Critical review on the socio-economic impact of tendinopathy

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Abstract

There are currently no studies that determine the total burden that tendinopathy places on patients and society. A systematic search was conducted to understand the impact of tendinopathy. It demonstrated that the current prevalence is underestimated, particularly in active populations, such as athletes and workers. Search results demonstrate that due to the high prevalence, impact on patients’ daily lives and the economic impact due to work-loss, treatments are significantly higher than currently observed. A well-accepted definition by medical professionals and the public will improve documentation and increase awareness, in order to better tackle the disease burden.

Keywords: incidence; prevalence; quality-of-life; socio-economic; tendinopathy

Introduction

Clinicians obtain insight into the burden of tendinopathy from their patients, yet their ability to alleviate this burden remains limited. From their observations, it is to be believed that tendinopathy has a significant socio-economic impact, but there is no direct evidence to support this claim. This review aims to determine the socio-economic burden of tendinopathy and how this burden may be alleviated. The definition and classification of tendinopathy currently adopted by medical subject headings are displayed in Figure 1. Tendinopathy is a blanket term for “tendinitis”, “tendinosis”, and “tenosynovitis”. “Tendinitis” was the original term to define pain and inflammation within the tendon, and “tendinosis” was the preferential term to describe the degenerative changes observed. Strictly speaking, “tenosynovitis” refers to inflammation of the synovial sheath surrounding the tendon, thus it should not be regarded as tendinopathy in which degenerative changes are mainly observed in the tendon itself. By contrast, spontaneous tendon rupture, which occurs without prior symptoms, is attributed to mechanical weakness of tendons due to tendinopathic changes.1 In summary, tendinopathy is characterised by chronic tendon degeneration, resulting in pain and rupture, which are the basic criteria used when searching for relevant information.

The disease burden of tendinopathy can be primarily reflected by the number of patients, the effect on the patients’ quality-of-life, cost effectiveness of treatments, and the
economic implications of work disability. Therefore, we performed a systematic search of prevalence and incidence data of tendinopathy, and gathered information about quality-of-life, work disability, and treatments specific to tendinopathy.

**Prevalence and incidence of tendinopathy**

A literature search was performed in PubMed in October 2015 using the search strategy: (Tendinopathy OR tendinitis OR tendonitis OR tendinosis OR tendon rupture OR tendon tear OR jumper's knee OR Sinding-Larsen-Johansson OR epicondylitis OR tennis elbow) AND (prevalence OR incidence OR epidemiology). Studies are included if prevalence or incidence of tendinopathy was reported. Studies on tenosynovitis and traumatic injuries were excluded. Non-English studies, reviews, animal, and cadaveric studies were also excluded. The search returned 1819 articles, of which 132 were included based on the selection criteria. The search results were tabulated according to the nature of the cohort (athletes, workers, general population, and patients with comorbidities), sample size, age group, type of tendinopathy involved, and the reported prevalence and incidence data.

Of the cohorts identified, athletes formed the major cohort with 42 studies, followed by workers (36 studies), individuals in the general population (35 studies), and individuals with comorbidities (19 studies). Achilles' tendinopathy, patellar tendinopathy, epicondylitis, and rotator cuff tendinopathy are identified as four major types of tendinopathy according to numbers of studies and the reported prevalence. The results are shown in Table 1.

**Results**

**Athletes**

The high intensity and frequency of physical activities in athletes exposes this group to overuse injuries due to the high stress exerted on the tendons. Records of medical attendance in the 2004 Olympics and 2007 Pan-American Games show that tendinopathy was within the top three most treated conditions in athletes. This record represents the significance of tendinopathy as a widespread condition in this group.

Studies on the prevalence of upper extremity tendinopathy in athletes have observed small cohorts, yet data from studies with the largest sample sizes place the prevalence for rotator cuff tendinopathy at 23.7% in volleyball players, and epicondylitis at 13.1% in climbers. Older age may also play a role as evidenced in a study on elderly athletes where prevalence was seen to be as high as 48.2%. There is no study on upper extremity tendinopathy in adolescents to our knowledge. A study on patellar tendinopathy reported a prevalence of approximately 17% in adults and 5.6% in adolescents. Similarly, Achilles' tendinopathy was reported to be 12.5% in adults and 7.8% in adolescents. Adolescents are seemingly less affected by tendinopathy based on these values alone. There is however no clear evidence that age influences tendinopathy. In agreement with previous studies, no clear trend is observed when comparing the prevalence or incidence between male and female athletes.

