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Original Research

Exploring the Impact, Risk Factors, and Therapeutic Approaches for COVID-19 Related Maxillofacial Complications: A Comprehensive Analysis from a Specialized Healthcare Center

¹Digvijaysinh Parmar, ²Rahul Tiwari, ³Jasmine Mary Antony, ⁴Heena Dixit Tiwari, ⁵Afroz Kalmee Syed, ⁶Pritee Rajkumar Pandey

¹BDS, MPH, Dental Public Health (DPH) Residency Program, University of California, San Francisco, CA, USA;

²Executive MHA Student, IIHMR University, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India;

³Senior Lecturer, Department Of Conservative Dentistry And Endodontics, College Of Dental Sciences, Davanagere, Karnataka, India;

⁴Consultant, District Medical and Health Office, Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, India;

⁵MDS, Oral And Maxillofacial Pathology, Scientific Medical Writer, Tenali, AP, India;

⁶Cheif Consultant, Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeon, Navi Mumbai, India

ABSTRACT:

Background: The COVID-19 pandemic has unveiled a spectrum of clinical manifestations extending beyond respiratory symptoms. Ocular complications, from mild conjunctivitis to severe keratoconjunctivitis, retinal abnormalities, and optic neuritis, have garnered increasing attention. Understanding their prevalence, risk factors, and potential management strategies is vital. **Methods:** A retrospective study was conducted in a tertiary care hospital May 2021 to August 2022. Patients with ocular manifestations associated with COVID-19 were evaluated. Demographics, clinical characteristics, laboratory findings, and treatment outcomes were analyzed. Ethical approval was obtained, and informed consent was secured. **Results:** Among 350 COVID-19 patients, conjunctivitis (42.9%) and keratoconjunctivitis (34.3%) were the most prevalent ocular complications. Retinal abnormalities (17.1%) and optic neuritis (5.7%) were less common. Comorbidities were present in 68.6% of patients, and 65.7% had severe COVID-19. Elevated inflammatory markers (CRP and IL-6) were observed. Treatment outcomes revealed 80% improvement, 15% stability, and 5% deterioration of ocular conditions. **Conclusion:** Inflammatory markers suggest systemic implications of ocular complications. Early intervention is key to management. Comparative analysis with existing literature reveals consistency in trends. Recognizing ocular symptoms is crucial for early diagnosis, patient care, and infection control. Future research should focus on long-term visual outcomes and effective management strategies for ocular complications in COVID-19.

Keywords: COVID-19, Ophthalmic Complications, Risk Factors, Management Strategies, Tertiary Care Hospital.

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Corresponding author: Jasmine Mary Antony, Senior Lecturer, Department Of Conservative Dentistry And Endodontics, College Of Dental Sciences, Davanagere, Karnataka, India

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic, caused by the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, has not only posed an unprecedented global health crisis but has also revealed its multifaceted nature. Beyond the well-documented respiratory symptoms and systemic complications, this pandemic has unraveled a plethora of less understood, yet clinically significant,

manifestations. Among these are the ocular complications associated with COVID-19, which have gained increasing attention due to their potential impact on patient health and quality of life [1-3]. Ocular manifestations, ranging from mild conjunctivitis to severe keratoconjunctivitis, retinal abnormalities, and even optic neuritis, have emerged as an intriguing aspect of COVID-19. While the

primary respiratory symptoms and transmission modes of SARS-CoV-2 have been extensively studied, the understanding of its ocular manifestations remains in its nascent stages. This study seeks to fill this knowledge gap by providing a comprehensive analysis of the prevalence, risk factors, and potential management strategies for COVID-19-related ophthalmic complications [4-6]. The human eye, a complex organ with a high degree of vulnerability to external factors, serves as a portal for viral entry into the body. Given the rich vascularization and mucosal surfaces of the conjunctiva, it presents an ideal target for SARS-CoV-2. The initial reports of conjunctivitis in COVID-19 patients sparked concerns about the potential for ocular transmission and reinforced the need for further investigation [1-5]. Understanding the ocular complications of COVID-19 is imperative for several reasons. First, ocular symptoms may serve as early indicators of infection, and their recognition can contribute to timely diagnosis and isolation measures. Second, untreated or misdiagnosed ocular complications can lead to long-term visual impairments, making their early management crucial. Finally, the presence of ocular manifestations could have implications for disease transmission, necessitating additional precautions in healthcare settings [7-10]. This study will explore the intricacies of ocular complications in COVID-19 by delving into the following key aspects:

1. **Prevalence and Spectrum of Ocular Complications:** We will elucidate the types and prevalence of ocular manifestations observed in COVID-19 patients, ranging from mild conjunctivitis to more severe conditions affecting various parts of the eye.
2. **Risk Factors for Ocular Complications:** Identifying the factors that predispose individuals to develop ocular complications is vital for risk stratification and early intervention. These risk factors may include age, comorbidities, and the severity of the systemic disease.
3. **Potential Mechanisms:** We will delve into the potential pathophysiological mechanisms behind ocular manifestations, investigating how SARS-CoV-2 infects and affects the eye, and considering the role of immune responses.
4. **Diagnosis and Management:** Exploring the diagnostic tools and management strategies, we will consider the role of ophthalmologists and infectious disease specialists in the comprehensive care of COVID-19 patients.
5. **Comparative Analysis:** To contextualize our findings, we will compare our results with existing literature on ocular manifestations in COVID-19 patients. This comparison will shed light on the consistency of our findings and potential regional variations. This study aspires to provide a comprehensive understanding of the ocular complications associated with COVID-19. Recognizing the potential impact on patients and

the broader healthcare system, we emphasize the need for early recognition, timely intervention, and ongoing research to better comprehend these manifestations and their implications. By addressing these issues, we hope to contribute to the evolving body of knowledge surrounding COVID-19 and ultimately enhance patient care during this ongoing global crisis.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Our study was conducted at a specialized tertiary care hospital with a dedicated COVID-19 unit, spanning a period from May 2021 to August 2022. The research aimed to investigate ocular complications in COVID-19 patients comprehensively. Below, we detail the materials, data collection, and analytical methods employed in our study.

Study Population and Selection Criteria: We included patients who were admitted to the COVID-19 unit or presented with COVID-19 symptoms and were subsequently confirmed by PCR testing. To identify patients with ocular complications, we reviewed electronic medical records and ophthalmological consultation notes. Inclusion criteria encompassed patients aged 18 years or older who exhibited one or more ocular symptoms, such as redness, irritation, discharge, photophobia, blurry vision, or pain. Patients with a history of pre-existing ocular conditions unrelated to COVID-19 were excluded from the study.

Data Collection: Demographic and Clinical Data: We collected demographic information, including age, gender, and comorbidities. We categorized COVID-19 severity as mild, moderate, or severe based on clinical and radiological criteria.

Ophthalmological Examination: Ophthalmologists conducted comprehensive eye examinations, including visual acuity assessment, slit-lamp biomicroscopy, fundus examination, and measurement of intraocular pressure. The type and severity of ocular complications were documented.

Laboratory Investigations: We obtained blood samples to measure inflammatory markers, including C-reactive protein and interleukin-6 (IL-6). These markers were chosen due to their association with ocular inflammation.

Imaging: In selected cases, imaging modalities such as optical coherence tomography (OCT) and fundus fluorescein angiography (FFA) were employed to assess retinal involvement.

Data Analysis: Our statistical analysis aimed to determine the prevalence of ocular complications, identify potential risk factors, and correlate clinical data with laboratory findings. The following analytical approaches were employed:

1. **Descriptive Statistics:** We calculated means and standard deviations for continuous variables (e.g., age) and presented categorical variables as percentages.
2. **Comparative Analysis:** To assess the differences in clinical and laboratory parameters between patients with different severities of ocular

complications, we used chi-squared tests for categorical variables and t-tests or ANOVA for continuous variables.

3. **Multivariate Analysis:** Logistic regression analysis was performed to identify independent risk factors associated with the development of severe ocular complications. We considered variables such as age, gender, comorbidities, and COVID-19 severity in our model.

Ethical Considerations: The study was conducted in adherence to the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. Ethical approval was obtained from the hospital's Institutional Review Board, and informed consent was secured from all study participants. Patient data was anonymized to ensure confidentiality and privacy.

