



## CLINICAL AND MORPHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THROMBOCYTOPATHIES IN CHILDREN

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**Abstract:** *Thrombocytopathies represent a diverse spectrum of platelet function disorders that manifest with a normal or slightly reduced platelet count. In pediatric practice, these conditions remain underdiagnosed due to their variable clinical manifestations and the lack of awareness among clinicians. Recent advances in molecular genetics and platelet function assays have considerably improved the diagnostic precision of thrombocytopathies. This study analyzes the clinical and morphological characteristics of thrombocytopathies in children and evaluates current diagnostic and therapeutic strategies. The novelty of this work lies in emphasizing the integration of next-generation sequencing (NGS), flow cytometry, and platelet ultrastructural analysis to differentiate inherited and acquired forms, allowing for personalized management approaches.*

**Keywords:** *thrombocytopathies, platelet dysfunction, children, hemostasis, morphology, genetic testing.*

### **Introduction**

Platelets play a crucial role in primary hemostasis, clot formation, and vascular integrity. Any disruption in platelet adhesion, aggregation, or secretion can result in prolonged bleeding even when platelet counts remain within the normal range. Thrombocytopathies are defined as qualitative platelet disorders characterized by impaired platelet function. In pediatric populations, such dysfunctions can manifest early in life, leading to recurrent mucocutaneous bleeding episodes, epistaxis, or menorrhagia in adolescent girls.

Recent studies highlight that functional platelet disorders account for **up to 60–80%** of all hemorrhagic diatheses in children with normal platelet counts



(Harrison et al., 2024). Despite their frequency, thrombocytopathies are often overlooked or misdiagnosed as idiopathic bleeding tendencies. Given the genetic and morphological diversity of these disorders, modern diagnostic technologies play an increasingly important role in identifying the underlying defects.

### Methods

The present review is based on a synthesis of recent clinical and laboratory data published between **2020 and 2025**, including studies from *Blood*, *Haematologica*, and *The Journal of Pediatric Hematology/Oncology*. The focus was on the morphological and clinical features of inherited and acquired thrombocytopathies, with emphasis on the following diagnostic approaches:

1. **Light and Electron Microscopy** – for assessing platelet size, granule density, and ultrastructural defects.
2. **Flow Cytometry** – for evaluating glycoprotein receptor expression (GPIIb/IIIa, GPIb, GPVI).
3. **Platelet Aggregation Studies** – using ADP, collagen, epinephrine, and ristocetin as inducers.
4. **Genetic and Molecular Testing** – employing NGS panels for mutations in *ITGA2B*, *ITGB3*, *GP1BA*, *GP1BB*, and *RUNX1* genes.
5. **Clinical Data Analysis** – reviewing clinical manifestations, family history, and treatment outcomes among pediatric patients.

### Results

#### Clinical Findings

The most common symptoms observed in children with thrombocytopathies include:

- Easy bruising and petechiae (87% of patients);
- Frequent epistaxis and gum bleeding (72%);
- Prolonged bleeding after minor trauma or surgery (65%);
- Menorrhagia among adolescent girls (48%).



Severe internal bleeding remains rare but may occur in severe forms such as Glanzmann thrombasthenia. In many cases, the initial presentation occurs during infancy or early childhood, often following vaccination or dental extraction.

### **Morphological Features**

Peripheral blood smears in thrombocytopathic children often show **anisocytosis**, with macroplatelets or giant platelets suggesting inherited defects such as **Bernard-Soulier syndrome**. Electron microscopy has revealed distinct ultrastructural abnormalities, including:

- Deficiency of alpha- and dense granules (storage pool disease),
- Disruption of the open canalicular system,
- Abnormal mitochondrial distribution within platelets.

Recent work by Liu et al. (2023) demonstrated that platelet ultrastructural analysis can help differentiate between congenital and acquired dysfunctions more effectively than traditional aggregation assays alone.

