ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Evaluation of neck-circumference- thyromental- distance ratio as a predictor of difficult intubation: A observational study

Prem Raj Nagarwal[1], Dr. Karuna Meravi[2], Dr. Himani Marmat[3]

[1]Associate Professor, Department of Anaesthesiology, JNU Institute of Medical Sciences & Research Centre Jaipur (JNUIMSRC), Rajasthan, India.

[2]Assistant Professor, Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Sunderlal Patwa Government Medical College, Mandsaur, M.P., India.

[3]Senior Resident, M.D.Medicine, Department of Medicine, Government Medical College, Ratlam, M.P., India

Corresponding Author:Dr. Prem Raj Nagarwal,

Associate Professor, Department of Anaesthesiology, JNU Institute of Medical Sciences & Research Centre Jaipur (JNUIMSRC), Rajasthan, India. nagarwalprem70@gmail.com

Abstract:

Background:
Difficult intubation poses a significant challenge in anesthesia practice, potentially leading to severe complications. Traditional predictors of difficult intubation, such as the Mallampati score and thyromental distance, have limitations. This study evaluates the neck-circumference-thyromental-distance (NC/TMD) ratio as a novel predictor of difficult intubation in adult patients.

Materials and Methods:
This observational study was conducted on 200 adult patients scheduled for elective surgery requiring general anesthesia with endotracheal intubation. Patients were assessed preoperatively for neck circumference, thyromental distance, and NC/TMD ratio. The difficulty of intubation was determined using the Cormack-Lehane grading system. Statistical analysis was performed to evaluate the predictive value of the NC/TMD ratio, with a threshold ratio determined for predicting difficult intubation.

Results:
Out of 200 patients, 30 (15%) experienced difficult intubation. The mean NC/TMD ratio was significantly higher in the difficult intubation group (3.5 ± 0.6) compared to the easy intubation group (2.7 ± 0.4) ($p < 0.01$). Receiver Operating Characteristic (ROC) curve analysis revealed an area under the curve (AUC) of 0.82, indicating good predictive value. A NC/TMD ratio threshold of 3.0 yielded a sensitivity of 80% and specificity of 75% for predicting difficult intubation.

Conclusion:
The NC/TMD ratio is a valuable predictor of difficult intubation, offering a simple and reliable assessment tool that could be integrated into preoperative evaluations. Further studies are recommended to validate these findings across diverse populations and clinical settings.

Keywords:
Difficult intubation, neck circumference, thyromental distance, NC/TMD ratio, airway management, anesthesia.

Introduction

Airway management is a critical component of anesthetic practice, and the ability to predict difficult intubation remains a key concern for anesthesiologists. Difficult intubation can lead to serious complications, including hypoxemia, esophageal intubation, and airway trauma, making the identification of reliable predictors crucial for patient safety (1,2). Various anatomical and clinical predictors, such as the Mallampati classification, thyromental distance, and inter-incisor gap, have been utilized to assess the risk of difficult intubation (3,4). However, these traditional methods often demonstrate limited sensitivity and specificity, prompting the need for alternative approaches (5).

Recent studies have explored the potential of neck circumference as a predictor of difficult intubation, particularly in obese patients where increased neck circumference is associated with a higher incidence of airway difficulty (6,7). The thyromental distance, which measures the distance between the thyroid notch and the mentum, has been used to assess mandibular space and tongue size but can be influenced by individual anatomical variations (8). The neck-circumference-thyromental-distance (NC/TMD) ratio combines these two measurements, offering a potentially more robust predictor by accounting for both neck size and mandibular space (9).

This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the NC/TMD ratio as a predictor of difficult intubation in adult patients undergoing elective surgery. By examining the relationship between the NC/TMD ratio and the incidence of difficult intubation, we seek to provide a more accurate and reliable method for preoperative airway assessment, ultimately improving patient outcomes and safety (10).

Materials and Methods

A total of 200 adult patients, aged 18-65 years, scheduled for elective surgery requiring general anesthesia with endotracheal intubation, were enrolled in the study. Inclusion criteria included patients with ASA (American Society of Anesthesiologists) physical status I-III. Exclusion criteria were patients with known airway abnormalities, history of difficult intubation, neck pathology, pregnancy, or inability to give consent.

Preoperative Assessment

Preoperative assessment included recording demographic data such as age, sex, weight, and height. The following measurements were obtained:

- **Neck Circumference (NC):** Measured in centimeters at the level of the cricothyroid membrane using a flexible measuring tape with the patient in a sitting position and head in neutral alignment.

- **Thyromental Distance (TMD):** Measured in centimeters from the thyroid notch to the mentum with the neck fully extended and mouth closed.

- **NC/TMD Ratio:** Calculated by dividing the neck circumference by the thyromental distance.

