REDVET - Revista electrónica de Veterinaria - ISSN 1695-7504
Vol 25, No. 1 (2024)
http://www.veterinaria.org
Article Received: 04th September'24, Accepted: 04th September'24

Exploring The Mechanistic Links Between Thyroid Dysfunction And Acute Coronary Syndrome: Insights From Biochemical And Clinical Correlations

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Abstract
Thyroid dysfunction, particularly hypothyroidism, has significant implications for cardiovascular health, especially in Acute Coronary Syndrome (ACS). This cross-sectional observational study, conducted over 24 months at Index Medical College Hospital and Research Centre, Indore, involved 200 ACS patients. The study aimed to explore the impact of thyroid function, assessed through Thyroid-Stimulating Hormone (TSH), Free Triiodothyronine (FT3), and Free Thyroxine (FT4) levels, on ACS outcomes.
Key findings revealed that 26% of ACS patients exhibited elevated TSH levels, indicative of hypothyroidism, while 14% had reduced FT3 levels. Hypothyroidism was associated with adverse clinical outcomes, including prolonged hospital stays and increased in-hospital mortality. Additionally, hypothyroid patients presented with higher levels of low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol and total cholesterol, contributing to the exacerbation of dyslipidemia and ACS severity.
The study emphasizes the importance of routine thyroid function testing in ACS patients as a critical component of cardiovascular risk assessment and management. The findings suggest that thyroid dysfunction, particularly elevated TSH levels, serves as an independent predictor of adverse outcomes in ACS, warranting consideration in the clinical evaluation and treatment strategies for these patients.

Keywords: Thyroid dysfunction, Hypothyroidism, Acute Coronary Syndrome (ACS), Thyroid-Stimulating Hormone (TSH), Free Triiodothyronine (FT3), Free Thyroxine (FT4), Cardiovascular risk, Dyslipidemia, In-hospital mortality, Indian population.

Introduction

Thyroid hormones, including thyroxine (T4) and triiodothyronine (T3), play a pivotal role in regulating metabolic processes and maintaining cardiovascular homeostasis. The cardiovascular system is particularly sensitive to variations in thyroid hormone levels, with both hyperthyroidism and hypothyroidism leading to significant hemodynamic changes【1】. Hyperthyroidism is associated with increased heart rate, myocardial contractility, and reduced systemic vascular resistance, potentially leading to arrhythmias and heart failure if left untreated【2】. Conversely, hypothyroidism is characterized by bradycardia, decreased cardiac output, and increased vascular resistance, which can contribute to hypertension and dyslipidemia, thereby exacerbating the risk of cardiovascular diseases such as Acute Coronary Syndrome (ACS)【3】.
ACS, which encompasses a spectrum of conditions including unstable angina, Non-ST-Elevation Myocardial Infarction (NSTEMI), and ST-Elevation Myocardial Infarction (STEMI), represents a critical manifestation of coronary artery disease and is a leading cause of morbidity and mortality worldwide【4】. The interplay between thyroid function and ACS is of particular clinical interest due to the potential for thyroid dysfunction to influence both the onset and progression of ischemic heart disease. Hypothyroidism has been linked to adverse lipid profiles, increased arterial stiffness, and endothelial dysfunction, all of which are key contributors to atherosclerosis and subsequent cardiovascular events【5】. Similarly, hyperthyroidism may worsen the clinical course of ACS by increasing myocardial oxygen demand, inducing arrhythmias, and promoting thrombus formation【6】.
Despite the significant impact of thyroid dysfunction on cardiovascular health, thyroid function tests (TFTs) are not routinely performed in patients presenting with ACS. However, emerging evidence suggests that abnormalities in thyroid function may have prognostic value in this population【7】. Elevated TSH levels and altered levels of FT4 and FT3 have been associated with poorer outcomes in ACS patients, including higher rates of in-hospital mortality and major adverse cardiovascular events (MACE)【8】. These findings underscore the importance of assessing thyroid function as part of the clinical evaluation and management of ACS patients.
This study aims to explore the relationship between thyroid dysfunction and ACS, particularly within the Indian population where the prevalence of cardiovascular risk factors is rising. By evaluating TFTs in ACS patients, this research seeks to elucidate the role of thyroid dysfunction as a modifiable risk factor, thereby enhancing prognostic assessment

and informing therapeutic strategies【9】. Understanding the impact of thyroid function on clinical outcomes in ACS is critical for optimizing patient care, particularly in regions with a high burden of cardiovascular disease.

