E-ISSN 2250-0944

ISSN 2250-1150
Doi: 10.48047/ijprt/15.02.22

Visual outcomes of medical and surgical modalities in secondary glaucomas (inflammatory vs pigmentary) compared to primary open-angle glaucoma. A multi-factorial comparative study

Adeel Chaudhry[1], Fareeha Mirza[2], Tariq Pervaiz Khan[3], Fakhar Humayun[4], Fahd Kamal Akhtar[5], Muhammad Imran Ali[6]

[1] Senior Registrar, Ophthalmology, Lahore General Hospital, dr.adeel.randhawa@gmail.com.
[2] Senior Registrar, Ophthalmology, Avicenna Medical College, Lahore, fmirza063@gmail.com.
[3] Consultant Eye Specialist, Associate Professor, Avicenna Medical College and Hospital, Lahore, klopidstar@gmail.com.
[4] Associate Professor of Ophthalmology, Continental Medical College, Lahore, humayunfakhar@yahoo.com

[5] Senior Registrar, Ophthalmology, Services Hospital, Lahore, fkak82@gmail.com.
[6] Consultant Ophthalmology, King Khalid Hospital, Al-Majmaah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, ali.ophth@gmail.com.

Corresponding author (Tariq Pervaiz Khan,klopidstar@gmail.com).

Abstract

Secondary glaucomas, particularly inflammatory glaucoma (IG) and pigmentary glaucoma (PG), demonstrate greater clinical variability and treatment complexity compared to primary open-angle glaucoma (POAG). This prospective, multifactorial cohort study evaluated and compared visual outcomes, therapeutic responses, surgical choices, follow-up demands, financial implications, and patient-reported satisfaction across these three glaucoma subtypes. A total of 180 patients (60 per group) were enrolled and stratified by disease severity at presentation. All underwent standardized initial medical therapy, with surgical intervention (trabeculectomy or valve implantation) employed in refractory cases. POAG patients exhibited the highest response rate to medical therapy (78%), followed by PG (62%) and IG (48%) ($p < 0.01$). Trabeculectomy was predominantly successful in POAG and PG (82% and 64% respectively), while valve implants were favored in IG (68%) due to inflammatory risks. IG cases, despite improved intraocular pressure (IOP) control post-valve implantation, required the most intensive follow-up and incurred the greatest financial burden. Visual stabilization was achieved in 88% of POAG, 75% of PG, and

64% of IG cases ($p < 0.05$). Patient satisfaction was highest in POAG (91%) and lowest in IG (66%). These findings underscore the need for early diagnosis, customized therapeutic strategies, and informed patient counseling in secondary glaucomas, particularly in IG where disease aggressiveness and postoperative care demand a tailored multidisciplinary approach.

Keywords: Secondary glaucoma, Inflammatory glaucoma, Valve implantation

Introduction

Glaucoma represents a heterogeneous group of optic neuropathies, characterized by progressive retinal ganglion cell death and irreversible visual field loss, resulting from sustained intraocular pressure (IOP) elevation or altered ocular biomechanics. While primary open-angle glaucoma (POAG) remains the predominant form globally,^1 secondary open-angle glaucomas—such as inflammatory glaucoma (IG) and pigmentary glaucoma (PG)—exhibit distinct etiologies, more aggressive courses, and unique management challenges. POAG typically progresses insidiously with a slower visual decline, and often responds favorably to first-line medical therapy, including prostaglandin analogs, β-blockers, and laser trabeculoplasty.^2 In contrast, IG results from inflammatory-mediated damage to the trabecular meshwork in uveitic eyes, often refractory to standard pharmacotherapy and frequently necessitating surgical intervention.^3 PG arises from pigment dispersion syndrome, in which liberated iris pigment obstructs aqueous outflow—commonly in young myopic males—and may demonstrate variable responsiveness to medical or procedural treatments.^4,5

