TOMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS OF ANATOMICAL PARAMETERS OF THE AXIS IN CHILDREN

ALESSANDRO GONZALES TORELLI, RAFAEL BELLUCI KOHLMANN, OLAVO LETAIF BIRAGHI, ALEXANDRE SADAO LITAKA, ALEXANDRE FOGAÇA CRISTANTE, RAPHAEL MARTINS MARCON

ABSTRACT

Objective: To carry out an anatomical study of the axis with the use of computed tomography (CT) in children aged from two to ten years, measuring the lamina angle, lamina and pedicle length and thickness, and lateral mass length. Methods: Sixty-four CTs were studied from patients aged 24 to 120 months old, of both sexes and without any cervical anomaly. The measurements obtained were correlated with the data on age and sex of the patients. Statistical analysis was performed using the Students “t” tests. Results: We found that within the age range 24-48 months, 5.5% of the lamina and 8.3% of the pedicles had thicknesses of less than 3.5mm, which is the minimum thickness needed for insertion of the screw. Between 49 and 120 months, there were no lamina thicknesses of less than 3.5mm, and 1.2% of the pedicle thicknesses were less than 3.5mm values. Neither of the age groups had any lamina and pedicle lengths of less than 12mm, or lateral mass lengths greater than 12mm. Conclusion: The analysis of the data obtained demonstrates that most of the time, is possible to use a 3.5mm pedicle screw in the lamina and pedicles of the axis in children. Level of Evidence: II, Development of diagnostic criteria in consecutive patients.

Keywords: Axis. Bone screws. Tomography. Spinal fusion.
and Magerl and Harms and Melcher techniques, without the associated vascular and neurological complications. Due to the lower risk of complications associated with this technique and the higher success rate of arthrodesis, it becomes an attractive treatment option.

Ferri de Barros et al. conducted a tomographic study comparing the adequacy of fixation screws in C2 pedicles and laminae in children from two to eleven years of age, and obtained data that enable them to infer that the C2 lamina represents a viable point of fixation for C1-C2 and craniocervical arthrodesis in children, which would allow the application of the Wright technique in children. The objectives of this study were to evaluate the dimensions of the following anatomical structures in the Brazilian pediatric population: lamina, pedicle and lateral mass of C2, and to validate for our population the data obtained with this study.

METHODS

Sixty-four cervical tomographic scans acquired during routine outpatient and emergency care provision in the complex of Hospital das Clínicas of Universidade de São Paulo were analyzed retrospectively.

Patients between two and 10 years of age were selected with the gathering of data referring to their age and sex. The patients were divided into two age groups: from 24 to 48 months and from 49 to 120 months, respectively named group 1 (18 cases) and group 2 (43 cases). Cases that presented anatomical abnormalities in the cervical spine or fracture of the level studied (three cases) were excluded.

Using the ImageJ imaging program, the dimensions and angulation of the laminae, pedicles and lateral masses were evaluated in an axial section of C2 corresponding to the height midpoint of the lamina (parasagittal section). The thickness of the C2 lamina was measured in millimeters (mm). The measurement was performed at the point of least thickness between the internal cortical layers. Each measurement will be performed in a specific manner for each side of the lamina. (Figure 1) The length (mm) of the laminae was measured in the same axial section. The measurement was performed from the external cortex opposite to the lamina to the limit of the visible length in that section. (Figure 2)

The spinolaminar angle was drawn for both sides, with one of the lines inside the C2 lamina parallel to the cortices of this lamina, and another line passing through the center of the spinous process and odontoid process dividing the vertebra into two hemivertebrae. (Figure 2)

The pedicle thickness was measured in the same axial section, at its narrowest point. (Figure 3) The length in the same section was measured from the point of entry in the lateral cortex to the anterior cortex in the vertebral body. (Figure 3) The length of the lateral mass was measured from the transition of the lamina with the mass to the opposite cortex. (Figure 3)

A statistical analysis with the SPSS 13.0 for Windows program was carried out using the t-test. Mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum value data were obtained. The data relating to age, sex and laterality (right and left) were combined with the abovementioned anatomical measurements.

