Transverse momentum dependence of semi-inclusive pion production


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Cross sections for semi-inclusive electroproduction of charged pions ($\pi^{\pm}$) from both proton and deuteron targets were measured for $0.2 < x < 0.5$, $2 < Q^2 < 4$ GeV$^2$, $0.3 < z < 1$, and $P_t^2 < 0.2$ GeV$^2$. For $P_t < 0.1$ GeV, we find the azimuthal dependence to be small, as expected theoretically. For both $\pi^+$ and $\pi^-$, the $P_t$ dependence from the deuteron is found to be slightly weaker than from the proton. In the context of a simple model, this implies that the initial transverse momenta width of $d$ quarks is larger than for $u$ quarks and, contrary to expectations, the transverse momentum width of the favored fragmentation function is larger than the unfavored one.

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A central question in the understanding of nucleon structure is the orbital motion of partons. Much is known about the light-cone momentum fraction, $x$, and virtuality scale, $Q^2$, dependence of the up and down quark parton distribution functions (PDFs) in the nucleon. In contrast, very little is presently known about the dependence of these functions on their transverse momentum $k_t$. Simply based on the size of the nucleon in which the quarks are confined, one would expect characteristic transverse momenta of order a few hundred MeV, with larger values at small Bjorken $x$ where the sea quarks dominate, and smaller values at high $x$ where all of the quark momentum is longitudinal in the limit $x = 1$. Increasingly precise studies of the nucleon spin sum rule [1–4] strongly suggest that the net spin carried by quarks and gluons is relatively small, and therefore the net orbital angular momentum must be significant. This in turn implies significant transverse momentum of quarks. Questions that naturally arise include: what is the flavor and helicity dependence of the transverse motion of quarks and gluons, and can these be modeled theoretically and measured experimentally?

The process of semi-inclusive deep-inelastic lepton scattering (SIDIS), $IN \rightarrow lHX$ has been shown to factorize [5], in the high energy limit, into lepton–quark scattering followed by quark hadronization. Ideally, one could directly measure the quark transverse momentum dependence of the quark distribution functions $q(x, k_t)$ by detecting all particles produced in the hadronization process. In the present experiment, we detect only a single hadronization product: a charged pion carrying an energy fraction $z$ of the available energy. The probability of producing a pion with a transverse momentum $P_t$ relative to the virtual photon ($\vec{q}$) direction is described by a convolution of the quark distribution functions and $P_t$-dependent fragmentation functions $D^+(z, P_t)$ and $D^-(z, P_t)$, where $P_t$ is the transverse momentum of the pion relative to the quark direction, with the imposed condition [6] $P_t = 2Q^2 + Q^2$ (see Fig. 1). The “favored” and “unfavored” functions $D^+(z, P_t)$ and $D^-(z, P_t)$ refer to the case where the produced pion contains of the same flavor as the struck quark or not. "Soft" non-perturbative processes are expected [6] to generate relatively small values of $P_t$ with an approximately Gaussian distributions in $P_t$. Hard QCD processes are expected to generate large non-Gaussian tails for $P_t > 1$ GeV, and probably do not play a major role in the interpretation of the present experiment, for which the total transverse momentum $P_t < 0.45$ GeV. The assumption that the fragmentation functions do not depend on quark flavor (for example $D^+(z, P_t)$ applies equally well to $u \rightarrow \pi^+$ and $d \rightarrow \pi^-$) in principle allows the $k_t$ widths of up and down quarks to be distinguished. In the present experiment, the use of both proton and deuteron targets (the latter with a higher $d$ quark content than the former) and the detection of both $\pi^+$ and $\pi^-$ permits a first study of this problem.

