Epidemiology of Dermatophytes and Non Dermatophyte Molds among Patients Attending Rank Higher Specialized Dermatology Clinic, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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Abstract

Background Dermatophytes are keratinophilic fungi that infect keratinized tissues causing diseases known as dermatophytosis. Dermatophytosis is common worldwide and continues to increase. **Objective** This study was undertaken to determine the prevalence of dermatophytes and the spectrum of fungal agents in patients attending Rank higher clinic. **Methods** a cross sectional study has been conducted, in which 318 Samples from 318 suspected patient was collected from hair, nail and skin. A portion of each sample was examined microscopically and the remaining portion of each sample was cultured onto plates of Sabouraud's dextrose agar containing chloramphenicol with and without cycloheximide. Dermatophyte isolates were identified by studying macroscopic and microscopic characteristics of their colonies. **Result** Of 318 samples, fungi were detected in 133 (54.4%) by direct wet mount while 148/315(46.5%) of them were culture positive. From these 72/148(46.8%) were dermatophytes. Among dermatophyte isolates *T. tonsurans* 29/72(40.2%) was the most common cause of infection. Tinea capitis was the predominant clinical manifestation accounting for 170/315(53.4%) of the cases. Patients with age group 1-14 years were more affected. *T. tonsurans* was the most common pathogen in tinea capitis, whereas *T. mentagrophytes* was the most common pathogen in tinea corporis. **Conclusion** In this study the prevalence of dermatophytes were higher in tinea capitis 46/72(63.8%) and *T. tonsurans* 29/72(40%) was the dominant isolated dermatophyte. Recovery of large number of dermatophytes and non-dermatophyte fungi in our study showed that Non-dermatophyte fungi are emerging as important causes of dermatophytosis warranting further intensive epidemiological studies which have public health significance are needed.

Background

Dermatophytosis represents one of the common infectious diseases worldwide and causes chronic morbidity, especially in developing countries [1]. The condition is caused by dermatophytes, which are fungi basically molds that require keratin for growth. An increase in the incidence of dermatophytosis has been noted worldwide, especially in developing countries [2, 3]. In particular, tinea capitis one of the most common dermatophytosis represents a major public health issue among children in developing countries; mainly in children's of African or Caribbean origin [3].

Geographic location, health care, immigration, climate (temperature, humidity, wind, etc.), overcrowding, environmental hygiene culture, awareness to dermatophytes, age of individuals, hygiene and socioeconomic conditions have been described as major factors for these variations of dermatophyte epidemiology [4, 5,6,7]. Childrens between the ages of 4 and 16 years are more at risk due to more contact to different sources and inadequate amount of fungi-inhibiting fatty acids synthesized predisposed them to dermatophytic infections [8, 9, 10].

Now days, there are about 40 known species in the genera of dermatophytes. Of these species, about 25 species belong to the three most recognized and prevalent worldwide genera's; *Epidermophyton*, *Microsporum* and *Trichophyton* and these genera's are presently known to infect humans [7, 11, 12].

Ethiopia is a developing nation located in the tropical region with wet humid climate which makes it to fall into regions with high prevalence of dermatophytosis [9,10]. So, conducting further studies to investigate human dermatophytosis regardless of site, age, and the distribution of fungi implicated in causing dermatophytosis appears to be one of the priorities in health related studies in Ethiopia.

Methods

Study areas and population

A prospective cross-sectional institution based study was carried out from January 2018 to June 2018 among dermatophytosis suspected patients who visit Rank higher specialized dermatology clinic, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Sample size determination and sampling technique

The required sample size of the study was determined using the formula for single population proportion. A total of 318 clinical samples from 318 suspected patients (one sample from every patient based on their clinical manifestation) were collected from patients visiting the Dermatology clinic during the study period were included in the study.

Biological sample collection

The samples were collected from January 2018 to June 2018 using convenient sampling technique. Before collecting the sample the infected area was cleaned with 70% (v/v) ethanol. Scraping samples from skin, nail, and finger based on their clinical manifestation were collected aseptically using sterile blades and transferred into sterile plastic petri-dishes. In tinea capitis suspects, dull broken hairs from the margin of the scalp lesion with forceps was sampled and transferred to sterile folded papers and transferred in to sterile petri dishes.

