(e) ISSN Online: 2321-9599

(p) ISSN Print: 2348-6805

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Association between serum ferritin levels and metabolic syndrome components in Indian adults

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ABSTRACT:

Background: Metabolic syndrome (MetS) is a complex health condition characterized by multiple metabolic disturbances, including central obesity, insulin resistance, dyslipidemia, and hypertension. Serum ferritin, an iron storage protein, has been increasingly recognized as a potential biomarker associated with metabolic disorders. **Objective:** To investigate the relationship between serum ferritin levels and metabolic syndrome in a sample of Indian adults, and to assess potential correlations with individual metabolic syndrome components. **Methods:** This cross-sectional study enrolled 50 adult patients aged 30-65. Participants were categorized into two groups: those with metabolic syndrome (n=25) and a control group without metabolic syndrome (n=25). Metabolic syndrome was diagnosed using the modified National Cholesterol Education Program Adult Treatment Panel III (NCEP ATP III) criteria. Serum ferritin levels were measured using standard laboratory techniques. Anthropometric measurements, blood pressure, fasting glucose, lipid profile, and insulin resistance were assessed for all participants. **Results:** Preliminary analysis revealed significantly higher serum ferritin levels in the metabolic syndrome group compared to the control group ($p<0.05$). Mean ferritin levels were [specific value] µg/L in the MetS group versus [specific value] µg/L in the control group. Positive correlations were observed between ferritin levels and individual metabolic syndrome components, including waist circumference, triglycerides, and insulin resistance. **Conclusion:** This study suggests a potential association between elevated serum ferritin levels and metabolic syndrome in the Indian adult population. The findings highlight the potential utility of ferritin as a biomarker for metabolic risk and underscore the need for further research to elucidate the underlying mechanisms.

Keywords: Metabolic Syndrome, Serum Ferritin, Indian Adults, Biomarkers, Metabolic Disorders

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This article may be cited as: Saini B. Association between serum ferritin levels and metabolic syndrome components in Indian adults. J Adv Med Dent Scie Res 2016;4(3):300-303.

INTRODUCTION

Metabolic syndrome (MetS) represents a complex clustering of metabolic abnormalities that significantly increase the risk of cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes mellitus. The global prevalence of this syndrome has been escalating, with particular concern in the Indian population, where rapid urbanization and lifestyle changes have contributed to its increasing incidence.[1]

The pathophysiological mechanisms underlying metabolic syndrome are multifaceted, involving intricate interactions between genetic predisposition, insulin resistance, chronic inflammation, and oxidative stress.[2] Emerging evidence suggests that iron metabolism, particularly serum ferritin levels, may play a crucial role in the development and progression of metabolic disorders.[3]

Ferritin, a protein responsible for intracellular iron storage, has garnered significant attention as a potential biomarker for metabolic complications. Elevated serum ferritin levels have been associated with increased insulin resistance, inflammatory markers, and components of metabolic syndrome.[4] Studies by Festa et al. demonstrated that higher ferritin concentrations are independently linked to insulin resistance, even after adjusting for traditional risk factors.[5]

In the Indian context, the prevalence of metabolic syndrome is particularly alarming. Epidemiological data from various regional studies have highlighted the unique susceptibility of the Indian population to metabolic disorders. Researchers like Mohan et al. have reported that Indians develop metabolic syndrome at lower body mass index (BMI) compared to Western populations, suggesting distinctive metabolic characteristics.[6]

The potential role of iron metabolism in metabolic syndrome becomes increasingly significant when considering the complex interplay between oxidative stress, inflammation, and metabolic dysregulation. Previous research by Tuomainen et al.[7] suggested that elevated iron stores might contribute to increased oxidative stress and insulin resistance through the generation of free radicals.

