The Jigger Menace in Kenya

Where did we go wrong that jiggers can still torment people in the 21st Century

Daniel Arap Moi
Former President of Kenya

Vol. 2
Help remove my jigger!

We want to go school, and enjoy free education, just like our friends. But our feet and hands are covered in jiggers, making us unable to walk, write or concentrate in school. Some kids in school taunt and harass us, due to our condition. We love sports, but cannot play because our hands and feet are sore. Jiggers have affected both our school work and play. Our parents cannot afford to buy us proper sanitation equipment, medicine, shoes or learning equipment. Please help us remove jiggers, so we can learn and play, just like other children.

http://www.jigger-ahadi.org

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With over 2.6 million jigger infested Kenyans registered by Ahadi Kenya Trust, I can say jigger infestation is of great concern. Many people have been suffering from jigger infestation in silence. No comprehensive survey has been carried out, making it difficult to give the actual number of those affected.

But the effects of jigger infestation are not vague. With school going children dropping out of school, and the spread of HIV/AIDS among the infested through sharing of pins and other removing equipment; these are but just a few of the effects of jiggers infestation. Jigger victims also have to deal with stigmatisation and ridicule, being unable to exercise their voting rights due to disability, poverty and in extreme cases, death.

Jigger infestation, caused by poverty and subsequently lack of proper hygiene, has so far claimed the lives of over 265 people in the last two years. There is no doubt this number could be higher, as most cases go unreported.

Lack of political goodwill has been one of our biggest challenges in the fight against this menace, as political leaders feel embarrassed to come out and talk about jiggers.

But our partnership with the Government ministries, especially the Ministry of Public Health and Sanitation, has boosted the Anti-Jigger campaign. The media, corporate bodies, religious organizations, opinion leaders, as well as support from individual well wishers has been overwhelming.

Through that support, Ahadi Kenya Trust has had the joy of seeing children who a while ago could not walk, get back to school, while adults who depended on handouts get involved in income generating activities. So far, more than 3000 people have been treated and fully rehabilitated.

In Kenya, all the eight provinces have reported cases of jigger infestation, with a few isolated cases in Nairobi province. Our neighbouring countries have not been spared either, and are seeking our assistance.

As we look forward to completely eradicating jiggers in Kenya by the year 2015, plans are also underway to take jigger eradication campaigns to other African countries soon.

Galatians 6:9—Let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart!

Stanley Kamau Maina, HSC

THE JIGGER MENACE IS REAL

They say that jiggers only attack one’s feet...that they are caused by witch craft...that jiggers are only found in Central Kenya...that they only attack children...that those with jiggers are mentally retarded...the list goes on. Well, these are only but a few of the myths you and I have heard about jiggers.

Myths aside, jigger infestation is serious. So serious it is, that there have been over 265 reported death cases, resulting from jigger infestation. So serious is jigger infestation, that it has in some instances resulted in contraction of AIDs, among some of the victims, through the sharing of pins and needles during removal of the parasite.

Jiggers attack both males and females alike, including the young and the old. But young children are the most affected. So severe are attacks on the little ones, that some are left disabled. It is also not uncommon so see infants who have been attacked by jiggers.

Children suffering from jigger infestation can barely concentrate in class, as they are distracted by the pain caused by sores on their toes, the soles of their feet and other parts of the body. They are unable to concentrate, due to hunger, as this parasite feeds on their blood, denying them the necessary nutrients their bodies require to function properly.

These children mostly suffer in silence, as they have no one to run to, and are too young to take care of themselves. For them, seeking medical help for their condition is not an option, due to poverty, and the fact that some hospitals do not consider jigger infestation to be a medical condition.

Amidst all the despair, those affected by jiggers, have to contend with proud and selfish politicians and other leaders, who refuse to accept that the jigger menace is real.

At the end of the day, it is only by accepting the problem, that we will be able to start seeking a solution.

About those myths, read on, and see just how much you know, or don’t know, about jiggers.

Consulting Editor
Wairimu Githuka
**Tunga penetrans** is known as the **chigger**, **jigger**, **chigoe**, **bicho do pé** or **sand flea**.

