



## Anatomical Variations in Origin, Course, and Distribution of Mainterminal Branches of Brachial Plexus in Morphology among Black African Population; Cadaveric Study in Western Kenya.

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### ABSTRACT

The brachial plexus (Bp) has many variations, and a greater understanding of these differences is essential for achieving good surgical outcomes. The current study's objective was to investigate anatomical variations in the origin, course, and distribution of the terminal branches of Bp. The anatomical laboratory departments at Maseno, Masinde Muliro, and Uzima Universities undertook a descriptive, cross-sectional study. Using the Yamane Taro formula, a sample size of 70 (35 males and 35 females) cadavers was used from a total of 86. Ethical consideration was undertaken. X<sup>2</sup> test was applied. The P-value for significance was set at 0.05. Data was entered into a Microsoft Office Excel spreadsheet, and statistical analysis was performed using SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics were used to determine the mean, mode, median, and standard deviation of the variations. Study findings recorded no statistical significance in variation of the axillary, ulnar, musculocutaneous, medial, and radial nerve. This study found Bp variations at the root at 38 (27.1%), on the trunks at 11 (7.9%), at the divisions 3 (2.2%), and the cords at 4 (2.9%). The highest variation was at the prefixed root, while the least was at the division. Both anatomists and clinicians are interested in learning about these anatomical variances. These variances must be understood by surgeons who perform procedures involving

neoplastic or reparative traumasurgeries. Anesthetic regional blocks at the axilla brachial plexus nerves and surgical procedures may become disoriented because of median nerve variations.

**Keywords:** Anatomical variations; Brachial plexus; cadaver; course; distribution; length; origin.

### I. INTRODUCTION

Brachial plexus (Bp) is a complex interaction of nerves of the spinal cord at the brachium (humerus region) and neck region (Rasulic et al., 2020). It conveys motor and sensory innervation to extrinsic thoracic muscles and the sympathetic impulses from the spinal cord into the arms. It connects via inter-scalene muscle between the anterior scalene muscle and middle scalene, then through the posterior neck triangle Vaid and Vaid (2015). The union of C5, C6, C7, C8 and T1 forms it. There are different segments, thus the roots, trunks, divisions, and cords (Emamhadi et al., 2016).

Studies stipulated that it is located in the upper limbs of the human body, with embryological origin being the initial differentiation of mesenchyme occurring in the fourth week of embryology Standing (2016). Primordial dorsal nerves reach the length of the distal outstretch of the humerus innermost the sheath at the growing primordial arm muscle nerves originate from C5 to



T1 that commence extending on day 32 of human life, whereby the nerves merge and form Bp (Bala, Sinha, Tamang, & Sarda, 2014; Rasulic et al., 2020).

The interconnection of nerves conducts signals from the spine into the shoulder, arm, and hands. Bp injuries are caused by the destruction of those nerves (Sachar, Ray, Landau, Dy, and Brogan (2020). Commonly, injuries are caused by trauma to the neck and shoulder region. These symptoms might include a limp, paralyzed arm, inadequacy of muscle control in the arm, hand, or wrist, and absence of sensation in the arms and or hand (Emamhadi et al., 2016).

Pizzo and others (2019) established that it's essential for neurosurgeons, anesthesiologists, and anatomists to grasp the technical recognition of the anatomy of the human neuron complex network, leading to efficient outcomes in the critical and emergency patient comfort and a better prognosis. The most significant vital challenges in human anatomy are found in the nerve variations, particularly in extreme cases in the upper limb (Pizzo, Yoon, Adams, Lynch, and Liporace (2019). This could be due to sports injuries, car or motorcycle accidents, falls, medical conditions like autoimmune, and surgery around the upper limbs, which are vulnerable to trauma (Hardcastle, Texakalidis, Tora, Nagarajan, & Boulis, 2020; Verma, Vora, Thatte, & Yardi, 2020). It's important to note that Bp anatomical variations are so common. Most of the cadaveric anatomical studies of the human nerve connection are reported to erupt from the Bp (Pizzo et al., 2019).