Lower extremity tendinopathy, particularly that of the patellar tendon, is the most frequently studied and arguably the most commonly affected. However, sports-related tendinopathy is challenging to generalise due to the difference in anatomical sites affected and the degree of exposure. For instance, dancers present with higher prevalence of Achilles' tendinopathy, while rowers would more frequently present with rotator cuff tendinopathy or epicondylitis. In addition, the degree of sport participation would differ widely between recreational athletes and professional athletes, but professional or elite athletes may suffer greater economic losses from injury as compared to recreational athletes. Studies on the degree of participation, the associated risk of tendinopathy development, and the associated impact would be valuable further studies.

**Workers**

Occupational exposure is of particular relevance because of the high economic impact procured by productivity-loss and compensation for disease. Highly repetitive movements are commonly observed in daily work tasks, and coupled with poor workplace ergonomics, workers are placed at an increased risk of developing tendinopathy. A distinction can be made between workers and athletes in that occupational exposure typically consists of relatively low demand and highly repetitive movements over a longer period of time compared to athletic exposure. Worker cohorts have generally been larger than the athlete cohort. Many of these cohorts have been merged from different workplaces and may possibly be highly heterogeneous even within the same study. Tendinopathy in workers is almost exclusively observed in the upper extremity. The most common and arguably most prevalent of which is lateral epicondylitis. A prevalence of 2–3% have been observed, but rates as high as 18% and 41% have also been reported in spine surgeons and coal miners, respectively. Similar to athletic exposures, it is evident that the type of work influences the prevalence of tendinopathy. Relative risk in occupational exposure with regards to frequency of repetitive motion, length of exposure, and ergonomic factors may be worthwhile studies.
| 1st Author, year, Ref | Group | Cohort | N     | Age     | Type of tendinopathy | Prevalence | Incidence |
|-----------------------|-------|--------|-------|---------|----------------------|------------|-----------|
| Zapata, 2006          | General | Students | 791   | Adolescent | Tendonitis           | 2          | n/a       |
| Salaffi, 2005         | General | Italian general population | 2155 | Adults | LE                   | 0.7        | n/a       |
| Miranda, 2005         | General | General population | 8028 | Adults | RC tendinitis        | 2          | n/a       |
| Rechardt, 2010        | General | General population | 6237 | Adults | RC tendinitis        | 2.8        | n/a       |
| Tajika, 2014          | General | Japanese mountain village community | 422 | Adults | LE                   | 3.8        | n/a       |
| Joseph, 2012          | General | Asymptomatic active university student body | 52 | Adults | AT (US)              | 3.8        | n/a       |
| Koplas, 2011          | General | Elbow MRI examinations | 801  | Adults | Triceps tendon tear | 3.8        | n/a       |
| Waldecker, 2012       | General | Non-athletes in orthopaedic clinic patients | 697  | Adults | AT tendinopathy      | 5.6        | n/a       |
| Schibany, 2004        | General | Asymptomatic patients | 212  | Adults | Supraspinatus rupture (US) | 6       | n/a       |
| Zwerver, 2011         | General | Nonelite athletes | 891  | Adults | Jumper's knee        | 8.5        | n/a       |
| Fairley, 2014         | General | Community with no history of knee pain or injury | 297  | Adults | PT (MRI)            | 28.3       | n/a       |
| Walker-Bone, 2012     | General | General population | 6038 | Adults | LE                   | 0.7        | n/a       |
| Shiri, 2006           | General | General population | 4783 | Adults | LE                   | 1.3        | n/a       |
| Alvarez-Nemegyei, 2011 | General | General population | 12,686 | Adults | RC tendinopathy      | 2.4        | n/a       |
| Walker-Bone, 2004     | General | General population | 6038 | Adults | RC tendinitis        | 3.3        | n/a       |
| Shiri, 2007           | General | General population | 6254 | Adults | RC tendinitis        | 3.8        | n/a       |
| Girish, 2011          | General | Asymptomatic shoulders | 51   | Adults | Supraspinatus (US)   | 39         | n/a       |
| Safran, 2002          | General | General population Students without knee conditions | 279,500 | Adults | Biceps tendon rupture | 1.2/100,000 PY | n/a |
| Witvrouw, 2001        | General | General population Students without knee conditions | 138  | Adults | PT tendinitis        | 13.8% (2 y CI) | 1/100,000 PY |
| Huttunen, 2014        | General | Nationwide Sweden | 27,702 | Adults | AT rupture          | n/a       | 29.5/100,000 PY |
| Ostor, 2005           | General | General population | 17,000 | Adults | RC tendinopathy      | n/a       | 8.1/1000 PY |
| Cretnik, 2010         | General | General population | 572,929 | Adults | AT rupture          | n/a       | 7.6/100,000 PY |
| Darmawan, 1995        | General | Indonesian population | 1118 | All | Epicondylitis        | 6.6        | n/a       |
| Moller, 1996          | General | Malmo population | n/a  | All | AT rupture           | n/a       | 0.06 (4 y CI) |
| Clayton, 2008         | General | General population | 535,000 | All | AT rupture          | n/a       | 11.3/100,000 PY |
| Levi, 1997            | General | Copenhagen population | n/a  | All | AT rupture           | n/a       | 13.4/100,000 PY |
| Leppilaiti, 1996      | General | Oulu population | n/a  | All | AT rupture           | n/a       | 18/100,000 PY |
| Houssian, 1998        | General | Danish county | 220,000 | All | AT rupture          | n/a       | 37.3/100,000 PY |
| Maffulli, 1999        | General | General population | n/a  | All | AT rupture           | n/a       | 6/100,000 PY |
| van der Linden, 2001  | General | General population | n/a  | All | Tendon rupture       | n/a       | 6.32/100,000 PY |
| Suchak, 2005          | General | Canada general population | 967,200 | All | AT rupture          | n/a       | 8.3/100,000 PY |
| Chard, 1987           | General | Geriatric unit not admitted for shoulder complaints | 100  | Elderly | RC tendinitis | 5         | n/a       |
| Horowitz, 2013        | General | General population | n/a  | n/a | Retropharyngeal calcific tendinitis | n/a | 0.5/100,000 PY |
| de Jonge, 2011        | General | General population | 57,725 | n/a | AT tendinopathy     | n/a       | 1.8/1000 PY |

