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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

ASSOCIATION OF TOXOPLASMOSIS AND CATS

The admirably straight-forward study of the association of toxoplasmosis and cats reported by Peterson, Tronca and Bonin (1) prompted us to look at our own findings.

In 1963, a health census of Washington County, Maryland included a question about the presence of animals on the premises (2). In 1971, as part of a study of presumed ocular histoplasmosis, serum titers for toxoplasma antibodies were determined among 263 persons who were also identified in the 1963 census (3). All subjects were over 30 years of age. Toxoplasma antibody determinations were done by the immunofluorescent dye test.

Of the 263 sera tested, 97 (36.8 per cent) had titers of 1:16 or greater. There were no significant differences by sex, age or urban-rural residence. Table 1 shows the number of persons with the specified animals on their premises in 1963 and the proportion with positive titers in 1971.

Increased rates of positive toxoplasma titers were found among persons with cattle, horses, chickens, or birds on their premises. No association was found with dogs or cats.

Although our findings do not take into account the duration or intensity of exposure to cats, it is difficult to see how the failure to estimate these quantitative factors could obscure a real relationship.

It is tempting to draw an analogy with histoplasmosis. In that disease, there is a strong association with exposure to bird droppings in some situations but not in others. Could it be that cats are similarly associated with toxoplasmosis only in certain circumstances?

TABLE 1

Number of persons with specified animals on premises

Animal*	No. of persons tested*	% positive (1:16+)
Total	263	36.8
Cattle, horses	20	55.0
Chickens, birds	49	46.9
Dogs	98	35.7
Cats	74	31.1
Others	14	35.7
None	111	36.9

* Number of persons adds to more than 263 because some had more than 1 kind of animal on premises.

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