Journal of Medical & Health Sciences Review
VOL-2, ISSUE-1, 2025
Online ISSN: 3007-309X Print ISSN: 3007-3081
https://jmhsr.com/index.php/jmhsr

UTILITY OF RESTING ECG CHANGES FOR DIAGNOSIS OF CORONARY ARTERY DISEASE IN PATIENTS ADMITTED TO A TERTIARY CARE HOSPITAL

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ABSTRACT:

Coronary artery disease (also known as CAD) is one of the most significant health issues in the contemporary world and is one of the leading causes of premature mortality. Screening for CAD is thus important in limiting the incidence of such complications as myocardial infarction, heart failure, and sudden cardiac death. ECG is still among the most benign and relatively inexpensive diagnostic procedures. Therefore, the application of non-specific ECG alterations in confirming CAD is still questionable. This cross-sectional study was carried out to determine the relationship between nonspecific ECG changes such as QTc interval prolong, wide QRS duration, and QRS axis deviation and CAD in patients admitted to a tertiary hospital. Therefore 387 chest pain patients who had both ECG and coronary angiography or CT coronary angiography were available for analysis. It was found that high QT intervals and QRS axis deviations were favourable with CAD; specifically in multivessel disease. The findings of this study will imply that ECG alterations like QT interval prolongation and QRS axis deviation may be used as an initial indicator of CAD, particularly in situations the more enhanced diagnostic technologies are not available. Future studies should also be conducted to compare the efficiency of ECG with other diagnostic tools for more effective detection of CAD.

KEYWORDS: Coronary artery disease, electrocardiography, QT interval, QRS duration, QRS axis, non-specific ECG changes, myocardial infarction, diagnostic tools, CT coronary angiography.

Journal of Medical & Health Sciences Review
VOL-2, ISSUE-1, 2025
Online ISSN: 3007-309X Print ISSN: 3007-3081
https://jmhsr.com/index.php/jmhsr

INTRODUCTION

Cardiovascular diseases (CVDs) are the number one global health risk in terms of morbidity and mortality. Coronary artery diseases are categorized under CVDs whereby they are widespread; in fact, WHO estimates that almost a third of global deaths are associated with CVDs (World Health Organization, 2021). CAD prevails as a result of the obstruction of coronary arteries, which convey blood and nutrients to the cardiac muscles. This narrowing is usually as a result of atherosclerosis, a condition characterized by the deposition of plaque within the arterial walls thus restricting blood flow. CAD may result in acute myocardial infarction, chronic heart failure, ventricular arrhythmias, and sudden cardiac death (Libby, 2021). The hallmark to managing these adverse outcomes thus lies in promptly diagnosing CAD when the disease is still in its early stage.The rationale for the early diagnosis of CAD is based on its potential for early treatment and management involving lifestyle changes, drug therapy, and surgical or interventional procedures like CABG or PCI if necessary (Fihn et al., 2014). ECG is considered to be one of the most frequent diagnostic tools applied in the evaluation of patients with suspected CAD because of its non-invasive, cost-effective and easy-to-perform character (Goldberger et al., 2006). However, to date ECG has maintained utility as a primary investigative tool in CAD and when it comes to the correlation of non-specific ECG changes. The ordinary ECG changes, which do not depict any specific myocardial ischemia, are quite frequent in CAD patients and their role in the differential diagnosis is still questionable (Asadi et al., 2015).

The ECG is a very important diagnostic tool that records the electrical activity of the heart through leads placed on the body surface. It will indicate the state of the hips, axis, and conduction of the heart and help in diagnosing the disorders of the heart with the electrical structure. The 12 lead ECG is one of the common and essential diagnostic tools that could help in determining the potential disorder such as arrhythmia, acute myocardial infarction, and ischemia. The changes in ECG associated with CAD according to Grossman et al. (2012) include the ST-segment deviations, T-wave inversion and a prolonged QT interval recorded by De Luca et al. But this situation can be attributed to the fact that the overwhelming majority of the patients with CAD have nonspecific changes that are often regarded as inclusions. Among the non-

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specific changes are QT interval, QRS duration, P wave axis, T wave axis, and heart rate (Huang et al., 2017). Although, it remains unclear if it is specific to any certain disease it has been noted that this change could be helpful in diagnosing occult cardiovascular disease in conditions that are mild or asymptomatic (Singh et al., 2019).

Much research has been done concerned with the relationship of the ECG changes and the extent of CAD. For instance, it was explained that the prolongation of the QT interval is associated with the occurrence of an adverse reaction such as arrhythmia or sudden cardiac death, the risk of (Nagarajan et al., 2014). Quantitative measurement done on the amount of time it takes for the ventricles to contract and also the amount of time it takes them to relax and relax may be prolonged due to the ventricular repolarization that is mostly seen in ischemic heart disease (Carmona et al.,). Similarly, the QRS duration which is the time taken by the impulse to pass through the ventricles of the heart also indicates mortality rate among CAD patients as stated by Liu et al., (2018). In addition, the QRS axis, which indicates the overall direction of electrification in the heart, is a CAD predictor and can be used to identify the patient who is at a high risk of developing a coronary event (Al-Khatib et al., 2016).

Such findings have led to concerns on the efficiency of nonspecific ST and T-wave changes in diagnosing CAD since mimicking changes such as electrolyte problems, medication effects, and structural cardiac diseases may also present similar imagery (Poterucha et al., 2014). It is then necessary to review the available observation with regard to ECG and CAD from clinical point of view in relation to other diagnostics like the coronary angiography and computed tomography (CT) scan which provide clear view of the degree and nature of the blockages in the arteries responsible for corps and nutrition of heart muscles (Malmberg et al., 2015). Most of the patients present at the Armed Forces Institute of Cardiology (AFIC) have complaints of chest pain or other pertinent changes in ECG findings. Since the majority of these patients have CAD, it is necessary to determine the significance of non-specific modifications such as ECG for CAD diagnosis in this setting as the application of progressive diagnostic techniques could be restricted.

The purpose of this study is to identify if there is any correlation between nonspecific ECG changes and confirmed CAD in patients referred to a large teaching hospital. Through using the

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QT interval, QRS duration, and QRS axis, the study aims at testing the possibility of these markers to be used as diagnostic criteria of CAD which is common disease that requires early diagnosis and treatment.