The female jigger feeds by burrowing into the skin of its host, after which its abdomen becomes enormously enlarged, forming a round sac—the shape of a pea. An impregnated female jigger embeds under the toenails and fingernails of man—where the resultant sores may fill with pus and become infected. Others victims can be dogs, cats, rats, pigs, cattle, and sheep.

The first evidence of jigger infestation on a person is a tiny black dot on the skin, which occurs at the point of penetration. Because the jigger is a poor jumper, most lesions occur on the feet, often on the soles, the toe webs, and around or under the toenails.

A small inflammatory pupa with a central black dot forms early. Within the next few weeks, the pupa slowly enlarges into a white pea-sized nodule between 4–10mm in diameter. This lesion can range from asymptomatic to extremely painful. Multiple or severe infestations may result in a cluster of nodules with a honeycomb appearance.

Heavy infestations may lead to severe inflammation, ulceration, fibrosis, lymphangitis, gangrene, sepsis, and the loss of toenails. Auto amputation of the fingers and toes and death may also occur. In most cases however, this lesion heal without further complications. Nevertheless, the risk of secondary infection is high. Tetanus is a common secondary infection which has reported associations with death.

The “black dot” of the nodule is this posterior end of the flea sticking out. The opening provides the flea with air and an exit route for faeces and eggs. With its head in the dermis, the flea begins to feed on the host’s blood and enlarges up to one cm in diameter. Over the next two weeks, over 100 eggs are released through the exposed opening and fall to the ground. The flea then dies and is slowly sloughed by the host’s skin.

The eggs hatch on the ground in 3–4 days. In the next 3–4 weeks, they go through their larval and pupae stages and become adults. The complete life cycle of a *Tunga penetrans* lasts about a month.

**Symptoms**

- An infestation begins to irritate and itch when it is almost fully developed.
- Sometimes it causes severe inflammation and ulceration.
- If the female jigger dies in the skin, it may cause a secondary infection which if ignored could lead to tetanus, gangrene, and even loss of a toe.
- Natural extrusion of the eggs sac or removal of the jigger with a dirty pin or needle leaves a tiny pit in the skin, which may develop into a sore.
- The sore may extend and develop into a septic ulcer. An infection under a toenail may cause pus to form.

**Causes of the jigger infestation**

According to research, the biggest cause of infestations is poverty and poor hygiene.

**Effects of Jigger infestation:**

1. Inability to work easily due to pain in the affected areas of the legs
2. Inability to carry out normal day to day activities like working or playing
3. Stigmatisation
4. Loss of self-esteem resulting from the stigmatisation
5. Infections such as HIV/AIDS are passed from person to person due to sharing of pins and needles while removing jiggers
6. Disability as people with severe infestation are unable to walk or use their hands
7. Death

**Treatment**

1. Wash affected areas with clean water and soap (if available).
2. Dry the cleaned areas.
3. Soak affected area in a Potassium permanganate or disinfectant like Savlon solution for 15 minutes.
4. Apply petroleum jelly or oil to soften the skin.
5. Repeat the above procedure three times a day for two weeks.

**Preventive measures**

To completely eradicate jiggers, the victims’ homes should be thoroughly fumigated. Animals that may be carrying the fleas should also be treated. Victims and their families should also be educated on the need to observe hygiene.

Wearing shoes should be encouraged to ensure that the flea does not find entry into ones feet. In infested areas, people should check their feet daily for freshly burrowing jiggers which are visible as small black spots which cause an itch sensation.

The flea may also be deterred by an insect repellent applied to the skin—although walking barefoot in dirt quickly removes the repellent. Locating the jiggers’ hiding place and burning or spraying the said area with an insecticide would also help kill the jiggers.

**Link with HIV/AIDS**

Another noted problem that may be caused by jigger infestation is the risk of passing on blood transmitted infections such as HIV / AIDS to the victims. This is a result of using and sharing unsterilized pins and needles while removing the bugs.

**Vicious Cycle of Poverty**

Economic activity reduced by poor health due to jigger infestation, making people poorer and in unable to rise out of the poverty.
Since its inception, The Ahadi Kenya Trust team has visited many parts of the country, fighting the jigger menace. Below is a summary of the provinces visited.