Professor Ogeng'o (2013) and others indicated that Bp injuries may occur during the delivery of newborns. After head delivery, the anterior shoulder of an infant may not pass below the pubic symphysis minus manipulation (Bahm, Bouslama, Hagert, & Andersson, 2020; El Falougy, Selmeçiova, Kubikova, Stenova, & Haviarova, 2013). This manipulation may cause the baby's shoulder to overstretch, damaging the Bp to varying degrees (Feigl, Litz, & Marhofer, 2020; Singh, Das, Deora, Jaiswal, & Behari, 2020). This type of injury is often alluded to as shoulder dystocia. Shoulder dystocia can result in obstetric brachial plexus palsy (OBPP), the actual injury to the Bp (Tay et al. (2021). The incidence of OBPP in the USA is 1.5 per 1000 births, while lower in the UK and the Republic of Ireland (0.42 per 1000 births). While there are unknown risk factors for OBPP, if any newborn is involved in shoulder dystocia, this increases their risk for the OBPP 100-fold (Menticoglou, 2018). Nerve damage has been interconnected to birth weight, with bigger babies

being more susceptible to injury, but it may also involve the delivery methods. Although very difficult to prevent during live birth, clinicians must be able to deliver newborns with precise and tender movements to minimize the chances of injuring the nerve (Fakoya et al., 2019; Tay et al., 2021).

The most frequent variations of the Bp may lead to a lack of success amid infiltration of local anesthesia (Yee et al. (2019). Following invasive surgical therapy of lesions of the brachial plexus variations could lead to inadvertent injury of the nerves (Lam, Fufa, Chang, and Chuang (2015). The variations in the emergence of trunks of Bp have effectively been described. Other studies found the upper trunk not being formed in a smaller percentage of cases, lower trunk of Bp being created by the T1 plus T2 roots while a formation of superior trunk of the Bp by C5, C6 plus C7 roots is quite rare, which always unite minus the middle trunk where by surgeon defend this kind of scenario as the act of anatomical fusion of the middle with superior trunk (Leonel et al. (2021). A case was documented in regard to a fusion of the superior plus middle trunk established to be bilateral (Martin, Senders, DiRisio, Smith, and Broekman (2018).

Martin et al. (2018) extensively observed a female cadaver with a bilateral variation in the Bp. The musculocutaneous nerve arising from the median nerve instead of lateral code of Bp on the left part at a distance of 75mm while the right side at a distance of 66mm away from the coracoid process (Sharma et al. (2016). On both sides, the musculocutaneous nerve penetrates coracobrachialis muscles at a distance of 128mm away from the coracoid process (Ellabban, Sadek, Galhom, Hafez, and Ramadan (2021). In both limbs, the Bp nerve cell projection fibers of musculocutaneous run along with a projection of the median nerves for 21mm along their pathway (Russo et al. (2020). The median nerve was established on the left side at 54mm, while the right part was at a distance of 45 mm away from the coracoid process. No other variations were identified in the pathway of the median nerves on both sides.

Studies done by Kuhn and others (2015) indicated that the median nerve was established at different distances away from the coracoid process, and the musculocutaneous nerve pierced the coracobrachialis at different distances away from the coracoid process. This type of study is essential and valuable to orthopedicians, anatomists, neurosurgeons, radiologists, anesthesiologists, surgeons, nurses, and other carders. In invasive surgical



procedures around the humerus and shoulder region, nerve blocking, plastic surgical operations, diagnosis, and managing of traumatic peripheral neuropathies in which these structures must be recognized and protected for probable injuries; therefore, collecting information regarding these structures plus their variations in the different populations is very essential Kuhn, Lebus, and Bible (2015). In comparison, some studies on Bp variations have been documented by several authors who identified variations in 47.1% of their series and 53.5% of human females on the right side. This indicates the variations; therefore, it explains clinical syndromes with effect resolution in post-traumasurgical procedures. It is important to note that selective therapeutic failures and lack of success of the brachial plexus tumors reparative surgery are directly interconnected to variations Leaper, Tanner, Kiernan, Assadian, and Edmiston (2015). Different anomalies of long thoracic nerves were united at other parameters, though they couldn't outline a long thoracic having a course from C3 specifically encountered in that research Kuhn et al. (2015). The surgeons operating should, on the back of their minds, be bound to understand the feasibility of the proximal and or distal superior with inferior root joining. Surgeons with classical technical skills of nerve fibers may cause destruction. The suprascapular nerve is more often prone to a variable; it may begin at C4 or C5 from the posterior or anterior division of the upper trunk plus from the posterior cord Leonel et al. (2021).