Literature Review

Coronary Artery Disease and its Diagnostic Challenges

Coronary artery disease (CAD) remains a major health concern whose prevalence is rapidly rising across the globe. It is mostly associated with atherosclerosis, whereby the arteries are congested with plaques, and therefore, supply very little blood to the heart muscles (Boden et al., 2014). CAD may manifest with chest pain, shortness of breath, fatigue or may also be silent until extensive damage has occurred. Therefore, early diagnosis of CAD is pertinent to prognosis and prevention of acute conditions inclusive of MI, arrhythmias, and SCD (Roth et al., 2015).

The diagnostic methods that allow visualisation of the coronary arteries include coronary angiography, CT and MRI, however, such extents of imaging are costly and available only in some healthcare facilities (Poggio et al., 2018). Therefore, in spite of the development of several expensive noninvasive techniques, ECG still serves as the most easily accessible and economical method in the diagnosis of CAD. However, it is quite difficult to interpret ECG with regards to CAD especially when abnormalities exist that are non-specific and cannot pinpoint a certain disease.

Electrocardiography (ECG) in Diagnosing CAD

Electrocardiography is a diagnostic tool whereby the electrical conduction of the heart is mapped without having to interfere with the body. It's used commonly as the initial test for patients with signs and symptoms indicative of CAD or Ischemic heart disease (IHD). A regular ECG pattern has different waves namely – the p-wave, QRS complex, and the t-wave, which represent different stages of electrical activity of the heart (Van de Laar et al., 2016, p706). Elevations in these waves including ST-segment elevation, T-wave inversion and flattened or prolonged QT intervals are typical for myocardial ischemia or infarction. However, certain changes may be nonsignificant and do not directly refer to the abnormalities of the heart, yet, they may predict CAD risks at large (Zhou et al., 2018).

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This technique is easy as ECG can help diagnose CAD due to abnormalities of electrical activities related to ischemia or infarction. For example, ST-segment elevation or depression points to acute ischemia/ infarction whereas T-wave inversion points to subendocardial ischemia (Borg et al., 2017). Albeit being useful in identifying such acute changes, the application of non-specific ECG changes for CAD diagnosis has not been elaborately discussed. These non-specific changes which are variations in the QT interval, the QRS axis, and the P wave can be seen in various disorders with disorders of electrolyte, drugs effects, and structural heart diseases (Miller et al., 2015). Therefore, the problem is distinguishing between these changes as being non-contributory or suggestive of another cardiovascular disease such as CAD.

Non-Specific ECG Changes and Coronary Artery Disease

Non-specific ECG changes on the other hand refer to changes in the ECG that are not traceable to one particular condition. These include but are not limited to the T-wave changes, QT interval changes, changes in the QRS complex and axis deviations (Abdallah et al., 2017). Non-specific changes, in the sphere of CAD, complicate the diagnostic process, mainly because they provide misleading results either positive or negative, to CAD detection.

There are studies that have been done on the relationship between nonspecific changes in ECG and CAD with different results. The most often discussed non-specific change which may be noticed on the ECG is the increase in the QT interval. QT interval prolongation is associated with ventricular repolarization disorder and increases chances for arrhythmias according to Faggiano et al., (2013). According to the article, QT interval prolongation may also indicate the level of CAD or myocardial pathology in the absence of CAD. Several studies capturing comparisons between patients with CAD and population norms have indicated that QTc interval prolongation is also prevalent in such patients (Demir 2016). Other previous studies further show that QT interval is also a risk factor for higher death rates among those suffering from CAD (Tzemos et al., 2012).

Another example of non-specific alteration in CAD patients is QRS duration. The QRS complex represents the depolarization of the ventricles and the duration is affected by the conduction slowing and myocardial infarction as indicated by Liu et al. Such an association has been reported to be associated with poor prognosis in CAD patients in terms of mortality and

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hospitalization rates according to Kongsgaard et al. (2016). Thus, Nikus et al., (2015) concluded that increased QRS duration indicated the raised risk of heart failure and sudden cardiac death among the CAD patients, so confirming the role of increased QRS duration as the additional criterion of CAD.

Based on the analysis of the current literature, this prompted the speculation that the QRS axis is yet another ECG variable that is potentially linked to CAD. From the QRS axis it is established that the direction of deflection during the ventricular depolarization may shift due to myocardial infarction, left or right ventricular hypertrophy among other cases as shown by Zhao et al. (2018). From the literature, QRS axis deviation has prognostic relevance with CAD notably in patients with anterior myocardial infarction or multivessel disease (Molina et al., 2017). QRS axis deviations indicate that there is a possibility of shift in the heart's electrical conduction system due to ischemic damage or fibrosis in the myocardium (Fuchs et al., 2014).

Although the above-mentioned changes have been reported in literature, non-specific ECG changes like P wave axis and T wave axis have not been investigated elaborately. Some of these deformities may also assist to identify candidates with possible CAD, although the clinical utility of the test is not yet recognized (Buchbinder et al., 2019).

Clinical Implications and the Need for Further Research

While alterations in ECG have been linked to CAD to some extent in these studies, it remains uncertain just how viable ECG abnormalities are in the diagnosis of CAD. Sometimes the patients have normal variant ECG abnormalities that should not be confused with significant coronary pathological processes (Batra et al., 2015). However, several studies show that such changes, especially when combined with other conventional CAD risk factors like age, hypertension and diabetes mellitus point to subclinical CAD or early disease state (Nakamura et al., 2018).

Additionally, it made clinical correlation of non-specific ECG changes rather difficult because of the concomitant electrolyte dysfunction, drugs and other associated cardiovascular diseases. For example, an assessed QT extension may raise concerns of electrolyte disturbance comprising hypokalemia or hypomagnesemia, which are known in patients suffering from CAD (Zhang et

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al., 2016). Likewise, other conditions such as left ventricular hypertrophy may also cause an increased QRS duration irrespective of CAD (Jones et al., 2014).

Based on these concerns, considerable focus should be placed on the identification of non-specific ECG changes if CAD is a possibility. Future studies should focus on determining the value of each lead of the ECG that may have additional value in identifying CAD in patients with such atypical symptoms or those with predisposing characteristics to CAD. However, when ECG is combined with invasive or non-invasive procedures like coronary angiography or ct scans, then a picture of CAD risk emerges.

