

A Systematic Review of the Association of Low Platelet Counts and Preeclampsia

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KEYWORDS

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Preeclampsia is a serious pregnancy-related disorder that affects women worldwide; representing as a main cause of feto-maternal morbidity and mortality.

Objectives: The present systematic review aims to evaluate the reported values of platelet count differences in preeclamptic women and compare them to normotensive pregnant women as controls.

Methods: Pubmed-NCBI, Web of Science and Google scholar Database were searched till November 2023 using the keywords "Preeclampsia OR eclampsia AND platelet count". Cohort, case-control, and cross-sectional studies reporting data on platelet count in preeclampsia in comparison to normotensive pregnant women were included.

Results: Ten articles were included, with a total of 870 preeclampsia cases and 1409 controls. The mean (SD) of the platelets count was significantly lower in preeclamptic women compared to normotensive pregnant women [195.2 (55.7) % vs. 249.4 (52.5) %, $P < 0.001$]. The mean difference was 55.18, 95% CI = 38.33–72.04. However, it was insignificantly lower in women with severe preeclampsia compared to those with mild preeclampsia [178(42.11) vs. 216 (48.69), respectively, $P = 0.76$]. The mean difference was 40.6, 95% CI = 34.24–46.95.

Conclusions: The platelets count is low in preeclampsia and can be considered as a promising laboratory marker for the detection and follow-up of pregnant women who develop preeclampsia.

1. Introduction

Preeclampsia is a serious pregnancy-related disorder which considered as the main cause of feto-maternal morbidity and mortality. The prevalence of preeclampsia differs in various populations and multi-ethnic groups with approximately 5-8% of pregnant women affected [1-12]. Even though the exact pathogenesis of preeclampsia remains unidentified, placental vascular under-perfusion, maternal endothelial damage, and increased vascular permeability are thought to contribute to the pathophysiology of the disease [13-15]. The injured endothelium due to defective placental trophoblastic invasion leads to the activation of the platelets [16, 17]. Normal platelets are present in an inactive form in the bloodstream and can be activated when became contact with damaged endothelial wall [18- 21]. Preeclampsia is characterized by platelet activation, triggering the coagulation, and consequently fibrin deposition in small blood vessels.

It is obvious that preeclampsia is one of the causes of maternal thrombocytopenia and the platelet count increases rapidly after the delivery [22-26]. A low platelet count is suggested to be a characteristic of worsening preeclampsia [27-30]. Platelet-related parameters in pregnant women with preeclampsia are not given much thought until they exhibit a major shift, even if their platelet count is normal. Preeclamptic women may have thrombocytopenia as a result of increased platelet adhesion at the location of injured vascular endothelium, which increases platelet consumption and subsequent destruction. There is an activation of platelets along with increased degranulation leading to a decrease in platelet life span and an increase in the number of immature platelets in peripheral blood smears [31, 32].

2. Objectives

In literature, numerous studies' findings revealed a low platelet count in preeclampsia. Thus, the present review is aimed to assess and analyze if the platelet count is decreased in preeclampsia, by searching Databases in the following site: Pubmed-NCBI, Web of Science and Google scholar.

3. Methods

Searching strategies:

No publication period/date or any other type of restriction were imposed. A literature search was performed on November 15, 2023. Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines were followed [33]. In brief, a literature search was done in PubMed-NCBI, Web of Science and Google scholar. The search terms based on the following keywords: "Preeclampsia OR eclampsia AND platelet count". Published studies till November 2023 were retrieved and evaluated if eligible based on this systematic review inclusion/exclusion criterion. Titles and abstracts of eligible papers were checked: not relevant, inappropriate design, non-English language, and duplicates studies were removed.

Inclusion criteria:

Cohort, case-control, and cross-sectional study, original articles published in English reporting human pregnancy, preeclampsia investigated on maternal side using the strict definition and platelet count analyzed and reported.

Exclusion criteria:

Review articles, case reports, in vitro based studies, posters, conference abstracts, and studies without controls (normotensive pregnant women).

