

Researchers find worm index closely associated with a nation's human development index

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With the Millennium Development Goals established by the United Nations in 2000 coming to an end in 2015, and the new Sustainable Development Goals now in the works to establish a set of targets for the future of international development, experts at Baylor College of Medicine have developed a new tool to show why neglected tropical diseases, the most common infections of the world's poor, should be an essential component of these goals.

Using World Health Organization data for the number people at risk of parasitic worm infections in each of the largest nations and comparing this number to each nation's population, Dr. Peter Hotez, dean of the National School of Tropical Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine, and Dr. Jennifer R. Herricks, postdoctoral fellow at Baylor, developed the worm index, which they found to have a strong association with a nation's [human development](#) index, a summary measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development.

Their work was published today in *PLOS Neglected Tropical Diseases*.

"Through this paper, we've shown how the major neglected tropical diseases, which include intestinal worm infections, schistosomiasis and lymphatic filariasis, are intimately tied to human development," said Hotez, who also is Texas Children's Hospital Endowed Chair of Tropical Pediatrics and president of the Sabin Vaccine Institute.

"We found a very tight association between the worm index of a country and the human development index. The higher the worm index, the lower the [human development index](#)."

Parasitic worm infections affect millions of people and can cause long-term, chronic and disabling diseases.

"Because decreased human development is related to increased burden of parasitic worm infections, we recommend that serious consideration should be given to parasitic worm infections and other neglected [tropical diseases](#) when trying to attain goals that will ultimately improve human development; for example, when implementing the sustainable development goals," said Herricks, postdoctoral fellow in Disease and Poverty at the National School of Tropical Medicine at Baylor, who is also with Rice University's James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy.

More information: *PLOS Neglected Tropical Diseases*, dx.plos.org/10.1371/journal.pntd.0003618

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