

Bone mineral density and complete blood count ratios in children and adolescents with obesity

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Abstract. – **OBJECTIVE:** Monocyte-to-lymphocyte ratio (MLR), platelet-to-lymphocyte ratio (PLR), neutrophil-to-lymphocyte ratio (NLR), monocyte-to-high-density lipoprotein ratio (MHR), and mean platelet volume (MPV) are considered novel inflammatory markers. In this study, we aimed to investigate the relationship between bone mineral density (BMD) Z score and blood cell composition in children and adolescents with obesity and to create a suitable index for the diagnosis of obesity-associated osteoporosis.

PATIENTS AND METHODS: We included 148 children, comprising 112 children with obesity (obese group) and 36 sex- and age-matched healthy children (normal weight) (control group). Patient details acquired from medical records were used to measure blood count levels; BMD, using dual-energy X-ray absorptiometry; and BMD Z-scores, using race and sex specific curves.

RESULTS: Mean BMD Z score in the obese and normal weight group was within the normal limits and significantly higher in the obese group. The BMD Z score showed a significant relationship with MLR and PLR. Patient BMD Z-scores were negatively correlated with MLR and PLR in the obese group and positively correlated in the control group. In addition, a positive correlation was found between BMD Z score and NLR in the control group.

CONCLUSIONS: Our study outcomes show that there may be a relationship between bone mass and inflammation expressed as PLR and MLR in obese children and adolescents. PLR and MLR, which are common indicators of morbidity and mortality in many chronic inflammatory diseases, may also be useful for evaluating bone status in children with obesity. However, further research on the subject is warranted.

Key Words:

Bone mineral density, MLR, PLR, Obesity, Childhood.

Introduction

Prevalence of obesity and its related comorbidities has increased worldwide^{1,2}. Aside from being one of the important risk factors related to impairment of bone health, the rapid increase in body mass index (BMI) associated with obesity in the pediatric population consequently impairs bone health and causes bone fractures early in life^{3,4}.

Subclinical inflammation accompanying obesity causes cardiometabolic complications and development of insulin resistance⁵. Increasing serum levels of proinflammatory cytokines (IL-1, IL-6, and TNF- α) and acute phase proteins in obesity, especially abdominal obesity, are important mediators in bone resorption and osteoclast differentiation⁶. Increase in proinflammatory cytokines caused by chronic inflammation result in bone loss and resorption⁷. The rapid progression of osteoarthritis in the obese population is another example of chronic inflammation affecting bone health⁸.

Platelet-to-lymphocyte ratio (PLR) and neutrophil-to-lymphocyte ratio (NLR) are not old markers for increased inflammatory response^{9,10}. Particularly, NLR and PLR are predictors of the inflammatory responses of the vascular system¹⁰. In addition, PLR and NLR are associated with osteoporosis and decreased bone mineral density (BMD)^{11,12}. Additionally, the relationship between PLR and NLR and osteoporosis remains unclear.

Bone immunology has shown that the immune system and inflammatory mediators play major roles in osteoporosis¹³. Increase in monocyte-to-lymphocyte ratio (MLR), an inflammatory marker¹⁴, in proportion to inflammation is associated with osteoporosis and bone-derived diseases^{15,16}.

Mean platelet volume (MPV) is widely used to evaluate platelet activation and function. Furthermore, MPV is strongly associated with various

cardiovascular and inflammatory diseases¹⁷. Few studies¹⁸ in adults have reported the relationship between MPV and osteoporosis.

MPV is a distinguishing feature for platelet count (PC) activation¹⁹. The MPV/PC ratio has been associated with ischemic cardiovascular disease mortality²⁰. However, we did not find any study that investigated the relationship between the MPV/PC ratio and bone health in both adults and children.