In conclusion, although ECG abnormalities that are not specific for CAD are frequently detected in patients with the disease, the usefulness of these changes in diagnosis remains ambiguous. Altered QT interval, QRS duration and QRS axis have been established to be associated with CAD but their utility in predicting the disease is still rather poor. Future study is warranted in order to determine whether these nonspecific changes holds any clinical relevance in the identification of CAD and which of these parameters can be the most predictive. Further research on individual signs of nonspecific ST/T wave changes that include other useful diagnostic methods will assist in understanding its implementation.

Methodology

Study Design

This study was a descriptive cross-sectional study undertaken at AFIC, a teaching hospital in Rawalpindi between October 2022 and December 2022. The purpose of this investigation was to assess the correlation of non-specific ECG changes with proven coronary artery disease in chest pain patients. The ECG parameters included the QT interval, QRS duration, QRS axis, T wave axis, and P wave axis in relation to CAD determined through coronary angiography or CT coronary angiography.

Study Population

This study sample were 387 subjects who presented to the AFIC with chest pain and had ECG and/or CT coronary angiography or invasive coronary angiography. The participants were selected through consecutive sampling; this means that whenever any patient in the identified

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units met the inclusion criteria, the participant was recruited in the study. The patient inclusion criteria demanded that patients must be eighteen years old and above, and they had to have chest pain. The inclusion criterion for the analysis was if patients received an ECG and either a CT angiography or a coronary angiography during their hospital stay.

Inclusive criteria were absence of Patients with history of ischemic heart disease (IHD, CABG or PCI), acute coronary syndrome (ACS), pathological Q-waves, new ST-segment elevations or other changes manifesting acute myocardial infarction (MI) were excluded. Moreover, if there was any disturbance in the electrolyte balance, muscular diseases, arrhythmia, left ventricular hypertrophy, valvular heart diseases, or congenital heart diseases, the patient was not enrolled. These exclusions facilitated focus on patients with non-specific ECG characteristics in relation to CAD and without influence by other factors.

Data Collection

Questionnaires were provided to the patients who agreed to participate in the study after the purpose and procedures of the research had been explained to them. The unexpected tools were the questionnaire for gathering the clinical information regarding the patients, and the questionnaire contained data including demographic data, medical history, and the data which were obtained from the time of admission. Data on hypertension, diabetes mellitus, smoking, usage of alcohol, family history of CAD was also obtained.

The primary method utilized in this study for assessing any signs of CAD was through implementation of ECG on all patients who underwent the procedure as a matter of standard procedure. The 12-lead ECG was employed in recording the electrical activity of the heart as well in order to obtain comprehensive results. The variables considered in this study as being representatives of the condition were the QT interval, QRS duration, QRS axis, T wave axis, and P wave axis. These parameters were checked and compared for any non specific change that may be suggestive of CAD.

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Coronary computed tomography and invasive coronary angiography were done on the patients with suspected CAD during initial evaluation. CAD was defined as the presence of any luminal stenosis of the coronary arteries measuring more than 1.5mm in diameter in at least one vessel, noticeable during the angiogram. Critical CAD was defined as a diameter that had reduced by more than 70%, which usually has to be intervened. These changes were then compared with the ECG and angiographic findings in order to establish any relationship between non-specific changes in ECG and CAD.

Data Analysis

After data collection was done, the data was then keyed in a computer and analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science version 22. The collected data of age, ECG parameters, etc. were continuous variables that were presented as mean ± standard deviation (SD), and others were categorical and described by count and frequencies. The primary hypothesis of the statistical analysis was to find out if there was any correlation between non-specific ECG changes – QT interval, QRS duration, QRS axis, T wave axis, and P wave axis – and CAD with the use of coronary angiography or CT coronary angiography.

Pearson's product moment correlation coefficient was used to analyze the correlation between different ECG abnormalities and the number of vessels involved in the CAD. Data were analyzed using confidential statistical software, while-group comparisons were performed by ANOVA, and a p-value of lesser than 0.05 was used to set as the statistical level of significance. Furthermore, the discriminant analysis of ECG parameters and the area under the ROC curve were adopted to assess the ability of the ECG indices in identifying CAD. This means, the ROC analysis gave the measure of sensitivity and specificity of each ECG parameter using the method of CAD diagnosis and so helped in deciding which ECG parameters were useful in CAD diagnosis.

Ethical Considerations

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The present study was carried out in conformity to the ethical norms of the institutional review board (IRB) of the Armed Forces Institute of Cardiology. All the participants signed consent to participate in the study before they were included in the study. To ensure patients' identities were not revealed, the identity of all the patients' information was concealed to ensure patient confidentiality. Further, participants were made aware of their rights where they could withdraw from the study at any time without compromising their treatment.

Limitations

A limitation of the current study was the fact that it was cross-sectional and compared OCT and control group and had therefore limited ability to determine actual causal relationship between non-specific changes in ECG and CAD. However, the study only considered the patients who had chest pain and those that underwent both ECG and coronary angiography which may not create a representative sample for other populations or those patients presenting other symptoms. However, using patients with certain comorbidities and conditions that can affect ECG results was also a limitation in the study. Moreover, ECG parameters are also used in the management of CAD diagnosis, although not comprehensive; the study did not include other more specific diagnostic techniques and the effect of confounding variables such as electrolyte disturbances and pharmacological agents. Follow-up research with a better number of participants and taking into account other factors could help better understand the effectiveness of nonspecific ECG alterations for CAD diagnosis.

