

PARASITIC INFECTIONS AMONG ORANG ASLI (ABORIGINE) IN THE CAMERON HIGHLANDS, MALAYSIA

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Abstract. In April 2004, an outbreak of acute diarrheal illness occurred among the Orang Asli (aborigine) in the Cameron Highlands, Pahang State, Peninsular Malaysia, where rotavirus was later implicated as the cause. In the course of the epidemic investigation, stool samples were collected and examined for infectious agents including parasites. Soil transmitted helminthes (STH), namely *Ascaris lumbricoides* (25.7%), *Trichuris trichiura* (31.1%) and hookworm (8.1%), and intestinal protozoa, which included *Giardia lamblia* (17.6%), *Entamoeba histolytica/E. dispar* (9.4%), *Blastocystis hominis* (8.1%) and *Cryptosporidium parvum* (2.7%), were detected. Forty-four (59.5%) were infected with at least one parasite, 24 (32.4%), 12 (16.2%) and 8 (10.8%) had single, double and triple parasitic infections, respectively. STH were prevalent with infections occurring as early as in infancy. *Giardia lamblia*, though the most commonly found parasite in samples from symptomatic subjects, was within the normally reported rate of giardiasis among the various communities in Malaysia, and was an unlikely cause of the outbreak. However, heavy pre-existing parasitic infections could have contributed to the severity of the rotavirus diarrheal outbreak.

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