The monocyte-to-high-density lipoprotein cholesterol ratio (HDL-C) (MHR), an indicator of inflammation, is a novel predictor of mortality and morbidity as well as a prognostic factor in many diseases²¹. There is a close relationship between HDL and bone physiology and pathology²². However, the results obtained from epidemiological studies conducted in humans are contradictory. Although a negative correlation between bone mass and HDL levels has been reported²³, other studies²⁴ have shown that as HDL increases, bone quality improves the risk of osteoporosis decreases.

Despite the increased fracture risk in obesity, there is an increase in BMD²⁵. Therefore, it is difficult to predict osteoporosis in obese individuals. Hence, more readily available inflammation biomarkers associated with BMD and BMI should be used.

A hemogram is widely used to study the distribution of blood cells. We aimed to investigate the differences in the proportions of blood cells and the relationship between BMD Z score and blood cell composition in children with obesity as well as to establish an appropriate index for the adjunctive diagnosis of osteoporosis. To the best of our knowledge, no study has reported on the relationship between blood count ratios and BMD in a pediatric population with obesity. Therefore, we aimed to investigate the relationships between NLR, MLR, PLR, MPV, MPV/PC, MHR, and BMD to show the associations with inflammation and bone metabolism in children and adolescents with obesity.

Patients and Methods

Patients

We included 148 children and adolescents aged 6-18 years who visited our outpatient clinics between 2018 and 2020. Among these patients, those with a BMI above the 95th percentile were defined as obese (n = 112; obese group), and those below the 85th percentile as normal weight (n = 36; control group), according to Turkish national standards, according to age and sex²⁶.

Those with BMI percentiles of 85th-95th (overweight) were not included in this study. We excluded children with diseases that could adversely affect bone health, such as a fracture in the previous year; orthopedic surgery or a history of chronic glucocorticoid use; a history of kidney, gastrointestinal, or liver disease; and obesity caused by endocrine disease.

For anthropometric measurements, patients' body weights and heights were measured with a digital scale (Seca pediatric digital scale, Hammer Steindamm 3-25, 22089 Hamburg, Deutschland) and a Harpenden stadiometer (Holtain, Crosswell, Crymych, Pems., SA41 3UF, UK), respectively. BMI measurement was calculated as weight (kg) divided by height squared (m²). We calculated the weight, height, and BMI standard deviation scores with reference to the 2015 Turkey National Growth Tables²⁶. Tanner and Marshall staging methods were used to evaluate the state of puberty in girls and boys, respectively²⁷.

Autohematology analyzer (Abbott, Cell-Dyn Ruby, IL, USA) was used for acquiring complete blood counts. Biochemical parameters were measured *via* photometric analysis (Abbott, c16000, IL, USA). Hormone parameters were measured using chemiluminescence immunoassay (Abbott, i2000sr, IL, USA). MLR, NLR, PLR, MHR, and MPV/PC were calculated using the following formulas: Monocyte count/lymphocyte count; neutrophil count/lymphocyte count; platelet count/lymphocyte count; monocyte count/high-density lipoprotein level and mean platelet volume/platelet count, respectively.

We acquired height, weight, BMI, blood count levels, 25-OH vitamin D (25OHD), alkaline phosphatase (ALP), parathormone (PTH), phosphorus (P), calcium (Ca), cholesterol, triglyceride, fasting blood glucose, insulin, HbA1c, and BMD Z-scores of patients from the medical records and calculated the NLR, MLR, PLR, MPV, MPV/PC, and MHR levels.

We performed the present study under the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki and received Ethics Committee Approval (Decision No.: 2020-11) from Health Sciences University Trabzon Kanuni Training and Research Hospital. We received written informed consent form from all subjects and their parents or guardians.

Dual-Energy X-Ray Absorptiometry

We defined osteoporosis as a history of clinically significant fracture with a BMD Z score of ≤ -2 . We defined a history of clinically significant frac-

tures as follows: ≥ 2 long bone fractures by the age of 10 years or ≥ 3 long bone fractures at any age up to 19 years²⁸. In all subjects, BMD (BMD unit: g/cm²) was evaluated using Lunar Prodigy (General Electric, GE Healthcare, Lunar DPX, NT + 150301, Madison, WI, USA) with dual-energy X-ray absorptiometry. We measured BMD at the level of lumbar spine segments L1-L4 (LS) through whole-body scans. BMD Z-scores were calculated using data on healthy Turkish adolescents and children after adjusting for age and height^{29,30}. The same experienced operator performed all the scans.

