

## Changing Epidemiological Profile of Leprosy in Children in the Nampula District (Mozambique) at the Turn of the Elimination Campaign

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**Background and aims** – Leprosy detection rate in children is an indicator of disease prevalence and transmissibility in the general population. Mozambique achieved the WHO elimination target of < 1 case of leprosy per 10.000 inhabitants in 2007; however, endemic pockets still present a threat to public health in some remote and low resource areas. The aim of this study is to analyse the disease's epidemiological profile in children in the Nampula district during the 2006-2008 period.

**Methods** – From January 2006 to December 2008 APARF cooperated closely with the Health Ministry in the active search of new cases in the rural Nampula district (>200.000 inhabitants), providing access to disease information, diagnosis and multidrug therapy.

**Results** – During the year of 2006, 144 new leprosy cases were detected, and this high detection rate decreased to 45 in 2008 (estimated prevalence fell from 8 to 2 cases per 10.000 inhabitants, the difference being very close to statistic significance [ $p=0,057$ ]). The proportion of children < 18 years decreased from 32 to 20% ( $p=0,14$ ) during the same period and there was a trend towards new cases being detected in older children, suggesting decreased transmissibility. The multibacillary proportion increased from 77 to 89% and the cumulative proportion was a significant 71% ( $p<0,001$ ), which is a phenomenon observed when leprosy is close to elimination.

**Conclusions** – This changing epidemiological profile in children, although still not statistically significant, suggests that leprosy is decreasing as a result of a sustained effort towards elimination, but a strong commitment is still required to fully achieve this goal.

**Keywords:** Leprosy, Children, Elimination, Mozambique.