### **Diagnostic Advances**

Traditional platelet aggregation tests remain essential, but their diagnostic accuracy has been enhanced by **flow cytometric quantification** of platelet receptors. For example, reduced expression of **GPIIb/IIIa** confirms Glanzmann thrombasthenia, while **GPIb $\alpha$  deficiency** indicates Bernard-Soulier syndrome.

Moreover, **next-generation sequencing (NGS)** has become a cornerstone in identifying novel mutations associated with platelet dysfunction. Studies conducted in 2024–2025 identified previously unknown variants in *FERMT3* and *RAC1* genes linked to mild platelet signaling defects (Zhang et al., 2025).

These innovations enable early genetic counseling and the development of individualized treatment strategies.

### **Discussion**

#### **Inherited vs. Acquired Thrombocytopathies**

Inherited thrombocytopathies are primarily caused by genetic mutations affecting platelet membrane receptors, signaling pathways, or granule release mechanisms. The most well-known examples include:





- **Glanzmann thrombasthenia** (defect in GPIIb/IIIa complex);
- **Bernard-Soulier syndrome** (GPIb deficiency);
- **Gray platelet syndrome** (absence of alpha granules).

Acquired thrombocytopathies, in contrast, result from exposure to drugs (e.g., aspirin, NSAIDs), infections, autoimmune disorders, uremia, or metabolic disturbances such as hypothyroidism and vitamin C deficiency. These forms are usually reversible after addressing the underlying cause.

### **Clinical Implications**

Children with thrombocytopathy face a high risk of hemorrhagic complications during surgical or dental procedures. Therefore, accurate diagnosis is essential for perioperative management. Modern diagnostic algorithms recommend a **stepwise approach** combining platelet function testing, receptor analysis by flow cytometry, and confirmatory genetic testing.

### **Morphological Perspective**

From a morphological standpoint, platelet heterogeneity in size and granule content serves as a valuable diagnostic clue. Macrothrombocytes, vacuolated cytoplasm, and abnormal alpha-granule distribution are now recognized as morphological hallmarks of specific thrombocytopathies. The correlation between **morphological phenotype** and **molecular genotype** is currently a focus of pediatric hematology research.

### **Novel Therapeutic Approaches**

Traditional management of thrombocytopathies includes antifibrinolytic agents (e.g., tranexamic acid), desmopressin (DDAVP), and platelet transfusions in severe bleeding episodes. However, recent advances have shifted attention toward **gene-based and receptor-targeted therapies**. For instance, experimental trials in 2024 explored **gene editing using CRISPR-Cas9** to correct *ITGA2B/ITGB3* mutations in stem cells, offering future potential for curative treatment.

Additionally, **recombinant platelet-derived microparticles** and **agonists of thromboxane A2 receptors** are being investigated as pharmacological alternatives to platelet transfusions.



## Preventive Strategies and Prognosis

Preventive measures involve avoidance of antiplatelet drugs, early recognition of bleeding tendencies, and preoperative planning for at-risk children. Education of caregivers and coordination between pediatricians, hematologists, and dentists play key roles in preventing bleeding episodes.

When appropriately diagnosed and managed, the long-term prognosis for children with thrombocytopathy is favorable. Many can lead normal, active lives with minimal restrictions.

## Conclusion

Thrombocytopathies in children constitute an important and often underrecognized group of bleeding disorders. Despite normal platelet counts, affected patients exhibit recurrent mucocutaneous bleeding due to functional platelet abnormalities.

The integration of **modern morphological evaluation**, **flow cytometry**, and **genetic sequencing** has revolutionized the diagnostic process, allowing clinicians to distinguish between inherited and acquired forms with greater precision. The novelty of this study lies in emphasizing these combined diagnostic modalities as essential components of modern pediatric hematology. Furthermore, the emergence of gene therapy and receptor-targeted treatments offers hope for precision medicine approaches in the management of thrombocytopathies. Ongoing research between 2023 and 2025 continues to refine our understanding of platelet biology, ensuring that children with these disorders receive earlier diagnosis, safer management, and improved quality of life.

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