Statistical Analysis

The descriptive data are presented as frequencies (percentages) or median and range (minimum-maximum) or mean \pm standard deviation. Normality of the continuous variables was assessed with Shapiro Wilk tests and histogram graphs. Independent samples *t*-tests or non-parametric

Mann-Whitney U-tests were used for the comparison of continuous variables between two groups. The relationship between the categorical variables was assessed with Pearson's chi-square test. The degree of association between the continuous variables was estimated by the Pearson's correlation coefficient. The analyses were performed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences 26.0 for Windows (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA). The results were considered to be significant at a level of $p < 0.05$.

Results

The statistical analysis of the study population characteristics for the patients in obese and control groups were presented in Table I. The mean BMD Z-score in the obese and normal weight group was within the normal limits (2.40 ± 1.10 and 1.03 ± 0.68 ,

Table I. Clinical characteristics in control and obese groups.

	Control group (BMI < 85 th per) (n=36)	Obese Group (BMI \geq 95 th per) (n=112)	<i>p</i>
Gender			0.795
Male	12 (33.3%)	40 (35.7%)	
Female	24 (66.7%)	72 (64.3%)	
Age (years)	12.88 \pm 2.59	12.35 \pm 3.09	0.354
Pubertal stage (1-5)	3.0 (1.0-5.0)	4.0 (1.0-5.0)	0.200
Lumbar spine BMD (g/cm²)	0.80 \pm 0.18	0.97 \pm 0.22	<0.001
BMD Z score (SDS)	1.03 \pm 0.68	2.40 \pm 1.10	<0.001
Calcium (mg/dL)	9.46 \pm 0.30	9.63 \pm 0.41	0.025
Phosphorus (mg/dL)	4.44 \pm 0.57	4.14 \pm 0.58	0.008
Alkaline phosphatase (IU/L)	220.22 \pm 94.51	170.04 \pm 72.89	0.001
Parathyroid hormone (pg/mL)	56.11 \pm 8.73	48.50 \pm 18.02	0.001
HDL-cholesterol (mg/dL)	41.0 (37.0-83.0)	41.5 (28.0-60.0)	0.420
WBC	7.20 (6.60-9.00)	8.05 (5.10-15.20)	0.152
Hgb	13.22 \pm 1.30	13.50 \pm 1.00	0.232
MCV	79.63 \pm 9.48	81.50 \pm 5.30	0.265
PLT	313.56 \pm 43.72	308.86 \pm 65.91	0.625
MPV	8.07 \pm 0.99	8.28 \pm 0.88	0.250
PLR	110.98 \pm 28.41	117.42 \pm 36.19	0.331
NLR	1.32 (0.58-2.50)	1.51 (0.48-5.37)	0.074
MLR	0.17 (0.14-0.33)	0.22 (0.03-0.78)	0.041
MPV/PC	0.02 (0.01-0.04)	0.02 (0.02-2.71)	<0.001
MHR	0.01 (0.01-0.01)	0.01 (0.01-0.03)	<0.001
RDW	13.2 (11.8-14.9)	13.6 (12.4-130.0)	<0.001

Values are expressed as n (%), means \pm sd or median (min – max). For the categorical variable, Gender Pearson's chi-square test is used. For continuous variables, if values are reported in means, *p*-values are calculated using independent samples *t*-test; if values are given in medians, *p*-values are calculated using Mann Whitney U test. Bold *p*-values indicate statistical significance at $\alpha < 0.05$. BMD: Bone mineral density, WBC: White blood cell, NLR: neutrophil-to-lymphocyte ratio, MLR: monocyte-to-lymphocyte ratio, PLR: platelet-to-lymphocyte ratio, MPV/PC: mean platelet volume-to-platelet count ratio, MHR: monocyte-to-high-density lipoprotein ratio, RDW: Red Cell Distribution Width, MCV: Mean Corpuscular Volume, Hgb: Hemoglobin, PLT: Platelet, MPV: mean platelet volume (MPV), PCT: plateletcrit PDW: Platelet Distribution Width.

