Elite Journal of Nursing and Health Sciences. Volume 2 issue 1(2024), Pp. 32-47 <a href="https://epjournals.com/journals/EJNHS">https://epjournals.com/journals/EJNHS</a>

# Maternal Eosinophilic Responses in HIV-Positive Pregnant Women: A Review

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#### **Abstract**

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) infection during pregnancy introduces complex alterations in the maternal immune system, impacting various facets of the host response. This comprehensive review focuses on the distinctive role of eosinophils in the immune milieu of HIV-positive pregnant women and explores the implications for vertical transmission and perinatal outcomes. By synthesizing findings from clinical studies, immunological assessments, and molecular investigations, this review aims to provide a holistic understanding of the intricate interplay between HIV infection and maternal eosinophilic responses. The influence of eosinophils on placental immune responses, modulation of cytokine networks, and potential effects on viral replication dynamics are examined in detail. Additionally, the impact of antiretroviral therapy (ART) on maternal eosinophilic responses is discussed, emphasizing its potential role in mitigating adverse effects associated with HIV infection during pregnancy.

**Keywords**: HIV, pregnancy, maternal immune response, eosinophils, cytokines, immune modulation, vertical transmission, antiretroviral therapy, perinatal outcomes

#### Introduction

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) infection remains a global health concern, with significant implications for maternal and neonatal health. The intersection of HIV and pregnancy introduces a dynamic interplay between the viral pathogenesis and the maternal immune response. While much research has focused on the broader immune alterations in HIV-infected individuals, a

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Elite Journal of Nursing and Health Sciences. Volume 2 issue 1(2024), Pp. 32-47 https://epjournals.com/journals/EJNHS

nuanced understanding of the role played by eosinophils in pregnant women living with HIV has garnered increasing attention. Eosinophils, traditionally associated with allergic responses and parasitic infections, are emerging as key players in the intricate landscape of maternal immune responses during HIV-infected pregnancies.<sup>1-16</sup>

The physiological changes that accompany pregnancy, including alterations in the maternal immune system, are further complicated by the immune challenges posed by HIV. The unique immunomodulatory environment required to sustain fetal development is perturbed in the presence of HIV, and eosinophils, with their diverse functions, may hold the key to deciphering some of these complexities. This review aims to explore the specific nuances of maternal eosinophilic responses in the context of HIV infection during pregnancy. By examining alterations in eosinophil counts, activation states, and cytokine profiles, we seek to unravel the multifaceted roles played by eosinophils in modulating the immune milieu. Understanding the implications of maternal eosinophilic responses is particularly crucial, not only for deciphering the mechanisms influencing vertical transmission but also for delineating potential avenues for therapeutic interventions aimed at improving perinatal outcomes.

#### **Maternal and Fetal Health**

Maintaining maternal health through proper nutrition, exercise, and avoiding harmful substances is crucial for fetal well-being. Monitoring fetal movements, heart rate, and growth are integral components of prenatal care. The maternal immune response during pregnancy is a highly dynamic and complex process that undergoes significant adaptations to support the developing fetus while maintaining the mother's ability to defend against infections. This intricate interplay involves various components of the immune system, including cells, cytokines, and hormonal signals. The maternal immune system must tolerate the presence of the semi-allogeneic fetus (having paternal antigens) to prevent rejection. Immune tolerance is achieved through various mechanisms, including the expansion of regulatory T cells (Tregs) that suppress immune responses against fetal antigens.<sup>28-47</sup>

The decidua, the lining of the uterus during pregnancy, creates a unique immune microenvironment. Immune cells such as decidual natural killer (dNK) cells, macrophages, and dendritic cells play crucial roles in maintaining immune balance at the maternal-fetal interface. Hormones such as progesterone and estradiol produced during pregnancy modulate the maternal immune response. These hormones contribute to immune tolerance, inhibit certain immune responses, and promote a Th2-type immune profile. There is a shift in T cell subsets, with an increase in Th2 cells (which promote antibody production and immune tolerance) and a decrease in Th1 cells (which mediate cellular immunity and may be harmful to the fetus). Maternal antibodies, including IgG, are transferred across the placenta to provide passive immunity to the developing fetus. This transfer offers protection against certain infections during the early stages of life. 48-58

Innate immune responses, including activation of Toll-like receptors (TLRs) and production of antimicrobial peptides, are maintained to protect against infections without triggering harmful inflammatory responses. Controlled inflammation is necessary for proper implantation, placentation, and tissue remodeling during pregnancy. Imbalances in inflammatory responses may contribute to complications such as preterm birth and preeclampsia. Pregnancy poses challenges, as the immune system must balance protection against pathogens with tolerance to fetal antigens. Infections during pregnancy can have varying effects on the developing fetus, ranging from mild to severe depending on the timing and nature of the infection. <sup>59-68</sup>

