EPH - International Journal of Applied Science
ISSN (Online): 2456-6063
Volume 10 Issue 01 January 2024
DOI: https://eijas.com/index.php/as/article/view/174/version/174

ENHANCED DETECTION OF INTESTINAL PARASITES: COMPARING DIRECT WET MOUNTS AND SALT FLOATATION CONCENTRATION TECHNIQUES

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Abstract
Background: *Parasitic infections remain a major global health concern, especially in developing countries. Effective diagnosis of these infections is often compromised by the limitations of routine direct wet mount microscopy, which may lack sensitivity and specificity. This study aims to enhance the detection of intestinal parasites by employing a concentration technique—salt floatation—in conjunction with direct wet mounts.*
Aim: *To compare the detection rates of parasitic ova and cysts in stool samples using direct wet mounts before and after the application of the salt floatation concentration technique.*
Materials and Methods: *A total of 100 stool samples were collected from patients at a tertiary care hospital in central India, and analyzed using saline and iodine wet mounts. The salt floatation concentration technique was then applied to the samples, and subsequent wet mounts were examined for improved detection of parasites.*
Results: *Detection rates increased from 33% (33/100) before concentration to 47% (47/100) after applying the salt floatation technique, reflecting a 14% improvement. Analysis revealed higher prevalence in rural areas (78.7%) compared to urban areas (21.3%), with the highest infection rate observed in children aged 6-14 years (42.5%). Giardia lamblia was the most commonly detected parasite, accounting for 29.8% of positive samples.*
Conclusion: *The salt floatation concentration technique significantly enhances the detection of parasitic infections in stool samples, demonstrating its utility in improving diagnostic accuracy. The higher prevalence in rural areas and among children highlights the need for targeted public health interventions. Combining concentration techniques with direct wet mounts offers a reliable and cost-effective approach for better diagnosis and management of parasitic infections.*

Keywords: *Parasitic Infections, Salt Floatation Concentration Technique, Direct Wet Mount Microscopy, Stool Samples, Diagnostic Accuracy, Giardia lamblia, Intestinal Parasites, Rural Health, Urban Health, Prevalence, Parasitic Ova, Parasitic Cysts, Diagnostic Techniques, Public Health Interventions, Central India, Sensitivity and Specificity, Stool Examination, Parasitology, Children's Health, Cost-Effective Diagnostics.*

Introduction

Parasitic infections are a significant public health issue globally, particularly in developing nations where they contribute to morbidity, especially in children. These infections are primarily caused by intestinal parasites transmitted through contaminated water, food, and poor sanitation. Accurate and timely diagnosis of parasitic infections is crucial for effective management and prevention of further transmission. However, standard diagnostic techniques, such as routine direct wet mount microscopy, often show limited sensitivity and may fail to detect low-intensity infections.

To enhance diagnostic accuracy, concentration techniques like salt floatation are often used to improve the detection of ova and cysts in stool samples. This study aims to compare the detection of parasitic ova and cysts in stool samples before and after the application of a concentration technique using salt floatation. Direct wet mount methods were used, including saline and iodine wet mounts, both before and after the concentration technique.

Materials and Methods

The study was carried out in the Department of Microbiology, a tertiary care hospital in central India, using 100 stool samples collected from patients presenting with gastrointestinal symptoms indicative of parasitic infection. All samples were stored and transported in appropriate conditions to maintain their integrity for laboratory analysis. The study employed direct wet mount techniques and a salt floatation concentration method for comparison.

The inclusion criteria for the study included stool samples from patients with gastrointestinal symptoms, while samples showing signs of contamination or improper storage were excluded. Two direct wet mount methods were used: saline wet mount and iodine wet mount. In the saline wet mount, a drop of normal saline was mixed with a small amount of stool on a slide. In the iodine wet mount, a drop of iodine solution was added to highlight the structures of ova and cysts. These preparations were examined under a microscope at magnifications of 10x and 40x to detect the presence of parasitic ova, cysts, and trophozoites.

After the initial direct wet mount examination, all samples were subjected to the salt floatation concentration technique. The stool samples were mixed with a saturated salt solution, allowing the ova and cysts to float due to the difference in density. The upper layer containing the concentrated ova and cysts was then examined using the saline and iodine wet mounts.

Data were analyzed to compare the detection rates before and after the salt floatation method. Additionally, prevalence was analyzed based on geographical distribution (urban vs. rural) and age groups.

Results

Detection Rates Before and After Concentration

Out of the 100 stool samples, 33 samples (33%) were found to be positive for parasites using direct wet mounts before the concentration technique. However, after using the salt floatation concentration technique, the number of positive samples increased to 47 (47%), indicating a 14% improvement in detection rates. This highlights the effectiveness of the concentration technique in increasing the likelihood of identifying parasitic infections that might be missed by direct wet mounts alone.