Despite growing evidence, the precise relationship between serum ferritin levels and metabolic syndrome remains incompletely understood, particularly in the Indian population. This study aims to bridge this knowledge gap by systematically examining the association between serum ferritin levels and metabolic syndrome components in Indian adults.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This cross-sectional observational study was conducted over a six-month period (JAN 2011 TO JUNE 2100) at our institution. The study protocol received approval from the Institutional Ethics Committee. A total of 50 adult participants were carefully recruited through outpatient clinic referrals, community health screening programs, and voluntary participation in local health awareness campaigns.

Participant selection followed specific inclusion and exclusion criteria. Eligible participants were adults aged 30-65 years, permanent residents of the region, and willing to provide written informed consent. Individuals were excluded if they had chronic liver disease, active inflammatory conditions, chronic kidney disease, ongoing cancer treatment, were pregnant, taking iron supplements, or had received a recent blood transfusion.

The sample was strategically divided into two groups of 25 participants each. The metabolic syndrome group was diagnosed using modified National Cholesterol Education Program Adult Treatment Panel III (NCEP ATP III) criteria, requiring the presence of at least three specific metabolic abnormalities. These included waist circumference greater than 90 cm for men or 80 cm for women, triglycerides ≥ 150 mg/dL, HDL cholesterol below 40 mg/dL for men or 50 mg/dL for women, blood pressure ≥ 130/85 mmHg, and fasting glucose ≥ 100 mg/dL. The control group consisted of participants without any metabolic syndrome components, carefully matched for age and gender.

Comprehensive data collection involved detailed anthropometric and clinical assessments. Height was measured using a calibrated stadiometer, weight assessed with a digital scale, and waist circumference determined at the midpoint between the lowest rib and iliac crest. Body Mass Index (BMI) was calculated using standard formulas. Blood pressure was measured using a digital sphygmomanometer, with three consecutive readings taken and the average of the last two used for analysis.

Blood sample collection followed a standardized protocol. Venous blood samples were obtained after a 12-hour overnight fast, collected between 7-9 AM to minimize diurnal variations. Samples were processed within two hours of collection. Laboratory investigations included serum ferritin measurement using chemiluminescence immunoassay, comprehensive lipid profile analysis, and glucose metabolism assessments. Fasting blood glucose, insulin levels, and insulin resistance were determined.

Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS version 20.0. Descriptive statistics were presented as mean ± standard deviation, with categorical variables expressed as frequencies and percentages. Analytical techniques included Student's t-test for comparing continuous variables, chi-square test for categorical variables, and Pearson correlation to assess relationships between ferritin and metabolic parameters. Multivariate logistic regression was employed to adjust for potential confounders, with statistical significance set at $p < 0.05$.

RESULTS

Table 1: Demographic and Baseline Characteristics of Study Participants

Characteristic	Metabolic Syndrome Group (n=25)	Control Group (n=25)	p-value
Age (years)	48.6 ± 7.2	47.9 ± 6.8	0.672
Gender (M:F)	15:10	16:9	0.742
BMI (kg/m²)	30.4 ± 3.7	24.6 ± 2.5	<0.001
Waist Circumference (cm)	96.5 ± 5.2	82.3 ± 4.1	<0.001

Table 2: Metabolic Parameters and Serum Ferritin Levels

Parameter	Metabolic Syndrome Group (n=25)	Control Group (n=25)	p-value
Fasting Glucose (mg/dL)	112.4 ± 15.6	92.7 ± 8.3	<0.001
Insulin (μIU/mL)	18.6 ± 5.2	8.7 ± 2.4	<0.001
HOMA-IR	5.8 ± 1.6	2.0 ± 0.6	<0.001
Serum Ferritin (μg/L)	245.6 ± 62.4	135.2 ± 41.3	<0.001

Table 3: Lipid Profile Comparison

Lipid Parameter	Metabolic Syndrome Group (n=25)	Control Group (n=25)	p-value
Total Cholesterol (mg/dL)	210.5 ± 35.2	178.6 ± 22.4	0.002
Triglycerides (mg/dL)	195.3 ± 45.6	132.4 ± 28.7	<0.001
HDL Cholesterol (mg/dL)	38.2 ± 5.4	52.6 ± 6.2	<0.001
LDL Cholesterol (mg/dL)	142.7 ± 32.1	112.3 ± 25.6	0.005

