**Original research article**

**Clinical profile of obstetric patients undergoing transfusion at a tertiary care centre**

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**ABSTRACT:**

**Objective:** To study the transfusion practice in obstetric patients including indications, adverse events, types of blood components usage and their demographic profile.

**Method:** This is a retrospective observational study of all obstetric patients who had undergone transfusion of blood or its components in one year.

**Results:** Out of 10914 total patients 1473 patients underwent transfusion. Out of 1473 patients 73.3% were antenatal and 78% patients were below 30 years of age. The commonest indication for transfusion was anaemia 48%. 68.23% patients required >1 unit of PRBC’s. Out of 6259 transfusions 0.8% developed transfusion related adverse event.

**Conclusion:** Anaemia in pregnancy is the commonest cause of blood transfusion in Indian subcontinent which can be prevented by timely treatment. The decision to perform a blood transfusion should be made on both clinical and haematological grounds which reduces wastage of blood and adverse events.

**INTRODUCTION:**

A normal Haemoglobin level is a must for a healthy pregnancy and healthy new born at time of delivery. Severe anaemia, pregnancy related complications and disorders of labour present as risk factors for extra blood loss during pregnancy and cause severe hemodynamic instability. Timely availability and right choice of blood or blood component can save two or more precious lives. The reported transfusion rate in obstetrics varies from 0.16 to 2–6%. The rates are more in women with abnormal labour and deliveries. The rates for transfusion also vary and show regional variation, different practices of different hospitals and different clinicians. Studies have stated that junior doctors and surgical specialists are more likely to transfuse patients than physicians and anaesthesiologists [1–3].

This study was undertaken with the objective to ascertain the total patients receiving transfusion, indications for transfusion, various blood components used, timing of transfusion and the presence of any risk factors in the patients transfused (clinical and demographic profile).

**MATERIAL AND METHODS:**

This was a retrospective observational study carried out from Jan 01, 2021–Dec 31, 2021 at a tertiary care teaching hospital in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology (a high case load centre). All the women attending the antenatal and abortion services in IPD formed the study population; the study group included all the patients who were transfused with blood & its components during this period. The data collected was analysed and tabulated.

**RESULTS:**

**Table 1. Demographic characteristics**

**Characteristic % N**

**Age (years)**

<21 12% 1310

21–30 73% 7969

31–40 13% 1416

>40 2% 219

**Parity**

Primigravida/primipara 60% 6549

Multigravida 40% 4365

**Gestational age (weeks)**

<11 1.5% 163

11–20 3.3% 361

21–30 10% 1091

31–40 82% 8950

>40 3.2% 349

**Type of pregnancy**

Ectopic 0.8% 87

Abortion 4% 437

Intrauterine pregnancy 95.2% 10390

**Number of fetus**

Singleton 92% 10040

Twins 7.5% 819

Triplets & Quadruplets 0.5% 55

**Mode of delivery**

Vaginal delivery 68.66% 7134

Operative vaginal delivery 1.28% 133

Caesarean 30.06% 3123

**Table 2. Type of Blood and Blood products transfused**

**Blood product type % N =6259**

PRBC 51% 3220

FFP 24% 1489

Platelet concentrate 15.8% 980

Cryo-precipitates 0.2% 12

WHOLE BLOOD 9% 558

**TABLE 3. Shows distribution of patients as per their age groups receiving blood transfusion**

**Age group Percentage % Number of patients =1473**

<21 16% 236

21–30 62% 913

31–40 21% 309

>40 1% 15

**Table 4. Timing of blood transfusion (N= 1473)**

ANTENATAL 73.3% N=1079

POSTNATAL 26.7% N=394

**TABLE 5: Indication for blood transfusion in obstetrics in antenatal period**

**Indications of blood transfusion Percentage% Number of patients = 1079**

1. Pregnancy with anaemia 48% 518
2. Antepartum haemorrhage 12.5% 135
3. Lower segment caesarean section 19.5% 210
4. Abortion 4.8% 52
5. Ectopic pregnancy 15.2% 164

**TABLE 6: Indications of blood transfusion in the postpartum period**

**Indications of blood transfusion Percentage% Number of patients = 394**

1. Post vaginal delivery with PPH 20% 77
2. Post vaginal delivery with anaemia 28% 109
3. Post LSCS with PPH 4% 16
4. Post LSCS with Anaemia 16% 64
5. Post LSCS with kidney Disease 4% 16
6. Caesarean Hysterectomy 16% 64
7. Retained placenta 12% 48