Table 1. Detection Rates Before and After Salt Floatation Technique

Detection Method	Positive Samples (n=100)	Percentage
Direct Wet Mount (before concentration)	33	33%
Wet Mount after Salt Floatation	47	47%
Increase in Detection Rate	14	14%

Geographical Distribution

When analyzing the data based on geographical location, it was observed that parasitic infections were more prevalent in rural areas compared to urban areas. Specifically, 78.7% of the positive samples were from rural areas, while only 21.3% were from urban areas. This suggests that environmental factors such as sanitation, access to clean water, and socioeconomic conditions play a significant role in the higher incidence of parasitic infections in rural settings.

Table 2. Prevalence of Parasites Based on Geographical Distribution

Location	Positive Samples (n=47)	Percentage (%)
Rural	37	78.7%
Urban	10	21.3%

Age Group Distribution

The study also examined the distribution of parasitic infections across different age groups. The highest positivity rate was observed in children aged 6-14 years, with 42.5% of the positive cases occurring in this age group. This is consistent with previous research indicating that children in this age range are more prone to parasitic infections due to poor hygiene practices and increased exposure to contaminated environments. In contrast, the age groups 15-30 and 31-50 years showed lower positivity rates of 25.5% and 10.6%, respectively, while individuals over 50 years old had the lowest positivity rate of 6.5%.

Table 3. Prevalence of Parasites by Age Group

Age Group (years)	Positive Samples (n=47)	Percentage (%)
0-5	7	14.9%
6-14	20	42.5%
15-30	12	25.5%
31-50	5	10.6%
>50	3	6.5%

Parasite Species Distribution

In terms of specific parasites detected, *Giardia lamblia* was the most prevalent parasite, accounting for 29.8% of the positive cases. Other parasites detected included *Entamoeba histolytica* (19.1%), *Ascaris lumbricoides* (10.6%), *Hookworm* (10.6%), *Hymenolepis nana* (8.5%), *Trichuris trichiura* (6.4%), *Strongyloides stercoralis* (4.3%), and *Taenia* spp. (4.3%). Additionally, mixed infections, where more than one type of parasite was detected, accounted for 6.4% of the positive cases.

Table 4. Distribution of Parasite Species Detected

Parasite Species	Positive Samples (n=47)	Percentage (%)
Giardia lamblia	14	29.8%
Entamoeba histolytica	9	19.1%
Ascaris lumbricoides	5	10.6%
Hookworm	5	10.6%
Hymenolepis nana	4	8.5%
Trichuris trichiura	3	6.4%
Strongyloides stercoralis	2	4.3%
Taenia spp.	2	4.3%
Mixed Infections	3	6.4%

Comparison of Wet Mount Techniques

When comparing the effectiveness of the different wet mount techniques, the results indicated that the saline wet mount technique improved in detection after the concentration method, with 17 samples testing positive compared to 12 before concentration. The iodine wet mount also showed an increase in detection, with 13 positive samples after concentration compared to 10 before. The improvement in detection rates further supports the efficacy of combining wet mount techniques with concentration methods.

Table 5. Comparison of Detection Rates by Wet Mount Technique

Wet Mount Technique	Positive Before Floatation (n=33)	Positive After Floatation (n=47)	Percentage Improvement
Saline Wet Mount	12	17	15.0%
Iodine Wet Mount	10	13	10.0%

