

Electrophysiological Evaluation of Post COVID Neuropathy

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Abstract:

Background: The COVID-19 pandemic is caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome by corona virus-2 (SARS-COV-2). Although the predominant clinical presentation is with respiratory disease, neurological manifestation is being recognized increasingly. The aim of the study was to evaluate the nerve conduction study findings of COVID-19 patients with neuropathy. Electrophysiological evaluation of neuropathy can be used as a diagnostic as well as prognostic marker of COVID neuropathy so that patient can undergo an early therapeutic trial.

Objective: The objective of this study was to see electrophysiological findings of post COVID neuropathy.

Methods: This cross sectional observational study was undertaken in the department of Neurology, BSMMU, Dhaka, Bangladesh. Non-randomized convenient purposive sampling was done to selected COVID neuropathy patients. Total 44 patients were selected purposively. Study subjects were taken from confirmed cases of COVID-19 infection with symptoms of neuropathy admitted at COVID unit and visited at COVID follow up Clinic of BSMMU, Dhaka, after meeting inclusion and exclusion criteria during October 2020 to March 2022. Detailed history, physical examination findings, previous medical records, investigation findings were recorded in datasheet. Electrophysiological evaluation of neuropathy was done for each patient.

Results: Out of 44 patients most of the pathological form of neuropathy were demyelinating (44.4%) followed by axonal (40.7%) and rest were mixed (14.8%). Among our patients we found polyneuropathy 14 (51.9%), entrapment neuropathy 7(25.9%), mononeuropathy 3(11.1%) and multiple mononeuropathy were 3 (11.1%). We also found 4 (14.8 %) patients had pure motor neuropathy, 6 (22.2%) had pure sensory neuropathy and rest 17 (63%) had mixed sensory-motor neuropathy.

Conclusion: Electrophysiologically we found various type of neuropathies among our patients. Though most of the patients had mild neuropathy but moderate to severe neuropathy in long standing hospitalized patients also reported. So electrophysiological examination could be done for symptomatic neuropathy in Covid-19 affected patient.

Keywords: COVID-19, Electrophysiology, Neuropathy, Bangladesh

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I. Introduction:

The Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak originated from the Wuhan city, China in December 2019.¹ Since then the virus had spread to various countries across the globe including Bangladesh due to its ominously high rate of transmission. WHO had declared the illness as pandemic on March 11, 2020.² The identified virus is named as SARS-CoV-2 and the illness caused by the virus is named corona virus disease 2019 (COVID-19).

The primary manifestation of COVID-19 infection is pneumonia. Although the most common and important presentation is with respiratory disease, reports of neurological features are increasing involving both central nervous system and peripheral nervous system.

The neurological manifestations and complications can be divided into central and peripheral nervous system manifestation. Central nervous system manifestations are dizziness, headache, acute cerebrovascular disease, impaired consciousness, transverse myelitis, acute hemorrhagic necrotizing encephalopathy, encephalitis, epilepsy and ataxia. Among peripheral nervous system manifestations hypogeusia, hyposmia, neuralgia, Guillain-Barre Syndrome and skeletal muscle injury were found in different literature.³

The involvement of the nervous system can be due to a direct action of these viruses on the nervous tissue and/or to an indirect action through the activation of immune-mediated mechanisms. While the first action can be verified during the acute phase of the disease, the second can be apparently after days, weeks, or even months following the acute phase. Coronaviruses can invade the nervous tissues involving immune-functioning macrophages, microglia, or astrocytes⁴ and cause nerve damage through direct infection pathways (circulatory and neuronal), hypoxia, immune injury, attack to ACE2 enzymes, and other mechanisms.⁵

Among the peripheral nervous system manifestations anosmia (a complete or partial loss of smell sensation) and ageusia (loss of taste sensation) are the most frequent neurological manifestations of COVID-19. Anosmia and ageusia are common even in mild to moderate cases.⁶ The smell sensation is more severely affected than the taste sensation. In a French study, Lechien and co-workers reported 86% and 88% of mild to moderate COVID-19 patients reported anosmia and ageusia respectively.⁷ Anosmia was the first manifestation of Covid-19 in many patients. The possible mechanism is the SARS-CoV-2 virus utilizes angiotensin-converting enzyme 2 receptors, presents in the olfactory epithelium, to enter into the neuronal cells, and then via the olfactory nerve, it spreads to the olfactory bulb.⁸

