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HTLV-1 PROVIRAL LOAD IN PERIPHERAL MONONUCLEAR CELL QUANTIFIED IN TSP/HAM PATIENTS, ASYMPTOMATIC AND OLIGOSYMPOMATIC HTLV-1 CARRIES.

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Human T-cell lymphotropic virus type 1 (HTLV-1) is a human retrovirus that infected approximately 10 million people in the worldwide. The majority of infected individuals remain healthy. HTLV-1 is associated myelopathy/tropical spastic paraparesis (HAM/TSP) and adult T-cell leukemia (ATL). However, an increasing spectrum of HTLV-1 disease has been reported like: polymyositis, uveitis, interstitial keratitis, Sjogren's syndrome, alveolitis and arthritis. **Objective:** To verify the relationship among the epidemiological characteristics of the subjects, count cells and proviral load in HTLV-1 infected asymptomatic individuals and patients carrying different stages of clinical neurological manifestations. **Methods:** We retrospectively investigated the HTLV-FBDC cohort of 122 infected individuals (74 asymptomatic, 26 oligosymptomatic and 22 with TSP/HAM) derived from a state based surveillance system of HTLV infection set up in Salvador/Bahia-Brazil. HTLV-1 proviral load was quantified using a real-time TaqMan PCR method. **Results:** The median proviral load (HTLV-1 copies/ 10^6 PBMCs) was higher in HAM/TSP (185,414-log 5.27) when we compare with asymptomatics (13,224-log 4.12) ($p=0.0001$) and oligosymptomatics patients (20,904-log 4.3) ($p=0.0087$). There was no difference between asymptomatics and oligosymptomatics patients. ($p=0.3$). The median age was lower in the asymptomatics (35.5 yr). In addition, the median age in the oligosymptomatics was 50 yr and in the HAM/TSP was 46 yr. The women were more prevalent in the three groups. **Discussion:** These finding indicate that the abundant viral load could play an important role in the HTLV-1 pathogenesis and to quantify proviral load in PBMCs could be a useful tool to monitoring the disease progression.

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