Culture and microscopic examination: A portion of each sample was mounted in a drop of 10% (w/v) potassium hydroxide on a clean microscopic slide. After 5 minutes; the mount preparation was examined under low ($\times 10$) and high ($\times 40$) power magnification for the presence of any fungal elements. The remaining portion of each clinical sample was cultured in to Sabouraud's dextrose agar plates containing chloramphenicol with and without cycloheximide (Oxoid, Basingstoke, England) prepared according to the instruction of the manufacture. All inoculated plates were then incubated at inverted position at 25–30°C for 4–6 weeks. Culture plates containing the Sabouraud's dextrose agar were examined twice a week for any fungal growth. In the absence of growth during 6th week, the results were considered negative. Those suspected colonies for dermatophytes were sub cultured into potato dextrose agar for the production of spores. Cultures of dermatophytes were identified by examining macroscopic and microscopic characteristics of their colony on Sabouraud's dextrose agar. For the macroscopic identification; rate of growth, texture, topography, and pigmentation of the reverse and front side of the

culture were employed. Mold isolates was identified microscopically by placing pieces of the colony from Sabouraud's dextrose agar plates in to clean microscopic slide and stained using lacto phenol cotton blue stain. Each preparation was observed microscopically after placing a cover slip. In addition; urease test was also used in differentiating between some members of *Trichophyton species*. For the identification of yeasts, candida CHROMEagar was also used.

Statistical analysis

Data was collected, double entered, cleaned and analyzed using SPSS version 20 software according to the study objectives. Frequency and percentage were used for investigation of the outcome.

Result

A total of 318 dermatophytosis suspected patients were included in this study. Among these; fungi were detected in 133(41.8%) samples using potassium hydroxide wet mount while, 148 (46.5%) were culture positive (Table 1).

In the present study a total of 318 clinical samples were collected from suspected cases of dermatophytosis of which 193(60.7 %) of them were females. Tinea unguium was higher among females 38/51(74.5%) than males (Table 2).

The age of the study subject was ranged from 1 to 88 year with a mean age of 16 year. Dermatophytic infection rate was high in the age group of 1–14 years 144/318 (45.2%), followed by the age group of 25–44 years with 96/318(30.1%) patients, and old age group (>65 years) with only 7 (2.2%) (Table 3).

A total of 148/318(46.5%) fungi were recovered. Of these, 72/148(48.6%) were dermatophytes, 63/148(42.56 %) non- dermatophyte mold and (13/148) 8.7% were yeasts. *T. tonsurans* 29/72(40.2%) was the predominant dermatophyte followed by *T. Mentagrophytes* 13/72(18%) and *M. audouinii* 13/72(18%) whereas *Trichophyton schoenleinii* 1/72(1.3%) was the least common (Table 4). Among non dermatophyte molds *Cladosporium spp* 21/63(33.3%) was the predominate isolate followed by *Neoscytalidim dimidatum* 11/63(17.4%) and *Alternaria spp* 9/63(14.2%) respectively. Yeasts were the least common isolates accounting 13(8.7 %) of the total suspects of dermatophytosis (Table 4).)

As shown in Table 2, clinical manifestation in relation to age group was highest with age group 1–14, 144/318(45.2%) followed by age group 25–44 years accounting for 96/318(30.1 %). Among 170 Tinea capitis 115/170(67.6%) was found to be in patients >14 years and tinea corporis, the second most clinical manifestation 97/318(30.6%) was highest in patients of age group 25–44 years, 43/97(44.3%). Tinea unguium was common in patients of age group of 25–44 years (Table 2).

Tinea capitis was the predominant clinical manifestation accounting for 53.4% of the cases; of which 98 (57.6%) were females and 72 (42.4 %) males. This was followed by tinea corporis and tinea capitis accounting for 30.5% and 16% of the cases, respectively (Table 5). According to species frequency in different areas of involvement, *T. tonsurans* was the most common pathogen in tinea capitis, whereas *T. mentagrophytes* was the most common pathogen in *tinea corporis* (Table 5).

Discussion

Accurate diagnosis based on the clinical symptoms alone is nearly impossible. Currently, the diagnosis of dermatophytosis is confirmed by clinical examination and screening of the collected clinical specimen by direct microscopy and fungal culture [13]. The risk of developing adverse drug reactions, the cost and long duration of the therapy, and possible interactions with concomitant medications all affects the importance of accurate diagnosis of the condition before commencing therapy [13, 14]. In the present study, direct microscopy positivity rate is 133/318(41.8%) and culture positivity rate is 148/318(46.5 %) (Table: 1). This was in line with a study conducted in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 42.6% [9]. This occurrence is due to that; Ethiopia is a tropical country with wet humid climate, large population size, and low socioeconomic status and this is supported by other studies conducted on dermatophytosis etiologies and risk factors [9, 15, 16, 34].