Emamhadi and associates (2016) established that most cadavers had inconsistency in the infraclavicular part; the medial cutaneous nerve was found disconnected from the medial cord in a big branch, whereas five cadavers displayed a cross-connection between the nerve above and the T1 spinal root. A medial antebrachial cutaneous nerve originating from a medial cord in thirty-seven plexuses (57.81%). Nevertheless, the rest derived from the inferior trunk, in the totality of male cadavers. The suprascapular nerve was straightly established by the C5 spinal root of six brachial plexuses. Often, the subscapular nerve arises at the posterior cord. A variation was noted at the beginning of the upper subscapular nerve, appearing at the superior trunk. The medial pectoral nerve abnormally shot up from the anterior division at a medial trunk into two plexuses. The lateral pectoral nerve had no variations at all. Final dissection revealed that the thoracodorsal was found to vary in a sixty-year-old lady in one of the two arms, emerging from the axillary nerve.

In some cases, the thoracodorsal nerve usually arises from the posterior cord, as in totality,

spinal roots begin at the C5 to T1, forming the nerve. Brachial Plexus terminal branches that are ulnar nerve which arises from C8 to T1 roots. Rasulic et al. (2020) found that three cadavers (2 females and one male) had apparent variations on the ulnar nerve. These cases illustrated that the ulnar nerve got a connecting branch from the lateral cord. The median nerve had variations in the twenty-two plexuses. The median nerve in some cadavers was established by only two lateral roots originating from the lateral cord. And others with one medial root beginning from the medial line in six cadavers. The other five cases of significance are that either the musculocutaneous nerve generated an interconnecting branch into the median nerve or the median nerve drew a branch from the posterior cord of the plexus above Rasulic et al. (2020).

It was well-established that lateral roots from the lateral cord were exemplarily united to emerge from the musculocutaneous nerve. Some nerve fibers at C7 roots infiltrated in three females and five males. We revealed that the majority of cases of radial nerves were established by the posterior cord (C5 to T1 roots). In contrast, the main part united with the division of the middle cord a long with inferior trunks (C7 to T1 roots) and straight away communicated to produce radial nerve of the remainder in the bilateral plexus in 1 male cadaver Emamhadi et al. (2016) This kind of knowledge might also help in the treatment on neural tumors like lipoma Leijnse, de Bakker, and D'Herde (2020). Most of the orthopedic therapy on cervical spine injuries requires technical skills along with the atypical emergence of Bp, even though the reported variations may rarely alter the physiological function of an individual's upper limbs. All these are vital for general and orthopedic surgeries.

## II. MATERIAL STUDIED

The study population is represented by 70 cadavers of both genders, female n=35 and male n=35 in the analyzed number. This research was conducted at the Maseno University School of Medicine based in Kisumu County, Western Kenya. A descriptive cross-sectional study design was employed for measurements and description of brachial plexus anatomical variation regarding origin, length, distribution, and course. This was demonstrated in the distribution of the brachial plexus in observed cadavers in the study population between 2018 and 2022. The cadavers were properly embalmed and formalin-fixed before routine dissection practice for undergraduates was used. The inclusion criteria



entailed cadavers of black African descent, both genders (male and female) with the upper limb intact, were included in the study. Exclusion criteria entailed Cadavers with no demographic characteristic data, and those whose upper limbs had been dissected were also excluded from the study.

### 2.1 Sampling design Sampling strategy

The three universities were purposively and conveniently identified because of their

operational human anatomy department that met the CUE standards for storing human tissue. For equal distribution of samples, the sampling procedure was actualized proportionately with the strata population by location, whereby the sample size per laboratory was then calculated by dividing the cadaver in the laboratory (d) by the total location population (86) and then multiplying it by the desired sample size (70) as projected on Table 3.1.  $n = (d \cdot 70) / 86$ . The sample is shown in Table 1.

