

# Hunting-related pathogen exposure not just for adult males

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Children in Sierra Leone hunting. Credit: Jesse Bonwitt et al., *PLOS Neglected Tropical Diseases*

Hunting and slaughtering wild animals in Western and Central Africa can put humans at risk of contracting zoonotic infections, including Ebola virus and Lassa virus. While previous studies have suggested that this risky hunting behavior is mostly limited to adult males, a new study appearing in *PLOS Neglected Tropical Diseases* finds that women and children also participate.

Complex social and economic factors are known to influence hunting activities in sub-Saharan Africa. Since contact with animal secretions and fluids can occur through bites, scratches and handling organs during the hunting, slaughtering, and cooking of wild game, scientists have worked to understand who is involved in these behaviors and how to educate them on minimizing risks. Previous interventions have mostly focused on adult males.

In the new work, Jesse Bonwitt, of the University of Durham, United Kingdom, and colleagues from the UK and Sierra Leone, carried out a study involving 4 months of fieldwork in Sierra Leone—including 47 interviews, 12 focus groups, 13 school essays and ongoing participant observation—to understand interactions between humans and animals in the area. Their research was carried out both in Bo City—the second largest city in the country—as well as three rural villages outside Bo City and six more isolated villages. 70 percent of those interviewed were male and 30 percent were female. Children were involved in the study through participant observation.

The researchers found that hunting techniques used in the villages included communal and individual hunts. Hunters relied on nets, snares, traps, guns, and dogs. Descriptions of communal hunts included the ways children were involved, as well as how women played a role, for example helping to flush prey into nets, for instance. Boys often started hunting both alone and in groups from around age 7, and were motivated to do so due to pressure from their family and lack of access to other food, the researchers found. Animal carcasses were always handled with bare hands, and both men, women and children were all involved in preparing and cooking meat, over a fire. Reasons for hunting were complex, and included a need for food, crop protection, income, and social importance.

The new research "underscores the challenges of interventions, surveillance, research, and sensitization campaigns," the researchers say. "To address such complexity, intervention strategies should become more more diversified and context-specific". In particular, the role of children should be recognized; specific intervention strategies should be tailored to [children](#)'s specific [hunting](#) practices."

**More information:** Bonwitt J, Kandeh M, Dawson M, Ansumana R, Sahr F, Kelly AH, et al. (2017) Participation of women and children in hunting activities in Sierra Leone and implications for control of zoonotic infections. *PLoS Negl Trop Dis* 11(7): e0005699. [doi.org/10.1371/journal.pntd.0005699](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pntd.0005699)

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