Early childhood development and education for young children with visual impairment in Malawi

Poverty and poor health and nutrition are responsible for more than 200 million children under 5 years of age failing to reach their developmental potential. Of all people with disabilities, it is estimated that 80% live in developing countries and 90% of children with disabilities in such settings do not attend school.

The overall prevalence of blindness in the Sub-Saharan region is around 1%, with an estimated 19 million children below the age of 15 having a visually impairment. In Malawi prevalence of blindness ranges from 0.5 to 1.1 per 1,000 children, the highest prevalence in the poorest areas with vitamin A deficiency and corneal scarring accounting for 49% of blindness.

This 2 year research project will be a qualitative study looking at parents'/carers' attitudes, beliefs and behaviour towards their children with visual loss and how community workers can provide advice on how to support their children at home.

Aims

- to develop and trial a set of tools for assessing the development of young children (aged 0-8) with visual impairment (blind and low vision) in Southern Malawi;
- to provide associated advice, training and interventions for parents (caregivers) and community workers who may be supporting these families.

We anticipate that this programme could considerably increase the capacity for supporting the very young child with visual impairment and will then be a step in raising awareness countrywide and will work with stakeholders (UNICEF and WHO) in a number of areas in Malawi who may be able to use the package in a cost-effective and sustainable within Malawi.

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