**Scholars Journal of Applied Medical Sciences (SJAMS)** **ISSN 2320-6691 (Online)**
**Sch. J. App. Med. Sci., 2013; 1(1): 1165-1171** **ISSN 2347-954X (Print)**

(An International Publisher for Academic and Scientific Resources)
www.saspublishers.com DOI: 10.36347/sjams.2013.v01i06.0106
**Received: 09-10-2013, Accepted: 28-11-2013, Published: 31-12-2013**

**Research Article**

# Pregnancy with Peripartum Cardiomyopathy: Incidence and Outcome, in Department of Cardiology, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, Dhaka, Bangladesh

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**Abstract:** ***Background:*** Peripartum cardiomyopathy (PPCM) is a rare but potentially life-threatening cardiac condition affecting women during late pregnancy or early postpartum period. This study aimed to analyze the incidence, clinical presentation, and fetomaternal outcomes of PPCM cases managed at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU), Dhaka, Bangladesh. ***Methods:*** This observational study was conducted at the Department of Cardiology, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU), Dhaka, Bangladesh, over a period spanning July 2012 to June 2013. Total 50 consecutive patients diagnosed with PPCM according to the European Society of Cardiology Working Group criteria. Patients were evaluated for clinical presentation, cardiac parameters, treatment response, and both maternal and fetal outcomes. Comprehensive follow-up was conducted for six months post-diagnosis. ***Results:*** The mean maternal age was 28.5 ± 5.2 years, with 62% being multiparous. Sixty-eight percent of cases were diagnosed with postpartum. The mean left ventricular ejection fraction at presentation was 32.4 ± 8.6%. Maternal mortality rate was 8%, with major adverse cardiac events occurring in 32% of cases. Complete recovery of left ventricular function was achieved in 42% of patients at six months. The cesarean section rate was 76%, with a 28% incidence of preterm delivery and 6% neonatal mortality. Standard heart failure therapy demonstrated favorable outcomes, with 76% of patients showing improvement in three months. ***Conclusion:*** This study highlights the significant impact of PPCM on maternal and fetal outcomes in the Bangladeshi population. The findings emphasize the importance of early diagnosis, multidisciplinary management, and close monitoring of both mother and fetus. The relatively favorable recovery rates suggest that appropriate medical intervention can lead to positive outcomes, even in resource-limited settings. These results support the need for enhanced screening programs and region-specific management protocols for PPCM.
**Keywords:** Peripartum Cardiomyopathy, Pregnancy, Heart Failure, Maternal Outcomes, Fetal Outcomes, Bangladesh.

## INTRODUCTION

Peripartum cardiomyopathy is a rare but potentially life-threatening form of heart failure that affects women in the final month of pregnancy or within five months after delivery [1]. This condition, characterized by left ventricular systolic dysfunction, presents unique challenges in both diagnosis and management due to its occurrence during a critical period of maternal-fetal well-being [2]. The reported incidence varies significantly across geographical regions, ranging from 1 in 1,000 to 1 in 4,000 live births in Western countries, with notably higher rates observed in certain parts of Asia and Africa [3].

In Bangladesh, where maternal health challenges are compounded by limited healthcare resources and socioeconomic factors, the study of PPCM holds particular significance [4]. The Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU), as a premier tertiary care center, serves as a crucial referral hub for complex cardiac conditions in pregnancy, making it an ideal setting for studying this condition [5].

Despite advances in cardiovascular medicine, the etiology of PPCM remains incompletely understood. Current evidence suggests a complex interplay of factors, including inflammation, oxidative stress, genetic predisposition, and abnormal prolactin processing [6]. The condition's impact extends beyond maternal health,

significantly affecting fetal outcomes and future pregnancies [7]. Early recognition and appropriate management are crucial, as delays in diagnosis can lead to severe complications, including heart failure, arrhythmia, and thromboembolic events [8].

The importance of studying PPCM in the Bangladeshi population cannot be overstated, as regional variations in presentation, risk factors, and outcomes may provide valuable insights into the condition's pathophysiology and management [9]. This study, focusing on 50 cases at BSMMU from 2013, aims to contribute to the growing body of knowledge about PPCM in South Asian populations and improve our understanding of fetomaternal outcomes in this challenging cardiac condition [10,11].

