



MIGRATION, CIRCULATION AND SPREAD OF DISEASES: ONCHOCERCIASIS IN AFRICA AND THE AMERICAS

Magali Romero Sá *

* *Fundação Oswaldo Cruz/Casa de Oswaldo Cruz*
magali@fiocruz.br

Abstract

Onchocerciasis, until the early twentieth century, was only known to the African continent. In 1915, the first case of the disease was recorded in the New World, in Central America Guatemala. In 1923, it was found in Mexico; in 1949, in Venezuela; in 1965, in Colombia, and finally, in 1967, in Brazil. The introduction of the disease in the New World was attributed to the intense slave trade occurred in the Americas. Hypotheses have been proposed to explain the appearance of the disease in the Americas and their dispersal through migration. Caused by the parasitic worm *Onchocerca volvulus*, the disease can lead to blindness in its acute stage. The incidence of the onchocerciasis is directly associated with its vector, a tiny, aggressive fly sucking blood (simuliídeo) commonly known in Brazil as pium or "borrachudo". This paper presents the occurrence of the disease in the Americas and, in particular, in the Amazonian endemic area that include Brazil and Venezuela, a quite remote and practically isolated region of civilization until about 1970.