

Original Research Article

PATTERNS OF ANAESTHETIC DRUG USAGE IN SUSPECTED CASES OF PEDIATRIC ABUSE: A FORENSIC AND CLINICAL OBSERVATIONAL STUDY

K. Pramod Kumar¹, R. Balram², Suvarna B.³, Prashanth Kumar Patnaik⁴

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Forensic Medicine, RVM Institute of Medical Sciences and Research Centre, Laxmakapally Village, Siddipet District, Telangana, India.

²Assistant Professor, Department of Anaesthesiology, RVM Institute of Medical Sciences and Research Centre, Laxmakapally Village, Siddipet District, Telangana, India.

³Associate Professor, Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, RVM Institute of Medical Sciences and Research Centre, Laxmakapally Village, Siddipet District, Telangana, India.

⁴Associate Professor, Department of Pharmacology, RVM Institute of Medical Sciences and Research Centre, Laxmakapally Village, Siddipet District, Telangana, India.

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Corresponding Author:

Dr. Prashanth Kumar Patnaik
Associate Professor, Department of
Pharmacology, RVM Institute of
Medical Sciences and Research Centre,
Laxmakapally Village, Siddipet
District, Telangana, India.
Email: prashanthpaul86@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Background: Suspected cases of pediatric abuse often involve the administration of anaesthetic drugs, posing significant risks to the well-being of affected children. Understanding the patterns and clinical implications of anaesthetic drug usage in such cases is crucial for effective detection and intervention. This study aimed to analyze the prevalence, types, dosage patterns, clinical presentations, and forensic implications of anaesthetic drug usage in suspected cases of pediatric abuse.

Material and Methods: A comprehensive observational study was conducted, involving the analysis of 100 suspected cases of pediatric abuse. Anaesthetic drug usage was meticulously examined, and data were collected regarding the types of drugs administered, dosage patterns, clinical presentations, and forensic implications.

Results: Among the suspected cases, 65% exhibited evidence of anaesthetic drug usage, with Propofol being the most prevalent (40%), followed by Ketamine (30%) and Benzodiazepines (20%). High dosage administration was observed in 25% of cases, while 15% involved low dosage administration. Respiratory depression (60%) and CNS depression (45%) were the most common clinical presentations associated with anaesthetic drug usage. Additionally, 45% of cases involved the simultaneous administration of multiple anaesthetic drugs. Forensically, the identification of specific anaesthetic drugs and their dosage patterns served as crucial evidence in cases of suspected pediatric abuse.

Conclusion: Anaesthetic drug usage is prevalent in suspected cases of pediatric abuse, with significant clinical and forensic implications. Our findings underscore the importance of vigilance among healthcare providers and the implementation of robust child protection measures to detect and intervene in cases involving anaesthetic drugs. Enhanced awareness and understanding of these patterns are essential for safeguarding the well-being of vulnerable children.

Keywords: Pediatric abuse, anaesthetic drugs, prevalence, dosage patterns, clinical presentations, forensic implications.

INTRODUCTION

Pediatric abuse remains a grave concern worldwide, with profound implications for the health and well-

being of affected children.^[1] Among the various forms of abuse, the administration of anaesthetic drugs represents a particularly insidious threat due to

its potential for causing severe harm and even mortality.^[2] Understanding the patterns and clinical implications of anaesthetic drug usage in suspected cases of pediatric abuse is crucial for effective detection, intervention, and prevention efforts.^[3]

The administration of anaesthetic drugs in cases of suspected pediatric abuse presents unique challenges for healthcare professionals and forensic investigators.^[4,5] Unlike other forms of abuse, such as physical or sexual abuse, the effects of anaesthetic drugs may not leave visible external signs, making detection more difficult.^[6,7] Moreover, the misuse of anaesthetic drugs can lead to life-threatening complications, including respiratory depression, cardiovascular collapse, and neurological impairment.

Despite these challenges, there is a paucity of research examining the prevalence, types, dosage patterns, clinical presentations, and forensic implications of anaesthetic drug usage in suspected cases of pediatric abuse. Existing literature primarily focuses on case reports or small case series, limiting our understanding of the broader trends and patterns associated with this phenomenon.

Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by conducting a comprehensive observational analysis of suspected cases of pediatric abuse involving anaesthetic drug usage. By systematically examining a large sample size of 100 cases, we seek to elucidate the prevalence of anaesthetic drug administration, identify the types of drugs involved, analyze dosage patterns, explore clinical presentations, and assess the forensic implications of these findings.

Through our research, we aim to provide valuable insights that can inform clinical practice, forensic investigations, and child protection policies. By enhancing our understanding of anaesthetic drug usage in cases of suspected pediatric abuse, we can better equip healthcare professionals, law enforcement agencies, and child welfare organizations to detect and intervene in instances of abuse, ultimately safeguarding the health and well-being of vulnerable children.

Aim: The aim of this study is to comprehensively analyze the patterns and clinical implications of anaesthetic drug usage in suspected cases of pediatric abuse.

Objectives

Determine the prevalence of anaesthetic drug administration in suspected cases of pediatric abuse.

Identify the types of anaesthetic drugs involved in cases of suspected pediatric abuse.

Analyze the dosage patterns of anaesthetic drugs administered in suspected cases of pediatric abuse.

Assess the clinical presentations and forensic implications associated with anaesthetic drug usage in suspected cases of pediatric abuse.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Study Setting: The study was conducted at RVM Institute of Medical Sciences, located in Laxmakkapalli Village, Siddipet District. This tertiary care medical institution serves a diverse population and provides comprehensive healthcare services, including pediatric care.

Study Design: This study employed a retrospective observational design to analyze suspected cases of pediatric abuse involving anaesthetic drug usage.

Study Period: Data collection spanned from January 2023 to December 2023, ensuring a one-year comprehensive analysis of suspected cases within the specified timeframe.

Inclusion Criteria: Suspected cases of pediatric abuse involving children aged 0-18 years. Cases where anaesthetic drug administration was suspected or confirmed. Cases with complete medical records and documentation available for analysis.

Exclusion Criteria: Cases lacking sufficient documentation or incomplete medical records. Cases not meeting the criteria for suspected pediatric abuse or anaesthetic drug usage⁸.

Data Collection: Medical records of eligible cases were retrieved from the hospital's electronic database and manually reviewed by trained research personnel. Data pertaining to demographics, clinical presentations, anaesthetic drug usage (type, dosage), forensic documentation, and outcomes were extracted using a standardized data collection form.

Statistical Analysis: Descriptive statistics were utilized to summarize the prevalence, types, dosage patterns, clinical presentations, and forensic implications of anaesthetic drug usage in suspected cases of pediatric abuse. Quantitative data were presented as frequencies, percentages, and measures of central tendency, as appropriate.

Ethical Considerations: Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Ethics Committee of RVM Institute of Medical Sciences prior to commencement of the study. Confidentiality of patient information was strictly maintained throughout the study period, with all data anonymized and stored securely in accordance with institutional guidelines and regulatory standards.

RESULTS

In this study, we conducted a detailed analysis of anaesthetic drug usage patterns in suspected cases of pediatric abuse, drawing from a meticulously examined sample size of precisely 100 cases. The findings are summarized in Tables 1 through 5.

Table 1 illustrates the prevalence and types of anaesthetic drugs identified in the suspected cases. Notably, Propofol emerged as the most commonly detected anaesthetic drug, present in 40% of cases. Ketamine and Benzodiazepines followed, with

prevalence rates of 30% and 20%, respectively. Inhalational agents, including nitrous oxide and halothane, were observed in 15% of cases.

Table 2 outlines the dosage patterns observed in the administration of anaesthetic drugs. A significant proportion of cases, 25%, involved the administration of anaesthetic drugs at high dosages, potentially indicative of intentional misuse or overdose. Conversely, 15% of cases exhibited the administration of anaesthetic drugs at low dosages, which may suggest attempts to conceal administration or mitigate adverse effects.

Clinical presentations associated with anaesthetic drug usage are detailed in Table 3. Respiratory depression was the most prevalent clinical presentation, observed in 60% of cases, highlighting the critical risk posed by these substances to pediatric patients. CNS depression, characterized by

altered consciousness and decreased responsiveness, was documented in 45% of cases.

Table 4 illustrates the prevalence of combination usage, indicating that 45% of cases involved the simultaneous administration of multiple anaesthetic drugs, suggesting a propensity for polypharmacy in instances of suspected pediatric abuse.

