

COHORT PROFILE

Cohort Profile: Research on Osteoarthritis/ Osteoporosis Against Disability study

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How did the study come about?

Since the proportion of the ageing population in Japan is increasing, a comprehensive and evidence-based strategy is urgently required for the prevention of musculoskeletal diseases, including osteoarthritis (OA) and osteoporosis (OP), both of which affect the activities of daily living (ADL) and quality of life (QOL) and increase morbidity and mortality.^{1–4} However, few prospective, longitudinal studies for the purpose of developing such a strategy have been conducted, and little information is available regarding the prevalence and incidence of musculoskeletal disorders, including OA and OP, as well as pain and disability in the Japanese population.^{5–10} It is difficult to design rational clinical and public health approaches for the diagnosis, evaluation and prevention of OA and OP without such epidemiological data.

The Research on Osteoarthritis/osteoporosis Against Disability (ROAD) study was established in 2005 by N.Y., T.A., H.O., S.M., H.K. and K.N. (principal investigators). The principal investigators are affiliated with the 22nd Century Medical and Research Center, University of Tokyo.

What does the ROAD study cover?

The ROAD study is a multi-centre prospective observational study that aims to elucidate the environmental and genetic background of bone and joint diseases (with OA and OP as the representative bone and joint diseases). It is designed to examine the extent to which risk factors for these diseases are related to

the clinical features of the diseases, laboratory and radiographic findings, bone mass, bone geometry, lifestyle, nutritional factors, anthropometric and neuromuscular measures and fall propensity. It also aims to determine how these diseases affect the ADL and QOL of Japanese men and women.

The study will provide the information required to develop clinical algorithms for the early identification of potential high-risk populations. It will also provide information required to develop policies for the detection and prevention of OA, OP and osteoporotic fractures. The immediate goal of this study is to establish a representative population of elderly people, principally for the study of bone and joint health. The establishment of this cohort will also facilitate the expansion of other studies in related areas of investigation. Moreover, the knowledge gained from the ROAD study will have major implications for understanding and managing several other common problems of ageing.

Who are in the sample?

The subjects were residents of any one of the three communities that have different characteristics: an urban region in Itabashi, Tokyo; a mountainous region in Hidakagawa, Wakayama; and a coastal region in Taiji, Wakayama (Figure 1). The inclusion criteria, apart from residence in the communities mentioned above, were the ability to (i) walk to the survey site, (ii) report data and (iii) understand and sign an informed consent form. The age of the participants recruited from the urban region was ≥ 60 years, and that of the participants from the other

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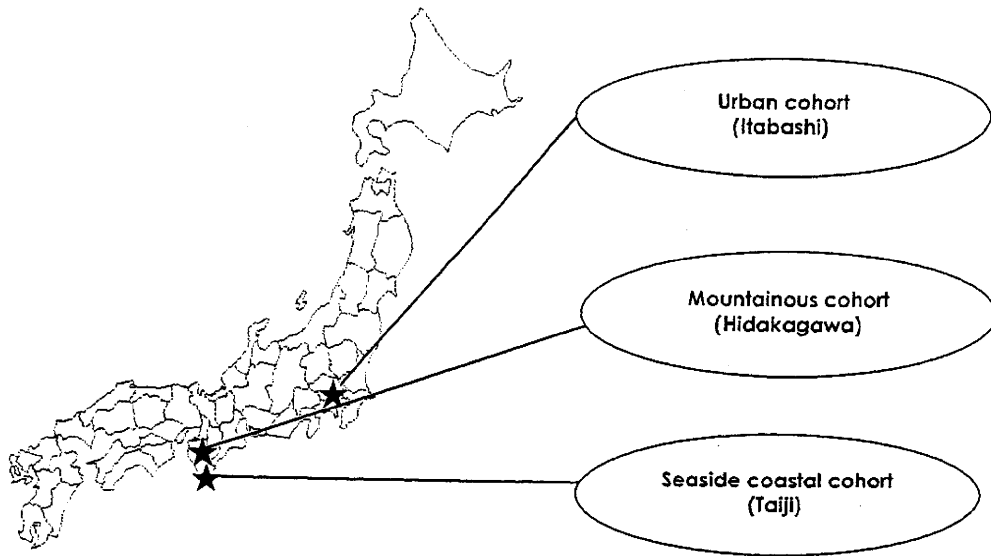


Figure 1 Locations of the three regions from which the study cohort was derived

Table 1 Age-sex distribution and mean values [standard deviation (SD)] of selected characteristics of the participants

Age strata (years)	Men				Women			
	Total	Urban	Mountainous	Coastal	Total	Urban	Mountainous	Coastal
≤39	14	0	2	12	31	0	7	24
40-49	44	0	7	37	105	0	17	88
50-59	107	0	36	71	211	2	67	142
60-69	168	11	93	64	385	60	183	142
70-79	535	315	150	70	913	594	196	123
≥80	193	139	31	23	334	229	75	30
Total	1061	465	319	277	1979	885	545	549
Age (years)	71.0 (10.7)	77.2 (4.3)	69.5 (9.1)	62.6 (13.2)	69.9 (11.2)	76.3 (5.0)	68.6 (10.4)	60.8 (12.5)
Height (cm)	162.5 (6.7)	161.3 (5.9)	161.4 (6.9)	165.8 (6.8)	149.8 (6.5)	148.5 (5.6)	148.2 (6.7)	153.2 (6.2)
Weight (kg)	61.3 (10.0)	60.0 (8.5)	60.0 (10.2)	64.8 (11.0)	51.5 (8.6)	50.8 (8.3)	50.5 (8.6)	53.5 (8.8)
BMI (kg/m ²)	23.1 (3.0)	23.0 (2.8)	23.0 (3.0)	23.5 (3.4)	22.9 (3.5)	23.0 (3.4)	23.0 (3.4)	22.8 (3.6)
Current smoker (%)	25.9	19.0	28.9	31.1	3.5	2.9	4.7	2.9
Current drinker (%)	64.4	60.5	69.8	63.2	25.9	27.4	26.1	24.2

BMI = body mass index.

two regions was ≥40 years. In the urban region, invitation letters were distributed only to the inhabitants whose name was on a list of community-dwelling people that was prepared in 2002.¹¹

Subjects from each area who were willing to attend the study were invited to participate. Despite being younger (58 years) than the age limit defined in the inclusion criteria, 2 inhabitants from the urban area, 9 from the mountainous area and 36 from the coastal area were included in the study because they were very keen to participate. Over the 1.5-year

period from October 2005 to March 2007, 3040 of 5785 candidates were enrolled from the three regions (participation rate, 52.5%).

Selected characteristics of the study population, including age, height, weight, BMI and proportions of participants who smoked and consumed alcohol, are shown in Table 1. In the urban, mountainous and coastal areas, 99.8, 84.3 and 54.7% of the participants, respectively, were >60 years of age. Two-thirds of the participants were women, and their mean age was 1 year less than that of the male

participants. No significant differences were observed in BMI values between the genders, but the proportions of both current smokers and alcohol consumers were significantly higher among men than among women.

All participants provided written informed consent, and the study was conducted with the approval of the ethics committees of the University of Tokyo (nos 1264 and 1326) and the Tokyo Metropolitan Institute of Gerontology (no. 5). Careful consideration was given to ensure a safe experience for the participants during the examination and during any other study procedures.

How often have they been followed up?

We intend to follow-up the three population-based cohorts of the ROAD study for at least 10 years. In October 2008, after a follow-up period of 3 years, a second comprehensive clinical examination

was started and is ongoing. We will repeat the baseline measurements during the second examination. A third and fourth examination will be performed at 6 and 10 years, respectively, after the baseline examination.

What has been measured?

The baseline examination of the ROAD study consisted of the following: interviewer-administered questionnaire, dietary assessment, anthropometric measurements, visual and neuromuscular function assessment, biochemical measurements, medical history taking, radiographic assessment and bone mineral density (BMD) measurement (Table 2).

