

Original Research Article

Diagnosis of Bacterial Vaginosis: Amsel's Criteria vs Nugent's scoring**Dr. S. Rajeshwar Rao, Dr. K. Girisha Pindi, Dr. Usha Rani, Dr. G. Sasikala, Dr. Vijendra Kawle**

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Abstract: Bacterial Vaginosis (BV) is the most common cause of vaginitis. If untreated, it is associated with serious complications. BV is a poly-microbial, synergistic infection, involving over-growth of multiple bacterial pathogens. Vaginal flora becomes altered leading to increased pH due to decrease in lactobacilli (which produce H₂O₂). Although Nugent's criterion is considered as the gold standard in diagnosis of BV, routinely a combination of various methods is used for the diagnosis of bacterial vaginosis (BV). In the present study we compared Amsel's composite clinical criteria with Nugent's method for the diagnosis of BV. The study was undertaken from February - November, 2015 at a Tertiary Care Hospital in Hyderabad. The study consisted of women with complaints of vaginal discharge. BV was diagnosed based on Amsel's criteria and Nugent's scoring. For each case, the following were interpreted: pH, Whiff test (a test in which vaginal secretions are mixed with 10% KOH resulting in a fishy odor typical of bacterial vaginosis) and the presence of the clue cells on vaginal wet smear. Gram staining was performed for Nugent's method. The present study included 362 cases of abnormal vaginal discharge. Prevalence of BV was 48%. Age group 24-29 years was most affected. Amsel's criteria detected 170/362 whereas Nugent score identified 173/362 subjects as having bacterial vaginosis. In comparison with Nugent's criteria the sensitivity, specificity, positive predictive value and negative predictive value of Amsel's criteria were 78.72%, 92.35%, 75.51% and 93.54%. The prevalence rate of BV in present study high. With limited resources in developing countries like ours, there is a great need for inexpensive diagnostic methods for bacterial vaginosis. Amsel's criteria is as good as Nugent's scoring in diagnosis of BV and it is simple, easy, cost effective, fast and reliable, and can be done in OPD which can be used for precise and fast treatment.

Keywords Bacterial vaginosis, Amsel's criteria, Nugent's scoring, Clue cells, Whiff test, Vaginal Discharge

INTRODUCTION

Bacterial vaginosis (BV) is the most common cause of vaginitis in women of reproductive age group [1]. It is the most common infection encountered in the Gynaecological outpatient setting. More than 90 million cases of bacterial vaginosis are reported worldwide per annum. According to the mid-term review of National AIDS control Programme III the prevalence of Bacterial vaginosis in adult population ranges from 17.8% to 63.7% in India [2].

BV is a poly-microbial synergistic infection characterized by complex changes in the normal vaginal flora attributed to reduction in the prevalence of Lactobacilli and an increase in the concentration of pathogenic organisms [1, 3]. In the healthy vagina, lactobacilli, inhibit the growth of other microorganisms through certain properties such as adhesive ability, production of acids, bacteriocins, hydrogen peroxide

and bio surfactants and their ability to compete for mannose and glycoprotein receptors [1].

The commonest pathogenic organisms causing vaginosis are facultative anaerobic bacteria like Gardnerella vaginalis and Mycoplasma, anaerobic Gram-negative rods such as Prevotellabivia, P. intermedia, Bacteroides spp, anaerobic Gram-positive rods like Mobiluncus morphotypes and anaerobic Gram-positive cocci like Peptostreptococcus pp[1]. The aetiology of BV is probably multi-factorial and the factors initiating the shift are unclear. The local pH of the vagina is increased mostly due to the reduction in the number of H₂O₂ producing lactobacilli making it more susceptible for growth of pathogenic organisms [4,5,6].

BV may be symptomatic or asymptomatic. Symptomatic women commonly present with increased

vaginal discharge that is characteristically foul smelling, thin, grey and homogeneous [3]. Bacterial vaginosis can lead to a variety of obstetric and gynaecological complications such as endometritis, Salpingitis, Pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) or complications of pregnancy such as premature rupture of membranes, preterm labour and spontaneous abortions [1], chorioamnionitis, postpartum endometritis, cuff cellulitis & vault infections after hysterectomy [4,5,6].

Most often, multiple criteria are used for the diagnosis of bacterial vaginosis. One of the methods of diagnosis is the Amsel's composite criteria which includes clinical diagnosis and a few simple laboratory tests. Bacterial vaginosis can also be diagnosed by Spiegel's and Nugent's criteria. Both these criteria are based on the evaluation of the normal flora in the Gram stained smears of the vaginal discharge [3].

In a developing country with limited resources such as India, where highly trained skilled manual labour comes at a premium, diagnosis of bacterial vaginosis by Nugent's score would place a great strain on available resources. The Amsel criteria method requires less infrastructural and manual resources; thus clinicians would be better placed if they knew the sensitivity and specificity of Amsel criteria in relation to Nugent's score before diagnosis. Hence this current study was undertaken not only to diagnosis and know the prevalence of bacterial vaginosis but also to compare Amsel's criteria with the Nugent scoring.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study setting & duration:

The study was conducted from February 2015 till November 2015 at Department of Microbiology and Department of OBG, at Tertiary care hospital in Hyderabad. Approval of institutional ethical committee was taken for this study.

