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Opinion Article

Environmental and Socioeconomic Factors Inducing Parasitic Disease Transmission

Emily Hughes*

Department of Epidemiology, University of Oxford, Oxford, United Kingdom

DESCRIPTION

Parasitic diseases remain a significant public health burden in many parts of the world, particularly in developing countries. Their transmission is influenced by a complex interplay of environmental and socioeconomic factors that create favorable conditions for parasite survival, reproduction and spread. Understanding these factors is important in designing effective interventions, improving public health infrastructure and ultimately reducing disease prevalence and severity.

Environmental factors play a central role in the life cycles and transmission dynamics of parasitic organisms. Climate, geography and seasonal variations influence the distribution and abundance of vectors and intermediate hosts such as mosquitoes, snails and flies. Warm temperatures and high humidity, for example, enhance the breeding and survival of mosquitoes that transmit malaria and lymphatic filariasis. Rainfall patterns can create stagnant water bodies, providing ideal breeding grounds for vector populations, while droughts may force communities to use unsafe water sources, increasing the risk of waterborne parasitic infections like giardiasis and cryptosporidiosis.

Soil and water contamination with human or animal feces is another key environmental determinant. Inadequate sanitation facilities allow for the unchecked spread of soil-transmitted helminths such as *Ascaris lumbricoides*, *Trichuris trichiura* and hookworms. Agricultural practices, such as the use of untreated human waste as fertilizer or the consumption of unwashed produce, can further contribute to the transmission of intestinal parasites. Irrigation and dam construction, although beneficial for food security, can inadvertently promote the proliferation of disease vectors. A notable example is the rise in schistosomiasis following the building of large water reservoirs, as these areas become habitats for snail hosts.

Urbanization and unplanned settlement expansion also influence parasitic disease transmission. Overcrowded living conditions, poor waste management and lack of access to clean water and sanitation contribute to the spread of various parasites. Informal housing often lacks adequate infrastructure, increasing the risk of exposure to infected vectors or contaminated environments. Moreover, in peril-urban areas, humans and livestock often live in close proximity, facilitating zoonotic transmission of parasites such as *Toxoplasma gondii* and *Echinococcus* species.

Socioeconomic factors are equally important in shaping the risk and burden of parasitic diseases. Poverty is a major determinant, as it limits access to healthcare, education and preventive measures. Poor communities often lack the resources to build proper sanitation systems or obtain clean drinking water, leaving them vulnerable to recurrent parasitic infections. Malnutrition, which is both a cause and consequence of parasitic disease, weakens the immune system, making individuals more susceptible to infection and its complications.

Education levels significantly influence health-seeking behavior and awareness about disease prevention. People with limited knowledge about hygiene practices, food safety, or the importance of deworming are less likely to take protective measures. Cultural practices and beliefs can also play a role, sometimes hindering the acceptance of medical interventions or promoting behaviors that inadvertently increase risk.

Occupational exposure further contributes to disease risk, particularly in farming, fishing and animal husbandry. Individuals working in these sectors may come into frequent contact with contaminated water, soil, or infected animals. In many cases, the lack of protective equipment and access to health services exacerbates their vulnerability. Migration and displacement due to conflict, climate change, or economic hardship can introduce parasitic diseases into new areas and disrupt healthcare delivery. Refugee populations are particularly at risk due to overcrowded living conditions, poor sanitation and limited access to medical care.

Correspondence to: Emily Hughes, Department of Epidemiology, University of Oxford, Oxford, United Kingdom, E-mail: ehughes@gmail.com

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