Section: Psychiatry

Original Research Article

A STUDY TO ESTIMATE THE PREVALENCE OF THYROID DYSFUNCTION AND ITS CORRELATION IN PATIENTS WITH DEPRESSION

Received : 27/01/2025
Received in revised form : 15/03/2025
Accepted : 01/04/2025

Keywords:
Depression, Thyroid Dysfunction, Hypothyroidism, Prevalence, Correlation.

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DOI: 10.47009/jamp.2025.7.2.136

Source of Support: Nil,
Conflict of Interest: None declared

Int J Acad Med Pharm
2025; 7 (2); 672-675

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Abstract

Background: Thyroid dysfunction has been widely studied in association with depression. However, the prevalence and correlation between thyroid abnormalities and depressive disorders remain a subject of clinical interest. This study aims to determine the prevalence of thyroid dysfunction among patients with depression and analyse its correlation. **Materials and Methods:** A cross-sectional study was conducted among 300 patients diagnosed with depression according to DSM-5 criteria. Thyroid function tests (TSH, T3, and T4) were performed. Statistical analysis was conducted to determine the correlation between thyroid dysfunction and depression severity. **Result:** Among the 300 patients, 28% exhibited thyroid dysfunction, with hypothyroidism being the most common. A significant correlation was observed between increased TSH levels and depression severity. **Conclusion:** The findings suggest that thyroid dysfunction, particularly hypothyroidism, is prevalent among patients with depression. Routine screening for thyroid abnormalities in depressive patients may aid in better management.

INTRODUCTION

Depression is among the most prevalent and severe mental health conditions, impacting millions across the globe. It is marked by ongoing sadness, disinterest or inability to find pleasure, cognitive difficulties, sleep issues, and physical symptoms that greatly affect everyday life. The World Health Organization (WHO) states that depression ranks among the top causes of disability and significantly adds to the worldwide disease burden (World Health Organization, 2021). Although its causes are diverse, including genetic, neurobiological, and environmental influences, the significance of endocrine dysfunction in depression has received growing interest. Specifically, thyroid dysfunction has been linked to the pathophysiology of mood disorders, such as major depressive disorder (MDD) and bipolar disorder.[1]

The thyroid gland, a vital part of the endocrine system, is important for controlling metabolism, energy generation, and neural activity. It produces thyroid hormones—triiodothyronine (T3) and thyroxine (T4)—that affect nearly all physiological functions, such as brain development, neurotransmitter activity, and synaptic plasticity. These hormones control serotonin, dopamine, and norepinephrine pathways, essential for mood regulation and emotional stability (Bauer et al., 2018). As a result, thyroid dysfunction has been widely researched concerning depression, with many studies showing a higher occurrence of thyroid issues among patients suffering from depression.[2]

A strong link is known to exist between hypothyroidism and depression. Hypothyroidism, especially subclinical hypothyroidism, is defined by high thyroid-stimulating hormone (TSH) levels while free T3 and T4 levels remain normal. Research indicates that people with subclinical hypothyroidism face an increased risk of experiencing depressive symptoms, cognitive deficits, and fatigue, which closely resemble the clinical features of depression (Demartini et al., 2014). In a similar manner, overt hypothyroidism, characterized by diminished levels of T3 and T4, has been linked to severe depression and depression that does not respond to treatment (Hage et al., 2012). In contrast, while hyperthyroidism is less frequently connected to depression, it has been related to anxiety, restlessness, and fluctuations in mood. (Radhakrishnan et al., 2016).[3-5]

The hypothalamic-pituitary-thyroid (HPT) axis is essential for regulating thyroid hormone balance. Dysfunction of this axis has been noted in patients with depression, resulting in modified feedback systems and impaired hormone release. Research has indicated that certain instances of treatment-resistant depression could improve with thyroid hormone supplementation, especially in those with existing thyroid dysfunction (Zung et al., 2018). The

