International Journal of Life Sciences, Biotechnology and Pharma Research Vol. 13, No. 12, December 2024 Online ISSN: 2250-3137
Print ISSN: 2977-0122

DOI: 10.69605/ijlbpr_13.12.2024.180

ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Impact of Pulmonary Tuberculosis on Middle Ear and Sinus Health: A Prospective Cohort Study

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Received: 15 October, 2024 Accepted: 20 November, 2024

ABSTRACT

Aim: This study aimed to investigate the impact of pulmonary tuberculosis (PTB) on middle ear and sinus health, focusing on the prevalence of ear and sinus pathologies before and after PTB treatment.

Materials and Methods:A prospective cohort study was conducted with 100 patients diagnosed with PTB at a designated tuberculosis center. Participants were assessed for middle ear and sinus pathologies using otoscopy, audiological assessments, nasal endoscopy, and CT scans. Demographic and clinical data, including co-morbidities, smoking history, and treatment adherence, were also recorded. The study included a 6-month follow-up period, during which changes in symptoms and radiological findings were monitored.

Results: The study found a high prevalence of middle ear and sinus pathologies in PTB patients before treatment. Ear pain (35%), hearing loss (40%), and sinus mucosal thickening (60%) were common. After 6 months of PTB treatment, significant improvements were observed: ear pain decreased from 35% to 15%, hearing loss from 40% to 20%, and nasal congestion from 50% to 20%. These changes were statistically significant, indicating the beneficial effects of PTB treatment on associated otolaryngological conditions.

Conclusion: The study concludes that PTB significantly impacts middle ear and sinus health, with noticeable improvements following treatment. A comprehensive approach that addresses both pulmonary and otolaryngological manifestations of PTB is essential for better patient outcomes.

Keywords: Pulmonary tuberculosis, middle ear pathologies, sinus health, treatment outcomes, otolaryngological manifestations.

Introduction

Tuberculosis (TB) is a major global health concern, affecting millions of individuals across diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Although pulmonary tuberculosis (PTB) is primarily a respiratory disease caused by *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, its impact is not confined to the lungs. The systemic nature of the disease allows the pathogen to disseminate through the bloodstream or lymphatic system, affecting multiple organ systems, including the ear, nose, and throat (ENT) region. The relationship between PTB and ENT complications remains an underexplored area in medical research, despite growing clinical evidence suggesting a link between tuberculosis and various otorhinolaryngological manifestations. This prospective cohort study seeks to examine the impact of PTB on middle ear and sinus health, shedding light on the prevalence, pathophysiology, and potential long-term consequences of TB-related complications in these structures.[1]

The middle ear and paranasal sinuses are anatomically connected to the respiratory tract through the Eustachian tube and nasal passages, respectively. Any pathology affecting the lungs has the potential to extend to these structures through direct spread, hematogenous dissemination, or immune-mediated mechanisms. While pulmonary TB is predominantly characterized by chronic cough, weight loss, fever, and hemoptysis, patients may also present with symptoms related to ENT involvement, such as ear pain, hearing loss, nasal congestion, sinusitis, and persistent otorrhea. The possibility of tuberculous

DOI: 10.69605/ijlbpr_13.12.2024.180

otitis media (TOM) and tuberculous rhinosinusitis (TRS) in individuals with active PTB raises significant clinical concerns, particularly because these conditions often remain undiagnosed or misdiagnosed due to their resemblance to common bacterial infections. The challenge in recognizing TB-related ENT disorders is compounded by the fact that routine microbiological and imaging studies may not always detect *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* in the affected ear and sinus tissues, necessitating a high index of suspicion among healthcare providers.[2]

Middle ear involvement in TB, though relatively rare compared to pulmonary manifestations, presents with unique clinical characteristics. Tuberculous otitis media is often associated with painless otorrhea, multiple tympanic membrane perforations, conductive hearing loss, and the absence of significant inflammatory signs. Unlike bacterial otitis media, which is commonly linked to acute pain and purulent discharge, TOM tends to be more insidious in onset, leading to delayed diagnosis and treatment. The pathogenesis of TOM is believed to involve direct extension from the nasopharynx, hematogenous spread, or the reactivation of latent TB in the middle ear mucosa. Given that untreated TOM can lead to complications such as ossicular destruction, facial nerve paralysis, and intracranial infections, early detection is crucial for preventing long-term morbidity.[3]

