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1 Burden of intestinal parasitic infections in children and its association with hand
2 washing practice in Ethiopia: a systematic review and meta-analysis

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27 **Abstract**

28 **Background:** Intestinal parasitic infections (IPIs) are a major public health challenges in
29 developing countries including Ethiopia, although few studies previously estimated the
30 magnitude of IPIs and associated factors in the country. Reports from these scarce studies
31 were also widely varied and remained inconsistent. This study thus aimed to synthesize the
32 pooled magnitude of IPIs and factors affecting it.

33 **Methods:** Internationally broad based medical database including MEDLINE/PubMed,
34 EMBASE, PsychINFO and Web of Science, and Google Scholar for grey literature were
35 exhaustively searched using *a priori* set criteria to identify studies estimating the prevalence
36 of IPIs among children from 2000-2018. PRISMA guideline was used to systematically
37 review and meta-analyze these studies. Details of study characteristics including sample size,
38 magnitude of effect sizes (including odds ratios (ORs)) and standard errors were extracted.
39 Random-effects model was used to calculate pooled estimates in Stata/se version-14. I^2 and
40 meta-bias statistics assessed heterogeneity and Egger's test for publication bias. Sub-group
41 analyses were also carried out based on age of children and regions.

42 **Results:** Forty-three studies were included in the final analysis (N = 20,008 children). The
43 overall prevalence of IPIs, with one or more species, was 48.2% (95% CI: 40.1, 56.3) in
44 Ethiopian children. Based on sub-group analyses, the highest prevalence of IPIs was observed
45 among school-age children (52.4% (95% CI, 41.3, 63.5)) and in Amhara regional state
46 (52.1% (95% CI, 37.3-66.8)). The odds of having IPIs was nearly six times higher in children
47 who were not practicing hand washing as compared to their counterparts (pooled OR = 5.6
48 (95% CI: 3.4,9.3). Funnel plot analysis and Egger's test detected no publication bias.

49 **Conclusion:** On aggregate, the pooled prevalence of IPIs among Ethiopian children is
50 significantly high. Not hand washing before eating was a risk factor for IPIs. The
51 establishment of applicable sanitation services and health education will help reduce the
52 magnitude of IPIs and promote a healthier childhood.

53

54 **Keywords:** Intestinal parasitic infections, systematic review and meta-analysis, Ethiopia

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56

57 **Background**

58 Intestinal parasitic infections (IPIs) are serious public health challenges globally [1] whereby
59 one-third of the total population is infected with intestinal parasites (IP), and an estimated 4.5
60 billion people are at risk of infection with one of the three common IPIs – ascaris
61 lumbricoides (800–1000 million), *hookworm* (700- 900 million) and *trichuris trichiura* (500
62 million) [2-4] contributing for significant illnesses and disability-adjusted life year lost [5].
63 Sadly, around 12% of global burden of disease caused by IPIs occur among school-age
64 children in developing countries [7] especially in sub-Saharan African countries ranging from
65 27.7% to 95% [8-12], and attributable to major causes of morbidity and mortality among
66 these children [1].

67 Multifactorial causes contribute to the escalation of IPIs in children including overcrowding,
68 lack of safe water, poor personal hygiene, poor hand washing and nutritional disorders [20,
69 21]. Indeed, IPIs can be consequences of poor socio-economic status and also contribute to a
70 substantial economic burden [6]. That is, IPIs are closely interrelated with poor
71 socioeconomic status of the family, lack of sanitation, inadequate access to pure water and
72 waste disposal especially in low- and middle-income countries [13-15]. In particular, under-
73 five and school-aged children in these settings are categorized as high-risk population for IPIs
74 [16]. Furthermore, these infections are causes and consequences for anemia and other
75 comorbidities as well as physical and cognitive developmental delays [17, 18] resulting in
76 suboptimal child survival, poor growth and development as well as meager educational
77 performance [8, 10, 18]. In addition, chronic forms of IPIs are associated with the
78 transmission and severity of other infections and/or diseases such as leprosy and human
79 immune-deficiency virus (HIV) [19].

80 Interestingly, these infections have recently been receiving a high priority from global
81 community. Cognizant to this, the World Health Organization (WHO) has permitted
82 preventive chemoprophylaxis as worldwide mainstay strategy to control the communicability
83 of these infections [22]. In this strategy, scheduled administration of safe and efficacious
84 deworming drugs for risk groups is recommended, setting a minimum target at 75%, and
85 maximum 100% for success rate [22-24]. In fact, general cleanliness or sanitation are
86 imperative indicators to achieve these standards at a community level [25].