Interviewer-administered questionnaire

A questionnaire was prepared by modifying the questionnaire used in the Osteoporotic Fractures in Men Study (MrOS),¹² and adding some new items to the modified questionnaire. Knee symptoms were

Table 2 Summary of data collected in the ROAD study

Interviewer-administrated questionnaire

Cigarette smoking, alcohol consumption
 Medical history, medications
 Reproductive variables, lactation
 Dietary history, history of falls and fractures
 Physical activity using PASE
 Family history
 Evaluation of knee symptoms using WOMAC
 Health-related QOL (EQ5D, SF-8)

Dietary assessment

Nutrient intake calculated using BDHQ

Anthropometric measurements

Height, weight, arm span, grip strengths
 Circumference of both wrists, circumference of waist
 Heart rate, systolic and diastolic blood pressure

Visual and neuromuscular function

Visual acuity
 Walking speed with tandem walking 6 m x 20 cm
 Rise from a chair

Biochemical measurements

Blood samples Blood counts, haemoglobin, haemoglobin A1C, blood sugar
 Sera Total protein, AST, ALT, GGT, total cholesterol, HDL-cholesterol, triglyceride
 BUN, uric acid, creatinine

DNA samples extracted

Urine samples Urinary protein, occult blood, sugar, urobilinogen

Medical information

Pain in back, lumbar, knee and hip
 Swelling and range of motion of the joints
 Tendon reflexes
 Cognitive function used by Mini-Mental Status Examination

Radiographic assessment

Anteroposterior and lateral views of lumbar spine
 Anteroposterior view of both knees
 Anteroposterior view of both hips

BMD measurements

Lumbar spine and proximal femur (mountainous and coastal areas)

AST=aspartate aminotransferase; ALT=alanine aminotransferase; GGT= γ -glutamyltranspeptidase; HDL=high-density lipoprotein; BUN=blood urea nitrogen; BDHQ=Brief Diet History Questionnaire; PASE=Physical Activity Scale for the Elderly; WOMAC=Western Ontario and McMaster University Osteoarthritis Index; EQ5D=European QOL-5 dimensions instrument; SF-8=Medical Outcomes Study 8-item Short Form.

evaluated using the WOMAC.¹³ The health-related QOL was evaluated using the EuroQOL, EQ5D¹⁴ and the SF-8.¹⁵ The study staff recorded all the medications administered and their doses. Physical activity was quantified using the PASE.¹⁶

Dietary assessment

Dietary assessment was made using a BDHQ, and the dietary intakes of nutrients during the previous month were determined. Each participant received a questionnaire that included detailed explanations. Well-trained interviewers clarified any unclear sections in the questionnaire, which was to be completed by the participants at their leisure. The BDHQ is a four-page structured questionnaire that includes questions about the frequency of consumption of 80 principal foods. The serving sizes of the foods are described as normal portions, i.e. the standard weight and volume of servings commonly consumed by the general Japanese population. The BDHQ was modified from a comprehensive, 16-page version of a validated self-administered diet history questionnaire.¹⁷ A total of 141 components, including dietary energy and nutrient intakes, were calculated using an *ad hoc* computer algorithm for the BDHQ.

Anthropometric measurements

Anthropometric factors were measured by well-trained medical nurses. The height and weight of the participants at age 25 years were also noted. BMI [weight in kilograms/(height in metres)²] was calculated on the basis of the current height and weight.

Visual and neuromuscular function

Visual acuity was assessed by the Landolt ring test. Walking speed was determined by recording the time taken by a subject to walk 6 m at the fastest possible speed. The time required for tandem walking across a 6-m long and 20-cm wide path was used to determine balance. The ability to rise from a chair without using the arms (chair stand) and the ability to perform five chair stands was evaluated; the time required to complete the tasks was noted.

Biochemical measurements

Blood and urine samples were obtained from each participant for biochemical and genomic examinations. Urinary protein, occult blood, sugar and urobilinogen were tested using disposable reagent strips (uro-hema-combi sticks; Siemens Medical Solutions Diagnostics, Tokyo, Japan). Residual blood, plasma, serum and urine specimens were processed and stored in a deep freezer (-80°C). DNA was extracted from stored whole-blood specimens, and biochemical markers of bone turnover and cartilage will be measured using these stored serum and urine samples.

Medical history

Medical history was obtained by experienced orthopaedic surgeons (S.M. and H.O.). To quantify cognitive function, the participants were instructed to complete the modified Mini-Mental Status Examination—Japanese version.¹⁸ Physicians explained any unclear sections of this questionnaire to the participants and assessed the participants' cognitive status on the basis of the completed questionnaire.

Radiographic assessment

The severity of OA was radiographically determined according to the Kellgren-Lawrence (KL) grading system as follows¹⁹: KL0—normal joint; KL1—slight osteophytes; KL2—definite osteophytes; KL3—disc-space narrowing and large osteophytes; and KL4—bone sclerosis, disc-space narrowing and large osteophytes. In the ROAD study, joints that exhibited only disc-space narrowing and no large osteophytes were graded as KL3. The radiographs were examined by a single, experienced orthopaedic surgeon (S.M.), who was blinded to the clinical status of the participants. If at least one knee joint was graded as KL2 or higher, the participant was diagnosed with radiographic knee OA. Similarly, if at least one intervertebral joint of the lumbar spine was graded as KL2 or higher, the participant was diagnosed with radiographic lumbar spondylosis.

BMD measurement

In the mountainous and coastal areas, the BMD of the lumbar spine and proximal femur was measured using dual energy X-ray absorptiometry (DXA) (Hologic Discovery; Hologic, Waltham, MA, USA) during the baseline examination. Another BMD measurement was scheduled for the second examination.

To maintain the quality of measurement, the same DXA equipment was used, and the same spine phantom was scanned daily to monitor the machine's performance in study populations from different regions. The BMD of the phantom was adjusted to $1.032 \pm 0.016 \text{ g/cm}^2$ ($\pm 1.5\%$) during all examinations. In addition, to exclude inter-observer variability, the same physician (N.Y.) examined all participants. In another study, N.Y. had measured the intra-observer variability in both *in vitro* and *in vivo* experiments using Lunar DPX.²⁰ In the case of the *in vitro* experiment, the coefficient of variance (CV) for the BMD of the L2-L4 vertebrae was 0.35%. In the case of the *in vivo* experiments, which were performed on five male volunteers, the CVs for the BMDs of the L2-L4 vertebrae, the proximal femur, Ward's triangle and the trochanter were 0.61-0.90, 1.02-2.57, 1.97-5.45 and 1.77-4.17%, respectively.

OP was defined on the basis of the World Health Organization (WHO) criteria; specifically, it was diagnosed when the BMD T-scores were lower than the mean lumbar peak bone mass minus 2.5 SDs.²¹

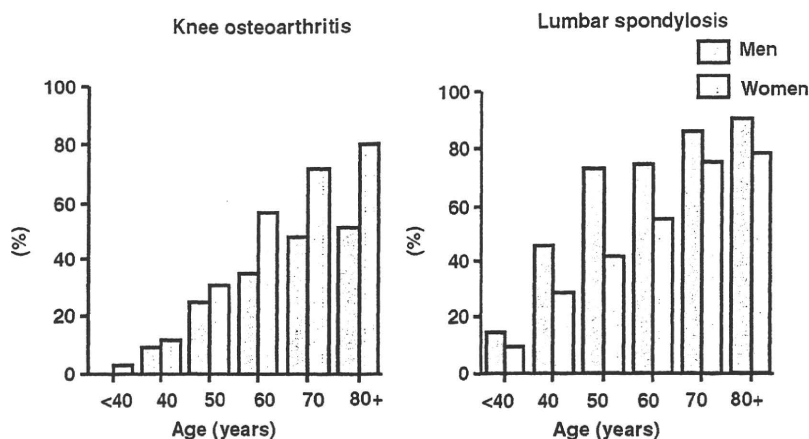


Figure 2 Prevalence of radiographic knee osteoarthritis and lumbar spondylosis, classified by age and gender

In Japan, the mean BMD of the L2–L4 vertebrae among both young male and female adults has been measured using Hologic DXA.²² These indices were used in the present study; lumbar spine BMD $<0.714\text{ g/cm}^2$ (in case of both men and women), and femoral neck BMD $<0.546\text{ g/cm}^2$ (men) or 0.515 g/cm^2 (women) were considered to indicate OP.

All assessments performed in the baseline study will be repeated at the first, second and third follow-ups.

What is attrition like?

The first follow-up (second examination) commenced on October 2008, 3 years from baseline assessment. By the end of 2008, follow-up was completed in Hidakagawa, the mountainous region. Of the 864 participants (319 men and 545 women) in the baseline study, 635 subjects (224 men and 411 women) attended the second examination. The response rate for the second examination in the mountainous area was 73.5%. The most common reasons for non-participation were illness and difficulty in visiting the clinic (43% of the dropouts). Further, 26 people (12% of the dropouts) who participated in the baseline study died during the 3-year period following the initial assessment. In other two areas, the follow-ups are on going. The total attrition will be determined at the end of March 2010.

What has the ROAD study found?

By analysing the data from the baseline study, we have determined the prevalence of OA and OP.

OA

The age–sex distribution of radiographic knee OA and lumbar spondylosis was calculated (Figure 2); both conditions were diagnosed at KL grades of ≥ 2 .

In the overall population, the prevalence of radiographic knee OA and lumbar spondylosis was 54.6% (42.0% in men and 61.5% in women) and 70.2% (80.6% in men and 64.6% in women), respectively. Thus, both the overall and sex-specific prevalence of lumbar spondylosis were higher than those of knee OA.²³

OP

The prevalence of OP was calculated for the participants from mountainous and coastal regions in the ROAD study (Figure 3). The prevalence of OP of the lumbar spine and femoral neck in women was 6- and 5-fold, respectively, than in men. The differences were significant ($P < 0.001$).²³

What are the main strengths and weaknesses of the ROAD study?

Strengths

In Japan, little epidemiological information is available of musculoskeletal diseases such as OA and OP. The ROAD study is the first large population-based prospective study conducted on the Japanese population and is designed to supply essential information, chiefly of OA and OP.

