

Morbidities, Complications and Outcomes at Discharge in Newborns Admitted with Respiratory Distress at a Tertiary Care Hospital of Nepal: A Descriptive Cross-Sectional Study

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Abstract

Introduction: Neonatal respiratory disorders are among the leading causes of admissions to neonatal intensive care units due to respiratory distress in the early neonatal period. However, studies on their spectrum and outcomes among Nepalese neonates are limited. This study aimed to find out the proportion and types of respiratory disorders among admitted newborns, along with associated complications and outcomes.

Methods: This descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted in the Neonatology Unit of a tertiary care hospital from July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024, among all inborn neonates meeting the inclusion criteria. Convenience sampling was applied, and the sample size taken was 150. Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Committee (Ref no 241/080/081-IRC). Data were entered in Microsoft Excel 2007 and analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 11.5.

Results: Among 150 newborns, the most prevalent morbidity was Transient Tachypnoea of Newborn 56 (37.30%), followed by Meconium Aspiration Syndrome 46 (30.70%). Similarly, 27 (18%) had complications, and 123 (82%) had no complications. Likewise, 134 (89.30%) babies recovered and were discharged, and 7 (4.70%) mortality during the course of treatment.

Conclusions: This study concluded that the most common morbidity was Transient Tachypnea of the Newborn, followed by Meconium Aspiration Syndrome. This study emphasizes early identification of different types of respiratory disorders and common complications among neonates with respiratory distress which will help in early recognition and treatment thereby minimizing complications and mortality.

Keywords: newborn; respiratory distress syndrome; transient tachypnea; treatment outcome.

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Introduction

Neonatal respiratory disorders account for most admissions to intensive care units in the immediate newborn period as they develop respiratory distress.¹ The causes of respiratory distress in the newborn are numerous and are due to pulmonary or extrapulmonary processes.² Significant respiratory morbidity affects 15% of term babies and 29% of late preterm babies admitted to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU), the percentage rises to 34% for babies born before 34 weeks of gestation.³ The common complications of respiratory distress in preterm newborns are divided into short term and long term complications.⁴ Short term complications include Patent Ductus Arteriosus (PDA), Intraventricular hemorrhage, Necrotizing enterocolitis, whereas long term complications include Bronchopulmonary dysplasia.⁴ The prognosis of infants with respiratory disorders depends on prompt identification of the underlying cause and timely initiation of appropriate interventions.⁵

There is a paucity of data in our part of the world however available reports have found that the incidence of respiratory disorders is 3.90% to 8% of all newborns getting admitted in neonatal units.^{6,7} The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of Nepal aim to end preventable deaths of newborns and children under five years of age by 2030, with all countries aiming to reduce neonatal mortality to at least 12 per 1,000 live births and under-five mortality to at least 25 per 1,000 live births.⁸ Early detection and timely treatment of respiratory disorders in newborns are essential in order to reduce complications associated with respiratory disorders and mortality.⁸

This study aimed to find out the proportions and types of respiratory disorders among admitted newborns, along with associated complications and outcomes.

Methods

A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted at the neonatology unit of the Department of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine, BPKIHS, Dharan. Ethical clearance was taken from the Institutional Review Committee (IRC), BPKIHS (Ref. no. 241/080/081-IRC). The study population included all inborn babies meeting the inclusion criteria from July 01, 2023, to June 30, 2024, using convenient sampling till sample size was reached. Inclusion criteria were only inborn neonates with respiratory distress and exclusion criteria was out born neonates and whose parents did not give consent.

Sample size was calculated using Cochran's formula.

$$n = (Z^2 \times p \times q) / e^2$$

$$= (1.96^2 \times 0.34 \times 0.66) / 0.08^2$$

$$= 135$$

Where,

n= minimum required sample size

Z= 1.96 at 95% Confidence Interval (CI)

p= prevalence of neonates with respiratory distress, prevalence was taken as 0.34 based on a study done by P Rijal and M Shrestha at Nepal Medical College and Teaching Hospital, Kathmandu, where 34.3% of all NICU admissions were contributed to respiratory distress⁹

q= 1-p

e= margin of error, was set at 8% (0.08)

After accounting for a 10% non-response rate, the final sample size was set at 150.