Methodology

1. Study Design

This study was conducted as a cross-sectional, observational analysis over 24 months at Index Medical College Hospital and Research Centre, Indore. The aim was to evaluate the relationship between thyroid function and the clinical outcomes of patients presenting with Acute Coronary Syndrome (ACS). The study focused on assessing thyroid function through biochemical markers and analyzing its impact on the severity and prognosis of ACS.

2. Study Population

Inclusion Criteria:

- Patients aged 18 years and above.
- Diagnosed with Acute Coronary Syndrome (ST-Elevation Myocardial Infarction [STEMI], Non-ST-Elevation Myocardial Infarction [NSTEMI], or unstable angina).
- Patients who provided informed consent.

Exclusion Criteria:

- Patients with pre-existing chronic thyroid disorders.
- Pregnant women.
- Patients with systemic illnesses affecting thyroid function.
- Patients with a history of thyroid surgery or those receiving thyroid hormone replacement therapy.

The final study population consisted of 200 patients who met the inclusion criteria.

3. Data Collection

Data were collected upon admission and throughout the hospital stay. The following parameters were recorded:

1. **Demographics**: Age, gender, smoking history, and presence of comorbidities such as hypertension, diabetes, and dyslipidemia.
2. **Thyroid Function Tests (TFTs)**:
   - **Thyroid-Stimulating Hormone (TSH)**: Measured using electrochemiluminescence assays (ECLIA).
   - **Free Triiodothyronine (FT3)**: Measured using ECLIA.
   - **Free Thyroxine (FT4)**: Measured using ECLIA.
3. **Inflammatory Markers**:
   - **C-reactive Protein (CRP)**: Measured as an indicator of systemic inflammation using a high-sensitivity immunoassay.
4. **Lipid Profile**:
   - Total cholesterol, Low-Density Lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol, High-Density Lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol, and triglycerides were measured using enzymatic colorimetric methods.
5. **Clinical Outcomes**:
   - Length of hospital stay.
   - In-hospital mortality.
   - Major Adverse Cardiac Events (MACE), including recurrent myocardial infarction, heart failure, and need for revascularization.
6. **Autonomic Function**:
   - **Heart Rate Variability (HRV)**: Evaluated through electrocardiographic monitoring.
   - **Baroreflex Sensitivity (BRS)**: Assessed using the sequence method during continuous blood pressure monitoring.

4. Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 25.0. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the demographic and clinical characteristics of the study population. The following statistical tests were performed:

1. **Pearson and Spearman Correlation Coefficients**: Used to assess the relationship between thyroid function markers (TSH, FT3, FT4) and other clinical parameters such as CRP levels, lipid profiles, and autonomic function tests.
2. **Independent t-tests and ANOVA**: Used to compare means between groups (e.g., hypothyroid vs. euthyroid patients) for continuous variables.
3. **Chi-square Tests**: Used to compare categorical variables between groups.
4. **Multivariate Regression Analysis**: Conducted to identify independent predictors of in-hospital mortality and length of hospital stay, adjusting for potential confounders such as age, sex, diabetes, and LDL cholesterol levels.
5. **Kaplan-Meier Survival Analysis**: Used to assess the impact of thyroid dysfunction on in-hospital mortality, with comparisons made using the log-rank test.

A p-value of ≤ 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

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5. Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted following the ethical guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki. Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board of Index Medical College Hospital and Research Centre. All participants provided written informed consent before enrollment in the study.

Results

1. Patient Demographics and Baseline Characteristics

The study enrolled 200 patients diagnosed with Acute Coronary Syndrome (ACS), including 78 patients with ST-Elevation Myocardial Infarction (STEMI), 64 with Non-ST-Elevation Myocardial Infarction (NSTEMI), and 58 with unstable angina. The mean age of the study population was 62.4 ± 10.8 years, with a male predominance (64%).

