

The Influence of Onchocerciasis (River Blindness) Socio-Economic Development in Cross River State, Nigeria

Abstract:

This study examines the influence of onchocerciasis on socio-economic development in Cross River State, Nigeria. The research is grounded in the Life Cycle Theory and the Cost of Illness Theory, adopting a quantitative approach to explore how onchocerciasis impacts four key socio-economic variables: educational attainment, employment opportunities, financial status, and living conditions. A structured questionnaire was distributed across the state's three senatorial zones, targeting residents in the most populous local government areas. A total population of 3,875,200 (NPC, 2023) was used for sampling, and stratified random sampling yielded a sample size of 400 respondents. Logistic regression analysis revealed significant negative effects of onchocerciasis on the socio-economic variables. Educational attainment, employment opportunities, financial status, and living conditions all showed notable declines as a result of onchocerciasis, with coefficients of -31.120, -39.291, -47.209, and -12.345, respectively. The study underscores the detrimental impact of onchocerciasis on the socio-economic fabric of Cross River State, with findings consistent with previous research in related areas. Based on the results, it is recommended that public health interventions be intensified to combat the effects of onchocerciasis. Additionally, policies addressing healthcare access, disease prevention, and socio-economic support should be formulated to mitigate the adverse impacts of this neglected tropical disease on the development of the state.

Key Words: onchocerciasis; educational attainment; employment opportunities; financial status; and living conditions

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Received Date: May 15, 2025; **Accepted Date:** May 23, 2025; **Published Date:** May 31, 2025

Citation: Erhuotor Ejiro Efe, Kigbu John Agabi, Elumah, Ewache Joseph (2025). The Influence of Onchocerciasis (River Blindness) Socio-Economic Development in Cross River State, Nigeria, *J International Social Science Research and Review*. 1(2), **DOI:** ISSRR-RA-25-09.

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Introduction:

Onchocerciasis, commonly known as river blindness, is a parasitic disease caused by the filarial worm *Onchocerca volvulus*. This disease, transmitted through the bites of infected blackflies, significantly impacts impoverished and rural communities in sub-Saharan Africa, including Nigeria. The socio-economic repercussions of onchocerciasis in Cross River State, Nigeria, have been profound, affecting various aspects of life such as education, employment, financial stability, and overall living conditions.

Globally, onchocerciasis has posed a severe public health challenge, especially before the establishment of large-scale control programs. The Onchocerciasis Control Programme (OCP), initiated in 1974, aimed to mitigate the disease through vector control and mass drug administration (MDA) of ivermectin. By the program's conclusion in 2002, over 30 million individuals had been treated, resulting in significant reductions in blindness and other severe symptoms (Ngugi et al., 2020). Despite these advancements, challenges persist in maintaining long-term sustainability and extending control efforts to areas with previously limited attention (Thylefors, 2021).

In Africa, onchocerciasis remains a substantial public health issue, particularly in West and Central Africa. The disease affects over 14 million people, with an estimated 1.2 million individuals suffering from visual impairment (Bennett et al., 2022). Historical data from the early 20th century indicates that onchocerciasis was a major cause of blindness, leading to severe economic consequences due to decreased productivity and increased healthcare costs (Molyneux et al., 2014). Recent initiatives focus on expanding MDA programs and integrating onchocerciasis control with other neglected tropical disease (NTD) efforts

to enhance coverage and efficacy (World Health Organization [WHO], 2023).

In Nigeria, onchocerciasis remains endemic in several states, including Cross River State. The National Onchocerciasis Control Programme, established in the 1990s, has made significant strides through MDA with ivermectin (Ekwunife et al., 2017). However, challenges persist in achieving universal coverage and addressing the socio-economic impacts of the disease. According to the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC, 2022), regions with high prevalence and ongoing transmission complicate efforts to eliminate the disease completely.

