

Maasai of Tanzania facing severe food insecurity and chronic child malnourishment

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In the first in-depth study of its kind of the Maasai people of Tanzania, research led by the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine has revealed that the health of Maasai children is very poor compared to other ethnic groups.

The new research, published in *PLOS ONE*, shows that four out of five Maasai households face severe food insecurity and nearly 60% of Maasai children are chronically malnourished. Maasai children were also more frequently reported to have illnesses such as pneumonia and diarrhoea, and to have inadequate diets.

The Maasai are traditionally semi-nomadic pastoralists; relying predominantly on livestock herding as a way of life.

Owing to their distinctive customs and dress, and their proximity to the popular East African wildlife parks of Tanzania and Kenya, which attract hundreds of thousands of tourists annually, the Maasai are the most globally recognisable ethnic group in sub-Saharan Africa. However, this study of over 3,500 households across 56 villages highlights that this 'fame' is not met with good fortune with respect to child health.

David Lawson, Research Fellow in Population Health at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine and lead author on the study said: "The Maasai face a number of challenges, including vulnerabilities to drought, substandard service provision and on-going land grabbing

conflicts in the region. This is the first study to quantify differences in [child health](#) between the Maasai and neighbouring [ethnic groups](#) that rely more on farming. Our findings are alarming."

The researchers conclude that the evidence could be used to reinforce support for targeted initiatives that address the health needs of the marginalised Maasai, who have previously been "invisible" to both policy makers and [health](#) researchers due to a lack of ethnicity data in national surveys.

More information: David W. Lawson¹, Monique Borgerhoff Mulder, Margherita E. Ghiselli, Esther Ngadaya, Bernard Ngowi, Sayoki G. M. Mfinanga, Kari Hartwig, Susan James, Ethnicity and Child Health in Northern Tanzania: Maasai Pastoralists Are Disadvantaged Compared to Neighbouring Ethnic Groups. *PLOS ONE*. [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0110447](#)

Provided by London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine

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