

# Relationship between Inflammation Markers and Stenosis Degrees in Stable Coronary Heart Disease

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# Relationship between Inflammation Markers and Stenosis Degrees in Stable Coronary Heart Disease

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**Abstract**— Stable coronary heart disease is the highest cause of death. This situation involves neutrophils and lymphocytes described by the neutrophil lymphocyte ratio (NLR) in inflammation. Inflammation makes an increase in acute phase protein C-reactive protein (CRP) and serum amyloid A (SAA), both of which also play a role in coronary artery stenosis. The degree of stenosis is measured by Gensini scores through invasive angiography. The relationship between the three hematological parameters and the degree of coronary artery stenosis needs a further investigation. A cross sectional study involving 35 stable coronary heart patients was calculated according to the formula of the sample size with inclusion and exclusion criteria. Examination of NLR was done by comparing absolute neutrophil counts, moreover absolute lymphocytes was examined by using a hematology analyzer. CRP levels were examined by the hs-CRP method and SAA levels were examined by using the ELISA principle. The Gensini score was used to assess coronary artery stenosis. The Spearman relationship test was used to analyze between variables.  $p < 0.05$  was considered significant. There is a significant positive relationship between NLR and SAA but no correlation between CRP and NLR and SAA. There is a significant positive relationship between NLR and SAA with Gensini scores. There is no relationship between CRP and Gensini score. NLR is a simple parameter and SAA is a biomolecular parameter, both of which increase with increasing weight coronary artery stenosis, in stable CHD patients, it can be used for evaluation of stable CHD patients.

**Keywords:** Neutrophil lymphocyte ratio, C-reactive protein, amyloid A serum, gensini score, stable coronary heart disease.

## Introduction

Cardiovascular disease is currently one of the main and first causes of death in both developed and developing countries [1,2]. The World Health Organization estimates that there are around 17.9 million deaths each year due to cardiovascular disease which is estimated at 31% of the world's population [3]. This shows that cardiovascular disease will continue to dominate mortality in the future. The prevalence of coronary heart disease diagnosed by doctors in Indonesia according to the 2013 Basic Health Research Agency for Health Research and Development was 0.5% or estimated at around 883,447 people [4].

Coronary heart disease is cardiovascular disease or heart and blood vessel disease caused by narrowing of the coronary arteries due to the process of atherosclerosis. One manifestation of coronary heart disease is stable coronary heart disease. Stable coronary heart disease refers to patients who have been diagnosed with coronary heart disease or those who are suspected of suffering from coronary heart disease who do not experience changes in acute symptomatic status at this time [5-7]. Dyslipidemia is one of the risk factors for the incidence

of stable coronary heart disease, because it plays an important role in the process of forming atherosclerosis in blood vessels which can lead to stable coronary heart disease [8,9]. Stable coronary heart disease is also known as chronic inflammation. Previous studies have shown that inflammatory symptoms are associated with the severity of stable coronary heart disease and worsening cardiovascular outcomes [10-12]. An increase in leukocytes count shows that there are infections and inflammation that play a role in atherogenesis, the development of ruptured atherosclerotic plaques and thrombosis. The process of atherogenesis is an inflammatory process in which neutrophils are a marker of nonspecific inflammation and lymphocytes as regulatory markers [13,14]. Neutrophil lymphocyte ratio (NLR) is an independent prognostic factor in coronary heart disease which is also influenced by the condition of hypercholesterolemia, metabolic syndrome and diabetes and hypertension. Neutrophil lymphocyte ratio can also be a predictor of mortality in cardiovascular disease [15]. Previous studies have shown a relationship between NLR and the severity of stenosis in stable coronary heart disease based on coronary angiography results [16]. There were significant differences in NLR in the group with a higher Gensini score than the group with a lower Gensini score [17].