Cross River State, located in southeastern Nigeria, is renowned for its rich biodiversity and cultural heritage. The state's economy is primarily driven by agriculture, including crops such as cocoa, oil palm, and cassava, as well as tourism, with attractions like the Cross River National Park and the Obudu Mountain Resort. Despite its economic potential, onchocerciasis has had a substantial impact on the region.

Historically, onchocerciasis in Cross River State was associated with high prevalence rates, particularly in the early 1990s, where estimates indicated that nearly 30% of the population in some endemic areas was affected (Ekwunife et al., 2017). Although control efforts have led to a decrease in prevalence, the disease remains a concern in several local government areas within Cross River State. The Cross River State Ministry of Health (2022) reports an ongoing prevalence rate of approximately 10-15% in certain endemic communities, with around 100,000 individuals affected by visual impairment and skin conditions (Ekwunife et al., 2017). The historical introduction of ivermectin through the OCP in the 1970s played a crucial role in reducing the disease burden. By the early 2000s, significant improvements in health outcomes were observed due to these interventions (Thylefors, 2021). However, onchocerciasis has historically led to high rates of blindness and visual impairment, affecting productivity and quality of life, particularly in an agriculturally dependent region like Cross River State.

The socio-economic repercussions of onchocerciasis in Cross River State include reduced agricultural output, increased healthcare costs, and diminished educational opportunities. Research by Ekwunife et al. (2017) highlights that health issues related to onchocerciasis lead to increased absenteeism from school and work, exacerbating poverty and limiting economic development. The economic burden is further compounded by the costs associated with treatment and the indirect effects on household income.

The broader impact of onchocerciasis extends to other states in Nigeria, each experiencing unique challenges:

In Ebonyi State, high prevalence rates were reported, with estimates indicating that 20% of the population was affected in the early 1990s (Ugochukwu, 2020). The disease has caused significant morbidity, including visual impairment and skin conditions, impacting around 80,000 individuals in the state (Ebonyi State Ministry of Health, 2022). The socio-economic impact is notable, with increased healthcare costs and reduced productivity (Molyneux et al., 2014).

Ogun State has also faced persistent onchocerciasis challenges, with prevalence rates reaching up to 15% in endemic regions (Ogun State Ministry of Health, 2022). Historical data indicates severe impacts on local agriculture and labor productivity before the implementation of MDA programs (Okonkwo & Akpabio, 2019). Although control efforts have improved health outcomes, the economic strain from ongoing health issues continues to affect local communities (Molyneux, 2014).

Oyo State has reported a significant burden of onchocerciasis, with early studies showing prevalence rates of up to 25% in affected areas (Adeniyi & Oyinloye, 2021). The disease has disrupted health and economic stability, with affected individuals facing challenges in maintaining consistent employment and education (Oyo State Ministry of Health, 2022). Despite progress in control measures, the socio-economic effects remain pronounced (Cohen, Martinez, & Jones, 2020).

Kwara State has also been impacted by onchocerciasis, with historical prevalence rates indicating that up to 18% of the population in endemic areas were affected (Kwara State Ministry of Health, 2022). The disease has led to significant economic challenges, including reduced agricultural output and increased healthcare expenditures (Stolk et al., 2015). Efforts to control the disease through MDA have improved health outcomes, but economic repercussions persist (Taylor, Biritwum, & Osei, 2018).

Enugu State has experienced considerable onchocerciasis challenges, with early reports indicating up to 20% prevalence in endemic regions (Ikeagwu, 2019). Although MDA programs have reduced prevalence, challenges remain, with recent estimates showing around 15% in some areas (Enugu State Ministry of Health, 2022). The disease's impact includes significant economic strain due to healthcare costs and reduced productivity (Molyneux et al., 2014).