Guillain-Barré syndrome is a frequently encountered neurological complication of COVID-19. The first patient of Guillain-Barré syndrome in COVID-19 was described by Zhao and co-workers.⁹ After this, 18 more patients of Guillain-Barré syndrome in COVID-19, have been described. Electrophysiological studies were done in 12 patients and were consistent with demyelinating disease in eight and axonal neuropathy in four patients.^{10,11} An albumino-cytologic dissociation in CSF and positive GD1b-IgG antibodies indicated an inflammatory pathology.¹²

Some authors found a higher neurological involvement in severe stage of COVID-19. Helms et al found significantly higher neurological complications in severe cases (84%) in France.¹³ As the disease burden become increasing day by day at Bangladesh the present study was intended to see whether there is any positive electrophysiological findings and type of electrophysiological findings among symptomatic post COVID neuropathic patients. It will also help to develop strategies for early detection and provision of therapy for neuropathy.

II. Methods:

This Cross sectional observational study was conducted in COVID unit and COVID follow up clinic of BSMMU, Dhaka, Bangladesh, from October 2020 to March 2022 after obtaining ethical clearance IRB board of BSMMU. All confirmed cases of COVID 19 infection with symptoms of neuropathy admitted at COVID unit and visited at COVID follow up Clinic of BSMMU were taken as study population after taking informed written consent. Total 44 patients were selected purposively. Patients with known prior neuropathy like Guillain Barre Syndrome, CIDP, diabetic neuropathy, uremic neuropathy etc. were excluded.

At first all COVID-19 patients who were admitted at COVID Unit or returned to the COVID follow up clinic of BSMMU were interrogated for any neuropathic symptoms. Those who had neuropathy clinically from the onset and those who developed neuropathy after recovery were selected for the study. Detailed clinical history and physical examination were done and patient were sent for Nerve conduction study. Nerve conduction study were done by Nihon Kohden machine in Neurology department of BSMMU. Normal reference values for nerve conduction study was taken from text book of Electromyography and neuromuscular disorders by David C. Preston and Barbara E. Shapiro.¹⁴ Necessary medical records were evaluated. The medical records demographic, neurological & other clinical and laboratory investigations and findings of nerve conduction study of the patients were recorded in the preformed data sheet.

At the end of data collection, all the data were rechecked, coded and entered in standard statistical software using SPSS. Qualitative data were expressed as frequency and percentage. The P value <0.05 will be considered statistically significant. Comparisons between positive electrophysiological findings of post COVID neuropathy and negative electrophysiological findings of post COVID neuropathy regarding demographic and laboratory characteristics were performed using Student's t-test and chi-square tests.