Quality assessment and data collection:

Modified Newcastle Ottawa quality assessment scale was used for assessing the quality of each selected study (34), with a total score of nine. A study that scored 7 and above was considered as high quality, and medium quality if scored 5. For inclusion in this review; the quality of each article was assessed by 2 reviewers independently.

Data extraction:

The most useful relevant data that was extracted was recorded into a table requiring the authors' name, year of publication, study location, and number of cases and controls, values of platelets count in cases and controls (Table 1). Median (range) or median (inter-quartile) were transformed into mean (SD) as previously described [35, 36].

Statistical methods:

Meta-analyses of the variation in the values of platelets count between cases and controls were performed using Open Meta Analyst software for Windows [35, 37].

Ethical consideration:

Ethical approval was not required since the study was a systematic review. PRISMA guideline recommendations were followed [33].

4. Results

The search strategies recognized 31 articles that reduced to 26 articles after removing duplicates and identifying ineligible records. Reports not retrieved were four, while 22 were assessed for eligibility. Report excluded either not relevant, inappropriate design, or non-English language.

Ten articles fulfilling the inclusion criteria and were eligible to be included [28, 38-46]. Among the eligible studies, three studies [38, 42, 43] were conducted in India. One study each was conducted in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia [41], Egypt [39], Sudan [48], Ethiopia [44], China [45], Republic of Korea [28], and Brazil [40]. The total number of preeclampsia cases was 870 and the total number of controls were 1,409. The number of the cases per study ranged from 29 [40] to 163 [45], while the controls ranged from 28 [40] to 816 [28]. The median and variance were reported in three studies [28, 43, 44] and this was converted to the mean (SD) using the specific formula [35, 36]. The mean (SD) of the platelet count value was significantly lower in preeclamptic women compared to healthy pregnant women [195.2 (55.7) % vs. 249.4 (52.5) %, $P < 0.001$]. The mean difference was 55.18, 95% CI = 38.33–72.04, and Std. error of 8.59 (Fig. 2). The I² test result revealed a high degree of heterogeneity ($I^2 = 93$, $P < 0.001$). Thus, we applied the continuous random effect model (Fig. 3). Five studies compared the platelet count in the mild with severe cases of preeclampsia [28, 39, 41, 44, 45]. There were 245 and 276 women with mild and severe preeclampsia, respectively. The mean (SD) of the platelet count value was insignificantly lower in women with severe preeclampsia compared to those with mild preeclampsia [178(42.11) vs. 216 (48.69), respectively, $P = 0.76$]. The mean difference was 40.6, 95% CI = 34.24–46.95 (Fig.

4).

Table 1 Mean, SD, Mean difference (MD) per cases and controls in included studies.

Author/Year	Country	Control /No.	Control /Mean	Control /SD	Cases /No.	Cases/ Mean	Cases/ SD	MD	Lower	Upper
Yang et al	Korea	816	228	79.2	119	195	69.2	32.5	18.9	46.1
Anaam et al	India	100	218	28.2	145	143	32.3	75.2	67.6	82.8
Alkholy et al	Egypt	50	249	38.4	100	161	34.9	87.5	74.8	100.1
Freitas et al	Brazil	28	234	62.8	29	195	68.8	38.8	4.6	72.9
Alsheeha et al	KSA	60	259	39.6	60	236	37.7	22.5	8.7	36.3
Singh et al	India	42	280	89.8	108	172	71.0	108	77.7	138.3
Thalor et al	India	30	241	74.0	30	217	78.0	24.0	-14.5	62.5
Tesfay et al	Ethiopia	140	291	58.4	79	205	58.4	85.9	69.9	102.0
Duan et al	China	93	232	20.3	163	190	24.8	42.0	36.4	47.6
Abass et al	Sudan	50	261	62.7	37	236	82.3	25.2	-6.5	56.9