In this study; tinea capitis was the most common clinical disease followed by tinea unguium and tinea corporis and this is in line with studies conducted in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (9, 21, 34). And this is due to low socioeconomic status, overcrowding and poor personal hygiene. *T. tonsurans*, *T. mentagrophytes*, *T. violaceum*, and *M. audouinii* species are causal agents of tinea capitis. Studies also revealed that the zoophilic *Trichophyton* and *Microsporum* species are seldom responsible for more than minor outbreaks of human scalp infections [24, 25]. The most susceptible persons to tinea capitis were among patients 1–14 years 115/170 (67.6%) and this is because of the lack of protective fatty acids in their scalp. Earlier, several authors have supported this finding [17, 18]. Many cases occurring in adults is involved with hormonal disorders resulting in carryover of tinea capitis from childhood or in patients with severe immune depression due to HIV/AIDS, leukemia, lymphoma, or treatment with immunosuppressant drugs [15, 19, 20]. *T. tonsurans* 26/46(56.5%) were the most abundant dermatophyte causing tinea capitis followed by *M. audouinii* 8/46(17.3%) and *T. verrucosum* 4/46(8.6%). Even though it is not in line with the current finding; a similar study in Ethiopia showed that the prevalence of *T. tonsurans* in the rate 5.8% & 18.4% [9, 21]. *T. tonsurans* had been reported in developing countries such as Kenya and other sub-Saharan countries as among the most common agent followed to *M. canis* and due to its ubiquitous in nature, abundance among human carriers, and Social phenomena of today on the continent could explain *T. tonsurans* are circulating in the population [20–23, 26, 27].

Tinea corporis (33/318(10.8%)) was the second most common infection with a significant incidence among age groups of 25–44. The site of infection was mostly restricted to face and neck. *T. mentagrophytes*, *T. rubrum* and *M. audouinii* were the main causative agents and this is in line with study conducted in Harari regional state, Ethiopia [28].

Tinea unguium 51/318(16%) was observed mainly on the age of 25–44; 19/51(30.1%) (Table 3). Since onychomycosis infections in children is not common due to many reasons such as; rapid growth of the nail, have less exposure to fungal infection risk factors than adults such as pedicure and manicure repeated aggressiveness, frequent housework and cosmetic reasons [16,29].

Non dermatophytic molds were isolated from 63/148(42.56%) cases, with *Cladosporium spp.* as a major isolate accounting 21/63(33.3%) of the total non dermatophyte mold isolates followed by *Neoscytalidium dimidiatum* 11/63(17.4%). A study in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia found a similar finding to our current study [21]. *Cladosporium* species are the most widely spread fungi in the world. It is true also; most of the time appears as a contaminant. But some studies showed that they are associated as opportunistic infection in subcutaneous and disseminated form, especially among immune depressed individuals [32]. *Neoscytalidium dimidiatum* was isolated from skin and nail scrapings predominantly of toenails. *Neoscytalidium dimidiatum* and *Scytalidium hyalinum* are common causative agents of human superficial infections in different parts of the world especially in tropical and subtropical region [21]. Similarly, yeasts were isolated from 13/148(8.78%) cases with *C. albicans* as a major isolate accounting 5/13(38.4%) of the total yeast isolated and this study was similar with study conducted in Saudi Arabia [33]. Non dermatophyte fungi were isolated as a cause of dermatophytosis in many studies [9, 13, 33, 34].

Conclusion: This study showed that the prevalence of dermatophytosis was 46.5% which is more or less similar to study conducted in Ethiopia [9] but in developed countries showed that less than 5% [35] which indicates that dermatophytosis is still a common problem in developing countries. *Tinea capitis* was identified as the most prevalent clinical presentation and children's are the most vulnerable group. This study found that *T. tonsurans* was the most common etiologic agent followed by *M. audouinii* and *T. mentagrophytes*. We recommend further research on the possible risk factors and spectrum for dermatophytes and Non dermatophyte Molds in large clinical setting and the community.

Declarations

Abbreviations: Not applicable

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Ethical clearance for this study was provided from Medical Laboratory science, college of health sciences, Addis Ababa University ethical review committee. Verbal informed consents were also obtained from participants. Assent form was completed and signed by family member and/or adult guardian for participants under the age of 16 years.