87 Numerous studies have studied the magnitude of IPIs in preschool and school-age children in
88 Ethiopia. However, there is a significant variability in the reports and an aggregate figure is
89 implicated to know the ‘real’ burden of IPIs. We thus carried out a systematic review and

90 meta-analysis on the prevalence of IPIs and its association with common indicators including
91 hand washing practice in children. These analyses were carried out in the context of in-depth
92 methodological application and rigorous statistical analyses that could be helpful for
93 estimating national level burden of IPIs as previous studies are characterized by high spatial
94 variation.

95 **Methods**

96 **Study design and search strategy**

97 Using broad-based computerized international databases, we employed systematic searches to
98 find all published studies on the prevalence of IPIs in Ethiopian children from 2000-2020.
99 Databases included MEDLINE/PubMed, EMBASE, Psych INFO and Web of Science, and
100 Google Scholar for grey literature. Reference lists of eligible articles, hand searches for grey
101 literature and relevant scientific conference websites were also appraised to enhance
102 electronic searches. Observational studies conducted on the prevalence of IPIs among
103 children in Ethiopia were selected for this systematic review and meta-analysis. Search
104 protocol was developed by using such keywords as “prevalence” OR “Epidemiology” AND
105 “intestinal parasite,” “intestinal helminthes”, “intestinal protozoa”, “soil-transmitted
106 helminthes” AND “associated factors” OR “predictors” AND “Ethiopia”. To make a certain
107 scientific rigor, we strictly adhered to the Preferred Reporting of Systematic Reviews and
108 Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) guideline [26].

109 **Inclusion criteria**

110 All studies written in English, estimating the prevalence of IPIs in Ethiopian children and of
111 high-quality scores were entered into the final meta-analysis.

112 **Exclusion Criteria**

113 Studies that did not estimate the prevalence of IPIs, articles without definite sample size or
114 full-text, those that did not achieve the minimum quality scores, case reports, case series, and
115 experimental studies were excluded from the meta-analysis.

116 **Data Extraction**

117 Two reviewers (FW and AT) screened the downloaded titles and abstracts using the
118 eligibility criteria. Discussions and mutual consensus were in place when possible arguments
119 raised between the reviewers. Two reviewers (FW and AT) then assessed full-texts of
120 potentially eligible papers. We made some efforts to communicate the authors whenever
121 further information was needed. Numerator and denominator data and beta coefficients and

122 their standard errors (if given) were used to calculate ORs, where ORs with 95% CI were not
123 available. The data extraction format included first author, study year, region of study, study
124 design and sample size, and prevalence of IPIs.

125

126 **Quality Appraisal**

127 Articles were assessed for quality, with only high-quality studies included in the analysis.
128 Two authors (FW, AT) independently evaluated the quality of each relevant article. The
129 reviewer's cross-checked their quality appraisal scores and resolved any disparity before
130 calculating the final appraisal score. Moreover, Kappa statistic was used to measure
131 agreement between reviewers to determine uniformity of amongst eligible full-text articles
132 using guidelines proposed by Landis and Koch [31]: < 0.20 = slight agreement; 0.21–0.40 =
133 fair agreement; 0.41–0.60 = moderate agreement; 0.61–0.80 = substantial agreement; and >
134 0.80 = almost perfect agreement. Finally, AA reviewed overall quality of extracted data and
135 edited the manuscript. Newcastle-Ottawa Scale adapted for prevalence studies
136 methodological quality assessment tool was also used [27]. The tool has three components in
137 general—the first component graded as five stars gives a due emphasis on the methodological
138 quality of each original study. The second component of the tool explores the comparability
139 of the study. The third component focuses on the outcome and statistical analysis of studies.
140 Articles with a score of ≥ 6 out of 10 were considered as high-quality. Accordingly, all
141 eligible studies had high quality scores.

142 **Data analysis**

143 Information about study designs, study sample and country were summarized using Microsoft
144 Excel and then exported to STATA/se version-14 for analysis. Meta-analysis of the
145 magnitude of IPIs was carried out using a random-effects model, generating a pooled
146 prevalence with 95% CIs. Heterogeneity among included studies was assessed using
147 Cochran's Q and I^2 statistic [28]. I^2 statistic estimates the percentage of heterogeneity across
148 studies. Forest plots were also used to estimate the pool effect sizes and weight of overall and
149 each included study with respective CI to offer a graphic summary of the data. Publication
150 bias was determined based on the symmetry of funnel plots [29], and Egger's test [30]. Sub-
151 group analysis was carried out, based on age of participants and regional states, because of
152 the presence of significant heterogeneity across the included studies.