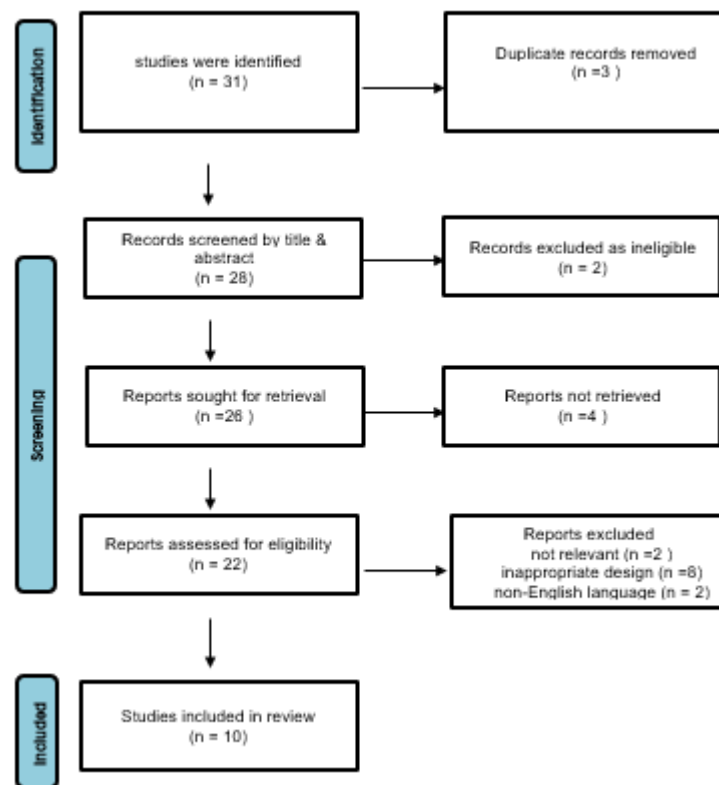


Fig 1: PRISMA flow diagram for systematic review

From: Page MJ, McKenzie JE, Bossuyt PM, Boutron I, Hoffmann TC, Mulrow CD, et al. The PRISMA 2020 statement: an updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. *BMJ* 2021;372:n71. doi: 10.1136/bmj.n71

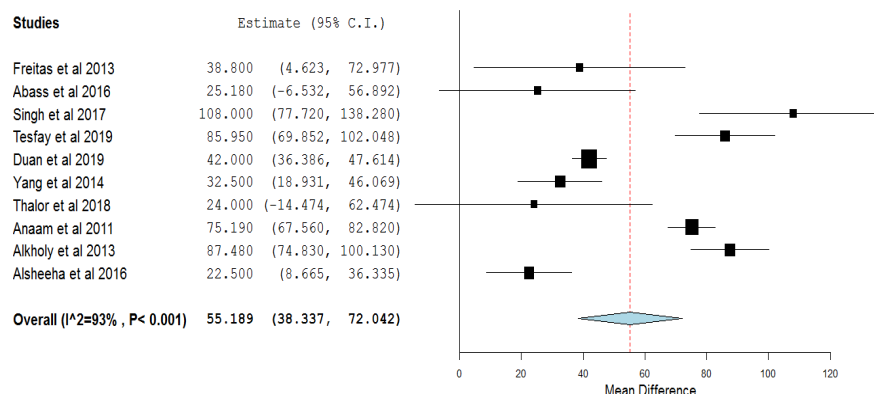


Fig 2: Platelets counts in preeclamptic and normotensive pregnant women.

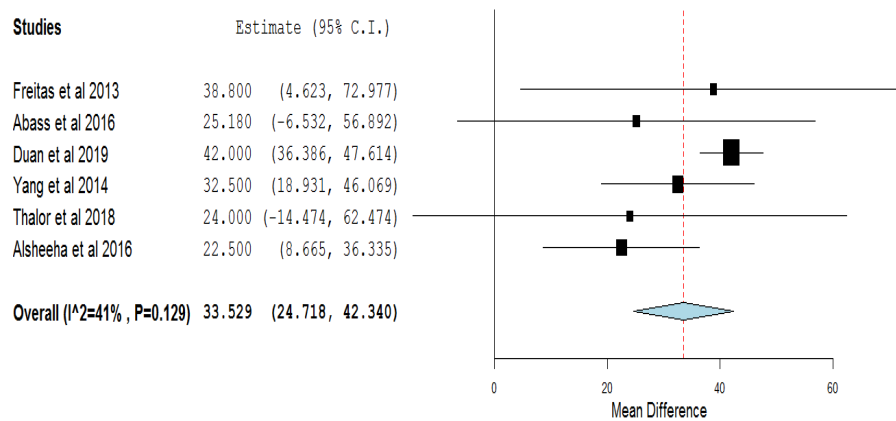


Fig 3: Platelets counts in preeclamptic and normotensive pregnant women after removing the outliers.

