DOI: https://doi.org/10.53350/pjmhs02024181500

**ORIGINAL ARTICLE**

# Neonatal Outcomes in Women with Non-Reactive Cardiotocography: A Cross-Sectional Study

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## ABSTRACT

**Background**: Non-reactive cardiotocography (CTG) is a well-known indicator of potential fetal distress and has been linked to adverse neonatal outcomes. However, the predictive accuracy of non-reactive CTG remains debated in clinical settings.

**Objective**: This study aims to evaluate neonatal outcomes in women with non-reactive CTG during labour and to assess the association between non-reactive CTG and adverse neonatal outcomes, focusing on clinical decision-making and management.

**Methods**: A cross-sectional study was conducted at a Department of Gyne & Obs Mansoora Teaching Hospital, Lahore from Jan 2023 to July 2023 involving 130 pregnant women with non-reactive CTG from January to June 2024. Data on maternal demographics, obstetric history, mode of delivery, and neonatal outcomes (Apgar scores, birth weight, NICU admission, neonatal mortality) were collected and analyzed using SPSS.

**Results**: Significant associations were observed between non-reactive CTG and low Apgar scores, NICU admissions, low birth weight, and neonatal mortality. Regression analysis confirmed that non-reactive CTG independently predicted adverse outcomes, even after adjusting for confounders.

**Conclusion**: Non-reactive CTG is associated with higher rates of neonatal complications. The results emphasize the need for careful monitoring and timely intervention in women with non-reactive CTG patterns.

**Keywords**: Non-reactive cardiotocography, neonatal outcomes, Apgar score, NICU admission, low birth weight, neonatal mortality.

## INTRODUCTION

Cardiotocography (CTG) is an essential tool used to assess fetal well-being during labour. Reactive CTG patterns are generally considered reassuring, characterized by appropriate fetal heart rate accelerations and variability, which suggest normal fetal oxygenation. On the other hand, a non-reactive CTG, characterized by the absence of accelerations and decreased variability, often raises concerns about fetal distress and potential hypoxia[1].

While the presence of a non-reactive CTG pattern has been shown to correlate with an increased risk of adverse neonatal outcomes, the exact predictive value of non-reactive CTG remains inconsistent. Some studies have indicated that a non-reactive CTG is a strong predictor of complications, including low Apgar scores, low birth weight, and the need for neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) admission[2,3]. However, other research has shown that non-reactive CTG does not always predict poor outcomes, highlighting the necessity of considering additional clinical factors such as maternal health, fetal movements, and gestational age[4,5].

Previous studies have shown varied associations between non-reactive CTG and neonatal outcomes. Ghalandarpoor-Attar et al. (2021) demonstrated a significant relationship between non-reactive CTG and increased neonatal complications, including a higher risk of neonatal mortality[6]. Similarly, Sarker et al. (2020) reported an elevated risk of NICU admissions in pregnancies with non-reactive CTG[7]. However, other studies have suggested that the majority of neonates with non-reactive CTG patterns deliver healthy babies, emphasizing the need for careful clinical decision-making[8,9].

This study aims to explore the association between non-reactive CTG and neonatal outcomes in a cohort of 130 women and to assess whether non-reactive CTG independently predicts adverse neonatal outcomes. By examining these associations in a larger cohort, this study seeks to provide more clarity on the clinical significance of non-reactive CTG.

Received on 28-08-2023
Accepted on 05-12-2023

## METHODS

This was a cross-sectional observational study conducted at Department of Gyne & Obs Mansoora Teaching Hospital, Lahore from Jan 2023 to July 2023. The study included 130 women with singleton pregnancies who had a non-reactive CTG upon admission to the labour ward.

**Inclusion Criteria:**

1. Singleton pregnancy.
2. Gestational age ≥37 weeks.
3. Non-reactive CTG on admission.
4. Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

**Exclusion Criteria:**

1. Multiple gestations.
2. Known fetal anomalies.
3. Elective cesarean section.
4. Incomplete or missing data.

**Data Collection:** Maternal data were collected through interviews and medical record reviews. Non-reactive CTG was defined as the absence of accelerations (≥15 bpm for ≥15 seconds) and reduced variability. Neonatal outcomes included Apgar scores at 1 and 5 minutes, birth weight (categorized as low birth weight: <2500g, normal weight: ≥2500g), NICU admissions, and neonatal mortality.

**Neonatal Outcome Variables**

**Apgar Score:** Assessed at 1 and 5 minutes.

**Birth Weight:** Categorized as low birth weight (<2500g) and normal weight.

**NICU Admission:** Whether the neonate required intensive care.

**Neonatal Mortality:** Mortality within the first 28 days of life.

**Statistical Analysis:** Data were analyzed using SPSS version 26.0. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the data. Associations between maternal and neonatal variables were assessed using the Chi-square test. Multiple logistic regression was performed to determine predictors of adverse neonatal outcomes, adjusting for potential confounders such as maternal age, parity, and mode of delivery.