153 **Results**

154 Our search yielded 2,896 articles; of these, 442 duplications and 2,411 unrelated articles were
155 excluded. Kappa coefficient revealed that agreement rate between the two reviewers for the
156 included articles was 0.81. Fifteen full-text articles [32-46] were excluded due to unmet
157 outcome of interest or location. Finally, 43 eligible studies representing 20,008 participants
158 met the inclusion criteria for this review that determine the burden of IPIs (**Figure 1**).

159 **Descriptive characteristics of the included studies**

160 Descriptive characteristics for the included epidemiological studies is presented in Table 1.
161 Of these, 42 studies were cross-sectional in design and only one study was case-control [47].
162 Children were classified based on presence versus absence of an IPI for any species. The
163 largest sample size was reported by the study conducted by Grimes J et al [50] and smallest
164 for the study done by Mulatu G [16]. Similarly, the prevalence of IPI was highest for the
165 study conducted by Worku L et al [48] and lowest for the study conducted by Zemene T [49]
166 (**Table 1**).

167 **Prevalence of IPIs in children**

168 The overall prevalence of IPIs with one or more species was 48.2% (95% CI: 40.1, 56.3%) in
169 Ethiopian children (**Figure 2**). We performed subgroup analyses based on regional states and
170 age of participants as there was significant heterogeneity across included studies. For instance,
171 the prevalence of IPIs was 52.4% (95% CI: 41.3, 63.5) in school-age children and 52.1%
172 (95% CI: 37.3, 66.8) of children with IPIs lived in Amhara regional state (**Table 2**). Overall
173 Egger's test revealed no statistically significant publication bias, p-value = 0.62 (**Additional**
174 **file 1**).

175 **Association of residence and hand washing practice with IPIs**

176 Five studies were included to determine the association of hand washing before eating on IPIs
177 (**Table 3**). Children without hand washing before eating experienced six times more likely
178 the occurrence of IPIs (OR: 5.6 (95% CI: 3.4, 9.3)) as compared to hand washing before
179 eating (**Figure 3**). However, the association between residence (urban versus rural) showed a
180 non-significant association with IPIs (OR: 1.1 (95% CI: 0.5, 2.1) (**Figure 4**).

181 **Discussions**

182 This study estimated the pooled prevalence of IPIs with one or more species in Ethiopian
183 children and its association with residence and hand washing practice, using the documented
184 data from systematic literature review, which was assembled from different regions of the
185 country. After diligent search through scientific databases, scientific reports and grey
186 literature, 43 studies were included in the final analysis. Accordingly, the overall pooled
187 prevalence of IPIs among Ethiopian children was 48.2%. This finding was in line with
188 previous studies that revealed 42.5% IPIs in Syria [51], 47.6% in Afghanistan [52] and 38%
189 in Iran [53]. In contrast, the prevalence of IPIs observed in current study is higher compared
190 to studies in Thailand that reported 38.8% [54], in Shush country (5.14%) [55], in Turkey
191 (17%) [56] and in Korea (10.5%) [57]. This observed variation could be due to socio-
192 economic status, poor hygienic practice and sanitary facilities, inadequate safe drinking water
193 and environmental factors as well as different methods used for the diagnosis of IPIs.

194 We performed sub-group analysis based on the age of participants and regional states of the
195 country. Accordingly, the evidence revealed that the prevalence of IPIs among school-age
196 children was two-fold higher than that in under five-children. The difference observed
197 between under-five and school-age children might be because of the following reasons—first,
198 close contact between students and unhygienic conditions in the school compound; second,
199 variation in sanitation and human development indices; and finally, due to implementation of
200 continuing deworming programme for under-five children by ministry of health. Likewise,
201 the highest prevalence of IPIs were observed in Amhara regional states and the lowest
202 prevalence was in Tigray state. This regional discrepancy might be because of cultural habits
203 (sanitary status) among the regions, variations in methodology and sample size. The
204 advancement of public health measures and policy implementation could also vary across
205 regions that might attribute for the difference.