Locations of laboratory	Location population	Sample size per location
Maseno university	43	35
Masinde Muliro University	23	19
Uzima University	20	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>70</b>

Table 1: Sample Size Allocation

### 2.3 Dissection technique

The dissection tools used were Adson dissecting forceps, hemostats, dissecting pair of scissors, tape measure, blade handle, and scalpel. This procedure demanded extreme care to preserve the essential fine distal nerve fibers. A dissection guide (Cunninghams) was used for accuracy and preciseness in the surgical dissection. The upper limb was abducted, and then, with a surgical scalpel, the skin of the pectoral part was removed, and an incision was made along the sternoclavicular plane. Another incision pressed vertically from the superior to inferior margin along the posterior neck triangle. Then, the superficial fascia was removed, and subsequently, the deep fascia exposed the clavicular and sternocostal heads of the pectoralis major afterward reflected to get lateral pectoral nerve piercing the pectoralis muscles. The pectoralis minor muscle was later reflected to expose the contents of the axilla along with the brachial plexus fibers. The cut was elongated to a deltoid, pectoral groove in the direction of the pectoralis central to get the starting point of the subscapular nerve, lateral pectoral, thoracodorsal, medial pectoral, medial brachial cutaneous plus medial antebrachial cutaneous nerves. An Oscillating saw cut the middle third of the clavicle bone to identify the axillary artery. The vertical incision was made to unveil the site between the triceps and biceps muscles. Then, the following was displayed: roots were located at the

scalene gap, trunkslay bare superiorly to the clavicle, divisions manifested around the posterior portion, and cords plus branches uncovered inferiorly to the clavicle. Median, axillary, radial, musculocutaneous, and ulnar nerves, plus their origin, were displayed in the infraclavicular region as well. Variations in the trunks, divisions, and cords were equally scrutinized. Dimension from the end-to-end part of the nerves from the origin toward the intent target muscles were located and measured.

### 2.4 Ethical consideration

The procedure of acquiring cadavers is a legal process. A court order must be obtained to enable the university to receive unclaimed bodies from the state after three months from the time of death. The university then contacts specific hospital boards of directors and the court to acquire selected bodies. After a court order, the university formally requests to accept bodies depending on different precise demands. The medical institution then liaises with the university to invoke transportation logistics of these bodies. The bodies are then received in the department of human anatomy. Labeling and coding are then concluded for an easy identification process. Cleaning plus embalming with formaldehyde 40% is done immediately in preparation for dissection.



### III. RESULTS

Levene's test for equality of the variances was used to determine if the variances of the main terminal branching patterns are equal and then to assess the strength of the relationship of variations from normal. An F value and its entire associated p-value were reported. If a p-value is less than .05,

the assumption of equal variances is violated, and therefore "equal variances were not assumed" row is used. A 95% confidence interval of the difference between the means was recorded. The standard error difference, the mean difference, and the upper and lower limits of the confidence interval were provided.

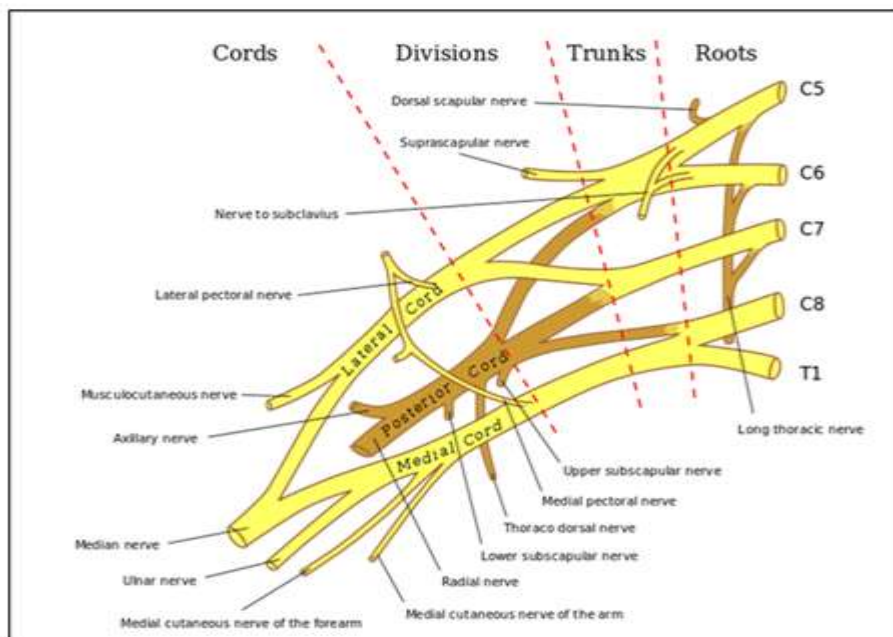
**Table 4.1:** Independent Samples Test (Right Terminals of Brachial Plexus)

