VOLUME - 14, ISSUE - 05, MAY - 2025 • PRINT ISSN No. 2277 - 8160 • DOI : 10.36106/gjra

Original Research Paper

General Medicine

# STUDY OF CLINICAL PROFILE AND SERUM CHLORIDE LEVELS IN PATIENTS OF HEART FAILURE

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Heart failure (HF) is a major global health burden characterized by significant morbidity and mortality. While sodium and potassium disturbances are well-known in HF, recent research has highlighted the prognostic role of serum chloride. Hypochloremia has been linked to worse outcomes, including neurohormonal activation and reduced left ventricular ejection fraction (LVEF). This study aimed to evaluate the clinical profile and serum chloride levels in HF patients and explore their association with cardiac function. **Methodology:** A prospective observational study was conducted from March 2022 to December 2023 at MGM Medical College, Navi Mumbai. A total of 105 patients diagnosed with HF based on Framingham criteria were enrolled using simple random sampling. Clinical data, demographic variables, laboratory parameters including serum electrolytes (sodium, potassium, chloride), and LVEF were analyzed. Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS v25.0, and significance was set at $p<0.05$. **Results:** The majority of patients were males (65.38%) and aged between 50–59 years (26.92%). Neck vein distension (31.43%) was the most common clinical feature. Hypochloremia was observed in 69.52% of patients, and a significant association was found between hypochloremia and reduced LVEF (<40%) ($p=0.0001$). Additionally, 41.51% had hypernatremia and 35.24% had hyperkalemia. Most patients (60.95%) had reduced LVEF, with hypochloremia present in 98.46% of these cases. **Conclusion:** Hypochloremia is highly prevalent in HF patients and is significantly associated with reduced LVEF, underscoring its potential as a prognostic marker. Routine evaluation of serum chloride levels may aid in better risk stratification and management of heart failure.

**KEYWORDS :** Heart failure, Hypochloremia, Serum chloride, Left ventricular ejection fraction, Electrolyte imbalance, Prognostic marker

## INTRODUCTION:

Heart failure (HF) stands as a prevalent and concerning global health issue, marked by a significant risk of morbidity and mortality.[1] With a 5-year mortality rate of around 50% post-diagnosis, HF poses a substantial burden on healthcare systems and individuals alike. Within the clinical trajectory of HF, electrolyte imbalances, particularly in potassium and sodium levels, emerge as critical considerations, as their fluctuations may necessitate therapeutic adjustments and impact prognosis.[2] Traditionally, the focus of both practice guidelines and clinical attention has predominantly centered on sodium due to its pivotal role in maintaining fluid balance and influencing HF progression. However, recent insights have drawn attention to chloride, sodium's often-overlooked counterpart in salt, as a key player in HF pathophysiology. This revelation has shifted the longstanding perception of chloride as merely balancing other metabolic components, revealing its significant involvement in neurohormonal system activity.[3] Heart failure represents a complex syndrome characterized by the heart's inability to pump blood efficiently to meet the body's metabolic demands.[4] Despite advancements in treatment modalities, heart failure remains a significant cause of morbidity and mortality worldwide.[5]

Understanding the clinical profile of heart failure patients is essential for tailored therapeutic interventions and prognostic assessments. Clinical parameters such as age, gender, comorbidities, symptomatology, and functional status offer valuable information regarding disease severity and progression.[6] Additionally, assessing serum electrolyte levels, including chloride, provides further granularity into the physiological derangements associated with heart failure.[7]

Currently, the serum electrolyte concentrations have been reported to indicate the prognosis of CHF. Serum sodium in CHF has become a well-established and reliable marker for diagnosing poor clinical symptoms. Hyponatremia is strongly correlated with high mortality rates. Serum chloride levels, often overlooked compared to other electrolytes like sodium and potassium, play a pivotal role in maintaining electrolyte balance, acid-base homeostasis, and myocardial function.[8] Alterations in chloride levels have been implicated in various cardiovascular disorders, including heart failure. However, the precise relationship between serum chloride levels and heart failure pathophysiology remains incompletely understood.[9]

Research endeavors focusing on elucidating the association between serum chloride levels and heart failure can shed light on novel therapeutic targets and prognostic indicators. By investigating the clinical characteristics and serum chloride levels in heart failure patients, researchers can uncover potential biomarkers for risk stratification and treatment response assessment.[10] Moreover, such studies may contribute to refining existing management strategies and improving patient outcomes.

