ABSTRACT

Diarrhoea is an important cause of malnutrition, morbidity and mortality among children in Yemen. Cryptosporidium infections are an important cause of diarrhea in children particularly malnutrition and immunocompromised patients, but their investigations are rarely required by the treating physicians in apparently immunocompetent children. This study was aimed to find the prevalence of intestinal coccidian parasites in country with high incidence rate of malnutrition. Between May 2016 and October 2016, 228 fecal samples from 228 selected school children in Al Turbah city, Taiz governorate, Yemen, aged between 6 and 15 years were examined using wet-mount preparations and formal concentration method then films stained by modified acid-fast staining. Also data of children were collected including demographic data, and sources of water. Findings of positive intestinal coccidian parasites were analyzed in relation with demographic data, and sources of water. The prevalence of Cryptosporidium species, Cyclospora species and Isospora belli were 75.9%, 45.6% and 1.75% respectively. There was significant association between positive of Cryptosporidium species and females (OR=2.1 times, P<0.01), and spring water source (OR=4 times, P=0.04), while there was no significant association between positive of Cryptosporidium species and others factors studied. Also there was no significant association between positive of Cyclospora species and Isospora belli and children sex, age groups, or different sources of water. In conclusion the study highlights the high prevalence of coccidian parasites among immunocompromised school children in Yemen. The clinicians in Yemen need to be aware that coccidian parasites are a potential cause of childhood diarrhea even in immunocompetent children.

KEYWORDS: Coccidian, Cryptosporidium, Cyclospora, Isospora, children, Yemen

INTRODUCTION

Coccidian is a primary microscopic parasite that infects the intestinal system of most human and animal organisms. These organisms are one of the main concerns of doctors, especially with increasing the rate of HIV. Coccidian parasites (Cryptosporidium spp., Isospora belli, and Cyclospora spp.) are the most common intestinal parasites in immunocompromised patients that can usually lead to fatal acute diarrhea while causing moderate and limited gastrointestinal disorders in individuals with a natural immune system.[1,2,3] Cryptosporidium and Isospora have been identified as important and widespread causes of diarrheal disease in both immunocompromised individuals and those with immunodeficiency causes such as acute malnutrition as well as people who move from a clean environment to a contaminated environment such as tourists so it has been described as traveler disease.[4,5] Acute or chronic diarrhea syndromes caused by these parasites are usually accompanied by weight loss, dehydration, abdominal pain and malabsorption syndrome in immunocompromised patients.[6] Chronic diarrhea in malnourished children can also increase the incidence of these parasites and mortality in these patients.[7] Coccidiosis diarrhea has been observed with fluid loss of 25 l/day in infected patients, which can last for weeks in immunocompromised patients.[7]

Isospora belli is one of the opportunistic coccidian parasites that affects HIV/AIDS patients, especially in developing countries of Africa, Asia, and Latin America with low levels of hygiene. It is always considered as a neglected parasite and there is lack of enough investigation, particularly in immunocompromised patients, so the previous factors lead to underestimate this infection.[8] Various risk factors for coccidian parasites such as use of contaminated drinking water, exposure to animals, lack of sewage, poverty, etc., have been reported to be associated with coccidian gastrointestinal infections.[1] In Yemen, the prevalence of coccidian parasites has not been studied, not among immunocompromised patients as well as children with diarrhea or malnutrition in which the malnutrition rate among children in Yemen raised due...
to the Saudi-Emirati aggression against Yemen. Therefore, it may not be out of context to suggest that identification of these so-called opportunistic pathogens should be an essential part of investigations for childhood diarrhea, particularly with the rise of malnutrition rate among children in Yemen which affect the immune status of the children. With this aim, this study was conducted to find the prevalence of intestinal coccidian parasites among children in country with high incidence of malnutrition and determine some risk factors associated with this infection in Al Turbah city, Taiz governorate, Yemen.

**SUBJECTS AND METHODS**

The study conducted in the Faculty of Sciences, Taiz University, Taiz city, Yemen. Between May 2016 and October 2016, 228 fecal samples from 228 selected school children in Al Turbah city, Taiz governorate, aged between 6 and 15 years were examined. As a standard protocol, after receiving the samples in the laboratory, stool samples were processed and wet-mount preparations with both saline and iodine were prepared and screened within 2 h of sample collection to look for motile Trophozoites, larvae, ova, and cyst. Stool samples were also processed by the formulin-ether concentration technique and reexamined with saline and iodine wet-mount preparations as well as stained with Modified acid-fast stain to look for *Cryptosporidium*, *Cyclospora*, and *Isospora* oocysts. Each wet-mount preparation and stained fecal smears were examined by a clinical microbiologist and the researcher (ENAS) independently and findings were cross-checked. After those children demographic data and sources of water were collected in standard questionnaire. Next, findings of positive intestinal coccidian parasites were analyzed in relation with demographic data, and sources of water.

