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Measurement of Single- and Double-Spin Asymmetries in Deep Inelastic Pion Electroproduction with a Longitudinally Polarized Target


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A measurement of transverse momenta ($P_T$) of final-state hadrons in semi-inclusive deep-inelastic scattering (SIDIS) $\bar{e}p \rightarrow e' hX$, for which a hadron is detected in coincidence with the scattered lepton, gives access to the transverse momentum distributions (TMDs) of partons, which are not accessible in inclusive scattering. QCD factorization for SIDIS, established at low transverse momentum in the current-fragmentation region at higher energies [1–3], provides a rigorous starting point for the study of partonic TMDs from SIDIS data using different spin-dependent and spin-independent observables [4].

Measurements of the $P_T$ dependences of spin asymmetries, in particular, allow studies of transverse momentum ($k_T$) widths of different TMDs, providing quantitative information on how quarks are confined in hadrons. The final transverse momentum of the hadron (for $P_T$ comparable to the proton mass $M_p$ and $\Lambda_{QCD}$ in leading order is defined by the combination $zk_T + P_T$ [5], where $P_T$ is the transverse momentum generated in the hadronization process, and $z$ is the fraction of the energy of the virtual photon carried by the final-state hadron.

Azimuthal distributions of final-state particles in SIDIS, containing information on both magnitude and direction of the hadronic transverse momentum, are sensitive to the orbital motion of quarks and play an important role in the study of transverse momentum distributions of quarks in the nucleon. Two fundamental mechanisms have been identified that lead to single spin asymmetries (SSAs) in hard processes; the Sivers mechanism [6–10], which generates an asymmetry in the distribution of quarks due to orbital motion of partons, and the Collins mechanism [9,11], which generates an asymmetry during the hadronization of quarks.

Measurements of significant azimuthal asymmetries have been reported for pion production in semi-inclusive deep-inelastic scattering by the HERMES and COMPASS Collaborations, as well as the CLAS and Hall-C Collaborations at JLab for different combinations of beam and target polarizations [12–22].

For the longitudinally polarized target case, first discussed by Kotzinian and Mulders [11,24], the only SSA, depending on the azimuthal angle $\phi$ between the lepton scattering and pion production planes [25], arising at leading order is the $\sin 2 \phi$ moment. It involves the convolution of the Ralston-Soper-Mulders-Tangerman (RSMT) distribution function $h^R_{1L}(x, k_T)$ [11,26] describing the transverse polarization of quarks in a longitudinally polarized proton [2,11,23,24,27], and the Collins fragmentation function $H_1^C(z, p_T)$ [28] describing fragmentation of transversely polarized quarks into unpolarized hadrons.

The only available measurement of the $\sin 2 \phi$ moment by HERMES [12] is consistent with zero. The RSMT distribution function has been studied in various QCD inspired models [29–32]. First calculations for $h^R_{1L}(x, k_T)$ have recently been performed in the perturbative limit [33], and first measurements have been performed using lattice methods [34,35]. A measurably large asymmetry has been predicted [29–32,36] only at large $x$ ($x > 0.2$), a region well covered by JLab.

The $\sin \phi$ moment of the spin-dependent cross section for the longitudinally polarized target is dominated by higher-twist contributions [4]. This moment has been measured for the first time by the HERMES Collaboration [12]. Both $\sin \phi$ and $\sin 2 \phi$ moments of the SIDIS cross section for longitudinally polarized targets can be an important source of independent information on the Collins fragmentation.
mechanism [4], complementary to recent Belle measurements [37].

In this Letter, we present measurements of the kinematic dependences of different single- and double-spin asymmetries in semi-inclusive pion production off longitudinally polarized protons. The current analysis is based on recently published data [38] from Jefferson Lab. The CEBAF large acceptance spectrometer [39] in Jefferson Lab’s Hall B was used to measure spin asymmetries in the scattering of longitudinally polarized electrons from longitudinally polarized protons. The data were collected in 2001 using an incident beam of 5-nA with \( E = 5.7 \text{ GeV} \) energy and an average beam polarization of \( P_B = 70\% \). The detector package [39] provided a clean identification of electrons scattered at polar angles between 8° and 45°. Charged and neutral pions were identified using the time-of-flight from the target to the timing scintillators and the signal in the lead-scintillator electromagnetic calorimeter, respectively. Ammonia (\( ^{15}\text{NH}_3 \)), polarized via dynamic nuclear polarization [40], was used to provide polarized protons. The average target polarization \( (P_T) \) was about 75%. The data were divided into 5 bins in \( Q^2 \) (0.9–5.4 \( \text{GeV}^2 \)), 6 bins in \( x \) (0.12–0.48), 3 bins in \( z \) (0.4–0.7), 9 bins in \( P_T \) (0–1.12 \( \text{GeV}/c \)), and 12 bins in \( \phi \) (0–2\( \pi \)). Cuts on the missing mass of \( e^+\pi^\pm X \) \( (M_X > 1.4 \text{ GeV}) \) and on the fraction of the virtual photon energy \( \nu \) carried by the pion \( z \) \( (z < 0.7) \), have been used to suppress the contribution from exclusive processes, including the \( \pi\Delta \) production.