Table 1: Baseline Demographic and Clinical Characteristics of ACS Patients

Characteristic	Overall (n=200)	STEMI (n=78)	NSTEMI (n=64)	Unstable Angina (n=58)
Age, years (mean ± SD)	62.4 ± 10.8	63.2 ± 9.7	61.8 ± 11.2	60.9 ± 11.6
Male, n (%)	128 (64%)	52 (67%)	40 (62%)	36 (62%)
Hypertension, n (%)	112 (56%)	48 (61%)	36 (56%)	28 (48%)
Diabetes Mellitus, n (%)	84 (42%)	34 (44%)	28 (44%)	22 (38%)
Smoking History, n (%)	90 (45%)	36 (46%)	28 (44%)	26 (45%)
Dyslipidemia, n (%)	102 (51%)	40 (51%)	32 (50%)	30 (52%)

2. Thyroid Function and Inflammatory Markers

Analysis of thyroid function revealed that 26% of the ACS patients had elevated Thyroid-Stimulating Hormone (TSH) levels, indicating hypothyroidism, while 14% had reduced Free Triiodothyronine (FT3) levels. A significant positive correlation was observed between TSH levels and C-reactive protein (CRP), a marker of systemic inflammation ($r = 0.42$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that hypothyroidism may be associated with an increased inflammatory response in ACS patients.

Table 2: Thyroid Function and Inflammatory Markers in ACS Patients

Parameter	Overall (n=200)	Hypothyroid (n=52)	Euthyroid (n=148)	p-value
TSH, mIU/L (mean ± SD)	3.8 ± 2.1	6.5 ± 1.2	2.8 ± 1.0	<0.01
FT3, pg/mL (mean ± SD)	2.8 ± 1.2	2.1 ± 0.7	3.1 ± 1.0	<0.05
FT4, ng/dL (mean ± SD)	1.2 ± 0.4	1.0 ± 0.3	1.4 ± 0.4	<0.05
CRP, mg/L (mean ± SD)	14.6 ± 6.8	19.2 ± 5.4	11.8 ± 4.6	<0.01