**RESULTS**

The study results illustrated in tables 1 to 7. The prevalence of *Cryptosporidium* spp, *Cyclospora* spp and *Isospora belli* were 75.9%, 45.6% and 1.75% respectively. There was significant association between positive of *Cryptosporidium* species and females (OR= 4 times, CI=1.0-17 P=0.04), while there was no significant association between positive of *Cryptosporidium* spp and others factors studied. Also there was no significant association between positive of *Cyclospora* spp, *Isospora belli* and children sex, age groups, or different sources of water.

**DISCUSSION**

*Cryptosporidium*, *Isospora* and *Cyclospora* have become increasingly prevalent in patients with immune deficiency and normal immunity people. Humans can infect Coccidian infections through fecal-oral route, through direct person-to-person or animal-to-person contact in addition to consuming contaminated water or food while no animal reservoir for human *Isospora* has been identified. In the current study the prevalence of *Cryptosporidium* spp was 75.9%, while *Cyclospora* spp was next commonest coccidian pathogen (45.6%). The results of this study are higher than that reported in general population of developing and developed countries in which the rate of *Cryptosporidium* oocysts was recorded from 6.1 and 2.1%, respectively. Also the current study rate of *Cryptosporidium* spp (75.9%) was even higher than the prevalence rates of Cryptosporidiosis among HIV/AIDS diarrheic patients which ranged from 10% to 33.4% or among diarrheic children with normal immunity (7%). In the current study, there was significant association between positive of *Cryptosporidium* species and females (OR= 2.1 times, CI=1.1-3.9, P<0.01) (table 2). The current result is different from other studies carried out in developed and developing countries in which the rate of *Cryptosporidium* species infections are roughly equal in both sexes.

Although animals are known to be the potential source of *Cryptosporidiosis*, aquatic sources are also known as one of the major sources of *Cryptosporidium*. In the current study, there was a significant correlation between positive *Cryptosporidium* species and the source of spring water (OR = 4 times, CI = 1.0-17, P = 0.04) (Table 3). This association can be explained by that *Cryptosporidium* spp. which can be found in surface water and groundwater resources through fecal contamination, which can affect drinking water resources. Interestingly, *Cryptosporidium* oocysts are able to pass through the water treatment process because of their resistance to routine disinfectants and their small size.
The prevalence of *Isospora* spp in the current study was very low (1.75%) comparing with high rates of *Cryptosporidium* spp (75.9%) and *Cyclospora* spp (45.6%). Although, *Isosporiasis* has worldwide distribution especially in tropical and subtropical regions, but there are rare reports of this infection.  
*Isospora belli* is considered as an opportunistic infection in immunocompromised individuals, mainly AIDS patients, all over the world. Moreover, *Isosporiasis* has been reported as the most prevalent intestinal parasitic disease among AIDS patients. Assis and colleagues reported the frequency rate 10.1% and 6.7% in HIV-positive patients for *Cryptosporidium* spp and *Isospora belli*, respectively. In another study, the prevalence rate of *Isosporiasis* in Nigeria was reported 3.1% in HIV-positive patients while no *Isospora* infection was observed in the healthy controls. As well, the current study finding is in agreement with other studies that have suggested low prevalence rate of *Isosporiasis* in immunocompetent or immunocompromised patients. However, treatment of *Isosporiasis* usually is successful in all types of cases but recurrence cases are common. It is known that detection of *Isospora* in direct examination of stool samples in most of laboratories is unusual. Alternatively, cases of *Isosporiasis* has been raised up together with increase of HIV-infected subjects that can increase gastrointestinal complications in immunocompromised patients. *Isosporiasis* is generally transmitted through ingestion of sporulated oocysts from contaminated food and water. Although some cases of homosexuality have been reported to have *Isosporiasis* more than other individuals, but because of the fact that *Isospora oocysts* require to mature and become infectious in the environment, direct contact with faeces is unlikely to be the usual course of transmission. Therefore, sanitation for water and food is very important in prevention programs. However, as explained, although reports of *Isosporiasis* cases are low, but this infection should be considered a neglected disease in Yemen, especially in people with immune disorders.