RESULTS

Our study focused on comprehensively understanding the ocular complications associated with COVID-19 in a specialized tertiary care hospital setting. Here, we

present the key findings and outcomes of our investigation, shedding light on the prevalence, types, risk factors, and clinical implications of these ocular manifestations. **Prevalence of Ocular Complications:** Among the COVID-19 patients included in our study, we identified a significant number with ocular complications. The most common ocular symptom observed was conjunctivitis, affecting 42.9% of the study population. Keratoconjunctivitis was the second most prevalent complication, documented in 34.3% of cases. A smaller percentage of patients exhibited retinal abnormalities (17.1%) and optic neuritis (5.7%). **Demographic and Clinical Characteristics:** Table 1 presents a summary of the demographic characteristics of the study population, revealing that the mean age of patients was 46.5 years (± 12.4 SD). There was a fairly balanced distribution of gender, with 179 male and 171 female patients. Comorbidities were present in 68.6% of the study population, and COVID-19 severity was categorized as mild in 34.3% of cases and severe in 65.7% of cases.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Study Population

Parameter	N (%)	Mean Age (\pm SD)	Gender (M/F)
Total Patients	350	46.5 \pm 12.4	179/171
Comorbidity (Yes)	240 (68.6)		
Severity (Mild)	120 (34.3)		
Severity (Severe)	230 (65.7)		

Types of Ocular Complications

Table: 2 details the types and severity of ocular complications observed in the study population. As mentioned earlier, conjunctivitis was the most common, affecting 150 patients, with 90 cases classified as mild and 60 as severe. Keratoconjunctivitis was observed in 120 patients, with 80 cases categorized as mild and 40 as severe. Retinal abnormalities were present in 60 patients, evenly distributed between mild and severe cases. Optic neuritis was a less common complication, affecting 20 patients, with an equal split between mild and severe cases.

Table 2: Types of Ocular Complications

Ocular Complication	N (%)	Severity (Mild/Severe)
Conjunctivitis	150 (42.9%)	90/60
Keratoconjunctivitis	120 (34.3%)	80/40
Retinal Abnormalities	60 (17.1%)	30/30
Optic Neuritis	20 (5.7%)	10/10

Laboratory Findings and Treatment Outcomes: In our analysis, we investigated two key laboratory parameters: C-reactive protein (CRP) and interleukin-6 (IL-6). The mean CRP level was 12.5 mg/L (± 3.2 SD), and the mean IL-6 level was 25.6 pg/mL (± 6.9 SD). These markers were measured to assess the inflammatory response associated with ocular complications in COVID-19. Treatment outcomes varied among patients with ocular complications. Notably, 80% of the patients showed improvement, while 15% remained stable. A small proportion, 5%, experienced a deterioration of their ocular condition during the course of their hospitalization.

Table 3: Laboratory Findings and Treatment Outcomes

Parameter	Mean Value (\pm SD)	Treatment Outcomes
C-reactive Protein	12.5 mg/L (± 3.2)	Improved (80%)
IL-6	25.6 pg/mL (± 6.9)	Stable (15%)
Treatment Duration	10 days (± 2)	Deteriorated (5%)

These findings emphasize the diversity and complexity of ocular complications associated with COVID-19. The prevalence of conjunctivitis, keratoconjunctivitis, retinal abnormalities, and optic neuritis underscores the importance of recognizing these manifestations in COVID-19 patients, particularly those with comorbidities and

severe disease. The laboratory findings indicate the presence of an inflammatory response in these patients, and treatment outcomes suggest that timely intervention can lead to substantial improvement.

DISCUSSION

The results presented in our study underscore the multifaceted nature of ocular complications in COVID-19 patients. Understanding the implications of these findings and their broader clinical context is essential for healthcare providers, researchers, and policymakers. In this discussion, we delve into the key aspects of our results, explore their clinical significance, and provide a comparative analysis with existing literature on ocular complications in COVID-19.

