|| ISSN(online): 2589-8698 || ISSN(print): 2589-868X ||

Available online on http://www.ijmbs.info

International Journal of Medical and Biomedical Studies; 2025; 9(1); 160-165

Original Research Article

Outcomes of Posterior Decompression and Spinal Instrumentation in the Treatment of Lumbar Canal Stenosis

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Received: 02-01-2025 / Revised: 11-01-2025 / Accepted: 29-01-2025
DOI: https://doi.org/10.32553/ijmbs.v9i1.3013
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Conflict of interest: Nil

Abstract:

Background: Lumbar canal stenosis (LCS) is a common degenerative spinal condition causing neural compression, leading to pain, functional impairment, and reduced quality of life. While posterior decompression is the gold-standard surgical approach, its combination with spinal instrumentation provides additional stability in cases with potential postoperative instability.

Aim: To evaluate the outcomes of posterior decompression and spinal instrumentation in patients with lumbar canal stenosis, focusing on functional improvement, pain relief, complications, and overall effectiveness.

Methods: This prospective study included 42 patients with lumbar canal stenosis treated with posterior decompression and spinal instrumentation at SCB Medical College, Cuttack, from February 2024 to January 2025. Preoperative and postoperative functional outcomes were assessed using the Oswestry Disability Index (ODI) and Visual Analog Scale (VAS) for pain. Data on complications and patient satisfaction were also recorded. Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS version 23.0, with significance set at $p < 0.05$.

Results: The mean preoperative ODI of 75.3% improved significantly to 25.4% at 12 months postoperatively ($p < 0.001$). Pain scores also demonstrated substantial improvement, with mean VAS scores decreasing from 6.8 at 1 month to 1.8 at 12 months. Minor complications, such as superficial infections, occurred in 3 patients (7.1%), with no major complications reported. Overall, 90.5% of patients experienced complete pain relief, and functional outcomes improved consistently over follow-up.

Conclusion: Posterior decompression with spinal instrumentation is an effective and safe intervention for lumbar canal stenosis, significantly improving functional outcomes and providing substantial pain relief with minimal complications. The procedure demonstrates high patient satisfaction and long-term efficacy.

Recommendations: Future research should explore the comparative effectiveness of this technique versus emerging motion-preserving surgical approaches, particularly in younger patients. Additionally, studies focusing on cost-effectiveness and the prevention of adjacent segment disease are warranted.

Keywords: Lumbar canal stenosis, posterior decompression, spinal instrumentation, functional outcomes, surgical complications

Introduction

Lumbar canal stenosis (LCS) is one of the most common spinal conditions encountered in clinical practice, particularly in the aging population. It is characterized by a narrowing of the spinal canal that leads to compression of neural structures, resulting in symptoms such as neurogenic claudication, lower back pain, and radiculopathy. With the global rise in life expectancy, the prevalence of LCS has increased significantly, making it a major cause of functional impairment and reduced quality of life in older adults [1].

The initial management of LCS typically includes conservative measures such as physical therapy, pharmacological pain relief, and epidural steroid injections. However, when these fail or when neurological deficits worsen, surgical intervention becomes necessary. Posterior decompression, involving the removal of compressive elements such as the lamina or ligamentum flavum, remains the gold standard treatment for relieving neural compression and improving patient outcomes [2]. Despite its effectiveness, decompression alone may lead to postoperative spinal instability, particularly in patients with pre-existing spondylolisthesis, severe facet joint degeneration, or deformities [3].

To address this, posterior decompression is often combined with spinal instrumentation and fusion to provide mechanical stability to the operated segments. Instrumentation using pedicle screws and rods has shown to improve long-term outcomes by preventing postoperative instability, enhancing fusion rates, and reducing the risk of recurrent symptoms [4]. Studies, including recent systematic reviews and meta-analyses, have confirmed the efficacy of combining decompression with instrumentation in improving functional outcomes and quality of life while maintaining a low complication profile [5,6].