The double-spin asymmetry \( A_1 \) is defined as

\[
A_1 = \frac{1}{f D(y) P_B P_r} \frac{N^+ - N^-}{N^+ + N^-},
\]

where \( f \approx 0.14 \) (dependent on kinematics) is the dilution factor, \( y = \nu/E \), and \( N^\pm \) are luminosity-weighted counts for antiparallel and parallel electron and proton helicities. The contribution from the longitudinal photon is accounted for in the depolarization factor \( D(y) \):

\[
D(y) = \frac{(1 - \epsilon)(2 - y)}{y(1 + \epsilon R)} = \frac{y(2 - y)}{y^2 + 2(1 - y - \epsilon^2 \gamma^2)(1 + R)},
\]

where \( R \) [41] is the ratio of longitudinal to transverse photon contributions and \( \epsilon \) is the ratio of longitudinal and transverse photon fluxes.

The main sources of systematic uncertainties in the measurements of the double-spin asymmetries include uncertainties in beam and target polarizations (4%), dilution factor (5%), and depolarization factor (5%). Contributions from target fragmentation, kaon contamination, and radiative corrections [42] were estimated to be below 3% each.

The double-spin asymmetry \( A_1 \) is shown in Fig. 1 as a function of \( P_T \), integrated over all kinematical variables. The open band corresponds to systematic uncertainties. The dashed, dotted, and dash-dotted curves are calculations for different values of the ratio of transverse momentum widths for \( g_1 \) and \( f_1 \) (0.40, 0.68, 1.0) for a fixed width for \( f_1 \) (0.25 \( \text{GeV}^2 \)) [5]. The lower panel shows the relative contributions to the data from simulated charged and neutral exclusive \( \rho \) production.

\[
A_{UL} = \frac{1}{f_{P_T}} \frac{N^+ - N^-}{N^+ + N^-}
\]
is measured from data by counting in $\phi$ bins the difference of luminosity-normalized events with proton spin states antiparallel ($N^+$) and parallel ($N^-$) to the beam direction.

The standard procedure for the extraction of the different moments involves sorting $A_{UL}$ in bins of $\phi$ and fitting this $\phi$ distribution with theoretically motivated functions. Results for the function $p_1 \sin \phi + p_2 \sin 2\phi$ and, alternatively, for $(p_1 \sin \phi + p_2 \sin 2\phi)/(1 + p_3 \cos \phi)$ are consistent, indicating a weak dependence of the extracted sin$\phi$ moments on the presence of the cos$\phi$ moment in the $\phi$ dependence of the spin-independent sum, which is the main source for mixing of sin$\phi$ moments. The main sources of systematic uncertainties in the measurements of single spin asymmetries include uncertainties in target polarizations (6%), acceptance effects (8%), and uncertainties in the dilution factor (5%). The contribution due to differences between the true luminosity for the two different target spin states is below 2%. Radiative corrections for sin$\phi$-type moments, for moderate values of $y$ are expected to be negligible [46].

The dependence of the target single spin asymmetry on $\phi$, integrated over all other kinematical variables, is plotted in Fig. 2. We observe a significant sin$2\phi$ modulation for $\pi^+$ ($-0.042 \pm 0.010$). A relatively small sin$2\phi$ term in the azimuthal dependence for $\pi^0$ is in agreement with observations by HERMES [14]. Since the only known contribution to the sin$2\phi$ moments comes from the Collins effect, one can infer that, for $\pi^0$, the Collins function is suppressed. Indeed, both HERMES [14] and Belle [37] measurements indicate that favored and unfavored Collins functions are roughly equal and have opposite signs, which means that they largely cancel for $\pi^0$. On the other hand, the amplitudes of the sin$\phi$ modulations for $\pi^+$ and $\pi^0$ are comparable in size. This indicates that the contribution from the Collins effect to the sin$\phi$ SSA, in general, is relatively small.

The sin$2\phi$ moment $A_{UL}^{\sin 2\phi}$ as a function of $x$ is plotted in Fig. 3. Calculations [30,36] using $h_1^T$ from the chiral quark soliton model [47] and the Collins function [48] extracted from HERMES [14] and Belle [37] data, are plotted as filled bands in Fig. 3. The kinematic dependence of the SSA for $\pi^-$ from the CLAS data is roughly consistent with these predictions. The interpretation of the $\pi^-$ data, which tend to have SSAs with a sign opposite to expectations, may require accounting for additional contributions (e.g., interference effects from exclusive $p^0 p$ and $\pi^- \Delta^{++}$ channels). This will require a detailed study with higher statistics of both double and single spin asymmetries from pions coming from $p$ decays.

In summary, kinematic dependencies of single and double-spin asymmetries have been measured in a wide kinematic range in $x$ and $P_T$ with CLAS and a longitudinally polarized proton target. Measurements of the $P_T$ dependence of the double-spin asymmetry, performed for the first time, indicate the possibility of different average transverse momentum for quarks aligned or antialigned with the nucleon spin. A nonzero sin$2\phi$ single-target spin asymmetry is measured for the first time, indicating that spin-orbit correlations of transversely polarized quarks in the longitudinally polarized nucleon may be significant.

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