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NEUROVASCULAR DYSREGULATION IN PREECLAMPSIA: PATHOPHYSIOLOGY AND CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS

Veera Venkata Prasad Nunna[1], Gargee Deshpande[2], S P Srinivas Nayak[3], John Kirubakaran[4], G S Chakraborthy[5]

[1,2] *Department of Pharmacy practice, Parul Institute of Pharmacy & Research, Parul University, Vadodara, Gujarat, India.*

[3]*Assistant Professor, Department of Pharmacy practice, Parul Institute of Pharmacy & Research, Parul University, Vadodara, Gujarat, India.*

[4]*HOD, Department of Pharmacy practice, Parul Institute of Pharmacy & Research, Parul University, Vadodara, Gujarat, India.*

[5]*Prof. & Principal, Parul Institute of Pharmacy & Research, Parul University, Vadodara, Gujarat, India.*

Corresponding Author: *S P Srinivas Nayak, Assistant Professor, Department of Pharmacy practice, Parul Institute of Pharmacy & Research, Parul University, Vadodara, Gujarat, India.*

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ABSTRACT

After 20 weeks of pregnancy, proteinuria and new-onset hypertension are hallmarks of preeclampsia, a complex hypertensive pregnancy disease that frequently coexists with systemic organ failure. It continues to be a major cause of maternal and newborn morbidity and mortality, affecting 5–8% of pregnancies worldwide, especially in environments with low resources. Although it has historically been associated with placental malfunction, mounting data indicates a substantial neurovascular involvement, including disruption of the blood-brain barrier (BBB), neuroinflammation, and oxidative stress, which results in cerebral edema, ischemia, and bleeding. Headaches, seizures, visual abnormalities, and posterior reversible encephalopathy syndrome (PRES) are examples of neurological symptoms.

The characteristics of preeclampsia, a complicated hypertensive pregnancy syndrome that often coexists with systemic organ failure, are proteinuria and new-onset hypertension after 20 weeks of pregnancy. It still accounts for 5–8% of pregnancies globally, particularly in low-resource settings, and is a leading cause of maternal and neonatal morbidity and mortality. Growing evidence suggests a significant neurovascular involvement, including disruption of the BBB, neuroinflammation, and oxidative stress, which leads to cerebral edema, ischemia, and bleeding, despite its historical association with placental dysfunction. Neurological symptoms include visual problems, headaches, seizures, and PRES.

Long-term monitoring, supportive care, and neuroprotective techniques are crucial, especially for cardiovascular risks and postpartum problems. The burden of preeclampsia can be lessened by addressing health inequities and including preventive care. Its neurovascular and systemic interactions warrant more investigation in order to develop novel therapeutic strategies that will eventually enhance the results for mothers and newborns.

KEYWORDS: *Neurovascular dysregulation, preeclampsia, brain-blood barrier, Angiogenic dysregulation, Oxidative stress.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Preeclampsia is a prenatal hypertensive condition marked by proteinuria and new-onset hypertension after 20 weeks of pregnancy, frequently with systemic organ dysfunction. It continues to be a major cause of maternal and neonatal morbidity and mortality, especially in low-resource environments, and affects 5–8% of pregnancies worldwide. [1], [2]. While traditionally viewed as a placental disorder, mounting evidence implicates significant neurovascular involvement, emphasizing the critical interplay between systemic hypertension, endothelial dysfunction, and cerebral pathology [3], [4]. The neurological side effects of preeclampsia, including as severe headache, visual abnormalities, seizures (eclampsia), and, in extreme situations, PRES, are mostly caused by neurovascular dysregulation [5], [6]. These symptoms are thought to result from a confluence of neuroinflammation, altered cerebral autoregulation, and disruption of the BBB. Maternal health is seriously at danger when these processes are dysregulated because they can result in cerebral oedema, ischemia, and bleeding [7]. Neurovascular dysregulation in preeclampsia has a complex pathophysiology that includes the interaction of systemic inflammation, oxidative stress, angiogenic imbalance, and suppression of vascular endothelial growth factor (VEGF) [8], [9]. Endothelial dysfunction and BBB damage are caused by elevated levels of anti-angiogenic factors, such as soluble fms-like tyrosine kinase-1 (sFlt-1), which inhibit VEGF signalling [10], [11]. Moreover, oxidative stress increases the generation of reactive

