

A-17: Distribution of symptomatic and asymptomatic malaria in the Kurunegala District

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A population of 4,791 residents in 10 villages of 3 different MOH (Medical Officer of Health) areas of the Kurunegala District, a malaria endemic area, was screened for malaria parasites by examination of both thin and thick blood films, within a 6 month period from January to June 1991. Every case of malaria infection detected was evaluated clinically for a detailed assessment of clinical symptoms by the use of a questionnaire.

A total of 178 malaria infections were detected, of which 61 were *Plasmodium falciparum*, 114 *Plasmodium vivax* and 3 mixed infections due to both *Plasmodium falciparum* and *Plasmodium vivax*.

Of the malaria infections detected 14.6% were truly asymptomatic, in that they had not experienced any clinical symptoms; even during a period of a month preceding the time of detecting parasite (*Plasmodium falciparum* 38%, *Plasmodium vivax* 50% and mixed infections 12%) Another 26.4% of patients were asymptomatic at the time their malaria infection was detected but they had experienced some malarial symptoms during the preceding month (*Plasmodium falciparum* 38%, *Plasmodium vivax* 62%). The remaining 59% of patients were symptomatic to varying extents (*Plasmodium falciparum* 30%, *Plasmodium vivax* 70%).

Passive case detection alone will thus not be sufficient to adequately control the malaria parasite rate in malarious villages in the Kurunegala District, since the proportion of asymptomatic malaria parasite carriers can be considerable in such villages.