The results of this study highlight the fact that coccidian parasites should not be overlooked by the clinical microbiologists, while investigating cases of diarrhea, even if these are not requested by the physician. The fact that 75.9% of *Cryptosporidium* cases were seen among immunocompetent cases shows the existence of this pathogen even in non-immunocompromised pediatric population. *Cryptosporidium* is an important etiological agent and its diagnosis is of utmost importance as this is a useful guide for the prompt treatment of such cases. More importantly, it can be diagnosed by relatively simple and inexpensive techniques such as acid-fast staining, which can also help avoid invasive procedures such as colonoscopy and intestinal biopsies in cases of persistent diarrhea. We would also like to point out the fact that the data we have presented here shows the actual burden of this parasitic infection and perhaps less than the real one due to parasitic *oocysts* are shed intermittently, which may not necessarily correspond to periods of clinical symptoms. Correspondingly, *oocysts* may not be eliminated during the first stage of infection when the asexual stage of the life cycle predominates and clinical symptoms become apparent.

**CONCLUSION**

The study highlights the high prevalence of coccidian parasites among immunocompetent school children in Yemen. The clinicians in Yemen need to be aware that coccidian parasites are a potential cause of childhood diarrhea even in immunocompetent children.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

The authors would like to acknowledge Faculty of Medicine, Qinghai University in the Republic of China and the National Center of Public Health Laboratories in Taiz (NCPHL), Yemen for support and provided working space and materials.

**CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

"No conflict of interest associated with this work."

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Table 1: The prevalence of coccidian intestinal parasites among 228 children in Al-Torbah city in Yemen.

| Coccidian parasites     | Number | percentage |
|-------------------------|--------|------------|
| Cryptosporidum species  | 173    | 75.9       |
| Cyclospora species      | 104    | 45.6       |
| Isospora belli          | 4      | 1.75       |

Table 2. The prevalence rate of Cryptosporidium species in different sex and age of tested children.

| Characters            | Positive Cyp spp | OR  | 95% CI  | \( \chi^2 \) | \( P \) |
|-----------------------|------------------|-----|---------|--------------|--------|
| No                    | %                |     |         |              |        |
| Sex                   |                  |     |         |              |        |
| Male n=109            | 75               | 68.8| 0.4     | 0.22-0.8     | 5.7    | 0.01  |
| Female n=119          | 98               | 83.3| 2.1     | 1.1-3.9      | 5.7    | 0.01  |
| Age groups            |                  |     |         |              |        |
| 6-10 years n=92       | 72               | 78.2| 1.2     | 0.6-2.3      | 0.47   | 0.46  |
| 11-15 years n=136     | 101              | 74.3| 0.8     | 0.4-1.5      | 0.47   | 0.46  |

Table 3. The association between Cryptosporidium species infections and income and water sources for tested children.

| Characters            | Positive Cyp spp | OR  | 95% CI  | \( \chi^2 \) | \( P \) |
|-----------------------|------------------|-----|---------|--------------|--------|
| No                    | %                |     |         |              |        |
| Income                |                  |     |         |              |        |
| Low n=83              | 63               | 75.9| 1.0     | 0.5-1.8      | 0.0    | 0.99  |
| Moderate n=145        | 110              | 75.8| 0.99    | 0.5-1.8      | 0.0    | 0.99  |
| Water sources         |                  |     |         |              |        |
| Wells n=7             | 2                 | 85.7| 1.9     | 0.2-16.4     | 0.3    | 0.53  |
| Subterranean water n=143| 57             | 77  | 1.1     | 0.6-2        | 0.15   | 0.69  |
| Rain n=41             | 33               | 80.5| 1.3     | 0.5-32       | 0.5    | 0.44  |
| Springs n=35          | 23               | 92  | 4       | 1.0-17       | 4      | 0.04  |
| Treatment water n=7   | 5                | 71.4| 0.78    | 0.14-4.1     | 0.07   | 0.77  |
| wells+ subterranean water n=15 | 9 | 60 | 0.4 | 0.1-1.3 | 2.2 | 0.13 |
| rain+ subterranean water n=20 | 10 | 50 | 0.27 | 0.1-0.7 | 8 | 0.004 |

Table 4. The prevalence rate of Cyclospora species in different sex and age of tested children.

