

## Background

- People with chronic low back pain experience myriads of challenges from living with the condition.
- Evidence shows that people's lived experience of pain and how they make sense of their condition is influenced by multitudes of spiritual, cognitive, cultural, and biomedical factors.

## Objective

This study aimed to explore the lived experience of people with chronic low back pain in Ethiopia.

## Methods

### Approach:

- This study employed a qualitative interpretative phenomenological analysis as a methodological approach.

### Sample and recruitment strategy:

- Purposive sampling of 15 adults with chronic low back pain

### Study setting

- Participants were recruited from the outpatient departments of the University of Gondar hospital in Gondar, Ethiopia.

### Inclusion Criteria

- Individuals with chronic low back pain (duration ≥ 3 months)
- Age ≥ 18 years old

### Data Collection

- In-depth interviews conducted with Ten women and Five men
- Interviews were conducted in Amharic Language (the official Ethiopian language)

### Data analysis

- Verbatim transcribed
- Initial coding was conducted in Amharic (*Van Nes et al 2010*)
- Data analysis process followed a process suggested by *Smith and Osborn (2003)*

## Results & Discussions

A thorough analysis of the interviews and phenomenological reflections resulted in five major themes that sum up what it means to live with chronic low back pain in the Ethiopian context.

Major themes	Sub-themes	Sample quotes
<b>Theme 1:</b> CLBP impacts life on a day-to-day basis.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Loss of mobility means being disabled</li> <li>Challenges in maintaining family and social roles</li> <li>Psychological impact – a struggle to maintain a “valued self “</li> </ul>	<p><i>“I used to walk far to fetch water. I gave birth to twins twice. You know, I used to be a very strong woman; I never felt defeated by anything. This one has broken me down.”</i></p> <p><b>40-year-old-woman; a housewife, lived with pain for 11 years</b></p>
<b>Theme 2:</b> The invisibility of pain results in misunderstanding, misjudgment, and loneliness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Misunderstood and judged</li> <li>You are alone with your pain and suffer in silence</li> </ul>	<p><i>“Isn't it a must for us to be confined to bed to be understood? If people see you walking, they think you are well. But back pain is not like that. You are in pain”</i></p> <p><b>24-year-old-woman; a nurse; lived with LBP for 2 years</b></p>
<b>Theme 3:</b> The cause of the pain is a mystery.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Misunderstood and judged</li> <li>You are alone with your pain and suffer in silence</li> </ul>	<p><i>“Initially, I thought it is from my muscles, and I went to the healer. He tried so many things for me. It did not work. When it got worse, some people told me it could be from her [evil spirit], and they advised me to make some sacrifices for her. Hmm, I don't know, but who knows?”</i></p> <p><b>46-year-old-woman; a file sorter at a printing press; lived with LBP for 5 years</b></p>
<b>Theme 4:</b> The search for the cure is a quest.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Searching for the right doctor</li> <li>Do not treat me blindly – scan my back first</li> </ul>	<p><i>“They did not understand my problem. They keep giving me painkillers. When I went back and told them that I wasn't getting better, they gave me a different kind of medicine. That did not help either. I went to see a doctor at a private clinic. Still, it is the same- nobody knows what to do for me.”</i></p> <p><b>48-year-old-woman; a housewife; lived with LBP for 6 years</b></p>
<b>Theme 5:</b> Each person has their own ways of managing, coping, and living with pain.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rest, avoid activities, or protect the back</li> <li>Pain killers</li> <li>Cultivating inner strength and adapting to pain</li> </ul>	<p><i>“He [God] sent this to me. It is a gift from him. There is nothing to complain about, and I think there is a reason why God sent this [LBP] to me. I only ask him for mercy.”</i></p> <p><b>40-year-old-man; a farmer; lived with LBP for 2 years</b></p>

## Conclusions & implications

- The collectivist culture called “*mehaberawi nuro*” shaped the lived experience of people with chronic low back pain in Ethiopia.
- People with chronic low back pain rely on traditional and spiritual practices (e.g., bathing in holy water) to manage and cope with symptoms when their perception of what caused the pain is incongruent with what their healthcare providers tell them.
- Further studies are warranted to unpack subtle spiritual, social, and cultural values that explain the “*lived world*” of Ethiopian people with chronic low back pain.
- These findings are relevant in designing person-centered low back pain management based on the patient's values and preferences. For example, Self-management programs could capitalize on existing social and religious structures to address the psychosocial needs of people with the condition in the Ethiopian context.

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## References



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