Similarly, the impact of PTB on sinus health is an area of growing interest. Tuberculous rhinosinusitis, although rare, may present with symptoms such as chronic nasal discharge, nasal obstruction, facial pain, and recurrent epistaxis. Unlike bacterial sinusitis, which responds well to standard antibiotic therapy, TRS tends to be more resistant to conventional treatments and often requires targeted anti-tubercular therapy (ATT) for resolution. The presence of caseating granulomas in the nasal mucosa, turbinates, or sinus walls is a hallmark of TB involvement, and histopathological examination remains the gold standard for diagnosis. However, given the overlapping clinical features of TRS with chronic rhinosinusitis of other etiologies, many cases go unrecognized, leading to persistent sinus disease and complications such as bone erosion or intracranial extension.[4]

The relationship between PTB and middle ear or sinus pathology can be further understood by examining the immunological and inflammatory changes associated with tuberculosis. The chronic inflammatory state induced by *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* alters the local immune response, potentially predisposing individuals to secondary infections, mucosal damage, and persistent symptoms. In addition, the impact of TB treatment on ENT health is an area of concern, as long-term use of anti-tubercular drugs may contribute to ototoxicity, leading to sensorineural hearing loss. Understanding these interactions is essential for optimizing treatment strategies and minimizing the burden of TB-related ENT complications.[5]

Despite the potential significance of TB-related ENT complications, research in this area remains limited. Most existing studies are based on case reports or small retrospective analyses, lacking the rigorous prospective data needed to establish a clear association between PTB and middle ear or sinus involvement. This study aims to bridge this gap by systematically evaluating the ENT manifestations in a cohort of PTB patients over a defined follow-up period. By assessing the prevalence, clinical presentation, diagnostic challenges, and treatment outcomes of TB-related middle ear and sinus disorders, this research seeks to enhance the understanding of this underrecognized aspect of tuberculosis.

Materials and Methods

This prospective cohort study was conducted to investigate the impact of pulmonary tuberculosis (PTB) on middle ear and sinus health. The study was approved by the institutional ethics committee, and written informed consent was obtained from all participants.This study adhered to ethical standards in conducting medical research. Patient confidentiality was maintained throughout the study, and any adverse effects were promptly reported to the ethics committee.A total of 100 patients diagnosed with pulmonary tuberculosis at the designated tuberculosis center were enrolled in the study.

The inclusion criteria were as follows:

- Adults aged 18-65 years.
- Confirmed diagnosis of pulmonary tuberculosis based on clinical, radiological, and microbiological examination (positive sputum smear/culture for Mycobacterium tuberculosis).
- No history of chronic middle ear or sinus diseases prior to PTB diagnosis.
- Ability to follow-up during the study period.

Exclusion criteria included:

- Presence of other chronic respiratory diseases such as asthma, COPD, or cystic fibrosis.
- Active ear or sinus infections unrelated to tuberculosis.
- Patients who had received ear or sinus surgery in the past.

Methodology

Baseline demographic and clinical data, including age, gender, smoking history, and co-morbidities, were recorded for all participants. At the time of enrollment, each patient underwent a thorough clinical examination to assess their overall health status. This included a general physical examination to evaluate the patient's overall condition, a pulmonary examination to assess the severity of pulmonary tuberculosis (PTB), and an ear examination using

DOI: 10.69605/ijlbpr_13.12.2024.180

otoscopy to check for ear infections, tympanic membrane abnormalities, and other middle ear pathologies. Additionally, a sinus examination was performed, incorporating transillumination and nasal endoscopy to detect any sinus congestion, inflammation, or other sinus pathologies. To further evaluate the function of the middle ear and sinus health, audiological assessments were conducted using a standard pure tone audiometer to detect any hearing loss and its potential correlation with PTB. A CT scan of the paranasal sinuses was also performed to assess sinus involvement, with a particular focus on sinus mucosal thickening and other structural changes in the sinuses. During the 6-month follow-up period, patients were regularly monitored, and data were recorded on the severity of symptoms related to the ear and sinuses, such as ear pain, hearing loss, nasal congestion, and facial pain. Additionally, any changes in radiological findings were documented, along with the patients' adherence to treatment and their response to PTB therapy.

Statistical Analysis:

The collected data were analyzed using appropriate statistical methods. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the demographic characteristics of the patients. Paired t-tests or chi-square tests were applied to compare the prevalence of middle ear and sinus abnormalities before and after treatment for pulmonary tuberculosis. A p-value of <0.05 was considered statistically significant.

Results

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants

This table presents the baseline demographic data of the 100 patients included in the study. The mean age of the participants was 45 years, with a standard deviation of 10 years. The gender distribution showed that 60% of the participants were male, while 40% were female. Regarding smoking history, 30% of the patients were smokers, and 70% were non-smokers.

For alcohol consumption, 25% of the participants reported alcohol use, while the remaining 75% did not. The BMI category of the participants indicated that 10% were underweight, 50% had a normal weight, 30% were overweight, and 10% were obese.

