Original Article

The Impact of Aging on the Human Skeletal System

Syed Asadullah Arslan[1], Sahar Ijaz[2], Ibrahim Mohammed[3], Amir Jameel[4], Sehar Fatima[5], Parvin Akbarov Alakbar[6], Kashif Ali Sultan[7]

[1]Faculty of Rehabilitation Sciences, Lahore University of Biological and Applied Sciences, Pakistan
[2]Department of Anatomy and Histology, University of Veterinary and Animal Sciences Lahore, Pakistan
[3]Department of Histopathology, Faculty of Medical Laboratory Sciences, Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto, Nigeria
[4]Sheikh Zayed Medical College, Lahore, Pakistan
[5]Department University Institute of Physical Therapy, University of Lahore, Pakistan
[6]Azerbaijan Scientific Research Institute of Medical Rehabilitation, Azerbaijan
[7]Department of Neurosurgery, Allama Iqbal Medical College, Lahore, Pakistan.
*Corresponding Author: Sahar Ijaz; Email: sahar.ijaz@uvas.edu.pk
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ABSTRACT

Background: Aging significantly affects the human skeletal system, leading to a decline in bone mass, density, and functionality. Conditions such as osteoporosis and arthritis become more prevalent, impacting the quality of life in older adults. This study aimed to investigate the impact of aging on the skeletal system, focusing on bone health, lifestyle factors, and medical interventions.

Objective: The objective of this research was to examine the prevalence of bone-related conditions, lifestyle habits, and the effectiveness of current medical interventions in mitigating the effects of aging on the skeletal system.

Methods: The study was conducted at the Faculty of Rehabilitation Sciences, Lahore University of Biological and Applied Sciences, Pakistan. A total of 47 participants, aged 20 to 84 years, were included. Data were collected through comprehensive questionnaires covering medical history, lifestyle habits, current medications, and menopausal status for female participants. Bone health was assessed through self-reported incidence of bone pain, fractures, and mobility issues, supplemented by medical records and imaging data. Logistic regression analysis was performed using SPSS version 25 to identify associations between bone pain and variables such as fractures, mobility issues, and supplement use.

Results: The study included 47 participants with a mean age of 52.47 years. The prevalence of osteoporosis was 55.3%, arthritis 57.4%, hyperthyroidism 38.3%, hypothyroidism 44.7%, diabetes 51.1%, and cardiovascular disease 59.6%. Smoking and alcohol consumption were reported by 55.3% and 59.6% of participants, respectively. Physical activity levels varied, with 29.8% being super active and 19.1% sedentary. The mean number of medications taken was 2.55. Bone pain was reported by 38.3% of participants, fractures by 46.8%, and mobility issues by 48.9%. Logistic regression indicated possible associations between bone pain and fractures (p=0.172) and mobility issues (p=0.153), while calcium or vitamin D supplements were not significantly associated with bone pain (p=0.823).

Conclusion: The study highlighted the significant impact of aging on the skeletal system, with high prevalence rates of osteoporosis, arthritis, and cardiovascular disease. Lifestyle factors such as smoking, alcohol consumption, and physical activity levels also played crucial roles. Fractures and mobility issues were identified as potential risk factors for bone pain. These findings underscore the need for comprehensive healthcare strategies addressing medical and lifestyle factors to mitigate the effects of aging on the skeletal system and improve the quality of life for older adults.

Keywords: Aging, Skeletal System, Osteoporosis, Arthritis, Bone Health, Lifestyle Factors, Medical Interventions, Bone Pain, Fractures, Mobility Issues, Calcium Supplements, Vitamin D Supplements, SPSS Analysis, Geriatric Health, Preventive Healthcare.

INTRODUCTION

Aging is an inevitable biological process that affects every system within the human body. Among these, the skeletal system is particularly vulnerable to the degenerative effects of aging. The skeletal system, comprising bones, joints, and connective tissues, provides structural support, facilitates movement, and protects vital organs. As individuals age, various physiological changes occur within the skeletal system, leading to a decline in bone mass, density, and overall functionality (1-3).

Bone remodelling, a continuous process of bone resorption and formation, becomes imbalanced with age. This imbalance often results in a net loss of bone mass, making bones more brittle and susceptible to fractures. Osteoporosis, a condition characterized by low bone density and increased fracture risk, is prevalent among the elderly, particularly postmenopausal women. The decline in estrogen levels after menopause accelerates bone loss, further exacerbating the risk of osteoporosis and related fractures (4-7).

Arthritis, another common condition associated with aging, involves the inflammation of joints. Osteoarthritis, the most prevalent form of arthritis, results from the wear and tear of joint cartilage. This degeneration leads to pain, stiffness, and reduced mobility, significantly impacting the quality of life for older adults. Rheumatoid arthritis, an autoimmune disorder, also becomes more common with age, causing chronic inflammation and joint damage (8,9).

