Risk factors for hidradenitis suppurativa: a pilot study

Fatores de risco para hidradenite supurativa: um estudo piloto

Juliano Vilaverde Schmitt¹
Manoela Martin¹
Giovana Bombonatto²
Hélio Amante Miot⁴

Abstract: The hidradenitis suppurativa is a chronic debilitating inflammatory disease whose etiology is not fully understood. We conducted a pilot case-control study matched by sex and age with other dermatological patients to analyze possible risk factors associated with this disease. We included 15 cases and 45 controls, 67% were women. Bivariate and multivariate logistic regression analysis identified significant association with smoking, higher body mass index and family history. The use of hormonal contraceptives was less frequent in women with hidradenitis.

Keywords: Hidradenitis suppurativa; Obesity; Risk factors; Smoking

We found no Brazilian studies that have evaluated these risk factors in our population, much less in a multivariate analysis or controlled by dermatology patients.

We conducted a case-control study matched by sex and age in the proportion of one case to three controls. We interviewed patients with hidradenitis suppurativa treated between 2008 and 2009 at a public clinic of dermatology, according to a standardized questionnaire. Controls were selected from patients attended in the same institution with other dermatologic problems at the same period. Data were compared in a bivariate and multivariate conditional logistic regression. We considered significant p values <0.05.

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¹ Dermatologist – Preceptor of the dermatology service of the Hospital Universitário Evangélico de Curitiba – Faculdade Evangélica do Paraná (HUEC-FEPAR) – Curitiba (PR), Brazil.
² Resident physician in internal medicine - Hospital Universitário Evangélico de Curitiba – Faculdade Evangélica do Paraná (HUEC-FEPAR) – Curitiba (PR), Brazil.
³ Trainee physician - Fundação Pró-Hansen (FPH) – Curitiba (PR), Brazil.
⁴ PhD Professor - PhD; assistant professor of the Dermatology and Radiotherapy Department of the Universidade Estadual Paulista “Julio de Mesquita Filho” (UNESP) – Botucatu (SP), Brazil.

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We included 15 cases and 45 controls, 67% were women. The current average age was 32.3 ± 11.6 years, with an age at onset of 20.6 ± 12.3 years. Nine patients had lesions in the armpits and 9 had lesions in the groin or genital area. One had infra mammary lesions. Ten reported active disease in the last two months and 5 had undergone surgical drainage or excision.

Six patients reported a similar condition in first-degree relatives. Skin diseases more frequent in controls were dyschromia, acne, seborrheic dermatitis and leprosy.

In bivariate analysis, HS patients had higher smoking history, family history compatible with HS and higher BMI. Women with HS less frequently used HC (Table 1).

In multivariate analysis, we identified significant association with family history of HS, highest daily consumption of cigarettes and the interaction between body mass index (BMI) and age (Table 2).

Among the cases there was a significant correlation between BMI and age at onset (Pearson R² = 0.65 / p <0.01).

Our data show age distribution, gender, and age at onset of the disease very similar to the literature. Likewise, the skin diseases present in the controls are compatible with the nosology of this age in our institution.5

The data reinforce the observations of other studies in terms of the association of HS with smoking and family history.7

Our data suggest a protective role of the use of HC. Similarly, recent work has verified the superiority of hormonal treatment when compared to other treatments such as antibiotics.8

Confirming previous studies, we identified elevated BMI as a risk factor for HS. However, in our data, BMI seemed to correlate with age at onset, suggesting that obesity should act as a risk factor especially among older patients. The association with obesity

| Variables | All (N=60) | Cases (N=15) | Controls (N=45) | Odds Ratio (confidence interval 95%) | p     |
|-----------|-----------|-------------|----------------|------------------------------------|-------|
| Current age (years)* | 31.7±11.3 | 32.3±12.0 | 31.4±11.3 | 0.78 |
| Females** | 40 (67%) | - | - | - |
| Weight (Kg)* | 68.5±14.6 | 72.3±19.1 | 67.2±13.0 | 0.52 |
| Body mass index* | 24.7±4.6 | 26.9±5.9 | 24.0±4.0 | - |
| Hormonal contraceptives - women** | 11 (31%) | 0 (0%) | 12 (40%) | - |
| Family history of hidradenitis suppurativa ** | 9 (15%) | 6 (40%) | 3 (7%) | 9.35 (1.96 to 44.49) | <0.01 |
| Smoking history** | 23 (38%) | 9 (60%) | 14 (31%) | 3.32 (1.00 to 11.14) | <0.05 |
| Smoking (cigarettes per day)*** | 0±11.25 | 9±20 | 0±5 | - |

*Student’s T test, mean ± standard deviation; ** Fisher’s exact test; *** Mann-Withney test, median ± interquartile range.

| Variables | Odds Ratio (confidence interval 95%) | p     |
|-----------|------------------------------------|-------|
| Females - paired | 1.06 (0.19 to 5.92) | 0.95 |
| Current age - paired | 0.62 (0.41 to 0.96) | 0.03 |
| Family history of hidradenitis suppurativa | 20.43 (2.38 to 175.7) | <0.01 |
| Smoking (cigarettes per day) | 1.14 (1.02 to 1.28) | 0.02 |
| Body mass index | 0.75 (0.46 to 1.22) | 0.24 |
| Body mass index versus age | 1.02 (1.00 to 1.03) | <0.05 |
| Constant | - | 0.25 |

Dependent variable: To present hidradenitis suppurativa; model p <0.01, correct classification = 85%.
could be reflected in findings of insulin resistance, but the small sample size and the non performing of laboratory tests limited such observations.  

The family history of HS was a significant risk factor, as seen in several studies, some of which describe syndromic patterns with great genetic penetration. However, we cannot rule out recall bias.  

Because this was a pilot study, this paper presents as the main limitation the small sample size. On the other hand, the pairing of the controls strengthens the results. 

We conclude that the present study revealed risk factors previously reported in the literature regarding hidradenitis suppurativa, reinforcing the role of smoking, obesity and genetic susceptibility. The data suggest that regular use of HC could prevent the development or persistence of HS in women, but larger studies should be performed.  

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MAILING ADDRESS:  
Juliano Vilaverde Schmitt  
Av. Sete de Setembro, 4713 80240-000 - Batel. Curitiba, PR  
E-mail: julivs@gmail.com

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