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Validity of p-LDH/HRP2-Based Rapid Diagnostic Test for the Diagnosis of Malaria on Pregnant Women in Maluku

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Pregnant women are one of the groups at risk for infection by the malaria parasites in endemic areas. The dangerous impacts of malaria in pregnancy are anemia and severe malaria that can cause death for mother, fetus and newborn. Clinical symptoms that are likely to be not typical until asymptomatic in pregnancy are one of the obstacles on diagnosing malaria in pregnancy in endemic areas. p-LDH/HRP2-RDT (*Pf/Pan*) is one of the WHO recommended RDT product on round 1-4 and has been used in Maluku. This tool is able to detect antigens of the *Plasmodium* metabolism results in peripheral blood so that it is regarded to be more sensitive than microscopic examination. The use of p-LDH and HRP2-RDT (*Pf/Pan*) for the detection of *P. falciparum* HRP-2 antigen and *P. vivax*, *P. malariae*, *P. ovale* p-LDH antigen have not been previously evaluated in the Province of Maluku.

Objectives: To evaluate the validity of p-LDH/HRP2-RDT (*Pf/Pan*) compared with microscopic examination and nested Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) as the gold standard for the diagnosis of malaria in pregnancy in Maluku.

Methods: This was a cross-sectional study using a diagnostic test of malaria in pregnant women. The study was conducted in Ambon City health center, Savana Jaya Buru Island health center and Haulussy Ambon Local Hospital. Sample data, the data of pregnancy, RDT results and microscopic results on the field were recorded in the questionnaire. Nested PCR examination was conducted at the Laboratory of Parasitology, Faculty of Medicine, Universitas Gadjah Mada as well as second reading for microscopic examination

Results: The results showed that p-LDH/HRP2-RDT (*Pf/Pan*) had the same sensitivity with microscopic of 11%, a specificity of 100% higher than microscopic 96% compared with nested PCR as the gold standard, p-LDH/HRP2-RDT (*Pf/Pan*) had PPV and NPV of 100% and 98% compared with nested PCR as the gold standard. p-LDH/HRP2-RDT (*Pf/Pan*) sensitivity was 80% compared to the microscopic examination.

Conclusion: diagnostic malaria in pregnancy in Maluku with p-LDH/HRP2-RDT (*Pf/Pan*) was less sensitive than nested PCR and microscopic.

Keywords: Malaria, pregnant woman, diagnostic test, validity, p-LDH/HRP2 Rapid Diagnostic Test (RDT) (*Pf/Pan*)

INTISARI

Pendahuluan: Wanita hamil adalah salah satu kelompok berisiko malaria di daerah endemis. Dampak malaria pada kehamilan seperti anemia dan malaria parah dapat menyebabkan kematian bagi ibu, janin dan bayi baru lahir. Gejala klinis yang mungkin tidak khas sampai asimtomatik pada kehamilan adalah salah satu kendala dalam mendiagnosis malaria dalam kehamilan di daerah endemik. RDT p-LDH/HRP2 Pf/Pan adalah salah satu rekomendasi WHO pada putaran 1-4 dan telah digunakan di Maluku. Alat ini mampu mendeteksi antigen dari hasil metabolisme *Plasmodium* dalam darah perifer sehingga dianggap lebih sensitif dibandingkan mikroskop. Penggunaan p-LDH/HRP2 Pf/Pan untuk mendeteksi *P. falciparum* HRP-2 antigen dan p LDH dari *P. vivax*, *P. malariae*, *P. ovale* antigen belum pernah dievaluasi di Propinsi Maluku.

Tujuan: penelitian ini adalah untuk mengevaluasi validitas p-LDH/HRP2 Pf/Pan dibandingkan dengan pemeriksaan mikroskopis dan *nested Polymerase Chain Reaction* (PCR) sebagai standar baku untuk diagnosis malaria dalam kehamilan di Maluku.

Metode: Penelitian ini merupakan studi cross-sectional menggunakan tes diagnostik malaria pada wanita hamil. Penelitian dilakukan di Kota Ambon Puskesmas, Puskesmas Savana Jaya Pulau Buru dan Haulussy RSUD Ambon. Data sampel, data kehamilan, hasil RDT dan hasil mikroskopis di lapangan dicatat dalam kuesioner. Pemeriksaan *Nested PCR* dan mikroskopis (*cross-check*) dilakukan di Laboratorium Parasitologi, Fakultas Kedokteran, Universitas Gadjah Mada.

