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RESEARCH ARTICLE

CLINICAL PROFILE OF MICROSPORIDIAL KERATITIS AT A TERTIARY EYE CARE CENTER IN BUNDELKHAND REGION

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Abstract

Background: Although rare, microsporidia are sometimes misdiagnosed as the cause of corneal infections. The ubiquitous, obligatory, intracellular parasite is the causal agent. In Asia, the prevalence of microsporidiosis is rising in tandem with the monsoon season. Immunosuppression (HIV infection, topical corticosteroids), contact lens usage, and injuries from water or dirt exposure are risk factors.

Purpose: To study clinical profile of patient with microsporidial keratitis in department of ophthalmology at M.L.B. Medical College Jhansi between April to October 2024. To summarize the current literature on the etiology and clinical presentation of microsporidial infections of the cornea and highlights ongoing developments in available diagnostic modalities and treatment regimens.

Materials and Methods: Prospective study of 20 patients of microsporidial keratitis present in Department of Ophthalmology at M.L.B. Medical College Jhansi.

Results: A total of 20 patients were examined out of which 19 patients (95%) presented with pain and redness, 18 patients (90%) present with foreign body sensation and blurring of vision, 15 patients (75%) present with photophobia, 14 patients (70%) present with lid swelling. 18 patients (90%) have conjunctival hyperemia, 16 patients (50%) have diffuse punctate epitheliopathy and 1 have deep stromal infiltrates on examination.

Conclusion: Most commonly patients presents with redness and eye pain, followed by foreign body sensation, blurring of vision, photophobia and least commonly with lid swelling.

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Introduction:-

The phylum Microspora & subkingdom Protista contain the unicellular, obligatory intracellular eukaryotic parasites known as microsporidia^{1,2}. There have been descriptions of more than 1300 microsporidia species from about 200 genera^{3,4}. Unclassified microsporidia, collectively known as Microsporidium, along with seven genera—Enterocytozoon species, Brachiola species, Encephalitozoon species, Pleistophora species, Nosema species, Vittaforma species, and Trachipleistophora species—have been linked to human illness. Microsporidia are

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opportunistic pathogens that have been linked to infections of the central nervous system, muscles, kidneys, sinuses, lungs, and intestines⁵. Besides infections of the digestive tract, ocular disease is the second most common clinical manifestation of microsporidia⁶. About 0.4% of instances of microbial keratitis in some populations are caused by microsporidia⁷.

In 1973, Ashton and Wirasinha reported the first instance of ocular microsporidiosis in an 11-year-old Sri Lankan child⁸. It may manifest as an isolated infections and as a component of systemic diseases⁹. Although there are a few case reports of microsporidia-induced scleritis¹⁰ and endophthalmitis^{11, 12}, ocular microsporidiosis often manifests as one of two types: Stromal keratitis or superficial keratoconjunctivitis.

The process by which microsporidial corneal infections arise remains unknown. Nonetheless, considering that microsporidia are aquatic pathogens, direct inoculation through exposure to polluted water in hot springs, rivers, and swimming pools has been implicated¹³⁻¹⁵. According to a retrospective case series, 50% of patient's eye has history of exposure to water contaminated with mud who have been found positive for microsporidial keratitis¹⁶. Although the extent of the corneal epithelium's damage was not specified, but 47% of respondents in another case series confirmed having a history of ocular trauma¹⁷. Wearing contact lenses is a significant risk factor since they may serve as a conduit for the organism to enter the cornea, particularly when there is inadequate lens cleanliness¹⁸. Rarely, microsporidial corneal infections have developed after ocular procedures such as collagen cross-linking (CXL), penetrating keratoplasty (PK), autodescemet stripping automated endothelial keratoplasty (DSAEK), and laser in situ keratomileusis (LASIK)¹⁹⁻²². Insect bites, topical corticosteroid use, and contact with household animals are additional risk factors^{6, 23, 24}.