206 In an effort to examine the association between residence and hand washing before eating and
207 IPIs, hand washing before eating was associated with a significant reduction in the
208 occurrence of IPIs. Indeed, IPIs is frequently caused by *hookworms*, *ascaris lumbricoides* and
209 *trichuris trichiura* and affected over one billion individuals globally [58]. This could be due
210 to probable to be hand contaminated with cysts of *giardia*, *cryptosporidium* and other
211 species. The meager association between residence and IPIs in this meta-analysis is supported

212 by previous studies [60, 61]. This might be because of variations among studies, although
213 Egger’s test for publication bias showed no statistically significant evidence, p-value = 0.06.

214 The findings of this study may have both clinical and public health implications towards
215 scaling up effective and efficient management of IPIs by informing decision makers and
216 practitioners. In other words, understanding the magnitude and distribution of IPIs is an
217 important precondition for planning and evaluating intervention programs. For instance, safe
218 water and personal hygiene as a basic human right will indisputably result in major health
219 improvements and prevention of different diseases including parasitic infections [59]. That is,
220 since almost all of IPIs are feco-oral communicable infections, delivery of tape water and
221 latrines, health education on personal hygiene and environmental sanitation are crucial to
222 control and reduce IPIs in the country.

223 However, these findings need to be considered in the context of some important limitations;
224 these include: (i) significant heterogeneity across studies might have contributed for meager
225 association between residence and IPIs, although presumably children in urban areas have
226 better access to personal and environmental hygiene; (ii) this study did not determine other
227 possible risk factors contributing to the occurrence of IPIs; (iii) the gold standard diagnosis of
228 Pinworm infection is Gram staining, though several studies had employed only wet smear;
229 and (iv) stool samples were taken at once but standard diagnosis usually take at least 3
230 samples.

231 **Conclusion**

232 This meta-analysis summarized a high pooled prevalence of IPIs in Ethiopian children
233 especially among school-age children. Establishment of applicable sanitation services and
234 health education for hand washing will help make a healthier childhood.

235 **List of abbreviations**

AA	Amanuel Abajobir
AT	Aster Tadesse
FW	Fasil Wagnew
IPIs	Intestinal Parasitic Infections
OR	Odds Ratio

236

237 **Declarations**

238 **Ethics approval and consent to participate**

239 Not applicable

240 **Consent to publication**

241 Not applicable

242 **Availability of data and material**

243 -The datasets used and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the
244 corresponding author on reasonable request.

245 -PRISMA checklist

246 **Competing interests**

247 The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

248 **Funding**

249 Not applicable

250 **Authors' contribution**

251 FW involved in the conception of research idea; (FW, AT, AA) undertook data extraction,
252 analysis, interpretation, and manuscript write-up. All authors read and approved the final
253 manuscript.

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540 Figure legends

541 **Figure 1:- Flowchart diagram describing selection of studies for the burden of IPIs and**
542 **association with residence and hand washing practice in Ethiopian children, 2018**

543 **Figure 2:- Forest Plot of the 31 studies that quantitatively assessed the pooled**
544 **prevalence of IPIs, 2018.**

545 **Figure 3: Forest Plot of the 6 studies that quantitatively assessed the effect of hand**
546 **washing before eating on the occurrences of IPIs, 2018**

547 **Figure 4:- Forest Plot of the 6 studies that quantitatively assessed the effect of residence**
548 **on the occurrences of IPIs, 2018.**

549 **Additional Files**

550 **Additional file 1:- Funnel plot of the included studies for checking publication bias.**

551

552 **Table 1: Descriptive summary of 31 included studies on the prevalence of intestinal**
553 **parasitic infections and association with residence and hand washing in Ethiopian**
554 **children.**

Authors name	year	Region	Design	Age of subjects	Sample size	No of people with outcome	Prevalence (%)	Quality score
Gemechu et al[62]	2017	SNNP	CS	<5yr	167	29	17.45	7
Girum Tadesse [63]	2001	SNNP	CS	school age	415	113	27.2	9
AidadeLucio et al[64]	2016	Amhara	CS	school age	393	234	59.6	7
Tamirat Hailegebri el[7]	2016	Amhara	CS	school age	359	235	65.5	7
Abossie A et al[65]	2012	SNNP	CS	school age	400	324	81	8
Zemene T et al[49]	2014	Amhara	CS	<5yr	217	38	17.4	7
Ageseew A et al[66]	2015	Amhara	CS	<5yr	401	141	35.2	8
Mathewos B et al[67]	2012	Amhara	CS	school age	261	174	66.7	8
Gelaw A et al[19]	2012	Amhara	CS	school age	304	104	34.2	8
Tadege B et al[68]	2015	SNNP	CS	school age	374	254	67.9	8