**TABLE 7: Haemoglobin level at the time of blood requisitions forms were sent for PRBC**

**Haemoglobin Percentage% Number of patients (N=1473)**

<4 g/dl 31.3% 461

4-7 g/dl 53.2% 784

7-9 g/dl 13.7% 201

>9 g/dl 1.8% 27

**TABLE 8: Numbers of blood transfusions (PRBC) required by individual**

**No. of blood transfusion Percentage N = 1473**

1 31.77% 468

2 42.3% 623

3 9.6% 141

>=4 16.34% 241

**TABLE 9: Number of patients requiring massive blood transfusion**

**(>=5 units of PRBC)**

**Indications % of total patients requiring massive transfusion N=62**

Caesarean Hysterectomy 42.8% 27

Post partum Haemorrhage 14.2% 9

Ante partum Haemorrhage 28.5% 17

Laparotomy for ectopic pregnancy 14.5% 9

**TABLE 10: Transfusion related adverse events**

**Adverse effects % of total adverse events N=52**

Mild 86.5% 45

(Fever, rash)

Moderate 11.5% 6

(Fever, rash & electrolyte abnormalities, haemolysis)

Severe 2% 1

(TRALI, coagulation abnormality, metabolic acidosis, hypotension and shock)

**DISCUSSION**

The main principle for the transfusion practice in medicine state that transfusion should only be used when the benefits outweigh the risks. The different components of the blood play different functions, and there is a need to realize that the component therapy is the need for the present day. The blood component therapy should not be just started on the basis of one investigation like Hb or platelet count, but the clinical profile of the patient, present condition, possibility of rebleed, comorbidities, expected surgical outcome, coagulation abnormalities etc[4] should also be the guiding factor. During the study period, the incidence of blood product transfusion for obstetric patients in our institution was 13.5% which is high in comparison to previously reported studies: 0.3–1% [5,6] by James in Europe and a Japanese center. In our study, the demographic characteristics observation [Table 1] showed most of the antenatal patients were in 20–30 year age group, primigravida having singleton intrauterine pregnancy and presenting in 30-40 weeks of gestational age. The most of these observations are in line with data from major tertiary care hospitals. [7]

The most commonly transfused blood product is Packed RBC’s (51%) [Table 2] followed by FFP (24%). Each bag of packed RBCs has 150–200 ml RBCs and 75 ml plasma with a haematocrit of around 60%. These are indicated when we have insufficient RBCs in circulation or there is decrease in oxygen-carrying capacity of blood.

Whole blood transfusion accounts for 9% of total units transfused. Alexander *et al*., in an observational study of massive obstetric haemorrhage at Parkland hospital, showed whole blood to be superior to PRBCs or combined transfusions in preventing acute tubular necrosis and other complications.[8] The availability of fresh warm blood in developing countries could provide an alternative to more expensive and infrastructure‑dependent blood components.[9] Whole blood replaces many coagulation factors, and its plasma expands blood volume. It has the added advantage of exposing the patient to fewer donors.

As FFP being transfused in multiple units in each patient, it accounts for 24% of total units transfused. FFP is used in correction of microvascular bleeding, multiple coagulation factor deficiencies, massive transfusion with coagulation abnormalities and platelet concentrates when the platelet counts fall below 20,000/mm3. One unit of platelets increases the platelet count by 5000–7000/l. There is no role of prophylactic platelet transfusion; one needs to investigate and treat the cause. If the coagulation profile is not available, four units of FFP are given for four units of blood transfused within 24 hr [10,11].

Most of the blood components were transfused in 21-30 year age group as they comprise the largest group of patients. 73.3% of transfusions were done in antenatal patients. [Table 3 & Table 4]. The indications for PRBC transfusion in antenatal patients were anaemia (48%), LSCS (19.5%), APH (12.5%), ectopic pregnancy (15.2%) & Abortion (4.8%) [table 5]. Anaemia is prevalent in antenatal patients frequently and at levels which require blood transfusions. In a study on retrospective analysis of blood transfusion in obstetrics, the common indications for blood transfusion were anaemia, obstetrics haemorrhage, abortion, ruptured ectopic [12], which are similar to the indications necessitating blood transfusion in our centre.

The indications for PRBC transfusion in postnatal patients were post vaginal delivery with PPH (20%) post vaginal delivery with anaemia (28%), LSCS with PPH (4%), LSCS with anaemia (16%), Retained placenta (12%), and LSCS with kidney disease (4%) and caesarean hysterectomy (16%).

In a study carried out in Sweden, in pregnant women who received blood transfusion, major risk factors apparent before delivery were abnormal placentation, preeclampsia, placental abruption and previous caesarean section. Risk factors at the time of delivery were uterine rupture, atonic uterus and caesarean delivery [13]. These risk factors were similar to the indications for which transfusions were done in our study population. Obstetric haemorrhage is the commonest cause of maternal death, causing one-fourth of maternal deaths yearly [14]. Massive and life-threatening obstetric haemorrhage occurs in 3–5% and 0.1% [14-16] of deliveries, respectively, and blood product transfusion is required in 0.3–1% [14, 15].