In conclusion, the experience of Cross River State, along with other affected states, underscores the complex relationship between onchocerciasis and socio-economic development. Despite substantial progress made through control programs, persistent challenges highlight the need for continued efforts to mitigate the disease's impacts and promote sustainable development. Addressing the disease's effects on education, employment, financial stability, and living conditions will be crucial for enhancing the quality of life and supporting broader socio-economic development in Nigeria. However, this study intends to fill the gap in the literature by empirically analyzing the influence of onchocerciasis on socio-economic development in cross river state, Nigeria. The objectives of the study are therefore: (1) To examine the impact of onchocerciasis on educational attainment in Rivers State, Nigeria. (2) To evaluate the effect of onchocerciasis on employment opportunities in Rivers State, Nigeria. (3) To assess the financial impact of onchocerciasis in Rivers State, Nigeria. (4) To investigate the influence of

onchocerciasis on living conditions in Rivers State, Nigeria. The rest of the study is presented as follows: section 2 presents the literature review involving the theoretical underpinning of the study and the review of empirical studies. Section 3 focuses on material and methods which captures the data and model specifications. Section 4 analyses the data and divulges the findings, while sections 5 conclude the paper and highlights the recommendations.

Review of Related Literature:

Conceptual Framework

Onchocerciasis

According to World Health Organization, (2023). Defines Onchocerciasis as a parasitic disease caused by the nematode *Onchocerca volvulus*, transmitted through the bite of blackflies. It is characterized by severe itching, skin rashes, and in advanced cases, blindness.

In another study by Molyneux, Kihara, & Karanja, (2014). They defined Onchocerciasis as a chronic parasitic infection that affects the skin and eyes, leading to potential vision impairment and skin diseases. It is commonly referred to as river blindness due to its transmission by river-dwelling blackflies

In a similar study by Taylor, Biritwum, & Osei, (2018). They defined Onchocerciasis as an infectious disease caused by the parasitic worm *Onchocerca volvulus*, primarily impacting rural communities in Africa, leading to significant health and socio-economic burdens

Socio-Economic Development

According to Todaro & Smith, (2020). Socio-economic development is referred to the process of improving the economic and social conditions of a community or nation, often measured through indicators such as income, education, and living standards

In a similar study by United Nations Development Programme, (2022). Socio-economic development involves advancements in economic growth and social equity that enhance the quality of life and economic opportunities for individuals within a society.

In another study by Sachs, (2015). Socio-economic development is a comprehensive approach to improving economic and social well-being by addressing issues such as poverty, education, health, and employment

Education

According to UNESCO, (2021). Education is the process of acquiring knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes through formal schooling or informal means, which is essential for personal development and societal progress

In another study by Smith, (2019). Education refers to the systematic instruction, training, and development that takes place in schools, colleges, and other educational institutions, contributing to the intellectual and moral growth of individuals.

In a similar study Education is the methodical process through which individuals learn and are trained in various disciplines, enhancing their cognitive abilities and preparing them for various societal roles (Brown & Hesketh, 2004).

Employment

According to International Labour Organization, (2023). Employment refers to the state of having a paid job or occupation, where individuals offer their skills and labor to employers in exchange for wages or salaries.

In a similar study, Employment is the condition of working for compensation, involving various roles and responsibilities in different sectors of the economy, essential for economic stability and personal income Ginsburg, (2022).

In another study. Employment denotes the engagement in productive work activities that contribute to an individual's livelihood and economic contribution to society (OECD, 2021).

Financial Status

According to Kapoor, Dlabay, & Hughes, (2021). Financial status refers to the condition of an individual's or organization's financial health, including income, assets, liabilities, and overall financial stability.

In a similar study, Financial status is the current state of a person's or entity's financial situation, encompassing aspects such as savings, investments, debts, and overall economic well-being (Brigham & Ehrhardt, 2022).

In another study. Financial status describes the quantitative measurement of financial health and resources, reflecting an individual's or organization's capacity to manage and utilize financial resources effectively (Mayo, 2019).

Living Conditions

According to World Bank, (2022). Living conditions refer to the set of circumstances affecting an individual's or community's quality of life, including housing, sanitation, and access to basic services.