Table II. Correlation analyses between BMD Z score and other variables in obese and control groups.

	Control group (n=36)		Obese Group (n=112)	
	R	p	R	p
<i>25OHD</i>	-0.205	0.231	-0.198	0.036
<i>Calcium (mg/dL)</i>	0.421	0.010	-0.126	0.184
<i>Phosphorus (mg/dL)</i>	-0.185	0.281	-0.203	0.032
<i>Alkaline phosphatase (IU/L)</i>	-0.305	0.07	-0.294	0.002
<i>Parathyroid hormone (pg/mL)</i>	0.212	0.215	-0.142	0.135
<i>HDL-cholesterol (mg/dL)</i>	-0.061	0.726	-0.18	0.058
<i>WBC</i>	-0.098	0.571	0.03	0.756
<i>NLR</i>	0.647	<0.001	-0.057	0.553
<i>MLR</i>	0.470	0.004	-0.221	0.019
<i>PLR</i>	0.553	<0.001	-0.226	0.016
<i>MPV/PC</i>	0.086	0.617	0.138	0.146
<i>MHR</i>	-0.167	0.332	-0.044	0.644
<i>RDW</i>	-0.278	0.101	0.001	0.995
<i>MCV</i>	0.339	0.043	0.039	0.684
<i>Hgb</i>	0.342	0.041	-0.082	0.389
<i>PLT</i>	-0.126	0.463	-0.169	0.075
<i>MPV</i>	0.172	0.314	0.081	0.393

r: Pearson's correlation coefficient. Bold *p*-values indicate statistically significant correlation between the variable and BMD Z score at $\alpha < 0.05$. BMD: Bone mineral density, WBC: White blood cell, NLR: neutrophil-to-lymphocyte ratio, MLR: monocyte-to-lymphocyte ratio, PLR: platelet-to-lymphocyte ratio, MPV/PC: mean platelet volume-to-platelet count ratio, MHR: monocyte-to-high-density lipoprotein ratio, RDW: Red Cell Distribution Width, MCV: Mean Corpuscular Volume, Hgb: Hemoglobin, PLT: Platelet, MPV: mean platelet volume (MPV), PCT: plateletcrit PDW: Platelet Distribution Width.

respectively). The lumbar spine BMD (g/cm^2) and BMD Z score were significantly higher in obese group, compared to control group ($p < 0.001$, $p < 0.001$, respectively). Among the biochemical and hemogram parameters, Ca ($p = 0.025$), P ($p = 0.008$), ALP ($p = 0.001$), PTH ($p = 0.001$), MLR ($p = 0.041$), MPV/PC ($p < 0.001$), MHR ($p < 0.001$), RDW ($p < 0.001$) were found to be statistically significantly different between obese and control groups.

In the correlation analysis significant negative correlations were observed between the BMD Z score and 25OHD ($r = -0.198$, $p = 0.036$), P ($r = -0.203$, $p = 0.032$), ALP ($r = -0.294$, $p = 0.002$), in the obese group (Table II).

While MLR and PLR were negatively correlated with BMD Z score in the obese group ($r = -0.221$, $p = 0.019$; $r = -0.226$, $p = 0.016$, respectively), positive correlations were observed between BMD Z score and MLR, and PLR in control group ($r = 0.470$, $p = 0.004$; $p = 0.553$, $p < 0.001$, respectively) (Table II) (Figures 1 and 2).