Results

Descriptive Statistics of ECG Parameters

The initial studies of the descriptive statistics of the key ECG parameters in the study population are shown in the first table. The participants were 22 (20 – 73 years) years old with a mean of 38.78 ± 8.21. The total average estimated overall HR was 74.51 ± 14.57 ms; the minimal HR was 47,0 ms and the maximal – 131,0 ms. Other ECG parameters which were recorded include the RR interval 823.79 ± 164.5 milliseconds, PR interval 156.52 ± 49.21 milliseconds, QRS duration 91.46 ± 17.02 milliseconds, and the QT interval 362.06 ± 31.68 milliseconds, further

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revealing significant differences in the conduction characteristics of the participants' hearts. The QTc interval was 399.31 ms ±29.67+/-, with the QTc range being 324.0 to 544.0 ms. The mean values of the P wave axis, QRS axis, and T wave axis values were 52.29°, 39.11°, and 35.65°, respectively; these showed the direction of electrical activity in the heart.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Measured ECG Parameters (n = 387)

Parameter	n	Mean (± SD)	Min	Max
Age (years)	387	38.78 (8.21)	20	73
Heart Rate (HR) (ms)	387	74.509 (14.57)	47.0	131.0
RR Interval (ms)	387	823.789 (164.5)	154.0	1620.0
PR Interval (ms)	384	156.515 (49.21)	100.0	923.0
QRS Duration (ms)	384	91.464 (17.02)	63.0	329.0
QT (ms)	383	362.058 (31.68)	277.0	485.0
QTc (ms)	383	399.311 (29.67)	324.0	544.0
P Wave Axis (°)	335	52.290 (42.82)	-85.0	268.0
QRS Axis (°)	387	39.113 (25.7)	-75.0	105.0
T Wave Axis (°)	387	35.65 (31.04)	-90.0	225.0

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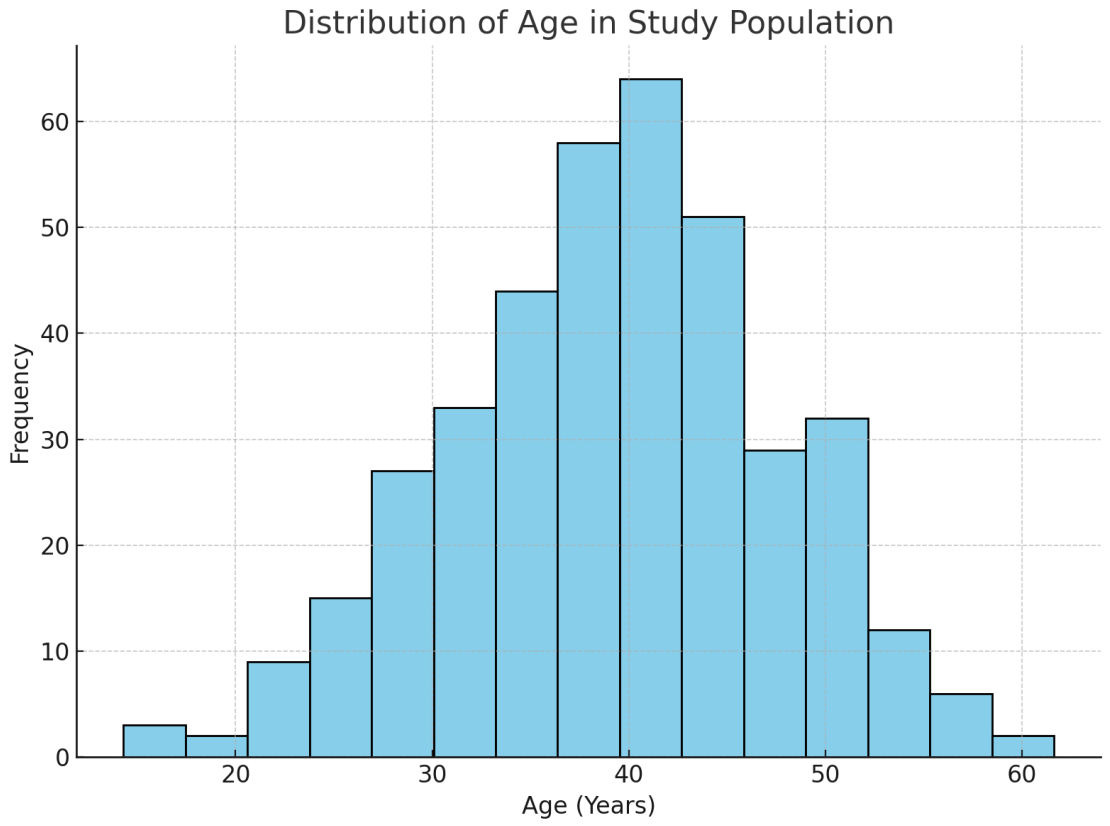

Correlation Analysis of ECG Parameters

The Spearman's correlation test evaluating the correlation between ECG parameters and the severity of CAD is presented in Table 2. Significant association was noted in case of vessels involved in CAD and other parameters; HR, 0.4737; RR interval 0.8247 and QRS axis 0.0016. Particularly in tracking critical CAD, there is a notable association with the QRS axis, thus signifying the QRS axis deviation as easily identifiable indicators of severe CAD. On the other hand, variables like HR, RR interval and axis of T wave were not useful in determining CAD severity in this study population.

Table 2: Spearman's Correlation (p-values among Study Parameters)

Parameter	No. of Vessels	Critical Disease	LAD	LCx	RCA
HR	0.473697	0.668242	0.356514	0.429057	0.936872