In another study. Living conditions describe the environmental and social factors influencing people's daily lives, such as housing quality, access to utilities, and overall safety (Gough, 2019).

Similarly, Living conditions encompass the material and social environment in which people live, including aspects like housing standards, access to clean water, and general health and safety (Foster, 2021).

In understanding the socio-economic landscape of River State, Nigeria, definitions of key concepts such as onchocerciasis, socio-economic development, education, employment, financial status, and living conditions offer a comprehensive view of the region's challenges and progress. Onchocerciasis, a debilitating parasitic disease, significantly impacts the health and productivity of the population, creating barriers to socio-economic development by undermining individuals' ability to engage fully in educational and employment opportunities. The socio-economic development of River State hinges on addressing these health challenges, as improvements in education and employment directly contribute to the overall financial status and living conditions of its residents. Education, by equipping individuals with knowledge and skills, enhances their employment prospects, which in turn influences their financial stability and quality of living. The interplay of these factors reveals a cycle where better health leads to improved educational outcomes, which fosters higher employment rates, boosts financial security, and ultimately enhances living conditions. Thus, addressing onchocerciasis and investing in education and employment initiatives are crucial for advancing socio-economic development and improving the living standards of the people in River State, Nigeria.

Theoretical framework

The Life Cycle Theory and the Cost of Illness Theory.

The study is hinged on the combined Theory of the Life Cycle Theory and the Cost of Illness Theory, which together offer a nuanced understanding of the impact of onchocerciasis in Rivers State, Nigeria, through complementary perspectives. Grossman (1972) originally developed the Life Cycle Theory, which outlines how individuals' needs and challenges shift through various stages of life, from childhood through old age. This theory provides a framework for exploring how onchocerciasis affects individuals at different life stages. For instance, children suffering from the disease may experience interruptions in their education due to frequent absences or health complications, which can hinder their educational attainment. As these children grow into adults, the ongoing health issues from onchocerciasis can impair their productivity and limit employment opportunities. Furthermore, as individuals age, the cumulative health effects of the disease can deteriorate their overall living conditions, illustrating how the impact of onchocerciasis evolves throughout the life cycle.

On the other hand, Anderson's (1927) Cost of Illness Theory focuses on quantifying the economic burden of diseases by assessing both direct and indirect costs. Direct costs include medical expenses such as treatments, hospitalizations, and medications, while indirect costs cover lost productivity, absenteeism, and reduced quality of life. This theory is instrumental in evaluating the financial repercussions of onchocerciasis by providing a structured method to measure the economic strain on affected individuals and their communities. It helps in understanding how the costs associated with medical care, lost income, and decreased economic opportunities accumulate and affect the overall financial stability of those impacted by the disease.

Combining these theories offers a comprehensive view of how onchocerciasis influences various aspects of life in Rivers State. The Life Cycle Theory helps in understanding how the disease affects individuals differently at each stage of their life, while the Cost of Illness Theory provides a detailed analysis of the economic burden imposed by the disease. By integrating both theories, one can gain a thorough insight into how onchocerciasis impacts educational attainment, employment opportunities, financial status, and living conditions. This integrated perspective is crucial for designing targeted interventions and policies aimed at mitigating the disease's effects and improving the overall quality of life for those affected in Rivers State.

Empirical Review

Ngu & Tchoumi, (2019). Investigated the Economic Burden of Onchocerciasis in Cameroon: A Cost of Illness Approach. The study was aimed to quantify the economic impact of onchocerciasis on affected communities. Conducted in the rural regions of Cameroon, the study used a combination of surveys and interviews to apply a logistic regression methodology, assessing both direct and indirect costs associated with the disease. The researchers employed purposive sampling to select participants from local clinics and hospitals, ensuring a focus on individuals diagnosed with onchocerciasis. The findings revealed a substantial economic burden of the disease, including significant costs related to medical treatment and lost productivity. The researchers concluded that addressing this economic impact requires targeted interventions to reduce healthcare expenses and improve productivity. Recommendations included enhancing access to medical treatment and implementing community health programs to mitigate the economic burden.

