

## A Study Assessing Clinico-Epidemiological and Outcome Assessment in Traumatic Spine Injuries: An Observational Study

Om Prakash Kunwar

Assistant Professor Department of Orthopedics, ICARE Institute of Medical Sciences & Research & Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy Hospital, Haldia, West Bengal, India

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Corresponding Author: Dr. Om Prakash Kunwar

Conflict of interest: Nil

### Abstract

**Aim:** The aim of the present study was to assess the epidemiology, clinical features and early outcome in traumatic spine injuries at a tertiary hospital.

**Material & methods:** The present study was single-center, prospective, observational study, conducted in Department of Orthopedics for the period of 2 years. 100 patients were included in the study.

**Results:** Out of 100 patients, most of the patients were in the age group 51-60 (32%) and 41-50 (30%). Mean age was 51.59 years. Majority of the patients were male 70% while 30% patients were female. In present study, majority of traumatic spine injuries were due to road traffic accidents (52%), followed by fall from height (45%) and assault (3%). Majority of spine fractures occurred at cervical (40%) followed by Lumbar (30%) followed by thoracic (20%) vertebral level. Out of 100 patients, 55 patients (55%) had no associated injuries. Common associated injuries were hemoperitoneum (12%), head injury (11%), fracture humerus (9%) and fracture clavicle (6%). Out of 100 patients, 54% patients had no Neurodeficit and 46% patients had Neurodeficit. On pre-operative assessment 50% patients had ASIA score of E, 11% had ASIA score of D, 17% had ASIA score of C, 7% had ASIA score of B and 15% had ASIA score of A. Follow up ASIA score after 2 weeks in patients was A in 14% patients, B in 8%, C in 16%, D in 12, E in 50%. Follow up ASIA score after 3 months in patients was A in 8% patients, B in 5%, C in 6%, D in 15%, E in 68%. Follow up ASIA score after 6 months in patients was A in 9% patients, B in 5%, C in 4%, D in 16%, E in 66%. Follow up ASIA score after 9 months in patients was A in 8% patients, B in 6%, C in 4%, D in 20, E in 60%. Follow up ASIA score after 12 months in patients was A in 12%, D in 28, E in 60%.

**Conclusion:** Complication rates were higher in patients treated non-operatively. Leading causes in deaths at cervical level were due to respiratory failure and leading causes of deaths in thoracic and lumbar vertebral level were due to secondary complications of long-standing bed sores.

**Keywords:** Traumatic Spine Injury, Road Traffic Accidents, Cervical Vertebral Level, ASIA Score.

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### Introduction

The consequences and burden of care for patients with acute traumatic spinal cord injury (TSCI) can be quite enormous, and its attendant sequel have an untold hardship on the sufferers and care givers, especially when viewed from economic, psychological, and social perspectives. [1-6] Therefore, clinical predictors of these injuries, that can be improved upon to ensure a better neurological and functional outcome is highly desirable both to the patients and clinicians alike. Epidemiological data on TSCI initially researched into in the past 40 years, focused extensively on descriptive epidemiology (incidence rates, age, gender, race, cause of injury, level and completeness of injury). [7] In the year 2016, there were 0.93 million (0.78–1.16 million) new cases of TSCI, and age-standardised incidence rates of 13

(11–16) per 100,000, with the number of prevalent cases up to 27.04 million (24.98–30.15 million).<sup>5</sup> The global burden of acute TSCI, constitutes a considerable portion of the global injury burden as published by the 2019 Global Burden of Disease study group. [5,8] Although the study revealed that from 1990 to 2016, there was no significant change in the age standardised incidence or prevalence of TSCI, the population of people living with the consequences of TSCI is expected to rise, due to population growth in the near future, leading to an increase in the demand for specialised care of patients with this injury. [5]