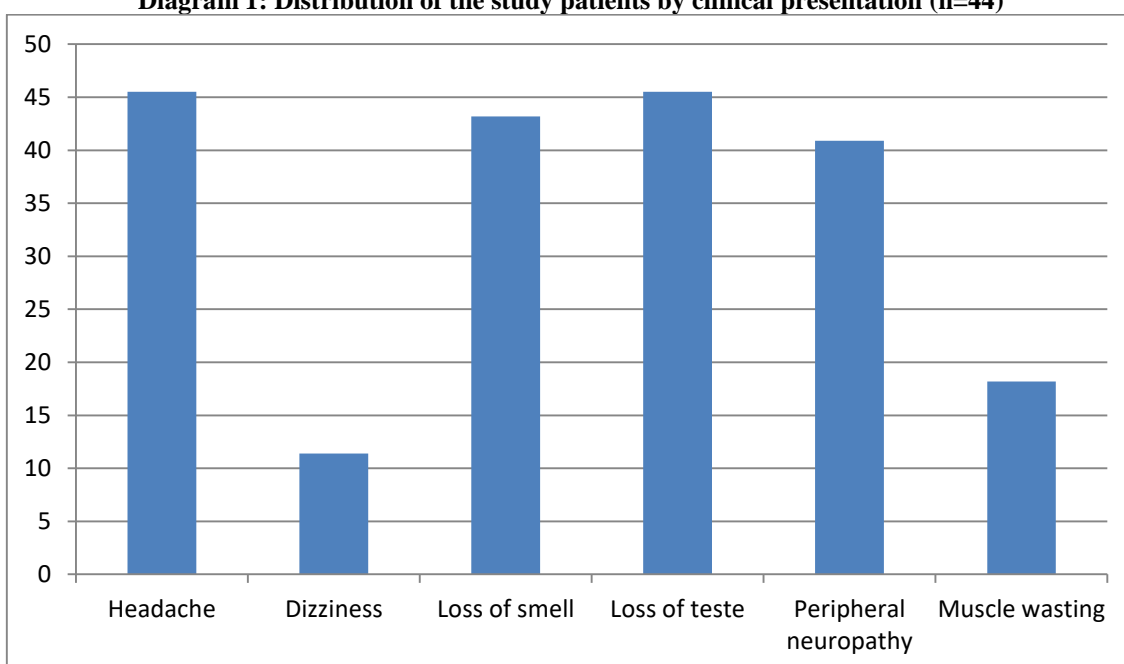
III. Results

It was observed that mean age of the patients was 48.5±17.9 years with a range of 11 – 90 years. In this study majority of the patients were male and male: female ratio was 1.8:1. Majority of the patients were service holder (47.7 %), among females majority were housewife 40.9% (Table -1).

Table-1: Sociodemographic characteristics of the study patients (n=44)

Variables	Number of patients	Percentage (%)
Age group (years)		
<40	15	34.1
41-60	17	38.6
>60	12	27.3
Mean±SD	48.5±17.9	
Range (min-max)	(11 – 90) years	
Sex		
Male	28	63.6
Female	16	36.4
Male: female ratio	1.8:1	
Occupation		
Service holder	21	47.7
Business	3	6.8
Housewife	18	40.9
Others	2	4.5

Diagram 1: Distribution of the study patients by clinical presentation (n=44)

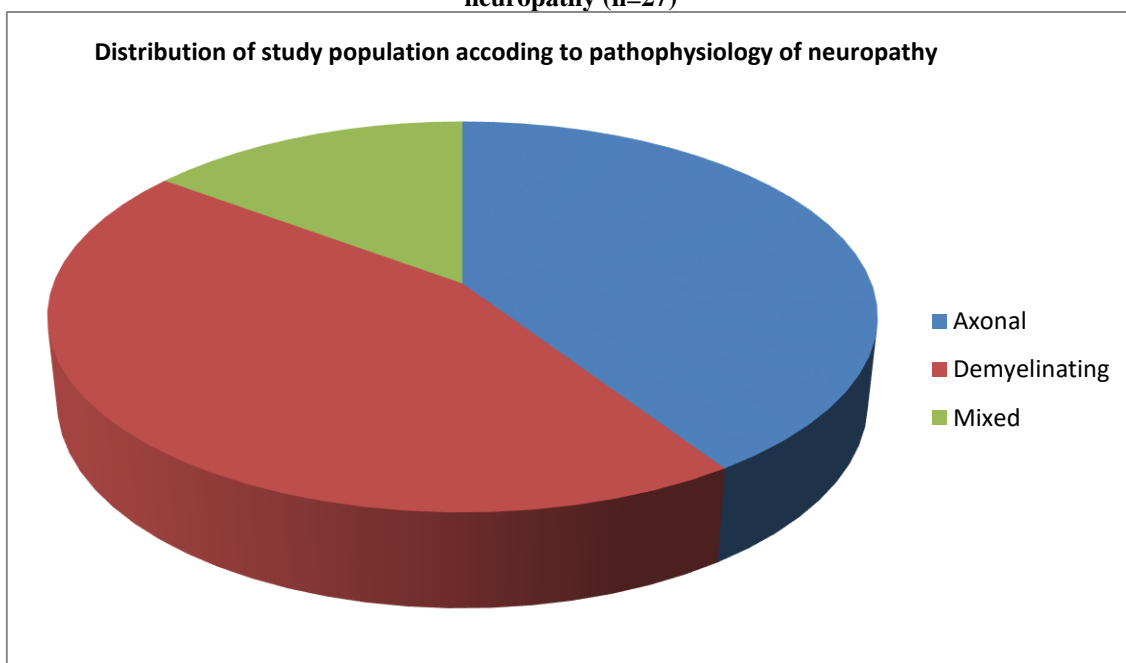


It was found that common presentations were headache (45.5%), loss of taste (45.5%), loss of smell (43.2%) followed by peripheral neuropathy (40.9%). Some patients had muscle wasting (18.2%) and dizziness (11.4%) as shown in diagram 1.