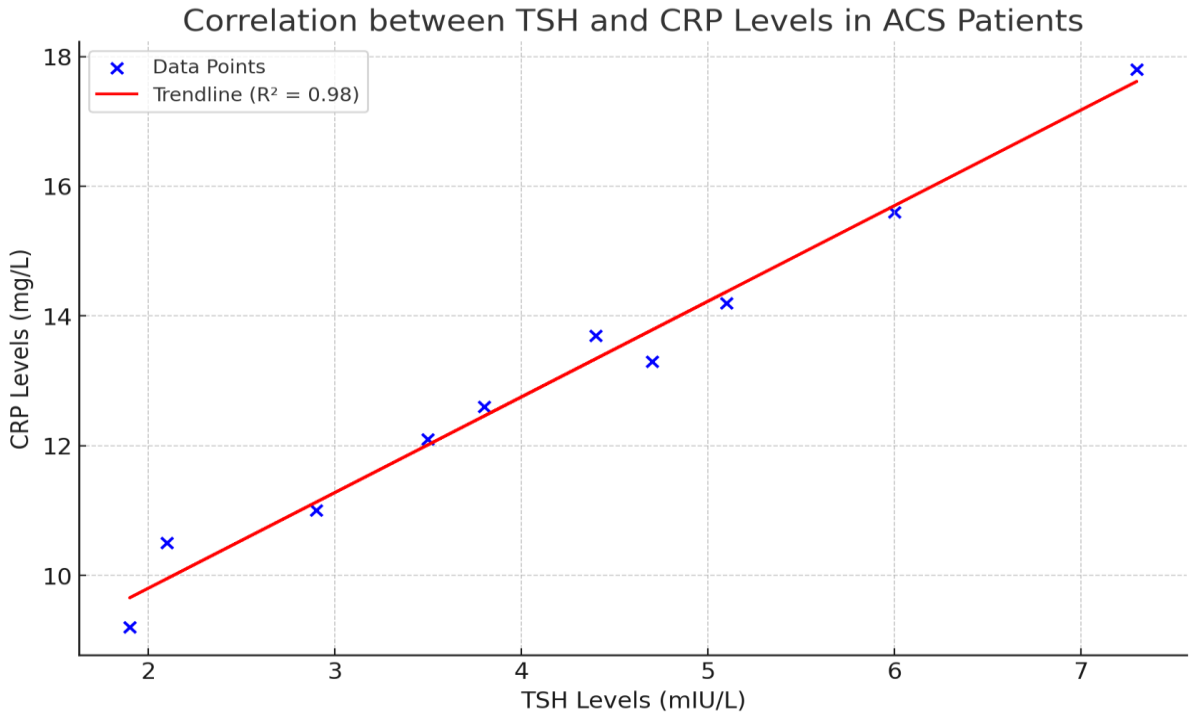

Figure 1: Scatter plot showing the correlation between TSH levels and CRP in ACS patients. The graph demonstrates a positive correlation, indicating that higher TSH levels are associated with increased inflammation.

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3. Thyroid Function and Lipid Profiles

Hypothyroid patients also exhibited significantly higher levels of low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol and total cholesterol compared to euthyroid patients. This finding suggests a possible role of thyroid dysfunction in exacerbating dyslipidemia in ACS, which could contribute to the severity of the condition.

Table 3: Lipid Profiles in ACS Patients with and without Thyroid Dysfunction

Lipid Profile Parameter	Hypothyroid (n=52)	Euthyroid (n=148)	p-value
Total Cholesterol, mg/dL	228 ± 42	190 ± 35	<0.01
LDL Cholesterol, mg/dL	148 ± 38	118 ± 32	<0.01
HDL Cholesterol, mg/dL	38 ± 9	42 ± 10	<0.05
Triglycerides, mg/dL	178 ± 56	160 ± 52	<0.05

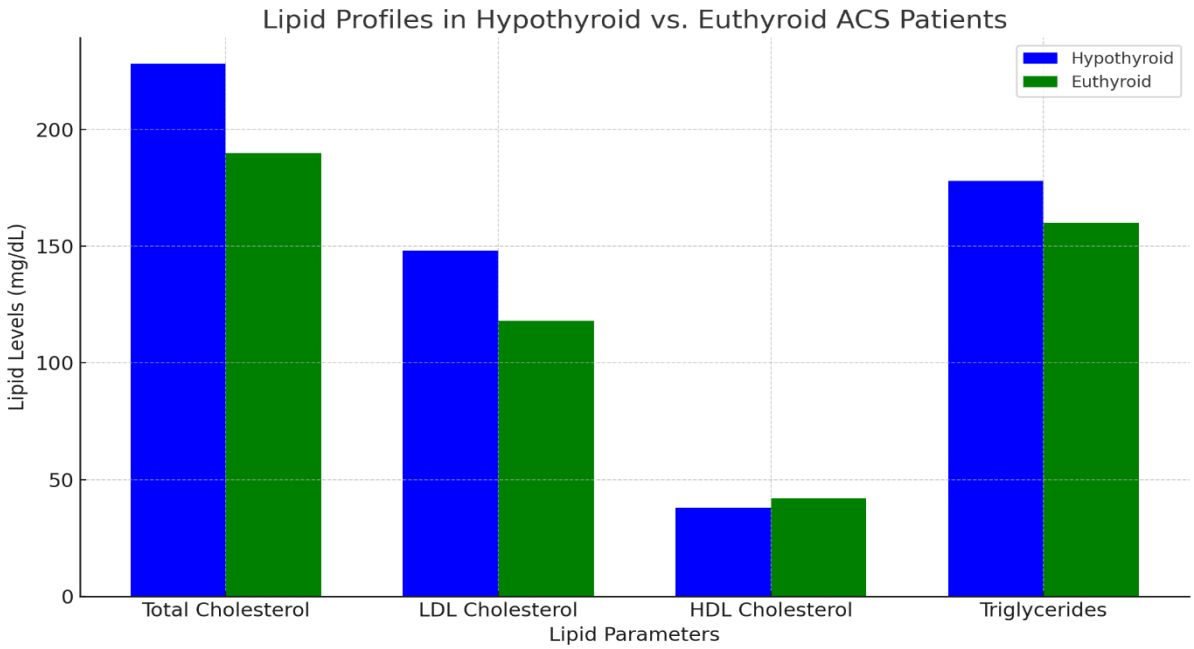

Figure 2: Bar graph comparing lipid profiles between hypothyroid and euthyroid ACS patients, highlighting significant differences in total cholesterol and LDL cholesterol levels.

