

Section **Radiodiagnosis**

Original Article

MRI – A Valuable Tool for the Evaluation of Various Abnormalities in Patients of Knee Pain

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ABSTRACT

Background: Diagnosis in cases of patients suffering from Knee pain has utmost important for treatment and to avoid unnecessary surgery. MRI is a non-invasive procedure in evaluation of knee joint. So this study was planned find out the prevalence of abnormalities detected by MRI in patients of knee pain.

Methods: The present study was conducted in Department of Radio Diagnosis and Orthopaedics at Era's Lucknow Medical College and Hospital. This prospective study was carried out on n=75 patients of knee pain attending Orthopaedic department of Era's Lucknow Medical College and Hospital, Lucknow for a period of six months.

Results: Initially 95 patients were enrolled in our study on the basis of inclusion and exclusion criteria. But out of 95 patients, only 75 patients were completed our study period. Out of 75 patients, 42 patients were males and 33 patients were females. Knee pain was found common in age group 50-60 years age group. Joint effusion (84.6%) were more common followed by Edema (68.8%), Menisci lesions (48.8%) were more common as compared to ligament

lesions (14.8%) in patients of knee pain. Osteoarthritis was found in 66.76 % of patients of knee pain.

Conclusions: Knee pain can occur at any stage of life due to various causative factors. MRI can demonstrate the exact nature and extent of bony as well as soft tissue abnormality. This has increase the use of MRI in evaluation of patients of knee pain.

Key words: MRI, Knee pain, Menisci, Osteoarthritis

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INTRODUCTION

Knee problems are one of the most common musculoskeletal disability in elderly persons. The prevalence of abnormalities increased with age, as might be expected. Knee pain is considered as most frequent symptom related to knee problems which brings patient to the hospital. Knee pain and related symptoms may come as a result of damage to one or more of the soft tissue structures that stabilize and cushion the knee joint, including the ligaments, muscles,

tendons, and menisci or due to non-traumatic injury like infection, inflammation etc.^[1] Presentation of knee pain in a middle-aged or older patient often leads to an x-ray of the knee but MRI is being used in clinical practice to facilitate diagnostic decisions. The potential for MRI to be more sensitive to earlier disease, detecting change, and the capacity of this technology to visualize joint structural changes beyond gross changes in bone and in the joint space, has resulted in great interest in the use of MRI for assessing diagnostic status, disease severity and monitoring progression.^[2,3] MRI visualizes most components of the joint, including articular cartilage, menisci, intra-articular ligaments, synovium, bone marrow, subchondral cysts, and other periarticular and intra-articular lesions that are not

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detectable by radiography.^[4] Various studies have reported structural changes in people with knee osteoarthritis by radiographic findings. Very few data are available regarding what structural changes are present in patients of knee pain and also this type of study was not conducted in our institute. So, this study was planned to find out the prevalence of abnormalities detected by MRI in patients of knee pain which will guide the physician in making treatment strategies according to diagnosis.

METHODS

This prospective study was conducted in the department of Radio Diagnosis and Orthopaedics at Era's Lucknow Medical College and Hospital. The study was carried out on n=75 patients of knee pain attending Orthopaedic department of Era's Lucknow Medical College and Hospital, Lucknow for a period of six months. Study was commenced after written informed consent taken from all the patients and with the permission from institutional ethics committee. A total of 75 patients referred to the department of Radio-diagnosis from department of Orthopaedic with complaints of knee pain were recruited. Patients' socio-demographic data, clinical history and physical examination findings were recorded after taking informed consent to correlate the findings.

Protocol of examination was in line with European society of musculoskeletal radiology (ESSR). It starts with the patient in supine position and slightly externally rotates the foot by about 10-15 degrees to stretch the anterior cruciate ligament. Pack some cushions around the knee to help it stay motion free. A small cushion under the ankle helps to keep the leg straight. Evaluation of the knee including the patello-femoral joint, medial and lateral compartments as well as related tendons and ligaments and the popliteal fossa is performed with a high resolution proton density sequence acquired in 3 planes: Axial, Sagittal and Coronal. Evaluation of bone marrow for contusion requires a T2 fat saturation sequence in either coronal or sagittal planes. If the patient has a suspicious mass then T1 fat saturation images are helping to determine if the mass is benign or malignant and better delineate its full extent. Obtained MRI images were diagnosed by an experienced musculoskeletal radiologist for the presence of ligament injury, tear, strain and laxity, as well as menisci degeneration and tear, joint effusion, subchondral and bone marrow edema, bony contusion, bursitis, baker cyst and tumor were noted in all patients.

