In the ward no any complication was noticed and the child was discharged on eighth day on healthy condition but with permanent right eye blindness.



Fig. 4. Sixth day post right eye tarsorrhaphy

3. DISCUSSION

Kilombero valley has endowed with good geographical factors that support both pastoralism and agricultural activities; the existence of fertile soils, rivers that flow throughout the year and presence of grazing areas and valleys that are evergreen throughout the year constitute the reason for the influx of people to take advantage and make use of the exciting opportunities [10,11]. This has resulted into frequent occurrence of conflicts between farmers and pastoralists who in mostly are Sukuma tribe which often lead into injuries and deaths. Since children are mostly involved in livestock grazing, as due to their age and being fond of playing games while grazing they leave the livestock to meander and trespass into the crop fields. Hence, crop destruction seem to be the major risk factor and starting point of many conflicts among these communities. On the other hand it is unfair for children to be involved in grazing activities since, they have limited judgement during risk prediction, but moreover, they have a limited knowledge on the values of crops and hence lack of precautions, as a result, whenever there is conflict of any origin children are mostly affected as it happened on our case which reflect the unfavorable consequence in the presented young boy.

Although there have been many Acts, bylaws, regulations reforms and policies in land issues, but in reality, the impact of their applicability is limited. There is an urgent need for new policies that would ensure harmony between pastoralists and farmers [12]. Social conflicts has multiple impacts on health stability for children, this include injuries for which in most cases leads to irreversible disabilities such amputation, head and neck injuries like traumatic brain injuries, eye injury and any other injuries which may be temporally or permanent [13,14]. In our case the child had eye-loss after being arrowed as explained before. This scenario has both physical and psycho-social impact since the child will have permanent eye disability but also no doubt that the effect will cause long term negative attitude towards the opposite tribe, also it has been reported in the literature that social conflicts has a negative impact on child education [15]. This correlate with our case that, during the short term effects of injury the child could not attend to school since child was admitted at the hospital for two weeks and the blindness he got will also affect his studies later.

Harm to children during social conflicts is often caused by direct or indirect attacks in which there has not been adequate international humanitarian law, including the principles of children protection. Children have been killed or injured by parties to conflict on their way to and from schools or any other domestic activities like what happened in our case, and they are not safe sleeping in their homes or playing outside, learning in school or seeking medical care at hospitals [16]. There is a need to have national approaches to stop conflict of all kinds for the sake of new generation.

4. CONCLUSION

Land conflict is a serious issue in the community which can lead to serious and irreversible complications as happened to a child from Chita ward in Kilombero District, Tanzania. There is a need for the Government to have clear and functional laws to stop land based conflicts. There should be all possible initiatives from both local and governmental authorities to end these undesirable conflicts. Also the affected groups should be protected by the specific laws. The community involvement in decision making processes especially on land allocation in their respective areas is the best way to end the conflict.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This case report was approved by the Institutional Research Board (IRB) of St. Francis Referral Hospital and St. Francis University College of Health and Allied Sciences.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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