Journal of Neonatal Surgery
ISSN(Online): 2226-0439
Vol. 14, Issue 15s (2025)
https://www.jneonatalsurg.com

OPEN ACCESS

A Study on QT Dispersion before and After Thrombolysis in Acute Myocardial Infarction and Its Prognostic Implications: A before and After Comparison Study.

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Cite this paper as: Dr Amulya Reddy. V, Dr Prabhakar K, Dr Anitha A, (2025) A Study on QT Dispersion before and After Thrombolysis in Acute Myocardial Infarction and Its Prognostic Implications: A before and After Comparison Study. *Journal of Neonatal Surgery*, 14 (15s), 2075-2081.

ABSTRACT

Background and Objectives: Acute myocardial infarction (AMI), particularly ST-segment elevation myocardial infarction (STEMI), is associated with increased morbidity and mortality. QT dispersion (QTd), a measure of ventricular repolarization heterogeneity, is known to predict arrhythmic risk. This study evaluates changes in QT, corrected QT (QTc), QTd, and corrected QT dispersion (QTcd) before and after thrombolysis in STEMI and their prognostic relevance. To assess changes in QT interval parameters before and after thrombolytic therapy in STEMI patients and explore their implications for arrhythmia prediction and short-term clinical outcomes.

Methods: This prospective, observational before-and-after study was conducted over three months in the ICU of R.L. Jalappa Hospital, Kolar. A total of 25 STEMI patients undergoing thrombolysis were enrolled. Standard 12-lead ECGs were obtained before and 90 minutes after thrombolysis. QT, QTc, QTd, and QTcd were manually measured. Statistical analysis was performed using paired t-tests, with $p < 0.05$ considered significant.

Results: The mean age was 58.4 ± 10.2 years, with a male predominance (72%). Post-thrombolysis, QT interval decreased significantly from 0.37 ± 0.06 s to 0.34 ± 0.05 s ($p=0.001$); QTd reduced from 68.4 ± 12.3 ms to 52.6 ± 10.8 ms ($p<0.001$); QTcd declined from 76.2 ± 13.4 ms to 59.8 ± 11.7 ms ($p<0.001$). Greater reductions in QT dispersion were seen in anterior wall MI and those receiving thrombolysis within 3 hours. Eight patients (32%) experienced reperfusion arrhythmias. Higher post-thrombolysis QT dispersion was associated with complications such as heart failure ($p=0.04$) and mortality ($p=0.01$).

Conclusion: Thrombolysis significantly reduces QT and QT dispersion parameters, indicating improved electrical stability post-reperfusion. Higher residual QT dispersion post-thrombolysis may predict adverse short-term outcomes, suggesting its potential role as a non-invasive prognostic tool in STEMI management.

Keywords: *Acute Myocardial Infarction, QT Dispersion, Thrombolysis, ST-Elevation Myocardial Infarction, QTc, Reperfusion Arrhythmias, ECG, Prognostic Markers*

1. INTRODUCTION

Acute myocardial infarction (AMI) continues to be a leading cause of morbidity and mortality worldwide despite advancements in early detection and management. It represents a state of myocardial necrosis resulting from an abrupt reduction or cessation of coronary blood flow, most commonly due to plaque rupture and subsequent thrombus formation. Among the different types of myocardial infarction, ST-segment elevation myocardial infarction (STEMI) is considered the most severe form, demanding immediate reperfusion therapy to minimize myocardial damage and improve clinical outcomes.[1,2,3]

In the setting of AMI, the myocardium undergoes ischemic changes that not only compromise contractile function but also significantly impact electrical conduction within the heart. These alterations in electrical activity predispose patients to life-threatening arrhythmias, particularly in the early phase following infarction. Hence, early identification of markers that predict arrhythmogenic risk becomes essential in optimizing patient care.[4,5,6]

One such marker that has gained considerable attention is QT dispersion (QTd), a non-invasive electrocardiographic

parameter defined as the difference between the maximum and minimum QT intervals measured across the 12 standard ECG leads. It serves as an indirect measure of the heterogeneity of ventricular repolarization. Increased QTd is associated with a higher risk of ventricular arrhythmias and sudden cardiac death, particularly in patients with structural heart diseases such as AMI. Similarly, corrected QT dispersion (QTcd), which accounts for heart rate variability using formulas like Bazett's, further refines this risk stratification.[7,8]

Thrombolysis is one of the cornerstone therapies in the acute management of STEMI, especially in resource-limited settings where percutaneous coronary intervention (PCI) is not immediately available. Thrombolytic agents work by lysing the occluding thrombus, restoring blood flow, and reducing myocardial ischemia. Successful thrombolysis is expected to normalize electrical instability caused by ischemia, including a reduction in QT dispersion. Evaluating QTd before and after thrombolysis can, therefore, offer valuable insights into the effectiveness of reperfusion and the potential for arrhythmic complications.[9,10,11]

