



## A PROSPECTIVE STUDY OF OPERATIVE MANAGEMENT AND FUNCTIONAL OUTCOME IN OLECRANON FRACTURES.

### Orthopaedics

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### ABSTRACT

**BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVE:** Olecranon fractures account for 5–7% of elbow fractures in adults but are much rarer in children. The Mayo classification is based on displacement, comminution, and elbow stability. Type II and III are treated operatively with various techniques, including TBW, locked plate fixation, intramedullary fixation, and fragment excision with triceps advancement. Most patients can expect a good outcome, there are some complications, including loss of motion, hardware irritation, and wound healing problems. This study reviews the evidence and current understanding of olecranon fractures. **MATERIALS AND METHODS:** 30 Confirmed cases of olecranon fractures treated operatively by above techniques were studied and assessed radiologically and clinically using MAYO Elbow Performance Score up to 6 months post-operatively. **CONCLUSION:** From this study we concluded that the technique of open reduction and internal fixation with Kirschner wires with tension band wiring or CC screws with tension band wiring for simple transverse and oblique fractures and olecranon plate fixation for comminuted fractures, and unstable fractures are effective and gold standard technique for the treatment of olecranon fracture.

### KEYWORDS

### INTRODUCTION

Olecranon fracture is a fairly common injury. Olecranon fractures account for 5–7% of elbow fractures in adults but are much rarer in children.<sup>1</sup> The common mechanism is either a direct fall onto the elbow, or in rare cases an indirect pull of the triceps tendon while the forearm is in pronation, causing the olecranon to break.<sup>2</sup> It can be as simple as non-displaced fractures or complex fractures with dislocation of the elbow joint.<sup>3</sup> The Mayo classification was described by Morrey and is based on several factors, including displacement, comminution, and elbow stability. Type I is nondisplaced, type II is displaced but the elbow is stable, and type III is displaced with elbow instability. Type I is treated conservatively. Type II and III are treated operatively and these can be accomplished with various techniques, including TBW, standard plate fixation, locked plate fixation, intramedullary fixation, and fragment excision with triceps advancement.<sup>4</sup> Fixation with Plate and screws is the gold standard treatment for comminuted fractures, fractures of Monteggia, fractures associated with dislocations and oblique fractures with distal extension affecting the coronoid.<sup>5,6</sup>

The surgical goals are to restore articular congruity, provide stable reliable fixation, and allow early mobilization to minimize joint stiffness.<sup>7</sup> Although most patients can expect a good outcome, there are some well-known complications, including loss of motion, hardware irritation, and wound healing problems. This study reviews the evidence and current understanding of olecranon fractures.<sup>8</sup>

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

This is a prospective study of 30 cases of olecranon fractures diagnosed with history taking, examination and investigations: Elbow Xray-AP and Lateral view. The study was conducted between February 2021 to August 2022 at Basaweshwara Teaching and General Hospital, Kalaburagi. The need of operative intervention is assessed based on the Mayo classification, Schatzker classification and Colton's classification and intervention done by techniques like K wire with tension band wiring, CC screw with tension band wiring and Olecranon hook plates. Patients were reviewed at 6 weeks, 3 months and 6 months interval and their assessment done by Mayo Elbow Performance Score.

### CLASSIFICATION:

#### Mayo Classification Of Olecranon Fractures

The Mayo classification was described by Morrey<sup>4</sup> and is based on several factors, including displacement, comminution, and elbow stability. Type I is nondisplaced, type II is displaced but the elbow is stable, and type III is displaced with elbow instability. Groups are further subclassified into groups A and B based on the presence of comminution.<sup>4</sup>