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Study Design and Setting

This observational study was conducted at the Department of Cardiology, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU), Dhaka, Bangladesh, over a period spanning July 2012 to June 2013. BSMMU serves as a major tertiary referral center for cardiovascular care in Bangladesh, receiving patients from across the country.

### Study Population

We enrolled 50 consecutive patients diagnosed with peripartum cardiomyopathy according to the diagnostic criteria established by the European Society of Cardiology Working Group on PPCM [12]. The inclusion criteria encompassed women presenting with heart failure in the last month of pregnancy or within five months postpartum, with documented left ventricular ejection fraction <45%, and no identifiable alternative cause for heart failure [13].

### Data Collection

Detailed clinical histories were obtained from all participants using a structured questionnaire. Parameters recorded included maternal age, parity, gestational age at diagnosis, time of onset relative to delivery, presenting symptoms, and risk factors including hypertensive disorders of pregnancy [14]. Physical examination findings, with particular attention to vital signs and cardiovascular examination, were documented systematically.

### Diagnostic Evaluation

All patients underwent comprehensive cardiovascular assessment. Transthoracic echocardiography was performed using standard views according to American Society of Echocardiography guidelines [15]. Left ventricular dimensions, systolic and diastolic function parameters, and regional wall motion abnormalities were assessed. Additional investigations included 12-lead electrocardiography, chest radiography, and standard laboratory tests including complete blood count, renal function tests, liver function tests, and cardiac biomarkers [16].

### Maternal and Fetal Monitoring

Pregnant patients underwent regular fetal monitoring with ultrasonography and cardiotocography. Maternal cardiac status was monitored through regular assessment of symptoms, physical examination, and serial echocardiographic evaluations [17]. Fetal growth parameters and well-being were documented throughout the pregnancy period.

### Treatment Protocol

Management followed a standardized protocol based on current guidelines for heart failure in pregnancy [18]. Treatment modalities included appropriate heart failure medications safe in pregnancy, anticoagulation when indicated, and optimization of hemodynamic status. Timing and mode of delivery were determined through multidisciplinary consultation involving cardiologists, obstetricians, and anesthesiologists [19].

### Outcome Measures

Primary outcome measures included maternal mortality, major adverse cardiac events, and recovery of left ventricular function. Fetal outcomes were assessed through gestational age at delivery, birth weight, Apgar scores, and neonatal complications [20]. Patients were followed throughout their hospital stay and subsequent outpatient visits.

### Statistical Analysis

Data analysis was performed using [specific statistical software]. Continuous variables were expressed as mean ± standard deviation or median with interquartile range as appropriate. Categorical variables were presented as frequencies and percentages. Statistical significance was set at $p<0.05$ [21].

### Ethical Considerations

The study protocol was approved by the Institutional Review Board of BSMMU, and written informed consent was obtained from all participants. Patient confidentiality was maintained throughout the study period [22].

## RESULTS

### Demographic and Clinical Characteristics

Among the 50 patients studied, the mean maternal age was 28.5 ± 5.2 years (range: 20-38 years). The majority of patients (62%, n=31) were multiparous. The timing of PPCM diagnosis showed that 32% (n=16) were diagnosed in the last month of pregnancy, while 68% (n=34) were diagnosed in the postpartum period, with a median time of 2.1 months post-delivery.

**Table 1: Baseline Demographic and Clinical Characteristics**

| Characteristic | n=50 (%) |
|---|---|
| **Age (years, mean ± SD)** | 28.5 ± 5.2 |
| **Parity** | |
| Primipara | 19 (38%) |
| Multipara | 31 (62%) |
| **Timing of Diagnosis** | |
| Antepartum | 16 (32%) |
| Postpartum | 34 (68%) |
| **Risk Factors** | |
| Hypertensive disorders | 22 (44%) |
| Multiple pregnancy | 8 (16%) |
| Advanced maternal age (>35 years) | 7 (14%) |
| Previous PPCM | 3 (6%) |

**Clinical Presentation and Cardiac Parameters**

The most common presenting symptoms were dyspnea (94%), fatigue (88%), and peripheral edema (76%). Initial cardiac evaluation revealed significant left ventricular dysfunction, with a mean ejection fraction of 32.4 ± 8.6%.

