



Original Research Article

Evaluation of Different Staining Techniques in the Diagnosis of *Trichomonas Vaginalis* Infection in Females of Reproductive Age Group

Pradeep Kumar, Madhurendra Singh Rajput, R.C.Thanna

M.M Institute of Medical Science and Research, Mullana Ambala, Haryana, India

Corresponding Author: R.C.Thanna

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ABSTRACT

Background: Trichomoniasis is a sexually transmitted disease (STD) caused by a small organism called *Trichomonas vaginalis*. Women are most often affected by this disease, although men can become infected and pass the infection to their partners through sexual contact. Therefore, to overcome this problem, various staining techniques like giemsa and acridine orange can be used along with wet mount examination for diagnosis of *T. vaginalis* infection.

Objective: To evaluate the efficacy of Giemsa and Acridine Orange staining in comparison with wet mount examination for the diagnosis of vaginal trichomoniasis.

Materials and Methods: A total of 415 female patients of reproductive age group having vaginal discharge were included in the study and swabs containing vaginal fluids were taken to perform wet mount examination, giemsa staining and acridine orange staining.

Result: *Trichomonas vaginalis* infection was detected in 37 patients with maximum cases (6.0%) detected by acridine orange staining, followed by giemsa staining (4.9%), whereas, wet mount examination was able to detect only 4.1% cases. Wet mount examination gave a sensitivity of 67.6%, whereas, the sensitivity of giemsa staining and acridine orange staining was found to be 80% and 100% respectively.

Conclusion: Since the performance of both the staining techniques was found to be much better in comparison to wet mount examination, and they also detected several wet mount negative cases, they should be used as an adjunct to wet mount examination. This will also be beneficial to the overall health of the patient by early diagnosis and treatment of cases, thereby, reducing the development of associated morbidity.

Key word: *Trichomonas vaginalis*, Staining, Reproductive age group, Female.

INTRODUCTION

Trichomonas vaginalis is an anaerobic, flagellated protozoan parasite and the causative agent of trichomoniasis. It is the most common pathogenic protozoan infection of humans in industrialized countries. [1] Infection rates between men

and women are similar with women being symptomatic, while infections in men are usually asymptomatic. Transmission usually occurs via direct, skin-to-skin contact with an infected individual, most often through vaginal intercourse. *Trichomonas vaginalis* causes most common non-viral sexually

transmitted disease, which has the world-wide annual incidence of more than 180 million cases per year. [1] Although the most common clinical presentation in females is vaginitis and foul smelling vaginal discharge, it has a varied range of presentation from asymptomatic infection to symptomatic diseases and complications in the form of endometritis, infertility, infection of adnexa and bartholin glands and enhanced risk of neoplastic transformation of cervical tissues. [2] In addition, there is also increased risk of acquiring other sexually transmitted diseases including human immunodeficiency virus infection. [3-5]

The diagnosis of trichomoniasis has traditionally depended on the microscopic observation of motile protozoa from vaginal or cervical samples in females and urethral or prostatic secretions in males. [6] Currently, wet mount microscopy is the most rapid and widely used method for diagnosing trichomoniasis in resource-constrained settings. [7] However, it is a subjective test that requires experience and even in the hands of trained observers it is only 35 to 80% sensitive compared to culture. [8] This lack of sensitivity contributes to the under diagnosis of the disease. Also, since viable organisms are required, a delay in the transport of sample reduces motility of the organism and, consequently, diagnostic sensitivity. [9] This can be overcome by using staining techniques in adjunct to wet mount microscopy. Stained smears have the advantage that there can be considerable delay between preparation and staining and examination of the smear without loss of reliability in diagnosis, provided the smear has been adequately fixed. Various stains commonly used are Papanicolaou, Giemsa and other Romanowsky stains. [10-12] Besides these, a number of staining techniques using Acridine Orange, Leishman, Periodic Acid Schiff and Fontana staining methods have

been used to improve the sensitivity of direct microscopy. [13-16] Giemsa stain, no doubt, is the most readily available stain in the average laboratory and the results, even in poorly prepared smear, justify its application. Certain features, such as; spindle shaped nucleus, the contours of the organism, and the cytoplasmic inclusions still make it possible to recognize and diagnose the organism easily. Acridine orange staining is a non-specific nucleic acid staining procedure which can be applied for fluorescence-based detection of *T. vaginalis*. [17] Hence, the present study was done to evaluate the efficacy of staining procedures like giemsa staining and acridine orange staining in comparison with wet mount examination for the diagnosis of *Trichomonas vaginalis* infection in females of reproductive age group.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was conducted at Microbiology department in collaboration with Gynecology department of Index medical college hospital and research center, Indore, M.P, India, over a period of one year from May 2013 to April 2014. The study group comprised of 415 female patients of reproductive age group (15-45 years) with complaints of foul smelling vaginal discharge, pruritus, dyspareunia, dysuria, and pain in lower abdomen. An oral informed consent was taken from each patient and two vaginal swabs were taken from posterior fornix. One was used to prepare wet mount and second was used to prepare smear for giemsa staining and acridine orange staining.

