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ePoster Viewing

International health, tropical and travel-associated diseases, and parasitology

"Assessments of both the prevalence of head lice (*Pediculus capitis*) infestation and parents' attitudes towards its management: a school-based epidemiological study in Istanbul, Turkey"

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OBJECTIVES: The head louse, *Pediculus capitis*, causes a common infestation in humans and has been a public health problem where people share a common living area, such as in schools. It can easily be transmitted after close contact with infested individuals, which sustains its significance as a nuisance for school children even in developed countries. Parents attitudes upon head lice infestation (HLI) of their children is varying, from old-fashioned applications to modern approaches for the elimination of parasites. In the present study, which is a part of a training project for medical students, we aimed to assess both the prevalence of *P. capitis* in two central schools in Istanbul and parent's attitudes towards HLI using unique questionnaires.

METHODS: Two primary schools from lower socioeconomic regions of Atasehir District were selected for the study. After necessary permissions were obtained, the directors of the schools were visited for the presentation of the study, which was designed in two sections: Assessment of HLI prevalence by on-site combing the hair of children for whom the parents had consented, and assessment of parents' attitudes towards HLI such as previous experiences with head lice, their education levels and monthly income, using a questionnaire for all children in both schools. With special combs, children were examined in their schools by trained medical students and a registered anti-lice product was given to the teachers of infested children for treatment. Chi-square test was used to assess the statistical significance of the results.

RESULTS: A total of 340 students were examined with combing, while 951 parents have returned the questionnaires. Thirty two of 340 combed students (9.41%) were found be infested with *Pediculus capitis*. Compared to boys, the infestation rate was six times higher in girls. Evaluation of 951 questionnaires revealed that one-third of the parents thought HLI as a menace for children not taking baths regularly, while more parents (42.1%) declared it as a social stigma for families as it was only correlated with lower hygiene. Almost one third of the parents approved regular, once-a-week use of permethrin, common but toxic anti-lice product to avoid HLI.

CONCLUSION: The rate of HLI in two schools located in lower socioeconomic regions of Istanbul was found to be high, almost 10%. The use of both new silicone-based products and regular combing with special combs, in coordination with teachers, were found 100% effective in eliminating HLI. Answers of parents on questionnaires indicated the urgent need of collaboration with school directors to elevate the vigilance of parents against HLI and present them correct attitudes to avoid its being regarded as a social stigma. Such measures together with regular monitorization and treatment of infested children are crucial to overcome this social menace.