Seroprevalence of Antibodies against Varicella Zoster Virus among Women before Marriage in Yazd, Iran

Zeynali L¹, Ayatollahi J¹, Sharifi M R¹, Tayebzadeh M A¹, Ahmadi A S², Doosti M*¹

1. Infectious Diseases Research Center, Shahid Sadoughi University of Medical Sciences, Yazd, Iran
2. Department of Microbiology, Golestan University of Medical Sciences, Gorgan, Iran

Abstract

Background and Aims: Varicella-zoster virus (VZV) infection among pregnant women can cause a serious threat to the health of mother and fetus. Varicella is clearly less dangerous for immunized mothers. The aim of this study was to determine the prevalence of VZV antibody among women before marriage.

Materials and Methods: This cross-sectional study was conducted on 300 women of child-bearing age who referred to Yazd clinic for premarital screening. The enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA) technique was performed to detect antibodies against VZV. Demographic characteristics of each participant, including age, educational level, place of residence, family and self-reported history of chickenpox were collected by a questionnaire.

Results: Mean age of women under study was 23±5.4 years that 223 participants (73.7%) were seropositive, and 77 cases (25.7%) were seronegative for anti-VZV antibody, while 2 (0.6%) subjects had an equivocal result. A higher immunity ratio (86.4%) was found among older women (33-44 years). Data showed no significant correlation between immunity to VZV and age, educational level, place of residence. A statistically significant association was found between the family history, self-reported history of chickenpox and immunity to VZV. The positive and negative predictive values for self-reported history of chicken pox were 97.1% and 81.1%, respectively.

Conclusions: A significant number of women before marriage had no immunity to VZV. They are in risk of getting varicella, which can cause serious complications in mother and fetus. It, therefore, seems necessary to screen women of child-bearing age for anti-VZV antibody. In addition, vaccination against VZV in Iranian women before marriage can be a good recommendation.

Keywords: Antibody, Chickenpox, seroprevalence, Varicella-Zoster Virus

Introduction

Varicella zoster virus (VZV) is a member of the Herpesviridae family that often causes chickenpox in children (1). After a period of latency in trigeminal ganglia, VZV can be reactivate and cause shingles in adults (2). The virus is very contagious and is transmitted to people through direct contact with the mucosa of the upper respiratory tract or the eyes (3). Varicella is usually a mild and self-limiting illness, but it may be associated with severe complications or even death in patients with weakened immune system and pregnant women (1). Women who get the varicella zoster virus during pregnancy are at risk for serious life-threatening complications including pneumonia (up to 20%) and encephalitis (up to 1%) (3).

If varicella infection occurs within the first trimester of pregnancy (weeks 1 to 12), the risk of serious birth defects is 0.5-1% (4). When a
include skin estimated tests. If women do 4.59% lalla zoster - the varicella Seroprevalence of anti-VZV antibody among Yazdian women 
2      Iranian Journal of Virology, Volume 10, Number 2,3, 2016 ... perf ormed according to manufacturer's protocols. Positive, negative 
and cut - off controls were used for each test.

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Antibody index was calculated using the following formula: Antibody index = (sample O.D./cut off serum mean O.D.) x 10. Samples with indexes below 9 were considered as VZV negative. Sera were classified as positive if indexes were above 11 and as equivocal for indexes between 9 and 11. Data were analyzed by the Chi-square and Fisher exact tests using SPSS software version 17 (Chicago, IL, USA). The p-value less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant. Positive predictive value (PPV) and negative predictive value (NPV) of self-reported history of varicella were calculated using the following formulas:

$$PPV = \frac{\text{number of women with positive varicella history and positive VZV - antibody}}{\text{number of women who reported positive varicella history}}$$

$$NPV = \frac{\text{number of women with negative varicella history and negative VZV - antibody}}{\text{number of women who reported negative varicella history}}$$

Results

In this study, anti-varicella antibodies were evaluated in 300 premarital young women. Participants were ranged from 14 to 44 years with the mean (±SE) of 23±5.4. Most participants (56%) were in the age group of 14-23 years. Positive levels of VZV-antibody were detected in 223 (73.7%) of women and 77 cases (25.7%) were negative for anti-varicella antibody, while 2 (0.6%) subjects had an equivocal result. The frequency and prevalence of varicella antibodies in the population under study according to studied variables are summarized in Table 1. Data show that with increasing age from 14 to 44 years, the proportion of the positive anti-VZV samples is increased. There was no statistically significant relationship between immunity against varicella zoster virus and variables of age and educational level (p>0.05). Furthermore, comparison of VZV prevalence between women living in Yazd province with those living in out of Yazd was not shown any significant difference (P = 0.501).