Despite its clinical utility, QT dispersion remains underutilized in routine practice, partly due to concerns over measurement variability. However, with standardized techniques and consistent methodology, it can be a valuable and cost-effective tool for monitoring high-risk patients post-MI.[12]

The present study aims to explore the changes in QT interval parameters—specifically QT, corrected QT (QTc), QTd, and QTcd—before and after thrombolytic therapy in STEMI patients and to investigate their prognostic significance. By doing so, we hope to better understand the electrical remodeling associated with successful reperfusion and provide a simple, non-invasive tool for post-thrombolysis risk assessment.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS-

This is a prospective, hospital-based, observational study with a before-and-after comparison design conducted to evaluate the changes in QT dispersion parameters following thrombolysis in patients with acute ST-segment elevation myocardial infarction (STEMI).

The study was carried out in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) of the Department of General Medicine at R.L. Jalappa Hospital and Research Centre, a tertiary care teaching hospital affiliated with Sri Devaraj Urs Medical College, Kolar. The study duration was three months, from October 2024 to January 2025.

The study population consisted of adult patients admitted with a confirmed diagnosis of STEMI who received thrombolytic therapy during the study period. The diagnosis of STEMI was made based on clinical history, characteristic electrocardiographic changes (ST-segment elevation of >1 mm in at least two contiguous leads), and supportive cardiac biomarker evidence.

Sample Size and Sampling Method

A total of 25 patients were enrolled in the study. The sample size was calculated using data from a previous study conducted by Mehta. et al.[15], where the mean QT interval before thrombolysis was 0.37 ± 0.06 seconds and after thrombolysis was 0.34 ± 0.06 seconds. At a confidence level of 95% and power of 80%, the minimum sample size was estimated to be 22. Considering a 10% non-response or dropout rate, the final sample size was rounded to 25. Patients were selected using a **convenience sampling** technique based on eligibility criteria.

Inclusion Criteria

- Patients aged ≥18 years.
- Patients with a confirmed diagnosis of STEMI.
- Patients who received thrombolytic therapy (e.g., Streptokinase).
- Patients who provided informed written consent for participation.

Exclusion Criteria

- Patients with previous history of myocardial infarction.
- Patients with known congenital long QT syndrome or bundle branch blocks.
- Patients on medications known to alter QT interval (e.g., antiarrhythmics, antipsychotics).
- Electrolyte imbalances not corrected before ECG measurement.
- Poor quality ECGs or incomplete data.

Data Collection Procedure

After obtaining informed consent, a structured proforma was used to collect detailed clinical data including demographic

profile, risk factors (hypertension, diabetes mellitus, smoking, alcohol consumption), drug history, and past medical history.

All patients underwent a standard 12-lead ECG recording before thrombolysis (baseline) and 90 minutes after the administration of thrombolytic therapy.
ECGs were recorded at a paper speed of 25 mm/s and amplitude of 10 mm/mV. QT intervals were measured manually using calipers and magnifying lens to increase accuracy.

Parameters Measured:

- **QT interval**: The time from the onset of the QRS complex to the end of the T wave.
- **QT dispersion (QTd)**: Difference between maximum and minimum QT interval across the 12 ECG leads.
- **Corrected QT interval (QTc)**: Calculated using Bazett's formula: $QTc = QT/\sqrt{RR}$.
- **Corrected QT dispersion (QTcd)**: The difference between maximum and minimum QTc intervals across all leads.

Each ECG was interpreted by two independent physicians who were blinded to each other's readings to minimize bias. The primary outcome was the change in QT and QT dispersion parameters (QT, QTc, QTd, QTcd) before and after thrombolysis. Secondary observations included the occurrence of reperfusion arrhythmias and clinical outcomes within 24 hours post-thrombolysis.

Ethical Considerations

The study was approved by the **Institutional Ethics Committee (IEC)** of Sri Devaraj Urs Medical College. Informed written consent was obtained from all participants prior to their enrollment. Patient confidentiality and data privacy were strictly maintained throughout the study in accordance with ethical guidelines.

Statistical Analysis

Data were compiled and entered into Microsoft Excel and analyzed using **IBM SPSS software version 22**.

- **Categorical variables** were expressed as frequencies and percentages.
- **Continuous variables** were presented as mean ± standard deviation (SD).
- **Paired t-test** was used to assess the significance of mean differences between pre- and post-thrombolysis QT and QT dispersion values.
- A **p-value < 0.05** was considered statistically significant.

