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SEROPREVALANCE OF TOXOCARIASIS IN CHILDREN IN THE HINDAGALA HEALTH AREA

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Toxocariasis is an important zoonotic infection in children worldwide and is responsible for many clinical presentations and ill health. Human toxocariasis is caused by species of the genus *Toxocara* such as *Toxocara canis* & *Toxocara cati* which are common parasites of canines & felines respectively.

Diagnosis is based on reliable immunodiagnostic tests. In Sri Lanka, apart from a few case reports, no studies have yet been carried out to determine the prevalence of this infection. Therefore the objective of this study was to determine the prevalence of toxocariasis in children in Sri Lanka based on ELISA assay.

Sera of 600 children in Hindagala Health Area were tested using ELISA assay for *Toxocara* larval Excretory Secretary (TES) antibodies.

Of these 65 (11%) were positive at high (compatible with recent infection) and 205 (34.16 %) were positive at low (compatible with light infection or past exposure) levels of antibody carriage.

Study findings indicate a high prevalence of *Toxocara* infection in children in the Hindagala Health Area. This is not surprising as the study area, like in most other inhabited areas in the country, has a high stray dog/ cat population with the risk of soil contamination with *Toxocara* spp. This pattern of TES antibody carriage is comparable to the seropositivity rates of 50-80% reported in children in other developing tropical countries.

Results highlight the urgent need for increased public awareness of this pet-associated health risk. Control of stray and improved veterinary care of pets is clearly indicated.