ABSTRACT

Objective: To determine if there is a statistically significant difference in the flexibility of the curves in the adolescent idiopathic scoliosis (AIS) by using lateral inclination radiographs in supine or prone decubitus. Methods: We evaluated 19 patients with AIS, waiting for surgery. Radiographs of the patients were performed in orthostatic anteroposterior incidences and right and left lateral inclinations in prone and supine decubitus. The comparison between prone and supine decubitus was performed through the flexibility rates of the curves measured in each position. Results: The mean flexibility rates measured in lateral inclination radiographs with the patient in the supine position were 54.4% ± 38.8% in the proximal thoracic curve, 45.8% ± 15.6% in the main thoracic curve, and 80.5% ± 20.7% in the thoracolumbar/lumbar curve. When the lateral inclination radiographs were performed with the patient in the prone position, we observed mean flexibility rates of 66.4% ± 34.3% in the proximal thoracic curve, 50.1% ± 12.8% in the main thoracic curve, and 80.6% ± 19.0% in the thoracolumbar/lumbar curve. Conclusion: This present study did not find a statistically significant difference between the flexibility rates of the curves in the prone and supine positions, suggesting that the two radiographic methods analyzed are similar in the evaluation of the flexibility of the curves in adolescent idiopathic scoliosis. Level of evidence II; Development of diagnostic criteria in consecutive patients (with “gold” reference standard applied).

Keywords: Adolescent Idiopathic Scoliosis; Radiography; Flexibility.

RESUMO

Objetivo: Determinar se há diferença estatisticamente significativa na flexibilidade das curvas na escoliose idiopática do adolescente (EIA), ao utilizar radiografias em inclinação lateral em decúbito supino ou prono. Métodos: Foram avaliados 19 pacientes com EIA, em espera de cirurgia. Os pacientes realizaram radiografias em incidências anteroposterior em ortostase, inclinações laterais direita e esquerda em decúbito prono e supino. Realizou-se a comparação entre o decúbito prono e supino através das taxas de flexibilidade das curvas aferidas em cada posição. Resultados: A taxa de flexibilidade média aferida, quando realizadas as inclinações laterais com o paciente em posição supino, foi de 54,4% ± 38,8% na curva torácica proximal, 45,8% ± 15,6% na curva torácica principal, e 80,5% ± 20,7% na curva toracolumbar/lombar. Quando realizadas as inclinações laterais com o paciente em posição prono, observou-se taxa de flexibilidade média de 66,4% ± 34,3% na curva torácica proximal, 50,1% ± 12,8% na curva torácica principal e 80,6% ± 19,0% na curva toracolumbar/lombar. Conclusão: O presente estudo não encontrou diferença com significância estatística nas taxas de flexibilidade das curvas nas posições prono e supino, sugerindo que os dois métodos radiográficos analisados são semelhantes na avaliação da flexibilidade das curvas na escoliose idiopática do adolescente. Nível de evidência II; Desenvolvimento de critérios diagnósticos em pacientes consecutivos (com padrão de referência “ouro” aplicado).

Descritores: Escoliose Idiopática do Adolescente; Radiografia; Flexibilidade.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: Determinar si hay diferencia estadísticamente significativa en la flexibilidad de las curvas en la escoliosis idiopática del adolescente (EIA), al utilizar radiografías en inclinación lateral en decúbito supino o prono. Métodos: Se evaluaron 19 pacientes con EIA, en espera de cirugía. Los pacientes realizaron radiografías en incidencias anteroposterior en ortostasis, inclinaciones laterales derecha e izquierda en decúbito prono y supino. Se realizó la comparación entre el decúbito prono y supino a través de las tasas de flexibilidad de las curvas medidas en cada posición. Resultados: La tasa de flexibilidad promedio medida, cuando se realizaron las inclinaciones laterales con el paciente en posición supino, fue de 54,4% ± 38,8% en la curva torácica proximal, 45,8% ± 15,6% en la curva torácica principal, y 80,5% ± 20,7% en la curva toracolumbar/lumbar. Cuando se realizaron las inclinaciones laterales con el paciente en posición prono, se observó tasa de flexibilidad promedio de 66,4% ± 34,3% en la curva torácica proximal, 50,1% ± 12,8% en la curva torácica principal y 80,6% ± 19,0% en la curva toracolumbar/lumbar. Conclusión: El presente estudio no encontró diferencia con significancia estadística en las tasas de flexibilidad de las curvas en las posiciones prono y supino, sugiriendo que los dos métodos radiográficos analizados son semejantes en la evaluación de la flexibilidad de las curvas en la escoliosis idiopática del adolescente. Nivel de evidencia II; Desarrollo de criterios diagnósticos en pacientes consecutivos (con el estándar de referencia “oro” aplicado).