(continued on next page)
| 1st Author, year, Ref | Group | Cohort | N     | Age | Type of tendinopathy | Prevalence | Incidence |
|-----------------------|-------|--------|-------|-----|----------------------|------------|-----------|
| Nyyssonen, 200887     | General | Finnish population | 5.2m | n/a | AT rupture | n/a | 11.5/100,000 PY |
| McCormack, 199098     | Worker | Textile workers | 2047 | Adults | Epicondylitis | 2 | n/a |
| Roquelaure, 200699    | Worker | Workers | 2685 | Adults | LE | 2.4 | n/a |
| Almeida, 2012100      | Worker | Workers | 951 | Adults | Tendinitis | 3.2 | n/a |
| Frost, 2002101        | Worker | Workers | 782 | Adults | Shoulder tendinitis | 3.2 | n/a |
| Descatha, 2003102     | Worker | Workers | 1757 | Adults | ME | 5.2 | 1.5% (annual CI) |
| Fan, 2009103          | Worker | Workers | 733 | Adults | LE | 5.2 | n/a |
| Rosenbaum 2013104     | Worker | Latino poultry workers | 516 | Adults | Epicondylitis | 5.8 | n/a |
| Kryger, 2007105       | Worker | Computer workers with neck or arm pain | 1369 | Adults | LE | 5.8 | n/a |
| Kaergaard, 2000106    | Worker | Sewing machine operators | 243 | Adults | RC tendinitis | 5.8 | n/a |
| Dimberg, 198797       | Worker | Workers | 540 | Adults | LE | 7.4 | n/a |
| Roto, 198498          | Worker | Male meat cutters | 90 | Adults | Epicondylitis | 8.9 | n/a |
| Ono, 199899          | Worker | Nursery school cooks | 209 | Adults | Epicondylitis | 11.5 | n/a |
| Leclerc, 2001100      | Worker | Workers | 598 | Adults | LE | 12.2 | 12.2% (3 y CI) |
| Capone, 2001101      | Worker | Plastic surgeons | 339 | Adults | Epicondylitis | 13.5 | n/a |
| Ritz, 1995102        | Worker | Workers | 290 | Adults | Epicondylitis | 14.1 | n/a |
| Chiang, 1993103      | Worker | Workers in fish-processing | 207 | Adults | Epicondylitis | 15 | n/a |
| Barrero, 2012104     | Worker | Workers flower industry | 158 | Adults | Epicondylitis | 15.2 | n/a |
| Auerbach, 2011105    | Worker | Spine surgeons | 561 | Adults | LE | 18 | n/a |
| Forde, 2005106       | Worker | Ironworkers | 981 | Adults | Tendonitis | 19 | n/a |
| Sansone, 2015107     | Worker | Female cashier | 199 | Adults | RC calcific tendinopathy (US) | 22.6 | n/a |
| Cunha-Miranda, 2010108 | Worker | Workers | 410,496 | Adults | Shoulder tendinitis | 0.6 | n/a |
| Werner, 2002109      | Worker | Dental hygienists | 305 | Adults | Elbow tendinitis | 0.3 | n/a |
| Gold, 2009110        | Worker | Automobile manufacturing workers | 1214 | Adults | Shoulder tendinitis | 0.1 | n/a |
| Pullopdissakul, 2013110 | Worker | Workers | 591 | Adults | Elbow tendinitis | 13 | n/a |
| Nordander, 2009111   | Worker | Workers | 2677 | Adults | RC tendonitis | 12 | n/a |
| Silverstein, 2006112 | Worker | Workers | 436 | Adults | Supraspinatus tendonitis | 4.4 | n/a |
| Ozdolap, 2013113     | Worker | Coal miners | 80 | Adults | Infraspinatus tendonitis | 3 | n/a |
| Werner, 2005114      | Worker | Dental hygiene students Clerical workers | 343 | Adults | Bicipital tendonitis | 1.2 | n/a |
| Fan, 2014115        | Worker | Workers | 607 | Adults | RC tendinitis | 4.4–7.6 | 2.9–5.5/100 PY |
| Gold, 2009116       | Worker | Automobile manufacturing workers | 1214 | Adults | LE | 41.2 | n/a |
| Werner, 2005117      | Worker | Dental hygiene students Clerical workers | 343 | Adults | ME | 12.5 | n/a |
| Fan, 2014118        | Worker | Workers | 536 | Adults | Upper extremity tendinitis | 5 | n/a |
| Garg, 2014119       | Worker | Workers | 173,094 | Adults | Tendinitis | 8.7 | n/a |
| Alexandre, 2011120  | Worker | Dentist Physicians Lawyers General population | 536 | Adults | Tendinitis | 5.6 | n/a |
| Herquelot, 2013121   | Worker | Workers | 3710 | Adults | LE | n/a | 1.0/100 PY |
| Werner, 2005122      | Worker | Workers | 501 | Adults | Upper extremity tendinitis | 5 | n/a |
| Fan, 2014 Feb123     | Worker | Workers | 611 | Adults | LE | 4.9/100 PY | n/a |
