A Review Article of Cases with Thrombocytopenia Diagnosed as HELLP Syndrome

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ABSTRACT
Introduction: The complications HELLP syndrome consists of preeclampsia- eclampsia for decades. Recognition and further management of HELLP syndrome in pregnant women with preeclampsia is increasing because of the frequency of blood tests results that reveals unexpected thrombocytopenia or elevated liver enzymes. The diagnosis of HELLP syndrome requires on peripheral smear examination, elevated liver enzymes and a platelet count below 100,000/cumm, after ruling out causes of hemolysis and thrombocytopenia. This study is to identify such patients for early intervention and management.

Material and Methods: It is a retrospective and prospective study done for Three years (May 2012-June 2015) at Department of Pathology and Biochemistry, MGMH/ OGH, Hyderabad Platelet counts were done on Sysmex and confirmed on microscopy. Biochemistry parameters were done in a semi-automated analyzer.

Results: More in multigravida women with 20-25 years age group 37 weeks of pregnancy and 100% correlation with pre eclampsia was observed. Haemoglobin levels were <10 gm/dl with elevated liver enzymes, Platelet counts were between 50,000/cumm to 1 lakh/cumm. We had three maternal deaths 5%, 20% intrauterine deaths, 55% of normal babies, 25% of Intrauterine growth retardation. HELLP syndrome cases were 75% according to Tenesse classification and 50% cases belong to Class III according to Mississippi classification

Conclusion: The global mortality rate of HELLP syndrome is 25%, it is important for expecting mothers to be made aware of this condition and treat early.

Keywords: Thrombocytopenia, Preeclampsia, Hemolysis

INTRODUCTION

HELLP syndrome1-8, is characterized by Hemolysis, Elevated liver enzymes and Low Platelet count. It is a life-threatening condition complicating pregnancy. In patients with preeclampsia, it may lead to fetal and maternal death. In the early 20th century, HELLP was diagnosed as edema-proteinuria-hypertension gestosis type B. The term ‘HELLP syndrome’ was coined by Louis Weinstein1 in 1982. Thrombocytopenia is, after anemia, the second most common abnormality of the complete blood count in pregnancy, with a reported frequency of 6.6% to 11.2%.2,8-10

Weinstein identified around 30 cases of severe preeclampsia–eclampsia complicated by thrombocytopenia, abnormal peripheral blood smear and abnormal LFT - liver function test. He identified that these abnormalities constituted a separate entity from the general observed eclampsia and hence gave the name HELLP syndrome (H - hemolysis; EL - elevated liver enzymes; and LP - low platelets).3

The pathophysiology of HELLP syndrome is unclear. Some authors describe HELLP as a variant of preeclampsia4-9, as both seem to have a common pathophysiology. Preeclampsia is characterized by defective placental vascular remodeling during 16th-22nd weeks of pregnancy with the second wave of trophoblastic invasion into the decidua resulting in decreased placental perfusion. Various factors such as soluble vascular endothelial growth factor receptor-1 (sVEGFR-1), are released which then binds vascular endothelial growth factor (VEGF) and placental growth factor (PGF). This causes dysfunction of endothelial cell along with placental dysfunction. It there by prevents the binding of endothelial cell receptors with the placenta, resulting in hypertension, proteinuria, and increased platelet activation and aggregation.1

The endothelial cells, when activated may release von Willebrand factor multimers. They are highly reactive with platelets. HELLP syndrome shows increased amount of active VWF leading to thrombocyto-penic and thrombotic microangiopathy.4-12-17

In recent studies have shown that fetal complications of mitochondrial fatty acid oxidation is associated with obstetric complications like placental bed infarct, preeclampsia, acute fatty liver of pregnancy and also the HELLP syndrome. Among some patients who are heterozygous with a defect in the long chain hydroxylacyl – co- A dehydrogenase (LCHAD) enzyme and who also have a defect in fetushomozy-gous, these disorders have shown to have occurred.4 The pathogenesis of HELLP syndrome is still unknown.1

Pregnancy in fourth decade i.e, after 30 years of age and multiparity are considered to be the high-risk factors of HELLP syndrome. Statistics show that HELLP syndrome occurs in 0.5% of all pregnancies and among 8% of preeclampsia cases. This syndrome has shown to have occurred typically between third trimester of pregnancy and delivery. In around 15-30% of the cases, HELPP syndrome

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How to cite this article: Ezhil Arasi N, M Padmavathy, Syeda Sumaiya Fatima. A Review article of cases with thrombocytopenia diagnosed as HELLP syndrome. International Journal of Contemporary Medical Research 2017;4(9):1915-1918.
had occurred in immediate postpatum period.\textsuperscript{1} The most life threatening complication in HELPP syndrome is DIC – Disseminated intravascular coagulation which needs aggressive management. Other complications include pleural effusion, pulmonary edema and ascites. Prematurity, IUGR-Intrauterine growth retardation and Thrombocytopenia are the most common neonatal complications. A very small percentage of infants also suffer with IVH-Intraventricular Hemorrhage in the brain.\textsuperscript{1}

Two common classifications used to predict maternal morbidity and mortality were described in and are known as the ‘Mississippi’\textsuperscript{18} and the ‘Tennessee’\textsuperscript{10} classifications. Hence the study was done to identify such patients for early intervention and management.