We confirmed the high prevalence of OA and OP among the ROAD study participants, and we will conduct follow-up examinations for at least 10 years in order to clarify the relationships of OA, OP and osteoporotic fractures with the following parameters: lifestyle, anthropometric and neuromuscular measurements, bone mass, bone geometry and fall propensity. Further, we will determine how these impairments affect QOL and mortality. We also expect to assess the similarities and differences in the risk factors of OA and OP. In addition, we will clarify the incident morbidity of other lifestyle-related disorders,

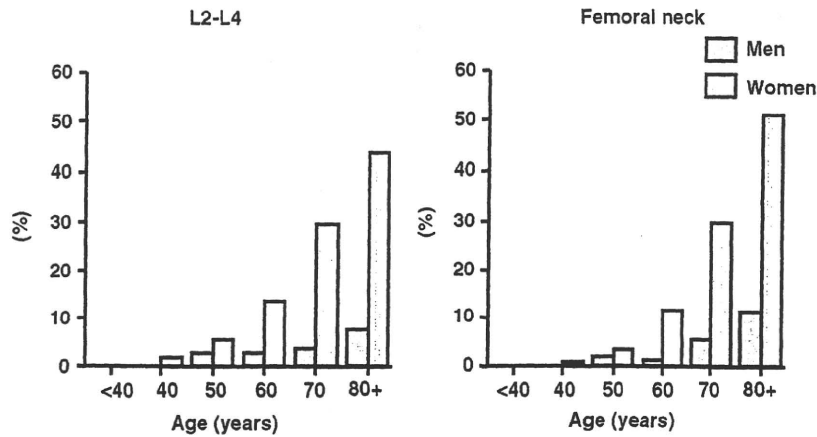


Figure 3 Prevalence of osteoporosis of the lumbar spine and femoral neck

such as obesity, hypertension, diabetes mellitus, cardiovascular and metabolic diseases and dementia.

The ROAD study data will facilitate the development of clinical guidelines for the detection and prevention of osteoporotic fractures in other countries. This study was designed such that it would be similar to the Study of Osteoporotic Fractures, a large observational study on the determinants of fractures in older women,²⁴ and to MrOS, a large observational study on the determinants of fractures in older men²⁵ in the USA.

Finally, the completion of the ROAD study will provide unique opportunities for the study of other conditions that are common among older men and women, such as obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cognitive disorders and frailty. The blood, plasma, serum and urine specimens stored during the ROAD study will enable the clarification of a variety of new biochemical and genetic factors associated with musculoskeletal disorders and the aforementioned diseases.

Weaknesses

Although the ROAD study includes a large number of subjects (more than 3000), these subjects are voluntary participants and have been recruited from only three areas; hence, they do not truly represent the general population. The 'healthy' and 'regional' selection biases should be confirmed.²⁶ We could not directly compare the baseline characteristics between the responders and non-responders owing to lack of data regarding the non-responders. Hence, to determine whether a selection bias existed in the ROAD study, we compared the anthropometric measurements and frequencies of smoking and alcohol drinking between the participants and the general Japanese population. The values for the general population were obtained from the 2005 National Health and Nutrition Survey conducted by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, Japan, which is an annual survey to clarify the health status of the Japanese population and is

conducted on approximately 18 000 inhabitants from 6000 randomly selected families.²⁷

The BMIs of ROAD study participants and the Japanese population were compared (Table 3). No significant differences were identified, except that the male participants aged 70–74 years were significantly smaller in build than men of this age group in the overall Japanese population ($P < 0.05$).

The proportion of current smokers and current drinkers (those who regularly smoked or drank more than once a month) in the general Japanese population was compared with that in the study population (Figure 4). Both proportions were significantly higher in the general Japanese population than in the study population (smokers: men, $P < 0.001$ and women, $P < 0.001$; drinkers: men, $P < 0.01$ and women, $P < 0.001$), suggesting that participants of the ROAD study had healthier lifestyles than the general Japanese population. This bias due to the selection of 'healthy' individuals should be taken into consideration while generalizing the results of the ROAD study.

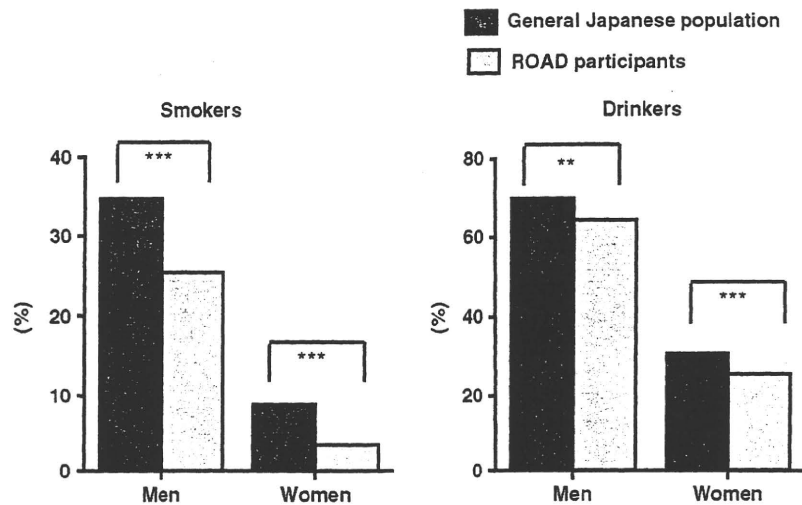
Further, BMD was measured only in the participants from the mountainous and coastal areas. The total number of participants from these two areas (1690) may be large enough to accurately estimate the incidence and evaluate risk factors. Nevertheless, regional bias should be taken into account while generalizing the results.

Can I get hold of the data? Where can I find out more?

The ROAD study group welcomes specific and detailed proposals for new collaborations. Initial enquiries should be addressed to N.Y. Some information about the ROAD study is available on the website of the Department of Joint Disease Research, 22nd Century Medical and Research Centre,

Table 3 Comparison of BMI (SD) (kg/m²) of the participants with general Japanese population

Age strata (years)	Men		Women	
	ROAD	Japanese	ROAD	Japanese
40–49	24.5 (4.4)	24.0 (3.3)	21.9 (4.1)	22.4 (3.5)
50–59	23.6 (2.9)	23.7 (3.1)	23.0 (3.3)	23.1 (3.4)
60–69	23.8 (3.2)	23.8 (2.9)	23.3 (3.2)	23.5 (3.7)
70–74	23.1 (2.8)	23.7 (3.2)	23.4 (3.5)	23.2 (3.4)
75–79	22.8(2.9)	23.3 (3.0)	23.0 (3.7)	23.4 (3.5)
≥80	22.6 (2.9)	22.3 (2.6)	22.2 (3.2)	22.5 (4.0)

**Figure 4** Comparison of the proportion of current smokers and drinkers between the participants of the ROAD study and the general Japanese population. ** $P < 0.01$, *** $P < 0.001$

University of Tokyo Hospital (<http://www.h.u-tokyo.ac.jp/center22/kansetu.html>).

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Conflict of interest: None declared.

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Impact of knee and low back pain on health-related quality of life in Japanese women: the Research on Osteoarthritis Against Disability (ROAD)

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Abstract Although knee and low back pain are major public health issues, little information is available on their impact on the quality of life (QOL). We have investigated the impact of knee and low back pain on the QOL in Japanese women by assessing the associations between knee pain and low back pain and various QOL domains using measures such as the Medical Outcomes Study Short Form-8, EuroQOL, and the Western Ontario and McMaster Universities Osteoarthritis Index. From the 3,040 Japanese women participating in the Research on Osteoarthritis Against Disability (ROAD) study, we analyzed data on 1,369 women >40 years old (mean age 68.4 years). We further examined the associations of Kellgren–Lawrence (KL) grade at the knee and lumbar spine and the presence of vertebral fracture (VFX) with the magnitude of QOL loss

in women with knee pain and low back pain, respectively. Knee pain and low back pain were found to be significantly associated with lower QOL scores among the women comprising the study cohort. In women with knee pain KL = 4, knee osteoarthritis was strongly associated with the magnitude of QOL loss. For women with low back pain, no significant associations were found between KL grade and magnitude of QOL loss, while there was a moderate association between the latter and VFX.

Keywords Epidemiology · Knee · Pain · Osteoarthritis · Quality of life

Introduction

Knee pain and low back pain are major public health issues and important causes of physical impairment among the elderly populations of most developed countries [1–3]. The prevalence of knee pain and low back pain is quite high among elderly women in Japan [1, 3]. However, although it is important to determine the impact of knee pain and low back pain on the quality of life (QOL), few studies have assessed the association between knee pain and QOL [4]. Several studies have focused on the association between low back pain and QOL in Caucasian populations [5–8], but the results of a subsequent population survey suggested that disease patterns differ according to ethnicity [9]. Therefore, clarification of the impact of knee pain and low back pain on the QOL of the Japanese elderly would be of interest. Furthermore, although the association of knee pain and low back pain with QOL may not be independent, to date, no population-based studies have examined the impact of knee pain and low back pain on QOL in the same population using the same QOL assessment tools.