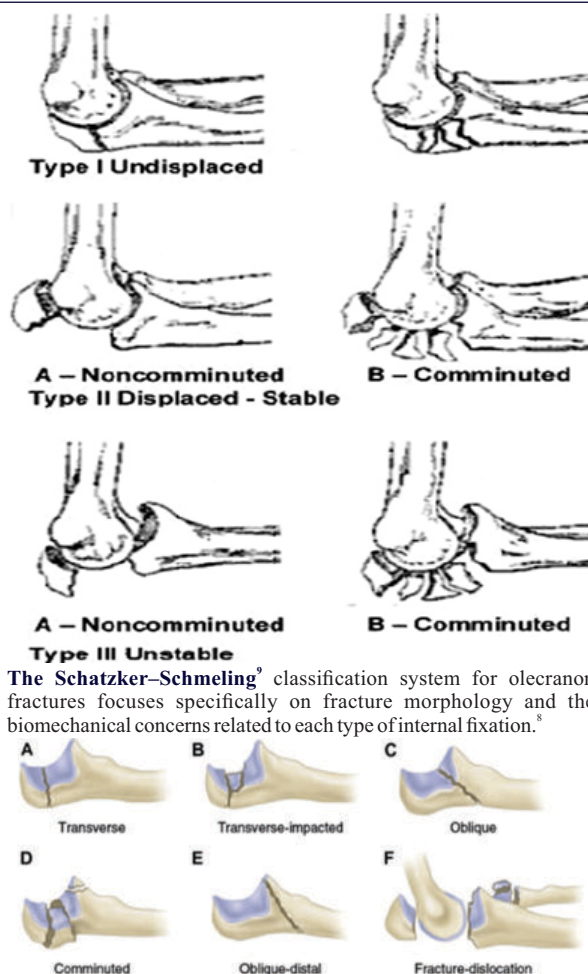


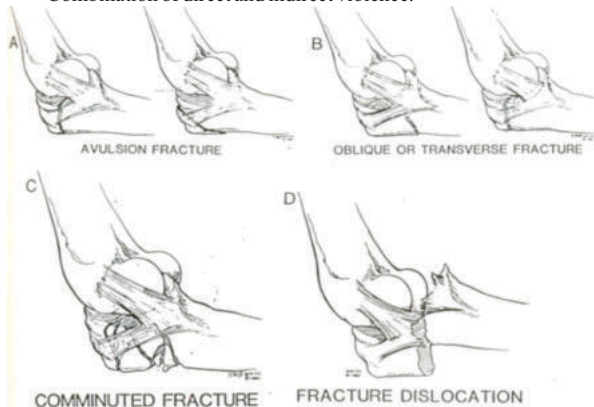
Fig. 2. Schatzker-Schmeling<sup>9</sup> classification system for olecranon fractures focuses specifically on fracture morphology and the biomechanical concerns related to each type of internal fixation.<sup>8</sup>

1. Type A fractures describe a transverse fracture extending through the articular surface of the ulnohumeral joint.
2. Type B fractures describe a type A fracture with some associated comminution or impaction at the articular surface.
3. Type C fractures are oblique fractures (proximal to the midpoint of the trochlear notch)

4. Type D fractures are comminuted fractures.
5. Type E fractures comprise an oblique fracture that begins and ends distal to the midpoint of the trochlear notch of the ulna.
6. Type F fractures include olecranon fracture dislocations that involve a fracture of the radial head and likely soft-tissue disruption of the medial collateral ligament.

#### MECHANISM OF INJURY:

- Fractures of the olecranon are usually caused by three main types of injuries: -
- Direct violence, such as falling on the tip of the elbow.
- Indirect violence, such as falling on a partially flexed elbow with indirect forces generated by the strong contraction of the triceps muscle.
- Combination of direct and indirect violence.



#### Colton Classification

#### TREATMENT

The vast majority of olecranon fractures require open reduction and internal fixation<sup>10</sup>. The exception is the rare undisplaced fractures with displacement of less than 2 mm when the elbow is flexed at 90 degrees with an intact extensor mechanism where conservative treatment is recommended. An initial 4 weeks of splint immobilisation followed by active-assisted mobilisation will ultimately lead to union and good function<sup>11</sup>.

Displaced fractures require fixation. The type of procedure will depend on whether the fracture is defined as stable or unstable. Comminuted fractures, fracture dislocations/ subluxations and displaced fractures distal to the midpoint of the sigmoid notch are defined as unstable<sup>12</sup>. Stable fractures are transverse, two-part and at or proximal to the midpoint of the sigmoid notch. The aim of fixation is to achieve anatomical reduction of the joint surface and stable fixation construct that allows early mobilisation and rehabilitation<sup>10</sup>.