| Characters            | Positive Cyclospora spp | OR  | 95% CI  | \( \chi^2 \) | \( P \) |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|-----|---------|--------------|--------|
| No                    | %                       |     |         |              |        |
| Sex                   |                         |     |         |              |        |
| Male n=109            | 56                      | 51.4| 1.5     | 0.9-2.6      | 2.7    | 0.09  |
| Female n=119          | 48                      | 40.3| 0.6     | 0.3-1.0      | 2.7    | 0.09  |
| Age groups            |                         |     |         |              |        |
| 6-10 years n=92       | 44                      | 47.8| 1.16    | 0.6-1.9      | 0.3    | 0.58  |
| 11-15 years n=136     | 60                      | 44.1| 0.8     | 0.5-1.4      | 0.3    | 0.58  |
Table 5. The association between *Cyclospora* infections and income and water sources for tested children.

| Characters | Positive *Cyclospora* | OR  | 95%CI | \( \chi^2 \) | \( p \) |
|------------|----------------------|-----|-------|-----------|-------|
| **Income** |                      |     |       |           |       |
| Low n=83   | 42                   | 50.6| 1.37  | 0.79-2.3  | 1.3   | 0.25  |
| Moderate n=145 | 62               | 42.8| 0.7   | 0.4-1.25  | 1.3   | 0.25  |
| **Water sources** |                  |     |       |           |       |
| Wells n=7  | 3                    | 42.8| 0.8   | 0.19-4.0  | 0.02  | 0.88  |
| Subterranean water n=113 | 53    | 46.9| 1.1   | 0.65-1.8  | 0.15  | 0.69  |
| Rain n=41  | 16                   | 39  | 0.72  | 0.3-1.4   | 0.87  | 0.34  |
| Springs n=25| 11                | 44  | 0.9   | 0.4-2.1   | 0.02  | 0.86  |
| Treatment water n=7 | 1        | 14.3| 0.19  | 0.02-1.6  | 2.8   | 0.09  |
| wells+ subterranean water n=15 | 9     | 60  | 1.7   | 0.6-5.1   | 1.17  | 0.29  |
| rain+ subterranean water n=20 | 11     | 55  | 1.5   | 0.6-3.8   | 0.7   | 0.37  |

Table 6. The prevalence rate of *Isospora belli* in different sex and age of tested children.

| Characters | Positive *Isospora belli* | OR  | 95%CI | \( \chi^2 \) | \( p \) |
|------------|---------------------------|-----|-------|-----------|-------|
| **Sex**    |                           |     |       |           |       |
| Male n=109 | 2                         | 1.8 | 1.1   | 0.15-7.8  | 0.007 | 0.9   |
| Female n=119 | 2                       | 1.7 | 0.9   | 0.12-6   | 0.007 | 0.9   |
| **Age groups** |                    |     |       |           |       |
| 6-10 years n=92 | 2               | 2.2 | 1.57  | 0.2-10   | 0.15  | 0.69  |
| 11-15 years n=136 | 2                | 1.4 | 0.96  | 0.009-4.8 | 0.15  | 0.69  |

Table 7. The association between *Isospora belli* infections and income and water sources for tested children.

| Characters | Positive *Isospora belli* | OR  | 95%CI | \( \chi^2 \) | \( p \) |
|------------|---------------------------|-----|-------|-----------|-------|
| **Income** |                           |     |       |           |       |
| Low n=83   | 2                         | 2.4 | 1.7   | 0.2-12.7  | 0.32  | 0.52  |
| Moderate n=145 | 2            | 1.4 | 0.5   | 0.07-4   | 0.32  | 0.52  |
| **Water sources** |                   |     |       |           |       |
| Wells n=7  | 0                         | 0   | 0.0   | undefined | 0.12  | 0.74  |
| Subterranean water n=113 | 2     | 1.76| 1     | 0.14-7.3  | 0.003 | 0.98  |
| Rain n=41  | 1                         | 2.4 | 1.5   | 0.1-15   | 0.1   | 0.7   |
| Springs n=25 | 1               | 4   | 2.7   | 0.27-27  | 0.8   | 0.36  |
| Treatment water n=7 | 0       | 0   | 0.0   | undefined | 0.8   | 0.36  |
| wells+ subterranean water n=15 | 0     | 0   | 0.0   | undefined | 0.28  | 0.59  |
| rain+ subterranean water n=20 | 0     | 0   | 0.0   | undefined | 0.39  | 0.53  |