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A significant causal factor of knee pain is knee osteoarthritis (OA) [10, 11], and the prevalence of knee pain also increases with increasing severity of knee OA [3]. The impact of knee pain on QOL may thus differ according to the severity of knee OA, but there is a lack of population-based studies on possible associations between knee pain and QOL according to the severity of knee OA. Among the elderly, one of the main causes of low back pain is vertebral fracture (VFX), leading to impaired physical functioning, immobility, loss of self-esteem, and depression [12]. Low back pain is also believed to be a principal clinical symptom of lumbar spondylosis, but there has as yet been no population-based studies that have examined the associations between low back pain and QOL according to the presence of VFX or lumbar spondylosis.

Gender differences have also been observed in knee pain and low back pain, with the prevalence of both conditions being higher in women than in men [1, 3]. The associations of these kinds of pain with lumbar spondylosis and knee OA also differ between genders [1, 3]. Consequently, the impact of these diseases on QOL may also differ between genders. Although a number of studies have examined the association of knee pain [4] or low back pain [5–8] with QOL, men and women were not assessed separately in most of these studies [4–6], and only two large-scale population-based studies have examined these kinds of pain specifically in women [7, 8].

In the study reported here, we first investigated the impact of knee pain and low back pain on QOL among 1,369 women who were participating in the Research on Osteoarthritis Against Disability (ROAD) study, a nationwide prospective study on bone and joint diseases involving population-based cohorts from several communities in Japan. Secondly, we investigated the impact of pain on QOL in women according to the presence and severity of various diseases, such as VFX, lumbar spondylosis, and knee OA.

Materials and methods

Materials

Recruitment for the ROAD study has been described in detail elsewhere [13, 14]. To date, we have completed the creation of a baseline database that includes clinical and genetic information on 3,040 Japanese inhabitants (1,061 men, 1,979 women) in the age range of 23–95 years (mean 70.6 years), who were recruited from listings of resident registration in three communities. All participants provided written informed consent, and the study was conducted with the approval of the ethics committees of the University of Tokyo and the Tokyo Metropolitan Institute of

Gerontology. Participants completed an interviewer-administered questionnaire consisting of 400 items, which included questions on lifestyle, such as smoking habits, alcohol consumption, family history, past history, physical activity, reproductive variables, and health-related QOL. Anthropometric measurements included height, weight, bilateral grip strength, and body mass index (BMI), which was calculated as weight in kilograms divided by the square of height in meters. All subjects were interviewed by well-experienced orthopedists on aspects related to knee pain and low back pain, who asked, “In the past month, have you experienced knee pain on most days?” and “In the past month, have you experienced low back pain on most days?”, respectively. Those respondents who answered “yes” were defined as having pain. From the baseline data compiled on all ROAD participants, we extracted data on 1,369 Japanese women ≥ 40 years old who had completed the questionnaire comprising the Medical Outcomes Study Short Form-8 (SF-8) health survey [15], the EuroQOL (EQ-5D) [16], and the Western Ontario and McMaster Universities Osteoarthritis Index (WOMAC) [17, 18].

Radiographic assessment

All participants underwent radiographic examination of both knees, both anteroposterior and lateral views, with weight-bearing and foot-map positioning, and of the lumbar spine, including intervertebral levels from L1/2 to L5/S, both anteroposterior and lateral views. Knee and lumbar spine radiographs by a single well-experienced orthopedist (S.M.) blinded to the participant’s clinical status. VFX was assessed by lateral radiography of the lumbar spine (L1–L5) using a semiquantitative method [19]. Lumbar spondylosis and knee OA were assessed using the Kellgren–Lawrence (KL) radiographic atlas, and severity was determined by KL grading [20] (Fig. 1). For this study, we defined lumbar spondylosis and knee OA as $KL \geq 2$ in at least one knee and one intervertebral level, respectively.

Assessment instruments

To carry out the QOL assessment, we used the SF-8, a new generic eight-item assessment that generates a health profile consisting of eight scales and two summary measures describing health-related QOL. The SF-8 is an alternate form to the SF-36 health survey (SF-36) [21], which is worldwide the most intensively used patient-based health status survey. The SF-8 uses one question to measure each of the eight SF-36 domains. Japanese versions of the SF-8 have been well-validated [15]. In the SF-8, each of the eight items assesses a different dimension of health: general health (GH); physical functioning (PF); role physical

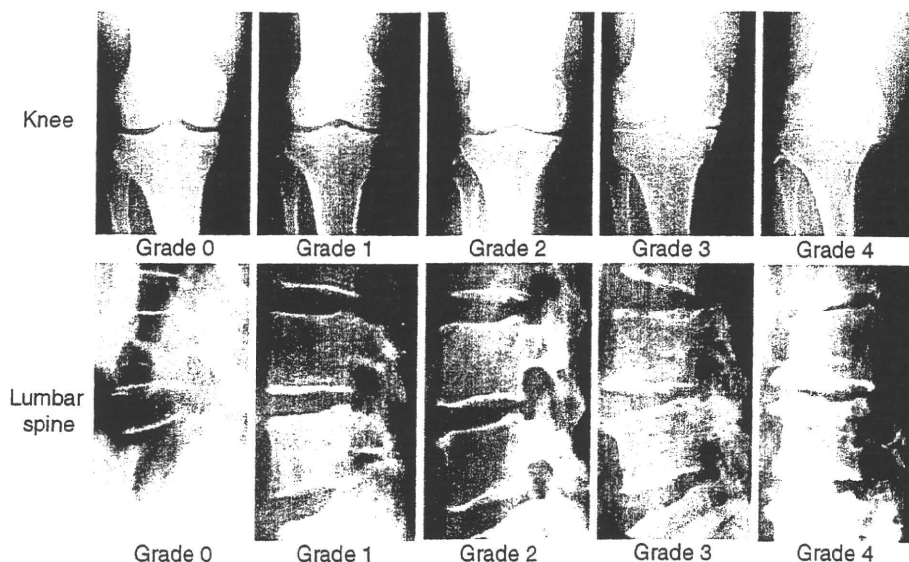


Fig. 1 Kellgren–Lawrence (KL) grade at knee and lumbar spine. *Knee: Grade 1* Doubtful narrowing of the joint space and possible osteophytic lipping, *Grade 2* definite osteophytes and possible narrowing of the joint space, *Grade 3* multiple moderate osteophytes, definite narrowing of the joint space, some sclerosis, and possible deformity of bone ends, *Grade 4* large osteophytes, marked narrowing of the joint space, severe sclerosis, and definite deformity of bone

ends. *Lumbar spine: Grade 1* Minimal osteophytosis only, *Grade 2* definite osteophytosis with some sclerosis of the anterior part of the vertebral plates, *Grade 3* marked osteophytosis and sclerosis of the vertebral plates with slight narrowing of the disk space, *Grade 4* large osteophytes, marked sclerosis of the vertebral plates, and marked narrowing of the disk space

(RP); bodily pain (BP); vitality (VT); social functioning (SF); mental health (MH); role emotional (RE). The SF-8 provides two summary scores for physical and mental health [physical component summary (PCS) and mental component summary (MCS)]. The EQ-5D questionnaire [16] translated into Japanese was also used [22]. This five-dimensional healthcare classification includes questions on the status of morbidity, self-care, usual activities, pain/discomfort, and anxiety/depression. Participants were asked to indicate current health status by checking off the most appropriate of three statements on each of five QOL dimensions. Each statement represents an increasing degree of severity. These results were coded and converted to a score of utility using the tables of values. For disease-specific scales, the WOMAC (version LK 3.0) [17, 18], a 24-item OA-specific index, was utilized. The WOMAC consists of three domains: pain; stiffness; physical function. Domain scores range from 0 to 20 for pain, 0 to 8 for stiffness, and 0 to 68 for physical function. Japanese versions of the WOMAC have been validated [23].

Statistical analysis

We performed a non-paired Student's *t* test to examine differences between subjects with and without knee pain and low back pain. The impact of knee pain and low back pain on QOL was analyzed by multiple regression analysis

after adjusting for age and BMI. We also examined the association of KL grade at the knee with the magnitude of QOL loss in subjects with knee pain using the Tukey honestly significant difference (HSD) test. If a subject showed pain in both knees, the more severe KL grade was designated as that of the subject. The Tukey HSD test was also used to examine the association of the presence of VFX and lumbar spondylosis with the magnitude of QOL loss in subjects with low back pain. For the lumbar spine, the most severe KL grade among all intervertebral spaces was designated as that of the subject. Data analyses were performed using SAS ver. 9.0 software (SAS Institute, Cary, NC).

Results

Characteristics of the 1,369 women ≥ 40 years old enrolled in the ROAD study are shown in Table 1. The prevalence of knee pain was higher than that of low back pain, while the prevalence of knee OA and lumbar spondylosis was similar and substantially higher than that of VFX.