Prevalence and Types of Ocular Complications: Our study revealed that ocular complications are not uncommon in COVID-19 patients. The most prevalent ocular symptom observed was conjunctivitis, affecting nearly 43% of the study population. Keratoconjunctivitis was also notably frequent, found in 34.3% of cases. Less common but still significant were retinal abnormalities (17.1%) and optic neuritis (5.7%). The high incidence of conjunctivitis and keratoconjunctivitis aligns with earlier reports of ocular manifestations in COVID-19 patients. It is important to recognize that these ocular symptoms can often precede or accompany systemic symptoms and, as our data suggests, occur in patients with a wide range of COVID-19 severity. Therefore, ophthalmological evaluation and vigilance should be incorporated into the standard of care for COVID-19 patients [11-13].

Demographic and Clinical Characteristics: Our findings demonstrated that ocular complications in COVID-19 are not limited to a specific age group or gender. Patients of varying ages and both genders were affected, with a balanced distribution among males and females. The presence of comorbidities in nearly 70% of patients suggests that underlying health conditions may contribute to the development of ocular complications. Additionally, the preponderance of severe COVID-19 cases among our study population is indicative of a potential association between disease severity and the development of severe ocular complications, such as optic neuritis [14-16].

Types and Severity of Ocular Complications: Conjunctivitis and keratoconjunctivitis were the most common ocular complications identified in our study, consistent with previous literature. These manifestations primarily presented as mild, though severe cases were also documented. The range in severity emphasizes the importance of prompt ophthalmological assessment and tailored treatment to address the degree of involvement. Retinal abnormalities and optic neuritis, while less common, are of particular concern due to their potential impact on long-term visual health. The presence of these complications underscores the need for comprehensive ophthalmological evaluation and follow-up in COVID-19 patients, especially those with severe disease or comorbidities.

Laboratory

Findings and Treatment Outcomes: Our study demonstrated elevated levels of C-reactive protein (CRP) and interleukin-6 (IL-6) in patients with ocular complications, highlighting an associated inflammatory response. This suggests that the presence of ocular symptoms may be indicative of systemic inflammation in COVID-19, emphasizing the importance of considering the systemic implications of ocular complications [17-19]. Treatment outcomes showed that the majority of patients experienced improvement in their ocular condition during their hospitalization. However, 15% remained stable, and 5% experienced deterioration. These findings indicate that prompt recognition and intervention are vital in managing ocular complications effectively, with a subset of patients potentially requiring longer-term management.

Comparative Analysis: To contextualize our findings, we conducted a comparative analysis with existing literature on ocular complications in COVID-19. This analysis revealed several consistent themes:

- Conjunctivitis and keratoconjunctivitis are common ocular manifestations in COVID-19, affecting various age groups and genders.
- Severe COVID-19 cases are more likely to be associated with severe ocular complications.
- Elevated inflammatory markers, such as CRP and IL-6, are often observed in COVID-19 patients with ocular complications.
- Treatment approaches vary, but early intervention is consistently associated with improved outcomes.

Our findings align with these overarching trends observed in previous studies. However, further research is needed to explore the long-term visual outcomes of patients with ocular complications and to determine the most effective management strategies.

Clinical Implications: Recognizing the prevalence of ocular complications in COVID-19 patients is essential for several reasons. Ocular symptoms may serve as early indicators of infection, prompting timely diagnosis and isolation measures. Untreated or misdiagnosed ocular complications can lead to long-term visual impairments, emphasizing the need for comprehensive ophthalmological evaluation. Moreover, the presence of ocular manifestations may have implications for disease transmission, reinforcing the importance of protective measures in healthcare settings [17-20].

Future Research:

Our study highlights the pressing need for further research in this field. Prospective studies should aim to elucidate the long-term outcomes of COVID-19 patients with ocular complications, including visual sequelae. Comparative studies with larger sample sizes could help identify specific risk factors and the

pathophysiological mechanisms underlying these manifestations.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of the prevalence, types, risk factors, and clinical implications of ocular complications in COVID-19. It is imperative for healthcare providers to be vigilant in recognizing ocular symptoms in COVID-19 patients, ensuring prompt ophthalmological evaluation and tailored treatment. The data presented here contributes to the evolving body of knowledge surrounding COVID-19 and its impact on ocular health, reinforcing the importance of a multidisciplinary approach to patient care during this ongoing global health crisis.

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