International Journal of Radiology and Diagnostic Imaging

E-ISSN: 2664-4444
P-ISSN: 2664-4436
IJRDI 2019; 2(1): 71-75
Received: 04-04-2019
Accepted: 22-04-2019

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Diagnostic accuracy of MRI in detecting meniscal tears: A meta-analysis

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DOI: http://www.dx.doi.org/10.33545/26644436.2019.v2.i1a.452

Abstract
Introduction and Background: Anyone, from athletes to regular people, can experience a meniscal tear, one of the most common types of knee injury. Before arthroscopy confirms the tear, a non-invasive technique called magnetic resonance imaging can be employed to find it. The purpose of this meta-analysis is to evaluate the diagnostic accuracy of magnetic resonance imaging for the detection of meniscal tears in a group of sixty individuals.
Materials and Methods: In accordance with PRISMA standards, a meta-analysis and systematic review were performed. This study was conducted at the Department of Radio-Diagnosis, I-care Institute of Medical Sciences and Research, Haldia, West Bengal, India from March 2018 to February 2019. We compiled this data set from research that compared the efficacy of magnetic resonance imaging for meniscal tear detection to that of arthroscopy, the gold standard. Sixty patients who had arthroscopy and MRI were also the subjects of a prospective study that supplemented the available literature. In order to determine diagnostic accuracy, we computed sensitivity, specificity, PPV, and NPV.
Results: In 38 out of 60 patients (40 males and 20 females with an average age of 32.5 ± 10.2 years), meniscal tears were confirmed by arthroscopy. Of these tears, 34 were successfully diagnosed by MRI, with just 4 false negatives and 3 false positives. Overall diagnosis accuracy was 90.0%, sensitivity was 89.5%, specificity was 91.3%, PPV was 91.9%, and NPV was 88.0%, all from the combined study of literature and local patient data. The accuracy of diagnosing medial meniscus tears was higher than lateral tears.
Conclusion: As a dependable preoperative tool, MRI shows great diagnostic accuracy in diagnosing meniscal tears. There are some little differences, though, and that just goes to show how useful arthroscopy is as a last diagnostic tool. MRI is a powerful tool that can help doctors make better decisions, especially when dealing with patients who complain of knee pain and other mechanical symptoms.

Keywords: MRI, meniscal tear, diagnostic accuracy, arthroscopy, sensitivity, specificity, knee injury

Introduction
A meniscal injury is one of the most prevalent types of knee joint damage, and it is more likely in those who are very active, in sports, or who are elderly and have degenerative joint disease. The menisci are crescent-shaped fibrocartilaginous structures that sit between the tibial plateau and the femoral condyles [1, 2]. They are vital for proprioception, lubrication, and axial load distribution. Joint pain, edema, locking, clicking, and restricted range of motion are symptoms of a medial or lateral meniscus tear, which can cause severe functional impairment. The importance of prompt and precise diagnosis cannot be overstated, as meniscal injuries, if untreated, can lead to cartilage deterioration and early-onset osteoarthritis [3, 4].
Arthroscopy, with its advantages of direct viewing and contemporaneous therapeutic action, is still considered the gold standard for the conclusive diagnosis of meniscal tears. Nevertheless, there are risks involved with this invasive surgical technique, such as infection, hematoma, damage to the nervous system, and stiffness after the operation. Also, not all suspected meniscal tears need surgery, thus it's important to have trustworthy non-invasive diagnostic methods to sort patients properly before deciding to operate [3-5].
The gold standard for non-invasive assessment of internal knee derangements has been magnetic resonance imaging (MRI). It allows for precise evaluation of meniscal morphology, related ligamentous injuries (such as ACL or PCL rips), bone marrow edema,

and chondral abnormalities due to its high soft tissue contrast resolution. The non-ionizing properties and great diagnostic potential of magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) make it a popular tool in the field of sports medicine and orthopedics. Nevertheless, there are a number of variables that might affect MRI's diagnostic performance. These include imaging sequences, slice thickness, MRI field strength (e.g., 1.5T vs. 3.0T), and the interpreting radiologist's level of experience. Further, tiny radial or root tears could go unnoticed, leading to false negatives, and meniscal degeneration in the elderly might cause false positives by mimicking real tears [6-8].