The experiment (E00-108) used the Short Orbit (SOS) and High Momentum (HMS) spectrometers in Hall C at Jefferson Lab to detect final state electrons and pions, respectively. An electron beam with energy of 5.5 GeV and currents ranging between 20 and 60 mA was provided by the CEBAF accelerator. Incident electrons were scattered from 4-cm-long liquid hydrogen or deuterium targets. The experiment consisted of three parts: (i) at a fixed electron kinematics of $(x, Q^2) = (0.32, 2.30 \text{ GeV}^2)$, $z$ was varied from 0.3 to 1, with nearly uniform coverage in the pion azimuthal angle, $\phi$, around the virtual photon direction, but at a small average $P_t$ of 0.05 GeV; (ii) for $z = 0.55$, $x$ was varied from 0.2 to 0.5 with a corresponding variation in $Q^2$, from 2 to 4 GeV$^2$, keeping the pion centered on the virtual photon direction (and again average $P_t$ of 0.05 GeV); (iii) for $(x, Q^2) = (0.32, 2.30 \text{ GeV}^2)$, $z$ near 0.55, $P_t$ was scanned from 0 to 0.4 GeV by increasing the HMS angle (with average $\phi$ near 180 degrees). The $\phi$ distribution as a function of $P_t$ is shown for all three data sets combined in Fig. 2. The virtual photon–nucleon invariant mass $W$, was always larger than 2.1 GeV (typically 2.4 GeV), corresponding to the traditional deep inelastic region for inclusive scattering.

At lower virtual photon energy and/mass scales, the factorization ansatz is expected to break down, due to the effects of final state interactions, resonant nucleon excitations, and higher twist contributions [7]. In particular, in the present experiment the residual invariant mass $M_x$ of the undetected particles (see Fig. 1) ranges from about 1–2 GeV (inversely correlated with $z$), spanning the mass region traditionally associated with significant baryon resonance excitation. The extent to which this situation leads to a break-down of factorization was studied in our previous paper [8]. It was found that good agreement with expectations based on higher energy data was achieved for $z < 0.7$, approximately corresponding to $M_x > 1.5$ GeV. The ratio of total up to down quark distributions $u(x)/d(x)$ extracted from ratios of cross sections, as well as the ratio of valence-only up to down ratios $uv(x)/duv(x)$, were also found to be reasonably compatible with

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higher energy extractions, provided $z < 0.7$. This issue will be addressed further for the $P_1$-scan data below. Finally, the ratio of unfavored to favored fragmentation functions $D^-(z)/D^+(z)$ (from the $\pi^-/\pi^+$ ratios on the deuteron) was found to be consistent with extractions from other experiments. All of these studies were done with the $z$-scan and $x$-scan data, for which the average $P_1$ was small ($< 0.1$ GeV), and the average value of $\cos(\phi)$ was close to zero.

In this Letter, we focus on the $P_1$ dependence, with the goal of searching for a possible flavor dependence to the quark distribution functions and/or fragmentation functions. Since the average value of $\cos(\phi)$ in the present experiment is correlated with $P_1$ (approaching $-1$ for the largest $P_1$ value of 0.45 GeV, see Fig. 2), we first studied the limited data available from this experiment on the $\phi$ dependence, which must be an even function since neither the beam nor the target were polarized. We parameterize [9] the data for each target and pion flavor according to

$$\frac{dN}{d\phi} = \frac{1}{2\pi} (1 + A \cos x + B \cos(2\phi)),$$

where the parameters $A(x, Q^2, z, P_1)$ and $B(x, Q^2, z, P_1)$ are a measure of the relative importance of the interference terms $\sigma_{LT}$ and $\sigma_{TT}$, respectively [10]. The assumed Gaussian $P_1^2$ dependence (with slopes $b$ for each case) is an effective parameterization that seems to describe the data adequately for use in making radiative and bin-centering corrections. We use this model for studying the $\phi$ dependence, then return to a more detailed study of the $P_1$ dependence in the context of a simple model that incorporates a different $P_1$ dependence for each struck quark and produced hadron flavor.