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oxygen species (ROS), which exacerbates endothelial damage and stimulates cascades of inflammation [12]. To avoid the development of eclampsia and long-term neurological consequences, clinical management of neurovascular problems in preeclampsia requires early detection and focused therapy. Recent developments in imaging methods, such magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), have made it easier to detect microvascular changes and cerebral oedema, which helps with the prompt diagnosis and management of neurovascular dysfunction [13], [14]. Additionally, new studies on biomarkers, including sFlt-1/PIGF ratios, hold promise for identifying and classifying preeclampsia patients' risk for brain problems [15].

II. EPIDEMIOLOGY

Preeclampsia is a major cause of maternal and newborn morbidity and mortality, affecting 5–8% of pregnancies worldwide [16]. Because to differences in healthcare availability and quality, the prevalence varies greatly among populations, with higher rates seen in low- and middle-income nations [17]. Preeclampsia and eclampsia are responsible for about 70,000 maternal and 500,000 fetal fatalities annually, accounting for an estimated 14% of all maternal deaths worldwide [18]. Preeclampsia risk is increased by demographic characteristics, such as nulliparity, advanced mother age, repeated gestations, obesity, and a history of diabetes or hypertension illnesses [19]. Its prevalence is also influenced by environmental circumstances and genetic predisposition. Interestingly, depending on the intensity and timing of previous pregnancies, recurrence rates in subsequent pregnancies might range from 20% to 65% [20].

III. ETIOPATHOPHYSIOLOGY OF PREECLAMPSIA

A complex hypertensive pregnancy condition, preeclampsia has a multifaceted etiopathogenesis that includes both maternal and fetal components. The illness, which has major effects on the health of both the mother and the fetus, is primarily caused by aberrant placentation, systemic endothelial dysfunction, and neurovascular dysregulation [21], [22].

1.Abnormal Placentation and Spiral Artery Remodelling

Preeclampsia begins in the early stages of pregnancy when the mother's spiral arteries are not properly remodelled and there is insufficient trophoblastic invasion. These arteries are typically invaded by trophoblasts, which change them into low-resistance vessels that can handle higher uteroplacental blood flow. Unfinished remodelling in preeclampsia causes small, high-resistance arteries that reduce placental perfusion [23], [24]. Placental hypoxia and ischemia result from this, releasing inflammatory and anti-angiogenic substances into the mother's bloodstream.[25].

2. Imbalance of Angiogenic and Anti-Angiogenic Factors

A key factor in preeclampsia is the angiogenic imbalance. Pro-angiogenic factors like VEGF and placental growth factor (PlGF) have less bioavailability when anti-angiogenic factors like soluble fms-like tyrosine kinase-1 (sFlt-1) and soluble endoglin (sEng) are increased. This imbalance worsens endothelial dysfunction and prevents angiogenesis [26], [27].

3. Endothelial Dysfunction and Systemic Inflammation

Vasoconstriction, elevated pro-inflammatory status, and increased vascular permeability are signs of endothelial dysfunction. The clinical manifestations of preeclampsia, such as hypertension, proteinuria, and multi-organ involvement, are caused by this systemic reaction. Increased levels of inflammatory cytokines, including interleukins and tumor necrosis factor-alpha (TNF-α), exacerbate endothelial damage [28], [29].

4. Oxidative Stress

Oxidative stress, characterized as an imbalance between reactive oxygen species (ROS) and antioxidant defenses, is exacerbated by placental hypoxia and ischemia. The production of ROS exacerbates endothelial damage and systemic inflammation by destroying lipids, proteins, and DNA, among other biological constituents. An important factor in the development of preeclampsia and its consequences is oxidative stress [30], [31].