Consent for publication

Not applicable as details like; videos or images related to study subjects were not recorded for this study.

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Availability of data and material

The data sets used or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Competing of interest

The author's listed above declare that there is no competing of interest.

Authors' contributions

SA, BT and DF had participated in culture media preparation, identification of bacterial pathogens, have given final approval of the version to be published; analysis and interpretation of data, and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved. All authors participated in this research have read and approved the manuscript.

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STROBE: Not applicable

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Tables

Table 1: correlation of direct microscopy with culture (N=318)

Test procedure	Number	Percentage
Direct wet mount (KOH) positive	133	41.8
Culture positive	148	46.5
Direct wet mount((KOH) negative culture positive	72	22.3
Direct wet mount positive (KOH) culture negative	54	16.9
Both Direct wet mount (KOH) and culture positive	76	23.8
Both Direct wet mount(KOH) and culture negative	111	34.9

Table2: Frequency and distributions of clinical manifestations in relation to sex (n= 318).

Clinical manifestation	Male	Female	Total n(%)
Tinea capitis	72	98	170(53.4)
Tinea unguium	13	38	51(16.0)
Tinea corporis	40	57	97(30.5)
Total	125(39.3%)	193(60.7%)	318(100%)

Table 3: Frequency of clinical manifestation in different age groups (n=318)

Site	Age n(%)					Total n(%)
	1-14	15-24	25-44	45-64	≥65	
T. Capitis	115	11	34	9	1	170(53.4)
T. corporis	21	14	43	14	5	97(30.6)
T. unguium	8	16	19	7	1	51(16.0)
Total	144(45.2)	41(12.8)	96(30.1)	30(9.4)	7(2.2)	318(100)

Table 4: Frequency and distribution of dermatophytes and Non dermatophyte Molds

Fungal category	Species	Frequency	Percent
Dermatophytes n=72/148(48.6%)	<i>Trichophyton schoenleinii</i>	1	0.67
	<i>M.audouinii</i>	13	8.78
	<i>T.tonsurans</i>	29	19.59
	<i>T.mentagrophytes</i>	13	8.78
	<i>T.rubrum</i>	6	4.05
	<i>T.violaceum</i>	1	1
	<i>T.verrucosum</i>	4	2.70
	<i>T.soudanense</i>	4	2.70
Non- dermatophytes n=63/148(42.56%)	<i>Cladosporium spp</i>	21	14.18
	<i>Colletotricum spp</i>	1	0.67
	<i>Exserohilum spp</i>	1	0.67
	<i>Stemphylium</i>	1	0.67
	<i>Neoscytalidium dimidatum</i>	11	7.43
	<i>Nigrospora spp</i>	1	0.67
	<i>Alternaria spp</i>	9	6.08
	<i>Fusarium spp</i>	6	4.72
	<i>Scopulariopsis breviculalis</i>	6	4.05
	<i>Paecilomyces spp</i>	1	0.67
	<i>Aspergillus fumigatus</i>	1	0.67
	<i>Geotricum candidum</i>	1	0.67
	<i>Aspergillus niger</i>	1	0.67
	<i>Bioplaris</i>	1	0.67
	<i>Helmentho spoiium</i>	1	0.67
Yeasts n=13/148(8.78%)	<i>C.cruzie</i>	3	2.02
	<i>C.albicans</i>	5	3.38
	<i>C.glbrata</i>	3	2.02
	<i>R.mucilainosa</i>	2	1.35
Total		148	100

Table 5: Frequency and distribution of dermatophytes in relation to clinical manifestation

Dermatophyte n=46	Clinical manifestation			Total n(%)
	Tinea capitis n(%)	Tinea corporis n(%)	Tinea unguium n(%)	
<i>Trichophyton schoenleinii</i>	1(2.1)	-	-	1(1.3)
<i>M. audouinii</i>	8(17.3)	5(23.8)	-	13(18)
<i>T. tonsurans</i>	26(56.5)	2(9.5)	1(20)	29(40)
<i>T. mentagrophytes</i>	3(6.3)	7(33.3)	4(80)	14(19.4)
<i>T. rubrum</i>	2(4.2)	4(19)	-	7(9.7)
<i>T. violaceum</i>	1(2.1)	-	-	1(1.3)
<i>T. verrucosum</i>	4(8.4)	-	-	4(5.5)
<i>T. soudanense</i>	1(2.1)	3(14.2)	-	4(5.5)
Total	46(100%)	21(100)	5(100)	72(100)