Mulatu G [16]	2011	SNNP	CS	<5yr	158	42	26.6	7
Beyene G et al [69]	2012	Oromia	CS	school age	260	129	49.6	6
Hailu T et al [70]	2017	Amhara	CS	school age	409	193	47.2	7
Reji P et al [71]	2008	Oromia	CS	school age	358	127	35.5	8
Teferae E et al [72]	2010	Oromia	CS	school age	715	346	48.4	7
Alemayehu B et al [73]	2015	SNNP	CS	school age	503	363	72.2	6
Yirgalem G et al [74]	2013	Oromia	CS	<5yr	374	91	24.3	7
Firdu T et al [47]	2011	SNNP	Case-control	school age	230	84	36.52	8
Worku L et al [48]	2013	Amhara	CS	school age	385	372	96.6	9
Begna T et al [75]	2013	SNNP	CS	school age	492	131	26.6	9
Grimes J et al [50]	2017	SNNP	CS	school age	3729	874	23	7
Daniel G et al [76]	2017	Oromia	CS	school age	279	85	30.5	7
Tilahun A et al [77]	2010	Amhara	CS	school age	384	211	54.9	7
Yami A et al [78]	2008	Oromia	CS	school age	855	403	47.1	9
Abebe Alemu et al [79]	2009	Amhara	CS	school age	319	263	82.4	7
Amare B [80]	2008	Amhara	CS	school age	405	92	22.7	8
Tadesse D [81]	2000	Tigray	CS	school age	800	285	35.6	8
Derso A [82]	2012	Amhara	CS	school age	385	170	44.2	8
Ayalew A et al [9]	2010	Amhara	CS	school age	704	562	79.8	6
Legesse M et al [83]	2003	Oromia	CS	school age	259	217	83.8	6
Alamneh A et al [84]	2014	Amhara	CS	school age	380	170	44.2	7
Tulu et al. [85]	2014	Amhara	CS	School age	340	89	26.2	8
Feleke et al. [86]	2018	Amhara	CS	<5	225	49	21.8	6

Wegayehu et al. [87]	2011	Amhara	CS	school age	284	81	28.5	7
Aranzazu A et al [88]	2016	Amhara	CS	School age	396	306	77.5	6
Bitew et al. [89]	2016	Amhara	CS	School age	384	251	65.6	7
Mulusew A	2014	Amhara	CS	School age	357	245	68.4	7
Abate et al [90]	2013	Amhara	CS	School age	410	255	62.3	7
Aida de Lucio [64]	2016	Amhara	CS	School age	393	216	55	8
Teha Shumbej [91]	2015	SNNP	CS	<5	377	88	23.3	6
Ayalew et al. [92]	2008	Dire-Dawa	CS	School age	655	311	47.5	7
Liza A.[93]	2010	SNNP	CS	<5	288	245	85	8
Gizaw et al.[94]	2018	Amhara	CS	<5	225	58	25.8	6

555 CS=Cross-Sectional, SNNP= Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples

556 **Table 2: Subgroup analysis based on regions and age of participants among diabetes**
 557 **patients**

558

Variables	Characteristics	Estimates with 95% CI	P-value
Age of participant	Under-five children	24.23(17.44-31.02)	<0.001
	School-age children	52.43(41.37-63.5)	
Region	Amhara	52.1(37.3-66.8)	<0.001
	Oromia	45.1(30.9-59.3)	
	SNNP	43.9(24.9-62.9)	
	Tigray	35.6(32.2-38.9)	

559 SNNP= Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples

560 **Table 3 the effect of hand washing before eating on intestinal parasitic infections in**
 561 **Ethiopian children.**

Authors and year	Region	Hand washing	Intestinal parasites		OR(with 95% CI)
		Before eating	Positive	negative	
Gemechu A et al,2017[62]	Southern	Yes	7	83	1
		NO	22	25	4.70(1.88-11.75)
Ayalew A et al,2010[9]	Amhara	Yes	261	110	1
		No	301	32	3.96(2.58-6)
Abera A et al,2014[84]	Amhara	Yes	135	191	1
		No	35	24	2.06(1.17-3.62)
Tadege B et al,2015[68]	SNNP	Yes	57	156	1
		No	140	21	14.02(8-24.3)
Alemu A et al,2015[66]	Amhara	Yes	6	96	1
		No	86	213	6.46(2.73-15.3)
Hailu et al, 2017[70]	Amhara	Yes	128	227	1
		No	40	14	2.90(1.52-5.53)
Teha et al. 2015[91]	SNNP	Yes	67	186	1
		No	21	191	4.4(2.6-7.6)
Gizew et al. 2018[94]	Amhara	Yes	10	92	1
		No	48	75	5.8(2.7-12.4)
Tegegne E. et al. 2017[95]	Amhara	Yes	22	148	1
		No	43	10	28.9(12.7-65.7)

