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ECLAMPSIA IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

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INDEX

INDEX OF TABLES.....	v
INDEX OF FIGURES.....	vi
ABSTRACT.....	vii
STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY.....	viii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ix
CHAPTER 1. LITERATURE REVIEW	1
1.1. FIRST DESCRIPTIONS- HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE.....	2
1.2. CLASSIFICATION AND DEFINITIONS OF PRE-ECLAMPSIA AND ECLAMPSIA.....	3
1.2.1. Classification system.....	3
1.2.2. Definition of pre-eclampsia.....	3
1.2.3. Definition of eclampsia.....	5
1.3. THE EPIDEMIOLOGY OF ECLAMPSIA.....	5
1.3.1. The difficulties in studying the epidemiology of eclampsia.....	5
1.3.2. Incidence.....	6
1.3.3. Maternal Mortality.....	8
1.3.4. Maternal Morbidity.....	9
1.3.5. Perinatal Mortality.....	10
1.3.6. Risk factors associated with pre-eclampsia and eclampsia.....	10
1.4. PATHOGENESIS OF PRE-ECLAMPSIA AND ECLAMPSIA.....	17
1.4.1. Pre-eclampsia.....	17
1.4.2. Eclampsia.....	19
1.4.3. Relationship between pre-eclampsia and eclampsia.....	20
1.4.4. Complications of pre-eclampsia and eclampsia.....	21
1.5. SUB-TYPES OF ECLAMPSIA.....	23
1.5.1. Timing of seizures in relation to the onset of labour.....	23
1.5.2. Gestational age at onset of seizures.....	24
1.6. MANAGEMENT OF ECLAMPSIA AND PRE-ECLAMPSIA.....	25
1.6.1. Current methods and controversies.....	25
1.6.2. Possible preventive measures.....	27
1.7. THE PROGNOSIS OF ECLAMPSIA.....	27
1.7.1. Future pregnancies.....	27
1.7.2. Long term maternal health.....	28
1.8. THE NEED FOR A NATIONAL SURVEY.....	28
1.8.1. The purpose.....	28
1.8.2. The plan.....	29
1.8.3. The prior hypotheses.....	30

CHAPTER 2. THE PILOT STUDY

32

2.1. INTRODUCTION.....	33
2.2. METHODS.	33
2.2.1. Ethics committee approval.	33
2.2.2. Collection of notifications.	34
2.2.3. Collection of clinical data.	36
2.2.4. Analysis of clinical data.	38
2.3. RESULTS.	39
2.3.1. Results of methodological aspects.	39
2.3.2. Results of clinical case-note reviews.....	42
2.4. DISCUSSION.	51
2.5. LESSONS FROM THE PILOT STUDY ON METHODOLOGY.....	53
2.5.1. Requests for notifications.	53
2.5.2. Criteria for notifications.	53
2.5.3. Collection of clinical data.	53
2.6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS.	55

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

56

3.1. INTRODUCTION.....	57
3.2. SETTING UP.....	57
3.2.1. Support from professional bodies.	57
3.2.2. Ethics committee approval.	57
3.2.3. Establishing consultant lists and midwife contacts.....	59
3.2.4. Publicity and posters.	59
3.3. COLLECTING NOTIFICATIONS.....	60
3.3.1. Criteria for notifications.	60
3.3.2. Regular mail-outs and reminders.	60
3.3.3. Checking with consultants.....	61
3.4. VERIFICATION WITH EXISTING SOURCES.....	61
3.5. COLLECTION OF CLINICAL DATA.....	61
3.5.1. Photocopies of case-notes and blinding of data.....	62
3.5.2. Criteria for inclusion in eclampsia series.	62
3.5.3. Hospital case-note data.	63
3.5.4. General Practitioner Questionnaires.....	64
3.5.5. Collection of extra baby information.....	64
3.5.6. Definitions of terms used in the study.	64
3.6. ESTABLISHMENT OF DATABASE.	65
3.7. DENOMINATOR DATA.	65
3.8. ANALYSIS.	66
3.8.1. General approach.	66
3.8.2. Statistical methods.	66
3.9. SUMMARY.	67

CHAPTER 4. DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS 69

4.1. NOTIFICATION AND DATA COLLECTION.....	70
4.1.1. Response rates to requests for notifications.....	70
4.1.2. Degree of over notification.....	70
4.1.3. Double notification of eclamptic cases.....	71
4.1.4. Comparison with existing maternity data systems.....	73
4.1.5. Hospital case-notes reviewed.....	73
4.1.6. Extra case-notes requested and reviewed.....	74
4.1.7. General Practitioner Questionnaires received.....	74
4.1.8. Complete antenatal care records.....	74
4.2. DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS.....	75
4.2.1. Incidence.....	75
4.2.2. Risk factors.....	75
4.2.3. Antenatal care.....	79
4.2.4. Location of patient at time of first seizure.....	79
4.2.5. Prodromal signs and symptoms.....	79
4.2.6. Antepartum, Intrapartum, Postpartum.....	82
4.2.7. Gestation of seizures.....	83
4.2.8. Multiple seizures.....	83
4.2.9. Management of eclampsia.....	83
4.2.10. Maternal Outcome.....	84
4.2.11. Fetal Outcome.....	87
4.3. DISCUSSION.....	88
4.3.1. A true picture of eclampsia?.....	88
4.3.2. Descriptive results.....	89

CHAPTER 5.

