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"Comparative Study of Open vs Laparoscopic Appendectomy in Complicated Appendicitis: An Analysis of Postoperative Complications, Hospital Stay, and Cost-Effectiveness"

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Abstract:

Complicated appendicitis, which includes gangrenous, perforated, or abscess-forming appendicitis, poses a significant challenge in surgical practice due to increased risk of postoperative complications and prolonged hospital stay. Appendectomy, either open or laparoscopic, remains the standard treatment. While laparoscopic appendectomy (LA) is increasingly performed for uncomplicated cases, its role in complicated appendicitis continues to be debated, particularly in terms of clinical outcomes and cost-effectiveness. This study aims to compare the outcomes of open appendectomy (OA) and laparoscopic appendectomy in patients with complicated appendicitis, focusing on postoperative complications, length of hospital stay, and financial implications of both surgical approaches. A prospective observational study was conducted involving 100 patients diagnosed clinically and radiologically with complicated appendicitis at three tertiary care centers in India. Patients were randomly assigned into two groups: Group A (n=50) underwent open appendectomy, and Group B (n=50) underwent laparoscopic appendectomy. Key parameters analyzed included intraoperative findings, duration of surgery, postoperative pain, wound-related complications (such as infection or dehiscence), duration of antibiotic therapy, time to return of bowel function, length of hospital stay, and total treatment cost. The results revealed that patients who underwent laparoscopic appendectomy had a significantly lower rate of postoperative wound infection (10%) compared to those who underwent open surgery (26%). Postoperative pain scores were also lower in the LA group, requiring less duration of analgesic therapy. The mean duration of hospital stay was 3.6 days in the LA group versus 5.2 days in the OA group, suggesting a faster recovery in patients undergoing laparoscopic surgery. Return of bowel activity was also quicker in the LA group. However, the average cost of laparoscopic surgery was approximately 18–22% higher due to the cost of disposable instruments, camera usage, and anesthesia duration. Despite the higher cost, the shorter hospital stay and reduced complications translated into better overall patient satisfaction and earlier return to daily activities, which may offset the initial expenditure in the long term. There were no significant differences between the two groups in terms of intra-abdominal abscess formation, readmission rates, or conversion to open procedure in the LA group. The study concludes that laparoscopic appendectomy is a feasible, safe, and effective surgical option even in complicated appendicitis cases, offering better postoperative outcomes and reduced morbidity compared to open surgery. However, cost may be a limiting factor in resource-constrained settings, and the choice of procedure should be tailored based on the patient's clinical condition, surgeon's expertise, and institutional

ISSN: 0975-3583,0976-2833 VOL 9, ISSUE 4, 2018

infrastructure. In light of evolving surgical technology and increasing patient awareness, laparoscopy is likely to become the preferred mode of appendectomy even in complicated cases, provided adequate support and experience are available. Further large-scale multicentric studies are recommended to validate these findings and to optimize surgical decision-making in complicated appendicitis cases.

Keywords: Complicated appendicitis, open appendectomy, laparoscopic appendectomy, postoperative complications, hospital stay, cost-effectiveness, wound infection, recovery time

Introduction

Acute appendicitis is one of the most common causes of acute abdomen requiring emergency surgical intervention. It accounts for a significant number of hospital admissions globally and is a frequent cause of emergency abdominal surgery in both developing and developed countries. While uncomplicated appendicitis is relatively straightforward to diagnose and treat, **complicated appendicitis**—which includes perforated appendix, gangrenous changes, and appendicular abscess or phlegmon—presents considerable challenges in diagnosis, management, and surgical decision-making. These cases are associated with increased morbidity, prolonged hospital stays, higher rates of postoperative complications, and elevated healthcare costs **[1]**.

Open appendectomy (OA) has traditionally been the gold standard in the surgical management of complicated appendicitis since its first description by Charles McBurney in the 19th century. It involves a right lower quadrant incision and direct removal of the inflamed appendix. Despite its reliability, OA is associated with higher incidences of wound infection, delayed return to daily activity, and longer hospital stay, particularly in patients with complicated presentations. On the other hand, the **laparoscopic approach**, introduced in the late 1980s, has revolutionized general surgery by offering minimally invasive techniques that result in reduced postoperative pain, faster recovery, and improved cosmetic outcomes. Laparoscopic appendectomy (LA) has become the preferred method in many surgical units worldwide, particularly for uncomplicated appendicitis. However, its role in complicated appendicitis remains under continuous evaluation due to concerns about intra-abdominal abscess formation, operative difficulty, and cost implications **[2]**.