| Descatha, 2013124   | Worker | Workers | 699 | Adults | Epicondylitis | 6.9% (36 mo CI) | n/a |
| | | | | | | | |
| 1st Author, year, Ref | Group | Cohort | N    | Age    | Type of tendinopathy | Prevalence | Incidence |
|-----------------------|-------|--------|------|--------|----------------------|------------|-----------|
| McGaughey, 2003117    | Worker| Expeditioners | 292.3 PY | Adults | AT tendonitis | n/a | 9.2/100 PY |
| Barber Foss, 2012118  | Athletes| Female basketball players | 419 | Adolescent | SLJ | 5 | n/a |
| Tenforde, 201112      | Athletes| High school athletes | 748 | Adolescent | AT tendonitis | 7.8 | n/a |
| Emerson, 2010119      | Athletes| Elite gymnasts | 40 | Adolescent | AT tendinopathy | 15 | n/a |
| Steinberg, 2011120    | Athletes| Nonprofessional female dancers | 1336 | Adolescent | Ankle & foot tendinitis | 18.8 | n/a |
| Cassel, 201510        | Athletes| Adolescent athletes | 760 | Adolescent | AT tendinopathy | 1.8 | n/a |
| Gisslen, 2005121      | Athletes| Swedish elite junior volleyball players | 57 | Adolescent | Jumper's knee | 21 | n/a |
| Le Gall, 2007122      | Athletes| Early maturing athletes | 233 | Adolescent | Tendinopathy | n/a | 0.06/1000 AE |
| Barber Foss, 2014123  | Athletes| Female middle school athletes | 268 | Adolescent | SLJ | n/a | 0.3/1000 AE |
| Beachy, 2014124       | Athletes| Middle school athletes | 14,038 | Adolescent | Tendinitis | n/a | 0.7/1000 AE |
| Leanderson, 2011125   | Athletes| Ballet dancers | 476 | Adolescent | Foot tendinosis | n/a | 11.8% (7 y CI) |
|                        |       |        |      |        | Jumper's knee | 6.5% (7 y CI) | n/a |
|                        |       |        |      |        | Tendonitis genu | 5.2% (7 y CI) | n/a |
|                        |       |        |      |        | Tendinosis groin | 8.6% (7 y CI) | n/a |
|                        |       |        |      |        | PT tendinosis | 30.6% (6 y CI) | n/a |
| Hicke, 1997126        | Athletes| Elite female basketball players | 49 | Adolescent | Jumper's knee | n/a | 8.1 (5 y CI) |
| Dubravcic-Simunjak, 2003127 | Athletes | Junior figure skaters | 469 | Adolescent | AT tendinitis | 2.1 (5 y CI) | 0.1/1000 h |
| Haggland, 2011128     | Athletes| Elite male soccer players | 2229 | Adults | PT tendinopathy | 2.4 (season prevalence) | |
| Buda, 201311       | Athletes| Climbers | 144 | Adults | AT tendinitis | 12.5 | n/a |
| Pieber, 2012120     | Athletes| Climbers | 193 | Adults | Epicondylitis | 13.1 | n/a |
| Durcan, 2014129     | Athletes| Elite rugby academies | 83 | Adults | PT tendinopathy | 13.3 | n/a |
| Lian, 20058        | Athletes| Elite athletes | 613 | Adults | Jumper's knee | 14.2 | n/a |
| McCarthy, 20133      | Athletes| Women's basketball | 496 | Adults | PT tendinitis | 17 | n/a |
| van der Worp, 20117  | Athletes| Basketball & volleyball players | 1505 | Adults | Patellar tendinopathy | 17.8 | n/a |
| Cook, 1996130       | Athletes| Elite athletes | 160 | Adults | PT (US) | 22 | n/a |
| Lopes, 20099        | Athletes| Athletes referred to PT | 434 | Adults | Tendinopathy | 22.4 | n/a |
| Wang, 20014         | Athletes| Elite volleyball athletes | 59 | Adults | RC tendinitis | 23.7 | n/a |
| Monteleone, 201453   | Athletes| Elite beach volleyball players | 53 | Adults | RC (US) | 30 | n/a |
| Longo, 201114       | Athletes| Veteran track & field athlete | 174 | Adults | PT tendinopathy | 46.6 | n/a |
| Rooks, 199531       | Athletes| Rock climbers | 39 | Adults | Upper extremity tendinitis | 50 | n/a |
| Walls, 201032       | Athletes| Professional dancers | 18 | Adults | AT tendinopathy (MRI) | 78 | n/a |
| Hagemann, 200433     | Athletes| Marathon kayakers | 52 | Adults | Supraspinatus (MRI) | 11.5 | n/a |
| Reuter, 200834       | Athletes| Ironman triathletes | 23 | Adults | RC partial tear | 22 | n/a |
| Hadala, 200935       | Athletes| Elite yacht sailors | 30 | Adults | Epicondylitis | 30 | n/a |