For each kinematic point in the $x$ and $z$ scans (average $P_1 = 0.05$ GeV, maximum $P_1 = 0.2$ GeV), we extracted $A$ and $B$ and found no statistically significant difference between the results for $\pi^+$ or $\pi^-$, or proton or deuteron targets. We therefore combined all four cases together, and present the results in Fig. 3. Systematic errors (not shown in the figure) are approximately 0.03 on both $A$ and $B$ and are highly correlated from point to point. Taking the systematic errors into account, the values of $A$ and $B$ are close to zero, for all values of $x$ studied, and for values of $z < 0.7$, where our previous studies showed a good consistency with factorization. The small values of $A$ and $B$ are also consistent with the expectations based on kinematic shifts due to parton motion as described by Cahn [11] (shown as the solid curves on the figures) and Levent–Mulders [12]. These effects are proportional to $P_1$ for $A$, and $P_1^2$ for $B$, respectively [11–14], so are suppressed at low $P_1$. More specifically, using the assumption that the average quark and fragmentation widths are equal, the Cahn [11] asymmetries are given by

$$A = -y (2(P_1^2)/Q^2)(2 - y)\sqrt{1 - y}/[1 + (1 - y)^2],$$

$$B = -y^2 (2(P_1^2)/Q^2)(1 - y)/[1 + (1 - y)^2],$$

where $y = z^2/(1 + z^2)$, $y = v/E$, $v$ is the virtual photon energy, and $E$ is the beam energy, yielding $A = -0.01$ and $B = -0.0002$ for $z = 0.55$. The more recent treatment of Ref. [6] also gives results for $A$ and $B$ which are very close to zero (especially for $B$). Other possible higher twist contributions will also be proportional to powers of $P_1/\sqrt{(Q^2)}$ [15,16], and therefore suppressed at our lower average values of $P_1$ and $P_1^2$. Specifically, the twist-2 Boer–Mulders [17] contribution to $B$ is essentially zero in the models of Refs. [17,18].

In contrast, the longitudinal-transverse and transverse-transverse coefficients $A$ and $B$ are much larger in exclusive pion production ($M_x = M$, where $M$ is the nucleon mass) than those predicted for SIDIS. This is evidenced by our extracted average values for exclusive $\pi^\pm$ electroproduction on deuteron and for $\pi^+$ on proton, shown as the open symbols near $z = 0.98$ in Fig. 3. This underlines the importance of accounting for the radiative tail from exclusive production, which in our analysis was done using the computer code EXCLURAD [19] together with a reasonable model of exclusive pion electroproduction. The corrections where checked with the Hall C simulation package SIMC, which treats radiative corrections in the energy and angle peaking approximation [20].

We now turn to the study of the $P_1$ scan data. We used the cross section model from our previous paper [8] to describe the $Q^2$ dependence of the data (needed because $P_1$ and $Q^2$ are somewhat correlated), and extracted cross sections at fixed $Q^2$ averaged over $\phi$. The corrections for $Q^2$ dependence did not distinguish between targets or pion flavor. Relatively small corrections (typically a few percent) for radiative effects (including the tails from exclusive pion production) and diffractive $\rho$ production were made [8] for each case individually. The systematic error on these corrections is estimated to be approximately 2%. The normalization errors due to target thickness, computer and electronic dead time, beam charge measurement, beam energy, and spectrometer kinematics combine to approximately 2% overall, and 1% from case to case. The overall error due to spectrometer acceptance is estimated to be 3%, but <1% from case to case because targets were exchanged frequently, as was the spectrometer polarity. The extracted cross sections are shown in Fig. 4 and listed in Table 1. The acceptance-averaged values of $\cos(\phi)$ range from $-0.3$ at low $P_1$ to nearly $-1$ at higher $P_1$, while the average values of $\cos(2\phi)$ approaches 1 at high $P_1$ (see Fig. 2 and Table 1).

Examination of Fig. 4 shows that the $P_1$-dependence for $\pi^+$ and $\pi^-$ are very similar to each other for each target, but that the slopes for the deuteron target are somewhat smaller than those for the proton. For a more quantitative understanding of the possible implications, we study the data in the context of a simple model in which the $P_1$ dependence is described in terms of two Gaussian distributions for each case. Following Ref. [6], we assume that the widths of quark and fragmentation functions are Gaussian in $k_t$ and $P_1$, respectively, and that the convolution of these distributions combines quadratically. The main difference from Ref. [6] is
that we allow separate widths for up and down quarks, and separate widths for favored and unfavored fragmentation functions. The widths of the up and down distributions are given by $\mu_u$ and $\mu_d$, respectively, and the favored (unfavored) fragmentation widths are given by $\mu_+$ ($\mu_-$). Following Cahn [11] and more recent studies [6], we assume that only the fraction $z$ of the quark transverse momentum contributes to the pion transverse momentum (see Fig. 1). We assume further that sea quarks are negligible (typical global fits show less than 10% contributions at $x = 0.3$). To make the problem tractable, we take only the leading order terms in $(r_i/Q_i)$, which was shown to be a reasonable approximation for small to moderate $P_t$ in Ref. [6]. The simple model can then be written as