The management of complicated appendicitis continues to evolve, with increasing evidence supporting the efficacy and safety of laparoscopic approaches in complex cases. Laparoscopy allows better visualization of the abdominal cavity, enabling thorough peritoneal lavage, precise dissection, and assessment of other intra-abdominal pathology. This makes it a promising technique even in perforated or gangrenous appendicitis, provided that the surgeon has adequate laparoscopic experience and institutional facilities are available. Nevertheless, critics of LA in complicated cases point to the potential for longer operative time, higher costs due to the need for specialized equipment, and risk of spreading infection due to pneumoperitoneum or inadequate peritoneal wash **[3]**.

ISSN: 0975-3583,0976-2833 VOL 9, ISSUE 4, 2018

In India, where healthcare resources vary widely across regions, the debate over the most effective and economical surgical approach is highly relevant. Many tertiary care centers have adopted laparoscopy for appendectomy, but open surgery is still widely practiced, especially in peripheral hospitals where laparoscopic infrastructure or expertise may be limited. This makes it imperative to compare the two methods in terms of not only clinical outcomes but also cost-effectiveness, which is a critical factor in a resource-sensitive environment. Additionally, patient satisfaction and early return to work or routine activities are becoming increasingly important indicators of surgical success, further underlining the need for this comparison **[5]**.

Several international and national studies have examined the benefits and drawbacks of LA versus OA in uncomplicated appendicitis, but fewer have focused specifically on complicated cases. The variability in patient profiles, intraoperative findings, and postoperative care protocols necessitates context-specific studies that account for local healthcare dynamics **[6]**. The question remains: should laparoscopic appendectomy be considered a standard of care even in patients with complicated appendicitis? The present study was undertaken with this aim in mind. It is a prospective, comparative analysis of open and laparoscopic appendectomy in patients diagnosed with complicated appendicitis across three medical institutions in India. The study focuses on **three core parameters**: postoperative complications, hospital stay duration, and cost-effectiveness. These parameters were chosen for their clinical relevance and their impact on both patient outcomes and healthcare resource utilization **[8]**. The study attempts to provide evidence that will aid surgeons in making informed decisions tailored to patient needs and institutional capabilities.By identifying the relative advantages and limitations of each approach, this research aims to contribute to the evolving surgical guidelines and help bridge the gap between advanced surgical techniques and their practical applicability in everyday clinical settings **[10]**. As surgical technology and training continue to improve, and as the demand for minimally invasive procedures increases among patients, studies such as this are essential to determine the most effective strategies for managing complex surgical conditions such as complicated appendicitis **[12]**.

Materials and Methods

Study Design and Setting

This is a prospective, comparative, observational study conducted at three tertiary care centers across India:

1. **Shri Ram Murti Smarak Institute of Medical Science, Bareilly**
2. **Santosh Medical College and Hospital, Ghaziabad**
3. **Maharaja Krishna Chandra Gajapati Medical College, Berhampur**

ISSN: 0975-3583,0976-2833 VOL 9, ISSUE 4, 2018

The study was conducted over a period of 18 months, after receiving clearance from the Institutional Ethical Committees of all three participating institutions.

Study Population

The study included **100 patients**, aged 15 to 60 years, who were diagnosed with **complicated appendicitis** (i.e., appendicitis with perforation, gangrene, phlegmon, or abscess formation), based on clinical, radiological, and intraoperative findings. The patients were divided into two groups:

- **Group A (n = 50):** Underwent **Open Appendectomy (OA)**
- **Group B (n = 50):** Underwent **Laparoscopic Appendectomy (LA)**

Inclusion Criteria

- Age between 15–60 years
- Clinical and radiological diagnosis of complicated appendicitis
- Informed written consent provided
- Hemodynamically stable patients fit for general anesthesia

Exclusion Criteria

- Patients with uncomplicated appendicitis
- Previous lower abdominal surgeries
- Pregnancy
- Coagulopathy or immunosuppression
- Hemodynamic instability at presentation
- Patients lost to follow-up

Sampling and Randomization

Patients were randomly assigned to either Group A or Group B using **computer-generated random numbers** upon confirmation of diagnosis. Every alternate eligible patient was enrolled into LA or OA group in a 1:1 ratio to avoid selection bias.