Table 2 shows the mean scores for all QOL domains in the SF-8 and EQ-5D utility score according to the presence of knee pain and low back pain. We further examined the independent association of knee pain and low back pain with QOL using multiple regression analysis after

Table 1 Characteristics of the participants

Clinical/demographic/QOL characteristics of study cohort	Values
<i>n</i>	1,369
Age (years)	68.4 ± 11.1
Height (cm)	150.0 ± 6.9
Weight (kg)	51.4 ± 9.0
BMI (kg/m ²)	22.8 ± 3.7
Knee pain (%)	27.9
Low back pain (%)	17.3
VFx (%)	7.7
Knee OA (%)	60.2
Lumbar spondylosis (%)	61.3
SF-8 score	
GH	49.5 ± 5.8
PF	49.5 ± 6.3
RP	49.8 ± 6.5
BP	49.1 ± 9.6
VT	49.3 ± 5.9
SF	51.9 ± 6.2
MH	53.3 ± 6.4
RE	51.4 ± 5.7
PCS	46.8 ± 7.0
MCS	52.5 ± 6.1
EQ-5D score	0.90 ± 0.15
WOMAC index	
Pain (0–20)	1.50 ± 2.57
Stiffness (0–8)	0.77 ± 1.33
Function (0–68)	4.49 ± 8.37

Unless indicated otherwise, values represent the mean ± standard deviation (SD)

QOL Quality of life, *BMI* body mass index, *VFx* vertebral fracture, *OA* osteoarthritis, *SF-8* Medical Outcomes Study Short Form-8 health survey, *GH* general health, *PF* physical function, *RP* role physical, *BP* bodily pain, *VT* vitality, *SF* social function, *MH* mental health, *RE* role emotional, *PCS* physical component summary, *MCS* mental component summary, *EQ-5D* EuroQOL questionnaire, *WOMAC* the Western Ontario and McMaster Universities Osteoarthritis Index

adjustment for age and BMI. Knee pain was significantly associated with lower QOL scores in all domains of the SF-8, with the exception of MH, RE, MCS, and also with lower EQ-5D utility scores. Low back pain was significantly associated with lower QOL scores in almost all domains of the SF-8, except for MCS, and with lower EQ-5D utility scores. The impact of low back pain was greater than that of knee pain in almost all QOL domains.

Scores of the SF-8, EQ-5D, and WOMAC by KL grade of knee in women with knee pain are shown in Table 3. The Tukey HSD test revealed that compared with women with KL = 0/1, PCS in the SF-8 and pain in the WOMAC

were significantly lower in women with KL = 3 knee OA, while PF, RP, BP, and PCS in the SF-8 and all domains of the WOMAC were significantly lower in women with KL = 4 knee OA. After adjusting for age and BMI, PCS in the SF-8 and pain and physical function in the WOMAC were also significantly lower in women with KL = 4 knee OA compared with those with KL = 0/1.

Table 4 shows the association of KL grade for the lumbar spine and presence of VFx with QOL in subjects with low back pain. In women with low back pain, no associations were seen between KL grade and any of the domains of the SF-8 or EQ-5D utility scores, while PF, RP, RE, and PCS were significantly lower in subjects with VFx than in those without VFx.

To compare the magnitude of impact on PCS between knee pain graded as KL = 4 knee OA and low back pain with vertebral fracture, we then used multiple regression analysis after adjusting for age and BMI. The impact of knee pain graded as KL = 4 knee OA on PCS was larger than that of low back pain with VFx (beta: −0.11 and −0.09, *p* < 0.0001, respectively).

Discussion

Few previous studies have examined the associations of knee pain with QOL [4], and there have been no studies published to date on the impact of knee pain and low back pain on QOL in women. The results of our study reveal that among our study cohort of 1,369 Japanese women ≥40 years of age, knee pain and low back pain were significantly associated with lower QOL scores. The multiple regression analysis showed that the impact of knee pain on QOL was weaker than that of low back pain; however, knee pain with severe knee OA had a strong, negative impact on QOL that was greater than that of low back pain with VFx. In fact, the severity of knee OA was significantly associated with the magnitude of QOL loss in subjects with knee pain. In other words, the Tukey HSD test after adjustment for age and BMI showed that in subjects with KL = 4 knee OA, PCS in the SF-8 was significantly lower and pain and physical function in the WOMAC were both significantly higher, while QOL scores of subjects with KL = 2 knee OA were similar to those of subjects with KL = 0/1. These results indicate not only that the prevalence of knee pain is higher but also that the magnitude of knee pain may be more severe in subjects with severe knee OA, whereas the magnitude of knee pain may be similar in subjects with moderate knee OA and in those without knee OA. However, the two features of knee OA, joint space narrowing and osteophytosis, cannot be assessed separately using the KL grade, so we were unable to clarify the independent effects of these two features to the association

Table 2 Scores for QOL in participants with and without knee pain and low back pain and associations with knee and low back pain by multiple regression analysis after adjusting for age, BMI, knee pain, and low back pain

QOL assessment domain	Knee pain			Low back pain		
	No	Yes	Adjusted beta ^a	No	Yes	Adjusted beta ^a
SF-8						
GH	49.9 ± 5.8	48.8 ± 5.8 ^b	-0.043 ^c	50.1 ± 5.7	47.1 ± 5.5 ^b	-0.152 ^c
PF	50.1 ± 6.0	47.9 ± 6.8 ^b	-0.064 ^c	50.2 ± 5.9	46.0 ± 6.9 ^b	-0.180 ^c
RP	50.4 ± 6.3	48.4 ± 6.9 ^b	-0.058 ^c	50.6 ± 6.1	47.3 ± 7.5 ^b	-0.182 ^c
BP	50.4 ± 9.4	45.6 ± 9.2 ^b	-0.163 ^c	50.3 ± 9.5	43.3 ± 7.7 ^b	-0.223 ^c
VT	49.7 ± 5.9	48.4 ± 5.8 ^b	-0.059 ^c	49.7 ± 5.9	47.2 ± 5.0 ^b	-0.134 ^c
SF	52.4 ± 5.6	50.8 ± 7.3	-0.077 ^c	52.4 ± 5.7	49.8 ± 8.0 ^b	-0.111 ^c
MH	53.6 ± 6.1	52.7 ± 6.8	-0.039	53.7 ± 6.2	51.4 ± 6.9 ^b	-0.128 ^c
RE	51.8 ± 5.4	50.8 ± 6.4	-0.038	51.9 ± 5.3	49.4 ± 7.1 ^b	-0.131 ^c
PCS	47.7 ± 6.9	44.5 ± 7.0 ^b	-0.113 ^c	47.8 ± 6.7	42.4 ± 7.0 ^b	-0.218 ^c
MCS	52.6 ± 5.9	52.6 ± 6.7	-0.004	52.7 ± 5.9	51.9 ± 7.3	-0.0052
EQ-5D	0.92 ± 0.14	0.85 ± 0.17 ^b	-0.127 ^c	0.91 ± 0.14	0.82 ± 0.17 ^b	-0.150 ^c

^a Adjusted beta values are shown using multiple regression analysis after adjusting for age, BMI, knee pain and low back pain

^b $p < 0.05$ vs. subjects without the corresponding pain by non-paired t test

^c $p < 0.05$

Table 3 Scores for SF-8, EQ-5D, and WOMAC by Kellgren–Lawrence (KL) grade in participants with knee pain

Variables	KL 0/1	KL 2	KL 3	KL 4
Prevalence (%)	26.8	37.5	22.8	12.9
SF-8				
GH	49.3 ± 5.9	49.1 ± 5.7	48.5 ± 6.3	47.2 ± 5.3
PF	49.3 ± 6.8	48.3 ± 6.1	47.2 ± 7.6	45.0 ± 6.3 ^a
RP	49.8 ± 6.4	48.4 ± 6.4	48.1 ± 7.8	46.1 ± 7.3 ^a
BP	46.7 ± 8.9	46.9 ± 9.2	44.2 ± 9.2	42.0 ± 8.7 ^a
VT	49.2 ± 6.0	49.0 ± 5.5	47.2 ± 6.2	46.8 ± 4.9
SF	51.6 ± 6.8	50.4 ± 7.2	50.5 ± 8.0	50.8 ± 7.3
MH	52.6 ± 7.6	52.5 ± 6.5	52.8 ± 6.8	53.6 ± 6.2
RE	51.4 ± 6.5	50.6 ± 5.9	50.6 ± 7.0	50.3 ± 6.7
PCS	46.1 ± 6.5	45.4 ± 6.4	43.5 ± 7.9 ^a	40.6 ± 6.1 ^{a,b}
MCS	52.5 ± 7.2	52.0 ± 6.1	52.7 ± 7.2	54.2 ± 6.3
EQ-5D	0.89 ± 0.15	0.84 ± 0.19	0.84 ± 0.16	0.81 ± 0.18 ^a
WOMAC				
Pain	1.67 ± 2.72	2.33 ± 2.99	2.80 ± 2.76 ^a	4.38 ± 3.29 ^{a,b}
Stiffness	0.96 ± 1.59	1.14 ± 1.61	1.34 ± 1.50	1.88 ± 2.20 ^a
Function	4.58 ± 9.38	6.95 ± 9.80	8.05 ± 9.56	14.94 ± 12.46 ^{a,b}

Except where indicated otherwise, values represent the mean ± SD

^a $p < 0.05$ vs. KL 0/1 in the corresponding group by the Tukey HSD test

^b $p < 0.05$ vs. KL 0/1 in the corresponding group by the Tukey HSD test after adjustment for age and BMI

of knee pain with QOL. Furthermore, radiographic joint space narrowing represents not only joint cartilage destruction but also meniscal loss or extrusion. In addition, knee pain may arise from a variety of structures other than joint cartilage, including menisci, synovium, ligaments, bursae, bone, and bone marrow [24–28]. Comprehensive

mechanistic studies of knee pain taking various tissues in and around the knee joint into consideration are thus needed to elucidate the relationships between radiographic OA and QOL.