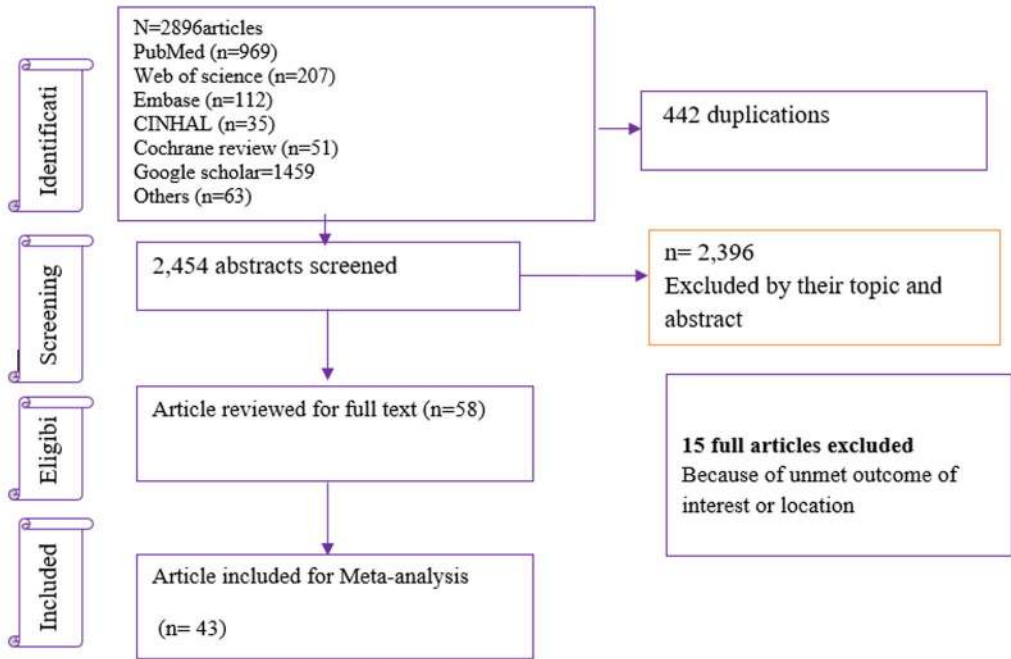
562 ^ SNNP= Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples

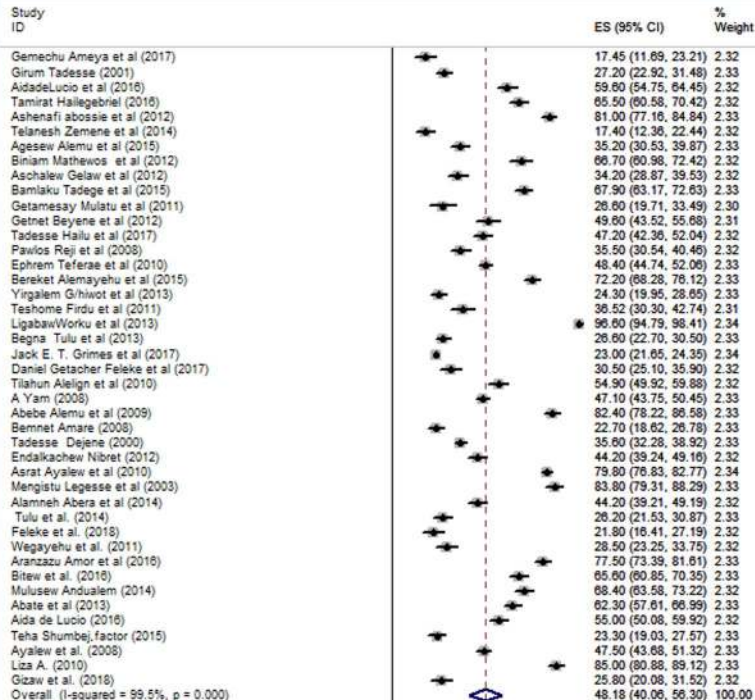
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NOTE: Weights are from random effects analysis

