



Detection of *Toxoplasma gondii* DNA in naturally infected sheep's milk

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ABSTRACT. The objective of this study was to verify whether *Toxoplasma gondii* is excreted in the milk of naturally infected sheep. In order to accomplish this, 275 lactating ewes were used; these were bred extensively in 17 estates distributed across nine cities. Polymerase chain reaction amplification was used to detect *T. gondii* DNA in milk samples, and the indirect immunofluorescence test was employed for the detection of anti-*T. gondii* IgG antibodies in the sera, with a cut-off value of 1:64. It was possible to verify the presence of the parasite DNA in 6.5% (18/275) of the studied animals. Anti-*T. gondii* antibodies were present in 41.5% of the animals studied (114/275). There was no correlation between parasite excretion in milk and the presence of IgG in 38.9% of the studied animals (7/18). The high seropositivity and the presence of parasite DNA in the milk led to the conclusion that *T. gondii* infection is present in the sheep population in southern and southwestern Bahia, and that there is a risk of the human population becoming infected due to the consumption of raw, *in natura* milk.

Key words: Lactation; PCR; Serology; Sheep; Toxoplasmosis