The results of our previous study showed that lumbar spondylosis is weakly associated with low back pain. In the

Table 4 Scores for SF-8 and EQ-5D by KL grade and VFx in subjects with low back pain

Variables	Lumbar spondylosis				VFx	
	KL 0/1	KL 2	KL 3	KL 4	No	Yes
Prevalence (%)	28.3	12.9	26.6	32.2	10.7	89.3
SF-8						
GH	48.1 ± 5.6	47.1 ± 5.7	46.4 ± 5.7	46.9 ± 5.1	47.2 ± 5.5	46.1 ± 5.4
PF	46.8 ± 7.4	45.9 ± 6.7	44.7 ± 6.7	46.3 ± 6.6	46.2 ± 6.9	43.9 ± 6.3 ^a
RP	47.2 ± 7.4	47.1 ± 6.9	44.7 ± 8.2	46.7 ± 7.2	46.7 ± 7.4	43.4 ± 7.6 ^a
BP	43.8 ± 8.0	44.1 ± 8.3	43.4 ± 7.9	42.6 ± 7.2	43.6 ± 7.7	41.1 ± 7.4
VT	48.3 ± 5.3	45.6 ± 6.7	47.3 ± 5.5	46.9 ± 5.0	47.3 ± 5.6	46.3 ± 3.9
SF	51.4 ± 6.6	50.8 ± 6.5	47.8 ± 9.8	49.7 ± 7.9	50.0 ± 7.9	48.3 ± 8.7
MH	52.8 ± 6.0	52.0 ± 7.4	50.0 ± 7.5	51.2 ± 6.8	51.5 ± 6.9	49.8 ± 7.0
RE	50.7 ± 5.9	51.2 ± 5.2	47.8 ± 8.8	49.0 ± 6.7	49.7 ± 7.0	46.9 ± 7.1 ^a
PCS	42.9 ± 7.7	42.3 ± 7.2	41.8 ± 7.0	42.4 ± 6.3	42.6 ± 7.0	40.2 ± 6.2 ^a
MCS	53.5 ± 6.0	52.8 ± 6.7	50.3 ± 8.6	51.5 ± 7.1	52.0 ± 7.3	50.6 ± 6.8
EQ-5D	0.86 ± 0.15	0.87 ± 0.18	0.77 ± 0.18 ^a	0.81 ± 0.17	0.83 ± 0.17	0.80 ± 0.21

Except where indicated otherwise, values represent the mean score ± SD

^a $p < 0.05$ vs. KL 0/1 in the corresponding group by the Tukey HSD test

present study, we found that low back pain was strongly associated with lower QOL scores, while the severity of lumbar spondylosis was not significantly associated with the magnitude of QOL loss in women with low back pain. These results may be partly explained by the weak association between lumbar spondylosis and low back pain, as reported by us and other researchers [1, 29, 30]. KL grade encompasses assessments of both osteophytosis and disk space narrowing, but not of narrowing of the spinal canal, spondylolisthesis, or scoliosis, all of which are associated with low back pain. In addition, low back pain arises from a number of disorders other than disc space narrowing, such as nociceptive stimuli, inflammation, muscle weakness, and abnormal load on muscles, ligaments, or capsular tissues [31]. Indeed, disc degeneration was detected by magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) at at least one lumbar level in all but one asymptomatic volunteer in a 60- to 80-year-old age group [32]. Pain is also influenced by psychological status, such as depression, since significant associations between low back pain and depression have been confirmed in many longitudinal studies [33, 34]. In terms of VFx, previous studies have shown strong effects of clinical VFx on QOL in clinical studies [35, 36], and associations of subclinical vertebral deformity with QOL were found in women in a population-based study [37]. The results of our also show that VFx was significantly associated with the magnitude of QOL loss as measured by the PF, RP, RE, and PCS of the SF-8 in subjects with low back pain, indicating that low back pain with VFx has a strong impact on QOL in women.

Knee pain and low back pain were not significantly associated with lower scores for the MCS of the SF-8 in

this study. MCS questions within the SF-8 include generic questions on energy levels, feelings of being “downhearted and blue”, and interference with daily activities as a result of emotional problems. As such, this summary score is less sensitive to the presence of mental health issues than disease-specific scales such as the Kessler psychological distress scale [38]. In fact, although in one study psychological distress was significantly more frequent in individuals with pain than in those without [39], the MCS score did not differ significantly between these two groups [40]. Whether the MCS is not associated with knee pain and low back pain is thus unclear. A further complication is that previous research has shown that chronic pain patients who accept their diagnosis display lower levels of pain and affective distress than those who are uncertain [41, 42], which may be one reason why in our study MCS was not associated with pain. The ROAD study is a longitudinal survey, and analysis of its data over time may elucidate the association of QOL measured by MCS and pain.

This study has several limitations. First, it was a large-scaled population-based study, but the baseline data were cross-sectional, so causal relationships could not be determined. The ROAD study is a longitudinal survey that will eventually shed light on the causal relationships. Second, we only used a semi-quantitative method to assess VFx. In addition, the KL system was used for knee OA and lumbar spondylosis. The KL system is the most conventional grading system to detect the radiographic severity of knee OA, but joint space narrowing and osteophyte formation cannot be assessed separately in this categorical system. In addition, since the KL system emphasizes osteophytosis, the handling of data on lumbar spondylosis

with disc space narrowing but no osteophytosis is unclear. In addition, in terms of the lumbar spine, we did not include lumbar spinal canal stenosis (LSCS), scoliosis, spondylolisthesis, or narrowing of the nerve canal in our analysis, although these changes are also associated with QOL. To determine the associations of these changes of the lumbar spine and knee with QOL, we are currently developing a computer-aided diagnostic program to enable automatic measurement of the major features of VFx, disc space narrowing, osteophytosis, LSCS, scoliosis, spondylolisthesis, and narrowing of the nerve canal in the lumbar spine, and of joint space narrowing and osteophytosis at the knee on plain radiographs [43]. Third, we did not include the onset of VFx in the analysis, although the severity of low back pain often appears to be associated with the interval from the onset of VFx. With respect to clinical fractures, we examined the history of fracture, including vertebral fracture, in the ROAD study by self-report, and no clinical vertebral fractures occurred within 1 month prior to baseline examination. However, we could not compare radiographs of the lumbar spine at baseline examination with those before the examination as the subjects had not undergone radiography of the lumbar spine prior to that examination. We were therefore unable to assess the incidence of subclinical fracture within the month prior to the baseline examination. Both clinical and subclinical vertebral fractures are associated with lower QOL in women [44], but the association between the severity of low back pain and the interval from onset of subclinical VFx may be weaker than that for clinical VFx; consequently, the absence of data on the incidence of subclinical VFx may not strongly affect the present results.

In conclusion, the results of our cross-sectional study using a large-scale population (1,369 Japanese women ≥ 40 years of age) from the ROAD study reveal that knee pain and low back pain were significantly associated with the QOL of these women. In women with knee pain, KL = 4 knee OA was strongly associated with QOL loss. In women with low back pain, no significant associations were seen between KL grade and QOL, while VFx may have some associations with QOL loss. The impact of knee pain with KL = 4 knee OA for PCS was larger than that of low back pain with VFx. Future studies, along with the continued longitudinal survey in the ROAD study, will elucidate the environmental and genetic backgrounds of knee pain and low back pain.

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Conflict of interest statement None.

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Original article

Normal and threshold values of radiographic parameters for knee osteoarthritis using a computer-assisted measuring system (KOACAD): the ROAD study

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Abstract

Background. Although radiographic severity of the knee is commonly determined by the Kellgren-Lawrence (KL) grading scale, it does not separately assess joint space narrowing or osteophyte formation. The present study aimed to establish normal and threshold values of radiographic parameters for knee osteoarthritis (OA) using the knee osteoarthritis computer-aided diagnosis (KOACAD) measuring system on a large-scale population-based cohort of the Research on Osteoarthritis/Osteoporosis Against Disability (ROAD) population.

Methods. From a total of 3040 participants in the ROAD study, standing anteroposterior radiographs of the knee were obtained from 2975 subjects (1041 men, 1934 women) in the ROAD cohort, and 5950 knees were evaluated using the KOACAD system to obtain the medial and lateral minimum joint space width (mJSW), medial and lateral joint space area (JSA), osteophyte area (OPA), and femorotibial angle (FTA). These indices were compared with the KL scores, and cutoff values for radiographic knee OA were determined by receiver operating characteristic (ROC) curve analysis.

