INTESTINAL PARASITES AND DIARRHOEA IN SRI LANKAN CHILDREN

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The protozoans Entamoeba histolytica, Giardia lamblia and Cryptosporidium and the helminth Trichuris trichiura are causally associated with diarrhoea. We present a study of their role in childhood diarrhoea in Sri Lanka.

Specimens of stools from children presenting with diarrhoea to ward 2 of the Lady Ridgeway Hospital were examined for Salmonella sp., Shigella sp., Enteropathogenic E.coli, Campylobacter sp., Vibrio cholerae, V. parahaemolyticus, Rotavirus, Entamoeba histolytica, helminth ova, Cryptosporidium cysts and other cysts. In a series of 940 children with acute diarrhoea, 85 (9%) had parasitic infestations, 57 (6%) had parasites which are known to cause diarrhoea. In 39 (4.1%) of these 57, the parasite was the only pathogen detected.

Cryptosporidium, G.lamblia and E. histolytica were associated with 2.7%, 1.0% and 0.5% of diarrhoeal episodes respectively. A concomittant infection with round worms appeared to prolong the duration of diarrhoea in rotavirus infections. In bacterial or viral infections where one would expect a watery or mucoid diarrhoea, blood and mucus diarrhoea was observed when there was concomittant infection with intestinal parasites. More malnutrition was noticed among children with parasitic infestations than among children without. In conclusion intestinal parasites are responsible for 6% of acute diarrhoea in Sri Lankan children and appear to affect the outcome of disease in bacterial and viral diarrhoeas.