



FREQUENCY OF ARRHYTHMIA AFTER ACUTE MYOCARDIAL INFARCTION

Ghaith Hamid Hameed^{1*}, Hashim Mahdi Hashim Ali- Kadhimi¹Imamain Kadhimain Teaching Hospital.

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*Corresponding Author: Ghaith Hamid Hameed

Imamain Kadhimain Teaching Hospital.

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ABSTRACT

Background: Acute Myocardial Infarction is one of the most serious and common diagnoses that necessitate admission to the Coronary Care Unit with prompt management, and about 90% of cases may develop different types of Arrhythmia that may require careful attention and immediate intervention. **Methodology:** This is a retrospective cross sectional study for 118 patients with Acute Myocardial Infarction admitted to the Coronary Care Unit of Al-Imamain Al-Kadhimain Medical City for eight months, starting from March 2013 to the end of October 2013, through reviewing patients case sheets and ECG records. **Results:** 67 patients out of 118 Acute Myocardial Infarction cases (56.7%) had developed one or more type of arrhythmia within their Coronary Care Unit stay, including 41 male (52.6% of all males with Acute Myocardial Infarction) and 26 female (65% of all females with Acute Myocardial Infarction), with age distribution (4.47%) 40-50 years, (32.83%) 50-60 years, (52.2%) 60-70 years and (10.44%) above 70 years, The types of arrhythmias found in the patients included in this study were as the following 36 cases with Premature Ventricular Contraction (30.5% of all patients with Acute Myocardial Infarction), 13 cases of Ventricular Tachycardia (11.01%), 8 cases with Ventricular Fibrillation (6.77%), 2 cases of Supraventricular Tachycardia (1.69%), 7 cases of premature Atrial Contraction (5.93%), 3 cases of Atrial Fibrillation (2.54%), 27 cases of Sinus Tachycardia (22.88%), 16 cases of Sinus Bradycardia (13.55%), 8 cases of first degree A-V Block (6.77%), 2 cases with Complete Heart Block (1.69%), 11 cases of Right Bundle Branch Block (9.32%) and 13 cases with Left Bundle Branch Block (11.01%) **Conclusion:** The frequency of arrhythmias and particularly ventricular arrhythmias, brady-arrhythmias following acute myocardial infarction was significantly high in Iraqi patients sample. Increasing with age in both sexes. More common in extensive infarctions, while Diabetes Mellitus, Hypertension, previous ischemic heart disease and smoking are the commonest associated risk factors, thrombolysis is under used and had no great impact.

KEYWORDS: Increasing with age in both sexes.

INTRODUCTION

Acute myocardial infarction (AMI) is one of the most common diagnoses in hospitalized patients in the developed and developing countries, The early (30-day) mortality rate from AMI is 30%, with more than half of these deaths occurring before the stricken individual reaches the hospital.^[1] Although the mortality rate after admission for AMI has declined by 30% over the past two decades, approximately 1 of every 25 patients who survives the initial hospitalization dies in the first year after AMI.^[1] Mortality is approximately fourfold higher in elderly patients (over age 75) as compared with younger patients.^[1,2]

About 90% of patients who have an Acute Myocardial Infarction (AMI) develop some form of cardiac arrhythmia during or immediately after the event. In 25% of patients, such rhythm abnormalities manifest within the first 24 hours. In this group of patients, the risk of serious arrhythmias, such as ventricular fibrillation, is greatest in the first hour and declines thereafter. The incidence of arrhythmia is higher with an ST-elevation myocardial infarction (STEMI) and lower with a non-ST-elevation myocardial infarction (NSTEMI).^[3,4] This study aims to know the frequency of arrhythmias in a sample of Iraqi patients that occur following Acute Myocardial Infarction during admission in the Coronary Care Unit.

METHODOLOGY

This is a retrospective cross sectional study for 118 patients admitted to the CCU of Al-Imamain Al-Kadhimain Medical City for eight months, starting from March 2013 to the end of October 2013.