Countries in South and Southeast Asia have seen the majority of cases of microsporidial corneal infections; a higher incidence has been observed during the July–October monsoon season, which is thought to be connected to either an increase in insect populations or water contaminated with microsporidia^{16, 25, 26}.

In immunocompetent people, MKC (Microsporidial Keratoconjunctivitis) typically develops as a self-limiting illness as a result of encephalitozoon species²⁷. Within a week following the commencement of symptoms, patients typically exhibit photophobia, redness, tears, sense of a foreign body, blurred vision, and eye pain^{6, 26, 28}.

The course of MSK (Microsporidial Stromal Keratitis) is slowly progressive; symptoms might appear anywhere from one month to two years before the initial presentation²⁹. Usually, MSK develops as a result of *Microsporidium* or *Vittaforma corneae* (formerly *Nosema corneum*)^{27, 30}. The symptoms of MSK include photophobia, conjunctival redness, unilateral eye discomfort, decreased visual acuity, and a sense of a foreign body¹⁷.

Purpose:

This research article presents a clinical profile of microsporidial keratitis through a prospective study of 20 patients in department of ophthalmology at M.L.B. Medical College Jhansi between April to October 2024. It also tries to summarize the existing work on the etiology, clinical profile, management of corneal microsporidial infections.

Materials and Method:-

A hospital based prospective study of 20 patients complaining of eye pain, redness, watering, foreign body sensation, blurred vision, photophobia. Patients was recruited from the OPD of MLB medical college, Jhansi, Uttar Pradesh and followed from 24 April 2024 to 24 October 2024. It was performed under the Helsinki Declaration of 1975, as revised in 2000. The necessary permission from the Ethical and Research Committee was obtained for the study.

Inclusion Criteria:

All patients who presented to the OPD of MLB Medical College Jhansi with the complaint of pain, redness, foreign body sensation, photophobia, blurring of vision.

Exclusion Criteria:

1. Patients with ocular diseases that could affect conjunctiva and cornea.
2. Patients with other ocular disorders.
3. Patients with recent intraocular surgery.
4. Patients with the history of trauma.

All patients were subjected to a detailed history taking and complete ophthalmic examination including biomicroscopic slit lamp examination.

Results:-

A total of 20 patients were studied. We included eyes with complaint of pain, redness, foreign body sensation, photophobia, blurring of vision.

Among the patients 65% (n=13) were male and 35% (n=7) were female [table 1

Table 1:- Gender Distribution.

Gender	No. of patients(percentage)
Male	13(65%)
Female	7(35%)

The affected patients mostly belong to the age group of 20-30 years i.e. 55% (n=11) followed by age group of 40-50 years i.e. 30% (n=6) [table2]

Table 2:- Age Distribution.

Age	No. of patients(percentage)
20-30	11(55%)
30-40	3(15%)
40-50	6(30%)

Most common presenting symptoms were pain and redness i.e. 95% (n=19) followed by foreign body sensation i.e. 90% (n=18)

Table 3:- Presenting Symptoms.

Clinical symptoms	No. of patients(percentage)
Redness	19(95%)
Eyepain	19(95%)
Blurring of vision	18(90%)
Foreign body sensation	18(90%)
Photophobia	15(75%)
Lid swelling	14(70%)

Microsporidia is common almost equally in both immunocompetent and immunocompromised now-a-days

Table 4:- Immunocompromised status.

Immunity status	No. of patients(percentage)
Immunocompetent	12(60%)
Immunocompromised	8(40%)

Most common slit lamp examination finding were conjunctival hyperemia i.e. 90%(n=18)

Table 5:- Slit lamp examination findings.