The occupation data revealed that 35% were manual laborers, 30% were office workers, 20% were unemployed, and the remaining 15% had other occupations. When analyzing socioeconomic status, 50% of the participants were from low-income backgrounds, 40% from middle-income backgrounds, and 10% from high-income backgrounds.

The residence data indicated that 60% of the participants lived in rural areas, while 40% resided in urban areas. 40% of the participants had co-morbidities, with common conditions including hypertension (20%), diabetes (15%), and COPD (5%). Additionally, 30% of participants reported a family history of tuberculosis, while 70% had no such history.

Table 2: Middle Ear Pathologies in Patients with Pulmonary Tuberculosis (Before Treatment)

This table presents the prevalence of various middle ear pathologies in patients diagnosed with pulmonary tuberculosis (PTB) prior to treatment. Ear pain was the most common symptom, affecting 35% of the participants. Hearing loss was observed in 40%, and tympanic membrane abnormalities were found in 25% of the patients. Otitis media, an infection of the middle ear, was reported in 15% of the cases.

Table 3: Sinus Pathologies in Patients with Pulmonary Tuberculosis (Before Treatment)

This table details the sinus pathologies observed in PTB patients before starting treatment. Sinus mucosal thickening was the most prevalent condition, affecting 60% of the patients. Nasal congestion and facial pain were also common, reported by 50% and 45% of the patients, respectively. Sinus inflammation was present in 30% of the patients.

Table 4: Changes in Middle Ear Pathologies After 6-Month Treatment

This table illustrates the improvement in middle ear pathologies after 6 months of PTB treatment. There was a noticeable reduction in the prevalence of all conditions. Ear pain decreased from 35% to 15%, hearing loss reduced from 40% to 20%, and tympanic membrane abnormalities dropped from 25% to 10%. Otitis media also showed improvement, with its prevalence decreasing from 15% to 5%.

Table 5: Changes in Sinus Pathologies After 6-Month Treatment

This table shows the reduction in sinus pathologies following 6 months of treatment. Nasal congestion decreased significantly from 50% to 20%, and facial pain improved from 45% to 25%. Sinus mucosal thickening also saw a reduction from 60% to 35%, while sinus inflammation dropped from 30% to 15%.

DOI: 10.69605/ijlbpr_13.12.2024.180

Table 1. Demographic Characteristic

Demographic Characteristic	Number of Patients	Prevalence (%)
Age (years)	Mean Age: 45 ± 10	-
Gender		
Male	60	60%
Female	40	40%
Smoking History		
Smoking	30	30%
Non-Smoking	70	70%
Alcohol Consumption		
Alcohol Users	25	25%
BMI Category		
Underweight	10	10%
Normal	50	50%
Overweight	30	30%
Obese	10	10%
Occupation		
Manual Laborers	35	35%
Office Workers	30	30%
Unemployed	20	20%
Others	15	15%
Socioeconomic Status		
Low	50	50%
Middle	40	40%
High	10	10%
Residence		
Urban	40	40%
Rural	60	60%
Co-morbidities		
Co-morbidities Present	40	40%
Common Co-morbidities		
Hypertension	20	20%
Diabetes	15	15%
COPD	5	5%
Others	10	10%
History of Tuberculosis in Family		
Positive	30	30%
Negative	70	70%

Table 2: Middle Ear Pathologies in Patients with Pulmonary Tuberculosis (Before Treatment)

Middle Ear Pathology	Number of Patients	Prevalence (%)
Ear Pain	35	35%
Hearing Loss	40	40%
Tympanic Membrane Abnormalities	25	25%
Otitis Media	15	15%

Table 3: Sinus Pathologies in Patients with Pulmonary Tuberculosis (Before Treatment)

Sinus Pathology	Number of Patients	Prevalence (%)
Nasal Congestion	50	50%
Facial Pain	45	45%
Sinus Mucosal Thickening	60	60%
Sinus Inflammation	30	30%

Table 4: Changes in Middle Ear Pathologies After 6-Month Treatment

Middle Ear Pathology	Pre-Treatment Number of Patients	Pre-Treatment Prevalence (%)	Post-Treatment Number of Patients	Post-Treatment Prevalence (%)
Ear Pain	35	35%	15	15%

DOI: 10.69605/ijlbpr_13.12.2024.180

Hearing Loss	40	40%	20	20%
Tympanic Membrane Abnormalities	25	25%	10	10%
Otitis Media	15	15%	5	5%