Operational Definitions:¹⁰

Preterm: Gestational age < 37 weeks

Term: Gestational age ≥ 37 weeks to <42 weeks

Birth weight has been classified into the following categories:

- Low birth weight: < 2500 grams
- Normal weight: ≥ 2500 grams to < 4000 grams

Diagnostic criteria for acute neonatal respiratory disorders

1. Respiratory distress syndrome (RDS): Increasing oxygen requirement during the first 24 hours, absence of any signs of infection; typical radiological pattern with reduced air content, reticulogranular pattern of the lung and air bronchograms.¹¹
2. Transient tachypnea of newborn (TTNB): Requirement of supplemental oxygen within the first 6 hours of life that does not increase during the subsequent 18 hours. Chest radiograms can either be normal or show reduced translucency, infiltrates and hyperinflation of the lungs.¹²
3. Meconium aspiration syndrome (MAS): Presence of meconium in both amniotic fluid and neonatal trachea, with chest radiograms showing hyperinflation, massive bilateral patchy infiltrates of the lung and frequently pleural fluid effusions.¹³
4. Pneumonia: Variable oxygen dependence with suggestive maternal history (premature rupture of membranes, fever during the 12 hours antepartum, chorioamnionitis), clinical signs of infection, supportive laboratory studies, radiographic patterns similar to RDS with

bilateral or unilateral alterations.¹⁴

- Sepsis: The presence of risk factors for sepsis, if clinical findings and lab findings (including absolute neutrophil count, C-reactive protein, and blood culture) are suggestive of sepsis.¹⁵

Respiratory disorders were classified into 5 subgroups: - respiratory distress syndrome, transient tachypnea of newborn, meconium aspiration syndrome, pneumonia, and sepsis.

After classifying respiratory disorders, neonates were observed for development of any complication, i.e. Necrotizing Enterocolitis (NEC), Patent Ductus Arteriosus (PDA), persistent pulmonary hypertension of newborn (PPHN), BronchoPulmonary Dysplasia (BPD), pulmonary air leak, and shock. Then the final outcome of babies was recorded in 4 major groups: 1) recovered and discharged, 2) discharged with complications, 3) left against medical advice, and 4) mortality.

Variables to be measured in the neonate included gestational age, birth weight, gender, type of respiratory disorders, their complications, and the newborn’s final outcome. Point estimates at a 95% Confidence Interval (CI) were calculated along with frequency and percentage for binary data and mean with standard deviation for continuous data. Data were entered in Microsoft Excel 2007 and analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 11.5

Results

During the one-year study period, 150 newborns with respiratory distress were included in this study; of these, 100 (66.70%) were male. The mean gestational age was 37.13±3.01 weeks. The mean birth weight was 2650.71±769.94 grams (Table 1).

Table 1: Baseline characteristics of newborns admitted with respiratory distress

Characteristics	Categories	No of newborn n(%)
Gender	Male	100(66.70%)
	Female	50(33.30%)
Gestational age (in weeks)	Term (≥37)	94(62.70%)
	Preterm (<37)	56(37.30%)
Mean Gestational age ± SD (min – max) in weeks		37.13±3.01 (26 – 41)
Birth weight (in gram)	Normal	86(60.60%)
	Low birth weight (LBW)	44(29.30%)
	Very low birth weight (VLBW)	13(8.70%)
	Extreme low birth weight (ELBW)	2(1.30%)
Mean Weight ± SD (min – max) in gram		2650.71±769.94 (830-3970)

As seen in Table 2, the most common respiratory morbidity among newborns was Transient tachypnea of the newborn, observed in 56 (37.30%), followed by Meconium Aspiration Syndrome in 46 (30.70%).