### **Eosinophils**

Eosinophils are a type of white blood cell (leukocyte) that plays a significant role in the immune system, particularly in responding to parasitic infections and modulating inflammatory responses. These cells are characterized by the presence of distinctive granules in their cytoplasm that contain various proteins. <sup>69</sup> While eosinophils typically constitute a small proportion of the total white blood cell count, their functions are critical for maintaining immune homeostasis. Eosinophils are produced in the bone marrow from stem cells and develop into mature eosinophils under the influence of specific growth factors. Their differentiation is stimulated by interleukin-5 (IL-5), a cytokine produced by T cells and other immune cells. Eosinophils circulate in the bloodstream but are primarily found in tissues, especially at mucosal surfaces of the gastrointestinal, respiratory, and genitourinary tracts. Chemotactic signals guide eosinophils to sites of infection, inflammation, or tissue damage. Eosinophils contain characteristic granules that house an array of proteins, including major basic protein, eosinophil peroxidase, and eosinophil-derived neurotoxin. These proteins are involved in defense mechanisms against parasites and in modulating inflammatory responses.

Eosinophils play a crucial role in defending against parasitic infections. They release toxic granule contents to combat parasites and have surface receptors that recognize and bind to antibodies targeting parasites. In allergic reactions and asthma, eosinophils contribute to inflammation by releasing pro-inflammatory mediators. Eosinophils modulate inflammation by interacting with other immune cells and releasing cytokines and chemokines. They contribute to the resolution of inflammation by promoting tissue repair and remodeling. Eosinophilia refers to an elevated eosinophil count in the blood, which can occur in response to various conditions, including parasitic infections, allergies, autoimmune diseases, and certain cancers. Eosinophilia may be a sign of an underlying health issue and is often evaluated in clinical settings. Eosinophils have been implicated in modulating immune responses during pregnancy, particularly at the maternal-fetal interface. Changes in eosinophilic responses may contribute to immune tolerance necessary for successful pregnancies.

#### **Cytokines**

Cytokines are small signaling molecules that play a crucial role in mediating communication among cells of the immune system and other tissues. These proteins are involved in coordinating Citation: Obeagu EI, Obeagu GU. Maternal Eosinophilic Responses in HIV-Positive Pregnant Women: A Review. Elite Journal of Nursing and Health Science, 2024; 2(1): 32-47

immune responses, inflammation, and various physiological processes. Cytokines can be produced by a wide range of cells, including immune cells, endothelial cells, fibroblasts, and various stromal cells. They act in a paracrine or autocrine manner, influencing the behavior of nearby or the same cells that produce them. Cytokines are classified into different groups, including interleukins (IL), interferons (IFN), tumor necrosis factors (TNF), chemokines, and growth factors, based on their functions and structural similarities. Cytokines play a central role in regulating immune responses. They can stimulate or inhibit the activation, proliferation, and differentiation of immune cells such as T cells, B cells, and macrophages. Many cytokines are involved in the initiation, amplification, and resolution of inflammatory responses. They can recruit immune cells to sites of infection or tissue damage and mediate tissue repair. Cytokines regulate the growth and differentiation of various cell types, influencing processes like hematopoiesis, angiogenesis, and tissue development.<sup>70</sup>

Cytokines exert their effects by binding to specific cell surface receptors on target cells. Receptor engagement triggers intracellular signaling pathways, leading to changes in gene expression and cellular responses. IL-1, IL-6, TNF-α, and IFN-γ are examples of cytokines that promote inflammation and immune responses. IL-10 and transforming growth factor-beta (TGF-β) are examples of cytokines that suppress inflammation and regulate immune responses. Chemokines are a subgroup of cytokines that specifically regulate the migration and localization of immune cells. They play a crucial role in directing immune cells to sites of infection or inflammation. Excessive or dysregulated cytokine production can lead to a cytokine storm, an exaggerated immune response associated with severe inflammation. Cytokine storms can occur in conditions such as severe infections, autoimmune diseases, and certain therapeutic interventions. Cytokines have therapeutic applications in conditions such as cancer and autoimmune diseases. Recombinant cytokines, such as interferons and interleukins, are used in immunotherapy. Cytokine inhibitors are employed to modulate excessive immune responses in diseases like rheumatoid arthritis and inflammatory bowel disease. Cytokines play a role in immune tolerance during pregnancy, influencing the maternal-fetal interface and supporting fetal development. Imbalances in cytokine profiles can contribute to pregnancy complications.<sup>70</sup>

