Short report

Encephaloceles in Nigerian Igbos

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SUMMARY A survey of surgical specimens submitted to a central laboratory suggests that the Igbos of Nigeria are a further ethnic group in whom the anterior encephalocele is comparatively common.

Studies of congenital malformations in different ethnic groups and communities are of interest (Spillane, 1972; Creasy and Alberman, 1976). From Wales, Spillane (1972) wrote as follows: 'Two examples of anterior (frontoethmoidal) encephalocele in a ward round in a Bangkok hospital some years ago seemed exceptional.' 'I had never', he continued, 'previously seen one of these lesions, but in Bangkok they were well recognised in infants and children and they even appeared to be more common than spina bifida aperta.'

It seems interesting, therefore, to present a small biopsy series of both occipital and anterior encephaloceles in the Igbos, a major ethnic group living mainly in the eastern part of Nigeria, West Africa (Basden, 1966). A previous report from western Nigeria (Odeku, 1967) included a single case in which the patient was probably an Igbo.

Investigation

My department receives surgical specimens from hospitals serving the Igbos of Nigeria. Between February 1970 and November 1976, approximately 8500 such specimens were examined. A review of this material was made in order to determine the characteristics of cases in which brain tissue was present in congenital malformations of the head. There were altogether five such encephaloceles (Table).

Comment

Bearing in mind the limitations of statistical studies of the type reported here (Spillane, 1972), we may conclude that Igbos are among peoples in whom there is a disproportionately higher incidence of anterior encephaloceles. The true prevalence needs to be determined. The classical case is easy to diagnose (Suwanwela and Hongsaprabhas, 1966), especially where clinical awareness

Table Details of encephaloceles in Nigerian Igbos

Case	Age	Sex	Site
1	9 months	F	Root of nose
2	14 days	M	Occipital region
3	10 days	F	Occipital region
4	14 days	F	Frontoparietal region
5	14 days	M	Nostril

of the condition is high. One of the present lesions looked like a nasal polypus, and only histology revealed its true nature. In all probability, a wider use of the free histology services available in this locality will lead to a better understanding of this intriguing entity.

The standard teaching is that this anomaly is more common in the Far East than in Europe (Dennison, 1974). However, the previous Nigerian report (Odeku, 1967) and the present one collectively indicate that Nigerians should be included among those prone to this condition.

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