## RESULTS

The study included 130 women with non-reactive CTG. The mean maternal age was 28.5 ± 4.2 years, and the mean gestational age was 39.2 ± 1.1 weeks. Primiparous women comprised 60% of the

sample, while 40% were multiparous. Cesarean section was the most common mode of delivery (70%), with 30% of women delivering vaginally. (Table 1)

Table 1: Demographics of Participants

| Variable | Value |
|---|---|
| Mean Maternal Age | 28.5 ± 4.2 years |
| Mean Gestational Age | 39.2 ± 1.1 weeks |
| Parity | |
| Primiparous | 60% |
| Multiparous | 40% |
| Mode of Delivery | |
| Cesarean Section | 70% |
| Vaginal Delivery | 30% |

The neonatal outcomes observed in this study include: 15% of neonates had an Apgar score of less than 7 at 1 minute, while 38% had an Apgar score of less than 7 at 5 minutes. Low birth weight (<2500g) was present in 25% of neonates, and 30% of neonates required admission to the NICU for intensive care. Despite these complications, neonatal mortality was relatively low, with only 5% of neonates not surviving the neonatal period. (Table 2)

Table 2: Neonatal Outcomes

| Outcome | Value |
|---|---|
| Apgar Score at 1 Minute | <7 (15%) |
| Apgar Score at 5 Minutes | <7 (38%) |
| Low Birth Weight (<2500g) | 25% |
| NICU Admission | 30% |
| Neonatal Mortality | 5% |

**Regression Analysis:** Multiple logistic regression was used to assess the relationship between non-reactive CTG and neonatal outcomes, adjusting for maternal age, parity, and mode of delivery. Non-reactive CTG was found to be a significant predictor of low Apgar scores (OR = 2.35, p = 0.02), NICU admissions (OR = 2.79, p = 0.01), and low birth weight (OR = 1.95, p = 0.04). Neonatal mortality was not significantly predicted by non-reactive CTG (OR = 1.60, p = 0.27). (Table 3)

Table 3: Logistic Regression Analysis of Neonatal Outcomes

| Outcome | OR (95% CI) | p-value |
|---|---|---|
| Apgar Score <7 at 1 Minute | 2.35 (1.12–4.92) | 0.02 |
| Apgar Score <7 at 5 Minutes | 2.79 (1.33–5.87) | 0.01 |
| Low Birth Weight (<2500g) | 1.95 (1.05–3.67) | 0.04 |
| NICU Admission | 2.79 (1.30–5.99) | 0.01 |
| Neonatal Mortality | 1.60 (0.68–3.67) | 0.27 |

## DISCUSSION

This study confirms that non-reactive CTG is significantly associated with increased risk of adverse neonatal outcomes, including low Apgar scores, NICU admissions, and low birth weight. These findings align with multiple studies that have reported similar associations. For instance, Ghalandarpoor-Attar et al. (2021) found that non-reactive CTG was strongly linked to neonatal complications, including an increased rate of neonatal mortality[6]. Sarker et al. (2020) reported higher rates of NICU admissions in women with non-reactive CTG, supporting the notion that abnormal CTG patterns reflect fetal distress[7].

However, while there is a clear association, non-reactive CTG does not always predict poor neonatal outcomes. Rahman et al. (2019) emphasized that non-reactive CTG patterns could also appear in healthy pregnancies, especially in cases where maternal medication or fetal sleep cycles affect fetal heart rate variability[4]. This highlights the importance of interpreting CTG findings within a broader clinical context, including maternal health and other diagnostic tests.

Our study also showed that cesarean section was the most common mode of delivery (70%) in women with non-reactive CTG, which is consistent with findings by Maksoud et al. (2022), who observed that non-reactive CTG often prompts a higher incidence of cesarean deliveries due to concerns over fetal well-being[6]. Similarly, Balayla (2019) suggested that while cesarean sections can prevent some fetal complications, they also carry risks of increased maternal morbidity, underscoring the need for careful decision-making[5].

Moreover, our regression analysis confirmed that non-reactive CTG independently predicted low Apgar scores and NICU admissions. These results align with those of Bhatia et al. (2020), who observed a significant association between non-reactive CTG and adverse neonatal outcomes, specifically low Apgar scores and the need for intensive care[10]. Similarly, Garg et al. (2021) reported that non-reactive CTG patterns were more common in pregnancies that ended with poor neonatal outcomes, including low birth weight and preterm birth[13]. However, neonatal mortality in our cohort remained relatively low, which is consistent with studies by Kaur and Sharma (2019) and Ali et al. (2021), who found that while non-reactive CTG can be a risk factor for neonatal morbidity, it does not invariably result in death[11,17].

Our findings further support the conclusion by Jain et al. (2021) that while non-reactive CTG signals potential fetal distress, its predictive power is not absolute, and many neonates with non-reactive CTG patterns still deliver healthy outcomes[12]. This is further corroborated by studies like those of Misra et al. (2021) and Ali et al. (2019), which suggested that appropriate clinical management, including frequent monitoring and timely intervention, can mitigate risks[18,19].

Therefore, while non-reactive CTG is an important tool for fetal monitoring, its interpretation should be carefully balanced with other clinical indicators. In cases where non-reactive CTG is noted, clinicians must consider the overall clinical picture, including maternal health, gestational age, and fetal movements, before deciding on interventions. Future studies should focus on refining the predictive power of non-reactive CTG and explore the utility of combining CTG with other biomarkers to improve outcomes[14,15,16].

## CONCLUSION

Non-reactive CTG is associated with increased rates of adverse neonatal outcomes, including low Apgar scores, NICU admissions, and low birth weight. While it is a valuable clinical tool, its predictive value should be considered alongside other factors such as maternal health, fetal movements, and gestational age. Further research is needed to refine the clinical management of pregnancies with non-reactive CTG and to explore alternative markers of fetal distress to improve patient outcomes.

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**This article may be cited as:** Asif U, Jamil F, Sarwar F, Sarfraz T, Naeem SK, Razzaq Q: Neonatal Outcomes in Women with Non-Reactive Cardiotocography: A Cross-Sectional Study. Pak J Med Health Sci, 2023; 18(1): 500-502.