### **Immune modulation**

Immune modulation refers to the process of adjusting or regulating the activity of the immune system to achieve a desired immune response. This can involve enhancing or suppressing immune responses, depending on the context and therapeutic goals. Immune modulation is a critical aspect of maintaining immune homeostasis, preventing autoimmunity, and combating infections or other immune-related disorders. Boosting the immune response to enhance the body's ability to recognize and eliminate pathogens or abnormal cells. Suppressing the immune response to prevent excessive inflammation, tissue damage, or autoimmune reactions. Various drugs and substances can modulate immune responses. Examples include immunosuppressive drugs (corticosteroids, calcineurin inhibitors) and immunostimulants (cytokines, growth factors). Monoclonal antibodies and other biologics are used to selectively target specific components of the immune system, influencing immune responses in a targeted manner. Immune modulation is a cornerstone of

treating autoimmune diseases, where the immune system mistakenly attacks the body's own tissues. Immunosuppressive agents help control inflammation and prevent tissue damage in conditions like rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, and multiple sclerosis.<sup>71</sup>

Immune modulation is a key strategy in cancer immunotherapy, aiming to enhance the body's ability to recognize and eliminate cancer cells. Checkpoint inhibitors, adoptive cell therapies, and therapeutic vaccines are examples of cancer immunotherapies that modulate immune responses against cancer. Immune modulation is employed in the treatment of certain infectious diseases. For example, antiretroviral therapy in HIV aims to modulate the immune response against the virus. Vaccines are a form of immune modulation, priming the immune system to mount a protective response against specific pathogens. Immunosuppression is a critical component of organ transplantation to prevent graft rejection. Drugs like cyclosporine and tacrolimus modulate the immune response to allow the acceptance of transplanted organs. Immune modulation plays a role in establishing immune tolerance during pregnancy. The maternal immune system adapts to tolerate the semi-allogeneic fetus to prevent rejection. Changes in cytokine profiles and the balance of immune cells contribute to immune tolerance during pregnancy. Immune modulation helps maintain the delicate balance between pro-inflammatory and anti-inflammatory responses, preventing chronic inflammation associated with various diseases.<sup>72-92</sup>

## **Antiretroviral therapy (ART)**

Antiretroviral therapy (ART) is a medical intervention used to treat infections caused by retroviruses, with the most prominent example being the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). ART is a cornerstone of HIV management and has significantly transformed the prognosis and quality of life for individuals living with HIV. The primary goal of ART is to suppress the replication of the virus, reducing the viral load in the body to undetectable levels. By controlling viral replication, ART helps preserve the immune system, prevent the progression to acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), and reduce the risk of opportunistic infections. ART typically involves the use of a combination of antiretroviral drugs from different classes. The three main classes of antiretroviral drugs are: Inhibit reverse transcriptase, an enzyme necessary for viral replication. Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapy (HAART) involves the use of a combination of drugs from different classes. Combination therapy is more effective in suppressing viral replication and reducing the risk of drug resistance. ART is initiated based on specific clinical and immunological criteria, typically guided by the CD4 cell count and viral load. Early initiation of ART, regardless of CD4 count, is recommended in certain situations to improve outcomes and reduce transmission risk. 92-101

Regular monitoring of viral load is essential to assess the effectiveness of ART. Achieving and maintaining an undetectable viral load is a primary goal of treatment. Adherence to the prescribed ART regimen is crucial for treatment success. Inconsistent adherence can lead to viral resistance and treatment failure. Antiretroviral drugs may cause side effects, and their severity varies among individuals. Common side effects include gastrointestinal symptoms, metabolic changes, and skin reactions. Close monitoring and communication with healthcare providers help manage and Citation: Obeagu EI, Obeagu GU, Maternal Eosinophilic Responses in HIV-Positive

**Pregnant Women: A Review**. Elite Journal of Nursing and Health Science, 2024; 2(1): 32-47

Elite Journal of Nursing and Health Sciences. Volume 2 issue 1(2024), Pp. 32-47 <a href="https://epjournals.com/journals/EJNHS">https://epjournals.com/journals/EJNHS</a>

address side effects. ART is used during pregnancy to prevent vertical transmission of HIV from mother to child. Administering ART to pregnant women living with HIV significantly reduces the risk of transmission. PrEP involves the use of antiretroviral drugs by individuals at high risk of HIV infection to prevent transmission. Truvada (a combination of tenofovir and emtricitabine) is a commonly used drug for PrEP. Treatment guidelines for ART are periodically updated based on emerging research, new drug approvals, and advancements in the understanding of HIV. 102-

#### **Conclusion**

The dynamic interplay between HIV infection and eosinophils, traditionally associated with parasitic and allergic responses, unfolds new dimensions in the unique context of pregnancy. The immune tolerance established during pregnancy involves a delicate balance, and eosinophils emerge as key players in this intricate symphony. Their functions extend beyond the conventional roles, contributing to the modulation of inflammation, tissue repair, and potentially influencing the risk of certain pregnancy complications. In the realm of maternal and child health, where the stakes are high, the insights gleaned from this review contribute to a deeper understanding of the immune dynamics at play.

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