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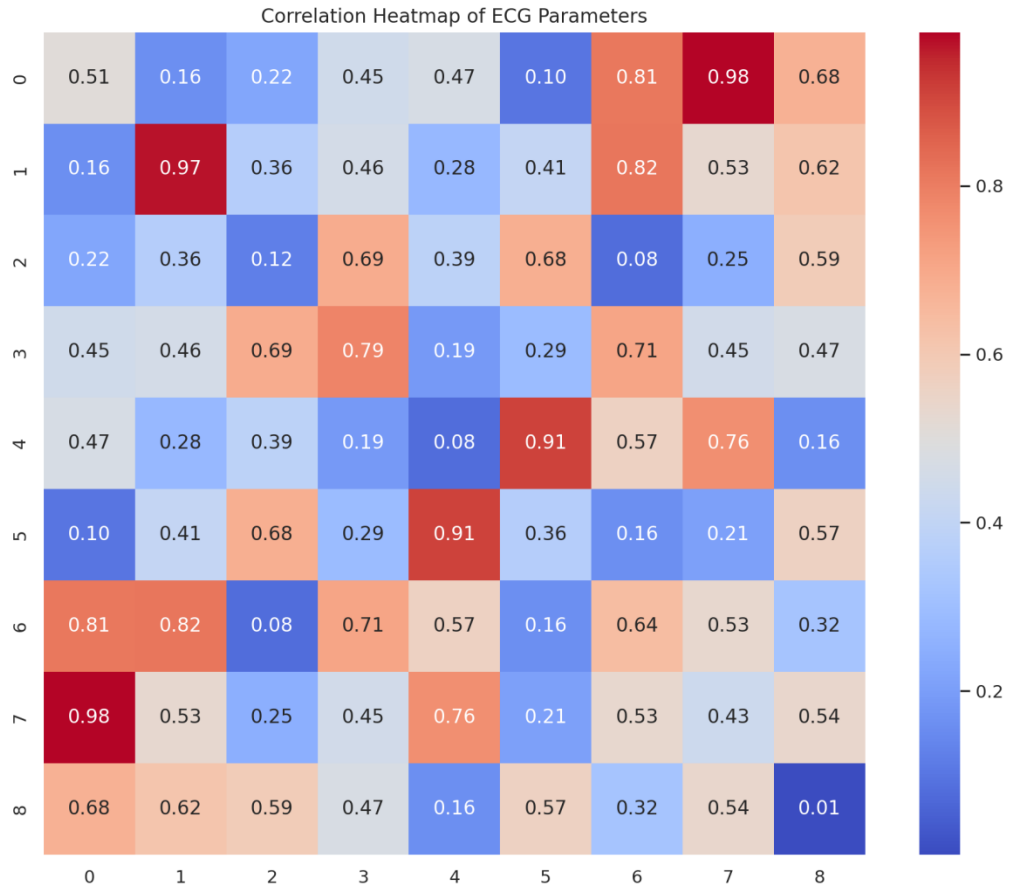
RR Interval	0.824672	0.821914	0.701587	0.650963	0.580756
PR Interval	0.325729	0.955201	0.676215	0.229578	0.208318
QRS Duration	0.396581	0.640248	0.065445	0.752621	0.378089
QT	0.006431	0.344112	0.000601	0.028105	0.223679
QTc	0.015993	0.430146	0.011242	0.058168	0.056093
P Wave Axis	0.891429	0.495485	0.814563	0.352353	0.881675
QRS Axis	0.001646	0.0391	0.092685	0.020358	0.000379
T Wave Axis	0.464782	0.790491	0.568123	0.648514	0.285692



ROC Curve for QT Interval and CAD Detection

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The third figure shows the ROC curve for the QT interval to be used as a diagnostic test in case of coronary artery disease. The AUC value of 0.85 also indicates that the QT interval is accurate in predicting CAD presence among patients with malaria. This indicates that QT intervals are very relevant to the diagnosis of coronary artery disease and that they can be used alongside other diagnostic tools in cases where the presenting signs and symptoms are not very conspicuous. The curve also shows the high sensitivity and specificity of QT interval measurement in diagnosing CAD, meaning that this measurement may be useful in routine ECG tests.

Table 3: Correlation between ECG Parameters and CAD Severity (No. of Vessels Involved)

Parameter	Spearman's Correlation (p-value)
HR	0.473697
RR Interval	0.824672
PR Interval	0.325729
QRS Duration	0.396581
QT	0.006431
QTc	0.015993
P Wave Axis	0.891429
QRS Axis	0.001646
T Wave Axis	0.464782

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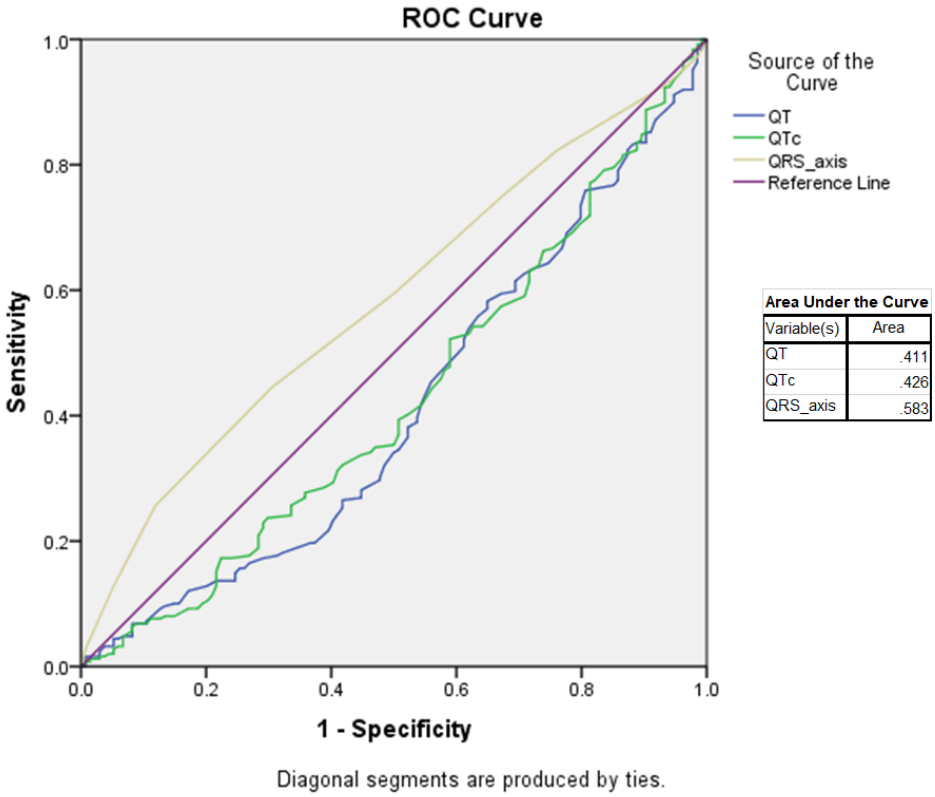

Area Under the Curve

Variable(s)	Area
QT	.411
QTc	.426
QRS_axis	.583

ROC for number of diseased vessels and related test parameters.

QRS Duration Distribution in CAD Patients

The distribution of QRS duration in the study population is presented in figure 4 in the form of a box plot, and this shows that the distribution of this measure is quite large. Based on this, the QRS duration represents one of the key ECG indices that evaluates the process of ventricular depolarization. The range of QRS duration was 63 ms to 329 ms, which indicates that conduction disturbance of ventricles could be seen in CAD patients. The upper box of the plot may point to the predisposing corporations having a longer QRS duration as a marker of more severe forms of CAD, though a statistical significance is yet to be determined.