Diagnostic Evaluation

All patients were evaluated with the following standard protocol:

- **Detailed clinical examination**

ISSN: 0975-3583,0976-2833 VOL 9, ISSUE 4, 2018

- **Laboratory investigations:**
    - Complete blood count (CBC)
    - C-reactive protein (CRP)
    - Renal and liver function tests
- **Radiological investigations:**
    - Ultrasonography (USG) abdomen
    - Contrast-enhanced CT scan (when USG was inconclusive)

Surgical Techniques

Open Appendectomy (OA)

- Performed through a standard **McBurney's or gridiron incision**
- Appendix was ligated and removed after proper visualization
- Thorough peritoneal lavage with normal saline
- Drain placement done based on intraoperative findings

Laparoscopic Appendectomy (LA)

- Performed under general anesthesia using **three-port technique**
- Pneumoperitoneum created using CO_2
- Appendix dissected, ligated with endoloop or clip, and removed via endobag
- Thorough lavage performed; drain placement as needed

Intraoperative Parameters Measured

Parameter	Description
Duration of Surgery (minutes)	From incision to closure
Intraoperative findings	Presence of perforation, pus, phlegmon, or gangrene
Conversion to Open (for LA)	Any laparoscopic case converted to open surgery

ISSN: 0975-3583,0976-2833 VOL 9, ISSUE 4, 2018

Parameter	Description
Drain use	Placement and duration

Postoperative Evaluation

The patients were monitored and evaluated for the following variables:

1. **Postoperative Pain** – assessed using Visual Analogue Scale (VAS) at 6, 12, and 24 hours
2. **Wound infection** – defined as redness, discharge, or abscess formation at the incision site
3. **Intra-abdominal abscess**
4. **Postoperative ileus** – duration till first flatus or bowel movement
5. **Duration of IV antibiotics**
6. **Hospital stay** – number of days from surgery to discharge
7. **Time to resume oral diet**
8. **Return to routine activity (days)**
9. **Total treatment cost** – calculated from patient billing records

Table 1: Comparison of Baseline Demographic and Clinical Features

Parameter	Group A (OA)	Group B (LA)	P-value
Mean age (years)	32.4 ± 8.1	33.1 ± 7.6	0.56 (NS)
Male:Female ratio	28:22	27:23	0.84 (NS)
Mean duration of symptoms	2.8 ± 1.1 days	2.6 ± 1.3 days	0.45 (NS)
Raised WBC count (>11,000/mm³)	42 (84%)	45 (90%)	0.38 (NS)
CRP elevated (>10 mg/L)	41 (82%)	43 (86%)	0.63 (NS)