Descritores: Escoliosis Idiopática del Adolescente; Radiografía; Flexibilidad.
INTRODUCTION

Defined as a three-dimensional spinal deformity (involving the sagittal, transverse, and frontal planes),1 scoliosis affects around 2-3% of children.2 Its treatment is divided into non-surgical and surgical.3,4 Observation, with serial imaging examinations is used in cases where the Cobb angle < 20°. In cases of patients with skeletal immaturity (Risser 0, 1, or 2) with curves between 20-40° the use of orthotics is recommended.5,6 Surgical approach is another form of treatment. The indication and planning of surgical treatment involve a detailed analysis of the characteristics of the curves, especially of their magnitude and flexibility, in addition to coronal and sagittal balance.7 Its classic indication involves cases of curves with Cobb angles > 40-45°.6,10

Preoperative surgical planning is of fundamental importance to prevent complications and poor results in any procedure, especially in surgical cases of adolescent idiopathic scoliosis (AIS). Correct operative planning in AIS allows the preservation of mobile segments and reduces surgical time and blood loss.7,8 In order to improve indications and surgical planning, several classification systems for adolescent idiopathic scoliosis were proposed. In 1983, King et al. proposed a classification system based on the evaluation of coronal radiographs, dividing the scoliotic curves into five types.9 In 2001, Lenke et al. structured the currently most commonly used classification based on the concept of three-dimensional deformity. In it, cases of scoliosis are evaluated in the coronal and sagittal planes and the flexibility of the curves is measured and recorded.10 Based on this classification, the assessment of the flexibility of the curves in scoliosis has been shown to be fundamental to the characterization of the deformity, assisting in the preoperative planning of patients and in defining the levels to be involved in arthrodesis and the correction to be achieved.11 Several forms of flexibility assessment have been proposed and compared, however there is still no consensus in the literature around which one should be used.6,11

Given that the usual surgical positioning of patients with scoliosis is ventral decubitus, the use of radiographic images in the prone position is reasonable in preoperative planning. Using radiographs in the supine position would simulate intraoperative positioning and could provide the surgeon with more relevant information.

This study aimed to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference in the flexibility of curves in adolescent idiopathic scoliosis when using lateral inclination radiographs in supine or prone positions.

METHODS

A cross-sectional study was conducted with patients diagnosed with adolescent idiopathic scoliosis waiting for surgery.

The sample was composed of patients who were on a waiting list for surgical treatment of adolescent idiopathic scoliosis, treated and in follow-up at the outpatient spine clinic of the orthopedics and traumatology department of a tertiary hospital that serves the Unified Health System.

The patients were invited to participate in the study during the registration and updating of their data on the waiting list for surgical treatment, performed in April 2019.

The inclusion criteria used were:
1. Adolescent idiopathic scoliosis diagnosis
2. On the waiting list for surgery
3. Having signed the ICF
4. Female patients

The study exclusion criteria were:
1. Those who did not want to participate or did not sign the ICF
2. Case of scoliosis with other etiologies
3. Male patients

The exclusion of male patients was aimed at making the sample more homogeneous in order to make the results more reliable.

The patients underwent anamnesis and physical examination. The anamnesis evaluated data on sex, patient age, age at menarche, age at AIS diagnosis, family history of AIS, and treatment with physical therapy and orthotics. With the patient in orthostasis, the physical examination assessed shoulder leveling and trunk balance.