In the present study, a total of 210 participants (out of 300) were reported the history of having chickenpox infection, whereas 90 subjects did not remember any history of infection. Of the 210 participants with self-reported positive history of varicella, 204 (97.1%) and 4 (1.9%) were seropositive and seronegative to VZV, respectively. Therefore, positive predictive value (PPV) was equal 97.1%. Also, negative predictive value (NPV) of self-reported history of varicella was calculated as 81.1%. A significant association was obtained between immunity to varicella and history of infection (p<0.05). Moreover, most persons (79.3%) with a family history of chickenpox had immunity to varicella (p=0.001).

Discussion

The result of the present study showed that only 73.7% of women before marriage in Yazd had anti-varicella antibody. In a similar study conducted in Iran by Pourahmal et al., 72.7% of women who intend to marry were seropositive for VZV (13). In study of Majidi et al., the prevalence of anti-VZV antibody in women before marriage in Sanandaj was 72.1% (7). Barazesh et al. reported that the level of immunity to varicella in women of Bushehr was 74.5% (14). In other researches, the higher proportions of women were seropositive for VZV. Serologic screening for VZV in Tehran was indicated that immunity to varicella among women population was more than 90% (15) that is higher than our finding among Yazdian women. A possible reason behind this difference is higher population density in Tehran in comparison to Yazd. In other studies, the estimated proportion of seropositivity among women in Hamadan, Kerman and Babol was 78.4%, 89.3%, and 90.2%, respectively (11, 16, 17). Therefore, in Iran with different climate zones, prevalence of VZV is varied from about 70% in cold low crowded cities to 90% in the hot crowded cities. In compatible with previous studies (18, 19), we found that varicella seroprevalence...
Seroprevalence of anti-VZV antibody among Yazdian women

Table 1: Prevalence of varicella antibodies in women before marriage in Yazd

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>variable</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>VZV-antibody</th>
<th>P value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Negative</td>
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<td>116 (69%)</td>
<td>51 (30.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (years)</td>
<td>14-23</td>
<td>168</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24-33</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>86 (78.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>34-44</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>19 (86.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>204 (97.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chicken pox</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>17 (18.9%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family history</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>157 (79.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of varicella</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>64 (62.7%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Educational level</td>
<td>Under Diploma</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>78 (75.7%)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>86 (68.3%)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>51 (79.7%)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Master of Science</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6 (85.7%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Place of Residence</td>
<td>Yazd</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>218 (73.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Out of Yazd</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3 (75%)</td>
</tr>
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</table>

increases from 69% among women 14-23 years old to 86.4% in women 34-44 years, which confirmed the more immunity against the Varicella zoster virus in the older women. Studies in some countries reported higher proportion of anti-VZV seroprevalence than that we obtained in the present study. In Croatia, the prevalence of VZV-antibody among women of child-bearing age reported equal 84.3% (18). In Italy (19), Tunisia (20) and Korea (21), it has been reported 80.9%, 80.9% and 89.6%, respectively. In 2007, 96.1% of Spanish women during their fertility period were immune to VZV (22). In Belgium,
the prevalence of Anti-VZV IgG among young women was 100% (23). In addition to demographic, climatic, and socioeconomic factors, the performance of the varicella vaccination program in developed countries may partly explain the difference between these findings and our result.

In agreement with our results, in some studies was not significant association between prevalence of VZV antibody and place of residence or educational levels (7, 11, 14, 16, 18, 22). Many studies have indicated a statistically significant relationship between history of chickenpox and immunity to varicella (15, 17). In the present study, the validity of self-reported history of varicella was evaluated considering the result of serological tests in participants. The PPV and the NPV of self-reported history of chickenpox were 97.1% and 81%, respectively, that were strong predictors of VZV immunity. Compatible with our data, Hosseininasab et al. found that the PPV and the NPV of varicella history in women population were 94% and 85%, respectively (17). Majidi and colleagues reported a PPV of 94.5% and a NPV of 50.7% for self-reported history of chickenpox in premarital women (7). Pourahmad et al. reported that the PPV of women with positive history of chickenpox was 79.5% and the NPV of those with negative history of chickenpox was 30.5% (13). In contrast to our finding, Talebi-Taher et al. obtained a NPV of 13.8% as a poor predictor of Varicella immunity (15). Also, Linder et al. estimated that a woman with a negative chickenpox history had a NPV of 6.8% (24).

In conclusion, in the present study, the mean of marital age was 23 years. Proportion of VZV-seronegative women was 30.4% at age group 14-23 and 20.9% among 24-33 years participants. Thus, the VZV screening of women under 30 years, especially who report no varicella history is recommended. According to our findings, seroprevalence of anti-varicella antibody among Yazdian women of child-bearing age is under 80% similar to the other regions of Iran. This shows that a noticeable proportion of young women is susceptible to the varicella-zoster virus. This makes women vulnerable to virus and increases the possibility of birth defects. VZV vaccination in developed countries is decreased the incidence of varicella infection and is declined the rate of abnormality in the fetus. Therefore, vaccination of Iranian women against chickenpox before marriage and pregnancy can be considerable.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

References

Seroprevalence of anti-VZV antibody among Yazdian women


