

NTDs disproportionately found in areas of poverty in Islamic Nations

November 25 2015

The Organisation of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC) is an inter-governmental organisation of 57 Muslim-majority countries with a mission to promote human rights and advance science and technology development. In a new *PLOS Neglected Tropical Diseases* Editorial, Drs. Peter Hotez and Jennifer R. Herricks from the Baylor College of Medicine review the current state of neglected tropical diseases in OIC countries and how this corresponds to human development and poverty.

A review carried out in 2009 found that many [neglected tropical diseases](#) disproportionately affected OIC countries, particularly in poorer areas of sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. Despite both national and international efforts over the last six years there is still widespread poverty and disease remaining amongst the 30 most populated OIC countries. The "worm index" (a measure of the proportion of the population requiring preventative treatment for helminth diseases) is substantially higher in OIC countries compared with global estimates. Other neglected tropical diseases including protozoan parasites and bacterial diseases are also widespread and endemic amongst OIC nations.

Previous research has revealed a strong relationship between the worm index and markers of human poverty such as the [human development index](#). In this examination of the OIC countries a significant rise in the worm index is seen as the human development index falls below the medium. As well as having a detrimental effect on childhood development and public health, endemic tropical diseases can promote poverty due to chronic and debilitating effects particularly on women

and children.

Targeting the control and elimination of neglected [tropical diseases](#) is therefore a vital consideration for the OIC. From a recent survey of experts the researchers recommend scaling-up global and integrated mass treatment programs as well as advancing new technologies for disease treatment. This could be achieved through national efforts including work from the Islamic Academy of Sciences and well as involvement in international programs to improve both [public health](#) and [human development](#).

More information: *PLOS Neglected Tropical Diseases*,
[dx.plos.org/10.1371/journal.pntd.0003782](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pntd.0003782)

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Citation: NTDs disproportionately found in areas of poverty in Islamic Nations (2015, November 25) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-11-ntds-disproportionately-areas-poverty-islamic.html>

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