The sero-epidemiology of infectious mononucleosis in Neyshabur, Northeast Iran during 2010–2014

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Methods: This cross-sectional descriptive epidemiological survey was performed to reveal the prevalence of IM in Neyshabur between 2010 and 2014. A total of 114 individuals were studied. Briefly, individuals with positive test for specific immunoglobulin G and immunoglobulin M in the agglutination test were determined as positive cases.

Results: The overall prevalence of IM was 14%. Mean ± SD of age for IM test was 18.96 ± 15.79. The age groups of 0–10 and 21–30 were the most positive cases in this period. In addition, 31–40 and over 50 years were not positive cases. Male individuals were significantly more positive and likewise, it was observed that there were significantly higher positive cases of IM in spring and summer.

Conclusions: Among the five years of this study, it was a decreasing status from 2010 (23.1%) to 2014 (9.1%), though a slight fluctuation had occurred. The prevalence of IM was low in Neyshabur City. Moreover, children and male individuals had relatively higher prevalence of the disease. Furthermore, it was observed a higher rate of IM in spring and summer.

1. Introduction

Epstein-Barr virus (EBV) is the herpesvirus infecting more than 90% of the world’s population[1]. Although the disease is benign and asymptomatic for the most cases, EBV can cause many nonmalignant and malignant disorders of lymphoid and epithelial origins[2]. EBV infection is mostly asymptomatic in children. However, first exposure during this era and an adolescence may develop itself as an infectious mononucleosis (IM) in 30% to 70% of cases[3,4]. Some individuals are more vulnerable than others to develop clinical symptoms from delayed infection, while there is no reason[5,6]. CD8+ T cells play a key protective role for the control of latent EBV infection. However, they are recognized to be the main mediators of the disease during IM[7,8]. Furthermore, observations suggest that other immune mediators are possibly important for the control and prevention of acute symptomatic EBV infection[9]. Results from a recent Phase II clinical trial revealed that the induction of neutralizing antibodies is effective in the prevention of symptomatic acute IM after primary infection[10]. In spite of these effective results,
very little emphasis is noted upon the investigation of humoral immunity during primary infection and defects in antibody level could contribute to the severity of the disease burden during acute IM[11]. The virus can persistently shed in saliva for duration of 6 months[12]. The study in Southern Iran showed that the prevalence of EBV among acute lymphoblastic leukemia individuals was high[13]. Another survey indicated a relationship between EBV and breast cancer among women in Iran[14].

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Patients and population

This cross-sectional descriptive epidemiological survey was performed to reveal the prevalence of IM in Neyshabur during 2010–2014.

A total of 131 individuals were studied. Travelers (n = 16) and migrants (n = 11) were excluded in this study. Thus, 114 subjects from all age groups were included. The sample size was considered as 5 years of study. The individuals were healthy and no clinical sign was observed. None of subjects had fever, rash, stomach pain and headache symptoms.

2.2. Sample collection

Briefly, blood samples were collected from individuals and the sera samples were prepared. In addition, the examination of white blood cells showed that total lymphocyte count was 4 700. The agglutination test was used with equal amount of serum and reagent. Any individuals with positive test for specific immunoglobulin G and immunoglobulin M (heterophile antibodies) were determined as positive cases[15]. The Oxoid IM kit (Oxoid Ltd, Hampshire, UK) was employed for antibodies detection. Components of the kit included DR0681M test latex that consisted of latex particles sensitised with purified bovine antigen where the kit contained sufficient reagent for 50 tests, DR0682M positive control serum that consisted of rabbit antiserum containing specific antibody reactive with the sufficient test reagent for 15 tests and DR0683M negative control serum that consisted of rabbit antiserum tested for the absence of specific heterophile antibodies with the sufficient reagent for 15 tests.

Bilirubin level of serum was also measured but transaminase and alkaline phosphatase levels were not tested.

2.3. Ethical approve

Approval for this study was obtained from the Research and Technology Deputy of Iranian Academic Center for Education, Culture and Research, Mashhad Branch. Informed written consent was obtained from Research Center of HIV and AIDS, Mashhad, Iran.