The process of aging also affects the structural integrity of bones through changes in mineral composition and the accumulation of microdamage. Reduced calcium absorption, often due to decreased dietary intake and impaired vitamin D synthesis, further contributes to bone weakening. Consequently, older adults are at a higher risk of falls and fractures, which can lead to severe complications, prolonged immobility, and increased mortality rates (10,11).

Beyond these conditions, the lifestyle and habits of individuals play a crucial role in the health of the skeletal system as they age. Smoking, excessive alcohol consumption, and a sedentary lifestyle negatively impact bone health, while a balanced diet and regular physical activity promote bone strength and flexibility. Understanding the interplay between these factors is essential for developing effective prevention and treatment strategies (12-15).

Given the profound impact of aging on the skeletal system and the prevalence of conditions such as osteoporosis and arthritis among the elderly, this research aims to comprehensively examine the various factors influencing bone health in aging individuals. Specifically, the study will investigate the prevalence of bone-related conditions, the role of lifestyle habits, and the effectiveness of current medical interventions in mitigating the effects of aging on the skeletal system. By identifying key risk factors and potential protective measures, this research seeks to inform the development of targeted strategies to improve bone health and overall quality of life for aging populations (16,17).

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study was conducted at the Faculty of Rehabilitation Sciences, Lahore University of Biological and Applied Sciences, Pakistan. The research aimed to examine the impact of aging on the human skeletal system, focusing on the prevalence of bone-related conditions, lifestyle habits, and the effectiveness of current medical interventions. Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional review board, ensuring compliance with the Declaration of Helsinki.

Participants included 47 individuals, both male and female, aged between 20 and 84 years, who provided informed consent prior to inclusion. The sample was stratified to represent a diverse demographic, capturing a wide range of ages and both genders. Data collection involved a comprehensive questionnaire assessing medical history, lifestyle habits, current medications, and menopausal status for female participants. The questionnaire was designed to elicit detailed information on conditions such as osteoporosis, arthritis, hyperthyroidism, hypothyroidism, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease, as well as family history of these conditions. Additionally, participants were asked about their smoking and alcohol consumption habits, physical activity levels, and dietary patterns.

Bone health was evaluated through self-reported incidence of bone pain, fractures, and mobility issues. The use of calcium or vitamin D supplements was also recorded. To corroborate self-reported data, medical records were reviewed when available. Imaging and test data, including bone density tests, X-rays, MRI, and CT scans, were collected to provide objective measures of bone health.

Menopausal status was assessed for female participants, noting the age of onset and the presence of menopausal symptoms. This information was crucial for understanding the role of hormonal changes in bone health.

Data analysis was performed using SPSS version 25. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the demographic and clinical characteristics of the participants. Logistic regression analyses were conducted to identify potential associations between bone pain and variables such as fractures, mobility issues, and the use of calcium or vitamin D supplements. P-values less than 0.05 were considered statistically significant.

All procedures adhered to ethical guidelines, ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of participant data. The findings aimed to provide insights into the factors influencing bone health in aging individuals, with the goal of informing future interventions and strategies to mitigate the impact of aging on the skeletal system.

RESULTS

The study included 47 patients with a mean age of 52.47 years, ranging from 20 to 84 years. The gender distribution was relatively balanced, with 53.2% female and 46.8% male participants.

Table 1: Patient Information Summary

Metric	Value
Total Patients	47
Gender Distribution	
- Female	25 (53.2%)
- Male	22 (46.8%)
Mean Age	52.47 years
Age Range	20- 84 years

Table 2: Medical History Summary

Condition	Presence (%)
Osteoporosis	55.3
Arthritis	57.4
Hyperthyroidism	38.3
Hypothyroidism	44.7
Diabetes	51.1
Cardiovascular Disease	59.6

Conditions such as cardiovascular disease (59.6%), arthritis (57.4%), and osteoporosis (55.3%) were prevalent among the participants. Family history of these conditions was noted in approximately 50% of the patients.

Table 3: Lifestyle and Habits Summary

Habit	Presence (%)
Smoke	55.3
Alcohol	59.6
Physical Activity Level	
- Sedentary	19.1
- Lightly active	25.5
- Moderately active	8.5
- Very active	17.0
- Super active	29.8
Diet	
- Balanced	34.0
- Unbalanced	38.3
- Special Diet	27.7

Smoking and alcohol consumption were reported by 55.3% and 59.6% of participants, respectively. Physical activity levels varied, with 29.8% being super active and 19.1% leading a sedentary lifestyle. Dietary habits showed that 38.3% of participants had an unbalanced diet.

