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Characteristics of bacterial sepsis among patients with visceral leishmaniasis

Mengistu Endris^{1*}, Yegnasew Takele², Desalegn Woldeyohannes^{3,4}, Chandrashekhar Unakal¹, Feleke Moges¹, Moges Tiruneh¹, Ermias Diro^{5,6}

¹Department of Medical Microbiology, School of Biomedical and Laboratory Sciences, University of Gondar, Ethiopia

²Leishmaniasis Research and Treatment Center, University of Gondar, Ethiopia

³Department of Immunology and Molecular Biology, School of Biomedical and Laboratory Sciences, University of Gondar, Ethiopia

⁴Department of Public Health, Addis Ababa Science and Technology University, Ethiopia

⁵Department of Internal Medicine, School of Medicine, University of Gondar, Ethiopia

⁶Institute of Tropical Medicine, Antwerp, Belgium

PEER REVIEW

Peer reviewer

Zinaye Tekaste, Assistant Professor, Aklilu Lemma Institute of Pathobiology, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Tel: +251 911976957

E-mail: zinzn98@yahoo.com

Comments

This review is a valuable work in which authors have demonstrated that VL and VL-HIV co-infected patients which are affected by bacterial infections leading to sepsis, should be diagnosed and treated early. Optimal infection control measures should be timely taken in order to reduce nosocomial sepsis. Indwelling of central venous lines for immune-suppressed patients such as VL and VL-HIV co-infected should be reduced as much as possible.

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ABSTRACT

Sepsis is one of the major causes and predictors of death in patients with visceral leishmaniasis (VL). Globally, incidence rate of sepsis ranged from 56–91 cases per 100 000 people, with a mortality rate of 30%. Incidence of sepsis has been raised due to aging of the population and the higher incidence of immunosuppressive conditions such as HIV, VL and others. The prevalence of sepsis was reported from 4.2% to 32.3% and 14.1% in VL and VL-HIV coinfecting patients, respectively. The mortality rate of VL patients with sepsis is greater than 50%. Factors associated with sepsis in VL patients are immune suppression, pancytopenia, HIV co-infection, age <1 year old and >40 years old, indwelling of central venous lines and hospitalization. Although antimicrobial susceptibility patterns were not well reported, both Gram-positive and Gram-negative bacteria were isolated from patients with VL. So far, limited information is available on sepsis in VL, especially in VL-HIV coinfecting patients. Therefore, further studies about sepsis prevalence, causative agents and their antibiotic patterns, and associated factors among VL and VL-HIV coinfecting patients are necessary. This review provides information about bacterial sepsis in patients with VL.

KEYWORDS

Sepsis, Visceral leishmaniasis, VL-HIV, HIV/AIDS

1. Introduction

Sepsis is defined as the presence or presumed presence of an infection accompanied by evidence of a systemic

response called the systemic inflammatory response syndrome[1]. Recently Vincent *et al.* defined as host's deleterious, non-resolving inflammatory response to infection that leads to organ dysfunction[2]. Although

*Corresponding author: Mengistu Endris, Department of Medical Microbiology, School of Biomedical and Laboratory Sciences, University of Gondar, P.O. Box 196, Gondar, Ethiopia.

Tel: +251-(0) 918-786365

E-mail: mengistu06@gmail.com

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sepsis can be caused by viruses and fungi, most is due to bacterial infections[3]. Recent review by Jawad *et al.* revealed that the incidence rate of sepsis ranged from 56–91 cases per 100 000 people, with a reported mortality rate of 30%[4]. Incidence of sepsis is increasing due to nosocomial infection, aging of the population and the higher incidence of immunosuppressive conditions such as HIV/AIDS[5], visceral leishmaniasis (VL) and VL–HIV co-infection and others[6–8].

VL is one of the most neglected infectious diseases[9]. Over 90% of the estimated annual incidence in half a million VL cases worldwide occur in just six countries which are Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Sudan, Ethiopia and Brazil[10–12]. The highest prevalence of VL–HIV co-infection in the world was reported from Eastern African region reached up to 40%[10,13].

Patients with VL usually present with fever, weight loss, organomegaly and pancytopenia. *Leishmania donovani*, etiologic agent of VL, targets reticuloendothelial system, spleen, liver, bone marrow and lymph nodes[9]. *Leishmania* invade and replicate within host macrophages, evading innate and cell-mediated immune responses. Patients with VL show a continuum of immune responses from protective to non-protective[14]. Leucopenia, malnutrition and lack protective responses to *Leishmania* and other antigens including bacteria, predispose patients with VL to bacterial infections[15,16].

Studies conducted on the prevalence of sepsis ranged from 3% to 28% among VL patients[6–8,17–21]. Although sepsis has high prevalence and affects the outcome of patients with VL, the causative agents and their antimicrobial susceptibility patterns are poorly understood. Under knowing the current magnitude of sepsis in immuno-compromised individuals such as VL and VL–HIV coinfecting patients, it is important to take rational management for them. This review, therefore aims to compile available information on the prevalence, associated risk factors and etiologic agents of bacterial sepsis in patients with VL and VL–HIV co-infection.

2. Methods

This review was developed after reviewing the pertinent information available about sepsis among patients with VL and VL–HIV co-infection from Hinari, Entrez–PubMed and Google Scholar web sites.

3. Sepsis

3.1. Prevalence of sepsis

The prevalence of sepsis in patients with VL and VL–HIV coinfecting patients in the world is not clearly known. Recent studies showed sepsis was a main factor that affected the treatment outcome of patients with VL[22]. Bacterial infections and sepsis among VL and VL–HIV coinfecting patients have been reported ranging from 15% to 84% and 3% to 28%, respectively (Table 1).

Table 1

Prevalence of bacterial infections and sepsis among patients with VL.

Country of study	Bacterial infections	Sepsis	Study group	Reference
Brazil	52.4%	NR	Admitted VL (n=63)	[24]
Brazil	60.0%	4.2%	Admitted VL (n=30)	[6]
Brazil	27.5%	9.1%	Paediatric VL (n=120)	[21]
Iran	41.0%	13.0%	Paediatric VL (n=54)	[7]
Albania	60.0%	NR	VL patients (n=50)	[25]
Albania	84.0%	3.0%	Admitted VL (n=1 210)	[20]
Iran	42.0%	28.0%	Paediatric VL (n=60)	[17]
Ethiopia	42.8%	5.0%	Non–HIV VL (n=247)	[8]
Ethiopia	23.1%	NR	Pediatric VL (n=77)	[26]
Ethiopia	15.0%	7.0%	All VL (n=81)	[18]
Ethiopia	16.0%+	10.0%+	Adult VL (n=241)	[19]
	40.0%++	14.0%++		

NR: Not reported, +: HIV negative, ++: HIV positive.

3.2. Associated risk factors

The increased susceptibility of VL patients to bacterial infections leads sepsis to be multi-factorial. Immuno-suppression, leucopenia and malnutrition are the most important factors associated with susceptibility to bacterial infections[8,17]. Extreme age (age <1 year old and >40 years old) and HIV are the factors associated with bacterial sepsis[8]. Malnutrition, pulmonary rales, severe anemia, severe absolute neutropenia and higher neutrophil count were also identified as risk factors related to bacterial infections that lead to death in patients with VL[15]. Neutropenia associated with bacteremia is common in immuno-compromised patients including cancer patients[23].

Increased exposure to potentially resistant bacteria in nursing homes and utilization of insufficiently sterilized medical devices including indwelling catheters and central venous lines will also increase risks. Patients with VL treated in hospital had significantly higher rates of complications than those treated on outpatient basis ($P<0.001$)[8].

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