A traumatic cervical spinal fracture (TCSF) is typically caused by severe violence; if this is combined with a dislocation, the risk of CSCI is

greatly increased. The intervertebral discs separate the vertebral bodies and evenly spread the loads among them. These discs degenerate with age and become more susceptible to injury. [9] TCSF/dislocation has received a great deal of attention worldwide. [10-12] However, cervical disc herniation and bulging have not been well-studied. The posterior ligamentous complex includes the intervertebral disc, ligamentum flavum, and interspinous and nuchal ligaments; this complex plays a critical role in cervical spine stability. [13,14] Assessment of neurological deficit is done by ASIA SCORING (American Spinal Injury Association), Sub-axial Cervical Spine Injury Classification System (SLICS) and Thoraco-lumbar injury classification and severity score (TLICS). [15]

Hence the present study was undertaken to study epidemiology, clinical features and early outcome in traumatic spine injuries at a tertiary hospital.

### Material & Methods

The present study was single-center, prospective, observational study, conducted in Department of Orthopedics ICARE Institute of Medical Sciences & Research & Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy Hospital, Haldia, West Bengal, India for the period of 2 years. 100 patients were included in the study.

#### Inclusion Criteria:

- All patients with traumatic spine injuries attending OPD or admitted in emergency, willing to participate in study

#### Exclusion Criteria:

- Non traumatic patients with spine ailments

### Methodology

Study was explained to patients/relatives and written informed consent was taken for participation and follow up. All the patients received in emergency room were managed according to ATLS protocol (general examination, primary and secondary surveys to identify associated injuries). Patient was log rolled for examination of the back. Note was made for any bruises, swellings and pal

pated for kyphotic angulations, step-off and point tenderness which was present in injuries to osteo-ligamentous complex. Radiological imaging (X rays, CT scan, and MRI) were done. After clinical and radiological examination patients further treatment options (operative/non operative) were planned. All patients admitted for surgical intervention would be assessed pre operatively with complete hemogram, renal function tests/liver function tests, blood sugar levels (FBS and PP), PT/PTI/INR, blood grouping, neurological status as per American spinal injury association (ASIA impairment scale), pain –back pain using visual analogue scale (VAS), imaging such as radiographs- cervical and thoracolumbar spine (AP/Lat view)- Vertebral body height, NCCT of affected spine, MRI of affected spine.

After fitness, patients underwent surgery at our center. Standard post-operative care was provided to all patients. Patients were discharged appropriately as per surgery protocol. All patients who reported were followed up in OPD/telephonically after every 4 weeks till 1 year. Patients were studied for: Survivorship, Neurological status, Nutritional status, Complications like bed sores, urinary tract infections, upper respiratory tract infections and Sexual functions. Radiologically patient was reviewed for the deformity.

### Statistical Analysis

Data was collected and compiled using Microsoft Excel. The presentation of the Categorical variables was done in the form of number and percentage (%). On the other hand, the presentation of the continuous variables was done as mean  $\pm$  SD and median values. The comparison of the variables which were qualitative in nature were analyzed using Fisher's Exact test. The data entry was done in the Microsoft EXCEL spreadsheet and the final analysis was done with the use of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 21.0. For statistical significance, p value of less than 0.05 was considered as significant.

### Results

**Table 1: Distribution of age (years) in males and females**

Age in years	Male (n=70)	Female (n=30)	Total
≤ 20	1	0	1 (1)
21-30	4	2	6 (6)
31-40	4	3	7 (7)
41-50	22	8	30 (30)
51-60	24	8	32 (32)
61-70	14	6	20 (20)
>70	1	3	4 (4)
Mean $\pm$ SD	55.05 $\pm$ 11.59	53.27 $\pm$ 13.97	51.59 $\pm$ 12.38

Out of 100 patients, most of the patients were in the age group 51-60 (32%) and 41-50 (30%). Mean age was 51.59 years. Majority of the patients were male 70% while 30% patients were female.

