

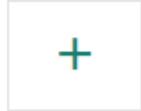
Study throws doubt on education benefit of deworming children



REUTERS

By Joseph D'Urso

July 23, 2015 2:59 PM



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LONDON (Thomson Reuters Foundation) - Fresh analysis of a landmark study in Kenya has thrown doubt on the educational benefits due to "deworming", the removal of the parasitic worms which affect millions of children in developing countries, researchers said on Thursday.

The World Bank, the World Health Organization and the Gates Foundation have heavily promoted deworming drug treatments in low-income countries in the belief they could improve school attendance and potentially benefit educational achievement, said Alexander Aiken, who co-authored the new study.

The reappraisal of data from the 1998-99 study exposed calculation errors which undermined the finding that school attendance had improved, but agreed with the original study's finding that exam results did not improve as a result of deworming.

Both studies concluded that deworming did reduce infections and generated small improvements in nutritional status.

"Our findings suggest that on the basis of this (1998-99) study alone, we should be cautious about concluding that there are educational benefits from deworming children," said Calum Davey, also of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and co-author of the new study.

The new analysis found missing data, inconsistent results, and data patterns which could have affected the results of the original study.

The Kenya study's conclusion, that big social and economic benefits might be gained from one cheap intervention, by keeping dewormed children in school longer than those who had not been given the treatment, has been highly influential.

It also claimed a knock-on effect - that deworming also improved the attendance of children at schools near those where children had been dewormed - but calculation errors meant there was no evidence supporting this, the researchers said.

"The researchers were therefore unable to replicate the finding that attendance was improved in untreated schools," a press release on the new research said.

"The belief that deworming will impact substantially on economic development seems delusional," said Paul Garner from the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine in a commentary related to the new analysis.

(Reporting By Joseph D'Urso, editing by Tim Pearce; please credit the Thomson Reuters Foundation, the charitable arm of Thomson Reuters, that covers humanitarian news, women's rights, trafficking, corruption and climate change. Visit www.trust.org)