Hasil: Validitas RDT p-LDH/HRP2 Pf/Pan memiliki sensitivitas sama dengan mikroskopik yaitu 11%, spesifisitas 100% lebih tinggi dibandingkan spesifisitas mikroskopik yaitu 96% dengan *nested PCR* sebagai standar baku emas. p-LDH/HRP2-RDT (*Pf/Pan*) memiliki nilai PPV dan NPV yaitu 100% dan 98% dibandingkan *nested PCR* sebagai standar baku emas. Sensitivitas p-LDH/HRP2-RDT (*Pf/Pan*) adalah 80% dibandingkan dengan pemeriksaan malaria dengan mikroskopis.

Simpulan: diagnosis malaria menggunakan p-LDH/HRP2-RDT (*Pf/Pan*) pada ibu hamil di Provinsi Maluku sebagai daerah endemis malaria, memiliki nilai sensitivitas yang lebih rendah dibandingkan dengan pemeriksaan *nested PCR* dan mikroskopis.

Kata kunci: Malaria, wanita hamil, tes diagnostik, validitas, RDT p-LDH/HRP2 (*Pf/Pan*)

INTRODUCTION

Until currently, malaria has been one of the infectious diseases that causes death in the world after tuberculosis¹. One of the risk groups infected with malaria is pregnant women. The impact of malaria in pregnant women is anemia, low birth weight and abortion; therefore, this is a threat to malaria endemic areas. The number of pregnant women and infants who die due to malaria and severe anemia due to malaria is 10,000 pregnant women and 200,000 babies

each year^{1,2}. Cases of malaria especially in pregnant women are still a problem in Eastern Indonesia, including Maluku. Maluku is one of provinces with the highest API (Annual Parasite Incidence) in Eastern Indonesia³.

One of the WHO strategies for malaria control in pregnant women is the early diagnosis of malaria in pregnant women with microscopic examination and the use of RDTs, thus appropriate malaria therapy could prevent the effects of malaria in pregnancy for both mother

and fetus⁴. Although malaria examination with the thick blood preparation can detect the number of parasites 50-100 parasites/ μ l, the sensitivity is dependent on several factors e.g. microscopic examination of slide-making skills, microscopic reading accuracy or availability of proper equipment⁵. RDT offers some conveniences such as easier to use in the field since it does not require special skills and provides faster results. Regarding the sensitivity, RDT could detect >100 parasites/ μ l in the peripheral blood⁶. However, RDT sensitivity is also influenced by various factors, namely: parasitic factors (species and degree of parasitemia, parasite antigen structure variability and antigen ability); factor of RDT condition, technical factors of the use of RDT, and its interpretation⁷.

A low number of parasites in the peripheral blood is due to sequestration process in the placenta by *P. falciparum* infection because the attachment of VAR2CSA protein antigen on the surface of erythrocytes with Chondroitin Sulfate A (CSA) and Hyaluronic acid (HA) receptors from the placenta is produced in the second trimester^{8,9,10}. This causes microscopic examination to be less sensitive than RDT which is able to detect antigens as the metabolism results of *Plasmodium* in blood. On infection by *P. vivax*, the sequestration process in the placenta does not happen, but *P. vivax* infection during pregnancy is likely to lead to babies born with low birth weight⁸.

Degree of parasitemia is also influenced by the immunity system. Pregnant women who are infected with malaria and living in endemic areas will have the ability to suppress parasitemia and develop protective specific

immunoglobulins (IgG) and cell mediated immunity (anti-parasite immunity) so that the symptoms of malaria in pregnant women become oligosymptomatic to asymptomatic on very low parasitic conditions in the blood due to antitoxic immunity^{11,12}.

p-LDH/HRP2-RDT Pf/Pan is one of RDT products recommended by the WHO in round 1 to round 4 for use in zone 2, like Asia that has a mixed *P. falciparum* infection of *P. vivax* and *P. malariae* as well as *P. ovale*¹³. This tool has the form of cassette containing membrane strip covered by a specific monoclonal antibody against HRP-2 at the Pf line for the detection of *P. falciparum* and specific polyclonal antibodies against p-LDH at the Pan lines for detection of *P. vivax*, *P. ovale* and *P. malariae*^{13,14}. Antigen of p-LDH on HRP2-RDTPf/Pan has the lower sensitivity than HRP-2 antigen. The sensitivity for the detection of *P. vivax* is only 50% compared to the microscopic as the standard, if the number of parasites is 1-50 parasites/ μ l of blood, and the sensitivity for the detection of *P. falciparum* from 93.8% up to 100% compared to the microscopic as the standard, if the number of parasites is 1-50 parasites/ μ l of blood¹⁴.