Study design:

Prospective, Cross sectional study

Study population:

Total number of patients with vaginal discharge attending the Gynaecology OP in the duration of 9 months. Exclusion criteria included vaginal bleeding, pregnancy, vaginal or cervical mass and patients on antibiotics. After obtaining written informed consent from the subjects, a detailed clinical and personal history regarding age, symptoms, character and quantity of discharge, odour, and pruritus were taken from the patients [8].

Specimen collection was done in a well-lit room. Patients were asked to lie on the examination

table in lithotomy position. An unlubricated Cusco's vaginal speculum was introduced into the subjects vagina under aseptic conditions, nature of the discharge, condition of vagina and cervix were noted [3]. Diagnosis of bacterial vaginosis was done by Nugent's scoring and Amsel's criteria.

DIAGNOSIS BY AMSEL'S CRITERIA:

Amsel's composite criteria includes the presence of a homogeneous vaginal discharge, pH of the vagina being > 4.5, the presence of clue cells in wet mount of the vaginal discharge and a positive whiff test. According to Amsel, if 3 of the 4 criteria are positive, the patient has bacterial vaginosis [3].

Vaginal pH determination:

pH of the vagina was tested using a pH paper (Qualigens Fine Chemicals, India) by dipping it in the secretions pooled in the posterior This was compared with a standardized colorimetric reference chart to estimate the actual pH.

Whiff test:

A drop of the vaginal fluid was taken on a grease free glass slide. To this one drop of 10% KOH was added. An intense, putrid, fishy odour indicates positive reaction.

Presence of Clue cells:

A drop of the vaginal fluid was mixed with a drop of normal saline on a clean grease free glass slide; a cover slip was placed on it. Slide was observed under 10 xs & 40 x magnifications within 10 mins. The vaginal epithelial cells which were coated with cocobacillary organisms so that their edges which normally have a sharply defined cell border became indistinct or stippled were considered as the clue cells. Clue cells are characteristic feature of BV. If the clue cells constitute 20% or more of the epithelial cells in the high power field it is considered positive. The presence of any motile trichomonads, budding yeast cells and pseudohyphae were also noted.

DIAGNOSIS BY NUGENT'S CRITERIA

The vaginal discharge was smeared on clean glass slides, air dried, heat fixed and stained by Gram's staining [3]. Each bacterial morpho-type was quantitated under an oil immersion objective (100x) by using the following scheme: 1+, <1 per field; 2+, 1 to 4 per field; 3+, 5 to 30 per field; 4+, >30 per field. Large Gram-positive rods were taken as lactobacillus morphotypes; small Gram-negative to Gram-variable rods were considered as *G.vaginalis* and *Bacteroides* spp. morphotypes; curved Gram variable rods were considered as *Mobiluncus* spp. morphotypes.

The scoring was done as shown:

Table -1: Nugent scoring of Gram stained smear for bacterial vaginosis.

Organism Morpho type	Number/oil immersion field	Score
Lactobacillus - like (parallel sided, gram positive rods)	>30	0
	5-30	1
	1-4	2
	<1	3
	0	4
Mobiluncus- like (curved, gram negative rods)	>5	2
	<1-4	1
	0	0
Gardnerella/bacteroides - like (tiny, gram variable coccobacilli and pleomorphic rods with vacuoles)	>30	4
	5-30	3
	1-4	2
	<1	1
	0	0

Total score:-0-3 Normal; 4-6 Intermediate, repeat test later; 7-10 Bacterial vaginosis.

RESULTS

A total of 362 patients in reproductive age group with complaints of vaginal discharge were examined for diagnosis of Bacterial vaginosis. Among these, 173 patients (48%) were diagnosed to be affected with BV by Nugent scoring and 170 by Amsel’s criteria.

Maximum patients belonged to the age group of 24-29 years. The mean age was 28 years. Highest prevalence of BV was noticed in the age group of 24-29 years followed by 30-35 years indicating that there is a high incidence of BV in young individuals in the reproductive age group. Vaginal discharge and malodour were very common, seen in 100% of cases followed by itching and dysuria.

Table 2: Amsel’s criteria

S.no.	VARIABLE	PRESENT
1	Vaginal Discharge	173(100%)
2	Clue cells	121(69.9%)
3	Whiff test	170(98.26%)
4	pH>4.5	117 (67.6%)

Based on Amsels Criteria, 170 cases were labelled to have BV

Table 3: Nugent’s scoring

S.no.	SCORE	NUMBER OF CASES
1	0-3	96(26.51%)
2	4-6	93(25.69%)
3	7-10	173(47.7%)
	TOTAL	362

Based on Nugents Criteria, 173 cases were labelled to have BV

In comparison with Nugent’s criteria, the sensitivity, specificity, positive predictive value and negative predictive value of Amsel’s criteria were 78.72%, 92.35%, 75.51% and 93.54%. Statistical

analysis showed that both methods could be used as a means for the diagnosis of Bacterial vaginosis (p< 0.01).