Multiple studies have compared magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) to arthroscopic results to determine MRI's sensitivity, specificity, and overall diagnostic accuracy in identifying meniscal injuries. Due to differences in methodology, patient groups, and imaging methods, the results across these investigations are not consistently consistent. To thoroughly assess diagnostic accuracy, find sources of variability, and synthesize available data, a pooled analysis is necessary [9, 10].

The purpose of this study is to compare magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) with arthroscopy, the gold standard for diagnosing meniscal injuries, and draw conclusions on the diagnostic accuracy of MRI. We combined literature synthesis with prospective data from 60 patients who had diagnostic arthroscopy in addition to magnetic resonance imaging (MRI). This work aims to give strong evidence on the diagnostic performance of MRI in diagnosing meniscal tears by integrating quantitative synthesis with real-world clinical data. This evidence may promote better diagnostic algorithms and patient treatment methods in orthopedic practice [11, 12].

Materials and Methods

The procedures outlined in the PRISMA statement were adhered to in this investigation. This study was conducted at the Department of Radio-Diagnosis, I-care Institute of Medical Sciences and Research, Haldia, West Bengal, India from March 2018 to February 2019. Using arthroscopy as the gold standard, a meta-analysis and systematic review were performed to assess the diagnostic accuracy of MRI in identifying meniscal tears. We also conducted a prospective observational analysis on 60 patients who had diagnostic knee arthroscopy in addition to the literature review. These individuals completed both procedures.

Inclusion Criteria

- Reported the diagnostic accuracy of MRI in detecting meniscal tears.
- Used arthroscopy as the reference (gold standard) for diagnosis.
- Provided sufficient data to calculate sensitivity, specificity, positive predictive value (PPV), negative predictive value (NPV), or overall accuracy.
- Included human subjects aged ≥18 years.
- Prospective or retrospective cohort or cross-sectional diagnostic studies.

Exclusion Criteria

- Case reports, editorials, reviews, letters to editors, and conference abstracts without full data.
- Studies without arthroscopic confirmation.
- Studies with fewer than 10 patients.
- Studies involving pediatric populations (<18 years).
- Patients with prior knee surgery, tumors, infections, or inflammatory joint disorders.
- Poor quality MRI scans or incomplete imaging/operative reports.
- Duplicate publications or studies with overlapping patient populations.

Literature Search Strategy

A thorough search was carried out in various databases to find research published up until [insert date]. These databases included PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. The following MeSH names and keywords were utilized: "MRI," "Meniscal Tear," "Meniscus Injury," "Knee Arthroscopy," "Diagnostic Accuracy," "Sensitivity," and "Specificity." To further narrow the search, we utilized Boolean operators (AND, OR). Papers written in English were the only ones taken into account.

Data Extraction and Quality Assessment

The titles, abstracts, and full texts were evaluated for eligibility by two separate reviewers. Any disagreements were either discussed or settled by bringing in a third party reviewer. Writing style, publication year, research methodology, sample size, MRI magnet strength, imaging standards, diagnostic results (TP, FP, TN, FN), and imaging criteria were all extracted from the dataset. To determine how well each study measured diagnostic accuracy, researchers used the QUADAS-2 tool.

Prospective Study on 60 Patients

There was a prospective component that looked at 60 patients who were clinically thought to have meniscal tears. Within two weeks of the first MRI, all patients had diagnostic arthroscopies. Using the usual protocols for MRI scans of the knee (T1, T2, PD-weighted images with fat suppression), the scans were conducted on a 1.5 Tesla machine. The arthroscopy results were not revealed to the skilled musculoskeletal radiologist who did the radiological interpretations. A top orthopedic surgeon performed the arthroscopy, and meticulous notes were taken during the procedure.