Recent epidemiological data indicate that approximately 30 % of uveitis patients develop IG, with incidence rates remaining stable over the last decade.^6 IG is marked by fluctuating IOP driven by recurrent inflammation or corticosteroid overuse, potentiating rapid visual field deterioration and optic nerve injury. A recent randomized analysis of selective laser trabeculoplasty in uveitic glaucoma demonstrated a 39 % reduction in IOP at six months without exacerbating inflammation,^7 affirming the need for multimodal interventions. Conversely, PG affects 1–1.5 % of Western glaucoma populations,^8 and nearly 10 % of pigment dispersion syndrome cases progress to PG within five years.^9 Although Nd:YAG laser peripheral iridotomy shows potential

to alleviate reverse pupillary block and reduce pigment liberation, clinical outcomes are inconsistent and long-term IOP control remains uncertain.^10

Surgical management strategies differ across subtypes. Conventional trabeculectomy is frequently effective in POAG, yielding mean IOP reductions of 30–40 % at one year.^11 In IG, however, success rates of trabeculectomy fall below 60 %, and postoperative complications—such as bleb fibrosis—are prevalent without anti-metabolite adjuncts.^12 As a result, glaucoma drainage devices like Ahmed or Baerveldt valves have become the preferred surgical option in refractory IG,^13,14 with studies demonstrating qualified success rates of 85–91 % and early IOP control superior to trabeculectomy in high-risk eyes.^15 Similarly, valve placement in complicated uveitic cases is associated with extended postoperative follow-up and higher financial cost compared to filtering surgery.^14

Despite these advances, comparative data between IG, PG, and POAG remain limited, especially regarding comprehensive evaluations that include medical therapy response rates, surgical modality distribution, visual stabilization, treatment burden, long-term follow-up patterns, and patient satisfaction. Previous studies have typically focused on single glaucoma subtypes, lacking multifactorial analyses across secondary and primary forms. The current study addresses this gap via a prospective comparative cohort design involving 180 patients (60 per group), with standardized stratification by baseline visual impairment and outcome measures spanning IOP control, visual stability, surgical invasiveness, adjunctive therapy, follow-up frequency, financial burden, and subjective satisfaction. In light of evolving surgical techniques—such as micro-invasive glaucoma surgery (MIGS) and improved valve technology—a timely, data-rich comparison across glaucoma subtypes is of critical clinical relevance.^16

Findings from this study reveal a clear gradient in medical therapy effectiveness (POAG 78 %, PG 62 %, IG 48 %, $p < 0.01$) and in visual stabilization rates (POAG 88 %, PG 75 %, IG 64 %, $p < 0.05$). Surgical modality choices likewise align with subtype aggressiveness: trabeculectomy was successful in most POAG and PG cases but valve implantation dominated in IG (68 %) due to higher inflammatory risk. Post-surgical care demands and financial burden were also highest in IG. This multifactorial outcome profiling emphasizes the necessity of tailored patient counseling—

particularly regarding the possibility of valve surgery, requirements for ongoing medication, and a high surveillance burden in IG and PG.

This study introduces a novel integrated metric combining clinical, socioeconomic, and patient-reported outcomes to better inform management strategies in glaucoma subtypes. To our knowledge, this is the first prospective study to assess and contrast these variables across IG, PG, and POAG cohorts in parallel. These data should empower clinicians to set realistic expectations during counseling and guide resource allocation in clinical settings.

Methodology

This was a prospective, multifactorial, comparative cohort study conducted over a 24-month period at Lahore General Hospital a tertiary ophthalmology center. Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional review board, and all procedures adhered to the tenets of the Declaration of Helsinki. Verbal and written informed consent was obtained from all participants after a detailed explanation of the nature, purpose, potential risks, and benefits of the study. Patients were consecutively enrolled into three groups: inflammatory glaucoma (IG), pigmentary glaucoma (PG), and primary open-angle glaucoma (POAG), with each group comprising 60 patients. Sample size was calculated using Epi Info version 7.2.5 (CDC, Atlanta, USA) for cohort studies, with a power of 80%, 95% confidence interval, and expected outcome difference of 25% in visual stabilization between POAG and IG groups, yielding a minimum required sample of 54 per group, inflated to 60 to account for potential dropout.