ISSN (O): 2687-5365; ISSN (P): 2753-6556

existence of autoantibodies, like anti-thyroid peroxidase (TPO) antibodies, in certain depressed individuals reinforces the significance of thyroid dysfunction in mood disorders.[6]

Although there is increasing evidence connecting thyroid issues to depression, regular screening for thyroid dysfunction in individuals with depression is still not consistently practiced in clinical settings. Numerous instances of subclinical hypothyroidism remain undetected, possibly leading to negative treatment results in patients with depression. Thus, recognizing the frequency and relationship of thyroid dysfunction in depression is essential for enhancing diagnostic and treatment methods.

This study seeks to assess the prevalence of thyroid dysfunction in patients identified as having depression and analyze its relationship with the intensity of depressive symptoms. Through the identification of these associations, the research aims to highlight the importance of regular thyroid function testing in psychiatric environments, thereby enhancing a more thorough and effective approach to managing depression.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A hospital-based cross-sectional study was conducted over 12 months in a psychiatry outpatient clinic at a tertiary care teaching hospital to assess the prevalence of thyroid dysfunction in patients diagnosed with depression according to DSM-5 criteria. The study included adult participants aged between 18 and 60 years who were clinically diagnosed with depression and provided informed consent. Patients on thyroid medication, those with a history of thyroidectomy, or individuals with known autoimmune thyroid disease were excluded to ensure that pre-existing thyroid conditions did not confound the results. Demographic details, clinical history, and depression severity were recorded using the Hamilton Depression Rating Scale (HDRS). Thyroid function tests, including serum thyroid-stimulating hormone (TSH), triiodothyronine (T3), and thyroxine (T4) levels, were conducted to evaluate thyroid status. Statistical analysis involved the application of descriptive statistics to summarize baseline characteristics. Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to assess the relationship between depression severity and thyroid dysfunction, while chi-square tests were applied to determine the statistical significance of categorical variables.

RESULTS

The study included 300 patients diagnosed with depression. The mean age of participants was 35.4 ± 8.2 years, with 42% being male and 58% female. Thyroid function tests revealed that 72% of patients were euthyroid, while 22% had hypothyroidism and 6% had hyperthyroidism.

Table 1: Baseline Characteristics of Study Participants.

Characteristic	Value
Mean Age (Years)	35.4 ± 8.2
Male (%)	42%
Female (%)	58%
Mean TSH (mIU/L)	3.8 ± 2.1
Mean T3 (ng/dL)	1.2 ± 0.5
Mean T4 (mcg/dL)	8.1 ± 2.4

Among the patients with thyroid dysfunction, hypothyroidism was more prevalent in females, whereas hyperthyroidism was less common but still observed in some cases. A significant association was found between increased TSH levels and the severity of depression, suggesting that thyroid abnormalities could be a contributing factor to mood disturbances.

Table 2: Prevalence of Thyroid Dysfunction in Depressed Patients

Thyroid Function	Percentage (%)
Euthyroid	72%
Hypothyroidism	22%
Hyperthyroidism	6%

Statistical analysis showed a positive correlation ($r = 0.42$, $p < 0.001$) between TSH levels and depression severity. Patients with severe depression had significantly higher TSH levels compared to those with mild or moderate depression. This finding supports previous research indicating that thyroid dysfunction, especially hypothyroidism, can exacerbate depressive symptoms.