C-Reactive Protein (CRP) is one of the acute reactant phase proteins produced by the liver, a marker of systemic inflammation and increases in various types of injuries. Previous research has shown that CRP is not only a sign of inflammation but can play an active role in atherogenesis. Syed SH, et al. (2013) conducted a study on the relationship between CRP levels and the severity of stenosis in patients with coronary heart disease. The results of the study prove that there is a significant positive relationship between CRP levels and the severity of stenosis in the group of patients with coronary heart disease [18]. High sensitivity CRP examination techniques have been developed to detect lower serum CRP levels than previous laboratory methods and are known as highly sensitive CRP (hs-CRP) methods. This technique can be used to assess the risk of heart disease associated with atherosclerotic chronic vascular inflammation [19,20]. Serum Amyloid A (SAA) is also an acute phase reactant protein produced by the liver which appears as a chronic and acute inflammatory response. In acute inflammation, SAA levels can increase to 1000-fold. Some evidence suggests that SAA plays a role in the pathophysiology of coronary stenosis, namely SAA is found as apolipoprotein in HDL particles and plays a role in acute modification of cholesterol transport during physiological stress. SAA also shows the chemotactic impact on monocytes. Previous research proved that there were significant differences in SAA levels between subjects with coronary stenosis and without coronary stenosis [21].

Coronary heart disease is stable with chronic inflammation, therefore laboratory parameters used in this study were NLR, CRP and SAA as markers of inflammation in stable coronary heart disease, where the three parameters influence the occurrence of atherosclerosis [17,21]. Neutrophil lymphocyte ratio and CRP can be important measures of inflammation in stable coronary heart disease because they are cost effective, easily available and can be easily calculated. The SAA parameter is a laboratory examination that is expected to detect early the occurrence of chronic processes in stable coronary heart disease. Moreover, determination of the degree of stenosis used in this study was based on the degree of coronary stenosis quantitatively obtained from the results of coronary angiography or cardiac catheterization because it is easier, more done and more applicable [22]. These things encourage researchers to prove the relationship between NLR and SAA levels with the degree of stenosis in stable coronary heart disease.

## 2. Methods

Analytical descriptive study with cross sectional approach was conducted on 35 stable coronary heart patients at Dr. RSUP Kariadi Semarang. The study was conducted in February to October 2018. Samples were taken by consecutive sampling where subjects were selected non-randomly in March to May 2018 who met the inclusion and exclusion criteria of the study. Inclusion criterias were above 40 years old, normal body

temperature and willing to take part in the study. On the other hand, exclusion criterias were patients with acute coronary syndrome, infection, undergoing chemotherapy, hematological malignancy, chronic liver disease, lysis and jaundice serum.

The patient's identity and other matters related to treatment and other risk factors were identified by history and looking at the patient's medical record. Blood was taken using 3 cc EDTA and plain tubes for each patient. A plain tube was left for 30 minutes to get the serum and then centrifuged 3000 rpm for 5 minutes then examined the levels of CRP and SAA. EDTA blood was examined using hematology analyzer to obtain absolute neutrophil counts and absolute lymphocyte counts. NLR was calculated manually by dividing between absolute neutrophil counts and absolute lymphocyte counts with a cut off value of <2.5. CRP levels were examined by the hs-CRP method, the examination using the ELISA principle with a cut off value of <5 mg / l, as well as SAA levels with a cut off value of <6 ng / mL. The degree of stenosis of stable coronary heart disease patients was determined based on the Gensini score by two SF and SLY cardiologists to assess the degree and extent of the atherosclerotic plaque area (Neeland et al., 2012).

Data analysis used the nonparametric correlation test with the Spearman test. Significance was expressed at  $p < 0.05$ . All research respondents were requested to give written informed consent and patient's identity was confidential. This research was approved by the Health Research Ethics committee of the Faculty of Medicine Diponegoro University/RSUP Dr. Kariadi Semarang

## 6 Results

The characteristics of the subject of this study can be seen in table 1.

**Table 1.** Characteristics of research subjects

Subject Characteristics	Median (min-max)
Age (year)	56 (43-78)
Height (cm)	160 (150-176)
Weight (kg)	61 (48-85)
IMT (kg/m <sup>2</sup> )	24,2 (17,0-31,2)
Systolic pressure (mmHg)	135 (100-170)
Diastolic pressure (mmHg)	80 (65-100)
Hb (g/dl)	13,0 (11,0-17,40)
Leukocyte count (x10 <sup>3</sup> /μl)	7,28 (3,24-13,20)
Neutrophils count (x10 <sup>3</sup> /μl)	4,17(0,76-7,18)
Lymphocyte count (x10 <sup>3</sup> /μl)	2,12(1,33-3,54)
NLR	1,78(0,29-4,61)
Platelet count (x10 <sup>3</sup> /μl)	246 (171-381)
Fasting blood glucose (mg/dl)	125 (75-390)
Total cholesterol (mg/dl)	158 (104-283)
LDL (mg/dl)	105 (60-190)
Triglyceride (mg/dl)	116 (60-216)
HDL (mg/dl)	41 (13-67)
CRP (mg/l)	1,5 (0,50-6,54)
SAA (ng/ml)	25,97 (14,43-56,23)
Gensini Score	42,5 (0-151)