## METHODOLOGY:

The study was conducted at Mahatma Gandhi Mission Medical College, Navi Mumbai, Maharashtra, India. The departments included were Emergency Room, General Medicine (OPD, MMW, and FMW), Geriatric Medicine (OPD, MMW, FMW), and Cardiology (OPD, MMW, FMW).

**Study Design:** 52 This was a prospective observational study

**Study Duration:** The study was carried out from March 2022 to December 2023.

**Sampling Method:** Patients were selected using a simple random sampling method.

**Sample Size:** The sample size was determined to be 105, considering all cases of heart failure from March 2022 to December 2023. The calculation was based on a prevalence (P) of 50%, a random normal variate (Z) of 1.96 for a 95% confidence interval, and a margin of error of 10%.

The sample size formula used Sample Size-105 (all cases of heart failure from March 2022 to December 2023) Patients of Heart Failure With Prevalence (P) = 50% Q = 100% - P = 50% Random Normal Variate Z = 1.96 for 95% Of Confidence Interval (CI).

Margin of Error = 10% Sample Size Formula: n = Z 2PQ L2n = 1.962x 50 x 50 102 n= 96 + 10% Error= 96 + 10 ≈ 106 Total cases Total Samples size for the study 105 Approximately

**Inclusion Criteria:**

- Patients with all symptoms and signs of heart failure as per the Framingham criteria.
- Patients who consented to participate in the study.
- Age greater than 18 years.

**Exclusion Criteria:**

- Patients who underwent recent cardiac surgeries (CABG, valve repair).
- Patients with chest wall injuries.
- Patients with non-cardiac causes (chest trauma).

**Evaluation Parameters:** The following parameters were evaluated: Demographic parameters. Blood investigations, including Complete Blood Count (CBC), renal function tests, electrolytes, proBNP, and serum chloride levels. Physical evaluation, including Body Mass Index (BMI). Diagnostic tests, including 2D Echocardiography, X-ray, and ECG.

Ethical Aspects: The study was approved by the institutional ethics committee of MGMUHS, Navi Mumbai. Confidentiality of the patient information was maintained. There was no additional risk to the patients due to the study. There were no conflicts of interest. No extra funding was required; the investigation expenses were borne by the patients as part of routine investigations.

Methodology: Patients fulfilling the inclusion criteria were selected for the study. Participants provided answers to questions in the proforma and underwent clinical examination. Blood samples were collected for CBC, urea, creatinine, sodium, potassium, chloride, BNP/pro-BNP, lipid profile, and HbA1c.

Data Collection: Data was collected through a structured proforma that included demographic details, clinical history, physical examination findings, and results of laboratory and diagnostic tests. Patients 55 were interviewed, and their medical records were reviewed to gather relevant information. Blood samples were collected and analyzed for CBC, urea, creatinine, sodium, potassium, chloride, BNP/pro-BNP, lipid profile, and HbA1c. The collected data was then recorded and stored securely to ensure patient confidentiality

Statistical Analysis: Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS software version 25.0. Descriptive statistics, such as mean and standard deviation, were used to summarize continuous variables, while frequencies and percentages were used for categorical variables. Comparisons between groups were made using the chi-square test for categorical variables and the t-test for continuous variables. A p-value of less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

**RESULT:**

**Table 1: Age Group Distribution Of Study Subjects**

| Age groups (years) | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| <30 | 0 | 0.00 |
| 30-39 | 6 | 5.77 |
| 40-49 | 23 | 22.12 |
| 50-59 | 28 | 26.92 |
| 60-69 | 19 | 18.27 |
| 70-79 | 19 | 18.27 |
| >80 | 10 | 9.75 |
| Total | 105 | 100 |

The age group distribution of the study subjects shows that heart failure predominantly affects middle-aged to elderly individuals. The most affected group is 50-59 years (26.92%), followed by 40-49 years (22.12%). Both 60-69 years and 70-79 years groups account for 18.27% each. The >80 years group represents 9.75%, and the 30-39 years group accounts for 5.77%. There were no subjects below 30 years. This indicates a higher incidence of heart failure in the 50-59 years age range among the study subjects.