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference			
		F	Sig.	T	df	One-Sided p	Two-Sided p	Mean Difference	SED	Lower	Upper
Axillary Nerve	EVA	.196	.659	-1.860	68	.034	.067	-.0886	.0476	-.1836	.0064
				-1.860	67.374	.034	.067	-.0886	.0476	-.1836	.0065
Radial Nerve	EVA	.161	.689	.575	68	.284	.567	.0343	.0597	-.0847	.1533
				.575	67.978	.284	.567	.0343	.0597	-.0847	.1533
Ulnar Nerve	EVA	1.952	.167	-1.300	68	.099	.198	-.5429	.4175	-1.3760	.2902
				-1.300	64.425	.099	.198	-.5429	.4175	-1.3768	.2911
Musculocutaneous Nerve	EVA	.965	.329	-1.422	68	.080	.160	-.3429	.2411	-.8241	.1383
				-1.422	67.270	.080	.160	-.3429	.2411	-.8242	.1384
Median Nerve	EVA	2.720	.104	.558	68	.289	.579	.2743	.4916	-.7067	1.2553
				.558	64.163	.289	.579	.2743	.4916	-.7078	1.2563

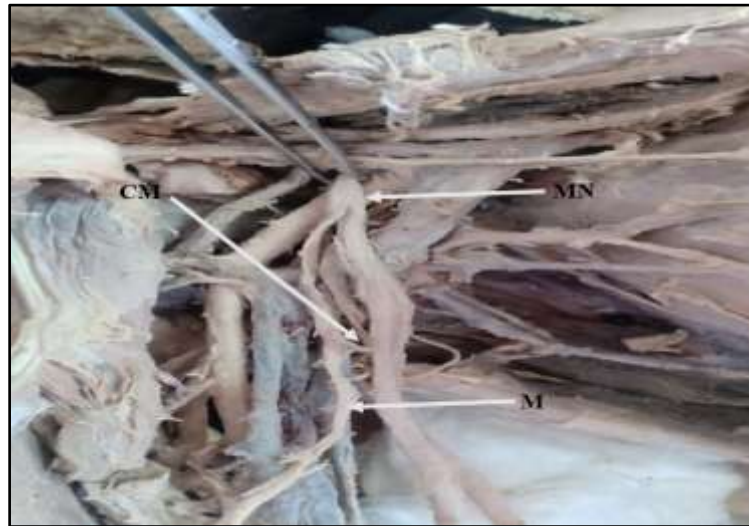
Key: EVA=Equal variance assumed; SED=Std. Error Difference

In Table 4.1, there was no statistically significant variation recognized in all the branching patterns of the brachial plexus; even though

variations were reported, Levene's test didn't show any strong atypical variation away from the normal anatomical standards.