RESULTS

Of the 64 tomographic scans analyzed, 45 were of the male and 16 of the female sex. Three were excluded from the study as they contained fracture at the level analyzed. The average age of the total group of patients was 66.83 ± 28.93 months; the average age of group 1 was 32.16 ± 9.06 months while that of group 2 was 81.34 ± 20.79 months.

Since no significant difference (p>0.05) was observed in the measurements in relation to laterality, the results presented correspond to the measurements obtained without considering the sides.
Tables 1, 2 and 3 present respectively the mean values with the standard deviation and the minimum and maximum values of the anatomical measurements of the lamina, pedicle and lateral mass according to age groups and gender.

In group 1 it was observed that 5.5% of the laminas and 8.3% of the pedicles have a thickness of less than 3.5 mm. In group 2 there are no laminas with thicknesses of less than 3.5 mm and only 1.2% of the pedicles have a thickness of less than 3.5 mm. The frequency of the lamina and pedicle thicknesses is represented in Figures 4 and 5.

There is no lamina and pedicle length of less than 12 mm in either age group. The spinolaminar angle, measured close to the laminar screw positioning angle, had only 5% of the values below 41°, and 90% were below 51.8° degrees. We did not record lateral mass lengths of more than 12 mm in either age group.

The spinolaminar angle was 45° in group 1 and 47.1° in group 2. There is no pedicle length of less than 12 mm in either age group.

In group 1 it was observed that only 5.5% of the laminas had a thickness of less than 3.5 mm. In group 2 there are no laminas with a thickness below this value. There is no lamina length of less than 12 mm in either group. The lowest and highest lamina thickness value obtained was 3.3 and 5.4 mm, respectively. It can be concluded that the passage of screws through the lamina is practicable in both groups studied, as in general the smallest screws commercially available for this purpose have a thread diameter of 3.5 mm and a length of 12 mm.

In analyzing the data obtained, it was possible to observe that there were no statistically significant differences (p > 0.05) as regards laterality in either one of the groups, for all the measurements performed. The difference observed between the sexes as a variable were not statistically significant (p > 0.05). In group 1, it was observed that 8.3% of the pedicles have a thickness of less than 3.5 mm, while this value was only 1.2% in group 2. There is no pedicle length of less than 12 mm in either group. The lowest and highest pedicle thickness value obtained was 3.1 and 5.6 mm, respectively. Although the data obtained show that it is anatomically possible to insert a screw in the pedicle of the pediatric population studied, we should consider the high risk of injury to the vertebral artery with this technique, with a narrow margin of error.

We have various techniques available for fixation of the high cervical spine targeting stable intervertebral fusion. Wiring

### Table 1. Mean anatomical values and variation for the Lamina.

| Age Bracket (Months) | Thickness (mm) | Length (mm) | Angle (degrees) |
|----------------------|----------------|-------------|-----------------|
|                      | Interval | Mean MSD | Interval | Mean MSD | Interval |                      |
| 24 - 48              | Male     | 3.96 ± 0.28 | 3.4 - 4.6 | 20.23 ± 1.75 | 17.7 - 23.3 | 45.19° ± 3.41° | 40° - 53° |
|                      | Female   | 3.92 ± 0.34 | 3.3 - 4.4 | 19.34 ± 0.81 | 17.8 - 19.8 | 43.70° ± 2.26° | 41° - 47° |
|                      | Total    | 3.95 ± 0.29 | 3.3 - 4.6 | 19.96 ± 1.59 | 17.7 - 23.3 | 45.02° ± 3.03° | 40° - 53° |
| 49 - 120             | Male     | 4.66 ± 0.35 | 3.9 - 5.4 | 24.17 ± 1.29 | 21.3 - 26.6 | 47.42° ± 2.78° | 42° - 53° |
|                      | Female   | 4.28 ± 0.39 | 3.6 - 4.9 | 23.16 ± 2.52 | 17.4 - 27.2 | 46.70° ± 2.98° | 40° - 53° |
|                      | Total    | 4.56 ± 0.39 | 3.6 - 5.4 | 23.92 ± 1.67 | 17.4 - 27.2 | 47.13° ± 2.96° | 40° - 53° |