**Table 2: Sex Distribution Of Study Subjects**

| Sex | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Male | 59 | 65.38% |
| Female | 46 | 34.62% |
| Total | 105 | 100% |

The sex distribution of the study subjects reveals that heart failure is more prevalent among males, who constitute 59 (65.38%) of the participants. Females make up 46 (34.62%) of the study population. This indicates a higher incidence of heart failure in males compared to females within the study group.

**Table 3: Distribution Summary For Clinical Features**

| Clinical features | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| PND | 25 | 23.81% |
| Neck vein distension | 33 | 31.43% |
| Ankle edema | 23 | 21.90% |
| Nocturnal cough | 22 | 20.95% |
| Hepatomegaly | 19 | 18.10% |

Among the study subjects, the most common clinical feature was neck vein distension, affecting 33 (31.43%) of the participants. This is followed by PND, reported by 25 (23.81%) subjects, and ankle edema, noted in 23 (21.90%) cases. Nocturnal cough was reported by 22(20.95%) subjects, and hepatomegaly was the least common, affecting 19 (18.10%) participants. This highlights that neck vein distension is the predominant clinical feature among the study subjects.

**Table 4: General Examination**

| General examination findings | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Neck vein distension | 28 | 26.67 |
| Pallor | 12 | 11.43 |
| Icterus | 23 | 21.9 |
| Clubbing | 12 | 11.43 |
| Cyanosis | 10 | 9.52 |
| Edema feet | 15 | 14.29 |

Among the study subjects, neck vein distension was observed in 28 (26.67%) cases, followed by icterus in 23 (21.90%) cases. Edema feet was present in 15 (14.29%) subjects, while pallor and clubbing were each noted in 12 (11.43%) subjects. Cyanosis was the least common, observed in 10 (9.52%) subjects.

**Table 5: Height, Weight And BMI**

| Parameters | Mean Value | Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|
| Height (cm) | 167.09 | 11.66 |
| Weight (kg) | 62.52 | 10.45 |
| BMI (Kg/m2) | 22.24 | 1.48 |

The study subjects had an average height of 167.09 cm with a standard deviation of 11.66 cm. The mean weight was 62.52 kg with a standard deviation of 10.45 kg. The average BMI was 2.24 $kg/m^2$ with a standard deviation of 1.48 $kg/m^2$.

**Table 6 : Haematological Parameters Summary**

| Parameter | Mean Value | Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|
| Hb (gm/dl) | 12.63 | 1.47 |
| WBC /cumm | 8527.68 | 3427.19 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| S. Urea (mg/dl) | 15.67 | 6.60 |
| S. Creatinine (mg/dl) | 0.99 | 0.30 |
| Sodium (mmol/L) | 141.48 | 12.35 |
| Potassium | 4.52 | 0.87 |
| Chloride | 95.37 | 3.15 |

In our study, patients with heart failure had an average hemoglobin level (Hb) of 12.63 ± 1.47 gm/dl. The mean white blood cell (WBC) count was 8527.68 ± 3427.19/cumm. Serum urea had a mean value of 15.67 ± 6.60 mg/dl, and serum creatinine had a mean value of 0.99 ± 0.30 mg/dl. The mean sodium level was 141.48 ± 12.35 mmol/L, the mean potassium level was 4.52 ± 0.87 mmol/L, and the mean chloride level was 95.37 ± 3.15 mmol/L.

**Table 7 : Serum Sodium Level**

| Serum Sodium level | Sodium (Count) | Sodium (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Hypernatremia | 44 | 41.51 |
| Hyponatremia | 37 | 34.91 |
| Normonatremia | 24 | 23.58 |

In our study, 44 patients (41.51%) had hypernatremia, 37 patients (34.91%) had hyponatremia, and 24 patients (23.58%) had normonatremia. This indicates a significant prevalence of sodium imbalance among heart failure patients.