$$
\begin{align*}
\sigma_{P_t}^{z+} &= C \left[ 4(C_1 P_t e^{-b_1 P_t^2} + (d/u)(D^{-}/D^+) C_2 (P_t e^{-b_2 P_t^2}) \right], \\
\sigma_{P_t}^{z-} &= C \left[ 4(D^{-}/D^+) C_3 (P_t e^{-b_1 P_t^2} + (d/u) C_4 (P_t e^{-b_2 P_t^2}) \right], \\
\sigma_{P_t}^{z0} &= C \left[ 4(d/u) C_4 (P_t e^{-b_1 P_t^2} + (D^{-}/D^+) C_4 (P_t e^{-b_2 P_t^2}) \right], \\
\sigma_{P_t}^{z0} &= C \left[ 4(d/u) (D^{-}/D^+) C_2 (P_t e^{-b_1 P_t^2} + (1/P_t^2) C_3 (P_t e^{-b_2 P_t^2}) \right],
\end{align*}
$$

where $C$ is an arbitrary normalization factor, and the inverse of the total widths for each combination of quark flavor and fragmentation function are given by

$$
\begin{align*}
\beta_{P_t}^{z+} &= (z^2 \mu_1^2 + \mu_2^2)^{-1}, \\
\beta_{P_t}^{z0} &= (z^2 \mu_1^2 + \mu_2^2)^{-1}
\end{align*}
$$

and we assume $\sigma_{P_t} = (\sigma_{P_t}^{z+} + \sigma_{P_t}^{z-})/2$. The Cahn effect [6,11] is taken into account through the terms:

$$
\begin{align*}
c_1(P_t) &= 1 + C_1 (\cos(\phi)) \mu_2^2 b_{P_t}^2, \\
c_2(P_t) &= 1 + C_1 (\cos(\phi)) \mu_2^2 b_{P_t}^2, \\
c_3(P_t) &= 1 + C_1 (\cos(\phi)) \mu_2^2 b_{P_t}^2, \\
c_4(P_t) &= 1 + C_1 (\cos(\phi)) \mu_2^2 b_{P_t}^2,
\end{align*}
$$

$$
\begin{align*}
c_0(P_t, \cos(\phi)) &= \frac{4z(2-y)\sqrt{1-y}}{\sqrt{1+(1-y)^2}} \sqrt{P_t^2} \cos(\phi).
\end{align*}
$$

We fit for the four widths ($\mu_u$, $\mu_d$, $\mu_+$, and $\mu_-$), $C$, and the ratios $D^{-}/D^+$ and $d/u$, where the fragmentation ratio is understood to represent the data-averaged value at $z = 0.55$, and the quark distribution ratio is understood to represent the average value at $x = 0.3$. The fit describes the data reasonably well ($\chi^2 = 78$ for 73 degrees of freedom), and finds the somewhat low ratio $d/u = 0.30 \pm 0.03$ (the LO GRV98 fit [21] has about 0.40 for valence quarks), and the more reasonable ratio $D^{-}/D^+ = 0.42 \pm 0.01$ (a fit to HERMES results [22], $D^{-}/D^+ = 1/(1+z)^2$, predicts 0.42 at $z = 0.55$). Both $d/u$ and $D^{-}/D^+$ are largely uncorrelated with other fit parameters. Since the data are at fixed $z$, the main contributions that distinguishes large fragmentation widths from large quark widths are the $\phi$-dependence Cahn-effect $c_i$ terms. While there is a significant inverse correlation between the two most important quark and fragmentation widths, ($\mu_u$ and $\mu_+$, respectively), the fit finds a clear preference for $\mu_u$ to be smaller than $\mu_+$, as shown in Fig. 5(a). On the other hand, the fit finds $\mu_d$ and $\mu_-

