

SECTION A

001/A

The knowledge, attitudes and practices about lymphatic filariasis and the Mass Drug Administration Programme in school children of different ethnic groups residing in a filariasis endemic area of Sri Lanka

M M S C Premaratne¹, N Ameen², G Erandu², S D Fernando^{1*}

¹*Department of Parasitology, Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo*

²*Medical students, Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo*

This cross sectional study compares the knowledge, attitudes and practices about lymphatic filariasis and Mass Drug Administration (MDA) programme, held by school children of two different ethnic groups; Sinhalese and Muslims, residing in a bancroftian filariasis endemic area in the Galle district of Sri Lanka. The population in this area has received five rounds of MDA from the anti-filarial campaign since the inception of the programme for elimination of lymphatic filariasis. 150 children from each ethnic group, attending grades 9, 10 and 11 were selected using stratified and systematic random sampling methods. A pre-tested structured questionnaire was administered by school teachers. Knowledge was assessed on epidemiology, transmission, clinical manifestations, diagnosis, prevention and the MDA campaign. Marks were given out of a total score of 100. All respondents had heard about lymphatic filariasis. The overall knowledge regarding the disease and the MDA programme was low among both groups of children with mean scores of less than 50.0 and no significant difference between the two groups. (Sinhalese: 49.95; Muslim: 47.08 and $p=0.042$). The knowledge of the Muslim children with regards to the transmission and clinical features of filariasis was significantly better than that of Sinhalese children ($p<0.001$ and $p<0.001$, respectively). A high proportion (88%) of children from both ethnic groups was aware of the role played by the mosquitoes in the transmission of the disease. However, their knowledge on the geographic distribution of the disease, clinical features, diagnosis and the preventive measures was poor as compared to that of transmission, as only 1% identified all three filariasis-endemic provinces, 19% was able to recognize a picture of elephantiasis, 56% were aware of the night blood sampling and only 43% named MDA as a preventive measure. Only 33% had mentioned the school system as a source of information. Hence, education on lymphatic filariasis should be emphasized in the school curriculum, especially with regard to the importance of consumption of drugs distributed for the MDA and vector control methods. Compliance to the Mass Drug Administration programme held in July 2006 was higher among Sinhalese (72%) than Muslim children (70%). A greater proportion of Muslim children (47.3%) than Sinhalese children (10%) admitted that they would avoid a person with elephantiasis. Emphasis should be placed on health education programmes to be concerned more on changing the attitudes and perceptions of the public regarding this neglected tropical disease.