Additionally, Ca ($r = 0.421$, $p = 0.010$), NLR ($r = 0.647$, $p < 0.001$), MCV ($r = -0.339$, $p = 0.043$), and

Hgb ($r = 0.342$, $p = 0.041$) were significantly and positively correlated with BMD Z score in control group.

Discussion

In this study, we examined the relationship between BMD with NLR, MLR, PLR, MHR, MPV, and MPV/PC in children and adolescents with obesity. BMD Z score showed correlations with MLR and PLR, in children with obesity and normal weight children.

Chronic inflammation is associated with low BMD, osteoporosis, and fractures³¹. Leukocyte subgroup tests are generally used to determine inflammatory diseases³². However, a recent study³³ showed that PLR, NLR, and MLR are more favorable markers of inflammation than leukocyte subsets.

Diagnostic values have been reported for MLR in many immunological diseases, reflecting the severity of systemic inflammation and immune damage¹⁴. To the best of our knowledge, there was only one adult study examining the relationship between osteoporosis and MLR. The

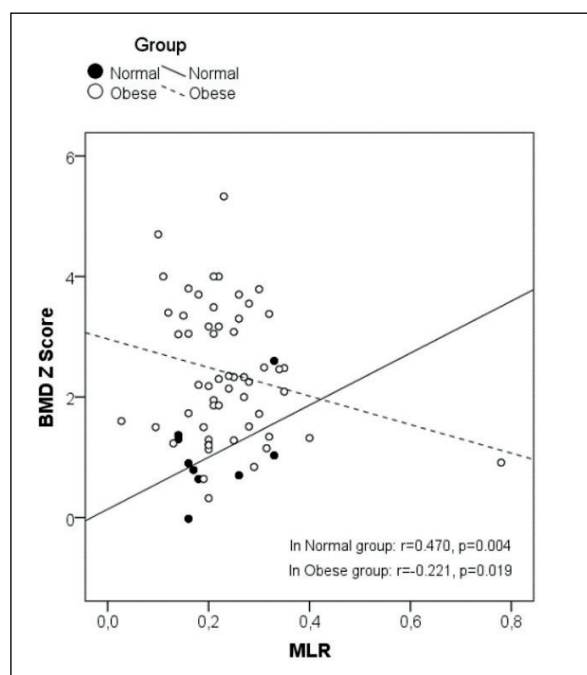


Figure 1. Correlations between BMD Z-score and MLR.

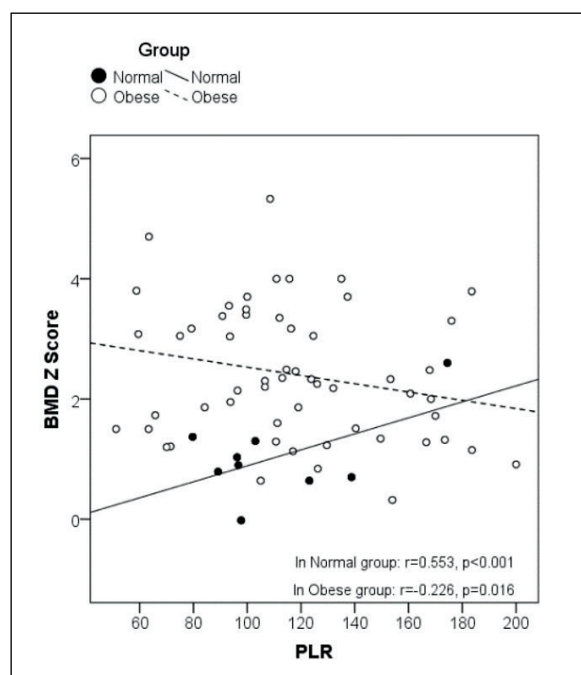


Figure 2. Correlations between BMD Z-score and PLR.

study revealed that when patients were classified as osteopenia and osteoporosis according to their BMD Z-scores, higher MLR, NLR, and PLR levels were found in the osteoporosis group. Gao et al¹⁶ reported that the diagnostic value of MLR in terms of osteoporosis was found to be higher than the other two parameters. In the present study, MLR was significantly associated with BMD Z score in both obese and control groups.