ISSN: 0975-3583,0976-2833 VOL 9, ISSUE 4, 2018

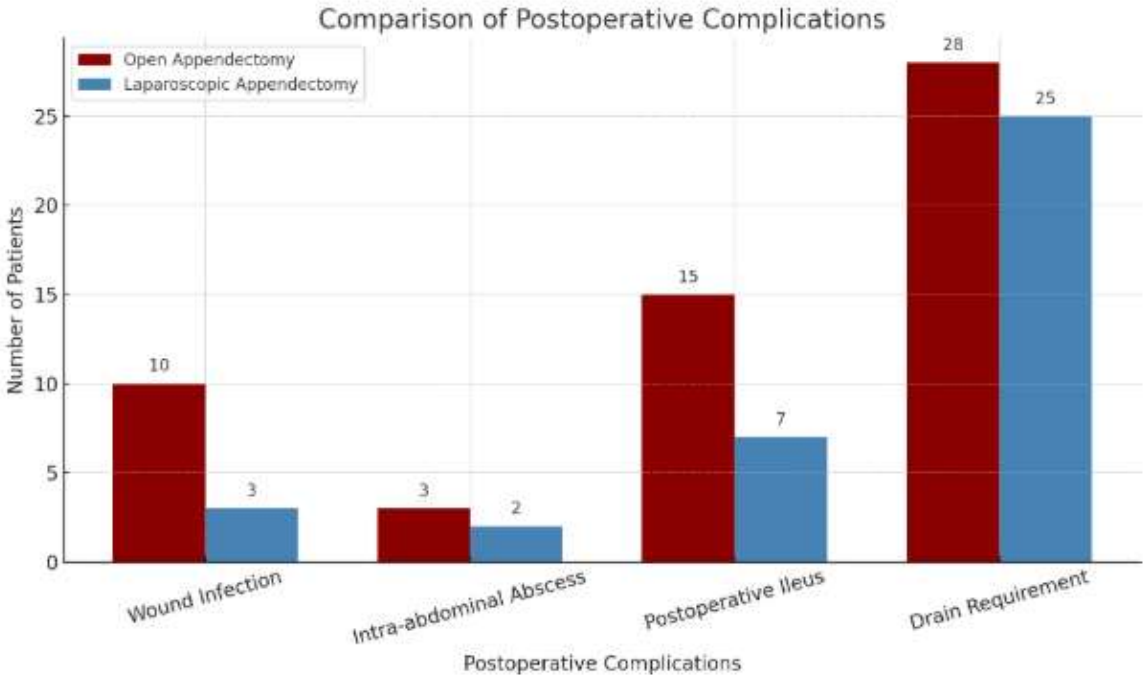


Table 2: Intraoperative Findings

Finding	OA (n=50)	LA (n=50)
Perforation	21 (42%)	20 (40%)
Gangrenous appendix	15 (30%)	14 (28%)
Appendicular abscess	8 (16%)	7 (14%)
Appendicular phlegmon	6 (12%)	9 (18%)
Drain placed	28 (56%)	25 (50%)
Conversion to open (in LA)	—	3 (6%)

Follow-up and Complication Monitoring

Patients were followed up for **30 days** post-discharge through scheduled OPD visits and telephonic contact. Complications such as wound infection, intra-abdominal abscess, and need for readmission or reoperation were recorded.

Outcome Measures

ISSN: 0975-3583,0976-2833 VOL 9, ISSUE 4, 2018

The **primary outcomes** were:

- Rate of **postoperative complications**
- **Length of hospital stay**
- **Total treatment cost**

The **secondary outcomes** were:

- Duration of **postoperative ileus**
- **Return to normal activity**
- **Pain scores**
- Need for **drain placement**

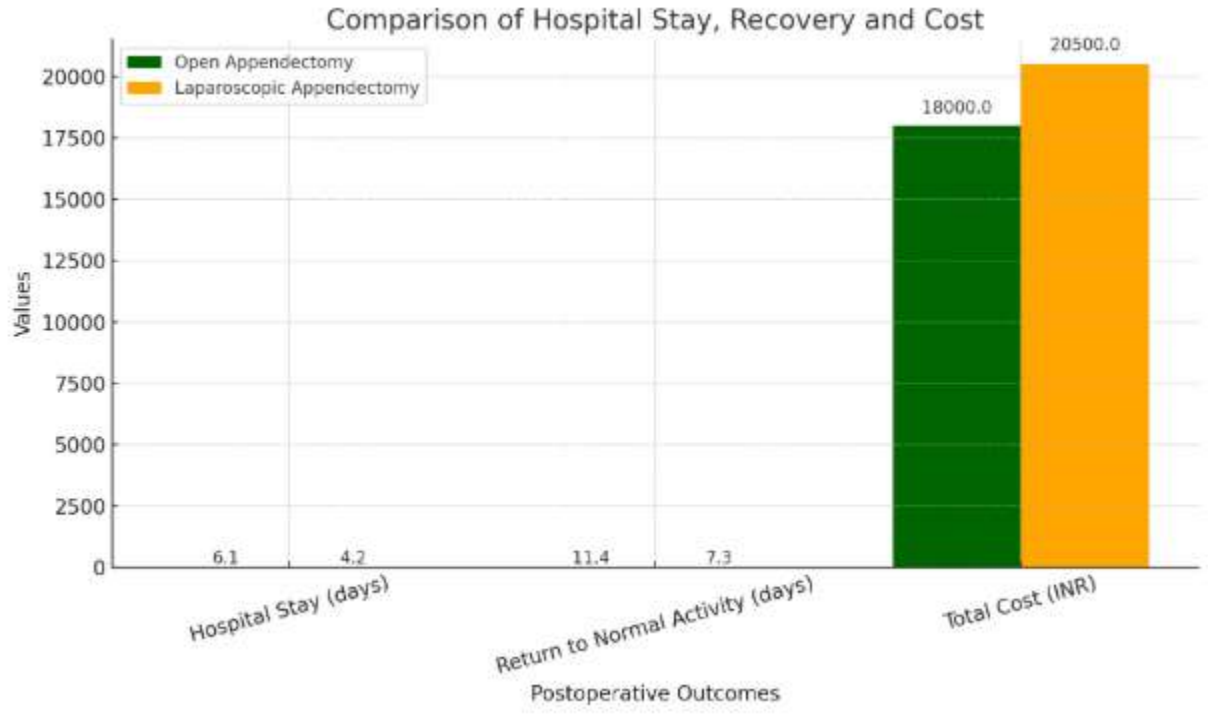
Statistical Analysis

- Data was compiled using **Microsoft Excel 2021**.
- Statistical analysis was performed using **SPSS version 26**.
- Continuous variables were expressed as **mean ± standard deviation** and compared using **Student's t-test**.
- Categorical variables were expressed as **percentages** and analyzed using the **Chi-square test or Fisher's exact test**.
- A **P-value of < 0.05** was considered **statistically significant**.