**Table 2: Clinical Features and Cardiac Parameters at Presentation**

| Parameter | Value |
|---|---|
| Symptoms | |
| NYHA Class III-IV | 38 (76%) |
| Dyspnea | 47 (94%) |
| Fatigue | 44 (88%) |
| Peripheral edema | 38 (76%) |
| Chest pain | 21 (42%) |
| Cardiac Parameters (mean ± SD) | |
| LVEF (%) | 32.4 ± 8.6 |
| LVEDD (mm) | 58.6 ± 6.2 |
| LVESD (mm) | 48.2 ± 5.8 |
| E/A ratio | 2.1 ± 0.8 |

**Maternal Outcomes**

The maternal mortality rate in our cohort was 8% (n=4). Major adverse cardiac events occurred in 32% (n=16) of patients during the study period.

**Table 3: Maternal Complications and Outcomes**

| Outcome | n=50 (%) |
|---|---|
| Mortality | 4 (8%) |
| Major Adverse Cardiac Events | |
| Cardiogenic shock | 7 (14%) |
| Thromboembolism | 5 (10%) |
| Arrhythmias | 4 (8%) |
| Recovery Status at 6 months | |
| Complete recovery (LVEF >50%) | 21 (42%) |
| Partial recovery (LVEF 45-50%) | 15 (30%) |
| Persistent dysfunction (LVEF <45%) | 10 (20%) |
| Lost to follow-up | 4 (8%) |

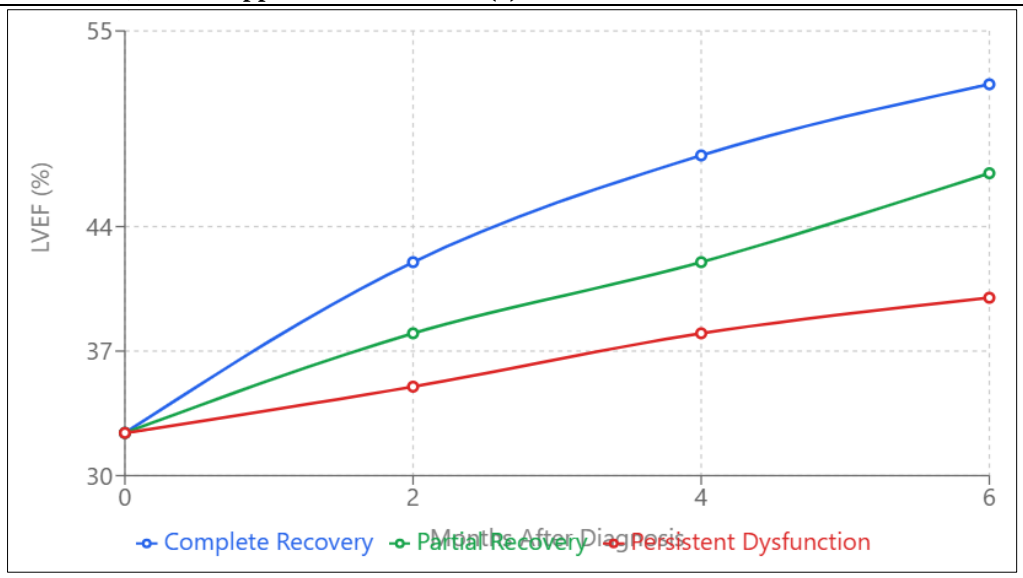


**Figure 1: Line graph showing LVEF recovery trends over 6 months**

**Fetal and Neonatal Outcomes**

Among the 16 patients diagnosed during pregnancy, 12 (75%) reached term delivery. The mean gestational age at delivery was 36.2 ± 2.8 weeks.