Results. The mean KOACAD parameters for KL = 0 were as follows: medial mJSW 3.70 mm; lateral mJSW 4.77 mm, medial JSA 125.0 mm², lateral JSA 140.0 mm², OPA 0, and FTA 176.1° in men; for women they were medial mJSW 3.26 mm, lateral mJSW 4.22 mm, medial JSA 100.9 mm², lateral JSA 111.0 mm², OPA 0, and FTA 174.9°. Threshold values for KL ≥ 2 provided by ROC curve analysis with area under the curve (AUC) > 0.7 were medial mJSW 2.8 mm and medial JSA 107.3 mm² in men and medial mJSW 2.7 mm in women. Those for KL ≥ 3 were medial mJSW 2.1 mm, medial JSA 81.1 mm², OPA 2.4 mm², and FTA 179.6° in men; and medial mJSW 2.1 mm, medial JSA 66.6 mm², OPA 2.5 mm², and FTA 178.1° in women. We then determined the cutoff values for medial knee OA and lateral knee OA.

Conclusions. The present study established normal and threshold values of parameters for knee OA using an automated computer-assisted program on plain radiographs.

Introduction

Osteoarthritis (OA) is a major public health problem among the elderly that affects activities of daily living (ADL) and quality of life (QOL), leading to increased morbidity and mortality. According to the recent National Livelihood Survey by the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare in Japan, OA is ranked first and fourth among the diseases that cause disabilities requiring support and long-term care, respectively.¹

Given the increasing proportion of the elderly among the Japanese population, a comprehensive, evidence-based prevention strategy for OA is urgently needed. However, few indices have been identified that can predict the future occurrence and progression of OA. Risk factors for knee OA are known to include age, heavy weight, previous knee injury, and history of work involving overloading the knees.²⁻⁴

One of the reasons for the scarcity of epidemiological studies on OA might be the diagnostic criteria. Most cases of OA are radiographically determined based on a rating of grade 2 or more on the Kellgren-Lawrence (KL) grading scale.⁵ The KL scale is the most conventional grading system for determining the radiographic severity of knee OA, but this categorical scale does not assess joint space narrowing or osteophyte formation separately. Accumulating evidence has shown that osteophytosis and joint space narrowing display distinct etiological mechanisms, and their progression is neither constant nor proportional.⁶⁻⁸ When examining factors associated with knee OA, these two features should thus be assessed separately. In addition, other indices

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of knee OA on plain radiographs, such as the femoro-tibial angle (FTA) and joint space area, should be determined for evaluation of the severity of knee OA. However, reference values of these indices have yet to be established for a general population.

In the present study, we obtained values for medial and lateral minimum joint space width (mJSW), medial and lateral joint space area (JSA), osteophyte area (OPA), and FTA using the knee osteoarthritis computer-aided diagnosis (KOACAD) measuring system, which we developed and reported elsewhere.⁹ We used it in a large-scale population-based cohort study called the Research on Osteoarthritis/Osteoporosis Against Disability (ROAD)^{10,11} to establish normal reference and threshold values of radiographic parameters for knee OA.

Participants and methods

Participants

Reference values were obtained based on the results of measurements from the participants of the ROAD study, a nationwide prospective study comprising population-based cohorts established in several communities in Japan. Recruitment methods for this study have been described in detail elsewhere.^{9,10} To date, we have completed creation of a baseline database that includes clinical and genetic information of 3040 inhabitants (1061 men, 1979 women) in the age range of 23–95 years (mean 70.6 years), recruited from resident registrations in three communities. All participants provided written informed consent, and the study was conducted with the approval of the ethics committees of the participating institutions.

In the present study, from among a total cohort of 3040 participants, 2975 individuals (1041 men, 1934 women) with knee radiographs that could be evaluated by the KOACAD system were selected as subjects for analysis. Among 65 dropouts in the present analysis, 29 underwent total knee arthroplasty (TKA), and 1 had unilateral knee arthroplasty (UKA). The radiographic conditions for the remaining 35 subjects were insufficient for automated analysis due to severe flexion contracture, so we excluded them from the overall analysis.

A summary of the characteristics of subjects are shown in Table 1. No significant differences in baseline characteristics were seen between the 3040 participants in the whole cohort and the 2975 subjects in the present analysis.

Radiographic assessment

All participants underwent radiographic examination of both knees using an anteroposterior (AP) view with

Table 1. Summary characteristics of participants

Characteristic	Men	Women
No. of participants	1041	1934
Age (yrs)	71.0 (10.7)	69.8 (11.3)
Height (cm)	162.5 (6.7)	149.8 (6.5)
Weight (kg)	61.3 (10.0)	51.5 (8.6)
Body mass index (kg/m ²)	23.2 (3.0)	22.9 (3.5)
Current smokers	25.7%	3.5%
Current drinkers	64.2%	25.9%

Results are the mean (SD) unless otherwise specified

weight-bearing and foot-map positioning. Fluoroscopic guidance with a horizontal AP X-ray beam was used to visualize the joint space properly, and images were downloaded into digital imaging and communication in medicine (DICOM) format files. The KOACAD system has been described in detail elsewhere⁹ and is only briefly summarized here. The KOACAD was programmed to measure mJSW and JSA in the medial and lateral compartments, OPA at the medial tibia, and FTA using digitized knee radiographs. Initially, correction for radiographic magnification was performed based on the image size of a rectangular metal plate.

Next, to determine the region of interest (ROI) including the tibiofemoral joint space, a vertical neighborhood difference filter was applied to identify points with high absolute values for difference of scales. The center of all points was then calculated, and the ROI was chosen. Within the ROI, the outline of the femoral condyle was designated as the upper rim of the joint space. The two ends were determined, and vertical lines from the ends were designated as the outside rims of the joint space. Outlines of anterior and posterior margins of the tibial plateau were drawn similarly to that of the femoral condyle, and the middle line between the two outlines was designated as the lower rim of the joint space (Fig. 1A). A straight regression line for the lower rim outline was then drawn, and the intersections of the lower rim outline and the regression line were designated as the inside rims.

Medial and lateral JSAs were determined as areas surrounded by the upper, lower, inside, and outside rims, as defined above. Medial and lateral mJSWs were further determined as the minimum vertical distances in the respective JSA (Fig. 1B).

To measure the osteophyte area and FTA, medial and lateral outlines of the femur and tibia were drawn. Inflection points for these outlines were then calculated. The medial outline of the tibia from the inflection point was drawn upward to the joint level, and the area that was medially prominent over the smoothly extended outline was designated the osteophyte area (Fig. 1C).

For FTA, a middle line between the medial and lateral outlines of the femur from the top of the image

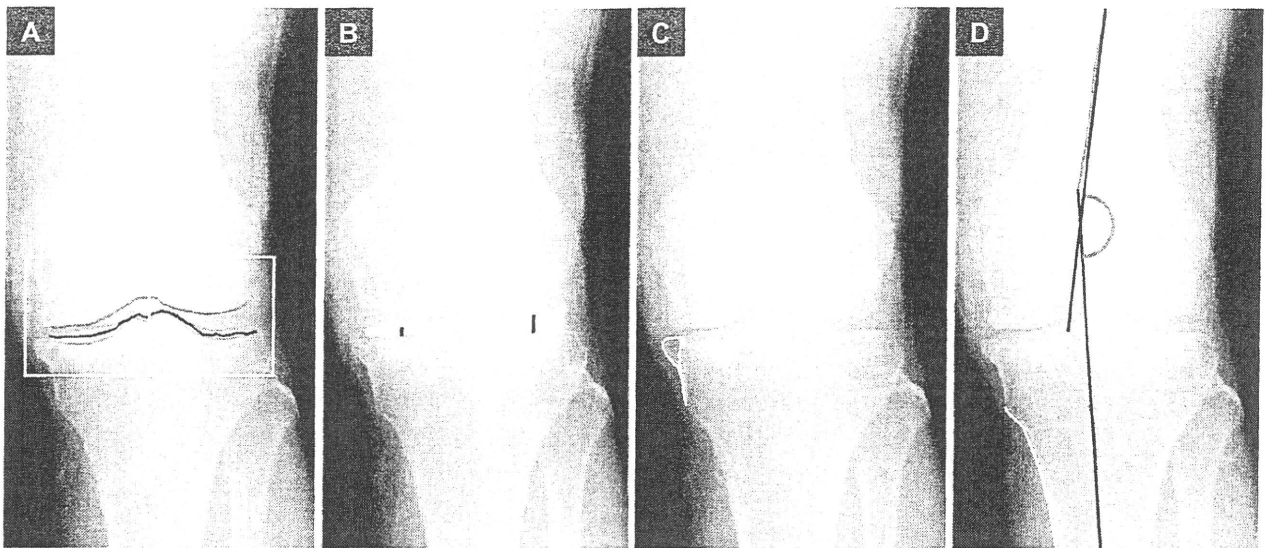


Fig. 1. Schema of image processing by the knee osteoarthritis computer-aided diagnosis (KOACAD) measuring system. **A** Outlines of anterior and posterior margins of the tibial plateau. The *middle line* between these two outlines represents the lower rim of the joint space. **B** Medial and lateral minimum joint space widths (mJSWs) as minimum vertical distances in

joint space areas (JSAs). **C** Osteophyte area (area surrounded by *white lines*) determined as the medial prominence over the smoothly extended outline of the tibia. **D** Tibiofemoral angle as the lateral angle between straight regression lines (*black lines*) of the *middle lines* above in the femur and tibia. (From Oka et al.⁹, with permission)

to the inflection points was drawn, and the straight regression line was determined as the axis of the femur. Similarly, the straight regression line of the middle line of the tibia from the bottom to the inflection points was designated as the axis of the tibia. The lateral angle between the two axis lines was calculated as the FTA (Fig. 1D).