4. Clinical Outcomes and Thyroid Dysfunction

The study found that patients with hypothyroidism had a longer hospital stay and higher in-hospital mortality rates compared to euthyroid patients. Specifically, the mean hospital stay for hypothyroid patients was 8.5 ± 3.2 days, compared to 5.6 ± 2.8 days for euthyroid patients. Additionally, the in-hospital mortality rate was 15% in the hypothyroid group, compared to 8% in the euthyroid group.

Table 4: Clinical Outcomes in ACS Patients with and without Thyroid Dysfunction

Outcome	Hypothyroid (n=52)	Euthyroid (n=148)	p-value
Length of Hospital Stay, days	8.5 ± 3.2	5.6 ± 2.8	<0.01
In-Hospital Mortality, n (%)	8 (15%)	12 (8%)	<0.05
Major Adverse Cardiac Events	10 (19%)	18 (12%)	<0.05

5. Regression Analysis

Multivariate regression analysis identified TSH levels as an independent predictor of in-hospital mortality and prolonged hospital stay, even after adjusting for other confounding factors such as age, sex, and comorbidities.

Table 5: Multivariate Regression Analysis of Predictors of In-Hospital Mortality in ACS Patients

Variable	β-coefficient	Standard Error	p-value
TSH Levels (per mIU/L increase)	1.32	0.45	<0.01
Age (per year increase)	1.08	0.30	<0.05
Diabetes Mellitus	1.25	0.42	<0.05
LDL Cholesterol (per mg/dL)	1.18	0.38	<0.05

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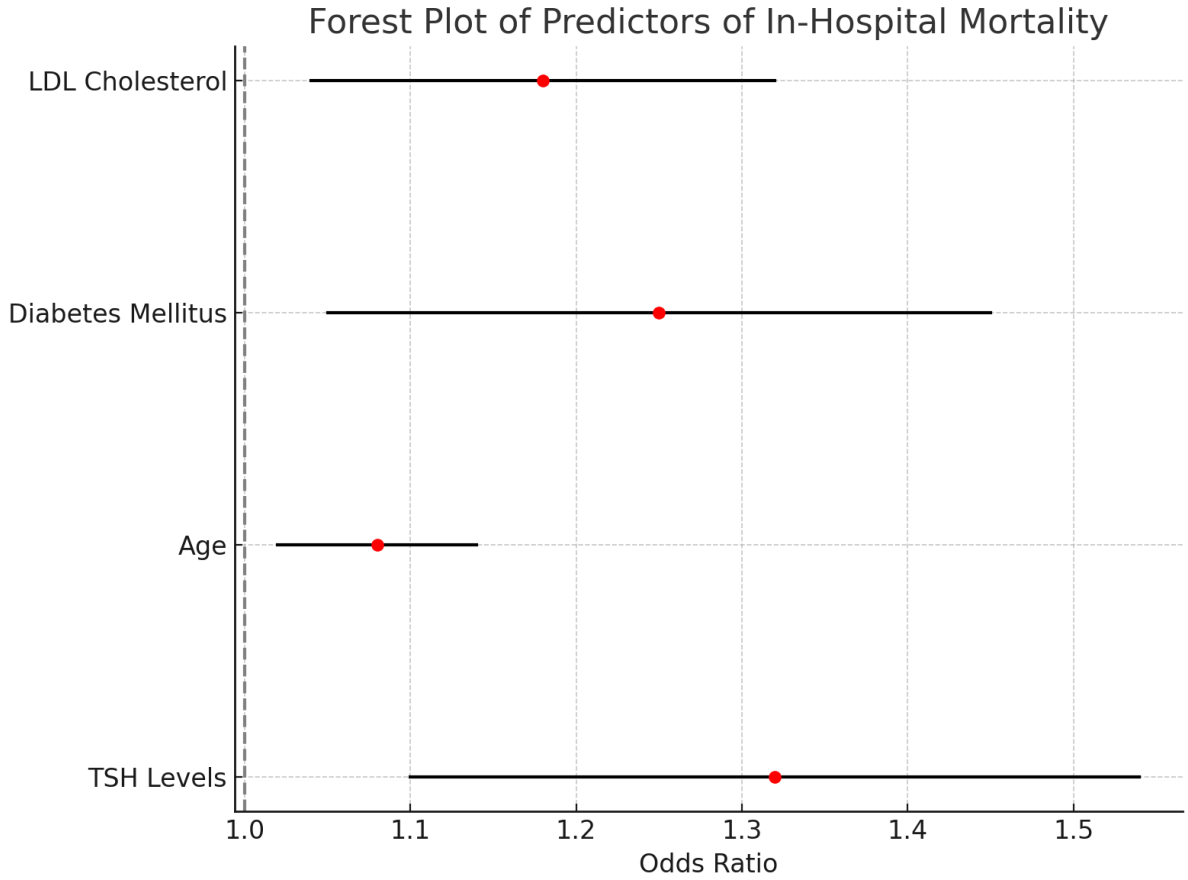