In this study most of the neuropathies were mild 26 (59.1%), followed by moderate 12 (27.3%). Rest of the neuropathies 6 (13.6%) were severe.

Among all patients 17(38.6%) patients had normal electrophysiological findings and rest 27(61.4%) were abnormal.

Diagram-2: Pie chart showing distribution of the study patients according to pathophysiology of neuropathy (n=27)



In this study most of the pathological form of neuropathy were demyelinating (44.4%) followed by axonal (40.7%) and rest were mixed (14.8%) as shown in Pie chart.

Table-2: Distribution of patients according to motor nerve distal latencies.

Distal latency (upper limbs)	Number of patients	Percentage (%)	Distal latency (lower limbs)	Number of patients	Percentage (%)
Median, left			Peroneal, left		
Normal (≤ 4.4)	24	54.5	Normal (≤ 6.5)	24	54.5
Prolonged (> 4.4)	6	13.6	Prolonged (> 6.5)	3	6.8
Absent	14	31.8	Absent	17	38.6
Median, right			Peroneal, right		
Normal (≤ 4.4)	27	61.4	Normal (≤ 6.5)	21	47.7
Prolonged (> 4.4)	6	13.6	Prolonged (> 6.5)	1	2.3
Absent	11	25.0	Absent	22	50.0
Ulnar, left			Tibial, left		
Normal (≤ 3.3)	27	61.4	Normal (≤ 6.7)	2	4.5
Prolonged (> 3.3)	3	6.8	Prolonged (> 6.7)	25	56.8
Absent	14	31.8	Absent	17	38.6
Ulnar, right			Tibial, right		
Normal (≤ 3.3)	3	6.8	Normal (≤ 6.7)	1	2.3
Prolonged (> 3.3)	30	68.2	Prolonged (> 6.7)	20	45.5
Absent	11	25.0	Absent	23	52.3

Table-3: Distribution of patients according to motor nerve conduction velocities.

Conduction velocity (upper limbs)	Number of patients	Percentage (%)	Conduction velocity (lower limbs)	Number of patients	Percentage (%)
Median, Left			Peroneal, left		
Normal (≥ 49.0)	28	63.6	Normal (≥ 44)	15	34.1
Decreased (< 49.0)	2	4.5	Decreased (< 44)	12	27.3
Absent	14	31.8	Absent	17	38.6
Median, right			Peroneal, right		
Normal (≥ 49.0)	27	61.4	Normal (≥ 44)	14	31.8
Decreased (< 49.0)	6	13.6	Decreased (< 44)	8	18.2
Absent	11	25.0	Absent	22	50.0
Ulnar, left			Tibial, left		
Normal (≥ 49.0)	29	65.9	Normal (≥ 41)	17	38.6
Decreased (< 49.0)	1	2.3	Decreased (< 41)	10	22.7
Absent	14	31.8	Absent	17	38.6
Ulnar, right			Tibial, right		
Normal (≥ 49.0)	30	68.2	Normal (≥ 41)	13	29.5
Decreased (< 49.0)	3	6.8	Decreased (< 41)	8	18.2
Absent	11	25.0	Absent	23	52.3

Table-4: Distribution of patients according to motor nerve amplitude (CMAP)