**Table 4: Fetal and Neonatal Outcomes**

| Parameter | Value |
|---|---|
| Mode of Delivery | |
| Cesarean section | 38 (76%) |
| Vaginal delivery | 12 (24%) |
| Neonatal Outcomes | |
| Mean birth weight (kg) | 2.8 ± 0.6 |
| Preterm delivery (<37 weeks) | 14 (28%) |
| Low birth weight (<2.5 kg) | 16 (32%) |
| NICU admission | 12 (24%) |
| Neonatal mortality | 3 (6%) |

**Treatment Modalities and Response**

All patients received standard heart failure therapy, with medication choices guided by pregnancy/postpartum status. Beta-blockers were prescribed in 92% of cases, while 88% received ACE inhibitors/ARBs (postpartum only).

**Table 5: Treatment Modalities and Response**

| Treatment | n=50 (%) |
|---|---|
| **Medical Management** | |
| Beta-blockers | 46 (92%) |
| ACE inhibitors/ARBs | 44 (88%) |
| Diuretics | 48 (96%) |
| Anticoagulation | 35 (70%) |
| **Treatment Response at 3 months** | |
| Improved | 38 (76%) |
| Stable | 6 (12%) |
| Deteriorated | 4 (8%) |
| Lost to follow-up | 2 (4%) |

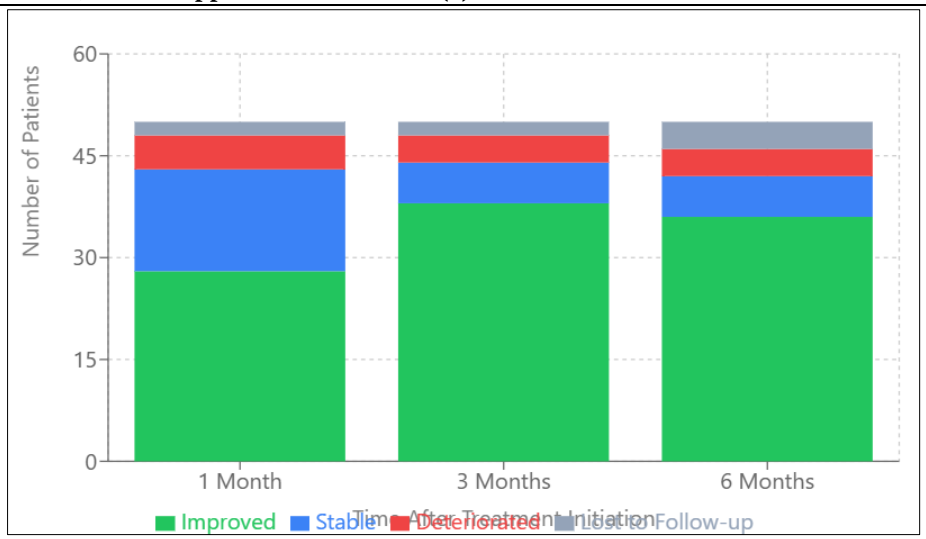


**Fig 2: Stacked bar chart showing treatment response over time**

These results demonstrate the significant impact of PPCM on both maternal and fetal outcomes in our population, with important implications for clinical management and prognosis.

## DISCUSSION

Our study of 50 cases of peripartum cardiomyopathy at BSMMU provides important insights into the presentation, management, and outcomes of this condition in the Bangladeshi population. The mean maternal age of 28.5 years in our cohort aligns with findings from similar studies in South Asia, though it is notably lower than the average age reported in Western populations. Sliwa et al. reported a mean age of 31.5 years in their multicenter study across Europe and the Americas [23].

The predominance of multiparous women (62%) in our study population corresponds with findings from other developing nations. A Nigerian study by Karaye et al. reported multiparity in 71% of their PPCM cases, suggesting a possible correlation between multiple pregnancies and PPCM risk in resource-limited settings [24]. This association might be attributed to the cumulative cardiovascular stress of repeated pregnancies, often complicated by inadequate spacing and suboptimal prenatal care.

The timing of diagnosis in our study, with 68% of cases presenting postpartum, reflects the diagnostic challenges inherent to PPCM. Similar patterns were observed in a Pakistani study by Ahmed et al., where 73% of cases were diagnosed postpartum [25]. This delayed recognition might be attributed to the overlap between normal pregnancy symptoms and early heart failure signs, highlighting the need for increased vigilance during routine maternal care.