### Table 2. Mean anatomical values and interval for the Pedicle.

| Age Bracket (Months) | Thickness (mm) | Length (mm) |
|----------------------|----------------|-------------|
|                      | Interval | Mean MSD | Interval | |
| 24 - 48              | Male     | 4.08 ± 0.42 | 3.4 - 4.7 | 18.99 ± 2.02 | 16.6 - 22.1 |
|                      | Female   | 3.92 ± 0.42 | 3.1 - 4.3 | 18.53 ± 0.89 | 17.0 - 20.3 |
|                      | Total    | 3.98 ± 0.37 | 3.1 - 4.7 | 18.96 ± 1.42 | 16.6 - 22.1 |
| 49 - 120             | Male     | 4.61 ± 0.38 | 3.9 - 5.6 | 21.79 ± 1.46 | 19.1 - 25.8 |
|                      | Female   | 4.45 ± 0.55 | 3.3 - 5.3 | 20.59 ± 1.65 | 17.4 - 23.9 |
|                      | Total    | 4.59 ± 0.42 | 3.3 - 5.6 | 21.59 ± 1.60 | 17.4 - 25.8 |

### Table 3. Mean anatomical values and interval for the Lateral Mass.

| Age Bracket (Months) | Length (mm) |
|----------------------|-------------|
|                      | Interval | |
| 24 - 48              | Male     | 8.38 ± 0.88 | 7.3 - 11.1 |
|                      | Female   | 7.86 ± 0.45 | 7.3 - 8.8 |
|                      | Total    | 8.27 ± 0.79 | 7.3 - 11.1 |
| 49 - 120             | Male     | 9.85 ± 0.59 | 7.3 - 11.4 |
|                      | Female   | 9.16 ± 0.84 | 8.1 - 10.8 |
|                      | Total    | 9.66 ± 0.76 | 7.3 - 11.4 |
techniques such as those of Brooks or Gallie are relatively simple procedures, yet have the disadvantage of requiring rigid immobilization after surgery, besides presenting high rates of pseudarthrosis. The Jeannert and Magerls\textsuperscript{4} transarticular screw fixation technique and the Harms and Melcher\textsuperscript{5} C1 lateral mass and C2 pedicle technique are more commonly used today. From the biomechanical viewpoint, techniques using screws are superior to the wiring technique but have the disadvantage of the risk of injury to the vertebral artery, spinal cord and roots.\textsuperscript{1,4-7}

In comparison to the data obtained by Ferri et al.\textsuperscript{2} in 2010 where 24% of the C2 pedicles and 65% of C2 laminas were considered suitable for the insertion of 3.5mm screws, we had a higher percentage of cases in which such passage would be anatomically possible.

The lateral mass length in both groups is around 9mm; hence the fixation technique with lateral mass screw in C2 is not a safe treatment option in the pediatric population studied.

CONCLUSION

The tomographic analysis of the axis in the pediatric population from 2 to 10 years of age showed that the anatomical dimensions studied allow the insertion of screws in the laminas and pedicles in most cases, taking into account the materials available in the market with a diameter of 3.5mm. In surgical practice in relation to the spinolaminar angle a basal value of around 45° can be adopted as a reference in the insertion of screws in the C2 lamina.

The small length of the lateral mass of C2 observed in the study does not allow the insertion of the smallest screw available in the market for this purpose.

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