CMAPs (upper limbs)	Number of patients	Percentage (%)	CMAPs (lower limbs)	Number of patients	Percentage (%)
Median, left			Peroneal, left		
Normal (≥ 4.0)	27	61.4	Normal ≥ 2	25	56.8
Decreased (< 4.0)	3	6.8	Decreased < 2	2	4.5
Absent	14	31.8	Absent	17	38.6
Median, right			Peroneal, right		
Normal (≥ 4.0)	1	2.3	Normal ≥ 2	2	4.5
Decreased (< 4.0)	32	72.7	Decreased < 2	20	45.5
Absent	11	25.0	Absent	22	50.0
Ulnar, left			Tibial, left		
Normal (≥ 6.0)	25	56.8	Normal ≥ 4	27	61.4
Decreased (< 6.0)	5	11.4	Decreased < 4	0	0.0
Absent	14	31.8	Absent	17	38.6
Ulnar, right			Tibial, right		
Normal (≥ 6.0)	29	65.9	Normal ≥ 4	21	47.7
Decreased (< 6.0)	4	9.1	Decreased < 4	0	0.0
Absent	11	25.0	Absent	23	52.3

Table-5: Distribution of the study patients by F-wave study of upper limbs

F-wave study (left)	Number of patients	Percentage (%)	F-wave study (right)	Number of patients	Percentage (%)
Normal ≤ 31	26	59.1	Normal ≤ 31	24	54.5
Prolonged > 31	1	2.3	Prolonged > 31	8	18.2
Absent	17	38.6	Absent	12	27.3

Table-6: Distribution of patients according to sensory nerve distal latencies

Distal latency	Number of patients	Percentage (%)	Distal latency	Number of patients	Percentage (%)
Median, left			Median, right		
Normal ≤ 3.5	30	68.2	Normal ≤ 3.5	28	63.6
Prolonged > 3.5	3	6.8	Prolonged > 3.5	6	13.6
Absent	11	25.0	Absent	10	22.7
Ulnar, left			Ulnar, right		
Normal ≤ 3.1	31	70.5	Normal ≤ 3.1	34	77.3
Prolonged > 3.1	2	4.5	Prolonged > 3.1	0	0.0
Absent	11	25.0	Absent	10	22.7
Sural (left)			Sural (right)		
Normal ≤ 4.4	30	68.2	Normal ≤ 4.4	22	50.0
Prolonged > 4.4	0	0.0	Prolonged > 4.4	1	2.3
Absent	14	31.8	Absent	21	47.7

Table-7: Distribution of patients according to sensory nerve conduction velocity

Conduction velocity	Number of patients	Percentage (%)	Conduction velocity	Number of patients	Percentage (%)
Median, left			Median, right		
Normal \geq 50	22	50.0	Normal \geq 50	18	40.9
Reduced $<$ 50	11	25.0	Reduced $<$ 50	16	36.4
Absent	11	25.0	Absent	10	22.7
Ulnar, left			Ulnar, right		
Normal \geq 50	19	43.2	Normal \geq 50	27	61.4
Reduced $<$ 50	14	31.8	Reduced $<$ 50	7	15.9
Absent	11	25.0	Absent	10	22.7
Sural (left)			Sural (right)		
Normal \geq 40	27	61.4	Normal \geq 40	22	50.0
Reduced $<$ 40	3	6.8	Reduced $<$ 40	1	2.3
Absent	14	31.8	Absent	21	47.7

Table-8: Distribution of patients according to sensory nerve amplitude (SNAP)

SNAP	Number of patients	Percentage (%)	SNAP	Number of patients	Percentage (%)
Median, left			Median, right		
Normal \geq 20	26	59.1	Normal \geq 20	23	52.3
Reduced $<$ 20	7	15.9	Reduced $<$ 20	11	25.0
Absent	11	25.0	Absent	10	22.7
Ulnar, left			Ulnar, right		
Normal \geq 17	27	61.4	Normal \geq 17	28	63.6
Reduced $<$ 17	6	13.6	Reduced $<$ 17	6	13.6
Absent	11	25.0	Absent	10	22.7
Sural (left)			Sural (right)		
Normal \geq 6	28	63.6	Normal \geq 6	22	50.0
Reduced $<$ 6	2	4.5	Reduced $<$ 6	1	2.3
Absent	14	31.8	Absent	21	47.7

In this study we found most of the patients 14 (51.9%) had polyneuropathy followed by entrapment neuropathy 7(25.9%), mononeuropathy 3(11.1%) and multiple mononeuropathy 3 (11.1%).