5. Neurovascular Dysregulation

Neurovascular dysregulation is the cause of neurological symptoms like eclampsia, PRES, and excruciating migraines. In preeclampsia, elevated blood pressure frequently exceeds the cerebral arteries' autoregulatory ability, resulting in hyper perfusion and rupture of the BBB [32], [33]. Cerebral edema and the ensuing neurological symptoms are caused by the extravasation of proteins and fluids made possible by BBB breakdown [34], [35].

6. Cerebral Autoregulation Impairment

Despite variations in systemic blood pressure, cerebral autoregulation maintains steady cerebral blood flow. Chronic hypertension and endothelial dysfunction impede this autoregulatory mechanism in pregnancy, making the brain more vulnerable to ischemia and vasogenic oedema [36], [37].

7. Genetic and Environmental Factors

The onset of preeclampsia is significantly influenced by genetic predisposition. Susceptibility is increased by variations in the genes controlling immunological response, oxidative stress, and angiogenesis. Environmental variables that worsen oxidative stress and endothelial dysfunction, like obesity and poor nutrition, increase these risks [38], [39].

IV. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HYPERTENSION AND NEURONAL IMPACTS IN PREECLAMPSIA

Neurological symptoms like headaches, visual disturbances, seizures, and cognitive dysfunction are brought on by cerebrovascular dysregulation, BBB disruption, and neuronal injury caused by preeclampsia-related hypertension [40], [41], [42].

1.Hypertension and Cerebral Perfusion

In preeclampsia, systemic hypertension can overpower cerebral autoregulatory systems, which typically regulate vascular tone to maintain steady blood flow [40], [43]. Impaired autoregulation results in:

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a. **Cerebral Hyper perfusion**: Vasogenic edema and an increase in intracranial pressure are caused by tiny vessel injury from high blood pressure [44], [45].
b. **Hypoperfusion and Ischemia**: Ischemic neuronal damage can occasionally result from vascular spasm or hypoperfusion in particular brain areas [42], [46].

2. BBB Disruption
The BBB is disrupted by hypertension in preeclampsia, which increases its permeability and permits dangerous chemicals like proteins and cytokines to enter the brain [47], [48]. This results in:
a. **Vasogenic Oedema**: Neuronal signalling is disrupted when fluid and plasma seep into the brain parenchyma [44], [49].
b. **Neuroinflammation**: TNF-α and IL-6 are examples of inflammatory mediators that enter the brain, activate microglia, and worsen neuronal damage [50], [51].

3. Cerebral Endothelial Dysfunction
Anti-angiogenic factors including sFlt-1, which lower VEGF availability, mediate systemic endothelial activation in pregnancy that extends to brain arteries [52], [53]. Consequences include:
a. **Reduced Nitric Oxide (NO)**: Reduced NO limits the transport of oxygen and nutrients to neurons via impairing vasodilation [54], [55].
b. **Microvascular Thrombosis**: Cerebral blood flow is further restricted by endothelial dysfunction, which encourages clot formation [48], [56].

4. Neuronal Injury and Dysfunction
There are multiple ways that chronic hypertension and its aftereffects cause neuronal damage:
a. **Oxidative Stress**: Neurons and glial cells are harmed by ROS generation brought on by hypertension [49], [57].
b. **Excitotoxicity**: Excessive glutamate release from ischemia overstimulates neurons and causes apoptosis [51], [58].

5. Altered Neurotransmission:
Cognitive and sensory functions are hampered by cytokine influx and BBB malfunction, which upset the usual neurotransmitter balance [59], [60].

V. CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS

Sr.no:	Eclampsia and Seizures:	Cognitive Impairments:	Posterior Reversible Encephalopathy Syndrome
1.	Seizures are caused by cortical irritation brought on by acute hypertension and BBB disruption [61], [62].	Postpartum cognitive deficits and long-term risks of neurodegenerative disorders are increased when preeclampsia-associated hypertension causes persistent neuronal damage [63], [64].	Vasogenic oedema mostly affects the posterior cerebral areas, and hypertensive encephalopathy in pregnancy frequently presents as PRES [65], [66].

VI. TREATMENT STRATEGIES
1.Blood Pressure Control
The control of hypertension is the mainstay of preeclampsia treatment. Labetalol, nifedipine, and hydralazine are examples of antihypertensive medications that are frequently used to reduce blood pressure and stop cerebral oedema from getting worse and causing additional problems [67], [68]. Generally, blood pressure goals are kept at 140/90 mmHg to prevent hypotension, which could impair cerebral perfusion, and to lower the risk of brain injury [69].

2. Anticonvulsant Therapy
The most often prescribed anticonvulsant for treating and preventing eclampsia in patients with preeclampsia is magnesium sulphate. Magnesium sulphate prevents seizures, which are frequently brought on by the neurovascular dysfunction linked to preeclampsia, by stabilizing neuronal membranes and lowering excitability [70].

3. Corticosteroid Therapy
In situations of early preeclampsia, corticosteroids, such as betamethasone or dexamethasone, are given to encourage foetal lung maturity in preparation for an early birth. In the foetal and maternal circulations, steroids may also indirectly improve endothelial function and lower inflammation [71], [72].

4. Delivery
The delivery of the foetus and placenta is the final treatment for preeclampsia. Most of the symptoms of the condition, including hypertension, are reversed as a result of the resolution of placental ischemia and the release of anti-angiogenic factors. The degree of preeclampsia, gestational age, and the health of the mother and foetus all affect when to deliver [73], [74].

5. Neuroprotective Strategies
Neuroprotective measures are essential for patients with neurological complications, such as PRES. Cerebral damage can be lessened with early diagnosis, supportive care, and hypertension management. In some cases, thrombolytic therapy may be considered if ischemic stroke is suspected [75], [76].

6. Monitoring and Supportive Care:
In order to effectively manage preeclampsia, blood pressure, renal function, and foetal health must be continuously monitored. Patients should also be watched for symptoms of neurological decline, such as seizures, disorientation, or visual abnormalities. Patients with severe preeclampsia or eclampsia

may need supportive treatment in an intensive care unit or high-dependency unit [77].

7. Long-Term Management

Monitoring for issues such postpartum preeclampsia, which can develop 48 hours to a week after delivery, is part of postpartum care. Given that women with a history of preeclampsia are more likely to develop cardiovascular disease, lifestyle modifications and ongoing cardiovascular monitoring are advised [78].

VII. CONCLUSION

Preeclampsia is a complicated pregnancy condition that offers serious hazards to long-term health in addition to affecting the health of the mother and foetus. Its pathogenesis includes neurovascular dysregulation, oxidative stress, endothelial dysfunction, and aberrant placental development, all of which lead to systemic and cerebral problems. Seizures, visual abnormalities, and cognitive deficits are examples of neurological symptoms that demonstrate the serious effects of preeclampsia on the brain.

Early identification, hypertension control, magnesium sulphate seizure prevention, and prompt delivery are the main focuses of effective management techniques. Developments in biomarker research and imaging methods could lead to early diagnosis and customized treatments. However, as preeclampsia continues to be a major cause of maternal and newborn mortality, especially in settings with limited resources, addressing health inequities is essential.

The immediate and long-term effects of preeclampsia can be lessened with a comprehensive strategy that includes neuroprotective techniques, postpartum surveillance, and prenatal care. Understanding the intricate interactions between systemic and neurovascular factors could result in new treatments that benefit moms and their kids as research advances. In addition to successfully managing the illness, the objective is to lessen its recurrence and related problems in subsequent pregnancies.

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