Köseoğlu et al¹² investigated the relationship between NLR and PLR and BMD in postmenopausal women and found that PLR values as inflammatory markers were significantly higher in the low BMD group. In addition, they found a correlation between PLR levels and BMD and suggested that PLR is a distinguishing factor for low BMD. In our study, similar to the above-mentioned study, BMD and PLR appeared to be negative correlated in children with obesity.

Few studies have evaluated the relationship between NLR and BMD. Typically, higher NLR values have been detected in patients with osteoporosis, and a correlation with BMD has been previously reported. However, some other studies^{11,12} did not any relationship. In our study, we did not find any relationship between NLR and BMD Z score in children with obesity, but a positive correlation was found in normal weight children.

Ye et al³⁴, in 2020, examined the relationship between BMD and complete blood count rates in adult patients and reported that the BMD T score showed a negative correlation with the neutrophil and monocyte ratios, and the neutrophil and monocyte ratios increased with the increase in osteoporosis severity.

Osadnik et al³⁵ studied obese adults and found a strong relationship only between BMI and MHR, among other inflammatory hemogram-based biomarkers. In addition, in multiple intergroup comparisons of other hemogram-based inflammatory markers showed weak associations with BMI, only borderline significance was observed for PLR in men. In our study, there was no correlation between BMI and NLR and MPV. These results and those of Osadnik et al³⁵, which is the only study on obesity and hemogram-based biomarkers, suggest that the increased inflammation in obesity may be effective especially on monocytes and HDL. There is increasing evidence that adiposity affects bone health in children. Obese children and adolescents have higher bone mineral content than their normal weight counterparts; thus, adipose tissue positively affects bone tissue³⁶. However, the rates of limb fractures increase in obese children, indicating that they have poor bone quality³⁷.

Fang et al³⁸ found that NLR is an independent risk factor for postmenopausal osteoporosis and in-

creases the risk of fracture. There are also studies³⁹ showing that a high NLR is associated with poor prognosis in osteoporotic individuals. Furthermore, a high NLR is proven to be indicative of an independent fracture in orthogeriatric patients⁴⁰. According to our study, there is no significantly correlation in obese children and adolescents.

Malgorzata et al⁴¹ investigated the relationship of BMD with NLR and PLR in girls with anorexia nervosa. In their studies, they found that total body BMD Z score and NLR and PLR were negatively correlated ($r = -0.239$, $p = 0.042$; $r = -0.231$, $p = 0.049$, respectively). They found that only PLR showed a negative correlation with the lumbar spine BMD Z score ($r = -0.236$, $p = 0.044$). In our study, there was a negative correlation between the lumbar spine BMD Z score and both NLR and PLR in obese children and adolescents ($r = -0.221$, $p = 0.019$; $r = -0.226$, $p = 0.016$, respectively). These findings suggest the interaction of chronic inflammation and impaired bone quality in both anorexia nervosa and obesity.

Study Limitations

This is a single-center study. Larger sample groups are needed to determine the diagnostic values of parameters that were found to be significant. We could not evaluate the investigated markers along with the other indicators of inflammation, such as C-reactive protein, erythrocyte sedimentation rate, and interleukin-6. We found that BMD Z score was associated with these markers regardless of BMI; however, comparison in healthy children without obesity will have a more impactful contribution to the literature.

Conclusions

In children with obesity, the negative impact of obesity on bone mass needs to be anticipated. This is due to the fact that fractures in children with obesity, especially upper and lower extremity fractures, constitute a large proportion of fracture groups. Considering the knowledge about the relationship between osteoporosis and blood count rates in adults, the data from our study suggest that these inexpensive, simple prognostic markers can be used to estimate bone mineral status in children and adolescents with obesity. In addition, long-term studies on children with obesity are needed to provide essential data for early interventions to prevent risks associated with obesity and impaired bone health.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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