PCR is a method to amplify DNA fragments in a short period of time¹⁵. This test is very specific and sensitive (approaching 100%). This test can detect at least 2 parasites, even 1 parasite/ μ l blood^{16,17}, but this PCR test has disadvantage: a) the provision of DNA and RNA primer is very complicated, b) the tools used for hybridization are complex, c) tools for PCR amplification and detection of amplification product is very sophisticated and expensive, d) it takes a long time (24 hours) so that it is only suitable for epidemiological and experimental studies¹⁶.

This study is to evaluate the validity of p-LDH/HRP2-RDT (*Pf/Pan*) compared with microscopic examination and nested Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) as the gold standard for the diagnosis of malaria in pregnancy in Maluku.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this cross sectional study, the population was pregnant women in Ambon City Public Health Center (PHC), Haulussy Ambon Local Hospital and Savana Jaya P. Buru Health Center. The inclusion criteria included pregnant women who lived and settled in the Maluku; pregnant women with symptoms of fever (temperature > 37.4 °C) in the past 2 weeks; pregnant women without symptoms of fever, but had any of the following sign: anemic conjunctiva, weakness, fatigue, lethargy, muscle pain, headache, vaginal bleeding, nausea and vomiting, and diarrhea. The exclusion criteria included pregnant women who were taking antimalarial drugs or taking malaria drugs within the last 2 weeks and pregnant women who were not willing to sign the informed consent of research. Fifty nine pregnant women in this study who met the inclusion and exclusion criteria were recruited.

The variables assessed in this study were: sensitivity, specificity, positive predictive value, negative predictive value of p-LDH/HRP2-RDT (*Pf/Pan*) tool compared with microscopic. Nested PCR is used as the gold standard. Informed consent had been signed by all who participated in the study. Permit of the study was approved by the research ethics committee of the Faculty of Medicine, Gadjah Mada University. Tests done were:

a. Microscopic examination (developing thick and thin blood smear preparation)

Malaria thick and thin slides were prepared, stained and counted according to WHO (2011) in Basic Malaria Microscopy 2nd edition⁴.

b. Examination with Rapid Diagnostic Test

p-LDH/HRP2-RDT was provided in the form of cassette. RDT examination was used to assess the presence of HRP-2 antigen in infections (*P. falciparum*) and p-LDH antigen in *P. vivax*, *P. malariae*, *P. ovale* infections. The RDT examination was done by two health personal (midwives or nurses). Before examining RDT, RDT officers ensured that it was not expired. Blood specimens taken with a disposable loop were inserted into the rounded-shape sample well. The officers then put four drops of assay buffer into the box-shaped assay diluent hole next to the sample well and allowed it to stand for fifteen minutes and read. Results should not be read after 30 minutes. Result was considered as positive Pf (*P. falciparum*) when 2 lines (test line "Pf" and the control line "C") were appeared in the result window; a positive Pan (*P. vivax*, *P. malariae*, *P. ovale*) if 2 lines (test line "Pan" and the control line "C") were appeared on the window; mixed infections (*P. falciparum* and *P. vivax* or *P. malariae*, *P. ovale*) if 3 lines (test line "Pf", test line "Pan" and control line "C") were appeared on the window. Result was considered as negative if only one control line "C" was appeared in the result window. No color that appeared on the control strip means that the examination should be repeated¹⁴.

c. Nested PCR examination

This examination was performed in the laboratory of Parasitology of FM-UGM, Yogyakarta. Peripheral blood samples were collected on filter paper (Whatman 3 MM chromatography paper). DNA was then extracted from the filter paper with a method and isolated using Chelex method.

Nested PCR was done through two steps, for nested one, a pair of primer was used rPLU 1 and rPLU 5. Second amplification was nested two for genus (rPLU 3 and 4) followed by nested two for species (rFAL 1 and rFAL2, rMAL1 and rMAL2, rVIV1 and rVIV2, rOVA1 and rPLU2 primers²¹. PCR condition was set as follow: initial denaturation 94°C for 1 minute, annealing 59°C for 2 minutes, extension 72°C for 5 minutes, denaturation repetition 94°C for 1 minute annealing 59°C for 2 minutes, extension 72°C for 5 minutes and repeated 35 times. Nested PCR

was done as suggested by CR product for nested two genus was positive at 240 bp, and nested species was confirmed positive when a band with specific base pairs was appeared (205 bp for *P. falciparum*, 144 bp for *P. malariae*, 117 bp for *P. vivax*, and 226 bp for *P. ovale*²¹.