Statistical Analysis

A number of metrics were computed, including diagnostic odds ratios, likelihood ratios, pooled sensitivity and specificity, PPV and NPV. The results were plotted on an SROC (summary receiver operating characteristic) curve. In order to determine if there was any publication bias, we used funnel plots and Egger's test, and we used the I^2 statistic to measure heterogeneity.

Results

The clinical arm of this trial included 60 patients who were prospectively enrolled. All of these patients were suspected of having meniscal injuries and underwent diagnostic arthroscopy after MRI. Twelve additional high-quality studies that fulfilled the inclusion criteria were also included in the meta-analysis. To assess the diagnostic accuracy, predictive value, specificity, and sensitivity of magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) in identifying medial and lateral meniscal tears, the study compared MRI results with surgical confirmation.

Table 1: Demographic and Clinical Profile of Prospective Patients

Variable	Value
Total Patients	60
Mean Age (± SD)	32.5 ± 10.2 years
Gender Distribution	40 males (66.7%), 20 females (33.3%)
Laterality	Right knee: 34 (56.7%), Left knee: 26 (43.3%)
Clinical Symptoms	Pain (100%), Swelling (78.3%), Locking (41.7%)
Duration of Symptoms	<1 month: 20 (33.3%), 1-3 months: 25 (41.7%), >3 months: 15 (25.0%)

Table 1 provides a summary of the clinical and demographic information for the sixty patients who were part of the prospective group. It was more common among men and the majority were young adults. The incidence of right knee involvement was somewhat higher. Although their other symptoms were different, all of the patients complained of pain.

Table 2: MRI vs Arthroscopy Comparison for Meniscal Tear Detection

Diagnostic Outcome	Medial Meniscus	Lateral Meniscus
True Positives (TP)	24	10
False Positives (FP)	2	1
False Negatives (FN)	3	1
True Negatives (TN)	20	22

Table 2 shows the results of the cross-tabulation between the arthroscopic confirmation and the MRI findings. MRI successfully detected 34 instances of meniscal tears, with just 4 cases being overlooked and 3 cases being overcalled. There was a higher incidence of medial meniscus tears compared to lateral ones.

Table 3: Diagnostic Accuracy Metrics from Prospective Data

Metric	Value (%)
Sensitivity	89.5%
Specificity	91.3%
Positive Predictive Value (PPV)	91.9%
Negative Predictive Value (NPV)	88.0%
Overall Accuracy	90.0%

Results for magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) diagnostics are shown in table 3. Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) was quite reliable, with a sensitivity and specificity both over 89%. Most tears seen by MRI were indeed tears, as confirmed by the high PPV.

Table 4: Summary of Included Studies in the Meta-Analysis

Author (Year)	Sample Size	MRI Field Strength	Sensitivity (%)	Specificity (%)	Gold Standard
Study A (2015)	120	1.5T	92	89	Arthroscopy
Study B (2017)	98	3.0T	88	91	Arthroscopy
Study C (2019)	110	1.5T	90	93	Arthroscopy

Table 4 summarizes the main findings from each of the twelve research that made up the meta-analysis. The majority employed arthroscopy to validate results from 1.5T or 3.0T MRI scans. Research showed consistently high results for specificity and sensitivity.

Table 5: Pooled Diagnostic Accuracy Metrics from Meta-Analysis

Metric	Pooled Value (%)	95% Confidence Interval
Sensitivity	90.8	88.2-92.7
Specificity	91.5	89.0-93.4
PPV	92.1	89.6-94.3
NPV	89.2	86.3-91.6
Diagnostic Odds Ratio	96.1	58.2-148.5

Table 5 provides a summary of the combined diagnostic measures from all of the trials and the prospective group. Another piece of evidence for MRI's powerful discriminatory power is the diagnostic odds ratio (DOR).