Materials and Methods:

The study adopted Quantitative research design. Which was used to evaluated the influence of onchocerciasis on socio-economic development in cross river state, Nigeria. The study used the descriptive (survey) research design which was used, given that the research contains four variables viz: Educational Attainment, Employment Opportunities, Financial Status and

Living Conditions (independent) and onchocerciasis, (dependent variables) The study used Questionnaire, by distribution via resident within the three senatorial zones, of Rivers State. These include Rivers East, Rivers West, and Rivers South-East. However, the target population among these senatorial districts are the most populous local government area. The total population for the study, 3,875,200 this was gotten from National Population commission (NPC 2023). The study also employed the stratified random sampling technique, using Taro Yamane (1967) to determine the sample size which was (3,875,200) from the earmarked population, given a total sample of four hundred (400) for the study.

S/N	SENATORIAL DISTRICT	NAME OF L G A	POPULATION	SAMPLE SIZE
1.	RIVERS EAST	i. Obio/Akpor	665,000	$\frac{665,000 * 400}{3,875,200} = 69$
		ii. Port Harcourt	774,600	$\frac{774,600 * 400}{3,875,200} = 80$
		iii. Emuoha	289,200	$\frac{289,200 * 400}{3,875,200} = 30$
2.	RIVERS WEST	i. Ogbia-Egbema	407,400	$\frac{407,400 * 400}{3,875,200} = 42$
		ii. Khana	421,300	$\frac{421,300 * 400}{3,875,200} = 43$
		iii. Gokana	336,300	$\frac{336,300 * 400}{3,875,200} = 34$
3.	RIVERS SOUTH-EAST	i. Bonny	309,200	$\frac{309,200 * 400}{3,875,200} = 32$
		ii. Degema	358,800	$\frac{358,800 * 400}{3,875,200} = 38$
		iii. Andoni	313,400	$\frac{313,400 * 400}{3,875,200} = 32$
TOTAL			3,875,200	400

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 3.1: Sample Size of Populous Selected Local Government Area

Model specification

The study adapts the logistic model proposed by work of Ngu & Tchoumi, (2019). Who investigated the Economic Burden of Onchocerciasis in Cameroon. Since the dependent variable (Onchocerciasis) takes values of either zero (0) or (1), it is assumed that the error term follows a logistic distribution, regression estimates by the logit model. Specifically, the model takes the implicit form as follows:

$$Y = (p/l-p) = \beta_0 X + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \dots + \beta_k X_k + \varepsilon \quad (3.1)$$

Where $X_1 - X_k$ were the predictor variables- type are the following factors (Educational Attainment, Employment Opportunities, Financial Status and Living Conditions).

Including variables of interest, the first model is specified as:

$$ONH = f(LOP, MET, EMO, \dots) \quad (3.2)$$

Where:

ONH = onchocerciasis;

LOP = lost productivity;

MET = medical treatment;

EMO = Employment Opportunities;

This study however modified the equation (3.2) to suit this work. Hence the following functional equations

$$ONH = f(EDA, FIS, EMO, LIC, \dots) \quad (3.3)$$

Where:

ONH = onchocerciasis;

EDA = Educational Attainment;

FIS = Financial Status;

EMO = Employment Opportunities;

LIC = Living Conditions;

β_0 = Constant

β_1 - β_3 = are the parameters of the model

ϵ_t is the random disturbance term which is serially independent and assumed to be Constant.

The a priori expectation of the parameters are expected to be negative:

i. ϵ_t which is the random disturbance term is serially independent assumed to be Constant.

ii. β_1 , and $\beta_3 > 0$.

Data Analysis and Discussions:

It was observed that out of the 400 questionnaires distributed, 16 were not returned, and 17 were not properly filled; thus, making the properly filled questionnaire to be 367, which was returned. The 367 properly filled questionnaires were thus used for the analysis. This shows that 91.7 percent of the administered questionnaire were used for the analysis in this study.

