

## Letters to the Editor

### NEED FOR INTENSIVE LEPROSY CASE FINDING FOR THE ELIMINATION OF LEPROSY

Sir,

As a result of successful implementation of the multidrug therapy (MDT) programme, the registered prevalence rate (PR) of leprosy has shown more than a 70% decline under the National Leprosy Eradication Programme in India.<sup>1</sup> However, the new case detection rate (NCDR) has not shown a significant decline though several factors influence the interpretation of this rate. Similar observations are also made in urban situations like Bombay.<sup>2</sup> A marked fall in registered cases has led to complacency in case-finding activities in the leprosy control programmes. To study the true levels of occurrence of new cases during low endemicity, intensified active case detection was undertaken in a statistically drawn sample population in the Bombay Leprosy Project (BLP) field area in Bombay during 1989, and 1991 in the Wardha district in Maharashtra in 1991 by group survey methods. MDT was introduced in both these areas by 1982. The case-detection rates calculated after the group surveys were compared with case-detection rates reported by the leprosy control programmes.

The registered prevalence rate showed a steady decline in BLP from 17 per 10,000 population in 1982 to 9 per 10,000 population in 1989 and to 5 per 10,000 population in 1991. The registered prevalence rate in Wardha district also showed a steady decline from 120 per 10,000 population in 1982 to 13 per 10,000 population in 1991. However, the new case-detection rate was ranging between 4 and 5 in BLP area and 16 and 32 per 10,000 population in Wardha district. Intensified case-finding activities

**Table 1.** New case-detection rate

	Bombay 1989	Leprosy Project 1991	Wardha 1991
<b>Intensive case finding</b>			
Population examined	32,101	21,626	70,96
New cases detected	118	82	165
MB (smear + ve)	2	2	8
Total NCDR/10,000, population	37	38	60
NCDR of smear positive MB cases/10,000 population	0.6	0.9	1.1
<b>Reported case-detection rate by the programme</b>			
Total NCDR/10,000	6	3	21
NCDR of smear positive MB cases/10,000 population	0.1	0.2	0.2

showed that NCDR was significantly higher than reported figures including the multibacillary leprosy (smear positive) case-detection rate.

These findings indicate that intensive case-finding to identify hidden leprosy cases with special emphasis on smear positive cases should be attempted at regular intervals, even though the prevalence rate shows a marked decline, in order to reduce transmission of the disease and to reach a realistic level of prevalence before declaring disease elimination as a public health problem. It is suggested that in addition to the criteria laid down for elimination of leprosy, i.e. prevalence rate of less than 1 per 10,000, new case detection rate of less than 1 case per 100,000 population could be considered.

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## References

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- <sup>2</sup> Revankar CR, Pai RR, Giriya D, Deshpande SS, Gandewar KL, Pai VV, Hiwase Nirmala & Ganapatti R. Epidemiological changes in an Urban Leprosy Control Project—15 years observations in Bombay. In Abstract book—14th International Leprosy Congress, Orlando, Florida, USA 1993.