

OCCURRENCE OF LEPROSY IN MANY MEMBERS OF THE SAME FAMILY

Sir,

It was very interesting to read the article on a case report of an 8-member family affected by leprosy (*Lepr Rev* 1984, **55**, 47–50).

In 1982 while I was working at the Niramol Leprosy Clinic, Khon Kaen, Thailand, I had the opportunity to study a similar family with 7 of its members affected by leprosy. The father aged over 60 years and 6 children aged between 20 and 38 years (5 brothers and 1 sister) had the disease, but the mother and 1 daughter had no evidence of either past or present disease.

The cases were picked up when one of the sons was brought to the clinic for treatment of ENL reaction. He was a case of active BL leprosy with pustular ENL reaction. Since it was our practice to

examine any accompanying contacts of patients, his sister who had accompanied him was examined too. She had lesions suggestive of resolving BT leprosy. Subsequently all other members reported to the clinic as instructed and all were examined.

The father and 2 other sons had lesions of inactive BT, the elder son was a case of inactive LL and another son had active TT lesion. Except the son with active TT, all others were already registered and treated elsewhere. Only the one with active BL was bacteriologically positive. Three of the sons had deformities of hands.

Surprisingly the father had non-infectious type of leprosy though he had the longest duration of disease (over 20 years). The children had the disease for durations varying from 5 to 10 years. There was no history of leprosy among the ancestors. No genetic study could be done.

Presently, I am treating a family of 8 members, 5 of whom have leprosy. The mother aged over 50 years, is a case of inactive LL and has had the disease for 30 years; 2 sons aged 27 and 20 years are cases of active LL with the duration of 13 years and 10 years, respectively; 1 son aged 13 years has had active BT for a duration of 5 years; another son who was said to have deformities has absconded from the family and so was not available for examination. The father and 2 sons have no evidence of leprosy.

These cases seem to support the idea that heredity plays a significant role in the transmission of leprosy.

Paradoxically however, I find that among the families in the colonies here, where most families have both the parents with leprosy (married after being settled here), the number of children affected is much less than what one would expect. There are very few families with 2 children affected and hardly any with more than 2 children with the disease.

MARY S JOSEPH

*Nonsombun Leprosarium
Khon Kaen, Thailand*