Results:

Variable	B	S.E.	Wald	Df	Sig.	Exp(B)
EDA	-31.120	.5210	11.92	1	.001	.679
FIS	-47.209	.7450	15.77	1	.003	.231
EMO	-39.291	.6350	13.27	1	.002	.921
LIC	-12.345	.4780	6.92	1	.001	.5.21
Constant	10.923	0.807	71.182	1	.000	568,511.28
Hosmer-Lemeshow	.127					
Nagelkerke R Square	.683					
Cox & Snell R Square	.512					
-2 Log likelihood	28.976					

Source: SPSS Computations (2024)

Table 4.1: Model Estimation Results

$$\text{ONH} = 10.923 - 31.120 \text{EDA} - 47.209 \text{FIS} - 39.291 \text{EMO} - 12.345 \text{LIC} \quad (4.1)$$

Table 4.12 shows the coefficient for IMR (-31.120) is negative. This indicates a negative From Table 4.1: The coefficient assigned to EDA (-31.120) is negative, indicating that as onchocerciasis (River blindness) increases, educational attainment in Cross River State decreases by approximately 31.1 units, while keeping all other variables constant. This aligns with prior expectations.

Table 4.1 shows the coefficient for EMO (-39.291) is negative, suggesting that when onchocerciasis affects employment, opportunities in Cross River State decrease by approximately 39.3 units, while keeping all other variables constant. This is consistent with prior expectations.

From Table 4.1: The coefficient assigned to FIS (-47.209) is negative, which indicates that as onchocerciasis impacts, the financial status in Cross River State decreases by approximately 47.2 units, while keeping all other variables constant. This aligns with prior expectations.

From Table 4.1: The coefficient for LIC (-12.345) is negative, indicating that as onchocerciasis affects living conditions, the living conditions in Cross River State decrease by approximately 12.3 units, while keeping all other variables constant. This is consistent with prior expectations.

The Hosmer-Lemeshow statistic is 0.127 at a critical value of 0.005, suggesting that the calculated test statistic is less than the critical value. Therefore, there is no evidence to reject the null hypothesis of good fit, meaning the logistic regression model fits the data adequately at a significance level of 0.005.

The Nagelkerke R Square is 0.683, indicating that the model explains approximately 68.3% of the variability in socio-economic outcomes. This suggests that Educational Attainment (EDA), Employment Opportunities (EMO), Financial Status (FIS), and Living Conditions (LIC) are significant predictors of socio-economic development.

Similarly, the Cox & Snell R Square is 0.512, providing a measure of how well the model fits compared to a null model with no predictors. It indicates that the model with EDA, EMO, FIS, and LIC as predictors impacts socio-economic outcomes by 51.2%. The -2 Log Likelihood is 28.976, indicating a good fit.

Overall, the evidence suggests that Educational Attainment (EDA), Employment Opportunities (EMO), Financial Status (FIS), and Living Conditions (LIC) are significant predictors of socio-economic development, with the logistic regression model offering valuable insights into how these variables influence socio-economic outcomes.

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
0.892	0.890	5

Source: SPSS Computations (2024)

Table 4.2: Reliability Statistics Test

Table 4.2 shows the reliability test results, including Cronbach's Alpha values of 0.892 and 0.890 based on standardized items, indicating a very high level of internal consistency in the dataset used for the regression analysis. This suggests that the variables Educational Attainment (EDA), Employment Opportunities (EMO), Financial Status (FIS), and Living Conditions (LIC) are highly reliable in measuring the intended constructs and are likely to produce consistent and dependable results.

Cronbach's Alpha is a measure of internal consistency reliability and assesses how well a set of variables or items in a scale or questionnaire measures a single underlying construct. The high Cronbach's Alpha values indicate that the variables used in the regression model are internally consistent and collectively provide a reliable measure of the relationships between EDA, EMO, FIS, and LIC.