The diagnosis of patients relied on the presence of two out of three criteria, these are:

1. The Clinical Symptoms of MI (severe central chest pain at rest with radiation, with or without nausea, vomiting and sweating).
2. ECG changes (ST elevation, recent LBBB) or NSTEMI.
3. Positive results of Troponin Test.^[1,2]

Data were collected by reviewing the patients case sheets, looking for the diagnosis criteria listed above, age, sex, past medical history (Diabetes and Hypertension, Ischemic Heart Disease), smoking

History, review of ECG records to specify the site of infarction, the occurrence of any type of arrhythmia (Atrial, Supraventricular, Ventricular, and AV block).

Any patient who developed any type of arrhythmia within the CCU admission days, had been regarded as a case for this study, we have adopted the daily 12 leads ECG records and doctors notes.

All the data collected had been analyzed and demonstrated in numbers, tables and percentage.

RESULTS

Of the 118 patients with AMI included in the study, 78 (66.1%) were males, and 40 (33.8) were females, with age distribution of (1.6%) less than 40 years, (9.3%) 40-50 years, (32.2%) 50 – 60 years, (46.6) 60-70 years, and (10.1%) above 70 years (Table 1).

Table 1: Age and sex distribution of patients with Acute Myocardial Infarction March 2013 – October 2013.

| Sex | Below 40 years | 40-50 years | 50-60 years | 60-70 years | Above 70 years | Total |
|--------|----------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|----------------|-------|
| Male | 2 | 9 | 24 | 36 | 7 | 78 |
| Female | 0 | 2 | 14 | 19 | 5 | 40 |
| Total | 2 | 11 | 38 | 55 | 12 | 118 |

The Medical History of the 118 patients revealed that 73 Patients (61.8%) are diabetic, 89 patients (75.4%) are hypertensive, 42 cases of Ischemic Heart Disease

(35.5%) , 60 smoker patients (50.8%) and 21 (17.7%) ex-smoker (Table 2).

Table 2: Risk factors for all cases with AMI.

| Risk Factor | Male | Female | Both sexes | Percentage |
|---------------------------------|------|--------|------------|------------|
| Diabetes Mellitus | 47 | 26 | 73 | 61.8% |
| Hypertension | 61 | 28 | 89 | 75.4% |
| Smoker patients | 53 | 7 | 60 | 50.8% |
| Previous Ischemic Heart Disease | 29 | 13 | 42 | 35.5% |
| Ex-smoker patients | 13 | 8 | 21 | 17.7% |

Out of the 118 patients, 67 patients (56.7%) developed one type or more of arrhythmia, including 41 male (52.6% of all males with AMI) and 26 female (65% of

all females with AMI), with age distribution (4.47%) 40-50 years, (32.83%) 50-60 years, (52.2%) 60-70 years and (10.44%) above 70 years (Table 3).

Table 3: Age and sex distribution of patients with arrhythmia following Acute Myocardial Infarction March 2013 – October 2013.

| Sex | Below 40 years | 40-50 years | 50-60 years | 60-70 years | Above 70 years | Total | Percentage Out of the Total Number of patients |
|--------|----------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|----------------|-------|--|
| Male | 0 | 3 | 13 | 21 | 4 | 41 | 52.6% |
| Female | 0 | 0 | 9 | 14 | 3 | 26 | 65% |
| Total | 0 | 3 | 22 | 35 | 7 | 67 | 56.7% |

Reviewing the main risk factors in the past Medical History of the 67 patients who developed arrhythmia following AMI, regarding Diabetes, Hypertension and smoking, the results were as the following for both sexes,

33 (49.2%) diabetic, 59 (88%) hypertensive, 39 cases with previous history of IHD (58.2%), 36 (53.7%) smokers, and 12 (17.9%) ex-smokers (Table 4).