Panoramic spinal radiographic images were taken under the supervision of the medical examiner in the following incidences:
1. Anteroposterior in orthostasis
2. Lateral in orthostasis
3. Right and left lateral inclinations in the prone position
   a. With the patient in dorsal decubitus on the radiotransparent table
   b. Pelvis balanced and level with the horizontal line of reference
   c. Upper limbs turned to the side of the inclination
   d. Maximum active inclination allowed before the pelvis leaves its primary leveling
4. Right and left lateral inclination in the supine position:
   a. Pelvis balanced and level with the reference line
   b. Face turned to the side of the inclination
   c. Upper limbs turned to the side of the inclination
   d. Maximum active inclination allowed before the pelvis leaves its primary leveling

The Cobb angles of the curves were measured and defined in each of the radiographs by consensus of 3 spine surgeons with more than 10 years of experience, and the Lenke classification was determined from the right and left lateral inclination radiographs in both prone and supine positions.

The flexibility rates of the proximal thoracic, main thoracic, and thoracolumbar/lumbar curves were also evaluated in the supine and prone inclinations using the formulas:

- **Flexibility rate in the prone position (%) = (Cobb angle value in the AP - Cobb angle value in the PRONE inclination) / Cobb angle value in the AP x 100**
- **Flexibility rate in the supine position (%) = (Cobb angle value in the AP - Cobb angle value in the SUPINE inclination) / Cobb angle value in the AP x 100**

Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS 13.0 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) for Windows and Excel 2010. All the tests were applied with 95% confidence. The results are presented in table form with their respective absolute and relative frequencies. The numeric variables are represented by central tendency measures and measures of dispersion. The comparison with two groups was conducted with the Mann-Whitney test (Not Normal). We used the Wilcoxon (Not Normal) test for the test between paired groups. Spearman’s correlation coefficient was used to verify the correlation between variables.

The individuals who met the inclusion criteria and accepted participation in the study were made aware of the scientific use of the research and the risks and signed the Informed Consent Form, in addition to the consent form for research in subjects under 18 years of age. The scientific project was submitted to the Institutional Review Board and followed the Guidelines and Regulatory Standards for research involving human beings established by National Health Council Resolution 466/12 of December of 2012.

RESULTS

Nineteen patients, all of them female, diagnosed with adolescent idiopathic scoliosis and on the surgery waiting list were evaluated.

The mean age of the patients analyzed was 14.3 ± 2.2 years and the mean age at AIS diagnosis was 11.9 ± 1.3 years. (Table 1)

The evaluation of radiographic aspects showed that all patients had a left proximal thoracic curve, a right main thoracic curve, and a left thoracolumbar/lumbar curve. The mean values of the Cobb angle measurements in the anteroposterior incidence radiographs in the orthostatic position were 22.4° ± 12.2° for the proximal thoracic curve, 55.6° ± 13.1° for the main thoracic curve, and 40.1° ± 13.1° for the thoracolumbar/lumbar curve. The mean degree of thoracic kyphosis, measured from T5 to T12 in the lateral radiographs, was 25.9° ± 11.8°. (Table 2)

The Cobb angle measurements in the right and left lateral inclinations on the supine position were a mean proximal thoracic curve of 20.0° ± 12.2°, a mean main thoracic curve of 30.5° ± 12.4°, and a mean thoracolumbar/lumbar curve of 17.1° ± 9.7°. When the
Cobb angles were analyzed in the right and left lateral inclination radiographs in the prone position, the mean measurements for the proximal thoracic, main thoracic, and thoracolumbar/lumbar curves were 17.1° ± 13.3°, 28.3° ± 12.2°, and 16.7° ± 8.4°, respectively. (Table 2)

The mean flexibility rates measured, when considering the Cobb angle values of the curves in the right and left inclinations in supine and prone positions, are shown in Table 3.

The analysis of the difference between the flexibility rates of the scoliotic curves, considering the lateral inclinations with the patient in the supine and prone positions, are shown in Table 3.

The analysis of the difference between the flexibility rates of the scoliotic curves, considering the lateral inclinations with the patient in the supine and prone positions, are shown in Table 3.