**Description:** min: lowest value, max: highest value

Table 1. shows that the research subjects with more male gender were 21 respondents (60%) compared to women which amounted to 14 respondents (40%). The median age of the study subjects was 56 years with a range of 43-78 years. Media values of NLR, CRP levels, SAA levels and Gensini scores in the study subjects were 1.78; 1.5 mg / l; 25.97 ng / ml and 42.5. The median CRP and NLR in this study were still below the cut-off value, while the SAA level exceeds the cut-off value.

Distribution of risk factors in the subject of this study were presented in the following table 2.

**Table 2.** Risk factors for stable CHD in study subjects

<b>Risk Factor</b>	<b>Number (Person)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Diabetes mellitus	17	48,57
Hypertension	16	45,71
History of active smokers	14	40,00
Dyslipidemia	10	28,57

The research subjects had diverse risk factors with at least one risk factor in one patient, there were also 2 to 4 risk factors in one patient when added together, the risk factors for the most stable emergence of coronary heart disease were diabetes mellitus.

The body mass index of the subject of this study was classified and presented in the following table 3. The most body mass index of the research subjects was in the normal category (42.86%) even though there were 18 overweight research subjects (52.43%). It was possible for these patients to know their condition before being diagnosed with stable coronary heart disease, so they regulated their eating patterns that could affect body weight.

**Table 3.** Body mass index of research subjects

<b>IMT</b>	<b>Number (Person)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<i>Underweight</i>	2	5,71
Normal	15	42,86
<i>Overweight</i>	7	20,00
<i>Obese</i>	11	31,43

The correlation between inflammation parameters were done. There was a significant moderate positive ( $r=0.628$ ;  $p=0.000$ ) between NLR and SAA. No correlation between CRP and NLR, and so did CRP and SAA. The relationship between NLR values and SAA levels with Gensini scores showed a moderate positive relationship with a significance of 0.000. This states that there is a significance moderate positive relationship between NLR values (0.593) and SAA levels (0.584) with the degree of coronary stenosis. The more severe coronary stenosis occurs in a person, the higher the NLR value and SAA level. There is no relationship between CRP levels and Gensini scores.

#### **4. Discussion**

The results of this study have a correlation between NLR and the degree of stenosis. Neutrophil/lymphocyte ratio (NLR), according to the research, has been used as a marker for systemic inflammation, cardiovascular disease, cancer that is easy and quite inexpensive [24]. NLR is reported to be related to the severity of heart disease and its clinical output. Sahin, et al. (2013) reported that there was a relationship between NLR and the severity of coronary heart disease, where high NLR was a poor prognostic factor in SKA patients.



Furthermore, NLR is referred to as a free predictor of stable CHD severity because it is significantly associated with a Gensini score that increases with an increase in NLR [25]. The process of atherogenesis is an active inflammatory process with important actions from functional and dysfunctional leukocytes. Neutrophils provide an important role both in eliminating infarction or in platelet leukocyte aggregate formation and in reperfusion injury in coronary heart disease [26,27].

Neutrophil lymphocyte ratio can also be a predictor of mortality in cardiovascular disease. <sup>12</sup> The results of this study are in line with previous studies which showed that there was a relationship between NLR and the severity of stenosis in stable coronary heart disease based on coronary angiography results. There were significant differences in NLR in the group with a higher Gensini score than the group with a lower Gensini score [26-28].