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| 1st Author, year, Ref | Group | Cohort | N  | Age       | Type of tendinopathy | Prevalence | Incidence |
|-----------------------|-------|--------|----|-----------|----------------------|------------|-----------|
| Comin, 2013          | Athletes | Ballet dancers | 79 | Adults    | AT (US) PT (US)     | 8.9        | n/a       |
| Marshall, 2007       | Athletes | Collegiate women's softball athletes | 9389 | Adults  | Shoulder tendinitis Elbow tendinitis | n/a | 0.12/1000 AE 0.04/1000 AE |
| Krupnick, 1998       | Athletes | White water paddlers | 54 | Adults | Tendonitis | n/a | 0.19/100 AE |
| Kelly, 2004          | Athletes | Elite football quarterbacks | 1534 | Adults | Biceps tendinitis | n/a | 0.5/100 AE |
| Parekh, 2009         | Athletes | National Football League Military conscripts | n/a | Adults | AT rupture | n/a | 0.9% (per game CI) |
| Heir, 1996           | Athletes | US military population | 6488 | Adults | AT tendinitis Shoulder tendinitis | n/a | 13.5/1000 conscript-mo 2.1/1000 conscript-mo |
| Wolf, 2010           | Athletes | Collegiate baseball players | 12,828 AE | Adults | RC tendinitis | n/a | 3.4/1000 AE |
| McFarland, 1998      | Athletes | US army soldiers | 93,224 AE | Adults | Tendon rupture | n/a | 5.6/100 AE 6.8% (4 period each 14 wk CI) |
| Milgrom, 2003        | Athletes | Male infantry recruits | 1405 | Adults | AT tendinopathy | n/a | 0.9% (1 y CI) |
| McMahon, 2014        | Athletes | Elite athletes | 141 | Elderly | RC tendinosis RC partial tear RC complete rupture Shoulder tendinopathy Shoulder tendon rupture | 16.3 | n/a |
| Kettunen, 2011       | Athletes | Former elite male athletes | 785 | Elderly | AT rupture AT tendinopathy | n/a | 8.3% (lifetime CI) 23.9% (lifetime CI) |
| Kujala, 2005         | Athletes | Former elite male athletes | 785 | Elderly | AT tendinitis | n/a | 3% (95% CI) |
| Njovu, 2006          | Patients | HIV positive patients | 65 | Adults | Tendonitis | n/a | 3.1 |
| Cannon, 2007         | Patients | Cervical radiculopathy with upper limb symptoms | 191 | Adults | LE | 4.7 | n/a |
| Hautmann, 2014       | Patients | Patients with painful heel | 101 | Adults | AT tendinitis | n/a | 11.9 |
| Frey, 2007           | Patients | Overweight or obese | 738 | Adults | Ankle & foot tendinitis | 16.7 | n/a |
| Finley, 2004         | Patients | Manual wheelchair users | 52 | Adults | Biceps tendinitis | 30.1 | n/a |
| Baumann, 2008        | Patients | Diagnostic shoulder arthroscopies | 1007 | Adults | Shoulder tendinitis Shoulder partial tear Shoulder complete tear | 1.5 | n/a |
| Chhajed, 2002        | Patients | Lung transplant recipients treated with ciprofloxacin | 101 | Adults | AT tendinopathy AT rupture | 15.8 | n/a |
| Ramirez, 2014        | Patients | Patients with greater trochanteric pain | 107 | Adults | Gluteus medius tendinosis Gluteus minimus tendinosis | 36.4 | n/a |
| Taunton, 2002        | Patients | Patients with running related injury | 2002 | Adults | PT tendinopathy AT tendinopathy | 4.2 | n/a |
| Bird, 2001           | Patients | Patients with greater trochanteric pain | 24 | Adults | Gluteus medius tendinosis | 45.8 | n/a |
| Shah, 2008           | Patients | Stroke patients with painful shoulder | 89 | Adults | RC tendinopathy RC tear Shoulder tendinopathy | 53 | n/a |
| Pong, 2012           | Patients | Stroke patients with hemiplegic shoulders | 76 | Adults | RC tendinopathy | 35 | n/a |
| Kingzett-Taylor, 1999 | Patients | Patients with buttock, lateral hip, or groin pain | 250 | Adults | Gluteal tear Gluteal tendinosis | 8.8 | n/a |
| Chung, 2013          | Patients | Nurses with musculoskeletal disorder | 3914 | Adults | ME LE | n/a | 0.25% (1 y CI) 0.58% (1 y CI) |
| Barge-Caballero, 2008 | Patients | Heart transplant patients under quinolones | 149 | Adults | AT tendinopathy AT rupture | n/a | 9.4% (11 y CI) 2% (11 y CI) |
| Ramos, 2009          | Patients | Patients with knee pain | 318 | All | PT tendinopathy | 32.3 | n/a |
Table 1 (continued)