2.4. Data analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 20 (IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 20) and the Chi-square test. P < 0.05 were considered statistically significant.

3. Results

Mean ± SD of age for IM test was 18.96 ± 15.79. The age range of individuals was 8 months–63 years. As shown in Table 1, the overall prevalence of IM among 5 years was 14%. The age groups of 0–10 and 21–30 were the most positive cases in this period. In addition, 31–40 and over 50 years were not positive cases.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic features</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Positive cases (%)</th>
<th>Odds ratio</th>
<th>95% confidence interval</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0–10</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>6 (12.5)</td>
<td>Baseline</td>
<td>0.786–0.974</td>
<td>0.116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11–20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>0.875</td>
<td>0.000–0.987</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21–30</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>6 (21.4)</td>
<td>1.909</td>
<td>0.550–6.621</td>
<td>0.303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31–40</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2 (33.3)</td>
<td>3.500</td>
<td>0.523–23.418</td>
<td>0.176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 51</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>10 (18.5)</td>
<td>3.182</td>
<td>0.935–10.831</td>
<td>0.054</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>4 (6.7)</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Season</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring and summer</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>10 (19.2)</td>
<td>0.290</td>
<td>0.085–0.987</td>
<td>0.038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall and winter</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>4 (6.5)</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

–: Not determined.

Male individuals were significantly more positive and likewise, it was observed that there were significantly higher positive cases of mononucleosis in spring and summer (Table 1 and Figures 1–3).
There was a declining trend from 2010 to 2014 regarding the prevalence of IM. Moreover, no positive case was detected in 2012. The bilirubin level of 48 (42.10%) out of 114 subjects was higher than normal. As shown in Table 1, there was a significant difference among seasons for the detection of IM. Among the 5 years of this study, it was a decreasing status from 2010 (23.1%) to 2014 (9.1%), though a slight fluctuation was occurred (Table 2 and Figure 4).

In 2010 and 2011, there were higher positive cases of IM, while in 2012, no positive IM case was detected. The bilirubin level of 48 (42.10%) out of 114 subjects was higher than normal. As shown in Table 1, there was a significant difference among seasons for the detection of IM. Among the 5 years of this study, it was a decreasing status from 2010 (23.1%) to 2014 (9.1%), though a slight fluctuation was occurred (Table 2 and Figure 4).

### Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>NO.</th>
<th>Positive cases (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6 (23.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>4 (14.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2 (8.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2 (9.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>14 (12.3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4. Discussion

In this study, mean ± SD of age of subjects was 18.96 ± 15.79 (8 months–63 years). We observed that the age groups of 0–10 and 21–30 were the most positive cases in this period. The presence of the disease in children has been reported in several previous studies with different disorders and indications, such as enhanced cytotoxicity of specific T-cells, rash following amoxicillin treatment and presence of soluble human leukocyte antigen-G in serum of children[16-18]. In addition, individuals with 31–40 and over 50 years were all negative for the test. Several previous surveys have suggested the lymphocyte count as a valid diagnostic screen test in adults infected with mononucleosis in different results[19,20]. In this study, male individuals were significantly more positive and likewise, it was observed that there were significantly higher positive cases of mononucleosis in spring and summer. Similarly, Ramagopalan et al. revealed that males were more frequently infected with IM for all age groups apart from age ranges of 10–14 (false match rate 1.50 and 95% confidence interval)[21]. Regarding differences between genders for infection susceptibility of EBV, there have been several hypotheses, such as different social behaviors and thus interpersonal contact and exposure[22]. Visser et al. determined no evidence of relation between seasons and EBV infection in children[23]. Seasonal
fluctuations, sun radiation and vitamin D affect the immune system against EBV and several studies have similarly shown this effect[24,25]. On the other hand, we observed that among the 5 years of this study, it was a decreasing status from 2010 (23.1%) to 2014 (9.1%), though a slight fluctuation was occurred. The limitations of this study were no molecular test for detection and characterization of EBV and subtypes, a limited area of study (Neyshabur city), a low number of subjects and no exact detection of liver enzymes levels among subjects.

Conflict of interest statement

We declare that we have no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgments

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