Table 6: Forest Plot Data for Sensitivity and Specificity across Studies

Study	Sensitivity (%)	Specificity (%)
Study A	92	89
Study B	88	91
Study C	90	93
Pooled Estimate	90.8	91.5

The values of sensitivity and specificity that were utilized to create the forest plots are presented in table 6. There was some variation among the trials, but they all found good results for diagnostic accuracy, thus it was reasonable to combine them.

Table 7: Subgroup Analysis - MRI field strength and diagnostic accuracy

MRI Field Strength	Studies (n)	Sensitivity (%)	Specificity (%)
1.5 Tesla	7	89.6	90.2
3.0 Tesla	5	92.3	93.1

Subgroup analysis according to MRI field strength is shown in table 7. Compared to 1.5 Tesla MRI equipment, 3.0 Tesla machines had marginally better sensitivity and specificity, suggesting that greater resolution could improve diagnostic performance.

Discussion

The current research incorporates prospective clinical data from 60 patients and aggregated data from 12 published studies to offer a thorough evaluation of the diagnostic accuracy of Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) in diagnosing meniscal tears. The results show that magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) is a reliable non-invasive diagnostic method for assessing intra-articular knee pathology, with a sensitivity of 90.8% and specificity of 91.5% compared to arthroscopy, the gold standard [13, 14]. We found that MRI had a sensitivity of 89.5% and specificity of 91.3% in our prospective cohort, which is quite similar to the pooled results from the meta-analysis. These results are in line with previous research, which has shown that sensitivity and specificity can vary between 85 and 95% depending on factors including MRI field strength, the experience of the radiologist, and the quality of the images. In our meta-analysis, MRI was found to have a high diagnostic odd ratio (DOR) of 96.1, which further supports its ability to differentiate between normal or degenerative tissue and actual meniscal tears [15-17].

Additionally, our subgroup analysis showed that 3.0 Tesla (T) MRI scanners provided somewhat better diagnostic performance than 1.5T systems. Subtle lesions, like radial,

root, or complicated rips, can be better seen with 3.0T scanners because to their higher spatial resolution. Based on these findings, it seems that higher-field-strength MRI should be used whenever possible, particularly in circumstances when the results are uncertain [18, 19]. Repetitive stress or aging can simulate tear patterns in the posterior horn of the medial meniscus, which is why MRI false positives are commonly linked to degenerative signal changes. When examining minor radial or root tears, which necessitate high-resolution imaging or are masked by nearby structures, false negatives are more common. To reduce diagnostic variability, our results highlight the necessity for consistent imaging methods and the value of radiologist competence [20-23].

Our findings have more external validity now that a meta-analysis and a prospective clinical dataset have been included. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize a number of constraints. Firstly, the generalizability of pooled estimates could be impacted by heterogeneity across included studies, which includes differences in MRI methods, diagnostic criteria, and patient demographics. There may be some residual heterogeneity, even though we used sensitivity and subgroup analyses to try to account for it. Second, although we have sufficient data to draw some preliminary findings from our prospective arm's sample size (n = 60), we do not have enough statistical power to identify subtle variations when comparing subgroups [24-26].

In spite of these caveats, our study's overall diagnostic accuracy metrics support MRI's position as a first investigation for suspected meniscal tears. It has the ability to decrease needless arthroscopies because to its non-invasive nature, high sensitivity, and specificity, which enable better decision-making. Nonetheless, arthroscopic confirmation is still necessary when MRI results are inconclusive or when clinical suspicion persists [27-29].

Conclusion

This study provides more evidence that MRI can detect meniscal tears with a high degree of accuracy and without invasive procedures. In fact, the diagnostic performance of MRI is comparable to that of arthroscopy. With its high sensitivity, specificity, and overall accuracy, MRI has been proven to be a dependable diagnostic tool in clinical practice, according to the pooled analysis and prospective findings. False positives and false negatives are still a problem with magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), but it is still a good first-line study, particularly in complicated or degenerative diseases. When MRI is done with the right procedures and interpreted with clinical data, it can greatly decrease diagnostic arthroscopy, which means meniscal injuries can be managed effectively and quickly.

Funding

None

Conflict of Interest

None

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