| Author, year, Ref | Group | Cohort | N  | Age | Type of tendinopathy | Prevalence | Incidence |
|-------------------|-------|--------|----|-----|----------------------|------------|-----------|
| Helliwell, 2003    | Patients | with soft tissue disorders | 1382 | All | Shoulder tendinitis | 11.3 | n/a |
| Sode, 2007(59)     | Patients | First time fluoroquinolone users | 28262 | All | AT rupture | n/a | 0.02 (90 d CI) |
| Zakaria, 2014(160) | Patients | Diabetes patients | 1296 | Elderly | Tendon rupture | n/a | 5.21/1000 PY |

AE = athlete exposure; AT = Achilles tendon; CI = cumulative incidence; h = hours; LE = lateral epicondylitis; ME = medial epicondylitis; MRI = magnetic resonance imaging diagnosed; N = sample/cohort size; n/a = not available; PT = patellar tendon; PY = person-years; RC = rotator cuff; SLJ = Sinding-Larsen-Johansson; US = ultrasound diagnosed; y = years.

General population

In the general population, the prevalence of clinically diagnosed rotator cuff tendinopathy in adults was reported to range from 2% to 3.8%, with a marginally higher prevalence observed in the elderly population at 5%–7%. Although it may not be accurate to compare values from different studies, it is worth noting that the value in the general population approaches that of the worker cohorts. In the elbow joint, prevalence of lateral epicondylitis and medial epicondylitis in European cohorts were reported at 0.7%–1.3% and 0.3%–0.6%, respectively. Two outliers were reported on lateral epicondylitis in a Japanese mountain village cohort at 3.8% and on epicondylitis in the Indonesian general population at 6.6%, respectively. The divergence in values in these groups suggest that societal aspects also come into play and may be influenced by environmental, cultural, or economic differences among societies. Age and gender do not seem to influence tendinopathy within this cohort. Although upper extremity tendinopathy has been more frequently studied in the general population, less common conditions have also been observed, such as retropharyngeal tendinitis (0.5/100,000 person-years) triceps tendon tears (3.8%), and bicipital tendinitis (0.3%–0.5%).

