

PREVALENCE OF DERMATOLOGICAL DISEASES IN SCHOOL CHILDREN IN A SEMI-URBAN AREA IN PONDICHERRY

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A total of 3835 children attending schools in the Gorimedu region of Pondicherry were examined. Prevalence rate of skin diseases was 49.1%. The most common dermatological diseases detected were pediculosis capitis (50.2%), miliaria (15.1%), pityriasis alba (9%) and pyoderma (8.8%). The prevalence of leprosy and ichthyosis vulgaris was only 0.8% and 0.3% respectively.

Key words : Prevalence, Dermatological diseases, School children.

Survey of the dermatoses in school children reflects the picture of the dermatoses in the society in that age group and when it is not possible to screen the society by mass surveys, school survey is useful. It will not only tell the prevalence of various dermatoses in different age groups, but will also help in detecting some of the infections or serious dermatoses in the early stage. There are reports of prevalence of skin diseases detected during routine school health surveys by general physicians.¹⁻⁵ But reports on screening of school children for skin diseases by dermatologists are scanty.^{6,8}

Materials and Methods

This study was conducted during July and August 1986. A total of 3835 students attending schools in the Gorimedu region which is a semi-urban area were examined. Majority of children were from low socio-economic strata. A team of skin specialists scanned the whole body skin of these students in day-light. Special care was taken to detect asymptomatic skin lesions.

Results

Out of 4100 children enrolled in the nine schools, 3835 were examined, giving a coverage of 93.5%. A total of 1883 (49.1%) children had skin problems; of which 691 (36.7%) were

boys and 1192 (63.3%) were girls. The dermatological lesions/diseases recorded in these children are given in table I.

Comments

This survey recorded a high percentage of prevalence of dermatological diseases (49.1%) in comparison to a varying percentage of 8.7 to 35% recorded by different authors.¹⁻⁶ This may be explained by the fact that this study was conducted in a semi-urban society and during the tropical summer months of south India. The high prevalence of pediculosis capitis in this study unlike that reported recently from Meerut⁶ is not unexpected. This is because our students belong to such families where pediculosis capitis is not considered a disease and so they do not take any precautionary measures or treatment. This is an area where health education is needed for the patients. The prevalence of miliaria was next to pediculosis capitis. This was also expected because the survey was conducted in July and August when the weather was hot and humid. Incidentally the prevalence of scabies was low; this was due to the habit of daily bathing in the children and the lack of over-crowding because of absence of a cold winter in the south. The prevalence of leprosy was 4 per thousand; this is a very significant number and makes the situation alarming. This is an indication that there must be more cases of leprosy in the area to which these children belong. The prevalence of

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Table I. Prevalence of dermatological diseases in school children.

Disease	Number of cases in the age group			Total	Percentage
	2-5	6-10	Above 10		
1. Pediculosis capitis	51	586	308	945	50.2
2. Miliaria	22	165	98	285	15.1
3. Pityriasis alba	9	121	40	170	9.0
4. Pyoderma	12	120	33	165	8.8
5. Molluscum contagiosum	6	31	18	55	2.9
6. Warts	1	35	17	53	2.8
7. Pityriasis versicolor	1	2	30	33	1.8
8. Scabies	1	25	3	29	1.5
9. Phrynoderma	—	20	7	27	1.4
10. Acne vulgaris	—	—	24	24	1.3
11. Cafe-au-lait spot	—	12	12	24	1.3
12. Vitiligo	—	5	13	18	0.9
13. Leprosy	—	9	7	16	0.8
14. Tinea corporis	—	3	4	7	0.4
15. Contact dermatitis	—	3	2	5	0.3
16. Keloid	1	4	—	5	0.3
17. Ichthyosis vulgaris	—	1	4	5	0.3
18. Lichen striatus	—	4	—	4	0.2
19. Keratoderma	—	—	4	4	0.2
20. Seborrheic dermatitis	—	—	3	3	0.1
21. Candidial intertrigo	—	1	1	2	0.1
22. Polymorphic light eruption	—	1	—	1	0.05
23. Pityriasis rosea	—	1	—	1	0.05
24. Neurofibromatosis	—	—	1	1	0.05
25. Lichen planus	—	1	—	1	0.05
Total	104	1150	629	1883	

other infective dermatoses like pyoderma, molluscum contagiosum, warts and pityriasis alba was as expected. Surprisingly, there were no cases of tuberculosis of the skin and tinea capitis. Tinea corporis too was found in very few children. Pityriasis versicolor was found in 33 children which shows that the disease is not restricted to adults only but affects a substantial percentage of children also.⁷⁻⁹ Ichthyosis was seen in only 5 children which is contrary to the

belief that ichthyosis is more common in south India. There was no case of psoriasis and only one case of lichen planus. This shows the rarity of these dermatoses in children.

As a majority of these dermatoses were asymptomatic, coupled with health care ignorance of the parents, most of these children never sought medical advice. School surveys should thus be made obligatory to find out the magnitude of the dermatological problems and to detect

the treatable dermatoses including leprosy in their early stages.

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