Examination findings	No. of patients(percentage)
Conjunctival hyperemia	18(90%)
Diffuse punctate epitheliopathy	16(80%)
Deep stromal infiltrates	1(0.05%)

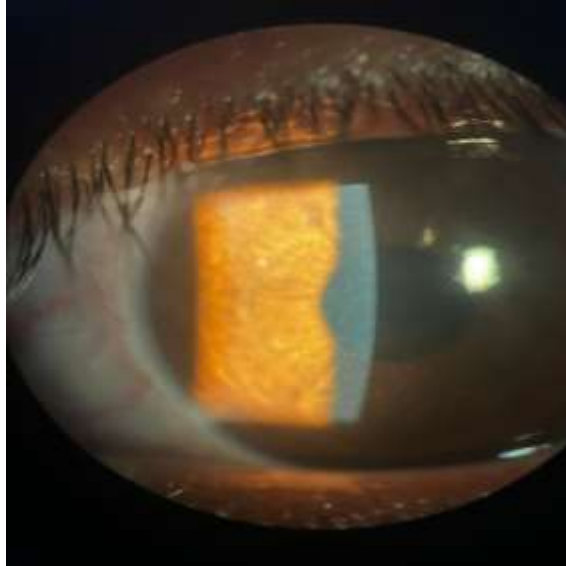


Figure 1:- Clinical appearance of left eye of patient on slit lamp examination showing conjunctival hyperemia and superficial punctate keratitis.

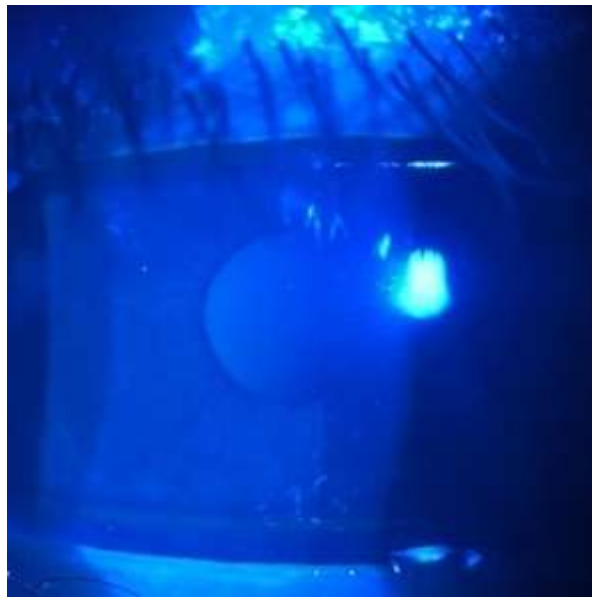


Figure 2:- Clinical appearance of left eye of patient after staining with fluorescent stain seen under cobalt blue filter light showing stain positive superficial punctate keratitis.

Discussion:-

Two possible ways in which ocular microsporidiosis can manifest it are: isolated ocular microsporidiosis or as a component of a systemic illness. Ocular microsporidiosis has 2 main types: stromal keratitis, which usually affects immunocompetent people, and keratoconjunctivitis, which usually affects immunocompromised people^{31, 32}.

Mostly affecting immunocompetent patients, deep stromal keratitis start off subtly and resemble progressive herpes disciform keratitis with recurrent stromal infiltration and uveitis. Additionally, they have been reported to show as vascularized corneal scar and perforated corneal ulcer with hyphaema, which are clinical signs that resemble keratitis caused by the herpes simplex virus (HSV). Corneal biopsies can be used to make the diagnosis, however penetrating keratoplasty could be required for visual rehabilitation.

All three Encephalitozoon species (*E. hellem*, *E. cuniculi*, and *E. intestinalis*) have the potential to induce keratoconjunctivitis in HIV-infected patients. In addition to bilateral conjunctival inflammation, the majority of patients have bilateral punctate epithelial keratopathy, which impairs visual acuity. Keratoconjunctivitis is usually mild or asymptomatic, but it can occasionally be severe and infrequently results in corneal ulcers. Only individual case reports were provided for the other species (*V. corneae*, *N. ocularium*, *T. hominis*, *M. ceylonensis*, and *M. africanum*)³³.

Table 1:- Characteristics of microsporidial keratoconjunctivitis and stromal keratitis³⁴.