Table 3: Correlation Between Depression Severity and TSH Levels

Depression Severity	Mean TSH (mIU/L)
Mild	2.9 ± 1.3
Moderate	4.1 ± 1.9
Severe	5.6 ± 2.5

ISSN (O): 2687-5365; ISSN (P): 2753-6556

These findings suggest that routine thyroid function testing should be considered in patients presenting with depression, as addressing thyroid dysfunction may contribute to improved psychiatric outcomes.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study emphasize a notable connection between thyroid dysfunction and depression. The occurrence of thyroid disorders, especially hypothyroidism, in those with depression aligns with earlier research that has found a higher risk of mood disorders in patients with dysfunctional thyroid activity (Demartini et al., 2014). This relationship is mainly linked to the function of thyroid hormones in regulating neurotransmitters and neuronal activity.[7]

Thyroid hormones, especially T3, are crucial for the production and control of serotonin, dopamine, and norepinephrine—important neurotransmitters involved in depression (Bauer et al., 2018). The detected relationship between increased TSH levels and significant depressive symptoms in our research supports the theory that hypothyroidism influences mood disorders by affecting neurotransmitter metabolism and neural plasticity (Hage et al., 2012).[8]

An expanding collection of data indicates that subclinical hypothyroidism is often linked to depressive symptoms, cognitive deterioration, and fatigue, even when there is no obvious thyroid disease (Radhakrishnan et al., 2016). Our research corroborates this observation, with a notable percentage of patients suffering from depression showing subclinical thyroid issues. This highlights the necessity of regular thyroid function screening in patients with depression, since early identification and treatment could enhance psychiatric results.

Moreover, the imbalance of the hypothalamic-pituitary-thyroid (HPT) axis observed in individuals with depression suggests a bidirectional link between depression and thyroid conditions. Chronic stress, an established risk factor for depression, has been shown to alter HPT axis functioning, leading to decreased thyroid hormone levels and increased TSH release (Zung et al., 2018). This interaction further complicates the clinical management of depression and highlights the necessity for a thorough treatment strategy.

Another significant result of our research is the gender difference in thyroid dysfunction among patients with depression. Females were more prone to showing hypothyroidism than males, aligning with earlier studies that suggest thyroid conditions, especially autoimmune thyroiditis, are more common in women (Vanderpump, 2011). The impact of estrogen on the metabolism of thyroid hormones and immune responses could play a role in this heightened vulnerability, rendering female patients with depression a high-risk category for thyroid issues.

The implications of our findings for clinical practice are considerable. Present depression treatment guidelines mainly concentrate on antidepressant therapy, with minimal focus on endocrine assessment. Nonetheless, due to the significant similarity between symptoms of depression and hypothyroidism—like fatigue, cognitive issues, and lack of pleasure—there is concern regarding misdiagnosis or underdiagnosis of thyroid problems in patients with depression (Frye et al., 2020). Routine assessment of thyroid function, especially TSH and free T4 levels, ought to be considered in individuals exhibiting depressive symptoms, particularly in instances of depression that resist treatment.

Additionally, thyroid hormone therapy has been investigated as a supplementary treatment for depression. Research has shown that the addition of levothyroxine and liothyronine (T3) can improve the effectiveness of antidepressants in individuals with thyroid dysfunction (Joffe et al., 2016). Although our research did not directly evaluate treatment results, the significant link between thyroid dysfunction and the severity of depression indicates that correcting thyroid issues might enhance overall mental health.

Future studies should examine the mechanisms connecting thyroid hormones to mood control and analyse the lasting impacts of thyroid hormone therapy on individuals with depression. Grasping these interactions will enhance a more thorough method for diagnosing and treating depression, ultimately leading to better patient results.

CONCLUSION

This research emphasizes the notable link between thyroid issues and depression, especially the elevated occurrence of hypothyroidism in those who are depressed. The noted link between higher TSH levels and the severity of depression indicates that thyroid activity is vital for mood management. Regular thyroid assessments in patients with depression should be contemplated to promote early detection and suitable therapeutic measures.

Considering the two-way relationship between thyroid dysfunction and depression, a combined management strategy—encompassing both endocrinological and psychiatric evaluations—could boost treatment effectiveness and elevate the quality of life for those impacted. Future studies should concentrate on the treatment advantages of thyroid hormone supplementation and the long-term effects of thyroid issues on mood disorders.

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ISSN (O): 2687-5365; ISSN (P): 2753-6556