PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENTAL INFLUENCE ON HIGH IODINE INTAKE AMONG SAHARAWI REFUGEES IN THE SAHARA DESERT TINDOUF, ALGERIA

Ingrid Barikmo,
Sigrun Henjum, Arne Oshaug,
Akershus University College, Norway.
Liv Elin Torheim
Fafo, Norway

Background

- Refugees in harsh environments in the Sahara desert more than 30 years
- Cease-fire in 1991
- Total dependency on food aid as well as all other needs for survival
- Water: a considerable scarcity
- Health problems such as undernutrition, anaemia and goitre are common
Objective

- Assess the prevalence of goitre among women and children
- Assess urine iodine concentration
- Identify sources of iodine

Method

Randomly selected households in four refugee camps, households n=92, women (15 – 45 years) n=398, children (6-14 years) n=416
- Assessment of goitre on women and children using ultrasound
- Collecting urine from women and children
- Samples collected in the household:
  - Drinking water, n=92
  - Ground salt, n=81 (rock salt, n=53 fine or coarse, n=28;)
  - Local milk, n=19 (goat, n=16; camel, n=3)
- Determined of iodine concentration in:
  - Water and urine by Sandell-Kolthoff reaction
  - Milk by Inductively Coupled Plasma-Mass Spectrometry (ICP-MS).
  - Salt by standard iodometric titration.
Results

Prevalence of enlarged thyroid gland measured by ultrasound

- **Women:** 22% (cut-off volume thyroid gland > 12.5 ml)
- **Children:** 86% (international reference values (thyroid gland volume - Tvol) for BSA with cut-off point at the 97 percentile)

Excretion of iodine in urine

- **Women:** Median 466µg/L (range 54-3,640)
- **Children:** Median 565 µg/L (102-3,594)

Iodine in water

- **Median all camps:** 108µg/L (range 55-545)
- **Median for 2 camps (Ausserd and El Ajune):** 300µg/L (range 55-545)
- **Median for Dakla:** 70µg/L (range 55-96)
- **Median for Smara:** 87µg/L (range 55-127)
- **Median for tea water:** 148µg/L (range 29-367)

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Figure 1 Median iodine content (µg/L) in water and urine (women and children)
Local salt

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Iodine µg/g, median (range)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rock salt, (n=53)</td>
<td>4.4 (0-33.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine or coarse salt, (n=28)</td>
<td>11.8 (0-50.8)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Local milk

- **Goat milk** (n=16)
  - Content of iodine: median 370 µg/L, (70-13,071)

- **Camel milk** (n=3)
  - Content of iodine in the 3 samples 540 µg/L, 4.170 µg/L and 11.980 µg/L
Sources of the iodine intake among women

- Water: 48%
- Local milk: 38%
- Tea water: 6%
- Salt: 7%
- Dairy products: 1%

Iodine in urine, women:

- 600 µg/day: Proposed safe upper level for adults (Scientific Committee on Food in the European Union, 2002)
- 1100 µg/day: Tolerable upper level of daily iodine intake for adults (Food and Nutrition Board, USA, 2006)
Conclusion

- The prevalence of enlarged thyroid gland was severe, especially for the children.
- The majority of the Saharawi refugee women (74%) and children (84%) had excessive intake of iodine.
  - It was differences between the camps: of those with iodine excretion more than 600 µg/L, 88% of the women and 91% of the children came from the two camps, Ausserd and El Ajune.
- The content of iodine in local milk was extremely high and need to be more investigated.
- The high concentration of iodine in water are affecting the humans directly and probably also indirectly through the local milk.