Inclusion criteria were patients aged 18–70 years with a confirmed diagnosis of IG (secondary to uveitis), PG (based on slit-lamp identification of pigment dispersion and gonioscopic findings), or POAG (based on open angles on gonioscopy, glaucomatous optic neuropathy, and reproducible visual field defects). Only patients with moderate-to-severe risk of visual loss and no prior glaucoma surgery were included. Exclusion criteria included prior intraocular surgery within six months (except cataract surgery), neovascular or traumatic glaucoma, angle-closure mechanisms, monocular patients, and those with less than 12 months of follow-up. Baseline demographic and clinical parameters were recorded, including best-corrected visual acuity (BCVA), IOP, visual

field indices, cup-to-disc ratio, and severity of visual disability categorized into mild (BCVA ≥6/18), moderate (6/60–6/18), and severe (<6/60).

All patients were initially managed with standard maximum tolerated medical therapy, including prostaglandin analogs, β-blockers, carbonic anhydrase inhibitors, and topical steroids in IG cases, adjusted based on clinical response. Non-responders—defined as those with IOP ≥21 mmHg or progression of visual field loss despite maximum therapy—were scheduled for surgical intervention. The surgical approach was determined based on glaucoma subtype and clinical judgment: conventional trabeculectomy with mitomycin C was preferred in POAG and PG, while Ahmed glaucoma valve implantation was performed in most IG cases due to higher risk of surgical failure and inflammatory complications. Surgical outcomes were recorded based on IOP control (target ≤18 mmHg without hypotony), visual acuity change, and need for adjunctive medication postoperatively.

Follow-up was scheduled monthly for IG, bimonthly for PG, and quarterly for POAG, with adjustments based on postoperative status. At each visit, data were collected on IOP, BCVA, number of medications, visual field stability, and any complications. Patient-reported satisfaction was assessed via a structured questionnaire on a 5-point Likert scale evaluating vision stability, medication burden, cost, and overall experience. Financial burden was estimated through direct (medication, surgery) and indirect (follow-up transport, lost wages) costs over the follow-up period.

Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS version 26.0 (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY). Continuous variables such as IOP and cost were reported as means with standard deviation (SD), and categorical variables as frequencies and percentages. Chi-square or Fisher's exact tests were used for categorical comparisons, while one-way ANOVA or Kruskal–Wallis test was applied for continuous variables depending on distribution. A p-value <0.05 was considered statistically significant.

Results

Table 1: Demographic and Baseline Clinical Characteristics of Study Participants

Variable	POAG (n=60)	PG (n=60)	IG (n=60)	p-value
Mean Age (years)	58.2 ± 7.1	42.6 ± 6.4	46.3 ± 8.9	<0.001
Gender (Male %)	34 (56.7%)	41 (68.3%)	29 (48.3%)	0.041
BCVA at presentation (LogMAR)	0.36 ± 0.21	0.42 ± 0.25	0.58 ± 0.34	0.008
Mean IOP (mmHg)	25.6 ± 3.2	27.1 ± 4.5	32.4 ± 5.3	<0.001
Severity at presentation				
- Mild	26 (43.3%)	18 (30.0%)	8 (13.3%)	
- Moderate	24 (40.0%)	29 (48.3%)	22 (36.7%)	<0.001
- Severe	10 (16.7%)	13 (21.7%)	30 (50.0%)	

Explanation: IG patients presented significantly younger with more severe disease and higher baseline IOP than POAG or PG ($p < 0.001$). Visual disability was more severe in IG at presentation.

Table 2: Treatment Modalities and Visual Outcomes

Parameter	POAG (n=60)	PG (n=60)	IG (n=60)	p-value
Responded to medical therapy (%)	47 (78.3%)	37 (61.7%)	29 (48.3%)	<0.001
Underwent trabeculectomy (%)	49 (81.7%)	38 (63.3%)	14 (23.3%)	<0.001
Underwent valve implantation (%)	3 (5.0%)	9 (15.0%)	41 (68.3%)	<0.001
Visual stabilization (%)	53 (88.3%)	45 (75.0%)	38 (63.3%)	0.004
Post-surgery medication need (%)	18 (30.0%)	27 (45.0%)	42 (70.0%)	<0.001

Explanation: Medical therapy was most effective in POAG. IG had a significantly higher need for valve surgery and continued medical therapy. Visual stabilization was lowest in IG.

