Infestation rate of lice in patients in a mental hospital, Seoul, Korea

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Abstract: We examined the infestation rate of head and/or body lice in patients in a mental hospital, Seoul, Korea on June 27-28, 1988. Of 438 women, 146 (33.3%) were positive with nits or worms of lice. Of 143 men, 22 (15.4%) were positive with those of lice. Regular control programs were necessary to this hospital.

Key words: Louse, epidemiology, mental hospital, Korea

Louse infestation had been prevalent not only in school children, but also in persons in mental hospitals or in orphanage in Korea (Pai et al., 1989; Pai, 1992; Ree et al., 1992; Huh et al., 1993). In late-June, 1988, a physician of a mental hospital asked if we could examine and control louse infestation in his hospital in Seoul, Korea. We visited the hospital on June 27 and 28, 1988 and examined the patients for louse infestation in six women's and two man's wards, where the head and/or body louse was known to be prevalent. The patients' age were all over 17. We examined hairs or body surfaces of each patient by naked eyes for the presence of nits or worms (adults and nymphs) of lice. We also asked the patients whether they saw the body louse and confirmed the body louse from seams of wears. At this survey, we regarded the louse found from the seams of wears or body surface as body lice, and from hair as head lice. Infested persons were treated with 0.1% permethrin shampoo without the follow-up examination.

Total number of patients examined was 581. Of 438 women, 146 (32.4%) were infested with nits or worms of lice. In 21 infested women, the lice were found both hairs and body surfaces. In seven positive women the lice were seen not from the hair but from the body surface. Of 143 men, 22 (15.4%) were infested: Two were infested only with nits or adults of head lice, 17 were infested with worms of body louse, and three were infested with both body and head lice. We could find lice from body surface of women. However, they did not look body louse, but they were believed to migrate from the hair due to over-crowding. Although, lice were found only on the body not in hairs from seven women, it was probably due to that they were transmitted directly from neighbours or that there was a miss-detection of lice in hairs. At the same hospital, results of mass delousing effect with bioallethrin in August and September, 1991 was reported. From those data, we could see the endemicity of head louse infestation had persisted till 1991 when the prevalence rate of head louse in a woman's ward was 70.0% (Pai, 1992). Why did this endemicity continue in this hospital? It should be considered that there was a ward for admission of vagrants supported by the municipal city hall. There was a continuous entrance and exit of the persons. Therefore,
although we controlled it at a certain point, new comers could bring lice again and again. Of 143 infested women, 47 (33.1%) were worm positive, and 95 (66.9%) only nit positive. It meant that there was active transmission in this group. The percentage of presence of worm from positive subjects in a group might anticipate the future status of the infestation (Huh et al., 1993). Only intensive and regular eradication program with mass chemotherapy can control this infestation.

**REFERENCES**