Wet Mount Examination

Wet mount was prepared using 0.85% physiological saline and examined with a light microscope at 10X and 40X. [18] The trichomonas were identified by their size (10-20 µm), round or oval shape, and

characteristic quivering or twitching motility [Table/Fig-1a].

Giemsa Staining

The prepared smear was fixed by immersion in methanol for one minute and allowed to dry. It was then stained with giemsa stain (Hi Media Laboratories, India), diluted 1 part to 19 parts of 1/15M phosphate buffer, pH 7.2 for 10 min and scanned for *Trichomonas vaginalis* at 100X magnification. [19,20] Both the internal and external structures of the organism were clearly visualized. The former stained dark blue with a red nucleus and the latter was sharply outlined, showing clearly the flagella and the undulating membrane [Table/Fig-1b].

Acridine Orange Staining

The prepared smear was fixed with methanol for 2-3 min and covered with freshly prepared acridine orange dye (Hi

Media Laboratories, India) in a concentration of 5mg/ml which was then left at room temperature for 2 min. After being rinsed with distilled water, the slide was examined under a fluorescence microscope (with a 470-490 nm filter) at a magnification of 40X. [20] Epithelial cells fluoresced light green with a bright green nucleus. The nuclei of leukocytes (pus cells) fluoresced bright green and bacteria stained bright red [Table/Fig-1c]. The trophozoites of *Trichomonas vaginalis* were seen as characteristic brick red colour with a yellowish green nucleus [Table/Fig-1d].

Statistical Analysis

The collected data were analyzed by using Graph pad software.

Sensitivity, specificity, negative predictive value (NPV), Positive predictive value (PPV) was calculated.

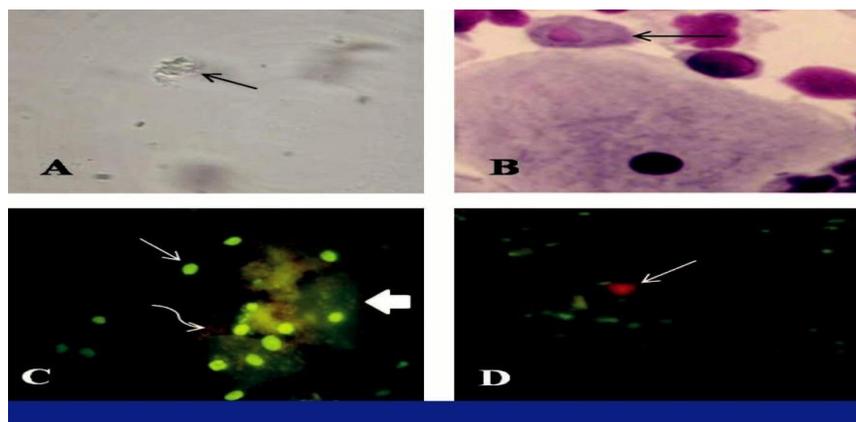


Figure 1: a) Wet mount showing *Trichomonas vaginalis* (thin arrow); b) Giemsa staining showing *Trichomonas vaginalis* (thin arrow); c) Acridine Orange staining showing epithelial cell (thick arrow), pus cell (thin arrow) and bacteria (curved arrow); d) Acridine Orange staining showing brick red coloured *Trichomonas vaginalis* (thin arrow)

Table 1: Age wise distribution of participant.

Total Subjects	Age group	Mean age
415	15-45	32.64± 0.44

RESULTS

A total of 415 female patients of reproductive age group (15-45 years) were included in the study. The mean age of the patients was 32.64±0.44 years. Direct microscopic examination of smears from vaginal swab detected 37 positive cases of

trichomoniasis. Wet mount examination for *T. vaginalis* was positive in 4.1% of cases, whereas, giemsa staining and acridine orange staining were positive in 4.9% and 6.0% of cases respectively [Fig-2]. Out of total 37 positive cases, 25 cases were positive in wet mount examination. The sensitivity of wet mount examination was found to be 67.6%.

A correlation was done between the different diagnostic tests performed and it was found that out of 37 positive cases, giemsa staining detected 10 wet mount negative cases, whereas, acridine orange staining detected 12 wet mount negative cases along with 7 giemsa negative cases.

The efficacy of staining techniques was determined in comparison with wet mount examination and sensitivity, specificity, positive predictive value (PPV) and negative predictive value (NPV) of giemsa staining and acridine orange staining were calculated [Table-2].