Table 4: Comparison of diagnosis of Bacterial Vaginosis by Amsel’s criteria with Nugent’s scoring as gold standard.

Methods of diagnosis		Diagnosis of BV by Nugents scoring			P-value
		Nugents score > 7 n=173	Nugents score 0-6 n=189	Total n=362	
Amsel’s criteria	Bacterial vaginosis	159	11	170	<0.01
	Normal	14	178	192	

DISCUSSION

Bacterial vaginosis is the most common cause of vaginal discharge among women in reproductive age with a prevalence of 16-69% depending on the population studied [9]. Culture is the gold standard method for diagnosis of most of the bacterial diseases; however, culture cannot become the gold standard for diagnosis of bacterial vaginosis as the organisms which are involved in bacterial vaginosis cannot be isolated in the laboratory easily and as normal women also have this flora in their vagina in small numbers [3].

Proper diagnosis of bacterial vaginosis is challenging. In addition to scientific considerations, choosing a method for laboratory diagnosis requires consideration of complexity, cost, and the frequency of un-interpretable specimens. Nevertheless, some alternative diagnostic methods have been developed, such as the polymerase chain reaction (PCR), rapid nucleic acid hybridization test, proline amino peptidase activity. More recently, several point-of-care tests based on various combinations of microbial products, presence of RNA, or more complex laboratory instrumentation such as sensor arrays, have also been introduced for the diagnosis of bacterial vaginosis. However, most of these are expensive and their sensitivities and specificities do not offer a huge advantage over the classical methods. Given these considerations, methods like Amsel and Nugent's scoring [13] remain the most practical, viable and economical options for diagnosing bacterial vaginosis, especially in developing countries [16].

Most often, multiple criteria are used for the diagnosis of bacterial vaginosis. One of the methods of diagnosis is the Amsel's composite criteria which includes clinical diagnosis and a few simple laboratory tests. Bacterial vaginosis can also be diagnosed by Spiegel's and Nugent's criteria. Both these criteria are based on the evaluation of the normal flora in the Gram stained smears of the vaginal discharge [3]. We conducted a study on 362 cases complaining of vaginal discharge. Of these, 173(48%) were diagnosed as BV. Similar prevalence rates were found in other studies: (41.5% by Nawani *et al.*[8] and 53% by Tiyyagura *et al.* [10].

BV was most common in the 24-29 years age group. The disease occurs mainly in young women in the reproductive age group which also correlates with other studies done earlier.[8] Changes in structure and composition of vaginal ecosystem maybe influenced by age, infections, methods of birth control by using contraceptives, frequency of sexual activities and number of sexual partners. These features are most likely seen in women of reproductive age group [8].

The most common symptoms of BV were vaginal discharge and malodour- found in all the 173 cases followed by itching and dysuria. These were also the findings of studies done by Falagas *et al.*; in 2007 [11]. Among the 362 patients 170(47%) were diagnosed having bacterial vaginosis by Amsel Criteria, i.e. 173(48%) patients had vaginal discharge, 170(47%) had a positive whiff test, 163(45%) had clue cells and 159(44%) had $\text{pH} > 4.5$., and 173 (48%) were diagnosed by Nugent's Scoring. These similar results were reported by Gratco *et al.*; [12].

Nawani *et al.*[10] also reported that Amsel's criteria are as good as Nugent's scoring and it is simple, easy, and cost effective and fast and reliable, and can be done in OPD which can be used for precise and fast treatment. A Study by K. Pavani [17] showed the prevalence of Bacterial vaginosis as 24.01% by Amsel's criteria, 23.03% by Nugent scoring and that Amsel's method was found to be 78.72% sensitive and 92.35% specific as compared to Nugent's method . These are comparable to our study.

A study by Udaya Laxmi *et al.*[3] which involved comparison of Amsel, Spiegel's criteria and culture with Nugent as gold standard showed that culture is the least sensitive method. Enrique *et al.*[19] showed that sensitivity and specificity of the Nugent's score compared to the Amsel's criteria were 97% and 98%, respectively. Schwebke *et al.*[20] showed that vaginal Nugent's score was more sensitive than Amsel's criteria for diagnosis of BV. But, based on Amsel's criteria, 90 percent of women with BV can be diagnosed correctly as reported in the studies by Amsel R *et al.*; [21] and Thomason JL *et al.*; [22]

As the prevalence of BV in developing countries are high, countries with limited resources have a great need for inexpensive diagnostic methods that are reliable and unifies clinical and microbiological parameters to make it more sensitive while retaining its specificity.

CONCLUSION

The prevalence of BV was 48%. Amsel's criteria were comparable with Nugent's criteria for the diagnosis of bacterial vaginosis and it is simple, easy, and cost effective and fast and reliable, and can be done in OPD which can be used for precise and fast treatment. Nugent score is specific but needs microbiology expertise. There is a great need for an inexpensive diagnostic method that is both reliable and unifies clinical and microbiological parameters to make it more sensitive while retaining its specificity.

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