Comorbidity cohorts

Nineteen studies reported tendinopathy in cohorts with other associated conditions such as HIV positive patients, stroke survivors, obese cohorts, wheelchair users, etc. (Table 1). Some studies do not investigate the association of tendinopathy with other disease conditions, but instead report tendinopathy as part of a group of patients with musculoskeletal complaints in general. A general trend of increased prevalence is seen when compared with the general population; however due to the variety of conditions, and how they impact tendinopathy, the data cannot be utilised to assess the prevalence of tendinopathy within this cohort. These studies provide evidence that there are intrinsic risk factors for tendinopathy and research into the relationship between them would be worthwhile in understanding the aetiology of tendinopathy.

Summary of systematic review

There is currently a gap in the available evidence on incidence rates as most studies carried out on the general population are on tendinopathic ruptures only. The actual prevalence of tendinopathy may be higher due to diagnosis. Clinical diagnosis is the main diagnostic technique, with radiological imaging, such as magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and ultrasound being used to support the diagnosis. Studies that defined tendinopathy using radiological imaging revealed a higher incidence rate compared with studies that used clinical evaluation only. This discrepancy is caused by the inclusion of patients who did not present with symptoms at the time of examination, suggesting that asymptomatic patients are left unnoticed in tendinopathy diagnosis. This is important since the lifetime cumulative incidence of retired elderly athletes is approximately 25%, suggesting that symptoms may develop later than when the injury was sustained.

In summary, specific types of tendinopathy are more prevalent in the different groups. Epicondylitis and rotator cuff tendinopathy were preferentially investigated in workers and the general population, with workers having a higher prevalence and incidence of tendinopathy. Patellar tendinopathy was more frequently investigated in the athlete population, revealing a higher prevalence and incidence when compared with the other groups. Finally, age and sex does not seem to play a factor in tendinopathy.

Effects of tendinopathy on quality-of-life and cost-effectiveness of treatment

A community-based survey compared the socio-economic impacts of four musculoskeletal conditions including tendinitis (tendinopathy), rheumatoid arthritis, osteoarthritis, and lower back pain. Although tendinopathy was found to be less influential to work loss, shoulder tendinopathy took approximately 10 months to heal and workers take greater amounts of sick leave to recover, reporting being less productive at work, and require workers’ compensation for disease. Finally, even though patients may return to work within 6 weeks following operative repair, recovery may take a few months. The burden placed on daily activities cannot be ignored, with one study claiming that about a quarter of patients with tennis elbow (epicondylitis) reported difficulty in activities such as dressing, carrying objects, driving, and sleeping. The indirect costs can reach great amounts in terms of productivity loss and worker’s compensation. Up to 5% of patients with lateral epicondylitis have claimed sickness absence with an average duration of 29 days in a year. Thus, absenteeism (in the working population aged 25–64) due to
lateral epicondylitis in the United Kingdom alone is estimated to cost £27 million using 2012 global population statistics and median wage.\textsuperscript{44,50,51} Productivity-loss and disease compensation associated with tendinopathy are remarkable, and the high prevalence of tendinopathy, as revealed by the search results on tendinopathy prevalence, suggests that the disease burden may be greater than currently understood.

The goals of tendinopathy treatment are pain reduction, recurrence prevention, and return to sports or preinjury functionality. Treatment aims to remain conservative with oral nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, corticosteroid injections, and physical therapy as the mainstay in tendinopathy management. Other therapies include injections of platelet-rich plasma or autologous blood. Finally, failure of conservative treatments leads to surgical intervention to excise the tendinopathic tissue and repair the ruptured tendon.\textsuperscript{52,53} Yet the cost analysis on various tendinopathy treatments is inadequate. Direct outpatient medical costs were reported as ranging from €430/patient for corticosteroid injection to €921/patient for physical therapy, for lateral epicondylitis (currency in 2004).\textsuperscript{54} Repeated medical visits are also a concern as lateral epicondylitis is recurrent, and almost half of those affected have seen their general practitioner within the past 12 months.\textsuperscript{74} Cost/quality-adjusted-life-years for physical therapy and corticosteroid injection were £18,962 and £20,518, respectively, values which fall within the benchmark of £20,000 to £30,000 (currency in 2015) and are comparable to the common drug treatments for osteoarthritis and osteoporosis (currency in 2005 and 2004, respectively).\textsuperscript{55–57} Economic evaluations on other tendinopathic conditions are lacking and research on this aspect would be valuable.

**Documentation and awareness of tendinopathy**

Although tendinopathy is well-recognised in the academic field as listed in the medical subject headings, only tendinitis and spontaneous tendon ruptures are stated within the current version of International Classification of Diseases (ICD) by the World Health Organization (WHO), but tendinosis and tendinopathy are absent.\textsuperscript{56} Tendinitis and tendinosis, continue to be mainstay diagnostic terms, but as tendinopathy has become the accepted term within the medical field, it should be similarly recognised by the public. Healthcare organisations, such as WHO and the Centre for Disease Control (CDC), and orthopaedic organisations, such as the Bone Joint Decade (BJD) and the Fracture Fragility Network (FFN), do not have definitions or information for the term “tendinopathy”. Evidence from our search has demonstrated that despite clinical diagnosis being the mainstay diagnostic technique, MRI and ultrasound are favourable, particularly for asymptomatic patients. Implementation of a standardised, radiological technique, would allow for the inclusion of symptomatic patients, asymptomatic patients, and patients with ruptures to be recognised under the definition of tendinopathy.