Table 2: Efficacy of different staining technique in comparison with wet mount

Staining technique performed	Sensitivity (%)	Specificity (%)	Negative predictive value (NPP) (%)	Positive predictive value (PPP)(%)
Gimsa	80	98	99	66.7
Acridine orange	100	98	100	67.6

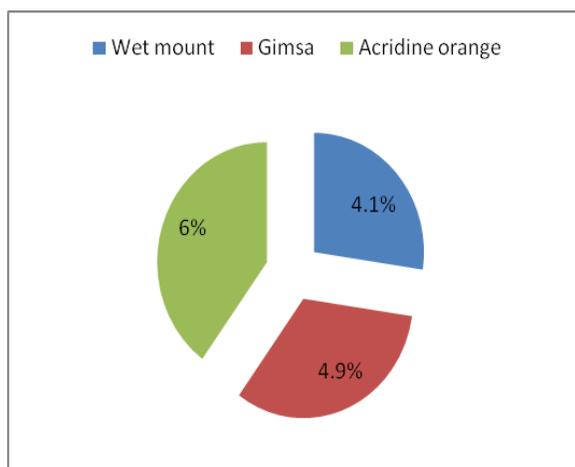


Figure 2: Correlation between different diagnostic technique performed for trichomonas vaginalis.

DISCUSSION

Wet mount examination is the most frequently used method for diagnosis of trichomoniasis in women. In our study, out of the 615 patients tested, 25 (4.1%) cases were positive for *T vaginalis* infection by wet mount examination with sensitivity of 67.6%. It has been reported that the sensitivity of wet mount examination ranges between 35-80% depending on the technical expertise of the observer. [8] In one of the study it was shown that the sensitivity and specificity of direct wet mount microscopy was 95.83% and 100% respectively, in comparison to culture. [21] Since the protozoa lose their distinctive motility on cooling to room temperature, a microscope and an experienced microscopist must be readily available in the clinical setting and

the specimen should be examined as quickly as possible. [9]

The performance of giemsa staining was good and it was able to detect *Trichomonas vaginalis* in 30 (4.9%) out of 615 patients, with a sensitivity of 80% and specificity of 98.3%. Although, positive wet mount is diagnostic, a negative test cannot exclude trichomoniasis because of low sensitivity. [22] It is reported that a minimal concentration of 10^4 organisms per millilitre of vaginal fluid is necessary for the identification of this protozoan by wet mount as low number of trichomonas can be easily missed when they are in the presence of large number of leukocytes. [23] Studies done by different workers have reported varying range of sensitivity (41-56%) of giemsa stained smears for the diagnosis of *Trichomonas vaginalis* infection. [19] In one study it was reported that giemsa staining had high sensitivity (100%) and specificity (99.69%) compared to culture. The high sensitivity (100%) reported in their study was attributed to centrifugation of sample prior to preparation of smears which led to concentration of large number of parasites. [21] In set up lacking immediate microscopic facilities giemsa staining is very useful, where prepared and fixed smears can be transported to the laboratory for diagnosis. Also, with large number of patients attending gynaecological outpatient department, an immediate examination of a

vaginal swab is virtually impossible. Unlike, wet mount examination, delay in transport has no significant impact on its reliability for diagnosing *Trichomonas vaginalis*. However, it is time consuming and needs technical expertise.

Also, it has been reported that the sensitivity of acridine orange staining is high (67%) in women with *T. vaginalis* infection alone, and low (53%) in women with multiple infections. [17]

In the present study, maximum number of cases of vaginal trichomoniasis was detected by acridine orange staining. This is in agreement with a previously done study which showed that the infection rate detected by acridine orange staining was higher than either culture or other vaginal swab examinations. [19] Although acridine orange staining is easy to perform, rapid and screening of the vaginal smears is done in less time, the major disadvantage of this technique is that it requires special microscopic facilities, trained personnel and availability of the dye. Also, the smears lose their fluorescence with the passage of time, so permanent record is not possible. However, the rapidity, ease and reliability of acridine orange staining justify its use in routine laboratory diagnosis of trichomonal infection.

CONCLUSION

Although wet mount examination is the most commonly used test in routine diagnosis of *Trichomonas vaginalis* infection, but staining techniques should be used as an additional diagnostic test in order to diagnose cases missed either due to unavailability of immediate microscopic facility or delay in the transport of samples to the laboratory for culture. Acridine orange staining was found to be the best microscopic method when compared with wet mount examination and giemsa staining. Hence, it should be used in routine diagnosis

of *Trichomonas vaginalis* infection in places where fluorescent microscopic facility is available. This will also provide rapid screening of vaginal smears in patients suffering from vaginal discharge and thus, help in early diagnosis and prompt treatment of patients. As giemsa staining performed well in comparison to wet mount examination and can easily be done in routine, it should be used as an adjunct to wet mount microscopy in small setups lacking facilities for fluorescent microscopy. This will ultimately prove beneficial to patients in reducing morbidity and associated adverse health outcomes in the form of pelvic inflammatory diseases and increased risk of acquiring other sexually transmitted diseases including human immunodeficiency virus infection.

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