Note: In Table 4 there is no statistically significant difference between the positions analyzed. (Table 4)

Table 4. Analysis of the difference between the rates of flexibility of the scoliotic curves considering the lateral inclinations with the patient in the supine or prone position.

| Variables | Supine | Prone | p-value *
|-----------|--------|-------|---------|
| Mean ± SD | Mean ± SD | |
| % Flexibility proximal thoracic | 54.4 ± 38.8 | 45.5 ± 17.2 | 0.019 |
| % Flexibility main thoracic | 45.8 ± 15.6 | 43.3 ± 35.2 | 0.608 |
| % Flexibility thoracolumbar/lumbar supine | 80.5 ± 20.7 | 85.0 ± 60.0 | 0.019 |
| % Flexibility thoracolumbar/lumbar prone | 80.6 ± 19.0 | 80.0 ± 65.0 | 0.019 |

(*) Wilcoxon test.

Table 5. Absolute and percent distribution of the Lenke classification when lateral inclination radiographs in the supine and prone positions were considered.

| Variables | n | %
|-----------|---|---|
| Lenke classification supine | | |
| Type 1 | 15 | 78.9 |
| Type 2 | 2 | 10.5 |
| Type 3 | 1 | 5.3 |
| Type 5 | 1 | 5.3 |
| Lenke classification prone | | |
| Type 1 | 16 | 84.1 |
| Type 2 | 1 | 5.3 |
| Type 3 | 1 | 5.3 |
| Type 5 | 1 | 5.3 |

Table 6. Correlation between the flexibility rates of the curves in prone and supine positions and between age and the Cobb angle of the curve in orthostatic AP.

| Variables | Age when scoliosis was discovered | Proximal thoracic Cobb (orthostatic AP) | Main thoracic Cobb (orthostatic AP) | Thoracolumbar/lumbar supine (orthostatic AP) |
|-----------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| % Flexibility proximal thoracic | 0.290 | -0.542 * | -0.431 | -0.177 |
| % Flexibility main thoracic | 0.201 | -0.107 | -0.097 | -0.275 |
| % Flexibility thoracolumbar/lumbar supine | 0.475 * | 0.090 | -0.106 | -0.851 * |
| % Flexibility thoracolumbar/lumbar prone | 0.405 | -0.696 * | -0.660 * | -0.284 |
| % Flexibility main thoracic prone | 0.231 | -0.103 | -0.236 | 0.065 |
| % Flexibility thoracolumbar/lumbar prone | 0.340 | 0.019 | -0.003 | -0.804 * |

(A) Spearman’s correlation (*) Significant correlation (p-value ≤ 0.05).
**DISCUSSION**

The evaluation of AIS involves a directed medical history, a detailed physical examination, and a full-spine radiological assessment, evaluating the magnitude and flexibility of the curves. This study observed an age distribution of AIS like that described in other studies. The mean age of the patients included in the study was 14.3 years, with a mean age at diagnosis of 11.9 years. The mean Cobb angle values reported in this study for the proximal thoracic and main thoracic curves in the orthostatic position (22.4° and 55.6°, respectively) approximate what Klepps et al. described in 2001 (19° for the proximal thoracic and 58° for the main thoracic curve). Several classifications have been published in order to assist the evaluation of curves and the therapeutic indication. Currently, the Lenke classification is widely used and helps the spine surgeon in preoperative planning for adolescent idiopathic scoliosis. It defines the criteria for determining the structure of smaller curves in AIS, agreeing with what is shown in the literature. Our results are also like those of other studies involving comparisons between different techniques for measuring the flexibility of idiopathic scoliosis curves that do not report any superiority between the different techniques assessed.

**CONCLUSION**

This study found no statistically significant difference between the Cobb angle of the curves in prone and supine positions. They evaluated 32 patients, 26 female and 6 male, and observed that the supine position radiographs were adequate for evaluating the flexibility of AIS curves, especially type C lumbar curves. The data obtained also showed a change in the Lenke classification in only one of the 19 patients analyzed (Lenke 2 with supine decubitus and Lenke 1 with prone decubitus). The flexibility rates measured considering lateral inclination in the supine position, in turn, have values close to those reported by Klepps et al. for the main thoracic curves, corroborating the results of our study. The assessment of the flexibility rates of the curves in the prone and supine inclination radiographs in this study did not reveal any statistically significant difference in the flexibility rates of the curves, suggesting that the two radiographic methods analyzed are similar in this evaluation.

