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## ABSTRACT

### **Risk Assessment of Cutaneous Leishmaniasis in the West Bank, Palestine: A Case Control Study**

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**Background:** Cutaneous leishmaniasis (CL) is a vector-borne parasitic disease transmitted by sand-fly bites. In Palestine, CL is endemic and poses a significant public health challenge, particularly in areas like Jericho and Jenin. Previous studies predict a rise in CL incidence in Palestine until 2060.

**Research Question and Study Main Objectives:** This study aimed to provide an updated assessment of the risk factors associated with CL infection among people living in the West Bank in Palestine.

**Methods:** This was a retrospective case-control study that included a case group of 96 patients diagnosed with CL in 2023, and a group of 96 controls matched for geographical area, age, and sex groups. Data were collected from the Ministry of Health records for cases and a self-administered questionnaire for controls. Statistical analysis was done using Epi Info 27. A p-value of  $< 0.05$  was considered statistically significant.

**Results:** The majority of CL cases were observed in children under 14 years of age (53.1%). CL exhibited a higher prevalence among patients residing in villages compared to those in cities,

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camps, and Bedouin areas. No significant difference in prevalence was observed between genders. CL cases demonstrated significantly lower educational attainment compared to controls. This pattern was also evident in the educational levels of both fathers and mothers (p-value <.001). Risk factors associated with CL acquisition included the presence of Rock Hyrax around residential areas (OR = 8.55, 95% CI: 4.04–18.08, p-value <.001) and residence in houses in proximity to caves, domestic animals, and foxes. Protective factors encompassed painting the interior walls of the house and the application of pesticides in residential areas (OR = 5.85, 95% CI: 2.92–11.72, p-value <.001).

**Conclusion:** CL remains endemic in some regions of Palestine. This study provides valuable information on risk and protective factors, which may contribute to the mitigation of CL risk and endemicity in Palestine in the future.