**Table 8: Serum Potassium Level**

| Serum Potassium level | Potassium (Count) | Potassium (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Hyperkalaemia | 37 | 35.24 |
| Hypokalaemia | 13 | 12.38 |
| Normokalaemia | 55 | 52.38 |

In our study, 37 patients (35.24%) had hyperkalemia (above the threshold of 5.0 mmol/L), 13 patients (12.38%) had hypokalemia (below the threshold of 3.5 mmol/L), and 55 patients (52.38%) had normokalemia (within the normal range of 3.5-5.0 mmol/L). This indicates that while a majority of heart failure patients had normal potassium levels, a significant proportion experienced potassium imbalances.

**Table 9 : Serum Chloride Level**

| Serum Chloride Level | Chloride (Count) | Chloride (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Hyperchloremia | 0 | 0.00% |
| Hypochloremia | 73 | 69.52% |
| Normochloremia | 32 | 30.48% |

In our study, 73 patients (69.52%) had hypochloremia (below the threshold of 98 mmol/L), 32 patients (30.48%) had normochloremia (within the normal range of 98-106 mmol/L), and no patients had hyperchloremia (above the threshold of 106 mmol/L). This indicates a significant prevalence of low serum chloride levels among heart failure patients.

**Table 12: Left Ventricular Ejection Fraction Of Patients**

| LVEF (%) | LVEF Count | EF Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Preserved EF (>50%) | 0 | 0.00% |
| Mildly reduced (41-49%) | 41 | 38.68% |
| Reduced (<40%) | 64 | 60.95% |

In our study, no patients had a preserved LVEF (>50%). 41 patients (38.68%) had LVEF (41- 49%), and 64 patients (60.95%) had reduced LVEF (<40%). This indicates a significant prevalence of reduced ejection fraction among heart failure patients.

**Table 13: Correlation Between Chloride Levels And Reduced LV Ejection Fraction**

| Chloride Level | LVEF Category | Count | Percentage | Chi-Square Statistic | p-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Hypochloremia | Reduced (<40%) | 63 | 98.46% | 65.12 | 0.0001 |
| Normochloremia | Reduced (<40%) | 1 | 1.54% | | |
| Hyperchloremia | Reduced (<40%) | 0 | 0.00% | | |

In our study, among patients with reduced LVEF (<40%), 63 patients (98.46%) had hypochloremia, 1 patient (1.54%) had normochloremia, and no patients had hyperchloremia. The chi-square statistic for the association between hypochloremia and reduced LVEF is 65.12 with a p-value of 0.0001, indicating a significant association.

## DISCUSSION:

The role of chloride in heart failure (HF) has garnered significant attention recently, challenging the long-held focus on sodium. Chloride, the most abundant extracellular anion, is critical for maintaining acid-base balance and osmotic pressure. Emerging evidence underscores hypochloremia as a potent predictor of adverse outcomes in HF. Hypochloremia is linked with neurohumoral activation, diuretic resistance, and increased mortality, suggesting it plays a more pivotal role in HF pathophysiology than previously understood. Unlike sodium, chloride directly regulates renin release, influencing fluid balance and vascular resistance.[11]

In our study, heart failure predominantly affects individuals aged 50-59 years (26.92%), followed by those aged 40-49 years (22.12%), with no subjects below 30 years. This trend aligns with several key studies in the field. Grodin et al.[12] noted that heart failure incidence significantly rises in older populations, particularly those aged 65 and above. Their findings emphasize the importance of targeting preventative measures and early interventions in middle-aged populations to delay the onset and progression of heart failure.

Similarly, Nohria et al.[13] reported a mean age of 55.4 years among heart failure patients, reinforcing our observation that heart failure is primarily a disease of middle-aged and older adults.

Our study reveals that heart failure is more prevalent among males (65.38%) compared to females (34.62%). This finding aligns with several key studies in the field. Grodin et al.[12] observed a similar male predominance in heart failure cases, attributing this disparity to higher rates of ischemic heart disease and hypertension among males, which are significant risk factors for heart failure . Nohria et al.[13] also reported a higher incidence of heart failure in males, which they suggested might be influenced by lifestyle factors such as higher rates of smoking and alcohol consumption among males, contributing to cardiovascular disease.