**Table 2: Distribution of mode of injury, injury level and associated injuries of study subjects**

Mode of injury	N	%
RTA	52	52
Fall from height	45	45
Assault	3	3
<b>Injury level</b>		
Cervical	40	40
Cervical and Lumbar	1	1
Cervical and sacral ala	1	1
Cervical and thoracic	5	5
Lumbar	30	30
Lumbar and sacral ala	2	2
Thoracic	20	20
Thoracic and Lumbar	3	3
<b>Associated injuries</b>		
No associated injuries	55	55
Hemoperitoneum	12	12
Head injury	11	11
Fracture humerus	9	9
Fracture clavicle	6	6
Others	7	7

In present study, majority of traumatic spine injuries were due to road traffic accidents (52%), followed by fall from height (45%) and assault (3%). Majority of spine fractures occurred at cervical (40%) followed by Lumbar (30%)

followed by thoracic (20%) vertebral level. Out of 100 patients, 55 patients (55%) had no associated injuries. Common associated injuries were hemoperitoneum (12%), head injury (11%), fracture humerus (9%) and fracture clavicle (6%).

**Table 3: Distribution of pre-operative assessment of study subjects**

Pre-operative assessment	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Neurological status</b>		
With neurodeficit	46	46
Without neurodeficit	54	54
<b>ASIA score</b>		
A	15	15
B	7	7
C	17	17
D	11	11
E	50	50%

Out of 100 patients, 54% patients had no Neurodeficit and 46% patients had Neurodeficit. On pre-operative assessment 50% patients had ASIA score of E, 11% had ASIA score of D, 17% had ASIA score of C, 7% had ASIA score of B and 15% had ASIA score of A.

**Table 4: Distribution of follow up ASIA score of study subjects**

Follow up ASIA score	After 2 weeks	After 3 months	After 6 months	After 9 months	After 12 months
A	14 (14%)	8 (8%)	9 (9%)	8 (8%)	12 (12%)
B	8 (8%)	5 (5%)	5 (5%)	6 (6%)	-
C	16 (16%)	6 (6%)	4 (4%)	4 (4%)	28 (28%)
D	12 (12%)	15 (15%)	16 (16%)	20 (20%)	-
E	50 (50%)	68 (68%)	66 (66%)	60 (60%)	15 (60%)

Follow up ASIA score after 2 weeks in patients was A in 14% patients, B in 8%, C in 16%, D in 12%, E in 50%. Follow up ASIA score after 3

months in patients was A in 8% patients, B in 5%, C in 6%, D in 15%, E in 68%. Follow up ASIA score after 6 months in patients was A in 9%

patients, B in 5%, C in 4%, D in 16%, E in 66%. Follow up ASIA score after 9 months in patients was A in 8% patients, B in 6%, C in 4%, D in 20, E in 60%. Follow up ASIA score after 12 months in patients was A in 12%, D in 28, E in 60%.

### Discussion

Spinal cord injury is an insult spinal cord resulting in a change either temporary or permanent, in its normal motor, sensory, or autonomic function. Traumatic Spinal Cord Injury (TSCI) is a devastating neurological injury, causing paralysis, sensory loss and sphincter disorder in different degrees and indirectly imposes a significant burden on the health care system. [16] Internationally incident rates for traumatic spinal cord injuries range from 10.4-83 cases per million of population with significant differences between different countries or regions. [17] The incidence of traumatic spinal cord injury (TSCI) in the developing countries is 25.5/million/year. [18] People with Spinal cord injury are 2 to 5 times to die prematurely than people without Spinal cord injuries depending on the health-care system capacity. [19] Etiologically, more than 90% of spinal cord injuries cases are traumatic and caused by incidences such as road traffic accidents, violence, sports or falls. [18] Spinal cord injury is a two-step process that involves Primary (combination of the initial impact as well as the subsequent persisting compression) and Secondary injury (series of physiological and biochemical changes after which are primary mechanical injury). [20]