Table 3: Follow-Up Intensity, Financial Burden, and Patient Satisfaction

Outcome Measure	POAG (n=60)	PG (n=60)	IG (n=60)	p-value
Mean follow-up visits/year	4.1 ± 1.2	6.3 ± 1.8	11.5 ± 2.6	<0.001
Mean total treatment cost (USD/year)	420 ± 85	870 ± 190	1430 ± 235	<0.001
High patient satisfaction (%)	55 (91.7%)	47 (78.3%)	40 (66.7%)	0.003

Explanation: IG patients experienced significantly higher treatment costs and follow-up frequency, correlating with lower satisfaction levels compared to POAG and PG.

Discussion

The present study offers a robust comparative analysis across inflammatory glaucoma (IG), pigmentary glaucoma (PG), and primary open-angle glaucoma (POAG), uniquely integrating clinical, economic, and patient-reported outcomes. The notably poorer medical therapy response in IG (48 %) versus POAG (78 %) and PG (62 %) aligns with recent trials highlighting the therapy-resistant nature of uveitic glaucoma driven by persistent trabecular inflammation and corticosteroid-induced IOP spikes, underscoring the need for early surgical consideration ^16–^18. This finding amplifies the clinical imperative for prompt recognition of IG's aggressive behavior and supports a shift toward earlier, more intensive intervention paradigms.

Valve implantation in IG was employed in 68 % of cases, significantly surpassing trabeculectomy usage, consistent with contemporary evidence demonstrating higher success rates and lower postoperative inflammation in uveitic eyes ^19,20. The improved postoperative IOP control observed in this cohort after valve surgery reinforces these reports, though it entailed increased follow-up frequency. These findings support a nuanced surgical algorithm that balances efficacy with resource demands, advocating valve placement as first-line in IG patients with high inflammatory risk factors.

Despite high surgical intervention, 70 % of IG patients required continued medication, revealing that drainage devices alone may not suffice for long-term IOP management in complex cases. This is congruent with recent longitudinal analyses reporting adjunctive therapy in up to 65 % of valve-implanted IG eyes ^21,22. Findings emphasize the need for realistic patient counseling regarding postoperative expectations and medication adherence to achieve stable outcomes.

Visual stabilization results (IG 64 %, PG 75 %, POAG 88 %) reinforce the gradient of disease severity, with IG posing the greatest threat to vision. These outcomes are well-substantiated by recent population-based studies demonstrating higher rates of visual field progression and optic nerve damage in uveitic glaucoma compared to primary variants ^23,24. The comparatively favorable optics in PG reflect its intermediate position, necessitating vigilant monitoring but offering scope for stabilization when managed effectively.

Economic analysis revealed that IG patients faced substantially higher direct and indirect costs than PG or POAG groups. This confirms emerging data indicating that uveitic glaucoma incurs up to double the annual healthcare expenditure of other glaucoma types due to frequent visits, anti-inflammatory treatments, and surgical expenses ^25,26. These data reinforce the urgency for policy-level interventions to mitigate patient financial burden and optimize resource allocation.

Patient satisfaction was lowest in IG (66 %) despite aggressive management, highlighting a concerning disconnect between clinical intervention and patient-perceived quality of care. This parallels findings from recent qualitative studies showing that long treatment journeys, unpredictable outcomes, and economic strain diminish satisfaction even when clinical targets are met ^27,28. Emphasizing realistic pre-treatment counseling and psychosocial support may be key to enhancing patient experience.

Collectively, the data advocate for a comprehensive, subtype-specific management model integrating early surgical planning, robust follow-up pathways, and financial counseling. This study fills a critical gap by systematically comparing multifaceted outcomes across glaucoma subtypes in a prospective cohort and lays groundwork for future randomized trials to refine management algorithms and optimize resource utilization ^29,30.

Conclusion

This study highlights the distinct clinical trajectory and management burden of inflammatory and pigmentary glaucomas compared to POAG. Valve implantation in IG offers superior IOP control but demands higher postoperative care and incurs greater financial and patient satisfaction challenges. The findings fill a critical research gap by emphasizing the need for individualized, subtype-specific glaucoma strategies to improve long-term outcomes.

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