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# Childhood Cancer Treatment Abandonment in Ethiopia

## Health Care Providers' Perspective

### Executive Summary

Treatment abandonment is the major cause of childhood cancer treatment failure in low-income countries (LICs). The perceived magnitude of treatment abandonment was high, 35% (SE 2.5%) in Ethiopia. The major influencing risk factors include the high cost of care, low economic status, long travel times to treatment centers, long waiting times, belief in the incurability of cancer, and poor public awareness about childhood cancer.

### Background

Treatment abandonment is one of the major reasons for childhood cancer treatment failure and a low survival rate in low- and middle-income countries, where only two to three out of every ten children survive, compared to the high survival rate in high income countries, around eight out of ten.

In this work, the authors estimated the perceived treatment abandonment

rate and the influencing risk factors to inform the Ethiopia National Childhood and Adolescent Cancer Control Plan (NCACCP), which aims to reduce abandonment by 60% (2019–2023).

### Research overview and findings

A multicenter cross-sectional study was carried out in Ethiopia to assess the perceived magnitude of treatment abandonment and influencing risk factors from the health care providers' perspective, as it was not possible to include the guardians' perspective or directly estimate due to the poor cancer registry.

The perceived treatment abandonment rate was high, 35% (SE 2.5%) in Ethiopia. The risk of treatment abandonment is dependent on the type of cancer (high for bone sarcoma and brain tumors), the phase of treatment, and the treatment outcome.

### BERGEN CENTRE FOR ETHICS AND PRIORITY SETTING (BCEPS)

is an inter-disciplinary research centre that aims to understand and promote ethically fair and efficient priority setting in national health systems.

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### LINKED ARTICLE

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## Key findings

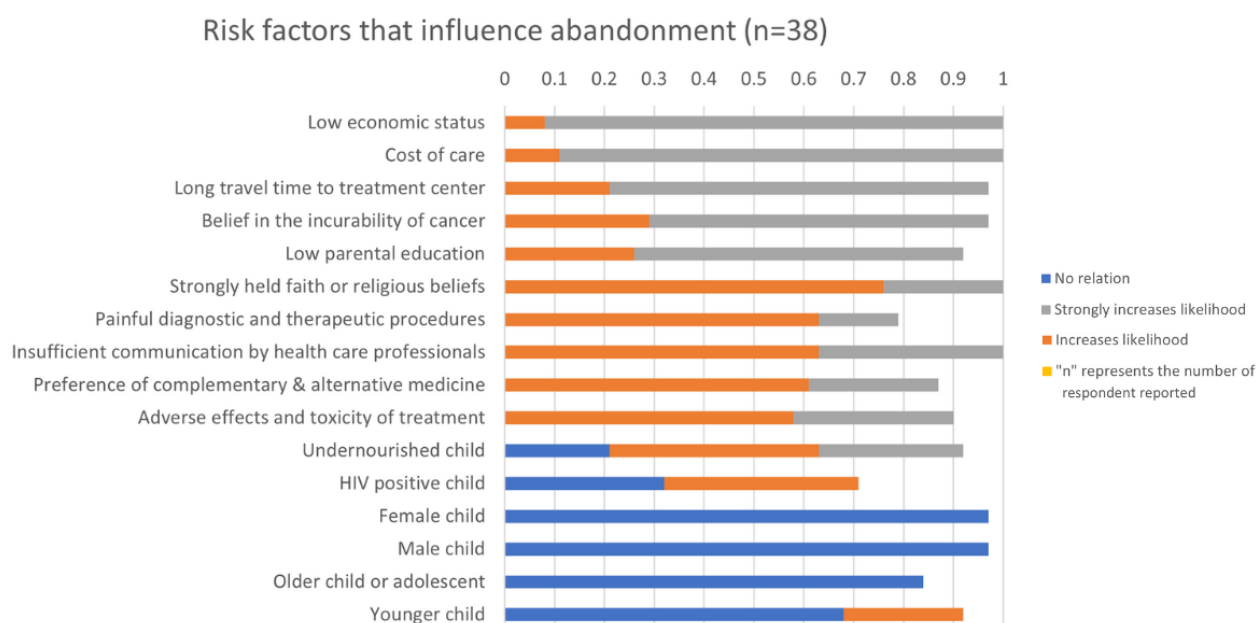


Figure 1. Risk factors associated with treatment abandonment

The highest risk is during the maintenance phase and treatment relapse for acute lymphoblastic leukemia, and during the pre- or post-surgical phase for Wilms tumor and bone sarcoma (due to the long waiting times and fear of surgical outcomes such as loss of vision and amputation).

The major influencing risk factors for treatment abandonment in Ethiopia include the high cost of care, low economic status, long travel time to treatment centers, long waiting times, belief in the incurability of cancer, and poor public awareness about childhood cancer.

### Policy implications/recommendations

- Prioritizing the most influential risk factors is key, given that there are too many risk factors that are complex, require time to address, and some might even be beyond the scope of the health sector. Therefore, more emphasis should be placed on the risk factors that play a major role. Furthermore, mitigation strategies that are high-impact, affordable, and feasible for implementation, should be prioritized to meet the ambitious goal set in the NCACCP (reducing abandonment by 60%).
- These research findings could serve as a baseline for the Ethiopia National Childhood and Adolescent Cancer Control Plan and in developing a tailored mitigation plan to address the barriers contributing to treatment abandonment. This could lead to an improvement in the survival rate of children with cancer.