Multiple methods of internal fixation have been proposed for olecranon fractures and the commonly used are-

1. Open reduction and fixation with K-wire and tension band wiring (figure of 8 wire loop).
2. Intramedullary fixation with CC screws and tension band wiring.
3. AO plate fixation.

The advantages of open reduction and internal fixation include-

1. This method provides an anatomical reduction of the fracture and a congruous articular surface.
2. Rigid fixation allows for an early range of motion.
3. Elbow stability is preserved.
4. The extensor power of the triceps muscle is maintained.
5. Pain free range of motion.

#### 1. Open reduction and internal fixation with K wire and tension band wiring:

It is indicated for stable oblique and transverse fractures types (Mayo IA-IIA). A vertical incision was taken over the posterior aspect of the elbow about 2.5cms proximal to olecranon, curving distally along the lateral aspect of olecranon reaching the subcutaneous border of the ulna and extending distally for about 7.5cms distal to olecranon. Fascia was incised along the line of skin incision and fracture site was exposed. Fracture hematoma was cleared off and the fracture site was gently curettage. Accurate anatomical hairline reduction was achieved

and held with either reduction clamp or long towel clip. Two parallel Kirschner wires are inserted in a longitudinal direction from the proximal fragment of the olecranon, into the ulna more distally just the tip of the wire crossing the anterior cortex. A drill hole is placed 3-5cms distal to the perpendicular to the axis of the ulna on the dorsal side. An 18/20-gauge wire is passed in a figure-of-eight pattern through a predrilled hole in the dorsal cortex of the ulna distal to fracture line and around the proximal end of K-wires deep to the triceps. The wire is tensioned in unison to create compression across the fracture. The wires are cut proximally and buried deep to the triceps tendon. The elbow is then moved through full range of motion to ensure the fixation is stable Thorough wash given with normal saline. Skin closed in layers. Dressing done and compression bandage applied. Above elbow slab applied with elbow in 90 degrees flexion.

#### K wire and tension band wiring



Pre-op Xray



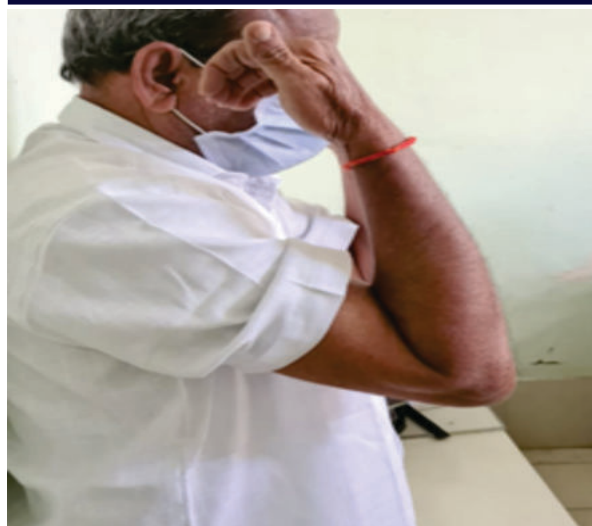
Immediate Post-op Xray



6 Months Follow Up Xray



Extension



Flexion



Flexion

Extension



Supination

Pronation



Pronation

Extension

## 2. Intramedullary Fixation With CC Screw And Tension Band Wiring:

It is indicated in avulsion fractures, transverse, oblique superior, or oblique inferior fracture configurations were included. Usually, medullary 6.5mm AO cancellous screws are used which are long enough to obtain purchase in the medullary canal of the distal ulna providing rigid fixation.<sup>13,14</sup> A drill hole is placed 3-5cms distal to the perpendicular to the axis of the ulna on the dorsal side. A 18/20-gauge wire is passed in a figure of 8 pattern through the predrilled hole of the ulna distal to the fracture line and around the proximal end of the CC screw below the washer. Now the wire is tensioned in unison to create compression across the fracture. Now the CC screw is tightened completely over the wire to achieve hairline reduction. The wires are cut proximally and buried deep to the triceps tendon.

