

ACTUAL SITUATION OF HEAD AND BODY LOUSE INFESTATIONS IN TURKEY

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During the period of the Ottoman Empire lice were used to determine whether a bride or groom had leprosy, as well as to guess the sex of an unborn child. In the 20th Century louse-borne diseases caused many fatalities among the soldiers and civilians. During WW1 for example within 6 months in Sirbistan area (Serbia) alone more than 150,000 people died as a result of epidemic typhus.

In recent years most of the epidemiological studies on head lice were conducted in schools. The infestation rate varied between 2.1% and 37% according to the region and the socio-economic level of the children. In given areas the rate of infestation in girls was as high as 68% which was at least 4 times higher than in boys. The girl's longer hair was thought to be the reason for the higher infestation rates observed.

The average infestation rate of school-children with head lice was estimated to be 11%. In Turkey, according to Ministry of Education today there are 16 million school-children. In 1992 more than 2.5 million pediculicides were sold in this country, indicating that about 15% of the children were infested with head lice. From 1996-2000 an average of only 7,500 infested people per year were reported to the Ministry of Health. In psychiatric clinics infestation rates of 1.3% and 17.3%, and in orphanages rates of 0.8% were reported. After the big earthquake on August 17, 1999 the louse infestation rate in people living in tents was as high as 8.7%.

During the last 10 years, there have been only sporadic reports of infestations with body and pubic lice. In the years 1979-88 the infestation rate among patients visiting a dermatological polyclinic in Istanbul was 0.6% for head lice and 0.02% for body and pubic lice. Phthiriasis palpebrarum was observed in very rare cases.

Local head lice are susceptible to d-phenothrin but have developed resistance to lindane and sumithrin. Benzyl benzoate is only effective when used at higher concentrations. 1% permethrin cream formulation is effective in controlling pubic lice whereas lindane (0.1%) was effective in 88% and 0.4% sumithrin in 56% of the cases.