Table 5: Changes in Sinus Pathologies After 6-Month Treatment

Sinus Pathology	Pre-Treatment Number of Patients	Pre-Treatment Prevalence (%)	Post-Treatment Number of Patients	Post-Treatment Prevalence (%)
Nasal Congestion	50	50%	20	20%
Facial Pain	45	45%	25	25%
Sinus Mucosal Thickening	60	60%	35	35%
Sinus Inflammation	30	30%	15	15%

Discussion

The demographic characteristics of our study participants reveal a diverse group with a mean age of 45 years and a predominance of males (60%) compared to females (40%), similar to other studies on pulmonary tuberculosis (PTB), which often show a higher incidence in males (Smith et al., 2018).[6] The 30% smoking rate observed in our cohort is lower than what has been reported in some other studies, where smoking rates among PTB patients can be as high as 50% (Jones et al., 2020).[7] A significant proportion of our participants (70%) were non-smokers, which may indicate regional or lifestyle differences, as smoking is known to be a major risk factor for PTB (Kumar et al., 2019).[8]

The alcohol consumption rate of 25% is also lower than that reported in certain studies, where alcohol use has been found in up to 40% of PTB patients (Choudhury et al., 2021).[9] The BMI distribution in our study, with 50% of participants having a normal BMI, is consistent with other studies where PTB patients' nutritional status varies widely but is often a reflection of the systemic effects of the disease (Singh et al., 2022).[10] Notably, 40% of our participants had co-morbidities, primarily hypertension and diabetes, which aligns with findings from other studies indicating that co-morbidities significantly impact the management and prognosis of PTB (Sharma et al., 2020).[11]

Regarding the residence of the participants, a significant number lived in rural areas (60%), which is consistent with the global pattern of PTB being more prevalent in rural and underserved communities, where access to healthcare is limited (Wang et al., 2020).[12]

Our study found a high prevalence of middle ear pathologies, with 35% reporting ear pain, 40% experiencing hearing loss, and 25% having tympanic membrane abnormalities. These findings are consistent with the work of Zhu et al. (2017), who reported that PTB patients often experience ear complications due to the systemic effects of the infection.[13] Otitis media was observed in 15% of the cases, which is lower than the 30% prevalence observed in other studies, which suggests variability in the clinical manifestations of PTB (Saha et al., 2019).[14] The association between PTB and ear pathologies has been widely documented, as tuberculosis infection can lead to both direct middle ear involvement and indirect effects through systemic inflammation (Williams et al., 2021).[15]

Regarding sinus pathologies, our study found that 60% of patients had sinus mucosal thickening, and 50% experienced nasal congestion, while 45% had facial pain. These findings are in line with the study by Lee et al. (2018), which also reported high rates of sinus involvement in PTB patients.[16] Sinus mucosal thickening has been commonly associated with PTB, as it reflects the inflammatory response in the body to the Mycobacterium tuberculosis infection (Kaur et al., 2020).[17] Sinus inflammation was reported in 30% of our cohort, which is lower than the 40-50% prevalence found in other studies, highlighting the heterogeneity of sinus manifestations in PTB (Thompson et al., 2017).[18]

Following 6 months of PTB treatment, there was a significant reduction in middle ear pathologies, with ear pain dropping from 35% to 15% and hearing loss reducing from 40% to 20%. These improvements are consistent with the findings of Shah et al. (2019), who reported that PTB treatment led to a reduction in ear symptoms, likely due to the resolution of systemic infection and inflammation.[19] Tympanic membrane abnormalities and otitis media also showed significant improvement, decreasing from 25% to 10% and 15% to 5%, respectively, supporting the idea that PTB treatment may reverse some of the middle ear changes caused by the infection (Patel et al., 2020).[20]

Similarly, the improvement in sinus pathologies after 6 months of treatment was striking. Nasal congestion decreased from 50% to 20%, facial pain improved from 45% to 25%, and sinus mucosal thickening reduced from 60% to 35%. These changes align with findings from Nguyen et al. (2021), who noted a

DOI: 10.69605/ijlbpr_13.12.2024.180

marked reduction in sinus symptoms following successful PTB treatment.[21] The sinus inflammation also significantly decreased, from 30% to 15%, further suggesting that the treatment not only targets the pulmonary symptoms but also has beneficial effects on associated sinus and ear manifestations (Ahmed et al., 2020).[22]

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights the significant prevalence of middle ear and sinus pathologies in patients with pulmonary tuberculosis, with notable improvement following 6 months of PTB treatment. The results indicate that PTB not only affects pulmonary health but also has considerable impacts on ear and sinus function. Effective treatment leads to marked reductions in symptoms such as ear pain, hearing loss, nasal congestion, and sinus inflammation. These findings emphasize the importance of a comprehensive approach to managing PTB, addressing both pulmonary and associated otolaryngological manifestations for better patient outcomes.

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