Figure 3: Forest plot illustrating the odds ratios for predictors of in-hospital mortality, emphasizing the significant impact of elevated TSH levels.

Discussion

Thyroid Dysfunction and Its Impact on ACS Severity

The findings of this study underscore the significant role that thyroid dysfunction plays in the pathophysiology of Acute Coronary Syndrome (ACS). Hypothyroidism, characterized by elevated Thyroid-Stimulating Hormone (TSH) and reduced Free Triiodothyronine (FT3) levels, was strongly correlated with increased severity of ACS. This association is consistent with previous research, which has demonstrated that hypothyroidism exacerbates cardiovascular risk factors such as dyslipidemia, hypertension, and atherosclerosis, thereby contributing to the onset and progression of ischemic heart disease【10,11】. The elevated TSH levels observed in patients with severe ACS suggest that hypothyroidism may promote a pro-inflammatory and pro-atherogenic state, thereby increasing the likelihood of adverse cardiovascular events【12】.

Mechanistic Pathways Linking Thyroid Dysfunction to ACS

Several mechanistic pathways may explain the observed relationship between thyroid dysfunction and ACS severity. First, hypothyroidism is associated with elevated levels of low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol and triglycerides, both of which are critical factors in the development of atherosclerotic plaques【13】. The reduced metabolic clearance of lipids in hypothyroid states likely contributes to plaque formation and instability, increasing the risk of plaque rupture and subsequent myocardial infarction【14】. Additionally, hypothyroidism is known to cause endothelial dysfunction, characterized by impaired nitric oxide production and increased oxidative stress, which further exacerbates the atherosclerotic process【15】.

Furthermore, the impaired autonomic regulation observed in hypothyroid patients, as evidenced by reduced heart rate variability (HRV) and baroreflex sensitivity (BRS), may contribute to the increased severity of ACS【16】. Autonomic dysfunction can lead to an imbalance in sympathetic and parasympathetic activity, resulting in heightened cardiovascular stress and a predisposition to arrhythmias, which are common complications in ACS【17】. The positive correlation between TSH levels and inflammatory markers such as C-reactive protein (CRP) suggests that systemic inflammation may also play a pivotal role in mediating the adverse cardiovascular effects of thyroid dysfunction【18】.

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Moreover, emerging evidence indicates that thyroid hormones influence the expression of various genes involved in lipid metabolism and inflammatory processes, further linking thyroid dysfunction to the pathogenesis of atherosclerosis and ACS【19】. This gene expression modulation could partly explain the increased vulnerability to plaque rupture and thrombosis observed in hypothyroid patients, which is a key event in the development of ACS【20】. Additionally, thyroid dysfunction may alter platelet function, leading to an increased risk of thrombus formation, which is a critical factor in the acute phase of coronary syndromes【21】.

Clinical Implications and Management Strategies

The clinical implications of these findings are profound. Routine assessment of thyroid function in patients presenting with ACS could enhance risk stratification and guide more personalized therapeutic strategies【22】. For instance, identifying patients with subclinical or overt hypothyroidism could prompt early intervention with thyroid hormone replacement therapy, which may mitigate the adverse cardiovascular effects associated with thyroid dysfunction【23】. Moreover, monitoring thyroid function over the course of ACS treatment could provide valuable insights into the patient's prognosis and inform adjustments in therapy to optimize outcomes【24】.