Finally, Table 5 addresses the forensic implications of our findings. The identification of specific anaesthetic drugs and their dosage patterns serves as invaluable forensic evidence in cases of suspected pediatric abuse. Moreover, our results underscore the imperative of implementing robust child protection measures and maintaining vigilance among healthcare providers to detect and intervene in cases of pediatric abuse involving anaesthetic drugs.

Table 1: Prevalence and Types of Anaesthetic Drugs

Anaesthetic Drug	Percentage (%)	Number of Cases (n)
Propofol	40%	40
Ketamine	30%	30
Benzodiazepines	20%	20
Inhalational Agents	15%	15

Table 2: Dosage Patterns

Dosage Pattern	Percentage (%)	Number of Cases (n)
High Dosage	25%	25
Low Dosage	15%	15

Table 3: Clinical Presentations

Clinical Presentation	Percentage (%)	Number of Cases (n)
Respiratory Depression	60%	39
CNS Depression	45%	29

Table 4: Combination Usage

Combination Usage	Percentage (%)	Number of Cases (n)
Multiple Drugs Administered	45%	45

Table 5: Forensic Implications

Forensic Implications	Description
Forensic Documentation	Identification of specific anaesthetic drugs and their dosage patterns as invaluable forensic evidence in cases of suspected pediatric abuse.
Child Protection Measures	Imperative of implementing robust child protection measures and maintaining vigilance among healthcare providers to detect and intervene in cases of pediatric abuse involving anaesthetic drugs.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study shed light on the complex interplay between anaesthetic drug usage and suspected cases of pediatric abuse, providing valuable insights into the prevalence, clinical implications, and forensic considerations associated with this phenomenon.

Prevalence and Types of Anaesthetic Drugs: Our study revealed a notable prevalence of anaesthetic drug administration in suspected cases of pediatric abuse, with Propofol emerging as the most commonly detected drug, followed by Ketamine and Benzodiazepines. This underscores the diverse array of anaesthetic agents utilized in instances of suspected abuse, highlighting the need for heightened vigilance among healthcare providers in detecting and intervening in such cases.^[9]

Dosage Patterns and Clinical Presentations: The observation of both high and low dosage administration of anaesthetic drugs in suspected cases of pediatric abuse underscores the variability in practice and potential motivations behind drug administration. Furthermore, the predominance of respiratory and CNS depression as clinical presentations highlights the grave risks posed by anaesthetic drugs to pediatric patients, necessitating prompt recognition and intervention to mitigate adverse outcomes.^[10,11]

Combination Usage and Forensic Implications: The substantial proportion of cases involving the simultaneous administration of multiple anaesthetic drugs emphasizes the complexity of abuse scenarios and the potential for polypharmacy in pediatric populations.^[12] Forensically, the identification of specific anaesthetic drugs and their dosage patterns

serves as critical evidence in corroborating suspicions of abuse and supporting legal proceedings against perpetrators.

Clinical and Public Health Implications: The findings of this study underscore the urgent need for enhanced awareness, vigilance, and intervention strategies within pediatric healthcare settings to detect and prevent cases of abuse involving anaesthetic drugs. Furthermore, our results highlight the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration between healthcare professionals, law enforcement agencies, and child welfare organizations in safeguarding the well-being of vulnerable children and ensuring their protection from harm.

Limitations and Future Directions: Limitations of this study include its retrospective design, reliance on medical records for data collection, and the potential for selection bias inherent in single-center studies. Future research should aim to prospectively evaluate the effectiveness of intervention strategies aimed at identifying and addressing cases of pediatric abuse involving anaesthetic drug usage, with a focus on multidisciplinary approaches to detection, intervention, and prevention. Additionally, further exploration of the underlying motivations and risk factors associated with anaesthetic drug abuse in pediatric populations is warranted to inform targeted prevention and intervention efforts.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the alarming prevalence of anaesthetic drug usage in suspected cases of pediatric abuse, with significant clinical and forensic implications. The findings highlight the urgent need for heightened vigilance among healthcare providers and interdisciplinary collaboration to detect and intervene in cases of abuse. Enhanced awareness, targeted intervention strategies, and robust child protection measures are essential in safeguarding the well-being of vulnerable children. By addressing these challenges, we can work towards creating safer environments and ensuring the protection of pediatric patients from the harmful effects of anaesthetic drug abuse.

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