Table 4: Risk factors of 67 cases with AMI who had developed Arrhythmia.

| Risk Factor | Male | Female | Both sexes | Percentage |
|-------------------|------|--------|------------|------------|
| Diabetes Mellitus | 18 | 15 | 33 | 49.2% |
| Hypertension | 37 | 22 | 59 | 88% |

| | | | | |
|---------------------------------|----|----|----|-------|
| Previous Ischemic Heart Disease | 25 | 14 | 39 | 58.2% |
| Smoker patients | 30 | 6 | 36 | 53.7% |
| Ex-smoker patients | 7 | 5 | 12 | 17.9% |

Studying the site of infarction for cases with AMI demonstrated that there are 20 patients with Anterior MI (including 10 patients developed Arrhythmia, 50%), 24 patients with Anteroseptal MI (15 patients of them developed arrhythmia (62.5%), 17 patients with Anterolateral MI (11 of them had arrhythmia 64.7%), 19

patients with Inferior MI (11 of them developed arrhythmia 57.8%), 9 patients with extensive MI (including 8 patients with arrhythmia 88.8%) and 29 patients with NSTEMI (including 12 patients with arrhythmia 41.3%) and no case recorded with posterior MI (Table 5).

Table 5: Distribution of patients according to the site of infarction.

| Site of Infarction | Total Number of MI Patients | Patients who developed Arrhythmia | Percentage |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------|
| Anterior | 20 | 10 | 50% |
| Anteroseptal | 24 | 15 | 62.5% |
| Anterolateral | 17 | 11 | 64.7% |
| Inferior | 19 | 11 | 57.8% |
| Posterior | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Extensive | 9 | 8 | 88.8% |
| NSTEMI (Subendocardial) | 29 | 12 | 41.3% |
| Total | 118 | 67 | 56.7% |

The types of arrhythmias found in the patients included in this study were as the following 36 cases with Premature Ventricular Contraction (30.5% of all patients with AML), 13 cases of Ventricular Tachycardia (11.01%), 8 cases with Ventricular Fibrillation (6.77%), 2 cases of Supraventricular Tachycardia (1.69%), 7 cases of premature Atrial Contraction (5.93%), 3 cases of

Atrial Fibrillation (2.54%), 27 cases of Sinus Tachycardia (22.88%), 16 cases of Sinus Bradycardia (13.55%), 8 cases of first degree A-V Block (6.77%), 2 cases with Complete Heart Block (1.69%), 11 cases of Right Bundle Branch Block (9.32%) and 13 cases with Left Bundle Branch Block (11.01%) as in Table 6.

Table 6: frequency and percentages of Arrhythmias recorded in patients with AMI.

| Type of Arrhythmia | Number | Percentage out of the 67 Patients who developed arrhythmia | Percentage out of the Total Number of Patients with AMI |
|--------------------------------------|--------|--|---|
| Premature Ventricular Contraction | 36 | 53.73 | 30.5% |
| Ventricular Tachycardia | 13 | 19.4% | 11.01% |
| Ventricular Fibrillation | 8 | 11.94% | 6.77% |
| Supraventricular Tachycardia | 2 | 2.98% | 1.69% |
| Premature Atrial Contraction | 7 | 10.44% | 5.93% |
| Atrial Flutter | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Atrial Fibrillation | 3 | 4.47% | 2.54% |
| Sinus Tachycardia | 27 | 40.29% | 22.88% |
| Sinus Bradycardia (not drug induced) | 16 | 23.88% | 13.55% |
| First Degree Block | 8 | 11.94% | 6.77% |
| Second Degree Block | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Third Degree Block | 2 | 2.98% | 1.69% |
| RBBB | 11 | 16.41% | 9.32% |
| LBBB | 13 | 19.4% | 11.01% |

A total number of 39 patients (33%) had received Thrombolytic Therapy, with 23 cases reported of arrhythmia (58.9%) as in Table 7.