SUBGROUP ANALYSIS AND LOGISTIC REGRESSION 93

5.1. ANTENATAL CARE - WHAT IS ITS ROLE?.....	94
5.1.1. Prior hypothesis: A significant proportion of eclampsia occurs in women who have had a long interval between formal screening checks for the signs of pre-eclampsia.....	94
5.1.2. Further questions: Do women who have long antenatal screening intervals prior to the onset of eclampsia develop more complications than those women who receive frequent screening for pre-eclampsia?.....	95
5.2. UNHERALDED ECLAMPSIA.....	96
5.2.1. Prior hypothesis: Eclampsia occurs in some women without prodromal symptoms and signs.....	96
5.2.2. Further questions: Do women who develop eclampsia without the classical prodromal illness have a fewer complications?.....	96
5.3. ECLAMPSIA AT THE EXTREMES OF MATERNAL AGE.....	99
5.3.1. Prior hypothesis: There is greater morbidity from eclampsia amongst older women.....	99
5.4. ECLAMPSIA IN MULTIPAROUS WOMEN.....	101

5.4.1. Prior hypothesis: A significant proportion of eclampsia occurs in multiparous women and these women have a greater morbidity from eclampsia.....	101
5.5. ANTEPARTUM, INTRAPARTUM AND POSTPARTUM ECLAMPSIA.....	103
5.5.1. Hypothesis arising from pilot study: Eclampsia occurring prior to labour is a more severe form of eclampsia than intra- or postpartum eclampsia....	103
5.5.2. Prior hypothesis: Post-partum eclampsia which occurs without pre-existing signs of severe pre-eclampsia is a relatively benign condition.....	104
5.6. EARLY ONSET PRE-ECLAMPSIA - IS IT A MORE SEVERE ILLNESS?.....	107
5.6.1. Hypothesis arising from pilot study: Pre-term eclampsia has more severe consequences for mother and fetus than eclampsia which occurs at term.....	107
5.6.2. Prior hypothesis: A significant proportion of eclampsia occurs in women at or before 32 weeks gestation.....	108
5.7. LOGISTIC REGRESSION ANALYSIS.....	110
5.7.1. Introduction to multiple logistic regression analysis.....	110
5.7.2. Associations with major maternal complications.....	112
5.7.3. Associations with general practitioner reported maternal morbidity.....	113
5.7.4. Associations with fetal/infant death.....	114
5.7.5. Associations with infant morbidity - multiple logistic regression analysis....	115
5.8. DISCUSSION.....	116
5.8.1. Antenatal care.....	116
5.8.2. Unheralded eclampsia.....	116
5.8.3. Morbidity in older women.....	117
5.8.4. Multiparous women.....	118
5.8.5. Antepartum vs. intra- and postpartum convulsions.....	118
5.8.6. Preterm vs. term.....	119
5.8.7. Major maternal complications.....	120
5.8.8. Maternal morbidity.....	120
5.8.9. Fetal/infant deaths.....	121
5.8.10. Infant morbidity.....	121

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSIONS 123

6.1. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS.....	124
6.2. FUTURE DIRECTIONS.....	126

APPENDICES.....	129
Data sheet	
General Practitioner questionnaire	
Publications arising from the thesis	

BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	160
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ABSTRACT

Eclampsia, now rare in the United Kingdom, remains one of the major causes of maternal mortality in this country and world-wide. This is a prospective, descriptive study of every case of eclampsia that occurred in the United Kingdom during 1992.

All 279 hospitals with a consultant obstetric unit in the United Kingdom participated. Obstetricians and midwives notified 582 possible cases and 383 were confirmed as eclampsia. No additional cases were identified when checks were made with existing maternal data base systems. Detailed information about each case was collected from a hospital case-note review and a general practitioner questionnaire.

The national incidence of eclampsia was 4.9/10,000 maternities (95% CI 4.50-5.4). In the majority of cases seizures occurred despite antenatal care (70%) and within one week of the woman's last visit to a doctor or midwife (85%). Seventy-five percent of first seizures occurred in hospital, and in 38% of these, before both proteinuria and hypertension had been documented. Women under 20 years of age or with multiple pregnancy were particularly susceptible. Most cases (44%) occurred after delivery, more than a third (38%) antepartum, and the remainder (18%) intrapartum.

The maternal case fatality rate was nearly 1 in 50 women (1.8%). Thirty-five percent of all women had at least one major complication and of those who survived 63% had some residual morbidity reported by their general practitioner. The stillbirth and neonatal mortality rates were 22.2/1000 and 34.1/1000 respectively.

Multiple logistic regression analyses were carried out to help assess which factors of the eclamptic episode were associated with poorer maternal and fetal outcomes. Antepartum seizures and high maternal blood pressures were associated with maternal complications, while the factor most strongly associated with fetal/infant death and infant morbidity was the occurrence of seizures preterm.