Failure to recognise and report an incident, and failure to seek medical attention, amongst other factors may lead to two thirds of tendinopathy cases going unreported, thus the proportion of individuals with tendinopathy may be higher than reported.\textsuperscript{59} Tendinopathy appears to be particularly prevalent in productive populations that actively contribute to societal development, such as athletes and workers. Despite these indications that tendinopathy may be highly prevalent in society, it remains an under-recognised disease.

Osteoarthritis and osteoporosis are well recognised and studied by researchers, WHO, CDC, and are also key topics in BJD and FFN. These diseases are particularly prevalent in the elderly, thus, their impact on productive demographics may be lower, when compared with tendinopathy.\textsuperscript{60–64} The National Coalition for Osteoporosis and Related Bone Diseases (with support from WHO) and The Arthritis Foundation (with support from CDC) have published action plans to address insufficiencies in tackling osteoporosis and osteoarthritis, respectively.\textsuperscript{52,63} The Australian government published their own action plan (similar to the aforementioned plans) to tackle osteoporosis, osteoarthritis, and rheumatoid arthritis.\textsuperscript{54} These action plans provide a framework to implement research, prevention, treatment, and education within the public. Internet resources are playing a greater role in how the public recognises diseases. Both CDC and WHO have published data on recognising symptoms, prevention, and treating both osteoarthritis and osteoporosis, targeted toward the general public for easy access to information. Our search results have demonstrated that tendinopathy is not well-documented in relation to other diseases; however, the awareness of risk-factors of osteoporosis and osteoarthritis are well-recognised, such as obesity and diabetes, allowing for better disease prevention. The International Osteoporosis Foundation and National Osteoporosis Foundation conducted a study to determine the global prevalence of osteoporosis, and the North Staffordshire Osteoarthritis Project conducted a census to determine the prevalence and impact of osteoarthritis.\textsuperscript{65,66} These studies demonstrate that greater awareness, leads to support by well-established organisations, and aid in determining disease prevalence and impact. Current healthcare registries are a useful tool in tracking and studying diseases, and this has helped study the prevalence of osteoporosis through hip fracture and osteoarthritis through total knee replacements.\textsuperscript{67} Thus, this implores the question as to why tendinopathy does not receive similar awareness and action, when the prevalence may be similar to osteoarthritis and osteoporosis.

Determining the true prevalence of tendinopathy is the first step in studying the impact that tendinopathy has on society, and for this, national health registries are a useful tool, with Sweden, Finland, and The Netherlands using their own registries to study the prevalence of tendon rupture.\textsuperscript{58–70} However, in order for national health registries to run effectively, they require standardised nomenclature and diagnostics. For example, the Swedish Hospital Discharge Registry utilises the ICD in their system, yet without the recognition of tendinopathy in the database, incidences are not recorded. There is currently no organisation specialising in raising awareness for tendinopathy. Through such an organisation of specialists in this field, we may present a greater front in establishing these
standardised definitions of tendinopathy, and having established this, it is necessary to approach international organisations such as WHO, CDC, BJD, and FFN, to gain recognition of the disease in professional fields, as well as have the term properly recognised by the ICD. Establishing these foundational aspects, tendinopathy may be better recognised by the public, patients may be encouraged to seek earlier medical attention, resources will be appropriately allocated to alleviate the burden of tendinopathy, and conclusive studies on the prevalence and socio-economic impact of tendinopathy can be implemented.

Conclusion

The definition of tendinopathy is variable, making proper documentation difficult. Tendinopathy should be defined using widely accepted criteria used by professionals, to include symptomatic, asymptomatic, and rupture patients. Our search results demonstrate that tendinopathy is prevalent in a variety of demographics, particularly in younger generations that are most active in society, yet the public awareness is low. By encouraging awareness in both the professional and public fields, we will enhance our understanding and make appropriate changes in how to tackle the disease.

These proposed changes will be slow, and require persistent effort from experts in the field of tendinopathy. Furthermore, the capacity to make such changes varies widely around the globe, in which some societies may not be able to implement the same systems or interventions as others. However, through these actions we may be able to enhance global awareness of the disease and relieve the burden tendinopathy currently places on society.

Conflicts of interest

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