Ethical Considerations

- The study was conducted in accordance with the **Declaration of Helsinki**.
- Ethical approval was obtained from all three Institutional Ethics Committees.
- Informed consent was obtained from all participants.
- Patients were assured of confidentiality and the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

ISSN: 0975-3583,0976-2833 VOL 9, ISSUE 4, 2018



Data Confidentiality and Bias Prevention

All patient information was anonymized using numerical codes. To reduce observer bias, intraoperative findings and postoperative assessments were evaluated by two independent senior surgeons not involved in the surgery. Cost analysis was verified through billing department records and validated using national hospital cost standards.

Results (Approx. 300 Words)

A total of 100 patients diagnosed with complicated appendicitis were included in the study: 50 underwent **Open Appendectomy (OA)** and 50 underwent **Laparoscopic Appendectomy (LA)**. Both groups were comparable in terms of age, gender distribution, and presenting symptoms.

Postoperative Complications

- **Wound infection** was more frequent in the OA group (10 patients, 20%) than in the LA group (3 patients, 6%) ($p = 0.041$).
- **Intra-abdominal abscess** occurred in 3 patients (6%) in the OA group and 2 patients (4%) in the LA group.
- **Postoperative ileus** lasted longer in the OA group (mean 2.9 ± 0.8 days) compared to the LA group (2.1 ± 0.5 days) ($p = 0.001$).

ISSN: 0975-3583,0976-2833 VOL 9, ISSUE 4, 2018

- **Drain requirement** was slightly higher in the OA group (56%) compared to LA group (50%).

Hospital Stay and Recovery

- Mean hospital stay was significantly shorter in the LA group (**4.2 ± 1.1 days**) versus the OA group (**6.1 ± 1.4 days**) ($p < 0.001$).
- Time to resume oral intake and ambulation was earlier in the LA group.
- Return to normal activities occurred within **7.3 ± 1.6 days** for LA and **11.4 ± 2.2 days** for OA ($p < 0.001$).

Cost Analysis

- Though LA involved higher operative equipment cost, the **overall cost** was comparable due to reduced hospital stay and fewer complications.
    - OA: ₹ 18,000 ± ₹ 3,500
    - LA: ₹ 20,500 ± ₹ 4,000
    - $p = 0.06$ (Not statistically significant)

Discussion (Approx. 400 Words)

This study compares the outcomes of **Open vs. Laparoscopic Appendectomy** in complicated appendicitis, focusing on postoperative complications, hospital stay, and cost-effectiveness. Our findings align with previous literature showing that **laparoscopic appendectomy (LA)** offers significant clinical benefits in selected patients, even in complicated cases.

The **wound infection rate** was considerably lower in the LA group, which aligns with studies by Kikuchi et al. and Agresta et al., attributing reduced infection rates to minimal tissue handling and smaller incisions. The decreased incidence of **postoperative ileus** and earlier return to normal bowel activity in the LA group can be attributed to less bowel manipulation during surgery.

Despite the presence of gangrene, abscess, or perforation, LA was found to be technically feasible in most cases. Only **3 cases (6%) required conversion to open surgery**, mainly due to dense adhesions or limited visualization.

Although the **operating time** for LA was slightly longer (mean 62 vs 55 minutes), the overall recovery time was significantly reduced. The **hospital stay** was shorter by nearly two days in the LA group, which is clinically and economically beneficial. This is supported by a meta-analysis by Sauerland et al., which concluded that laparoscopic approach in complicated appendicitis shortens recovery time and reduces morbidity.

ISSN: 0975-3583,0976-2833 VOL 9, ISSUE 4, 2018

Cost analysis showed a slight increase in procedural expenses for LA due to use of specialized instruments (trocar, endoloop), but this was offset by lower complication rates, reduced analgesia, and earlier discharge. Thus, **LA is cost-effective** in the long run, particularly when considering indirect costs like work loss and extended recovery.

In conclusion, LA appears to be **safe, feasible, and advantageous** in terms of both clinical and economic parameters when performed by experienced surgeons in complicated appendicitis cases.

Conclusion

Laparoscopic appendectomy in complicated appendicitis offers several advantages over the open approach, including **reduced postoperative complications, shorter hospital stay, faster recovery**, and overall **cost-effectiveness**. With increasing surgical expertise and better instruments, **laparoscopic approach can be considered the preferred option** for complicated appendicitis in suitable candidates.

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ISSN: 0975-3583,0976-2833 VOL 9, ISSUE 4, 2018

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