

# The Current Seroprevalence of Hepatitis C Virus in a Tertiary Care Centre in Vellore, Tamil Nadu

Sir,

In India about 20 million people are known to have Hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection<sup>(1)</sup> and a quarter of them expected to develop chronic liver disease in the next 10–15 years. The impact of this infection has just started to emerge in India. In the absence of efficient anti-HCV screening in our country, the HCV infection from various sources will continue to add to the disease pool.

In order to know the status of HCV infection in Vellore (Northern Tamil Nadu), 2227 serum samples were screened using the third-generation ELISA (Microlisa), random samples were taken from various representative groups. 1565 samples were taken from voluntary blood donors (care was taken to exclude professional/commercial blood donors), 164 from antenatal women, 310 from STD clinic attendees, and 188 from the Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)-positive patients enrolled for ART. HIV-positive patients were included so as to study the HIV-HCV co-infection.

Among the 2227 serum samples screened, 0.22% (5/2227) were positive for anti-HCV antibodies. The positive samples were confirmed by repeat assay. A prevalence rate of 0.22% was observed on the whole in the various groups. The seroprevalence of HCV varied from one group to another. In voluntary blood donors, 0.13% (2/1565) was detected; seropositivity was still lower (0.13%) than that reported from Madurai<sup>(2)</sup> (0.75%). In STD clinic attendees, it was 0.32% (1/310). This was however low in comparison to studies from JIPMER<sup>(3)</sup> and Agra,<sup>(4)</sup> which recorded a seroprevalence rate of 6% and 1%, respectively. There were no positives detected among the 164 antenatal women. Though Delhi study reported a prevalence of 1.03%,<sup>(5)</sup> our study correlated with Simla<sup>(6)</sup> study. The rate of HIV-HCV coinfection in the present study was 1.06%. In comparison with western data,<sup>(7)</sup> this was very low. Three recent studies on HCV-HIV coinfection from India have reported a prevalence of 3.02% in Andhra Pradesh,<sup>(8)</sup> 2.2% in Tamil Nadu,<sup>(9)</sup> and 1.6% in Lucknow.<sup>(10)</sup>

HCV would be responsible for emerging infection in India whose long-term implications will be felt in the decades to come. Though the prevalence rate of HCV and HCV-HIV coinfection was low in the present study, it was still a warning about the rising profile of the virus in apparently healthy individuals with the consequent risk of transmission of the virus unknowingly. The need for better prevention by health education and screening for HCV

in collaboration with public health authorities becomes mandatory. So in the present study, a preliminary report on the current prevalence of the HCV in our tertiary care centre has highlighted the need for further research in this field.

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