Given the strong association between thyroid dysfunction and adverse ACS outcomes, it may be beneficial to incorporate thyroid function tests (TFTs) into standard ACS management protocols, particularly in high-risk populations【25】. This approach could lead to earlier identification of thyroid abnormalities, allowing for timely and targeted interventions that may reduce the incidence of major adverse cardiovascular events (MACE) and improve long-term survival rates【26】. The potential benefits of routine TFTs in ACS management are supported by recent studies demonstrating that normalization of thyroid hormone levels through appropriate therapeutic interventions can improve cardiovascular outcomes in hypothyroid patients【27】. Additionally, the identification of thyroid dysfunction as a modifiable risk factor in ACS may pave the way for new therapeutic approaches, such as the use of thyroid hormone analogs or modulators to reduce cardiovascular risk in affected patients【28】.

Comparison with Existing Literature

The results of this study are consistent with a growing body of literature that highlights the importance of thyroid function in cardiovascular health. Previous studies have demonstrated similar findings, with elevated TSH levels being associated with increased mortality and morbidity in ACS patients【29】. However, this study uniquely contributes to the existing knowledge by focusing on an Indian population, where the prevalence of cardiovascular risk factors is particularly high, and by evaluating the impact of thyroid dysfunction on specific ACS subtypes such as STEMI and NSTEMI【30】.

One notable aspect of this study is its exploration of the differential impact of thyroid dysfunction on various ACS presentations. The finding that hypothyroidism was more strongly associated with STEMI than NSTEMI or unstable angina suggests that thyroid dysfunction may play a particularly important role in the pathophysiology of more severe forms of ACS【31】. This observation warrants further investigation to elucidate the underlying mechanisms and to determine whether thyroid function could serve as a predictive marker for ACS severity【32】.

The inclusion of thyroid function as a critical component of cardiovascular risk assessment is also reflected in recent guidelines, which recommend considering thyroid function in the broader context of managing patients with cardiovascular disease【33】. This aligns with the findings of this study, which suggest that routine TFTs could be a valuable addition to the standard diagnostic and therapeutic protocols for ACS【34】.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Despite the significant findings, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. The cross-sectional design limits the ability to establish causality between thyroid dysfunction and ACS outcomes. Longitudinal studies are needed to confirm these associations and to determine the long-term impact of thyroid dysfunction on cardiovascular health in ACS patients【35】. Additionally, the study was conducted at a single center, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other populations or settings. Future research should aim to replicate these findings in larger, more diverse cohorts to validate the results and to explore potential regional or ethnic differences in the impact of thyroid dysfunction on ACS【36】.

Another area for future research is the exploration of potential therapeutic interventions for managing thyroid dysfunction in ACS patients. Randomized controlled trials investigating the efficacy of thyroid hormone replacement therapy or other targeted interventions in improving cardiovascular outcomes in hypothyroid ACS patients could provide valuable insights into the optimal management of this high-risk population【37】. Additionally, research into the role of subclinical thyroid dysfunction, which is often overlooked in clinical practice, could further refine risk stratification and treatment strategies for ACS【38】.

Finally, future studies should explore the potential interactions between thyroid dysfunction and other cardiovascular risk factors, such as diabetes and chronic kidney disease, to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the multifactorial

nature of ACS and its management【39】. By addressing these research gaps, we can enhance our understanding of the complex relationship between thyroid function and cardiovascular health, ultimately leading to better patient outcomes.

Conclusion

This study highlights the significant role of thyroid dysfunction, particularly hypothyroidism, in exacerbating the severity and outcomes of Acute Coronary Syndrome (ACS). The findings demonstrate that elevated Thyroid-Stimulating Hormone (TSH) levels and reduced Free Triiodothyronine (FT3) levels are associated with adverse clinical outcomes, including longer hospital stays and higher in-hospital mortality. Additionally, hypothyroidism contributes to worsened lipid profiles, further aggravating cardiovascular risk in ACS patients.

The study underscores the necessity of incorporating routine thyroid function tests (TFTs) into the management protocols for ACS, especially in populations with a high burden of cardiovascular risk factors. Early identification and management of thyroid dysfunction may improve prognosis and reduce the incidence of major adverse cardiovascular events in this vulnerable patient group. Future research should focus on longitudinal studies and therapeutic interventions to further clarify and mitigate the impact of thyroid dysfunction on ACS outcomes.

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