**Western 1**

Ahadi Kenya Trust officially launched the Anti jigger campaign in Western Province, in September 2008. The launch took place at Emutsali Primary School, Emuhaya constituency. According to the area MP Hon. Wibere Ochiel who graced the occasion, 15 per cent of the constituents are jigger infected.

More than 500 school-going children were on that day treated for jigger infestation. Emuhaya Constituency CDF office was also identified to serve as the information office for all jigger related issues in the region, while a social worker was employed to attend to those in need of medication.

Other areas affected by jigger menace in Western Kenya include Kimili, Kakamega, Kirala, Bungoma, Butere, Teso and Gulu County.

**Nyanza 2**

In Nyanza, Gaudentia Awino, a mother of three, from Central Gem, Siaya District, in August 2008, had her newborn baby attacked by jiggers. According to the area assistant Chief, Mr Busi, there are many cases of jigger infestation in the area. Bondo, Gem, Siaya, Kopelo, Kituto Mbusa are among the other areas in Nyanza affected by the jigger menace.

**Coast 5**

In some areas, as many as 800 children from one school are affected. Baraka Katana, a class one boy aged eight in Malindi, Msabaha village had been out of school for the better part of the month due to severe jigger infestation. According to the headteacher, the child was unable to attend school due to jigger infestation.

More than 3000 children in Msabaha location, Malindi District, are jigger infected. Two people from the region had in the previous month been admitted at Maragwa District hospital. They had severe attacks of jigger infestation. Ahadi Kenya Trust found more than 40 children in Msabaha location, Malindi District, to be jigger infected. The team visited the area and interviewed the community leaders.

In Buruni village of Kwalale district, Mzee Juma Rai assembles school going children in his compound to remove jiggers. Ahadi Kenya Trust found more than 40 children waiting in line for Mzee Juma to remove jiggers from their feet. Apparently, this risky jigger removal method is undertaken at the end of every school holiday. There is a high risk of transmitting HIV among the children.

So far, Coast Province has the second highest number of jigger infested people in the country. Some of the most affected districts include; Kwaile, Kilifi, Malindi, Tana River, Taita Taveta and Lamu. As it is evident in other parts of the country with high rates of jigger infestation, there is a high level of poverty and poor sanitation in the area. During an anti jigger campaign in Garissa constituency, more than 400 people were treated.

In January 2009, more than twenty jigger victims from Kandara Constituency were admitted at Maragwa District hospital. They had severe attacks and were found bed ridden in their homes. Ahadi Kenya Trust, with the support of Red Cross volunteers carried the victims to hospital where they were admitted.

**Central 6**

A large number of children in Central province drop out of school every year due to jigger infestation. Of the eight provinces in Kenya, Central province is the most affected by the jigger menace, with the highest number of those affected being children.

In Nyahururu district, three people succumbed to jigger infestation in the month of October 2009, while four members of one family died of jigger infestation in Maragwa District, in August 2009. Ahadi Kenya Trust attended the funeral in which one of the victims, Wambui, left behind a six years old girl. So far there has been 262 jigger related deaths. This number could be higher, as most cases go unreported.

In Gaichanjiru primary school, Kandara division, more than 500 school-going children were treated for jigger infestation; at a medical camp sponsored by Safaricom Ltd. Ahadi Kenya Trust officially launched the anti-jigger campaign in Western Province, in September 2008. The launch took place at Emutsali Primary School, Emuhaya constituency. According to the area MP Hon. Wibere Ochiel who graced the occasion, 15 per cent of the constituents are jigger infected.

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Other areas in Central province heavily affected by jiggers include Masinga, Makueni and Kitui.

It is estimated that more than 400 000 people are affected by this menace in Eastern Province, yet political leaders in the area continue to snub Anti jigger campaign projects and deny the existence of jiggers in their areas, sighting embarrassment.

**Eastern 8**

Ahadi Kenya Trust launched an anti-jigger campaign in Eastern Province in March 2009, after several people from the region called on them to intervene. The campaign launched at Kathani constituency, Machakos, included home visits by Ahadi Kenya Trust volunteers, who were led by the area provincial administrators.

Other areas in Eastern province heavily affected by jiggers include Masinga, Makueni and Kitui.

We have reported cases from Wajir and Garissa and are planning to visit those areas soon.

**North Eastern 3**

Ahadi Kenya Trust officially launched the Anti jigger campaign in September 2008.