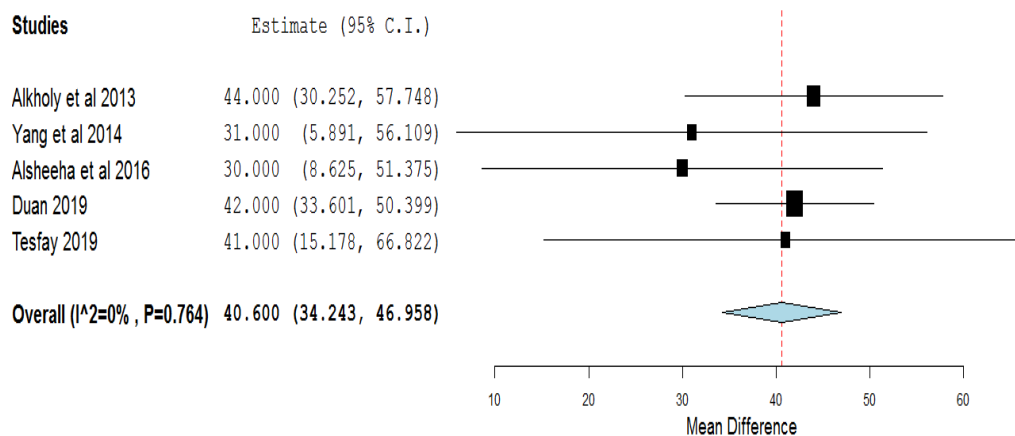


Fig 4: Platelets counts in severe and mild preeclampsia.

5. Discussion

The main result of the current systematic review was a reduced value of platelet count in preeclamptic pregnant women compared to normotensive pregnant women. Normal platelets are circulated in the blood stream in an inactive form; they become activated when contact the exposed endothelial wall [18, 19]. Abnormally active platelets are involved in the pathogenesis of many thrombophilic diseases like preeclampsia [47]. There are several studies which suggest platelet may play a major role in the pathogenesis of preeclampsia. Abnormal coagulation in established preeclampsia are well recognized [48]. The degree of thrombocytopenia increases with the disease severity. Lower the platelet count, greater are feto-maternal mortality and morbidity [49]. Thrombocytopenia is a well-documented procedure in preeclampsia. Preeclampsia and thereby maternal mortality might be reduced through serial monitoring of platelet count as a part of antenatal follow-up. The pathogenesis of thrombocytopenia in preeclampsia is not obvious. Although it is suggested that low platelet count in preeclampsia are linked to abnormal activation of coagulation system and faster platelet consumption [50]. Several studies evaluated the platelet count in preeclamptic women and healthy pregnant women as controls, their findings revealed that platelet counts of these patients were lower than the platelet counts of controls [28, 38-46]. A systemetic review and meta-analysis concluded by Walle and his colleagues revealed a significant decrease in platelet count during the development of preeclampsia among pregnant women [51].

However, the finding of this systemic review and meta-analysis revealed no significant variation when comparing platelets count in mild and severe preeclampsia. Woldeamanuel and his colleagues in their systemetic review and meta-analysis concluded that the platelet count was significantly lower in preeclamptic women, irrespective of severity and presence or absence of associated complications, even before the onset of preeclampsia and in the second trimester of pregnancy [52]. Based on this systematic review, there were significantly lower values of platelets count in preeclamptic women compared to normotensive pregnant women.

Platelet count can be a useful parameter for the detection and follow-up pregnant women with preeclampsia.

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Conflict of Interest

The Authors have no conflict of interest.

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