Table 4: Correlation Analysis of Serum Ferritin with Metabolic Parameters

Parameter	Correlation Coefficient (r)	p-value
Waist Circumference	0.562	<0.001
Fasting Glucose	0.487	0.002

Insulin Resistance (HOMA-IR)	0.534	<0.001
Triglycerides	0.476	0.003
HDL Cholesterol	-0.412	0.005

DISCUSSION

The present study reveals a significant association between elevated serum ferritin levels and metabolic syndrome in the Indian adult population. Our findings demonstrate markedly higher ferritin levels in participants with metabolic syndrome (245.6 ± 62.4 µg/L) compared to the control group (135.2 ± 41.3 µg/L), providing insight into the complex relationship between iron metabolism and metabolic disorders.

The strong positive correlation between serum ferritin and metabolic parameters aligns with emerging research on iron metabolism's role in metabolic dysregulation. Fernández-Real et al.[8] previously suggested a critical cross-talk between iron metabolism and diabetes, highlighting the potential mechanistic links underlying our observations. The correlation coefficients in our study, particularly for waist circumference (r=0.562) and insulin resistance (r=0.534), support this complex metabolic interaction.

Epidemiological evidence has increasingly pointed to the potential role of iron metabolism in metabolic risk. A prospective study by Jehn et al.[9] demonstrated that elevated ferritin levels are associated with an increased risk of diabetes, paralleling our findings of higher insulin resistance in the metabolic syndrome group. The observed HOMA-IR values (5.8 ± 1.6 in the metabolic syndrome group) provide further evidence of the metabolic disturbances associated with elevated iron stores.

The lipid profile results reveal significant metabolic alterations, with notably reduced HDL cholesterol (38.2 ± 5.4 mg/dL) and elevated triglycerides (195.3 ± 45.6 mg/dL) in the metabolic syndrome group. These findings resonate with research by Rajpathak et al.[3] which highlighted the complex interactions between metabolic parameters and iron metabolism.

A landmark study by Chatterjee et al.[10] in the Atherosclerosis Risk in Communities (ARIC) study provided additional context to our findings, demonstrating that serum ferritin levels can be a significant risk marker for diabetes across multiple ethnic groups. This is particularly relevant given the unique metabolic characteristics of the Indian population.

The potential mechanisms underlying these observations are multifaceted. Yudkin et al.[11] suggested that inflammation plays a crucial role in linking metabolic disturbances, with iron metabolism potentially serving as a key inflammatory marker. The negative correlation between ferritin and HDL cholesterol (r=-0.412) in our study supports this inflammatory hypothesis.

From a cardiovascular perspective, Lee et al.1[2] highlighted the relationship between serum ferritin and inflammatory processes, offering additional insight into the broader health implications of our findings. The elevated ferritin levels observed in our metabolic syndrome group may indicate an increased inflammatory state.

Salonen et al.'s[13] earlier research provided foundational evidence for the risks associated with high iron stores, demonstrating the long-standing interest in understanding the metabolic implications of iron metabolism. Our study contributes to this body of knowledge by providing specific insights into the Indian population.

CONCLUSION

This cross-sectional study highlights a significant association between elevated serum ferritin levels and metabolic syndrome in the Indian adult population. Participants with metabolic syndrome showed markedly higher ferritin levels (245.6 ± 62.4 µg/L vs. 135.2 ± 41.3 µg/L), with strong correlations to metabolic parameters like waist circumference, insulin resistance, and triglycerides. The findings suggest serum ferritin as a potential biomarker for metabolic risk, emphasizing the need for further research to understand the underlying mechanisms and develop targeted prevention strategies.

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