Validity of the diagnostic tool of p-LDH/HRP2-RDT (*Pf/Pan*) including the sensitivity, specificity, positive predictive value, negative predictive value was then assessed by comparing the RDT data with microscopy and nested PCR as the gold standard.

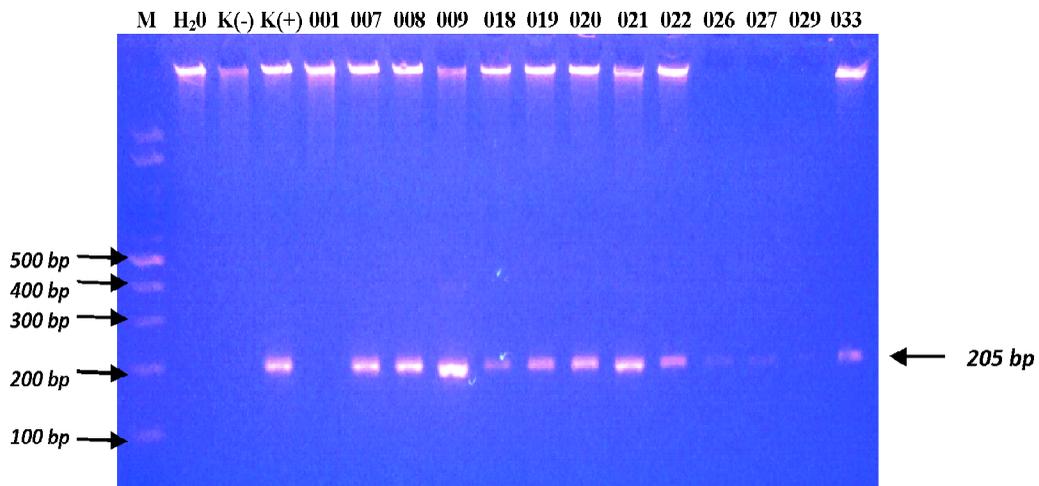


Figure 1. Example of Nested 2 PCR spesific spesies result showed the presence of *P. falciparum* of blood samples taken from pregnant wownen at Ambon Primary Health Center, Savana Jaya Primary Health Center, Haulussy General Hospital, Ambon on September 2012 – April 2013

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, the prevalence of malaria in pregnant women with RDT Pf / Pan is 6.8% (4/59), a microscopic 8.5% (5/59), 61% (36/59) nested PCR. Maternal age with the highest prevalence of malaria using PCR is in 21-29 age group by 27 (67.5%). The prevalence of malaria in pregnant

women in first pregnancy and two pregnancy as much as 23/39 (58.9%) less than multigravida malaria infection in 13/20 (65%) by PCR, in contrast to previous studies that found the prevalence of malaria is more common in the first and second pregnancies compared to multigravida²³.

The risk of reinfection in pregnant women in malaria-endemic areas will cause the immune system has the ability to suppress parasitemia^{11,12}. A low number of parasites in the blood due to suppression of the immune system and the effects of sequestration of the malaria

parasite of *P. falciparum* can cause the sensitivity of the RDT is become less^{7,19}. The low number of parasites in the blood, requires malaria RDTs as diagnostic tool with the high sensitivity in malaria endemic areas.

Table 1. Comparison of the results of p-LDH/HRP2 RDT *P.f/Pan*, and nested PCR of pregnant women in September 2012 – April 2013 in Ambon Primary Health Center; Savana Jaya (P.Buru) Primary Health Center and Haulussy General Hospital in Ambon City.

RDT <i>P.f/Pan</i>	Nested PCR		Total
	Positif	Negatif	
Positif	4	0	4
Negatif	32	23	55
Total	36	23	59

The results of the validity of RDT Pf /Pan (samples of peripheral blood) in this study for the examination of malaria in pregnant women have a sensitivity of 9.75%, specificity 100%, PPV 100%, NPV 42% when compared with nested PCR as standard gold standard (Table 1). Meanwhile, RDT sensitivity SD Pf/Pan compared to microscopic examination was 80%, 100%

specificity, 100% PPV and 98% NPV (Table 2). The sensitivity results of RDT Pf / Pan in this research is lower than the sensitivity of the RDT Pf / Pv 83.3% in Eastern Sudan. The difference of the sensitivity of the RDT tool can be influenced by differences in the criteria of the samples taken and the status of malaria in different areas¹⁸.