Features	Microsporidial keratoconjunctivitis(MSK)	Microsporidial stromal keratitis(MSK)
Risk factors	Exposure to contaminated water or soil, ocular trauma, contact lens wear, ocular surgeries, topical steroid use, insect bites, contact with domestic animals	
Time of presentation	Acute	Delayed
Clinical presentation	Photophobia, redness, tearing, foreign body sensation, impaired visual acuity, eye pain	
Slit lamp finding	Grayish-white, coarse, multifocal, raised epithelial lesions and non-purulent conjunctivitis → central epithelial lesions → superficial punctate keratopathy → subepithelial infiltrates or haze	Diffuse multifocal stromal infiltrates, non-purulent conjunctivitis, stromal edema, endothelial exudates; rarely, epithelial defects
Differential diagnosis	Thygeson's superficial punctate keratitis, <i>Acanthamoeba</i> keratitis, mycobacterial keratitis, adenoviral keratoconjunctivitis	Fungal, bacterial, or HSV stromal keratitis
Diagnostic technique	Transmission electron microscopy (TEM), light microscopy (LM) ± tissue staining, histopathology, polymerase chain reaction (PCR), in vivo confocal microscopy (IVCM), anterior segment optical coherence tomography (AS-OCT)	
Treatment option	Self-limiting; most often treated with monotherapy consisting of topical fumagillin, oral albendazole, topical antibiotics, topical antifungals, and/or topical antiseptics	Usually requires corneal graft transplantation, though some reports exist of resolution with medical therapy alone
Prognosis	Excellent	Guarded

Routine microbiological diagnosis may be challenging since the organism can be isolated utilizing specialist tissue culture procedures that are only available in a small number of specialized laboratories^{35,36}. It has been shown that biopsy specimens and alcohol-fixed cytologic samples of conjunctival scrapings, corneal epithelium, or both are highly effective in identifying microsporidial blastospores^{37,38}. Spores may be distinguished from bacteria and yeasts with help of light microscopy, which reveals that they are uniformly oval in shape and do not show budding³⁹ [ix] Gram stain gives the spores a strong stain^{40,41}. Other stains that can be used are giemsa stain & 1% acid fast stain. Electron microscopy, immunofluorescent staining technique and molecular techniques are recent diagnostic modalities. Two new diagnostic techniques that eliminate the necessity for corneal scrapings are anterior segment optical coherence tomography (AS-OCT) and in vivo confocal microscopy (IVCM)³⁴.

As of right now, there are no established protocols for treating ocular microsporidial infections. Albendazole, thiabendazole, itraconazole, propamidine isethionate, fumagilin, chlorhexidine, metronidazole, polyhexa methylene biguanide, and benzimidazoles are among the anecdotal reports of particular pharmacological treatment for microsporidiosis; nevertheless, their efficacy is still up for debate^{42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49}. Although fluoroquinolones are recommended by some, a recent randomized clinical trial concluded that microsporidial keratoconjunctivitis is self-limited and does not require antimicrobial therapy⁵⁰. Microsporidial keratoconjunctivitis often does not require surgery; nevertheless, there have been reports of the positive effects of epithelial debridement⁴⁸. Debridement helps

to reduce the organisms load in the corneal epithelial layer. Another surgical option that might work well is penetrating keratoplasty because the infection seems to be limited to the stroma and shouldn't reoccur⁵¹. After surgery, topical fumagillin, which has been demonstrated to be beneficial in treating epithelial illness, can be administered without experiencing any serious negative side effects⁵².

Conclusion:-

Microsporidia are an important cause of disease in both immunocompromised (40%) and immunocompetent (60%) patients among age group of 20-30 years (55%) most commonly. Due to its rarity, it is frequently disregarded as a diagnosis in first place. Therefore, for this condition to be diagnosed and treated quickly, a high suspicion index is required. Patients most often present with redness and eye pain.

Foreign body sensation, blurred vision, photophobia, and lid swelling are the less common.

Therefore, we recommend that ophthalmologists should consider microsporidia in the differential diagnosis of infectious keratitis more frequently.

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