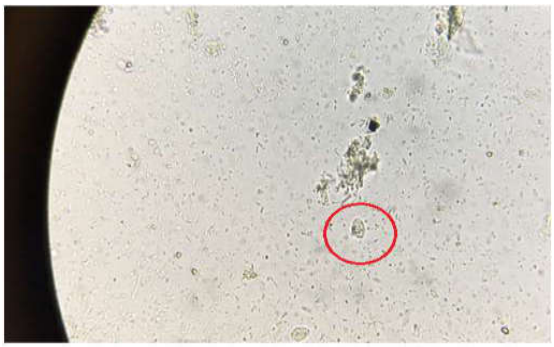

Figure I (a): Saline wet mount showing cyst of Giardia lamblia

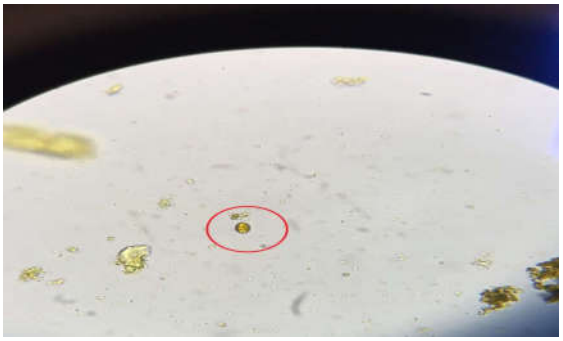

Figure I (b): Iodine wet mount showing cyst of Giardia lamblia

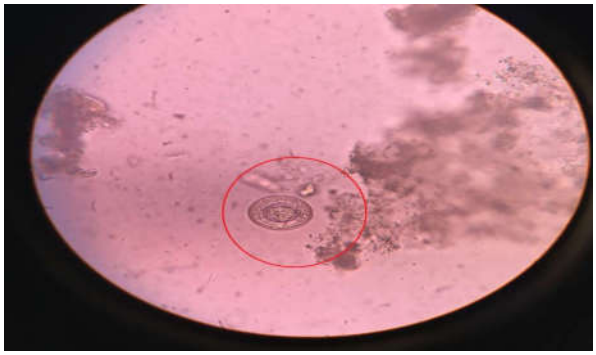

Figure II (a): Saline wet mount showing Hymenolepis nana egg

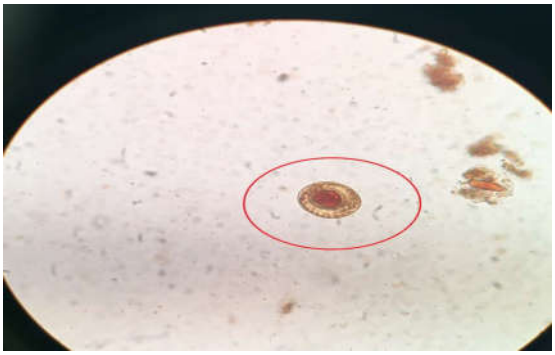

Figure II (b): Iodine wet mount showing Hymenolepis nana egg

Figure II (c): Lactophenol cotton blue wet mount showing Hymenolepis nana egg

Figure III (a): Iodine wet mount showing Ancylostoma duodenale egg

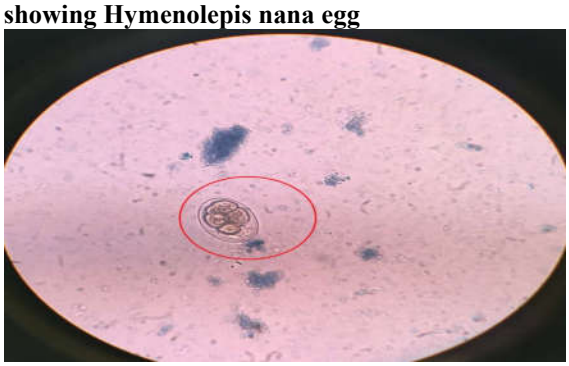

Figure III (b): Lactophenol cotton blue wet mount showing Ancylostoma duodenale egg

Figure IV (a): Iodine wet mount of Ascaris lumbricoides egg

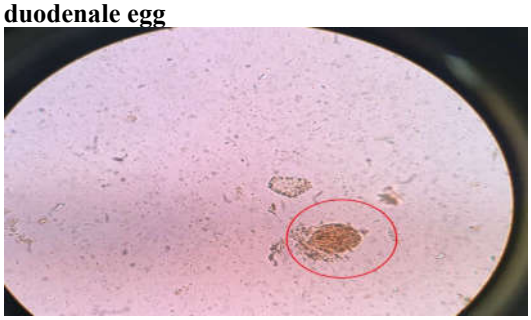

Figure IV (b): Lactophenol cotton blue wet mount of Ascaris lumbricoides egg

Figure V: Iodine wet mount showing Trichuris trichiura egg

Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the importance of concentration techniques, such as salt floatation, in improving the detection of parasitic ova and cysts in stool samples. While direct wet mounts are a useful initial screening tool, their sensitivity is limited, and low-intensity infections are often missed. The increase in detection rates from 33% to 47% after using the concentration method demonstrates that this technique significantly enhances the diagnostic capability for parasitic infections.

The higher prevalence of parasitic infections in rural areas, as compared to urban areas, is consistent with existing literature. Rural areas often face challenges such as inadequate sanitation, limited access to clean water, and lower socioeconomic conditions, which create an environment conducive to the transmission of parasitic infections. The

findings also reflect the vulnerability of children aged 6-14, who are more likely to be exposed to contaminated food and water sources, resulting in higher infection rates.

The predominance of *Giardia lamblia* in this study aligns with previous studies that identify it as one of the most common intestinal parasites, particularly in regions with poor sanitation and contaminated water supplies. Other parasites such as *Entamoeba histolytica* and *Ascaris lumbricoides* also showed significant prevalence, reinforcing the need for comprehensive diagnostic and preventive measures in affected regions.

The study's comparison of wet mount techniques before and after concentration revealed that the saline wet mount and iodine wet mount both benefited from the use of the concentration technique. The higher detection rates after concentration suggest that laboratories should routinely employ these methods, especially in resource-limited settings where advanced diagnostic tools may not be available.

Conclusion

This study highlights the effectiveness of the salt floatation concentration technique in enhancing the detection of parasitic ova and cysts in stool samples. By combining direct wet mount methods with the concentration technique, laboratories can significantly improve the detection rates of parasitic infections, thereby aiding in better diagnosis and treatment.

The high prevalence of parasitic infections in rural areas and among children emphasizes the need for targeted public health interventions, including improved sanitation, access to clean water, and health education. Routine use of concentration techniques should be considered, particularly in resource-limited settings where parasitic infections are endemic and where accurate diagnosis is essential for effective management.

Ultimately, the adoption of concentration techniques, along with the use of simple wet mount methods, offers a reliable, cost-effective approach to improving the diagnosis of parasitic infections, contributing to better health outcomes in affected populations.

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