**Table 7.** Correlation between family history, vest use, and physical therapy with the flexibility rates of the curves in the prone and supine positions and the Cobb angle of the curves in orthostatic AP

| Variables | % Flexibility Supine | % Flexibility Prone | Cobb (orthostatic AP) |
|-----------|----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
|           | Proximal thoracic | Main thoracic | Thoracolumbar lumbar | Proximal thoracic | Main thoracic | Thoracolumbar lumbar | Proximal thoracic | Main thoracic | Thoracolumbar lumbar |
| Vest use  |                      |                     |                       | Mean ± SD | Mean ± SD | Mean ± SD | Mean ± SD | Mean ± SD | Mean ± SD | Mean ± SD | Mean ± SD | Mean ± SD | Mean ± SD | Mean ± SD | Mean ± SD | Mean ± SD |
| Yes       | 16.1 ± 4.9          | 34.2 ± 15.5         | 79.1 ± 24.8           | 54.1 ± 33.8 | 54.7 ± 19.5 | 79.7 ± 23.0 | 24.5 ± 5.3 | 64.7 ± 14.0 | 43.3 ± 9.8 |
| No        | 67.2 ± 36.5         | 51.1 ± 13.0         | 81.2 ± 19.6           | 70.5 ± 35.0 | 48.0 ± 8.6  | 81.0 ± 18.0 | 21.8 ± 13.9 | 66.0 ± 13.2 | 38.6 ± 14.5 |
| p-value * | 0.021               | 0.053               | 0.927                 | 0.486      | 0.660       | 0.927      | 0.223      | 0.824      | 0.289     |
| Physical therapy |                |                     |                       | Mean ± SD | Mean ± SD | Mean ± SD | Mean ± SD | Mean ± SD | Mean ± SD | Mean ± SD | Mean ± SD | Mean ± SD | Mean ± SD | Mean ± SD | Mean ± SD | Mean ± SD |
| Yes       | 78.1 ± 43.8         | 48.7 ± 15.6         | 75.6 ± 23.0           | 87.5 ± 25.0 | 49.0 ± 12.2 | 79.0 ± 16.4 | 13.0 ± 4.8 | 49.0 ± 9.9  | 40.5 ± 8.2 |
| No        | 46.6 ± 35.4         | 45.0 ± 16.1         | 81.9 ± 20.7           | 59.4 ± 35.0 | 50.4 ± 14.5 | 81.0 ± 20.2 | 25.6 ± 12.4 | 67.3 ± 13.5 | 40.0 ± 14.4 |
| p-value * | 0.290               | 0.841               | 0.533                 | 0.163      | 0.920       | 0.835      | 0.024      | 0.188      | 0.920     |
| Family history |                  |                     |                       | Mean ± SD | Mean ± SD | Mean ± SD | Mean ± SD | Mean ± SD | Mean ± SD | Mean ± SD | Mean ± SD | Mean ± SD | Mean ± SD | Mean ± SD | Mean ± SD | Mean ± SD |
| Yes       | 29.3 ± 21.9         | 41.7 ± 23.6         | 86.9 ± 26.2           | 37.6 ± 19.3 | 44.5 ± 8.9  | 86.9 ± 26.2 | 35.3 ± 21.4 | 65.0 ± 10.5 | 37.8 ± 20.5 |
| No        | 60.3 ± 40.1         | 46.9 ± 13.7         | 78.8 ± 19.8           | 73.1 ± 34.0 | 51.6 ± 13.6 | 78.9 ± 17.5 | 19.5 ± 7.7  | 65.7 ± 14.0 | 40.7 ± 11.3 |
| p-value * | 0.189               | 0.764               | 0.377                 | 0.122      | 0.366       | 0.436      | 0.079      | 0.800      | 0.615     |

(*) Mann-Whitney, orthostatic AP: anteroposterior radiographic incidence in the orthostasis, SD: standard deviation, % Flexibility Supine: rate of flexibility in the supine position, % Flexibility Prone: rate of flexibility in the prone position. Note: There were statistically significant differences only in vest use in relation to the flexibility rate of the proximal thoracic curve in the supine position and in physical therapy in relation to the Cobb angle of the proximal thoracic curve in orthostatic AP.
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