**MATERIAL AND METHODS**

It was a retrospective and prospective study done for a period of Three year (May 2012-June 2015) at Department of Pathology and Biochemistry, Modern Government Maternity Hospital, Osmania Medical College, Hyderabad. Out of 500 cases of thrombocytopenia 57 cases of HELLP Syndrome were diagnosed.

Platelet counts were done on Hematology analyser and confirmed on microscopy. Biochemistry parameters were done in asemitautomated analyzermode number.

We had ruled out other causes of thrombocytopenia. Parity and gestational age was taken into consideration among these women. Serious complications including maternal morbidity and perinatal mortality was studied.

**STATISTICAL ANALYSIS**

Statistical analysis was done with the help of Microsoft office 2007. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data.

**RESULTS**

Most common age group observed was 20-25years, common age at presentation is < 37 wks of pregnancy. 65% of cases were multigravidae. There was a 100% correlation with preeclampsia [Figure 1]. 80% of cases were presented with Hb levels < 10gm/ dl. Platelet count observed were 50,000 / cumm to 1 lakh / cumm. liver enzymes were elevated in all the cases [Figure 2]. Peripheral smear findings showed schistocytes, fragmented RBCs and low platelet count [Figure 3].

Fetal complications like intra uterine growth retardation comprising 25% and intrauterine death was observed in 20% of cases. In our cases we have 3 maternal deaths (5%) and most of the mothers were with no morbidity. [Figure 4]

It is observed that 75% of the cases presented with full HELLP according to Tenesse classification. 50% of the cases are in class II, followed by class III and class I according to Mississippi classification. [Figure 5]

The most common symptoms were general malaise, epigastric pain, headache and vomiting. [Figure 1]

**DISCUSSION**

HELLP is an obstetric complication that is frequently missed at initial presentation as most of the symptoms like general malaise, headache and vomiting. It is considered as a variant of pre eclampsia\textsuperscript{16} and can be misdiagnosed as viral hepatitis, ITP, Gallbladder disease or TTP.\textsuperscript{9,10}

The underlying disease of thrombocytopenia has to be identified in order to give targeted treatment. Differential diagnosis is hence important. For example, in gestational thrombocytopenia, no complications for mother and child arise. But autoimmune thrombocytopenia leads to maternal

Differential Diagnoses

Other conditions causing thrombocytopenia are:
Acute fatty liver pregnancy, TTP,
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International Journal of Contemporary Medical Research  
Volume 4 | Issue 9 | September 2017   | ICV: 77.83 | ISSN (Online): 2393-915X; (Print): 2454-7379

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is considered the best and reliable marker in the diagnosis

in the management of pre eclampsia. Maternal Platelet count

early diagnosis by hematologists and input by the clinicians

of HELLP.

The increase in bilirubin and liver enzyme levels is
due to secondary to obstruction of fibrin deposits in
the liver sinusoids. This obstruction may lead to periportal
necrosis and in severe cases intrahepatic hemorrhage,
subcapsular hematoma or hepatic rupture.

The thrombocytopenia has been attributed to increased
consumption or destruction of platelets.

With platelet activation, thromboxane A and serotonin
are released, plateletagglutination and aggregation
and further endothelial damage.1

Management

Early diagnosis and aggressive management is must in
cases of HELPP syndrome.11,12 High risk patients who have
elevated hypertension and low platelet count have to be
followed regularly.

Timing of delivery is important. If gestation period is >34
weeks, then deliver. If <34 weeks gestation, administer
corticosteroids and then deliver in 48 hours.1

Patients who are at a risk of developing preeclampsia should
be identified as it is a preventable disorder.2 However, in high
risk cases, termination of pregnancy is recommended.

CONCLUSION

The presence of HELLP syndrome is associated with life
threatening maternal and fetal complications. The diagnosis
of HELLP syndrome is critical and the importance lies in
early diagnosis by hematologists and input by the clinicians
in the management of pre eclampsia. Maternal Platelet count
is considered the best and reliable marker in the diagnosis
of HELLP.

HELLP syndrome with pre eclampsia of early onset is
associated with poor prognosis. Any case of pregnant women
who have preeclampsia, thrombocytopenia, elevated BP and
proteinuria must be regularly followed up and checked for
any manifestations of HELLP syndrome.

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Source of Support: Nil; Conflict of Interest: None

Submitted: 27-08-2017; Accepted: 28-09-2017; Published: 08-10-2017