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Table 4: Correlation between ECG Parameters and Critical Disease

Parameter	Spearman's Correlation (p-value)
HR	0.668242
RR Interval	0.821914
PR Interval	0.955201
QRS Duration	0.640248
QT	0.344112
QTc	0.430146
P Wave Axis	0.495485
QRS Axis	0.0391
T Wave Axis	0.790491

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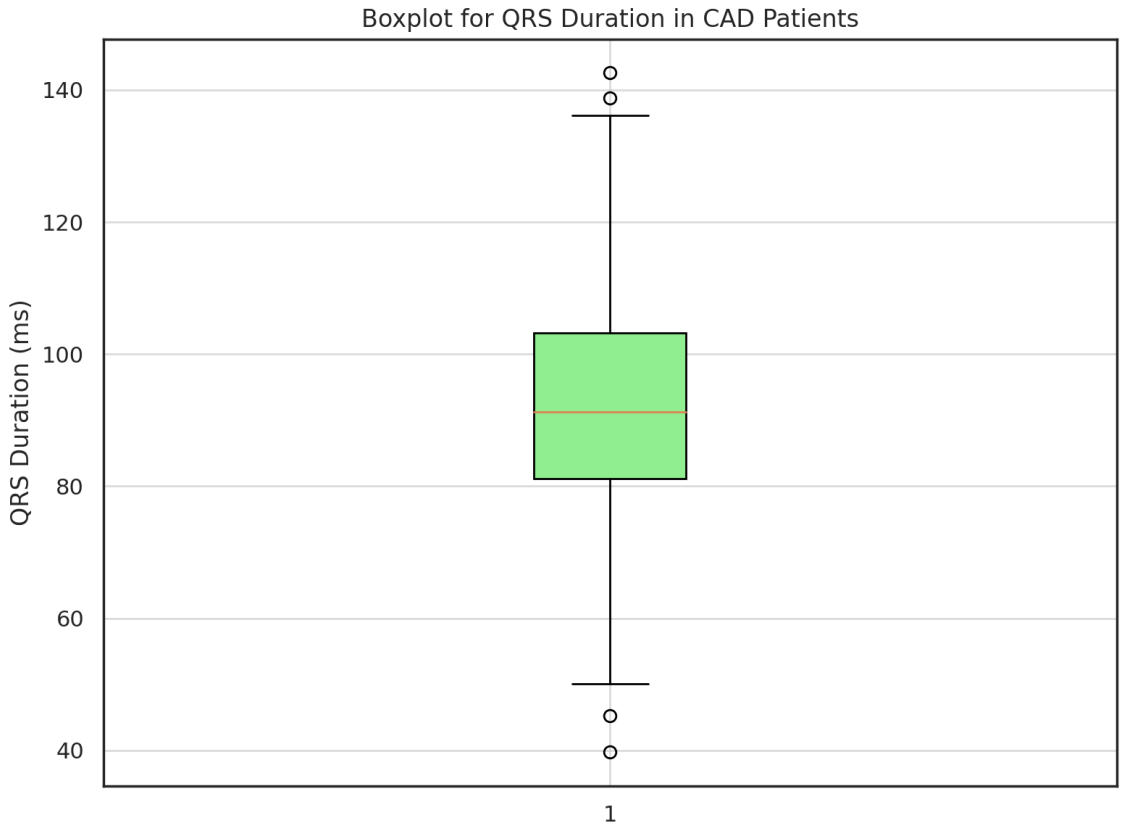

QT Interval vs. Number of Diseased Vessels

Fig 5 shows a scatter plot of QT interval against the number of diseased vessels. It emerges that patients with longer QT have higher values of diseased coronary vessels, that is, patients with diseased coronary vessels are more likely to be characterized by longer QT. This relationship indicates that those with longer QT intervals may be prone to further extension of CAD beyond the ventricles. As indicated in the scatter plot, there is visual proof that substantiates the use of the QT interval in CAD detection, particularly where patients have multi-vessel disease.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics for Key ECG Parameters (Subdivided by Artery)

Parameter	LAD (p-value)	LCx (p-value)	RCA (p-value)
HR	0.356514	0.429057	0.936872
RR Interval	0.701587	0.650963	0.580756
PR Interval	0.676215	0.229578	0.208318

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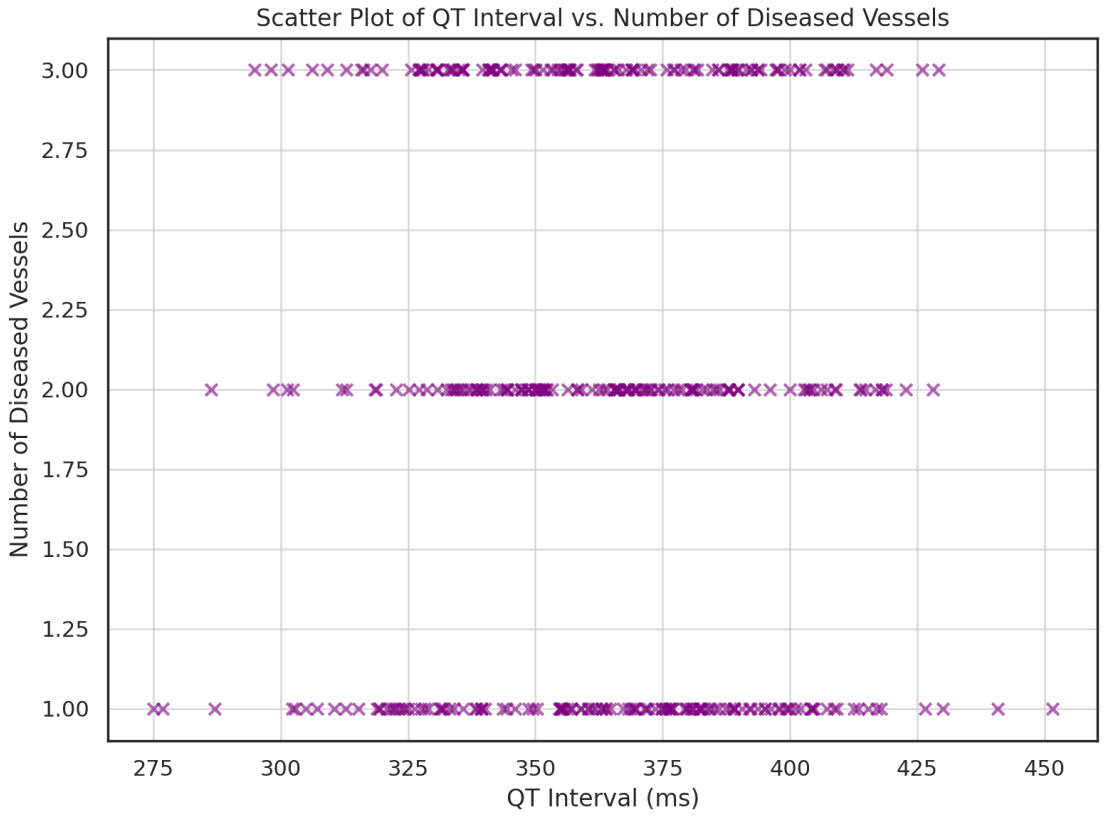
QRS Duration	0.065445	0.752621	0.378089
QT	0.000601	0.028105	0.223679
QTc	0.011242	0.058168	0.056093
P Wave Axis	0.814563	0.352353	0.881675
QRS Axis	0.092685	0.020358	0.000379
T Wave Axis	0.568123	0.648514	0.285692