Table 2. Comparison of the results of p-LDH/HRP2 RDT *P.f/Pan*, and microscopic of pregnant women in September 2012 – April 2013 in Ambon Primary Health Center; Savana Jaya (P.Buru) Primary Health Center and Haulussy General Hospital in Ambon City.

RDT <i>P.f/Pan</i>		Microscopic		Total
		Positif	Negatif	
Positif		4	0	4
Negatif		1	54	55
Total		5	54	59

RDT sensitivity 80%, specificity 100%, PPV 100%, NPV 98% compared to the microscopic. In contrast to the results of research in Sei Barombang, Labuan Batu, North Sumatra found that Parascreen RDT test results had a sensitivity of 0% and a specificity of 100% compared with the gold standard microscopic.²⁴ This difference may be due in Sei Barombang samples were taken from all pregnant women (with and without symptoms of malaria), whereas in this study the samples taken from pregnant women with malaria symptoms who are typical and not typical, so it can provide higher sensitivity results.

In this study, factors that could affect the validity of RDT are the condition of RDT, the use of RDT and interpretation techniques⁷ of p-LDH/HRP2-RDT Pf/Pan has been controlled by the researchers with keeping the RDT in the right temperature at 4°C-30°C and use it before the expired periods of RDT. The researchers disseminate and training on how to use the RDT tool to clinic staff and hospital personnel before the study so that officers can use RDTs correctly and can read it right interpretation of the results of the RDT.

The degree of parasitemia that can be seen by the microscope showed that the type of *P. vivax* malaria is highest at 1890-10800 / μ l and the number of *P. falciparum* parasites is 5707-15613 / μ l. p-LDH/HRP2-RDT Pf / Pan in this study can detect *P. falciparum* parasites in the blood by the number of > 5000 parasites / μ l of blood, *P. vivax* > 1000 parasites/ μ l of blood.

Thirty two of the fifty-five negative RDT results, giving the positive results in the nested PCR examination (false negative RDT) in table 1, might be due to: a) low number of parasites in the blood. Previous research has found that pregnant women with microscopic examination is negative, but RT-PCR examination give the

positive results, the number of parasites in the blood is very low at 2.9 parasites / μ l¹⁹; b) the type of p-LDH antigen produced by *Plasmodium* besides *P. falciparum* giving more lower sensitivity than HRP-2 antigen on the amount of blood parasites 1-50/ μ l (SD Malaria Antigen Pf / Pan[®])¹⁹, so the majority of malaria infections in the number of parasites in the blood 1-50/ μ l in this study was not detected by RDT; c) for the HRP-2 antigen types produced by *P. falciparum*, although the sensitivity was high 93.8%, but other factors that may affect the sensitivity of HRP-2 antigen is the possible due to the variability of antigen structure of HRP-2 antigen deletion or existence HRP-2 antigen mutation⁵. Previous research has also found a mutation of the HRP-2 antigen into HRP-3 after the sequence⁷. Antigen HRP-2 mutations can cause the HRP-2 antigen in the sample could not be detected by RDT PfHRP-2. Parasite antigens produced PfHRP3 encodes amino acids alanine and histidine-rich that similar to the antigen PfHRP2 but have differences in amino acid 4. This genetic variation can affect the detection of *P. falciparum* parasites in the amount of <1000 parasites / μ L⁷.

Therefore, the use of PCR for diagnosis of malaria placenta remains under discussion, especially in submicroscopic condition as it is difficult to determine what have been detected by PCR. PCR is very sensitive to detected parasites nucleic acids, but it is unclear if this is a residual from a non viable sequestered parasite, or a viable parasite, or gametocyte²⁹.

One positive result of microscopic examination of the *P. vivax* parasite number 10800 / μ L gave a negative result on the results of RDT and nested PCR which might be due to miss interpretation of the slide.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Rapid Diagnostic Test (RDT) p-LDH/HRP2 (*Pf/Pan*) has the same sensitivity to the microscopic sensitivity that is 11% when compared with nested PCR as the gold standard and less sensitive (80%) than microscopic to diagnosis malaria in pregnant women in the Maluku province as an endemic malaria areas.

Research on the validity of the RDT for pregnant women is needed before the RDT tool is used to diagnose malaria for pregnant women, especially pregnant women who living in malaria endemic areas with *oligosymptoms* and the number of parasites that tend to be low in the blood. Further epidemiological research and biotechnology research to determine the presence of HRP-2 antigen variation that can affect the reliability of the RDT tool especially for the Asia Pacific region.

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Scientific Journal

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