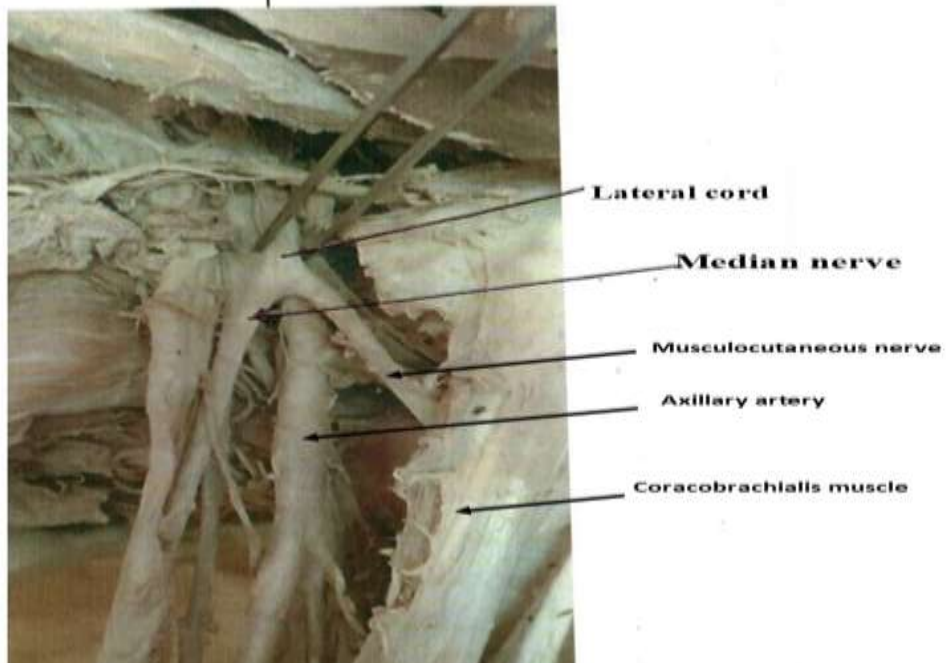


**Figure 4.1:** Anatomical diagram of an actual normal brachial plexus (M. Emamhadi et al., 2016)

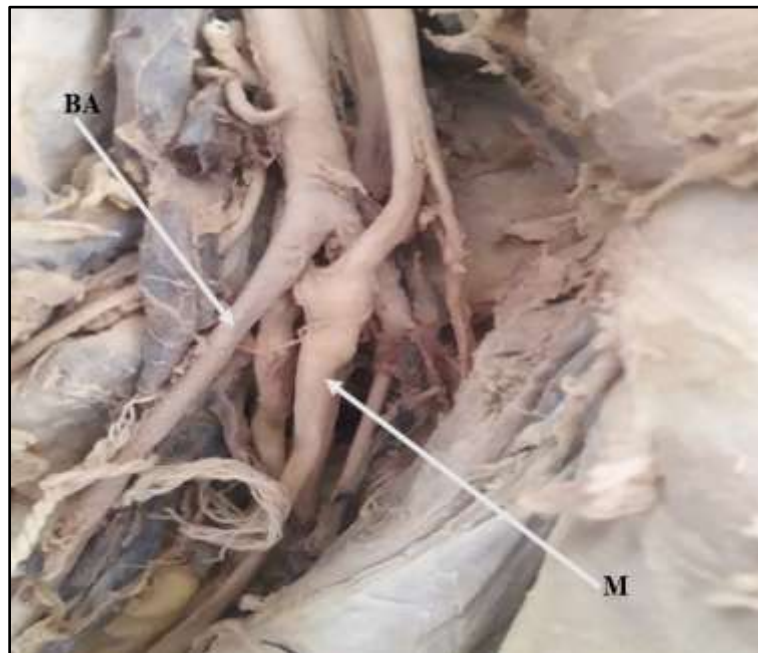


**Figure 4.2:** The median nerve is formed by a single nerve root, while the musculocutaneous nerve provides a communicating offshoot to the median nerve.

**KEY:** M=Musculocutaneous nerve, CM= Communicating branch of the musculocutaneous connecting the median nerve.MN= Median nerve.



**Figure 4.4:**Median nervewell-established from only one lateral cord.



**Figure 4.5:** Brachial artery passing superficially and superiorly to the median nerve.

**KEY:** BA=Brachial artery, and M=Musculocutaneous nerve.

**Table 4.2:** Frequency distribution of origin plus sections of the brachial plexus

		Total	
		Right + Left UL N=140	Percentage (%)
Roots	Normal	102	72.9
	Variant Post fixed	9	6.4
	Variant Prefixed	29	20.7
	Total	140	
Trunks	Normal	129	92.1
	Variant	11	7.9
Divisions	Normal	137	97.8
	Variant	3	2.2
Cords	Normal	136	97.1
	Variant	4	2.9

In Table 4.2, total variations in the root of the brachial plexus were 27.1% (38), the trunks 7.9% (11), the divisions 2.2% (3), and the cords 2.9% (4). The highest variation was in the prefixed root, while the least was in the division.