Advancements in surgical techniques and instrumentation have further improved the safety and efficacy of these procedures. The use of minimally invasive approaches has led to reduced blood loss, shorter hospital stays, and faster recovery times compared to traditional open surgeries [7]. However, the addition of spinal instrumentation also raises concerns about increased costs, surgical complexity, and the risk of adjacent segment disease due to altered biomechanics [8]. To evaluate the outcomes of posterior decompression and spinal instrumentation in patients with lumbar canal stenosis, focusing on functional improvement, pain relief, complications, and overall effectiveness.

Posterior decompression and spinal instrumentation have demonstrated varying outcomes depending on patient characteristics and surgical techniques. In a study by Okada et al., patients with lumbar canal stenosis (LCS) and diffuse idiopathic skeletal hyperostosis (DISH) who underwent posterior decompression experienced greater blood loss, longer operation times, and poorer recovery compared to patients without DISH. Furthermore, patients with DISH exhibited increased translation at the decompressed segment two years postoperatively [9]. Similarly, early functional outcomes of posterior spinal decompression highlighted significant reductions in pain and improvements in the Oswestry Disability Index (ODI) scores within 12 weeks postoperatively. However, complications like dura tears occurred in 23% of cases, emphasizing the need for careful surgical execution [10].

Multisegmental transforaminal enlarged decompression combined with posterior

pedicle screw fixation showed improved symptoms and reduced instability in patients with multilevel lumbar spinal canal stenosis and lumbar instability. Patients in this group reported greater satisfaction and fewer complications compared to those undergoing conventional laminectomy with fusion [11]. Additionally, sagittal alignment played a critical role in outcomes. Kawai et al. found that patients with sagittal malalignment had lower improvements in lumbar function and social life compared to those with normal alignment after decompression surgery, though clinical benefits were observed across both groups [12].

A comparative study by Ramesh and Vimalan demonstrated that unilateral decompression using a partial hemilaminectomy approach resulted in 70% of patients achieving good or excellent outcomes, with reduced invasiveness compared to conventional laminectomy. The unilateral technique preserved musculoligamentous structures while providing effective decompression [13]. Similarly, endoscopic posterior decompression under local anesthesia achieved significant improvements in pain and ODI scores, with outcomes maintained over two years. This approach was particularly beneficial for patients with preoperative spondylolisthesis, as no significant differences were observed in outcomes between these patients and those without spondylolisthesis [14].

Methodology

Study Design

This study is a prospective observational study.

Study Setting

The study is conducted at SCB Medical College and Hospital, Cuttack, a tertiary care center with expertise in spine surgery and management of complex spinal conditions.

Study Participants

A total of 42 patients diagnosed with lumbar canal stenosis were included in the study. These patients underwent posterior decompression and spinal instrumentation during the study period, from February 2024 to January 2025.

Inclusion Criteria

Patients were eligible for inclusion if they:

- Were aged 18 years or older.
- Were diagnosed with lumbar canal stenosis based on clinical and radiological findings.
- Had significant neurological symptoms or functional limitations warranting surgical intervention.
- Provided written informed consent for participation in the study.

Exclusion Criteria

Patients were excluded if they:

1. Had a history of previous lumbar spine surgery.
2. Had active infections or malignancies involving the spine.
3. Were diagnosed with severe osteoporosis or other contraindications to spinal instrumentation.
4. Did not consent to participate in the study.

Bias

To minimize selection bias, all eligible patients meeting the inclusion criteria during the study period were enrolled consecutively. Observer bias was mitigated by using standardized tools and protocols for data collection and analysis.

Data Collection

Data were collected prospectively using pre-designed case report forms. Variables included demographic details, clinical presentation, radiological findings, surgical details, intraoperative and postoperative complications, and functional outcomes assessed at regular follow-up intervals.

Procedure

All surgeries were performed under general anesthesia by experienced spine surgeons. The surgical procedure involved posterior decompression of the lumbar spine, followed by spinal instrumentation to stabilize the affected segments. Postoperative care included early mobilization, pain management, and physiotherapy. Patients were followed up at regular intervals to assess clinical and functional outcomes.

Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS software version 23.0. Continuous variables were presented as means with standard deviations, while categorical variables were expressed as frequencies and percentages. Preoperative and postoperative functional outcomes were compared using paired t-tests or Wilcoxon signed-rank tests as appropriate. A p-value < 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

Results

The study included 42 patients, with a mean age of 56.2 years. Of these, 25 were male and 17 were female. The most commonly affected spinal segments were L4-L5 (20 patients) and L5-S1 (22 patients). Preoperative disability, measured using the Oswestry Disability Index (ODI), had a mean value of 75.3%, which significantly improved to 25.4% postoperatively, reflecting a mean improvement of 49.9%. Among the participants, 3 experienced complications such as superficial wound infections, and 38 reported complete pain relief at the final follow-up.

Table 1: Patient Demographics and Baseline Characteristics

Variable	Value
Total Patients	42
Mean Age (years)	56.2
Male Patients	25 (59.5%)
Female Patients	17 (40.5%)
Patients with L4-L5 Stenosis	20 (47.6%)
Patients with L5-S1 Stenosis	22 (52.4%)

The study included 42 participants with a mean age of 56.2 years. Of these, 59.5% were male, and 40.5% were female. The most commonly affected spinal levels were L4-L5 (47.6%) and L5-S1 (52.4%), indicating these segments are more prone to degenerative changes leading to stenosis.

Table 2: Functional Outcomes (ODI) Pre- and Post-Surgery

Timepoint	Mean ODI (%)
Preoperative	75.3
1 Month Follow-Up	55.2
3 Months Follow-Up	40.8
6 Months Follow-Up	30.6
12 Months Follow-Up	25.4

Functional outcomes, assessed using the Oswestry Disability Index (ODI), demonstrated significant improvement over time. The mean preoperative ODI of 75.3% showed a progressive decrease, reaching 25.4% at 12 months post-surgery. This improvement highlights the efficacy of posterior decompression and spinal instrumentation in reducing disability and enhancing the quality of life.

Table 3: Postoperative Complications and Outcomes

Variable	Value
Patients with Complications	3 (7.1%)
Superficial Infections	3 (7.1%)
Major Complications	0
Patients with Complete Pain Relief	38 (90.5%)

Postoperative complications were minimal, with only 3 patients (7.1%) experiencing superficial infections, all of which were managed conservatively. No major complications or instrumentation failures were reported. Notably, 90.5% of patients (38 out of 42) reported complete pain relief by the end of the study, indicating the procedure's high success rate.

Discussion

The study analyzed the outcomes of 42 patients and the mean age of the participants was 56.2 years, with a majority being male (59.5%). The most commonly affected spinal levels were L4-L5 (47.6%) and L5-S1 (52.4%), emphasizing the frequent degenerative changes at these levels. This demographic profile aligns with the known prevalence of lumbar canal stenosis in older adults.

Functional outcomes, measured using the (ODI), showed significant improvement over the course of the study. The mean preoperative ODI was 75.3%, indicating severe disability among participants. Postoperatively, the ODI progressively improved, reaching 25.4% at 12 months, reflecting a mean improvement of 49.9%. This consistent reduction in disability underscores the efficacy of the surgical intervention in enhancing functional capacity and quality of life.

Pain relief outcomes were equally encouraging. The (VAS) scores demonstrated substantial reduction, with most patients reporting complete pain relief by the final follow-up. Specifically, 90.5% of patients achieved pain resolution, further validating the procedure's success in managing the primary symptoms of lumbar canal stenosis.

Complications were minimal, with only 3 patients (7.1%) experiencing superficial infections, all of which were managed conservatively. There were no major complications or instrumentation failures, highlighting the safety profile of the procedure. The absence of significant adverse events reinforces its reliability as a treatment option.

In summary, the study results indicate that posterior decompression and spinal instrumentation are highly effective in improving functional outcomes and pain relief while maintaining a low complication rate. These findings support its role as a valuable surgical option for managing lumbar canal stenosis, particularly in appropriately selected patients.

Conclusion

Posterior decompression and spinal instrumentation proved to be an effective and safe treatment for lumbar canal stenosis, significantly improving functional outcomes and pain relief. The mean (ODI) decreased from 75.3% preoperatively to 25.4% at 12 months, with 90.5% of patients achieving complete pain relief. Complications were minimal (7.1%), limited to minor infections, and no major adverse events were reported. These results highlight the procedure's efficacy in restoring mobility, reducing pain, and ensuring long-term benefits with minimal risks.

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