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THE PREVALENCE AND FEATURES OF SUBCLINICAL MALARIA IN AN ENDEMIC AREA OF SRI LANKA.

A study investigating the clinical nature of malaria, particularly with respect to subclinical malaria infections, in an endemic area of southern Sri Lanka revealed that in the case of 68% of 181 malaria infections detected at six mass blood surveys, the persons were unaware of being sick, to the extent that they did not feel the need to seek treatment. Their clinical state was assessed by administering a questionnaire. In 44% (n= 48) of the subclinical infections, the persons were completely free of any symptom, 75% of whom had P.falciparum infections. In this subclinical group paroxysm-associated symptoms were conspicuous absent while 'backache', 'sweating' and 'hypochondrial pain in left side' were more prominent in intensity and the prevalence when compared to that of a group of symptomatic malaria patients.

The subclinical infections sustained significantly lower parasite densities in blood (mean percentage parasitaemia = 0.01) than clinically patent infections (mean percentage parasitaemia = 0.08) ($t=2.95$; $p < 0.001$), and the chances of their being detected by the existing systems of surveillance were thus very small. A significantly higher proportion of subclinical P. falciparum infections had gametocytes in the peripheral blood (41%) than did symptomatic patients (24%) ($X2$ 6.55 $p<0.05$). Although the subclinical infections of either species did not infect a greater proportion of mosquitoes than did the clinically patent infections, they did lead to 4.4 fold higher oocyst densities in infected mosquitoes, as assessed in a sample of patients. These findings imply that subclinical infections, particularly those of P. falciparum, is an important reservoir of malaria under these transmission conditions in Sri Lanka.