Table 2: Distribution of Morbidities among newborns admitted with respiratory distress

Characteristics	Categories	No of newborns n(%)
Morbidities	TTNB	56(37.30%)
	MAS	46(30.70%)
	Pneumonia	20(13.30%)
	RDS	15(10%)
	Sepsis	13(8.70%)

Among 150 newborns, 123 (82%) had no complications, whereas 27 (18%) developed complications. Among those 27 newborns that developed complications, shock was the most common followed by PDA during the course of NICU stay (Table 3).

Table 3: Distribution of Complications among newborns admitted with respiratory distress

Characteristics	Categories	No of newborns n(%)
Complications	Yes	27(18%)
	No	123(82%)
Types of complications	Shock	10(37%)
	PDA	8(29.60%)
	NEC	3(11.10%)
	PPHN	3(11.10%)
	BPD	2(7.40%)
	Air Leak	1(3.70%)

Out of 150 babies, 134 (89.30%) newborns recovered and were discharged, 7 (4.70%) died during the course of treatment (Figure 1).

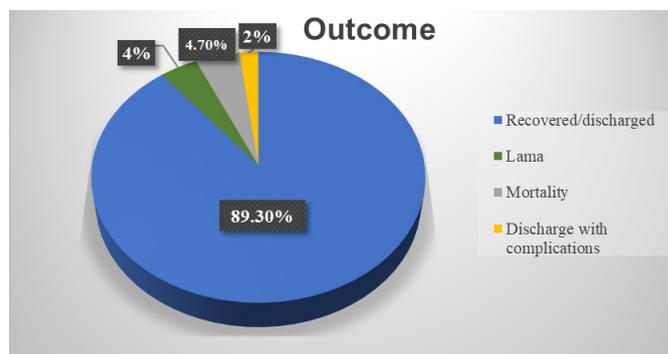


Figure 1: Distribution of outcome of newborns admitted with respiratory distress

Among the babies with RDS, 6 (40%) were recovered and discharged, 6 (40%) died, 2 (13.30%) left against medical advice, and 1 (6.70%) was discharged with complications (i.e., BPD).

All of the newborns with TTNB recovered and were discharged.

Among the babies with MAS, 42 (91.30%) were recovered and discharged, 2 (4.30%) left against medical advice, 1 (2.20%) was discharged with complications (i.e. PDA), and 1 (2.20%) died.

19 (95%) of the newborns who had pneumonia were discharged with recovery, whereas 1 (5%) was discharged with complications (i.e. BPD). Among the babies with sepsis, 11 (84.60%) recovered and were discharged, whereas 2 (15.40%) left against medical advice (Table 4).

Table 4: Distribution of outcomes in relation to cause of respiratory distress.

Morbidity	Outcome			
	Recovered & discharged	Lama	Mortality	Discharge with complications
RDS	6(40%)	2(13.30%)	6(40%)	1(6.70%)
TTNB	56(100%)	-	-	-
MAS	42(91.30%)	2(4.30%)	1(2.20%)	1(2.20%)
Pneumonia	19(95%)	-	-	1(5%)
Sepsis	11(84.60%)	2(15.40%)	-	-

Discussion

In this study consisting of 150 newborns, the mean gestational age of newborns was 37.13±3.01 weeks, with the majority of newborns being from the term gestational age 94 (62.70%), and the preterm gestational age was 56 (37.30%). Similar findings were found in a study done in Karachi in 2010 by Parkash et al. among 205 newborns with respiratory distress admitted at NICU, which showed the mean gestational age of 36.32 ± 2.72 weeks.¹⁶ Similarly, a study done in Maharashtra, India, by Kshirsagar VY et al. in 2018 among 100 newborns admitted with respiratory distress showed 52% of term gestation and 48% of preterm gestation.¹⁷ However, these findings are different from a study done in Nepal by Lamichhane et al. among 111 newborns who developed respiratory distress after birth which showed 59.46% of preterm and 40.54% of term newborns.¹⁸ This is because of a greater number of term gestational admissions at our center.