### Cancellous Screw With Tension Band Wiring



Pre-op Xray

Immediate post-op Xray



Check Xray At 6 Months

### AO Plate Fixation:

Precontoured locking plate fixation is also used in the treatment of olecranon fractures. It allows for significantly more compression at fracture site than does TBW as well as the ability to manage more complex and comminuted fracture patterns<sup>15</sup> (Mayo IIB-III), unstable fractures associated with elbow dislocation or fracture extending down along the shaft of the ulna. The fracture is reduced and a pre-contoured dorsal proximal ulnar hook plate is applied.



ORIF with olecranon hook plate

### POSTOPERATIVE COURSE:

The postoperative course depends on several variables, including soft tissue status, the stability of fixation, and the type of implant used. Elbow was immobilised in above elbow slab for 2 weeks until suture removal. In our study, patients were advised to report for follow up after 2 weeks for suture removal, at 6 weeks, 12 weeks and thereafter at 6 months post-operatively. At follow up, a detailed radiological and clinical examination was done and result was assessed at 6 months. At 2 weeks follow up, patients were instructed to carry out physiotherapy in the form of active flexion-extension of elbow joint and pronation-supination without loading and with partial loading was initiated at 6 weeks.

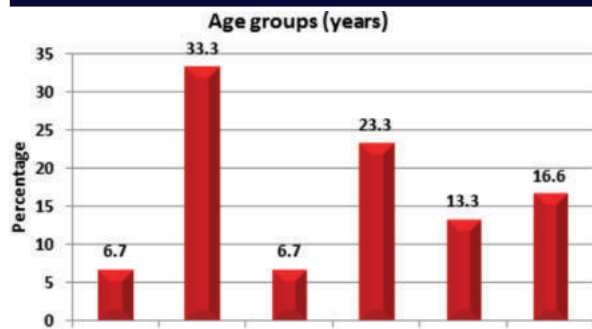
Early active range of movements were encouraged to prevent elbow stiffness. This can be applied to both TBW and plate fixation<sup>16</sup>.

### RESULTS

This study consists of 30 cases of olecranon fractures treated by K wire with tension band wiring or CC screw with tension band wiring for simple transverse fractures, oblique fractures (type IA, IIA) and Olecranon hook plate for comminuted fractures, fractures extending into diaphysis in Basaweshwara Teaching and General hospital attached to Mahdaveppa Rampure Medical College, Kalaburagi between February 2021 to August 2022. All cases were followed up periodically during the period 2021-2022. The following are the observations made and the available data are analysed as follows.

#### 1) Age Incidence

Mean (SD) age was 40.4 (14.3) years with the minimum of 19 and maximum of 67 years.



The fracture association being most common in 3<sup>rd</sup> decade i.e., 10 cases (33.3%).

In this series, 2(6.7%) patients between 0-20 years, 10(33.3%) patients between 21-30 years, 2 (6.7%) patients between 31-40 years, 7 (23.3%) patients between 41-50 years, 4(13.3%) patients between 51-60 years and patients above >60 years were 5(16.6%).

## 2) Gender Incidence:

Table-i: Gender Incidence

| Gender | Number | Percentage |
|--------|--------|------------|
| Female | 11     | 36.7       |
| Male   | 19     | 63.3       |
| Total  | 30     | 100.0      |

In the present series, males were 19 (63.3%) and females were 11 (36.7%) with M:F ratio of 1.72:1.

## 3) Side Of Involvement:

In this series, fracture of the olecranon on right side were 16 (53.3%) and on the left side were 14 (46.7%).



## 4) Mode Of Injury:

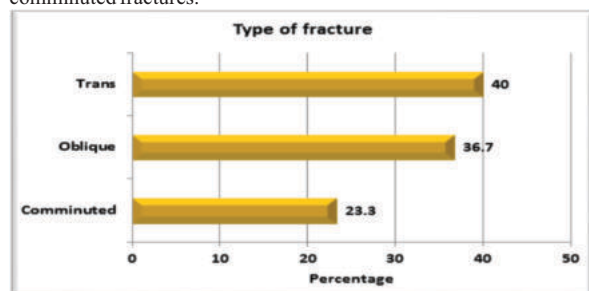
Table-II: Mode Of Injury

| Mode Of Injury         | Number | Percentage |
|------------------------|--------|------------|
| Assault                | 5      | 16.7       |
| Fall From Height       | 13     | 43.3       |
| Road Traffic Accidents | 12     | 40.0       |
| Total                  | 30     | 100.0      |

In this series, 12 cases (40%) were due to road traffic accidents, 13 cases (43.3%) were due to fall and 5(16.7%) cases sustained olecranon fracture due to assault.