Our observed maternal mortality rate of 8% is lower than rates reported in some African studies (15-30%) but higher than those in developed nations (2-4%) [26]. This intermediate position likely reflects the improving but still challenged healthcare infrastructure in Bangladesh. The major adverse cardiac events rate of 32% underscores the significant morbidity associated with PPCM, comparable to findings from an Indian cohort study by Prasad et al., which reported complications in 35% of cases [27].

The recovery patterns observed in our study, with 42% achieving complete recovery of left ventricular function at 6 months, align with global data. A systematic review by McNamara et al. found complete recovery rates ranging from 20-60% across different populations [28]. Our results suggest that early diagnosis and aggressive management can lead to favorable outcomes, even in resource-limited settings.

The high rate of cesarean deliveries (76%) in our cohort exceeds global averages but reflects the complex decision-making involved in managing high-risk cardiac patients. A Turkish study by Ersboll et al. reported similar rates (70%), emphasizing the preference for controlled delivery conditions in PPCM patients [29].

The fetal outcomes in our study, including a 28% preterm delivery rate and 24% NICU admission rate, highlight the significant impact of PPCM on neonatal health. These findings are comparable to those reported in a South African cohort by Blauwet et al., where preterm delivery occurred in 25% of cases [30]. The neonatal mortality rate of 6% emphasizes the need for integrated maternal-fetal care in these high-risk pregnancies.

Our treatment approach, emphasizing early initiation of heart failure therapy, demonstrated favorable outcomes. The high utilization rates of beta-blockers (92%) and ACE inhibitors/ARBs (88% postpartum) align with current international guidelines. A German registry study by Pfeffer et al. showed similar medication patterns with comparable recovery rates [31].

The socioeconomic implications of PPCM in our population cannot be overlooked. Limited healthcare access, delayed presentation, and financial constraints often complicate management. Similar challenges were reported in a systematic review of PPCM in developing nations by Tandoh et al., emphasizing the need for improved healthcare infrastructure and accessibility [32].

Study Limitations Our single-center design and relatively small sample size may limit the generalizability of our findings. Additionally, the retrospective nature of some data collection could have introduced recall bias. The loss to follow-up of some patients (8%) might have affected our long-term outcome assessment.

Future Directions These findings suggest several areas for future research, including the role of genetic factors in South Asian populations, the impact of socioeconomic factors on outcomes, and the potential benefits of screening programs for high-risk women. Multicenter studies with larger cohorts would help validate our findings and establish region-specific management protocols.

## CONCLUSION

Based on our comprehensive analysis of 50 cases of peripartum cardiomyopathy at BSMMU during 2013, several significant conclusions emerge. The study provides valuable insights into the characteristics and management of PPCM in the Bangladeshi healthcare context.

Our findings demonstrate that PPCM predominantly affects multiparous women in their late twenties, with most cases presenting in the postpartum period. The observed mortality rate of 8% and major adverse cardiac event rate of 32% underscore the serious nature of this condition, while also suggesting that outcomes can be favorable with appropriate medical intervention. The achievement of complete left ventricular recovery in 42% of patients at six months offers encouragement for proper management protocols.

The significant impact on fetal outcomes, including a 28% preterm delivery rate and 6% neonatal mortality, emphasizes the critical importance of integrated maternal-fetal care. These findings highlight the need for a multidisciplinary approach involving cardiologists, obstetricians, and neonatologists to optimize both maternal and fetal outcomes.

This study contributes to the growing body of evidence regarding PPCM in South Asian populations and supports the implementation of early screening programs for at-risk women. Furthermore, it underscores the necessity of developing region-specific guidelines that account for local healthcare resources and socioeconomic factors.

Moving forward, these findings should inform the development of targeted interventions and preventive strategies, particularly in resource-limited settings. Enhanced awareness among healthcare providers, improved diagnostic capabilities, and established referral pathways could significantly impact the management and outcomes of PPCM in Bangladesh and similar healthcare environments.

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