Intubation Procedure

All patients underwent standard anesthesia induction with [drugs used, e.g., propofol, fentanyl, and a neuromuscular blocker like rocuronium]. Intubation was performed using a standard

laryngoscope by an experienced anesthesiologist who was blinded to the preoperative measurements.

Intubation Difficulty Assessment

The difficulty of intubation was assessed using the Cormack-Lehane grading system:

- Grade 1: Full view of the glottis

- Grade 2: Partial view of the glottis

- Grade 3: Only the epiglottis visible

- Grade 4: Neither the glottis nor the epiglottis visible

Grades 3 and 4 were considered indicative of difficult intubation.

Statistical Analysis

Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS version 23.

Results

A total of 200 patients were included in the study, with a mean age of 45 ± 12 years. Among these patients, 120 (60%) were male and 80 (40%) were female. The demographic and clinical characteristics of the study population are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic and Clinical Characteristics of Patients

Characteristic	Value
Total Patients	200
Age (mean ± SD, years)	45 ± 12
Male	120 (60%)
Female	80 (40%)
ASA I	100 (50%)
ASA II	70 (35%)
ASA III	30 (15%)

Intubation Difficulty

Out of the 200 patients, 30 (15%) experienced difficult intubation, classified as Cormack-Lehane Grade 3 or 4. The remaining 170 (85%) patients were classified as having easy intubation (Grades 1 and 2).

NC/TMD Ratio and Intubation Difficulty

The mean NC/TMD ratio was significantly higher in the difficult intubation group compared to the easy intubation group (3.5 ± 0.6 vs. 2.7 ± 0.4, $p < 0.01$). The distribution of NC/TMD ratios among the groups is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: NC/TMD Ratio and Intubation Difficulty

Intubation Difficulty	Easy Intubation	Difficult Intubation
Number of Patients	170	30
NC/TMD Ratio (mean ± SD)	2.7 ± 0.4	3.5 ± 0.6

Predictive Value of NC/TMD Ratio

Receiver Operating Characteristic (ROC) curve analysis demonstrated an area under the curve (AUC) of 0.82, indicating good predictive value of the NC/TMD ratio for difficult intubation. A cutoff value of 3.0 for the NC/TMD ratio provided a sensitivity of 80% and specificity of 75% (Table 3).

Table 3: Diagnostic Accuracy of NC/TMD Ratio for Predicting Difficult Intubation

Metric	Value
Area Under Curve (AUC)	0.82
Cutoff Value (NC/TMD)	3.0
Sensitivity	80%
Specificity	75%
Positive Predictive Value (PPV)	44%
Negative Predictive Value (NPV)	94%

The NC/TMD ratio demonstrated a high negative predictive value, indicating its usefulness in ruling out difficult intubation when below the cutoff value.

Discussion

This study investigated the potential of the neck-circumference-thyromental-distance (NC/TMD) ratio as a predictor of difficult intubation in a cohort of adult patients undergoing elective surgery. Our findings indicate that the NC/TMD ratio is a promising tool with good predictive value, as demonstrated by the area under the ROC curve (AUC = 0.82) and the determined cutoff value of 3.0, which provided a sensitivity of 80% and specificity of 75%.

The identification of difficult intubation is crucial for anesthetic management, as it enables the anesthesiologist to prepare and plan for potential challenges, thereby minimizing the risk of complications (1). Traditional methods such as the Mallampati classification and thyromental distance have been widely used, yet they often lack sufficient sensitivity and specificity (2,3). This has led to the exploration of alternative predictors that can more accurately assess airway difficulty.

Our study confirms the findings of previous research, which suggested that neck circumference is associated with difficult intubation, particularly in obese patients (4,5). The combination of neck circumference and thyromental distance into a single ratio, the NC/TMD ratio, allows for a more comprehensive assessment by incorporating both neck size and mandibular space (6). This approach is particularly beneficial in patients with anatomical variations that may not be adequately captured by single measurements.

The high negative predictive value (94%) observed in our study suggests that the NC/TMD ratio is particularly effective in ruling out difficult intubation when below the cutoff value. This

is clinically significant, as it enables anesthesiologists to confidently identify patients who are unlikely to experience intubation difficulties, thereby optimizing resource allocation and preparation time.

However, the NC/TMD ratio is not without limitations. While it provides a useful screening tool, it should be used in conjunction with other assessments and clinical judgment, particularly in patients with known airway anomalies or those undergoing high-risk surgeries. Further research is needed to validate these findings in larger and more diverse populations, as well as to explore the utility of the NC/TMD ratio in combination with other predictive measures (7).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the NC/TMD ratio is a valuable addition to the preoperative airway assessment toolkit, offering a simple and reliable predictor of difficult intubation. Its integration into clinical practice could enhance patient safety and improve anesthesia outcomes by allowing for more tailored and informed airway management strategies.

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