Table 7: Patients with AMI who had received Thrombolytic Therapy versus those without Thrombolytic Therapy.

| | Total Number | Patient who developed Arrhythmia | Percentage |
|--|--------------|----------------------------------|------------|
| Patients with AMI who had received Thrombolytic | 39 | 23 | 58.9% |
| Patients with AMI Who did not receive Thrombolytic | 79 | 44 | 55.6% |

DISCUSSION

Out of the 118 Iraqi Patients presented with Acute Myocardial Infarction included in this study, males patients were about twice the females (66.1% versus 33.8%) (table 1, figure 1) which is consistent with previous similar studies and literature,^[1,2,5,6] A male predominance in the incidence of cardiovascular disease exists up to approximately age 70 years, when the sexes converge to equal incidence.^[7] Premenopausal women appear to be somewhat protected from atherosclerosis, possibly owing to the effects of estrogen, Women, however, follow men by 10 years, especially after menopause, the presence of diabetes, as well as tobacco use, eliminates the protection from heart disease associated with female sex.^[5,8,9]

The incidence of AMI increases with age for both sexes, (Table 1, Figure 1) with the highest incidence above 60 years, which is mainly explained by the increased risk factors and atherosclerotic changes of coronary arteries with age, Age is the strongest risk factor for the development of CAD.^[1,5,2] Most cases of CAD become clinically apparent in patients aged 40 years or older, but elderly persons experience higher mortality and morbidity rates from it. (9) Approximately 82% of people who die of CAD are 65 years or older.^[10,3] although we did not have many patients above 70 years, since the patient may die even before reaching hospital or for other reasons rather than AMI, and this is a well known fact in the developing countries like Iraq in comparison to developed countries with higher life expectancy.^[10,3,4]

In this study, we have concentrated on three main risk factors (Diabetes Mellitus, Hypertension and smoking) for precipitating AMI (Table 2, Figure 2) and its Arrhythmic complications (table 4, Figure 4), and we have found that 61.8% of the total number of cases were diabetic, since. Diabetes causes endothelial dysfunction, decreases endothelial thromboresistance, and increases platelet activity, thus accelerating atherosclerosis.^[1,11,9]

Hypertension was a major risk factor for 75.4% of overall patients (Table 2, Figure 2) and 88% of those who developed arrhythmia following AMI (Table 4, Figure 4), it is well known that Uncontrolled and prolonged elevation of BP can lead to a variety of changes in the myocardial structure, coronary vasculature, and conduction system of the heart.^[1,12] These changes in turn can lead to the development of left ventricular hypertrophy (LVH), coronary artery disease (CAD), various conduction system diseases, and systolic and diastolic dysfunction of the myocardium, complications that manifest clinically as angina or myocardial infarction, cardiac arrhythmias (especially atrial fibrillation), and congestive heart failure (CHF).^[13]

In the Framingham Heart Study, even high-normal blood pressure (defined as a systolic blood pressure of 130-139 mm Hg, diastolic blood pressure of 85-89 mm Hg, or

both) increased the risk of cardiovascular disease 2-fold, as compared with healthy individuals.^[12]

Smoking was a significant risk factor for development of AMI and the followed arrhythmia (50.8% of overall patients were smokers and 17.7% were ex-smokers) (Table 2, Figure 2), while in those patients who developed arrhythmias (53.7% smokers and 17.9% ex-smokers), (Table 4, Figure 4) and this is an expected result since the studies reported a strong association between cigarette smoke exposure and heart disease. Persons who consume more than 20 cigarettes daily have a 2- to 3-fold increase in total heart disease, and continued smoking is a major risk factor for recurrent heart attacks.^[14,15]

Other risk factors like obesity, metabolic syndrome, lack of physical activity, stress, depression, positive family history and other factors were not included in this study because of limitations in time and resources, and poor medical documentation.^[5,8]

Although we did not have full reports about ECG monitoring for our patients within their CCU stay, but the repeated ECG records and Doctors daily notes had shown that 67 patients (56.7% of AMI Patients) (Table 3, Figure 3), had developed some type of arrhythmia, which is less than expected, since similar studies had documented that about 90% of patients with AMI may have arrhythmia, especially during the first few hours after AMI, and we contribute our results because of the methodology used relying on case sheets review rather than continuous ECG monitoring reports.^[16,17]