3. RESULTS-

Table 1: Baseline Characteristics of the Study Population (n = 25)

Parameter	Number (%) / Mean ± SD
Age (years)	58.4 ± 10.2
Gender	Male: 18 (72%), Female: 7 (28%)
Hypertension	15 (60%)
Diabetes Mellitus	12 (48%)
Smoking	14 (56%)
Alcohol Consumption	10 (40%)
Anterior Wall MI	16 (64%)
Inferior Wall MI	9 (36%)
Time to Thrombolysis (in hours)	3.2 ± 1.4

Out of the 25 patients included in the study, **18 (72%) were males** and **7 (28%) were females**, with a **mean age of 58.4 ± 10.2 years** (range: 42–78 years).

Table 2: ECG Parameter Comparison Before and After Thrombolysis (n = 25)

ECG Parameter	Pre-Thrombolysis (Mean ± SD)	Post-Thrombolysis (Mean ± SD)	p-value
QT Interval (s)	0.37 ± 0.06	0.34 ± 0.05	0.001 **
QTc Interval (s)	0.43 ± 0.05	0.41 ± 0.04	0.004 **
QT Dispersion (ms)	68.4 ± 12.3	52.6 ± 10.8	<0.001 **
Corrected QT Dispersion (ms)	76.2 ± 13.4	59.8 ± 11.7	<0.001 **

**p-value < 0.05 considered statistically significant
** indicates highly significant difference

A statistically significant reduction in QT and QTc intervals was observed post-thrombolysis. Patients with greater reductions in QT dispersion were more likely to develop transient reperfusion arrhythmias, often considered a marker of successful thrombolysis.

Table 3: Association Between Reperfusion Arrhythmias and QT Dispersion Change

Parameter	With Arrhythmias (n=8)	Without Arrhythmias (n=17)	p-value
Mean Decrease in QTd (ms)	20.8 ± 6.2	13.1 ± 5.4	0.07
QT Dispersion After Thrombolysis (ms)	50.4 ± 9.8	54.3 ± 10.1	0.29

Reperfusion arrhythmias were observed in 8 patients (32%) within 1 hour of thrombolysis. These included accelerated idioventricular rhythm (AIVR) in 4 patients, transient ventricular ectopics in 3, and one case of non-sustained ventricular tachycardia (NSVT). Patients who developed reperfusion arrhythmias showed a greater reduction in QT dispersion (average decrease of 20.8 ms) compared to those without arrhythmias (average decrease of 13.1 ms), although this was not statistically significant ($p = 0.07$).

Table 4: QT Dispersion Changes Based on Infarct Location

MI Type	QT Dispersion Pre (ms)	QT Dispersion Post (ms)	Mean Change (ms)	p-value
Anterior Wall MI (n=16)	72.3 ± 11.7	53.4 ± 10.5	18.9 ± 6.1	<0.001 **
Inferior Wall MI (n=9)	61.1 ± 10.2	51.1 ± 11.2	10.0 ± 5.3	0.005 **

QT dispersion was higher in anterior wall MI both before and after thrombolysis, and the reduction was more pronounced than in inferior wall MI.

Table 5: Effect of Time to Thrombolysis on QT Dispersion Reduction

Time to Thrombolysis	Number of Patients	QT Dispersion Pre (ms)	QT Dispersion Post (ms)	Mean Change (ms)	p-value
≤3 hours	14	66.8 ± 11.9	49.1 ± 10.2	17.7 ± 6.4	<0.001 **
>3 hours	11	70.5 ± 12.7	56.8 ± 11.6	13.7 ± 6.0	0.02 *

Earlier thrombolysis (within 3 hours) was associated with greater reduction in QT dispersion, suggesting better myocardial salvage.

Table 6: QT Dispersion and 7-Day Outcomes

Outcome	Number of Patients	Mean QT Dispersion Post (ms)	p-value
Uneventful Recovery	18	51.3 ± 9.8	–
Heart Failure (Killip II–III)	5	59.7 ± 12.2	0.04 *
Mortality (in-hospital)	2	68.0 ± 9.2	0.01 *

Patients with higher QT dispersion post-thrombolysis had poorer short-term outcomes, including **higher incidence of complications and mortality.**

Table 7: Stratification Based on Post-Thrombolysis QTc Interval

QTc Interval Post (ms)	Number of Patients	Reperfusion Arrhythmias (%)	Complications (HF/Mortality) (%)
<440 ms	15	4 (26.7%)	2 (13.3%)
440–460 ms	7	3 (42.8%)	2 (28.6%)
>460 ms	3	1 (33.3%)	3 (100%)

A prolonged QTc interval post-thrombolysis was associated with increased complication rates, including mortality.

4. DISCUSSION-

The present study was undertaken to evaluate the change in QT dispersion before and after thrombolysis in patients with acute myocardial infarction (AMI) and to assess its prognostic significance. Our findings demonstrate a statistically significant reduction in QT dispersion post-thrombolysis, reinforcing the potential of QT dispersion as a surrogate marker for successful reperfusion and predictor of short-term outcomes.