More than 300 children at Lewa Downs Primary School in Samburu are infested with jiggers. During an anti jigger medical camp held in December 2008, more than 400 children were washed and treated.

A good number of those infested drop out of school every year. A visit to their homes indicated they live under very poor hygienic conditions. Poverty was also evident in the villages neighbouring the school.

In Kericho, the Ahadi team visited the District hospital, where a family of three was hospitalised due to serious jigger infestation. In Narok district, over 5000 people are jigger infested. This is according to a recent survey done by District health officials. This prompted the area leaders, led by Hon. Ntimama to seek intervention of Ahadi Kenya Trust and other partners.

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- Epush International

**Our Awards**

Ahadi Kenya Trust has received several awards, both local and international for their jigger eradication efforts. The awards include: Head of State Commendation from the HE The President of the Republic of Kenya, The Global Leadership and Management Award 2009 from USAID, Distinguished Alumni Service Award 2009 from Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT), Young Achievers Award 2009 from WOSWA (University Of Nairobi) and Laico Regency Humanitarian of the Year Award 2009 from Laico Regency.

**Our MPs Support**

- Hon. Kalonzo Musyoka - Vice President
- Hon. Beth Muiga - Laparotti
- Hon. Esther Mungai - Nyeri
- Hon. David Mungatana - Garsen
- Mrs Ida Odinga - Prime Minister's Wife
- Hon. Wilbur Otichilo - Emuhaya
- Hon. Charles Mung’aro - Malindi
- Hon. Clement Wambugu - Mathioya
- Hon. George Thuo - Juja
- Hon. Kabando wa Kabando - Mukurwe-ini
- Hon. Ibrahim Mwaura - Mathira
- Hon. Jakoyo Midiwo - Gem
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- Hon. Evans Kidero - Ruiru
- Hon. Charles Nyriru - Yatta
- Hon. Kiarie Mbuvi - Sabotia
- Hon. Eugene Wamalwa - Sabotia
- Hon. Alex Mabirizi - Ngunyoni MP
- Hon. Rachel Shebesh - Nominated MP
- Hon. Lendo Ng'endo - Nominated MP
- Hon. Jane Kariuki - Former Narok North MP
- Hon. Nyaguthi - Former Nominated MP
- Francis Atwoli - COTU Secretary General

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Where did jiggers come from?

There has been different theories about the origin of jiggers in Kenya. But according to some elderly people, jiggers were brought into the country by colonialists, as a biological warfare, to immobilise freedom fighters. They are said to have been fed on substances that cause mental retardation for human beings.

Is Central province the only place in Kenya where jiggers are found?

No. Jiggers are found in most parts of the Kenya. As a matter of fact, they are also found in other African countries, including Uganda and Tanzania.

Do jiggers affect any other parts of the body apart from the legs?

Yes. Jiggers are known to attack many other parts of the body, including the hands and knees. In our quest to fight jiggers and help the infested, Ahadi Kenya Trust has encountered people who have jiggers all over their bodies, including the head.

Is there a jigger awareness day in Kenya?

No. Ahadi Kenya Trust is however pushing the government to create one.

Why do people suffering from jiggers infestation seem retarded?

Jiggers feed on one’s blood, causing low blood circulation in the body. This in turn causes lack of enough oxygen in the brain, hence the mental retardation.

How do jiggers spread HIV Aids?

Though it is not the jiggers themselves which cause the spread of the virus, there has been reported cases of HIV infection through sharing of pins and needles while removing jiggers. There is a big risk of a HIV negative person contracting the virus, through sharing of needles with a HIV positive person to remove jiggers.

Do jiggers kill?

Yes. So far, there are over 265 reported cases of deaths caused by jiggers, across the country. Seeing that many cases also go unreported, the number could be higher.

Is there medication for jiggers?

There is no known medication to treat jiggers. When Ahadi Kenya Trust started eradicating jiggers, we were advised to use disinfectants like savlon or dettol, and found that it works. We have also been using a potassium permanganate solution, which is also quite helpful. That said, we are still researching for a medication that can completely eradicate jiggers.

Are jiggers treated in hospital?