In our study 4 (14.8 %) patients had pure motor neuropathy, 6 (22.2%) had pure sensory neuropathy and rest 17 (63%) had mixed sensory-motor neuropathy.

Table-09: Distribution of the study patients according to clinical and electrophysiological diagnosis

According to clinical diagnosis		
GBS		
AMAN	1	3.7
AIDP	1	3.7
Carpal tunnel syndrome		
Right	2	7.4
Left	2	7.4
Both	3	11.1
Critical illness neuropathy	2	7.4
Sensory neuropathy	6	22.2
Polyneuropathy (sensory, motor)	11	40.7

IV. Discussion

This was a cross sectional descriptive study carried out on patient who admitted in COVID unit and came in COVID follow up clinic of BSMMU, Dhaka, Bangladesh. In this study majority of the respondents 17 (38.6%) were belonging to age group 41-60 years. The mean age of the patients was 48.5 \pm 17.9 years with a range of 11 – 90 years. In this study majority of the patients were male and male: female ratio was 1.8:1. In another study done by Oaklander. A. L et al reported that participant's mean ages were averaged 43.3 \pm 3.3 years, and among them 68.8% were female.¹⁵ Our study has almost similar mean age but we found higher percentage of male patients 63.6%(28). Among 44 patients it was found that common presentations were headache (45.5%), loss of taste (45.5%), loss of smell (43.2%), followed by peripheral neuropathy (40.9%). Some patients had muscle wasting (18.2%) and dizziness (11.4%). In a large Iranian cohort of 10,069 patients by employing an online questionnaire-based survey Bagheri et al reported anosmia and hyposmia (48.23%), decreased taste sensation (83.38%) and headaches (48.6%) of the respondents.¹⁶ In another study done by Ftiha et al documented that 36.4% of patients of their study group had peripheral neuropathy after COVID-19 infection.¹⁷ In our study we also have almost similar findings of peripheral neuropathy (40.9%). In our study

11.4% patients had dizziness which has similarity with previous study done by Imran Ahmad and Farooq Azam Rathore.³They found 16.8% patients had dizziness. In this study we found most of the neuropathies were mild (59.1%), followed by moderate (27.3%) and rest of the neuropathies (13.6%) were severe according to Neuropathy Disability Score (NDS).¹⁸In our study 61.4% patients have abnormal electrophysiological findings. In a previous study done by Yan at all reported that 56.3% of post-COVID-19 patients had neuromuscular affection.¹⁹In our electrophysiological study we found 12(44.4%) patients had demyelinating neuropathy, 11(40.7%) had axonal neuropathy and mixed neuropathy in 4(14.80%) of cases. In previous electrophysiological studies were done in 12 patients of GBS by Ellul MA et al. were consistent with demyelinating disease in 8 and axonal neuropathy in 4 patients.¹⁰ In our study among 2 GBS patients we found 1 axonal and 1 demyelinating neuropathy. Carpal Tunnel Syndrome was found in 7 patients, among them 4 patients had unilateral and 3 patients had bilateral involvement. In one previous study Lica Roncati et al found that there is a causal link of Carpal Tunnel Syndrome (CTS) with COVID -19 infection.²⁰ Though we don't know whether they have CTS before affecting COVID -19 infection. We found 2 patients suffered from critical illness neuropathy who needed long term ICU care. Out of 44 patients 6 were suffered from pure sensory neuropathy, 4 had pure motor and 11 had sensory-motor polyneuropathy.

V. Conclusion

Though COVID-19 primarily affects the respiratory and cardiovascular system, neurological involvement is not very uncommon. Some patients suffered from neurological complications without severe illness. Electrophysiologically we found various type of neuropathies among our patients. We found mild neuropathy in most of the cases but moderate to severe neuropathy in long standing hospitalized patients. So electrophysiological examination could be done for symptomatic neuropathy in Covid 19 affected patients.

Disclosure

Author Contributions: All authors made a significant contribution to the work reported, whether that is in the conception, study design, execution, acquisition of data, analysis and interpretation, or in all these areas; took part in drafting, revising or critically reviewing the article; gave final approval of the version to be published; have agreed on the journal to which the article has been submitted; and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

Ethical issues: All patients gave informed written consent and study was approved by Institutional Review Board of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University.

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