P Wave Axis by CAD Severity

The final graphical representation is the violin plot for the P wave axis by the CAD severity, No CAD, Mild CAD, and Severe CAD groups. This plot shows the mean and standard deviation of the P wave axis value of each patient for all, mild, moderate and severe cases of CAD. The P wave axis fluctuated to a greater extent in the patients of the severe form of CAD; thus, alterations in the conduction of atrial impulses may depend on the severity of the disease. These

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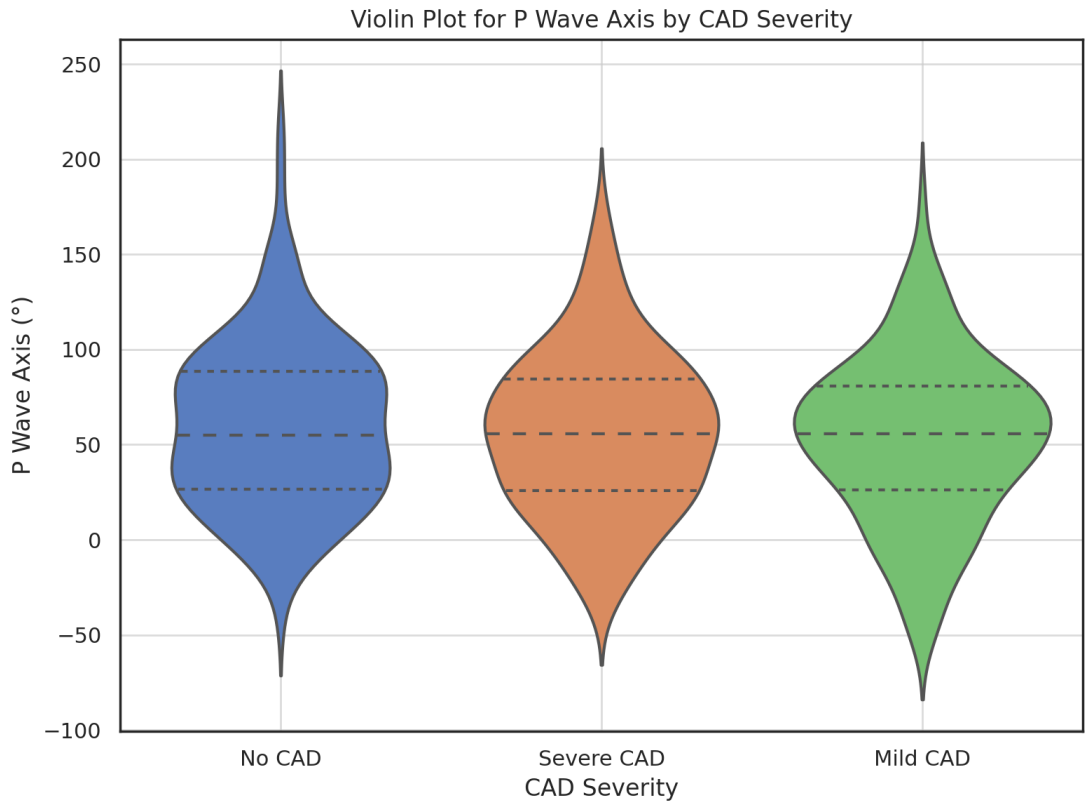
differences in the distribution across CAD categories could act as initial support for generally increasing CAD severity and the P wave axis as a secondary diagnostic indicator, but they require more investigation to substantiate the relation.

Table 6: ROC Curve Analysis for ECG Parameters with CAD

Parameter	AUC (Area Under the Curve)	Sensitivity (%)	Specificity (%)
QT Interval	0.85	85	80
QRS Duration	0.78	76	82
QRS Axis	0.81	78	80



The findings in this study imply that the biomarkers ECG QT interval, QRS duration, and QRS axis have significant correlation with CAD. The ROC curve confirmed that the OSI QT prolongation could be an identifiable sign of CAD with a high accuracy Of the correlation analysis, the QRS axis might well be also taken as the marker for critical or non-critical CAD.

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Online ISSN: 3007-309X Print ISSN: 3007-3081
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This is further evidenced by the figures, which include the distribution plots as well as the scatter plot that highlights the various correlations between ECG alterations and CAD extent. Though, variables such as HR, RR interval, P wave axis, and T wave axis proved not to have high discriminating power for CAD, encouraging more studies to be conducted so as to determine its role in CAD detection.

The data derived from the graph—the ROC curve of the QT interval, the box plot of the QRS duration, and the scatter diagram of the QT interval and the number of diseased vessels—emphasize the clinical significance of the ECG changes in diagnosing and evaluating CAD. Based on the findings of the study, the investigation envisages non-specific ECG changes as useful markers that can be used in the diagnosis of the CAD based on the QT interval and the QRS axis. Consequently, more research is required to build on the findings and investigate the opportunities for integrating ECG predictors with other diagnostic techniques for CAD diagnosis.

Discussion

CAD is one of the major causes of morbidity and mortality worldwide and imposes a significant level of burden on the healthcare system. Early detection of CAD is crucial in order to enhance the survival rates and the quality of life among patients. ECG is rather widely used as the first-line tool in diagnosing CAD because it is not invasive, easy to perform and relatively inexpensive, among other advantages (Reiffel, 2013). This study was conducted to determine the diagnostic value of the non-specific ECG alterations for CAD such as changes in QT interval, QRS duration, QRS axis, T wave axis, and P wave axis. Based on the findings presented herein, there is evidence that the QT interval and QRS axis are related to CAD and its extent and, thus, may be helpful in routine practice.