#### IV. DISCUSSION

In the current study, it ascertained that there was a statistically significant difference ( $p=0.008$ ) in a variation of distribution of the median nerve with gender (male and female). It is in agreement with observations by Pandey and Shukla (2007) in India, whereby it was confirmed that median nerve variation prevalence was at 12.8% and 13.2%, 10.7% among males and females, respectively. These alterations are variant in terms of origin, course, and location of the axillary artery. Therefore, this study postulates that

these variations are mainly prone to injury during radical neck and axilla surgical dissection procedures. The formation of the median nerve arises lateral to an axillary artery in the axilla, which is normal human anatomy.

Nevertheless, the median nerve may be correlated with variations in the uncommon communication with nerves such as musculocutaneous and ulnar or even splitting and penetrating adjacent blood vessels. The following anatomical variations were detected in the reports of (Budhiraja, Rastogi, & Asthana, 2017; Samarawickrama, 2017) in Brazil, whereby 22.4% of upper limbs three roots were associated in the formation of the median nerve, 6.12% medial to the axillary artery and 1.53% ventral to axillary artery. In this current study, notably, the median nerve was formed by one single root rather than the usual two



roots, which is anatomically peculiar. It was also detected that the brachial artery was superficial to the median nerve, which is inconsistent with the normal human anatomy of the brachial artery, which courses below the median nerve.

This study established total variations of brachial plexus at the root to be 27.1% (38), and on the trunks, 7.9% (11), the divisions 2.2% (3), and at the cords 2.9% (4). The highest variation was found at the prefixed root, while the least was in the division compared to studies realized by (Gilcrease-Garcia and others (2020), who indicated that the standard anatomy textbook of brachial plexus has five roots originating from C5-T1 spinal nerves, three trunks (superior, middle, and inferior trunk), six divisions (3 posterior and three anterior divisions), three cords (lateral, medial and posterior cord) and five main terminal branches (musculocutaneous, axillary, radial, ulnar and medial nerve)

In the entire study population, the findings realized no statistical significance in the variation of ulnar, axillary, musculocutaneous, radial, and medial nerve. The current study findings differed from those of Sinha, Khani, Mansoori, and Midha (2016) in Iran, who recognized a significant variation in the main terminal branches of the brachial plexus. Some other authors, Demis and Bekele (2017) from Ethiopia, collaborated with the current study pronouncement in reporting no statistically significant variation in the terminal branching of brachial plexus in both males and females. Nonetheless, it documented deviations mostly of the median, the musculocutaneous, and axillary nerve, respectively.

## V. CONCLUSION

Amidst surgical excursions encompassing the axilla and the neck region, variations assume a great deal of significance, for the nerves are furthermore vulnerable to injury. Nonetheless, some more variations we have cited may alter the typical operative functioning procedure of the arm pertaining to an individual.

This must be kept up-to-date by the surgeon in standard surgical intervention, including an anesthesiologist, during regional anesthesia block.

Its significance owing to surgeries is indeed undisputed to a large extent during trauma surgeries. Existence as regards entrapment of either the median nerve or brachial artery or both open on to several neuropathies largely attributed to compaction of the median nerve.

Regardless of any extent of morphological or anatomical variations, clinicians sought to nurture a high index of suspicion for their technical surgical interventions for a better prognosis for respective clients.

## VI. RECOMMENDATION

Brachial plexus variations are mainly encountered in many cases, but extremely little is known about the Bp on the etiology of embryological morphogenesis and the environmental factors. More studies should be undertaken in this scope. Receptors leading to this variation, to our knowledge, are unknown; however, this might incorporate and rarely be limited to hemodynamic and either oxygenation or nutrition indicators. Peri-surgical maneuvers encircling the axilla should undergo a radiological investigation to identify the least possible brachial plexus variations.

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