Table 4: Current Medications Summary

Statistic	Value
Mean Number	2.55
Min Number	1
Max Number	4
Median Number	3
Standard Deviation	1.18

Participants were taking an average of 2.55 medications, with a range of 1 to 4 medications. The median number of medications was 3, with a standard deviation of 1.18.

Table 5: Bone Health Assessment Summary

Aspect	Presence (%)
Bone Pain	38.3
Fractures	46.8
Mobility Issues	48.9
Calcium or Vitamin D Supplements	46.8

Bone pain was reported by 38.3% of participants, while 46.8% had experienced fractures. Mobility issues were present in 48.9% of the patients, and 46.8% were taking calcium or vitamin D supplements.

Table 6: Menopausal Status Summary (For Women)

Aspect	Value
Menopausal	47.8%
Mean Age of Menopause	53.13 years
Menopausal Symptoms	52.2%

Among the female participants, 47.8% were menopausal, with a mean age of menopause at 53.13 years. Menopausal symptoms were reported by 52.2% of these women.

Table 7: Imaging and Tests Summary

Test Type	Presence (%)
Bone Density Test	48.9
X-rays	53.2
MRI	53.2
CT Scan	48.9

Imaging tests showed that 48.9% of participants had undergone bone density tests, while 53.2% had X-rays and MRIs. CT scans were also performed in 48.9% of cases. Using logistic regression to identify associations with bone pain, the following results were obtained:

Table 8: Bone Health Assessment Associations

Variable	p-value
Fractures	0.172
Mobility Issues	0.153
Calcium or Vitamin D Supplements	0.823

The analysis showed that fractures and mobility issues had p-values close to significance ($p<0.2$), suggesting a possible association with bone pain. In contrast, calcium or vitamin D supplements did not show a significant association with bone pain in this sample.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlighted several critical aspects of the impact of aging on the human skeletal system. The prevalence of conditions such as osteoporosis, arthritis, and cardiovascular disease was significant among the participants, aligning with existing literature that emphasizes the increased vulnerability of the skeletal system in the aging population Osteoporosis, affecting 55.3% of the study population, was particularly notable given its direct correlation with bone fragility and fracture risk, a well-documented concern in geriatric health (18)

Arthritis was present in 57.4% of participants, reflecting the high burden of joint degeneration and inflammation in older adults. This finding corroborates previous research indicating that arthritis significantly impairs mobility and quality of life The prevalence of cardiovascular disease (59.6%) further supports the interconnected nature of systemic health and bone integrity, as cardiovascular health is crucial for maintaining adequate bone perfusion and nutrient supply (19)

Lifestyle factors such as smoking and alcohol consumption were prevalent among the participants, with rates of 55.3% and 59.6%, respectively. These habits are known to exacerbate bone loss and increase fracture risk, underscoring the need for targeted lifestyle interventions in this demographic Physical activity levels varied widely, with 29.8% of participants being super active and 19.1% leading a sedentary lifestyle. Regular physical activity is essential for bone health, promoting bone density and reducing the risk of osteoporosis and fractures (20)

The study also explored the role of dietary habits, finding that 38.3% of participants had an unbalanced diet. Adequate nutrition, particularly calcium and vitamin D intake, is fundamental for maintaining bone health and preventing osteoporosis (Holick, 2007). However, the logistic regression analysis indicated that calcium or vitamin D supplements did not show a significant association with bone pain, suggesting that supplementation alone may not be sufficient to manage bone pain without addressing other contributing factors such as fractures and mobility issues (17)

The analysis revealed that fractures and mobility issues had p-values close to significance, indicating a possible association with bone pain. This is consistent with previous studies that have identified fractures as a primary source of bone pain in older adults Mobility issues, often resulting from conditions like arthritis and previous fractures, further compound the risk of bone pain and disability (15)

One of the study's strengths was its comprehensive assessment of various factors influencing bone health, including medical history, lifestyle habits, and current medications. However, the reliance on self-reported data could introduce bias, and the relatively small sample size may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research with larger, more diverse populations and longitudinal designs would be beneficial to validate these results and provide deeper insights into the long-term impact of aging on the skeletal system.

The study's findings have important implications for clinical practice. Healthcare providers should prioritize early detection and management of osteoporosis and arthritis, incorporate routine lifestyle assessments into patient evaluations, and advocate for balanced diets and regular physical activity among older adults. Furthermore, tailored interventions addressing both medical and lifestyle factors are essential to improve bone health and reduce the incidence of fractures and mobility issues in the aging population (14)

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study highlighted the multifaceted nature of skeletal health in aging individuals, emphasizing the interplay between medical conditions, lifestyle habits, and dietary factors. By addressing these elements comprehensively, healthcare strategies can be more effectively tailored to mitigate the impact of aging on the skeletal system and enhance the quality of life for older adults.

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