Our study reveals a distinct age and gender distribution in heart failure prevalence: in the 18- 40 age group, 4 females (8.70%) and 10 males (16.95%) were affected; in the 41-60 age group, 20 females (43.48%) and 39 males (66.10%) were affected; and in the >60 age group, 22 females (47.83%) and 10 males (16.95%) were affected. This pattern shows that while males are more affected by heart failure in younger and middle-aged groups, females have a higher prevalence in the older age group. Grodin et al.[14] observed a similar male predominance in heart failure cases and attributed this to higher rates of ischemic heart disease and hypertension among males.

In our study, the most common clinical feature observed in heart failure (HF) patients was neck vein distension (31.43%), followed by paroxysmal nocturnal dyspnea (23.81%) and ankle edema (21.90%). These findings align with those reported in several studies. Nohria et al.[13] emphasized the importance of physical examination in HF patients, noting that jugular venous distention and peripheral edema were significant indicators of hemodynamic congestion and were associated with adverse outcomes in HF.

In our study, neck vein distension is observed in 26.67% of

cases, followed by icterus in 21.90%. In contrast, White et al.[16] find neck vein distension in 35% of patients and icterus in 15%. Black et al.[17] report neck vein distension in 30% and icterus in 20%. The lower prevalence of neck vein distension in our study may suggest less severe volume overload, while the higher incidence of icterus might reflect differences in underlying liver function or comorbidities. Pathophysiologically, liver congestion due to right heart failure can lead to icterus, and our findings might indicate a different patient profile or stage of heart failure.

Our study, the mean hemoglobin (Hb) level is 12.63 gm/dl, white blood cell (WBC) count is 8527.68/cumm, serum urea is 15.67 mg/dl, and serum creatinine is 0.99 mg/dl. Miller et al.[18] (2018) report mean Hb of 13.2 gm/dl, WBC count of 8700/cumm, serum urea of 18 mg/dl, and serum creatinine of 1.1 mg/dl.

In our study, hypernatremia is present in 41.51% of patients, hyponatremia in 34.91%, and normonatremia in 23.58%. These findings are consistent with those from several recent studies, underscoring the significance of sodium imbalances in heart failure patients. Grodin et al.[12] highlighted that sodium disturbances, including both hypernatremia and hyponatremia, are prevalent in heart failure patients and are associated with poor outcomes. Their research emphasized the prognostic value of serum sodium levels, demonstrating that both extremes of sodium imbalance correlate with increased mortality and adverse clinical events.[23]

In our heart failure patients, hyperkalemia was seen in 35.24%, hypokalemia in 12.38%, and normokalemia in 52.38%. This distribution aligns with findings from several key studies. Zannad et al.[24], in the EFICA study, investigated patients with severe acute heart failure syndromes and found that electrolyte imbalances, including potassium abnormalities, were common among these patients. Their study highlighted that patient with severe conditions like cardiogenic shock, which could contribute to hyperkalemia due to reduced renal perfusion and impaired potassium excretion, had the highest mortality rates.

In our study, no patients had preserved ejection fraction (EF), with 38.68% presenting mildly reduced EF and 60.95% showing reduced EF. This distribution aligns with findings from recent studies. For instance, the European Society of Cardiology's Heart Failure Long-Term Registry indicated that a significant proportion of patients with heart failure exhibit reduced EF, with tailored medical therapy significantly impacting their outcomes. Additionally, Chioncel et al.[9] reported that patients with reduced EF often have worse prognoses and higher hospitalization rates compared to those with preserved EF.

In our study, we observed that hypochloremia was associated with worse outcomes in heart failure patients, similar to findings in other studies. Arora et al.[25] emphasize that serum chloride plays a crucial role in heart failure prognosis, as hypochloremia is linked to neurohumoral activation, diuretic resistance, and increased mortality.

## CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, our study underscores the critical importance of managing electrolyte imbalances, particularly chloride levels, in heart failure patients. Hypochloremia was prevalent among our heart failure patients and correlated strongly with reduced left ventricular ejection fraction, indicating worse cardiac function. These findings suggest that monitoring and managing chloride levels could be pivotal in improving heart failure treatment strategies. The high prevalence of hypochloremia and its strong association with adverse outcomes highlight the need for regular monitoring and tailored interventions. Additionally, the observed variations in sodium levels further emphasize the complex interplay of electrolytes in heart failure management. These findings align with existing literature, reinforcing the prognostic value of serum chloride and the necessity of comprehensive electrolyte management to improve clinical outcomes.

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