The results of this study indicate that there is no significant relationship between CRP and the degree of coronary stenosis. Parameter CRP is a parameter for acute inflammation. This study took samples in stable CHD where the inflammation was chronic. Increased CRP synthesis in plasma is likely to increase but the amount is not large, so the level is not enough to give a sign of acute inflammation. In addition, the condition of stable CHD atherosclerosis is better than unstable CHD. This is due to atherosclerotic plaque in patients with stable CHD without rupture even though the Gensini score in the study subjects was more than 20 indicating a heavy blockage. The resulting inflammation is chronic and patients do not have prominent symptoms [29].

<sup>1</sup> C-Reactive Protein (CRP) is one of the acute reactant phase proteins produced by the liver as a sign of systemic inflammation and increases in various types of inflammation. This parameter is widely used as a predictor of someone having a high risk of blockage of the coronary arteries [30,31]. Induction of CRP formation in high conditions is caused by an acute inflammatory state that occurs in a person due to atherosclerosis by proinflammatory cytokines. CRP plays an important role in atherogenesis including complement activation, lipid uptake by macrophages, spurring the release of proinflammatory cytokines, inducing tissue factors, endothelial dysfunction, and inhibiting nitric oxide production [32]. CRP levels increase at the 19th hour of onset of inflammation and reach a peak in plasma at 24-48 hours [33].

The test results of the relationship between SAA levels and the degree of coronary stenosis in this study was positively significant. This value indicates that the increase in SAA levels is directly proportional to the severity of the degree of coronary stenosis. Chronic inflammatory reactions that occur in stable CHD induce liver to synthesize SAA <sup>10</sup> in response to cytokines produced by macrophages, namely tumor necrosis factor- $\alpha$  (TNF- $\alpha$ ), interleukin -1 (IL-1), interleukin-6 (IL-6) [34,35]. This acute phase protein can also be used as a marker of chronic inflammation that is different from CRP which increases in acute inflammation especially in unstable coronary heart disease after 12 hours of symptom onset [36]. Amyloid A serum induces monocytes and procoagulant factors in inflammation faster than CRP [37].

Other conditions, namely SAA, are also produced by monocytes/ macrophages, vascular muscle cells, and endothelial cells which results in increased levels of SAA with the course of inflammation caused by atherosclerosis of the coronary arteries. Amyloid A serum is degraded in the liver which in a state of inflammation both chronic and acute will decrease, so that SAA levels will be high [38]. This is the basis that SAA levels are higher and are significantly related to the degree of coronary stenosis compared to CRP levels.

Some evidence shows that SAA plays a role in the pathophysiology of coronary stenosis. SAA is found as apolipoprotein in HDL molecules and shows the chemotactic effects of monocytes and T lymphocytes. The SAA molecule allows vascular damage and induces the expression of metalloproteinase (MMP) matrix which causes atherosclerosis [39].

Amyloid A serum moves the apo A-1 from HDL to form larger and denser HDL molecules thereby it reduces the ability to catalyze cholesterol esterification. The SAA-HDL bond is not able to prevent LDL oxidation, and even strengthens the occurrence of foam cells and then becomes a fatty streak which is the beginning of the development of coronary stenosis. The SAA molecule can be distributed not only in HDL but also in LDL particles.

The SAA bond with LDL has been found to be formed from oxidative interactions between SAA and LDL that are catalyzed by ROS. The bond stimulates the formation of proteoglycans that contribute to the formation of atherosclerotic plaques. Early emergence of small plaques with small extracellular lipid content and cholesterol esters and thick fibrous capsules with stable plaque characteristics give rise to stable coronary levels beginning to increase [40-43].

This study did not analyze the effect of risk factors for stable CHD on research variables. Further research can take meaningful variables in this study to be able to be analyzed in a stable CHD population with only specific risk factors and taking into account these risk factors in variable analysis.

## 5. Conclusion

NLR is a simple parameter that can be conducted, while SAA is a biomolecular parameter, both of which increase with increasing weight coronary artery stenosis in stable CHD patients, it can be used for evaluation of stable CHD patients.

## 6. Ethical clearance

This study has been received ethical approval by Ethics Committee of Diponegoro University, Semarang, Indonesia.

## 7. Disclosures

The authors have no conflict of interest.

## 8. Funding

The authors are responsible for study funding without any involvement of grant, sponsorship, or another resources of funding.

## 9. Legends

Table 1. Characteristics of research subjects

Table 2. Risk factors for stable CHD in study subjects

Table 3. Body mass index of research subjects

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