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{cccccccc}
\hline
$P_t$ GeV$^2$ & $(\cos(\phi))$ & $(\cos(2\phi))$ & $\sigma_d$ nb/GeV & $\sigma_u$ nb/GeV & $\sigma_d$ nb/GeV & $\sigma_u$ nb/GeV & $\sigma_d$ nb/GeV \\
\hline
0.008 & -0.369 & 0.031 & 2.177 & 0.0175 & 0.0217 & 0.0217 & 1.796 \\
0.018 & -0.511 & 0.089 & 2.058 & 0.077 & 0.089 & 0.089 & 1.800 \\
0.025 & 0.533 & 0.105 & 1.885 & 0.082 & 0.105 & 0.105 & 1.690 \\
0.038 & 0.875 & 0.580 & 1.834 & 0.069 & 0.580 & 0.580 & 1.045 \\
0.048 & 0.892 & 0.623 & 1.815 & 0.094 & 0.623 & 0.623 & 1.567 \\
0.058 & 0.935 & 0.761 & 1.808 & 0.097 & 0.761 & 0.761 & 1.491 \\
0.068 & 0.941 & 0.780 & 1.658 & 0.100 & 0.780 & 0.780 & 1.511 \\
0.078 & 0.946 & 0.799 & 1.575 & 0.101 & 0.799 & 0.799 & 1.344 \\
0.088 & 0.952 & 0.818 & 1.507 & 0.105 & 0.818 & 0.818 & 1.403 \\
0.098 & 0.963 & 0.858 & 1.414 & 0.109 & 0.858 & 0.858 & 1.398 \\
0.108 & 0.963 & 0.860 & 1.477 & 0.120 & 0.860 & 0.860 & 1.208 \\
0.118 & 0.905 & 0.866 & 1.391 & 0.129 & 0.866 & 0.866 & 1.196 \\
0.128 & 0.963 & 0.875 & 1.208 & 0.133 & 0.875 & 0.875 & 1.123 \\
0.138 & 0.972 & 0.892 & 1.112 & 0.153 & 0.892 & 0.892 & 1.134 \\
0.148 & 0.972 & 0.892 & 1.146 & 0.176 & 0.892 & 0.892 & 1.142 \\
0.158 & 0.973 & 0.897 & 1.147 & 0.203 & 0.897 & 0.897 & 0.976 \\
0.168 & 0.973 & 0.902 & 0.868 & 0.236 & 0.902 & 0.902 & 0.795 \\
0.178 & 0.977 & 0.911 & 1.027 & 0.307 & 0.911 & 0.911 & 0.796 \\
0.188 & 0.977 & 0.911 & 0.771 & 0.366 & 0.911 & 0.911 & 1.244 \\
0.198 & 0.977 & 0.911 & 0.874 & 0.509 & 0.911 & 0.911 & 0.357 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

Fig. 4. The $P_t^2$ dependence of differential cross-sections per nucleus for $\pi^+$ production on hydrogen (H) and deuterium (D) targets at $z = 0.55$ and $x = 0.32$. The solid lines show the result of the seven-parameter fit described in the text. The error bars are statistical only. Systematic errors are typically 4% (relative, see text for details). The average value of $\cos(\phi)$ varies with $P_t^2$ (see Table 1).

Table 1
Differential cross-sections per nucleus for $\pi^+$ production on hydrogen and deuterium versus $P_t^2$. The error bars are statistical only. The values of $\cos(\phi)$ and $\cos(2\phi)$ averaged over the experimental acceptance are also indicated (see Fig. 2).
If the axial and scalar di-quarks have different masses, for example, in which the quark distribution. In this model, the distribution on how hadron transverse momentum in SIDIS is split into two fragmentation functions is needed for charged pions from valence quarks. The large dot near the bottom of panel c is from a di-quark model [23]. The dashed line in panels c and d indicate $\mu_u^2 = \mu_d^2$ and $\mu_u^2 = \mu_d^2$, respectively.