Yes. Though most hospitals had earlier on refused to take on jigger infested people as medical cases, Ahadi Kenya Trust has fought to ensure that jigger infested people receive medical treatment and care like all other patients in hospital.

What causes jiggers?

The biggest cause of jigger infestation is poverty, and lack of proper hygiene. People who do not keep their living homes clean, do not take a bath every day, and also share their living quarters with animals, especially poultry, are at a higher risk of being attacked by jiggers.

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Does one get back to normal after the jiggers have been removed?

Yes. With proper treatment and care, one can go back to normal after jigger infestation. We have seen people who were once heavily infested getting back to productive life.

What is the Ministry of Public Health doing about eliminating jiggers?

The Ministry of Public Health has been very supportive of the anti-jigger initiative. So far, it has mobilised health officers to fumigate the homes of the infested. It has also carried out training for public health social workers in most districts. Some money has also been set aside to facilitate jigger eradication.

Are jiggers contagious?

No. Although one has to observe proper hygiene to prevent jigger infestation.

How many Kenyans are infested with jiggers?

So far, there are over 2.6 million jigger infested Kenyans registered by Ahadi Kenya Trust. The number may be bigger, as Ahadi Kenya Trust has not been able to carry out a comprehensive behaviour study. The government recently put the figure for those at risk of jigger infestation at 10 million.

How did you start the anti-jigger campaign?

The anti-jigger campaign started after we encountered some families with severe jigger infestation in Murang’a. In an effort to help them, we discovered the problem was bigger than we thought, as there were children who were missing out on school due to the menace. The fact that there had also been some cases of HIV transmissions in the victims during the jigger removal process really gave us a wake-up call, and sprang us into action.

What can I do to help eradicate jiggers?

To get involved in the jigger eradication process, you can volunteer in charity work undertaken by Ahadi Kenya Trust, adopt a child and sponsor them in meeting their school fees and daily day requirements, donate cash to help Ahadi Kenya Trust buy disinfectants, sanitation material, food, clothes and medication for those suffering from jigger infestation, or help organise a medical camp. You can also donate food, shoes, clothing and sanitation products used in the Anti Jigger initiative.

Write to us

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**Summary of activities undertaken by Ahadi Kenya Trust in JIGGER ERADICATION**

**Registration**
Registration of jigger-infested persons: Ahadi Kenya Trust has so far registered over 2.6 million jigger-infested Kenyans. The ministry of Public Health estimates that 10 million people are affected by the menace. The registration is ongoing.

**Treatment**
Treatment of jigger-infested persons: Several medical centers are being held to treat jigger victims. Leaders, including ministers and other senior Government officials, have joined Ahadi Kenya Trust volunteers in these exercises.

**Fumigation**
Fumigation and supply of sanitation equipment: Ahadi Kenya Trust is conducting home visits, to spray and supply jigger-infested people with sanitation materials to be used in killing, and preventing the effects of jigger causing fleas.

**Home visits**
Ahadi Kenya Trust together with volunteers is visiting homes for those infested and supplied them with medication, sanitation equipments, foodstuffs and clothing.

**Other Activities**
1. Raffles
2. Opening centres
3. Fund raising
4. Networking

**Empowerment**
A beekeeping project and other agricultural activities to help the adults earn some income are launched. This projects help them gain food security and break the poverty cycle. Farming equipments are also supplied.

**Partnership**
Ahadi Kenya Trust is training partnerships with government institutions, the private sector, individuals and community. This is a way of creating project ownership and sustainability.
Help remove my jigger!
Ahadi Kenya Trust is a Non Governmental Organization started three years ago and whose major activity is to eradicate jiggers in Kenya. We work in partnership with the Ministry of Public Health, Ministry of Provincial Administration, Corporate bodies, NGO’s, Media and the Community. Among other awards, Ahadi Kenya Trust won the Global Leadership & Management 2009 from USAID and received Head of State Commendation from HE The President of the Republic of Kenya.

The objectives of Ahadi Kenya Trust are to mobilize resources in order to address the needs of poor communities, promote good health behavior among Kenyans and advocate for health and social rights.

**Our Vision**: A promise for a better, healthier life.

**Our Mission**: To create a better life for Kenyans, a promise to bridge the poverty gap by empowering women and youth in Kenya.

www.ahadi-jigger.org