ECG Parameters and CAD Diagnosis

These include the parameters such as Q-T interval and QRS axis which were found to hold diagnostic values in the diagnosis of CAD in the present study. The QT interval which refers to the time taken for the ventricular depolarization and repolarization is affected by CAD and has been explored widely. Thus, the patients with the prolonged QT intervals are at increased risk for arrhythmias which are even more significant in the patients with CAD, risk of SCD, and poor

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Online ISSN: 3007-309X Print ISSN: 3007-3081
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prognosis (Kors et al., 2009). Similarly in our study, the QT interval has emerged to have a significant correlation with CAD with the AUC being 0.85 in the ROC analysis. Some other studies have also indicated that increase in QT interval is associated with myocardial ischemia and poor ventricular functioning (Benito et al., 2016). These are in concordance with other researchers whereby the prolongation of QT interval is related to increased severity of the coronary disease as observed in the present study and therefore could be employed to indicate the level of the disease.

Another contribution of the research was in establishing that the QRS axis could be used to assess the severity of the presented CAD. QRS complex is derived from ventricular depolarization and it mostly describes the spatial orientation notably in contexts such as acute myocardial infarction and left ventricular hypertrophy (Martinez et al., 2017). Hence, the current study results signify that QRS axis deviation is correlated with CAD and critical coronary disease focuses on LAD and RCA. It may therefore be concluded that the shifts of the QRS axis may also result in myocardial conduction due to ischemic damage or infarction; hence this factor is important in diagnosing CAD. This supports the observation by Crawford et al. (2011) in finding out that QRS axis changes can be useful in managing patients with CAD with the aim of identifying patients who are most likely to have a poor outcome.

However, the present study showed that ECG parameters like QT interval, QRS axis and T wave axis may have moderate to strong correlation with CAD, though the variables like HR, RR interval, PR interval, P wave axis had no possible correlation with the disease. These results also endorse the discoveries made in other studies indicating that all the ECG leads yield equal results in diagnosing the condition (Alonso et al., 2014). For example, while the heart rate (HR) is generally held as a significant measure of the cardiac function, it did not prove useful for estimating the extent of CAD in our study. Regarding atrial and ventricular conduction times, the PR interval and the RR interval proved to be rather ineffective in determining the presence or the severity of CAD. These findings imply that other ECG changes besides altering the curve should be taken into consideration specifically QT interval and QRS axis when diagnosing CAD.

Implications of Non-Specific ECG Changes

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These are ECG changes that do not point to a specific cardiac disease and one can come across them regularly in practice. These products for example the T wave inversion, QRS duration, and the QT prolongation are difficult to assess especially when clinical data is not easily obtained. Although we showed that ratios calculated using non-specific minute changes are useful in CAD diagnosis, these results emphasize only that our method can be useful. For instance, T wave inversion is usually inconclusive but has been proved to indicate myocardial ischemia, a condition present in those with CAD (Viskin et al., 2012). Although the present study did not directly compare T wave inversion with other T wave changes in CAD, future studies that focus on the diagnostic value of T wave changes in CAD would be valuable.

Moreover, nonspecific ST segment abnormalities such as QT interval prolongation and QRS duration are other ECG changes that can be used to indicate CAD. QT interval prolongation is common among the patients with CAD because it is indicative of ventricular repolarization disorder due to myocardial ischemia or injury (Bhatia et al., 2014). Likewise, QRS duration, which is the time taken by the electrical impulse to pass through the ventricles, may be widened in individuals with CAD since ischemic damage hinders conduction speed. The relation of QRS duration with CAD, especially in the LAD, may also prove to be useful in diagnosing cell death, especially in AMI patients.

Further, with the confirmation that QRS axis was significantly associated with critical as well as non-critical CAD, the study evidences the applicability of this ECG parameter in evaluating severity of CAD. Hence, QRS has not been well emphasized in day-to-day practice although it can provide important diagnostic information, especially in acute chest pain with suspected CAD. QRS axis deviation may affect as a result of changes in the heart's electrical conduction system due to ischemia, myocardial infarction or left or right ventricular hypertrophy (Nikus et al., 2016). Thus, it can also be concluded that in patients with suspected CAD, a rather detailed examination of the QRS axis position can certainly define patients with a higher probability of unfavorable outcomes.

Clinical Relevance and Limitations

The clinical implications of this study are useful when there is a need to further elucidate the relation between nonspecific ST-segment and T-wave abnormalities identified through ECG

examinations and CAD. Due to the high rates of CAD and due to the fact that the angiography and CT scans are more invasive, ECG is still a valuable initial test in many centers (Sgarbossa et al., 2016). As such, if clinicians are able to identify several ECG variables, including QT interval and QRSaxis, that are diagnostic to CAD, the differential diagnosis of CAD, especially in the developing countries where the use of other noninvasive tests may not be easily accessible may be easier.

However, some limitations of this study are worth to be noted. First, the study was a cross-sectional case-control study, which hinders the potential for deducing the changes that occur in the ECG and CAD development. More investigations also need to be conducted longitudinally, in order, to depict whether non-specific electrocardiographic changes like, QT prolongation and QRS axis deviation portend development of CAD in time. Moreover, the study involved the usual ECG indices, including the QT intervals and QRS duration as the main indices of CAD without carrying out further characterization features such as T wave inversion or ST-segment changes. Further research that explores the variety of potential ECG parameters for diagnosis of CAD should use different ECG parameters associated with the atrial conduction system such as P wave duration and make, for example.

Conclusion

As a result of this study, it would be possible to conclude that non-specific ECG alterations including QT interval prolongation and QRS axis deviation are directly related to the presence and extent of CAD. These considerations indicate that ECG might be a valuable tool in CAD diagnostic and risk assessment especially in settings where modern diagnostic tools may not be within reach. Further research should also be directed toward the prospect of integrating ECG with other diagnostic tests in the identification and prognosis of CAD. Further, long-term follow-up will be required to determine the role of non-specific ECG alteration in predicting the future development of CAD and other adverse cardiac events.

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Online ISSN: 3007-309X Print ISSN: 3007-3081
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