Statistical analysis:

Data were expressed in percentages in comparison tables and graphs. Statistical analysis was performed using Microsoft Excel Software and the standard Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 15 for windows.

RESULTS

Total 75 patients were recruited with in a study period. MRI of knee was conducted in patients who were complaining knee pain. Of these 42 patients were males and 33 patients were females. Knee pain was found more common in 50-60

age group followed by 30-40 years age group and least in <15 years age group. Joint effusion was most frequently found knee pathology constituting 84.6 % in patients of knee pain followed marrow edema (68.8%), meniscal lesion (48.8%), osteoarthritis (66.76%) and Rheumatoid Arthritis (21.2%). Simple bone cyst, Ligament lesions, Bakers cyst were least common constituting (Table 1). Meniscal injury (48.8%) was found more common in patients of knee pain as compared to ligament injury.

DISCUSSION

MRI is a valuable tool in the evaluation and management of patients of knee pain and it has been established as an effective, non-invasive test for identifying different knee pathologies.^[5] MRI affects the treatment of patients with knee problems because it shows entire lesion in multiple planes so that exact diagnosis and treatment can be planned. Studies have shown that surgery of the knee is less frequently performed after MRI than initially planned before MRI.^[6,7]

In this study fifty patients of knee pain were evaluated by MRI. Knee pain was found to be common in males (66.4%) as compared to females (33.6%). These findings are in accordance with other studies too.^[8,9] This could be because of more activities in young males during sports as compared to females and they are also are more prone to accidents. In our study most affected age group was 46-60 years. This finding contradicts other studies showing high prominence in 30-45 age group.

Table 1: Clinical Presentation of knee pathologies detected by MRI in patients of knee pain (n=75)

Knee Pathologies	Male	Female
Joint effusion	42	30
Bone marrow edema	64	7
Meniscal lesions	30	8
Osteoarthritis	28	20
Rheumatoid Arthritis	5	9
Ligament lesions	6	4
Baker's cyst	6	2
Ganglion cyst	5	0
Subchondral edema	1	1
Patellar Subluxation	1	0

Joint effusion was found to be most frequent associated lesion constituting 84.6 %. In another study joint infusion was reported in 63.8 %.^[8] Higher percentage of joint effusion in our study and other study too could be due to more synovial reactions in patients of knee pain. Bone marrow edema was also found in 64.8% of patients of knee pain. This much high percentage of marrow edema in patients of knee pain may be due to non-specific finding which is simply fluid accumulation within the bone when there is any insult to bone. A recent systematic review reported that bone marrow lesions and effusion were associated with knee pain.^[10]

Menisci lesions were found in 48.8% patients. Depending on the patient's age, a prevalence of meniscal lesion up to 36% has been reported.^[11] In our study most of the menisci lesions

was found in males. Similar results have reported by other studies too of higher incidence of menisci injuries in male.^[12,13]

Grade I/II injury (signal changes) are common in our study because these are mostly occur with degeneration changes in knee joint and more common in 3rd and 4th decade¹⁴ and in our study most of the patients were in age between 31-50. A meta-analysis based on 22 studies described an overall sensitivity of 88% and specificity of 94% for detecting meniscal lesions with different grades.^[15] This would avoid unnecessary arthroscopic examination.^[1]

Osteoarthritis was found in 66.76 % of patients of knee pain with equal prevalence in both male and female. Baker's cyst which is mostly present with osteoarthritis patient was found in 8.5% in patients. Similar incidence of baker's cyst has been reported by other study conducted by Nasir A.^[9] In other studies incidence of osteoarthritis was found more in females and age above 50. The prevalence of osteoarthritis varies greatly depending on the definition used, age, sex and geographical area studied.^[16,17]

Difference in our study could be due to more patients in age group 21-50 years. MRI is an excellent tool for diagnosis of intraarticular tumors which in our study shows 6% incidence.

CONCLUSION

MRI is accurate, noninvasive technique for evaluating the structures of the knee, marrow space, synovium and periarticular soft tissue concerning the knee.

MRI gives the non-invasive diagnosis to the patients for their appropriate treatment. This has increase the use of MRI in evaluation of patients of knee pain.

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