Haemoglobin level was <7 g/dl at the time when PRBC request form was sent in 84.5% of total requests [Table 7]. Only 1.8% of patients had haemoglobin >9 g/dl at the time of request forms were sent. The transfusions in these cases were done in view of upcoming major surgery and expected moderate-heavy blood loss during labour, surgery or other probable complications.

Anaemia during pregnancy is significant cause of maternal mortality and morbidity. The decision for transfusion was done in this study when the Hb <7 gm%, and there were < 4 weeks for delivery or in labour. This trigger for transfusion of blood has been controversial, and the Cochrane review favours the restrictive transfusion policy for the safety of the patients [17].

In a study it was identified that patients delivered by caesarean section who had antepartum bleeding and low pre-operative haemoglobin were the only significant independent predictors for the need of blood transfusion [1]. In a study conducted by Anjali et al [18] they found that increased used of intravenous iron sucrose in antenatal period minimized the need of transfusion. Similar observations were made in our study where most of the patients who required 1 blood transfusion were those patients of moderate to severe anaemia where rest of the haemoglobin deficiency after giving one blood transfusion was treated by giving intravenous iron sucrose.

Most of the patients they required 1-2 units of PRBC transfusions (74%) [Table 8]. >4 units of transfusion were required occasionally (16.3%). Vachhaniet al. in their study discouraged practice of single-unit transfusion citing it as avoidable in majority of the cases, and the risks involved in blood transfusion can cause more damage than benefit to the patient [19,20]. Massive transfusions of >=5 units of PRBC were done rarely (1.5%) [Table 9]. The indication for massive transfusion was caesarean hysterectomy (42.8%), antepartum haemorrhage (28.5%), post partum haemorrhage (14.2%) and ectopic pregnancy (14.5%). In a study by Green L et al, the main cause for massive transfusion at the time of delivery was uterine atony (40%) and the main mode of birth was caesarean section (59%). 45% women underwent hysterectomy and among all causes of PPH, placenta accrete had the highest hysterectomy rate [21]. In a study carried out in Netherland to investigate the outcome of woman receiving massive transfusion due to postpartum haemorrhage they found that uterine atony remained the leading cause of haemorrhage and 30% patients underwent peri-partum hysterectomy [22]. In a study carried out in new York in patients requiring massive blood transfusion during hospitalization for delivery it was found that the most common aetiologies of massive blood transfusion were abnormal placentation (26.6%), uterine atony (21.2%), placental abruption (16.7%) and PIH associated with coagulopathy(15%) and a disproportionate number of women who received massive blood transfusion experienced severe morbidity including renal failure, acute respiratory distress syndrome, sepsis and in-hospital death[23].

During pregnancy the changes in the coagulation and the fibrinolytic system in form of enhancement and inhibition respectively occur, [24] large volume blood loss causes consumptive loss of coagulation factors, which causes more bleeding and starts a vicious cycle ending up with DIC. These obstetric haemorrhage’s could be massive and may require replacement of one entire blood volume within 24 h or replacement of 50% of total blood volume (TBV) within 3 h, i.e., massive blood transfusion (MBT). The setting of massive transfusion protocols (MTPs) describes the process of management of blood transfusion requirements in major bleeding episodes, assisting the interactions of the treating clinicians and the blood bank and ensuring judicious use of blood and blood components [25,26]. Increased capacity to tolerate bleeding due to physiological changes and often inaccurate estimation blood loss in obstetrics may not show change in their vital signs, resulting in a delay in the detection and treatment [24].

Around 57 units of PRBC were returned or discarded during the study period. This is because of over demand sent to blood bank in anticipation of requirement leading to expiry or non-usage. The faculty, residents and house surgeons are trained in accordance with guideline recommendations about sending request forms for issuing blood and its components periodically (when to send, what to fill etc.) to improve the practice and minimize wastage.

Transfusion is a lifesaving procedure, but approximately 0.8-1% [Table 10] of all transfusions cause an immediate and delayed adverse reaction, despite the measures taken to reduce risks. Transmitted infections, haemolytic reactions, transfusion-associated acute lung injury (TRALI), hypocalcemia, hypomagnesemia, hyperkalemia, problems of massive transfusion such as hypothermia, metabolic acidosis and abnormalities of coagulation should deter all of us from indiscriminate use of blood components [27,28].

**CONCLUSION**

Blood transfusion is an essential component of obstetric care and at times lifesaving. The decision to perform a blood transfusion should be made on both clinical and haematological grounds. To avoid dilutional coagulopathy, concurrent replacement with coagulation factors

and platelets may be necessary. Whole blood may be preferred in acute massive haemorrhage, especially where blood components are not readily available. From our study and review of literature we can safely conclude that anaemia in pregnancy is an important & commonest

cause of blood transfusion in Indian subcontinent. Anaemia is a preventable indication and

need for blood transfusion can be reduced if anaemia in pregnancy is rectified timely. Rational usage of blood and its components not only prevents transfusion related adverse events but also reduces their wastage.

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