## 5) Type Of Fractures:

In this series, 11 (36.7%) patients sustained oblique fractures, 12 (40%) patients had transverse fractures and 7 (23.3%) patients had comminuted fractures.



## 6) Type Of Fracture Fixation:

Table-iii: Showing The Type Of Fracture Fixation

| Type of fixation  | Number | Percentage |
|-------------------|--------|------------|
| CC screw with TBW | 9      | 30.1       |
| K wire with TBW   | 14     | 46.7       |
| OHP               | 7      | 23.2       |
| Total             | 30     | 100.0      |

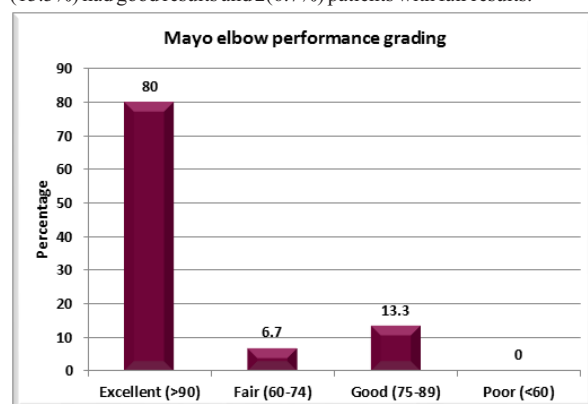
In this series, 9 (30.1%) underwent fixation with CC screw with tension band wiring, 14 (46.7%) patients treated with K wire and tension band wiring and 7 (23.2%) patients underwent plate fixation.

## 7) Interpreting The Mayo Elbow Performance Score:

Table-iv: Results

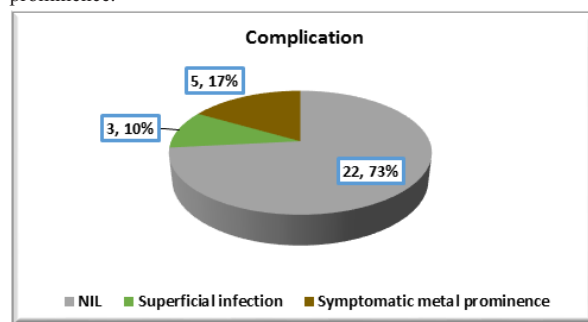
| Grading         | Number | Percentage |
|-----------------|--------|------------|
| Excellent (>90) | 24     | 80.0       |
| Good (75-89)    | 4      | 13.3       |
| Fair (60-74)    | 2      | 6.7        |
| Poor (<60)      | 0      | -          |
| Total           | 30     | 100.0      |

In this series, patients were graded according to MAYO Elbow performance score and 24 (80%) patients had excellent results, 4 (13.3%) had good results and 2(6.7%) patients with fair results.



## COMPLICATIONS:

The complications of the present study, superficial infection was in 3(10%) patients, which was treated with broad spectrum antibiotics. The symptomatic metal prominence was noticed in 5 (16.6%) patients. Due to thin skin and soft tissue coverage over the olecranon, most common complications were superficial infection and hardware prominence.



## DISCUSSION

Methods of fixation for the olecranon fractures are a matter of debate with many implant choices and configurations being studied.