This system can thus quantify the major features of knee OA on standard radiographs. Moreover, it allows objective, accurate, simple, easy assessment of the structural severity of knee OA without any manual operation in general clinical practice.

The severity of OA was radiographically determined according to the KL grading scale as follows⁵: KL0, normal joint; KL1, slight osteophytes; KL2, definite osteophytes; KL3, disc-space narrowing and large osteophytes; and KL4, bone sclerosis, joint space narrowing, and large osteophytes. In the ROAD study, joints that exhibited only joint space narrowing and no large osteophytes were graded as KL3. All radiographs were examined by a single, experienced orthopedic surgeon (S.M.) who was blinded to the clinical status of the participants.

Establishment of normal values and threshold values for parameters for knee OA

Each index determined using the KOACAD system — medial mJSW, lateral mJSW, medial JSA, lateral JSA,

OPA, FTA — was compared with KL scores. First, we established normal values of these parameters using mean values for knees with KL grade 0. Cutoff values for radiographic knee OA for KL ≥ 2 and KL ≥ 3 were then determined using receiver operating characteristic (ROC) curve analysis. The present study adopted cutoff points that maximized the area under the ROC curve (AUC) as threshold values. Threshold values were determined for total OA including medial and lateral OA, and then separate threshold values were determined for medial and lateral OA. Although parameters for medial OA could be obtained separately for each sex, those for lateral OA were evaluated for the combined number of men and women, given the small number of cases with lateral OA.

Statistical analysis

All statistical analyses were performed using STATA statistical software (STATA, College Station, TX, USA). First, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov Lilliefors test was used to evaluate the normality of distribution of each variable. All parameters were confirmed to fit normal distributions (*P* values after Kolmogorov-Smirnov Lilliefors test: medial mJSW 0.40; lateral mJSW 0.6; medial JSA 0.37; lateral JSA 0.76; OPA 0.10; FTA 0.49). Differences in values of the parameters were tested for significance using analysis of variance (ANOVA) for comparisons among multiple groups. Trends of values

Table 2. Various parameters classified by age and sex

Age strata (years)	No. of knees	Medial mJSW (mm)	Lateral mJSW (mm)	Medial JSA (mm ²)	Lateral JSA (mm ²)	OPA (mm ²)	FTA (°)
Men							
<40	28	4.12 (0.92)	4.91 (1.22)	141.6 (27.3)	153.2 (30.1)	0	176.5 (2.2)
40–49	82	3.67 (0.75)	5.06 (1.10)	132.9 (27.9)	156.2 (34.4)	0.40 (1.98)	177.5 (2.4)
50–59	214	3.63 (0.75)	4.88 (1.06)	124.1 (26.9)	148.5 (33.1)	0.30 (1.51)	176.5 (3.2)
60–69	334	3.37 (0.93) ^a	4.59 (0.96) ^{bc}	113.9 (28.4) ^{abc}	138.9 (28.8) ^{bc}	0.96 (3.60)	177.0 (3.0)
70–79	1052	3.13 (0.96) ^{abcd}	4.40 (1.02) ^{bc}	102.5 (26.7) ^{abcd}	125.7 (30.3) ^{abcd}	1.35 (4.68) ^c	177.1 (3.3)
80+	372	2.94 (0.98) ^{abcd}	4.22 (0.87) ^{abcd}	97.2 (27.4) ^{abcd}	121.3 (28.0) ^{abcd}	1.31 (4.06)	177.0 (4.0)
Total	2082	3.22 (0.96)	4.48 (1.02)	107.3 (29.0)	130.6 (31.7)	1.12 (4.07)	177.0 (3.3)
Women							
<40	62	3.37 (0.61)	4.31 (1.23)	106.3 (24.0)	116.8 (32.6)	0.18 (1.25)	175.6 (3.0)
40–49	210	3.22 (0.64)	4.36 (1.01)	104.0 (22.2)	116.9 (25.8)	0.46 (2.09)	175.5 (2.7)
50–59	418	3.03 (0.78)	4.23 (1.15)	97.5 (26.2)	112.3 (28.3)	0.96 (2.87)	175.8 (4.0)
60–69	762	2.80 (0.98) ^{abc}	4.03 (1.09) ^b	89.8 (28.7) ^{abc}	106.6 (28.7) ^{bc}	2.33 (6.39)	176.4 (3.8)
70–79	1764	2.52 (0.92) ^{abcd}	3.87 (1.00) ^{bcd}	79.5 (26.3) ^{abcd}	99.4 (26.8) ^{abcd}	4.60 (11.2) ^{abcd}	176.9 (4.2) ^{bc}
80+	652	2.32 (0.95) ^{abcde}	3.80 (1.08) ^{abcd}	77.4 (26.9) ^{abcd}	97.9 (28.0) ^{abcd}	6.39 (12.70) ^{abcde}	177.1 (4.6) ^{bc}
Total	3868	2.65 (0.95) ^f	3.96 (1.07) ^f	84.9 (28.0) ^f	103.2 (28.2) ^f	3.76 (9.87) ^f	176.6 (4.1) ^f

Results are the mean (SD)

mJSW, minimal joint space width; JSA, joint space area; OPA, osteophyte area; FTA, femoro-tibial angle; KL grade: Kellgren-Lawrence grade

^aSignificantly different from those of the group <40 years ($P < 0.05$)

^bSignificantly different from those of the group in their 40s ($P < 0.05$)

^cSignificantly different from those of the group in their 50s ($P < 0.05$)

^dSignificantly different from those of the group in their 60s ($P < 0.05$)

^eSignificantly different from those of the group in their 70s ($P < 0.05$)

^fSignificantly different from those of men ($P < 0.001$)

according to the KL grade were tested using the Jonckheere-Terpstra trend test. Scheffe's least significant difference test was then used for pairs of groups.

Results

The mean values for mJSW, JSA, OPA, and FTA, classified by sex, are shown in Table 2. The values for medial and lateral mJSW, medial and lateral JSA, OPA, and FTA all differed significantly between the sexes ($P < 0.001$). The mean values for medial mJSW, JSA, and FTA were significantly greater in men than in women ($P < 0.001$). By contrast, the OPA values in both knees were significantly lower in men than in women ($P < 0.001$).

The mean values for mJSW, JSA, OPA, and FTA classified by age are also shown in Table 2. The medial mJSW for men in their sixties was significantly smaller than that for men <40 years; and that for men ≥ 70 years was significantly smaller than that of men <70 years ($P < 0.05$). Lateral mJSW for subjects in their sixties and seventies was significantly smaller than that for subjects in their forties and fifties ($P < 0.05$). Medial JSA for subjects in their sixties was significantly smaller than that for subjects <60 years old ($P < 0.05$); and that for subjects ≥ 70 years was significantly smaller than that for subjects <70 years ($P < 0.05$). Lateral JSA for subjects in their sixties was significantly smaller than that for

subjects in their forties and fifties ($P < 0.05$); and that for subjects ≥ 70 years was significantly smaller than that for subjects <70 years ($P < 0.05$). No significant differences in OPA or FTA were seen according to age in men except for OPA in subjects between their fifties and seventies. In women, the medial mJSW for subjects in their sixties was significantly smaller than that for subjects <60 years ($P < 0.05$); that for women in their seventies was significantly smaller than that for subjects <70 years ($P < 0.05$); and that for women ≥ 80 years was significantly smaller than that of subjects <80 years ($P < 0.05$). The lateral mJSW for subjects in their sixties was significantly smaller than that for subjects in their forties ($P < 0.05$); that for subjects in their seventies was significantly smaller than that for subjects in their forties, fifties, and sixties ($P < 0.05$); and that for subjects ≥ 80 years was significantly smaller than that for subjects <70 years ($P < 0.05$). The medial JSA and lateral JSA showed trends with age similar to those of men. However, the mean OPA was significantly larger in women ≥ 70 years than in younger women ($P < 0.05$), and the FTA was significantly larger for subjects ≥ 70 years than for women in their forties and fifties ($P < 0.05$).

Table 3 shows mean values for mJSW, JSA, OPA, and FTA classified by KL grade. All values increased significantly according to the severity of the KL grade (P for trends < 0.0001). Regarding differences in the above-mentioned indices, values for medial mJSW and