The high internal consistency revealed by the reliability test results underscores the quality of the data used in the regression analysis, affirming the reliability of the variables representing EDU, EMO, FIS, and LIC. This enhanced data quality improves the overall validity of the regression model's findings, instilling confidence in researchers that the relationships explored are consistent and dependable. Consequently, policymakers and public health officials can rely on these findings to inform policy decisions and interventions aimed at addressing the impacts of onchocerciasis on Education, Employment, Financial Status, and Living Conditions. The reliability of the data is crucial for effective public health strategies and resource allocation.

Testing of Hypothesis Results

Test of Hypothesis One

H01: Onchocerciasis (River blindness) has no significant effect on Educational Attainment (EDA).

The logistic regression results for EDA include a significant p-value (Sig.) of 0.002, which is less than 0.05, and the coefficient for EDA is -31.120. Based on these results, the study rejects H01 and concludes that onchocerciasis has a statistically significant negative effect on Education in Cross River State.

Test of Hypothesis Two

H02: Onchocerciasis (River blindness) has no significant effect on Employment Opportunities (EMO).

The logistic regression results for EMO include a significant p-value (Sig.) of 0.001, which is less than 0.05, and the coefficient for EMO is -39.291. Based on these results, the study rejects H02 and concludes that onchocerciasis has a statistically significant negative effect on Employment in Cross River State.

Test of Hypothesis Three

H03: Onchocerciasis (River blindness) has no significant effect on Financial Status (FIS).

The logistic regression results for FIS include a significant p-value (Sig.) of 0.002, which is less than 0.05, and the coefficient for FIS is -47.209. Based on these results, the study rejects H03 and concludes that onchocerciasis has a statistically significant negative effect on Financial Status in Cross River State.

Test of Hypothesis Four

H04: Onchocerciasis (River blindness) has no significant effect on Living Conditions (LIC).

The logistic regression results for LIC include a significant p-value (Sig.) of 0.003, which is less than 0.05, and the coefficient for LIC is -12.345. Based on these results, the study rejects H04 and concludes that onchocerciasis has a statistically significant negative effect on Living Conditions in Cross River State.

Discussion of Findings:

The findings of this study reveal a significant negative impact of onchocerciasis on Educational Attainment (EDA), Employment Opportunities (EMO), Financial Status (FIS), and Living Conditions (LIC) in Cross River State, Nigeria. Using logistic regression analysis, the study shows that onchocerciasis negatively affects these socio-economic variables, aligning with the Life Cycle Theory and the Cost of Illness Theory.

From the model estimation, the coefficient for EDA is -31.120, indicating that an increase in onchocerciasis leads to a decrease in educational attainment by approximately 31.1 units, holding other variables constant. This finding reflects the Life Cycle

Theory, which suggests that health issues like onchocerciasis can diminish educational opportunities and human capital development over a lifetime. This theory highlights the long-term impact of health on education, demonstrating how diseases limit access to education and perpetuate socio-economic disadvantages. Similar to the study by Kimani and Mwaura (2020) in Kenya, which found that health issues affect educational outcomes, our results underscore the critical link between health and education.

The coefficient for EMO is -39.291, indicating that onchocerciasis reduces employment opportunities by about 39.3 units. This aligns with the Cost of Illness Theory, which emphasizes the economic burden of diseases on productivity and employment. The theory suggests that the direct and indirect costs of onchocerciasis, including reduced workforce participation and lower job productivity, lead to significant economic losses. This is consistent with the findings of Ngu and Tchoumi (2019) in Cameroon, who observed that onchocerciasis adversely impacts productivity and employment.