The outcome of the surgical treatment always depends directly on the precision of the joint reduction, restoration of mechanical stability that permits prompt mobilisation, respect for the soft tissues, and maintaining an intact extensor mechanism.<sup>17,18</sup>

The aim of surgery is to achieve an adequate stability to the fracture and to reconstruct the joint surface to enable range-of-motion exercises in the early post-operative period.<sup>19</sup>

In the management of intra articular fractures like fractures of the olecranon, a perfect anatomical reduction of the fragments to obtain articular congruity and rigid fixation of the fragments is of utmost importance, if early movements are to be instituted to prevent

complications like traumatic arthritis and joint stiffness. Tension band wiring provides the strength of fixation i.e., by converting tensile force to compressive force at the fracture site and for comminuted fractures Olecranon hook plate is used.

In our study 30 cases of fractures of the olecranon were treated with K wire and Tension band wiring or CC screw with tension band wiring for simple transverse and oblique olecranon fractures and Olecranon hook plate for comminuted fractures and unstable fractures (type IIB and III). Our experience with these methods of fixation has given favorable results. The findings, the end results and various other data will be analysed and compared in the following discussion.

### 1) AGE INCIDENCE:

Table showing average age incidence in various study groups

| Series                                         | Average age |
|------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| 1) Jiang Xieyuan (2000) <sup>20</sup>          | 38 years    |
| 2) Macko Donald and Szabo (1985) <sup>21</sup> | 35.5 years  |
| 3) Present study                               | 40.4 years  |

The average age incidence; in the present study was found to be 40.4 years. This is well in accordance with the authors Jiang Xieyuan (2000) is his study average age was 38 years and Macko Donald and Szabo California (1985) average age was 35.5 years.

### 2) SEX INCIDENCE:

| Series                                    | Male       | Female     |
|-------------------------------------------|------------|------------|
| 1) Jiang Xieyuan (2000) <sup>20</sup>     | 10(66.66%) | 5 (33.33%) |
| 2) Hume & Wiss (1992) <sup>22</sup>       | 30(73.17%) | 11(26.82%) |
| 3) Wolfgang G. et al (1987) <sup>23</sup> | 27(60%)    | 18(40%)    |
| 4) Sinha S et al (2020) <sup>24</sup>     | 39(65%)    | 21(35%)    |
| 5) Present study                          | 19(63.7%)  | 11(36.7%)  |

The present study of fracture olecranon revealed greater incidence in males (63.7%). Similar male predominance was found in the study conducted by Jiang Xieyuan, Hume and Wiss, Garry Wolfgang et al series and Sinha S et al series.

### 3) SIDE INCIDENCE:

| Series                                     | Right      | Left        |
|--------------------------------------------|------------|-------------|
| 1) Wolfgang G., et al (1987) <sup>23</sup> | 25(55.55%) | 20 (44.44%) |
| 2) Hume and Wiss (1992) <sup>22</sup>      | 16(39.2%)  | 25 (60.9%)  |
| 3) Sinha S et al (2020) <sup>24</sup>      | 37(61.7%)  | 23(38.3%)   |
| 4) Present study                           | 16(53.3%)  | 14(46.7%)   |

In this study, 16(53.3%) out of 30 patients had right side fractures implying right side fractures were more than the left side. In the study by Wolfgang G. et al and Sinha S et al, they found that right side involvement is more frequent and according to Hume and Wiss, left side involvement is more frequent.

### 4) MECHANISM OF INJURY:

| Series                                     | No.Of Cases | Percentage |
|--------------------------------------------|-------------|------------|
| 1) Jiang Xieyuan (2000) <sup>20</sup>      |             |            |
| Traffic Accident                           | 9           | 60%        |
| Fall From Height                           | 6           | 40%        |
| 2) Wolfgang G., Et Al (1987) <sup>23</sup> |             |            |
| Fall                                       | 22          | 48.88%     |
| Motor Vehicle Accident                     | 20          | 44.44%     |
| Direct Blow                                | 3           | 6.66%      |
| 3) Sinha S Et Al (2020) <sup>24</sup>      |             |            |
| RTA                                        | 22          | 36.7       |
| Fall                                       | 27          | 35         |
| Physical Assault                           | 11          | 18.3       |
| 1) Present Study                           |             |            |
| Road Traffic Accident                      | 12          | 40%        |
| Fall From Height                           | 13          | 43.3%      |
| Assault                                    | 5           | 16.7%      |

In this study, the patients who had road traffic accidents were 12(40%) patients, with fall from height were 13 (43.3%) patients and patients of assault were 5(16.7%). Whereas according to Jiang Xieyuan series, the patients with traffic accidents were 9(60%) and patients with fall from height were 6 (40%) and according to Sinha Smet al, 22 patients had RTA, 27 patients sustained fracture due to fall and 11 patients had physical assault. Wolfgang et al, 22 (48.88%) patients were fall from height 20(44.44%) were due to motor vehicle accident 3 (6.66%) were due to direct blow.