In this study, the mean QT dispersion significantly decreased from **68.2 ± 12.3 ms to 52.8 ± 11.4 ms** post-thrombolysis ($p < 0.001$), consistent with earlier reports. Kautzner et al. (1994) were among the first to show that successful reperfusion by thrombolysis leads to a reduction in QT dispersion, suggesting that the normalization of ventricular repolarization heterogeneity could reflect myocardial salvage and restoration of perfusion.[11]

Patients with anterior wall MI in our cohort exhibited higher baseline and post-thrombolysis QT dispersion compared to inferior wall MI patients (pre: 72.3 ms vs 61.1 ms, post: 53.4 ms vs 51.1 ms). This aligns with findings from Barr et al. (1994), who reported greater electrical instability and arrhythmogenic potential in anterior infarcts due to larger myocardial territory involved. These findings further underscore the significance of QT dispersion as a reflection of infarct size and location.[12]

Our study highlighted a greater reduction in QT dispersion among patients thrombolyzed within 3 hours of symptom onset compared to those thrombolyzed later (mean reduction: 17.7 ms vs 13.7 ms; $p < 0.05$). The QT dispersion reduction thus acts as a non-invasive electrocardiographic indicator of early reperfusion success.

A key observation was that patients with persistently high QT dispersion post-thrombolysis were more likely to develop complications, including heart failure and in-hospital mortality. This is in accordance with the findings by Zareba et al. (1995), who noted that a QT dispersion >60 ms post-MI was associated with increased risk of ventricular arrhythmias and adverse outcomes. In our study, both patients who died had QT dispersion >65 ms after thrombolysis, suggesting a strong prognostic implication.[13]

Moreover, our data revealed that patients with QTc intervals >460 ms post-thrombolysis had **100% complication rate**, a finding in agreement with Malik et al. (1994), who highlighted the correlation between prolonged QTc and electrical instability in post-infarction patients.[14]

The incidence of reperfusion arrhythmias (32%) in our study was consistent with previously reported rates in thrombolyzed AMI patients. According to a study by Mehta et al. (2000), reperfusion arrhythmias may occur in up to 50% of patients receiving thrombolytics, often paralleling changes in QT intervals. Although these arrhythmias are usually benign, the presence of higher QT dispersion among these patients suggests transient electrical instability during reperfusion.[15]

Study	Sample Size	QT Dispersion Reduction Post-Thrombolysis	Prognostic Link Observed	Our Study
Kautzner et al. (1994)[11]	48	Significant	Yes	Yes
Barr et al. (1994)[12]	60	Yes (anterior MI > inferior MI)	Yes	Yes
Zareba et al. (1995)[13]	120	Yes	Yes (QTd > 60 ms)	Yes
Our Study	25	Significant	Yes	–

Clinical Implications

This study strengthens the role of QT dispersion as a **simple, cost-effective, and non-invasive ECG marker** for assessing reperfusion success and predicting outcomes after thrombolysis in AMI. In resource-limited settings where advanced imaging or angiography may not be readily available, serial QT dispersion analysis can aid in triaging high-risk patients and anticipating complications.

5. LIMITATIONS

- Small sample size (n=25) may limit the generalizability of results.
- QT measurements were manually performed; automated systems may offer greater precision.
- Long-term outcomes beyond the 7-day period were not assessed.
- Influence of comorbidities and medications on QT intervals was not deeply explored.

Future Directions

Larger, multi-centric studies with long-term follow-up are needed to validate QT dispersion as a routine prognostic tool. Additionally, exploring QT variability in relation to newer reperfusion strategies like **primary PCI** or **thrombolytic adjuvants** may offer broader insights.

6. CONCLUSION-

This study demonstrates that QT dispersion significantly decreases following thrombolytic therapy in patients with acute myocardial infarction, highlighting its potential utility as a non-invasive marker of successful reperfusion. A greater reduction in QT dispersion was observed in patients thrombolyzed within the golden window (≤3 hours), and anterior wall infarctions were associated with higher baseline and post-thrombolysis QT dispersion compared to inferior wall infarctions.

Importantly, persistently elevated QT dispersion after thrombolysis was associated with adverse in-hospital outcomes, including heart failure and mortality, suggesting a prognostic value of QT dispersion in predicting short-term complications. These findings are consistent with earlier studies and reinforce the clinical relevance of QT dispersion analysis in acute coronary care settings.

Given its simplicity, cost-effectiveness, and wide accessibility, QT dispersion measurement should be considered as an adjunct tool in monitoring reperfusion efficacy and stratifying risk in AMI patients undergoing thrombolysis, especially in settings where advanced imaging or invasive strategies may not be readily available. Further large-scale studies with longer follow-up are warranted to substantiate these observations and to explore its prognostic relevance across various reperfusion modalities

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