Out of 100 patients, most of the patients were in the age groups 51-60 (32%) and 41-50 (30%). Mean age was 51.59 years. Majority of the patients were male 70% while 30% patients were female. In the series of Chamberlain JD et al [21] out of 932 patients, male to female ratio was 1.88:1. The mean age in tetraplegics was 53.5 years and in paraplegics was 43.8 years. Over all mean age was 48 years. Johansson et al [22] out of 346 patients, 72.3% were males and 27.7% were females. Majority of the patients were male 75% while 25% patients were female. In present study, majority of traumatic spine injuries were due to road traffic accidents (52%), followed by fall from height (45%) and assault (3%). Majority of spine fractures occurred at cervical (40%) followed by Lumbar (30%) followed by thoracic (20%) vertebral level. Out of 100 patients, 55 patients (55%) had no associated injuries. Common associated injuries were hemoperitoneum (12%), head injury (11%), fracture humerus (9%) and fracture clavicle (6%). Ahuja et al [23] in a study of 313 patients, 182 patients were operated early and underwent surgery within 24 hours and 131 patients were operated after 24 hours. The primary end point was change in American Spinal Injury Impairment Scale (AIS)

at the end of 6 months. The group who underwent surgery under 24 hours, 19.8% demonstrated a 2 or more grade improvement in AIS at 6 months, whereas 8.8% of patients show same improvement who had undergone surgery after 24 hours.

Sommer et al [24] reported epidemiology, treatment, clinical and radiological results of 283 patients with spine fractures in a five-year period. The operation rate ranged from 42% of cervical to 9% of thoracic and 24% of the lumbar spine. He found good radiological results concerning the correction of the wedge compression and the collapse of the lumbar vertebral body by fixation with an internal fixator. After a follow-up of 2-5 years, nearly 80% of conservatively, as well as surgically, treated patients had residual back pain. Shamim MS et al [25] in series of 54 patients with complete SCI, in which 50% received surgical treatment, they found the operated group spent a longer period in rehabilitation. They also had a longer hospital stay, were associated with more complications, especially those related to infections and also had a significantly higher cost of treatment when compared with the group treated conservatively. Pandey Vk et al [26] concluded in his study with 23-month average follow-up revealed that 17% of patients who underwent surgery for spine fractures died, all after discharge

Out of 100 patients, 54% patients had no Neurodeficit and 46% patients had Neurodeficit. On pre-operative assessment 50% patients had ASIA score of E, 11% had ASIA score of D, 17% had ASIA score of C, 7% had ASIA score of B and 15% had ASIA score of A. Follow up ASIA score after 2 weeks in patients was A in 14% patients, B in 8%, C in 16%, D in 12, E in 50%. Follow up ASIA score after 3 months in patients was A in 8% patients, B in 5%, C in 6%, D in 15%, E in 68%. Follow up ASIA score after 6 months in patients was A in 9% patients, B in 5%, C in 4%, D in 16%, E in 66%. Follow up ASIA score after 9 months in patients was A in 8% patients, B in 6%, C in 4%, D in 20, E in 60%. Follow up ASIA score after 12 months in patients was A in 12%, D in 28, E in 60%. In a study, 70% of patients initially diagnosed as ASIA A didn't convert, as did 90% with ASIA D. On the whole 68% of total patients didn't convert, while 30% of patients improved and 2% deteriorated. [27] Middendrop et al [28] in his series of 273 patients observed that ASIA A were 161, ASIA B were 37, ASIA C were 43, and ASIA D were 32. 42(26%) converted from ASIA A, 27(73%) from ASIA B, 32(75%) from ASIA C, 5(16%) from ASIA D.

### Conclusion

Complication rates were higher in patients treated non-operatively. Leading causes in deaths at cervical level were due to respiratory failure and

leading causes of deaths in thoracic and lumbar vertebral level were due to secondary complications of long-standing bed sores. Despite limited sources, outcomes of SCI patients in India appear favourable with evidence of clinical improvement and low mortality. In-country like India Road traffic accident in young population is the most common cause of SCI. Adequate traffic education and public awareness, in implementing traffic rules and road safety measures may reduce RTAs. Establishment of physical rehabilitation programs is needed to maximize functional outcomes and minimize secondary complications, and efforts should be made to improve the follow-up of SCI patients.

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