

# Schistosomiasis Case Study: Perceived Threat

**Background:** The MOH has been working on reducing schistosomiasis prevalence for more than 15 years. Still there are schools in our study that have 15%-48% prevalence of disease among their students. The first training of teachers for the school-based schistosomiasis behavioral prevention, control, and treatment program was completed six months ago. When visiting the schools I overhear many teachers who have not taken the MDA drugs when they were distributed. There are many reasons given for not taking the drugs. It becomes clear when listening “between the lines” there is a major perception that goes unspoken and has not been considered by the behavioral scientist and health education teams.

## **Questions to consider:**

1. What may be some of the barriers (if applicable) to taking the MDA tablets?
2. Based on what you know, what may be an underlying core belief that people have that could be influencing their decision to not swallowing the tablets?
3. What might be an unexplored perception that people have that keeps them from taking this disease seriously for themselves or their children?
4. What non-judgmental questions could you ask a group of teacher or community members that could from insight into this situation?
5. What personal beliefs of yours may conflict with their perception of the problem? How would you deal with this?

## Discussion:

It has become evident that people do not see schistosomiasis as a perceived threat with severe outcomes because they characterize the blood fluke as a worm. Everyone has had worms since they were young. Worms are not perceived as a severe disease. One can swallow tablets and then they can see the worm dead in their feces. They have been taught that the “blood fluke” is a normal worm. They lack the distinction between the two and therefore do not see this as a serious threat. They hear the health education messages and experience that behavior change intervention through the lens of the “worm.”

## Exercise: Rebranding the worm

### Materials:

*Worm photo*



Figure 1: Image of soil-transmitted helminths. Copyright CDC

*Blood fluke photo*



Figure 2: Image of schistosome worm pair. Copyright Natural History Museum, London



Figure 3 Child showing image of schistosome worm pair. Copyright S.Knopp