The fit tends to favor a larger $k_t$ width for $d$ quarks ($\mu_d^2 = 0.22 \pm 0.13 \text{ GeV}^2$) than for $u$ quarks ($\mu_u^2 = -0.01 \pm 0.04 \text{ GeV}^2$), as illustrated in Fig. 5(c). Fixing the quark widths to these values still gives a reasonable fit to our data ($\chi^2 = 81$ for 75 degrees of freedom). The magnitude of both widths is moderately sensitive to the choice of the model parameter $\lambda_0$ (we used 0.6 GeV), although the difference in widths is largely driven by the difference in axial and scalar di-quark masses (for example, increasing the axial di-quark mass to 1.4 GeV increases $\mu_u^2$ to 0.25 GeV$^2$, which is the central value of our fit). Using the fit parameters, we find the magnitude of the cos(\phi) term $\Lambda$ (Eq. (2)) at $\Pt = 0.4 \text{ GeV}$ to be about $-0.05$ for all cases except $\pi^+$ production from hydrogen, where it is 0.01. These results are similar in sign and magnitude to those found in the HERMES experiment [24].

We find that the fragmentation widths $\mu_+$ and $\mu_-$ are correlated, as illustrated in Fig. 5(d), although the allowed range is not large, and the central values ($\mu_+^2 = 0.23 \pm 0.04 \text{ GeV}^2$ and $\mu_-^2 = 0.19 \pm 0.04 \text{ GeV}^2$) are in reasonable agreement with both each other and also the flavor-averaged value of 0.20 GeV$^2$ found in Ref. [6]. While there is a slight tendency for the favored width to be larger than the unfavored one, a reasonable fit can be obtained setting the widths equal to each other ($\chi^2 = 81$ for 74 d.f., $\mu_+^2 = \mu_-^2 = 0.22 \pm 0.04 \text{ GeV}^2$).

To estimate the effect of experimental systematic errors on our fit results, we repeated the fits with: no diffractive $\rho$ subtraction; no exclusive radiative tail subtraction; relative target thickness changed by 1%; and difference in $\pi^+$ and $\pi^-$ absorption changed by 1%. In all cases, the quark and fragmentation width results remained well within the error ellipses shown in Fig. 5. The only parameter that changed significantly is the $d/u$ ratio, which goes up to 0.33 with no exclusive tail subtraction. We found no significant change to the fit parameters upon adding to $\mu_u^2$ and $\mu_d^2$ an average nucleon transverse momentum squared of 0.001 GeV$^2$ (evaluated using the Paris wave function [25]) for the deuteron model.

In summary, we have measured semi-inclusive electroproduction of charged pions ($\pi^\pm$) from both proton and deuteron targets, using 5.5 GeV energy electrons at Jefferson Lab. We find the azimuthal dependence to be small, compared to exclusive pion electroproduction, and consistent with theoretical expectations [6,11]. In the context of a simple model with only valence quarks and only two fragmentation functions, we find the $k_t$ width of $d$ quarks to be larger than for $u$ quarks, for which the width is consistent with zero within the statistical error. We find that the favored fragmentation $p_t$ width to be (unexpectedly) somewhat larger than the unfavored width, although both are larger than the $u$ quark width.

All of the above fit results can only be considered as suggestive at best, due to the limited kinematic range covered, the somewhat low $u/d$ ratio that we find, and the very simple model assumptions described above. Many of these limitations could be removed with future experiments covering a wide range of $Q^2$ (to resolve additional higher twist contributions), full coverage in $\phi$, a larger range of $P_t$, a wide range in $z$ (to distinguish quark width terms, which is weighted by powers of $z$, from fragmentation widths, which likely vary slowly with $z$), and including the $\pi^0$ final state for an additional consistency check (particularly on the assumption that only two fragmentation functions are needed for charged pions from valence quarks). Some of these goals should be attainable with existing and upcoming data from Jefferson Lab, especially after the planned energy upgrade. These data should provide potential information on how hadron transverse momentum in SIDIS is split between fragmentation and intrinsic quark contributions.

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