### 5) TYPE OF FRACTURE:

| Series                                  | No.Of Cases | Percentage |
|-----------------------------------------|-------------|------------|
| 1) Jiang Xieyuan (2000) <sup>20</sup>   |             |            |
| Oblique Fracture                        | 1           | 6.67       |
| Comminuted Fracture                     | 14          | 93.34      |
| 2) Murphy Et Al (1987) <sup>25,26</sup> |             |            |
| Transverse Fracture                     | 26          | 57.5%      |
| Oblique Fracture                        | 12          | 26.7%      |
| Comminuted Fracture                     | 7           | 15.6%      |
| 3) Present Study                        |             |            |
| Transverse Fracture                     | 12          | 40%        |
| Oblique Fracture                        | 11          | 36.7%      |
| Comminuted Fracture                     | 7           | 23.3%      |

In the present series, 12(40%) patients had transverse fractures, 11(36.7%) patients had oblique fractures and 7(23.3%) sustained comminuted fractures. In Jiang Xieyuan study, 1 (6.67%) patient had oblique fractures and 14 (93.34%) patients had comminuted fractures. In Murphy et al series, 26 (57.5%) patients had transverse fracture, 12 (26.7%) patients had oblique fractures and 7 (15.6%) patients sustained comminuted fractures.

### 6) POSTOPERATIVE COMPLICATIONS THIS PROCEDURE:

| Complications                   | Present Study | Murphy Et Al <sup>25</sup> | Sinha S Et Al <sup>24</sup> |
|---------------------------------|---------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Superficial Infection        | 3 (10%)       | -                          | -                           |
| 2. Symptomatic Metal Prominence | 5 (16.6%)     | 3 (6.6%)                   | 5 (8.3%)                    |

In the present series, superficial infection was seen in 3(10%) patients, which were treated with broad spectrum antibiotics but 1 patient also underwent wound exploration and thorough wash and the implant was left in situ. The symptomatic metal prominence in 5 (16.6%) whereas complications in the study by Murphy et al<sup>21</sup> is only symptomatic metal prominence 3 (6.66%).

### 7) RESULTS:

| Study                            | Results in percentage |      |      |      |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------|------|------|------|
|                                  | Excellent             | Good | Fair | Poor |
| 1) Murphy et al <sup>25,26</sup> | 60                    | 10   | 30   | -    |
| 2) Jiang Xieyuan <sup>20</sup>   | 53.33                 | 40   | 6.66 | -    |
| 3) Karlsson et al <sup>27</sup>  | 80                    | 13.3 | 6.7  | -    |
| 4) Sinha S et al <sup>24</sup>   | 83.3                  | 16.7 | -    | -    |
| 5) Present study                 | 80                    | 13.3 | 6.7  | -    |

The results were evaluated according to the Mayo elbow performance score. The results obtained in our series were excellent in 24 (80%) patients, good in 4(13.3%) patients, fair in 2(6.7%) patients and no poor results.

### CONCLUSION

From the present study it is concluded that the technique of open reduction and internal fixation with Kirschner wires with tension band wiring or CC screws with tension band wiring for simple transverse and oblique fractures (Type IIA). But in case of comminuted fractures, as TBW cannot provide a sufficient buttress for impacted articular fragments and also with risk of migrating K-wires, delayed union and non-union, plate fixation should be considered as a method of choice. Olecranon hook plate fixation used for comminuted fractures, fractures extending into diaphysis and unstable fractures (Type IIB, III) The plate acts as a posterior buttress, supporting the articular fragments till the fracture consolidates. Plate fixation (olecranon hook plate) is an effective and reliable way of treatment with very low risk of nonunion.

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