Researches explain the occurring Arrhythmias to the direct effects of ischemia and tissue hypoxia, decreased removal of noxious metabolites, including potassium, calcium, amphophilic lipids, and oxygen-centered free radicals, also impair ventricular performance.^[1,6]

The highest incidence of arrhythmia was in patients with extensive AMI (88.8%) followed by patients with Anterolateral AMI (64.7%), Anteroseptal AMI (62.5%), Inferior AMI (57.8%), Anterior AMI (50%), and the least was in the NSTEMI (41.3%) (table 5), and all these results are consistent with other similar studies which states that arrhythmia incidence increase with the increase of infarction size and especially in patients with history of previous ischemic heart disease, because of hypoxia and involvement of conductive cardiac tissues and the reasons mentioned above.^[16,18]

The most common recorded arrhythmia in our patients (Table 6) was the Premature ventricular Contractions (30.5%), which may precedes more serious ventricular arrhythmias like Ventricular Tachycardia (11.01%) or Ventricular Fibrillation (6.77%), the latter two complications are more serious and require immediate treatment while the former PVCs did not require intervention in most of cases, this result is consistent

with similar studies, which had emphasized on the ventricular tachyarrhythmias that may occur in up to 10% of cases especially in the first few hours, the relatively low incidence in our patients may be related to the timing of admission to the CCU, since those who develop serious ventricular arrhythmias may die even before their admission.^[17,19,20,18]

Sinus Tachycardia recorded in 22.8% of cases, possibly due to pain, anxiety, Hypoxia, Anemia, Heart failure and less commonly to Hypovolemia, Pericarditis and Pulmonary embolism, and it was not associated with serious complications.^[11] (Table 6, Figure 6)

While Sinus Bradycardia occurred in 13.55% of cases and mostly in patients with Inferior AMI, possibly due to involvement of the AV Node and right ventricular infarction, this percent in our study is less than what had been mentioned in previous studies (40%), may be because of the late diagnosis and admission of our patients and low percent of inferior AMI (16.1%).^[21]

Premature Atrial Contractions were detected in 5.93% of cases (Table 6), either alone or preceding other supraventricular arrhythmias like atrial fibrillation, this percent is lower than similar studies, and this may be explained because of the methodology of our study did not rely on continuous monitoring reports, The usual cause of these extra impulses is atrial distention due to increased left ventricular (LV) diastolic pressure or inflammation associated with pericarditis.^[17,2]

We did not record any case of atrial flutter and there was only 2.54% of patient who developed Atrial Fibrillation, and this is much lower than other studies (10-15%) for Atrial Fibrillation and 5% for Atrial Flutter.

AV Block incidence was low in our study (6.77% for first degree block, 0% for second degree block and 1.6% for complete heart block), (table 6, figure 6) may be due to lack of documentation and the low number of inferior AMI cases, compared to 15% for first degree block, 10% second degree block and 5-15% for complete heart block in other studies.^[3,21,18]

The RBBB (9.32%) in our patients may not reflect the real percentage of incidence since most of patients do not bring their old ECG records, so we were not sure about this new change, and our results may include many patients who have RBBB before infarction, however, the occurrence of RBBB suggest wide infarcted areas.^[11]

LBBB appeared in 11.01% of patients, which is close to the results of similar studies (15%), and also it had been reported in patients with big infarcted areas or those with previous history of ischemic heart disease.

Out of the total number of patients with AMI, 33% received thrombolytic therapy, with 58.9% developed some form of arrhythmia (mostly ventricular premature

beats and other non serious arrhythmias); (Table 7, Figure 7), and this was expected and consistent with similar studies, which had also emphasized that the occurrence of arrhythmias is neither sensitive nor specific to the success of reperfusion therapy.^[22,23]

CONCLUSION

The frequency of arrhythmias and particularly ventricular arrhythmias, brady-arrhythmias following acute myocardial infarction was significantly high in Iraqi patients. Increasing with age in both sexes. More common in extensive infarctions, while Diabetes Mellitus, Hypertension, previous ischemic heart disease and smoking are the commonest associated risk factors, thrombolysis is under used and had no great impact.

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