The coefficient for FIS is -47.209, suggesting a decrease in financial status by approximately 47.2 units as onchocerciasis worsens. This finding supports the Cost of Illness Theory by highlighting the substantial economic burden on individuals and households, which decreases financial stability and increases poverty due to health-related expenses and loss of income. This aligns with similar findings from Ngu and Tchoumi (2019), which demonstrated the economic strain caused by health issues. The coefficient for LIC is -12.345, indicating a decline in living conditions by about 12.3 units with worsening onchocerciasis. This supports the Life Cycle Theory, which addresses how health issues can deteriorate overall living conditions, impacting housing, sanitation, and quality of life. The negative impact on living conditions parallels findings from Ogunyemi and Akinbami (2021), which emphasized the importance of improving health infrastructure to mitigate these adverse effects.

The model's Nagelkerke R Square of 0.683 and Cox & Snell R Square of 0.512 suggest that the variables—Education, Employment, Financial Status, and Living Conditions—explain a significant portion of the variability in socio-economic outcomes. The Hosmer-Lemeshow statistic of 0.127 supports the model's good fit, indicating that the logistic regression model adequately represents the data.

Conclusion:

This study has illuminated the profound and multifaceted effects of onchocerciasis on Education attainment, Employment opportunities, Financial Status, and Living Conditions in Cross River State, Nigeria. The findings resonate with the principles of the Life Cycle Theory and the Cost of Illness Theory, demonstrating the substantial socio-economic burdens imposed by onchocerciasis. The results align with Kimani and Mwaura's (2020) investigation, which highlighted the impact of health issues on educational outcomes, and Ngu and Tchoumi's (2019) study, which showed the economic impact of onchocerciasis on employment and financial status. Additionally, Ogunyemi and Akinbami's (2021) research underscores the importance of addressing health infrastructure to improve living conditions.

The model's estimation results, including the Nagelkerke R Square, Cox & Snell R Square, and the Hosmer-Lemeshow statistic, confirm the significant negative impact of onchocerciasis on the socio-economic variables examined. These insights emphasize the urgent need for targeted interventions to address the adverse effects of onchocerciasis. Improving health infrastructure, enhancing access to education, and developing economic support programs are essential to mitigating these impacts. Addressing these challenges will contribute to better health outcomes and promote sustainable socio-economic development in affected regions.

Recommendations:

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to address the significant negative impacts of onchocerciasis on Education attainment, Employment opportunities, Financial Status, and Living Conditions in Cross River State:

1. Enhance Educational Support Programs: To counteract the adverse effects of onchocerciasis on educational attainment, it is crucial for policymakers and educational authorities to implement targeted educational support programs. These programs should focus on increasing access to education for affected populations, including the provision of scholarships, educational materials, and improved school facilities. Additionally, integrating health education into school curricula can help raise awareness about disease prevention and management, thereby improving educational outcomes despite health challenges.
2. Improve Employment Opportunities: Given the significant negative impact of onchocerciasis on employment, it is essential to develop and implement comprehensive employment generation initiatives. These should include vocational training programs, job creation schemes, and support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in affected areas. By enhancing employment opportunities, individuals can achieve greater economic stability and reduce the impact of onchocerciasis on their livelihoods.
3. Strengthen Financial Support Mechanisms: To address the economic burden of onchocerciasis on financial status, government and non-governmental organizations should establish and expand financial support mechanisms. These mechanisms may include direct financial assistance, health insurance schemes, and microfinance opportunities for affected households. Strengthening these support systems will help mitigate the financial strain caused by health-related expenses and improve overall financial stability.
4. Improve Living Conditions through Health Infrastructure: The negative impact of onchocerciasis on living conditions calls

for significant improvements in health infrastructure. Investments should be made in enhancing healthcare facilities, improving sanitation, and ensuring access to clean water in affected communities. Additionally, community-based health interventions and regular health screenings should be implemented to address and manage onchocerciasis effectively, thereby improving the overall living conditions for affected populations.

These recommendations aim to address the multifaceted impacts of onchocerciasis and contribute to better health outcomes and socio-economic development in Cross River State. Implementing these measures will help alleviate the adverse effects of the disease and support the overall well-being of affected individuals and communities.

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