



TROPICAL DERMATOLOGY

CHILDHOOD LEPROSY - STILL A PROBLEM IN THE ERA OF ELIMINATION!

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Introduction: In the era of leprosy elimination, childhood leprosy is a surrogate marker of recent transmission of disease.

Objective: To study clinical profile of childhood cases of leprosy presenting at a tertiary care hospital in Northern India, in the decade after its elimination.

Materials and Methods: A retrospective analysis of 6-year data retrieved from case records of patients younger than 18 years registered in the leprosy clinic at a tertiary care hospital in Northern India was undertaken. Demographic (age, sex) and disease characteristics (history of contact, duration of disease, type of leprosy, bacteriological status and presence of reactions and disabilities) were noted.

Results: Of the 2226 cases registered in leprosy clinic, 163 (7.3%) were children with mean age of 12.7 + 1.7 years and with a male preponderance (4:1). A history of contact with leprosy was present in 17 (10.4%). Mean duration of illness before diagnosis was 27.3 + 8.1 months. Based on clinicopathological and bacteriological parameters, borderline tuberculoid leprosy was the commonest clinical type of leprosy (63; 38.7%) followed by borderline lepromatous (45; 27.6%) while indeterminate leprosy was seen in 3 (1.8%). There were no patients with histoid or tuberculoid leprosy. Slit skin smear was positive in 26 (15.9%) and lepra reactions were observed in 33 (20.2%) patients with 18 (11%) having type 1 and 15 (9.2%) having type 2 reactions. Grade 1 disability was noted in 11 (6.7%) and grade 2 in 51 (31.2%) children.

Conclusion: Despite elimination, children (and a third of them with disabilities) continue to present in alarming numbers in India, indicating recent transmission and importantly gaps in the national program aimed at leprosy elimination. This data also emphasises the need for early detection of childhood cases through proactive methods to prevent development of disabilities.

