Author's response to reviews

Title: Prevalence and risk factors of hepatitis B and C virus infections among the general population and blood donors in Morocco

Authors:

Warda Baha (wardabaha@gmail.com)
Abderrahim Foullous (foullous@yahoo.fr)
Noureddine Dersi (ndersi@gmail.com)
Thierry Paluku They-they (thierrypal@yahoo.fr)
Khadija El alaoui (elalaouikhadija01@gmail.com)
Nadia Nourichafi (nadia_nourichafi@yahoo.fr)
Bouchra Oukkache (bouchraoukkache@hotmail.fr)
Fatiha Lazar (fatiha.lazar@pasteur.ma)
Soumaya Benjelloun (soumaya.benjelloun@pasteur.ma)
My Mustapha Ennaji (m.ennaji@yahoo.fr)
Abdelouhad Elmalki (abdelouhad.elmalki@pasteur.ma)
Hassan Mifdal (crtsasca@yahoo.fr)
Abdelouaheb BENNANI (abdelouaheb.bennani@pasteur.ma)

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COVER LETTER FOR SUBMISSION OF MANUSCRIPT

Subject: New submission of a manuscript to be considered for publication in the journal BMC Public Health.

Dear Sir/Madam,

Please find enclosed the manuscript: “Prevalence and risk factors of hepatitis B and C virus infections among the general population and blood donors in Morocco”, by Warda BAHAb, et al., to be submitted as a new article to the Journal BMC Public Health for consideration of publication.

Hepatitis B and C infections are a serious global and public health problem. They have been found to be highly prevalent in subjects with chronic liver disease and strongly associated with hepatocellular carcinoma. To understand and assess the magnitude and dynamics of transmission of these diseases in a community, and to support control and prevention, the assessment and study of its prevalence is very important. In Morocco there have been only a few studies that focus on the prevalence of Hepatitis B and C viruses (HBV and HCV). These studies were generally limited to blood donors or high-risk populations, such as barbers and haemodialysis patients. These populations usually have special
characteristics regarding age, sex, socioeconomic level and selective procedures; so they are not representative of the general population. Thus, the actual prevalence in the population at large is unknown.

In this manuscript we report for the first time the results of a nationwide cross-sectional study performed to assess the epidemiology and risk factors of HCV and HBV infections and we were able to estimate the prevalence at 1.58% and 1.81% respectively among the general population residing in fifteen principal cities. Strong associations between these infections were observed regarding age, dental treatment and use of glass syringes, while HBV infection was in addition associated with gender, history of jaundice and history of sexual risk behaviors.

We also investigated for the first time the seroprevalence of HBV and HCV, for a period of three years (2008-2010), among blood donors in Casablanca. This is the largest city in the Maghreb with between 5 and 6 million inhabitants from different ethnic groups. We found a prevalence of 0.62% and 0.96% of HCV and HBV respectively. Our results showed a declining trend of HBV and a rise in HCV seroprevalence over the study period.

In fact, our team has published earlier preliminary data about the prevalence and risk factor of HBV in French language [1]; however, by increasing the number of patients screened from other cities, the present complete study is reporting a significantly higher rate of HBV infection than the first data published (1.81% vs. 1.6%). Moreover, other risk factors were found to have an association with infection, such as age, gender, dental therapy and history of jaundice.

We believe that our findings could be of interest to the readers of the Journal because they lead to a better understanding of the burden of these liver diseases and allow medical professionals and policymakers to develop appropriate preventive strategies/programs to control the spread and consequences of these infections in Morocco.

All co-authors have seen and agree with the contents of the manuscript and there is no financial interest to report. We certify that the submission is original work and is not under review at any other publication, and if accepted, it will not be published elsewhere.

We hope that the editorial board will agree on the interest of this study.

Sincerely yours,

Abdelouaheb. Bennani on behalf of the authors.


Corresponding author:
Dr Abdelouaheb BENANI
Head of Molecular Biology Laboratory. Pasteur Institute of Morocco
Place Louis Pasteur. 20360 Casablanca
Phone : +212 522 43 44 53
Mobile : +212 661 29 11 62
Fax : +212 522 26 09 57
Email : abdelouaheb.bennani@pasteur.ma