Large-scale entomological assessment of *Wuchereria bancrofti* transmission by dissection and PCR-ELISA in Gampaha district, Sri Lanka

N D A D Wijegunawardana, Y I N Silva Gunawardane*, Aresha Manamperi, H A C Hapuarachchi, K B A T Bandara, W Abeyewickreme

*1Molecular Medicine Unit, Faculty of Medicine, University of Kelaniya, Ragama
2Department of Parasitology, Faculty of Medicine, University of Kelaniya, Ragama

Entomological surveys are important tools for monitoring progress of lymphatic filariasis (Lf) eradication programs. In this study, dissection of *Culex quinquefasciatus* was compared with a Polymerase Chain Reaction – Enzyme Linked Immunosorbent Assay (PCR-ELISA) for pooled mosquitoes to assess filarial infection levels in the major vector of *Wuchereria bancrofti* in Gampaha district, following mass-treatment programme with diethylcarbamazine (DEC) and albendazole. Mosquitoes were collected in 30 sentinel and 15 non-sentinel sites in 15 Medical Officer of Health (MOH) areas of Gampaha district known for the presence of *W. bancrofti* transmission. Captured mosquitoes were dissected to determine the *W. bancrofti* larvae (L1, L2, L3). PCR was carried out using Deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) extracted from mosquito pools (15 body parts/pool) utilizing primers specific for the Wb-Sspl repeat. PCR products were analyzed by hybridization ELISA using fluorescein-labeled wild type specific probes. The prevalence of infected/infective mosquitoes in PCR pools (3 pools/site) was estimated using the PoolScreen™ algorithm and a novel probability-based method. The prevalence of infected mosquitoes with L1-L2 larvae of *W. bancrofti* ranged from 0%–8.54% by dissection and point estimates of infection prevalence as assayed by PCR-ELISA, ranged from 0% – 25.4%. Mosquitoes collected from all MOH areas (80%, N = 12), except for Minuwangoda, Dompe and Ragama, were positive for *W. bancrofti* larvae, with a prevalence rate ranging from 0.78% to 16.97% in both methods. Of 30 sentinel sites, 43.3% (N = 13) were positive for *W. bancrofti* transmission whereas it was evident in 40% (N = 6) of non-sentinel sites. The proportion of positive pools detected by the PCR-ELISA assay was higher than that obtained by the dissection indicating that PCR-ELISA assay is more sensitive than the dissection method in detecting infected/infective mosquitoes. Also results of this study showed that autochthonous transmission of *W. bancrofti* continues in the Gampaha district despite completion of the 5 year mass drug administration (MDA) programme. Therefore, we emphasize the use of more sensitive tools such as PCR-ELISA to monitor the impact of the MDA programme on disease transmission. This study also emphasizes that control measures should be further continued until the microfilaremic population is reduced to a level which could interrupt transmission in the area.

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*nilminis@graduate.hku.hk*  
Tel: 011-2960483