Most of the newborns 100 (66.70%) were male. Similar findings were found in a study done in Karachi in 2010 by Parkash et al., among 205 newborns with respiratory distress, which shows 58.6% were male.¹⁶ Comparable findings were also observed in a study done in India by Kshirsagar VY et al. 51% male in Nepal by Anita Lamichane et al., 60.36% male.^{17,18} It is known that male babies are more prone to respiratory distress at birth. Additionally, it is worth considering data from the Nepal Demographic Health Survey 2022, which reported an increase in the male-to-female ratio for children under five years old to 1.09:1, which may also contribute to this observed male predominance.¹⁹

Most of the baby with respiratory disorder were

of normal birthweight (≥2500gm) i.e. 86(60.60%) while 44 (29.30%) were low birth weight and only 2 (1.30%) newborns were extremely low birth weight (<1000gm) with mean birth weight of 2650.71±769.94 grams which is similar to study done by Abdel baser et al. in 2018 among 145 newborn with respiratory distress in Qena, Egypt which reported a mean birth weight of 2108.19±810.92.²⁰ Similarly, a study done by Dey et al. in 2023 among 100 newborns in eastern India where 50% of babies were normal weight followed by 33% LBW, 9% VLBW and 8% ELBW.²¹ Chandrasekhar R et al. in 2014, among 100 newborns who developed respiratory distress in India, also reported 73% of normal weight and 27% of LBW.²² In contrast, Lamichhane et al. in Nepal in 2019, among 111 newborns, reported a higher proportion of low birth weight (50.45%) compared to normal birthweight (38.40%).¹⁸ This difference could be due to more number of term gestational age newborns with respiratory disorders admitted in our study.

In this study, transient tachypnea of newborn 56 (37.30%) was the most common cause of respiratory distress followed by meconium aspiration syndrome 46 (30.70%). These findings are similar to a study done by Piparsania et al. in Indore among 100 newborns & by Erbu Yarci, MD et al. among 903 newborns in Turkey.^{23,24} These similar trends across studies highlight the importance of strengthening perinatal care practices aimed at preventing, promptly recognizing respiratory disorders and early neonatal respiratory support.

The majority of newborns 123 (82.00%) with respiratory distress had no complications, whereas 27 (18.00%) had some complications. Among those with complications, the majority of newborns had shock 10 (37.00%), followed by PDA 8 (29.60%), NEC 3 (11.10%), PPHN 3 (11.10%), BPD 2 (7.40%) and air

leak 1 (3.70%). These findings are different from the study done by Erbu Yarci, MD et al. in 2020 among 903 newborns in Turkey, where 61% developed some complications in which Intraventricular hemorrhage (IVH) (24.90%) was the most common complication followed by PDA (19.8%), NEC (6.80%), air leak (5%) and BPD (4.70%).²⁴ The lower complication rate might be because of the inclusion of more term and normal birth weight babies in our study.

Most of the newborns 134 (89.30%) had recovered and were discharged. This finding is similar to a study done by Kshirsagar et al. among 100 newborns, where 88.84% were discharged and 4.70% died during hospital stay,¹⁷ which is also similar to a study done by Lamichhane et al. in 2019, where 4% of newborns had left against medical advice, and only 2% were discharged with complications.¹⁸

The study was conducted in a single tertiary care center. Multicenter studies are required to validate the results. The most common causes of respiratory distress requiring newborn care in this study are transient tachypnea of the newborn and meconium aspiration syndrome, and these have generally favourable outcomes, which may have influenced the overall complication and mortality rates. The availability of trained personnel to take care of these newborns may also have contributed to improved outcomes. The newborns in our study were followed until their discharge, which hindered the evaluation of long-term complications.

Conclusions

The majority of affected newborns exhibited an average and manageable clinical course, and a notable proportion developed complications, highlighting the clinical significance of early and accurate diagnosis. Early intervention not only improves clinical outcomes but also helps shorten NICU stays and minimizes the risk of long-term morbidity and mortality.

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