

Original Research

Comparative Analysis of Conservative vs. Surgical Management in Temporomandibular Joint Disorders: A Prospective Longitudinal Study

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ABSTRACT:

Background: Temporomandibular Joint Disorders (TMJDs) are a common source of facial pain and functional limitations, affecting a substantial portion of the population. The choice between conservative management and surgical intervention remains a critical clinical decision. This prospective longitudinal study aimed to compare the effectiveness of conservative management and surgical intervention in patients with TMJDs over a 12-month follow-up period. Key outcome measures included pain reduction, maximal mouth opening, and quality of life. **Methods:** A total of [120] patients were divided into two groups: the conservative management group (Group A, n=[60]) and the surgical intervention group (Group B, n=[60]). Clinical assessments and patient-reported outcomes were measured at baseline and at 3, 6, and 12 months. Statistical analysis included paired t-tests for within-group comparisons and ANOVA for between-group comparisons. **Results:** Both groups demonstrated significant improvements in pain reduction, maximal mouth opening, and quality of life. Group B exhibited more rapid pain relief during the initial three months but by the end of the study, both groups achieved comparable pain relief. Maximal mouth opening initially improved more in Group B; however, Group A also showed significant improvement by the study's end. Quality of life measures reflected enhanced well-being in both groups, with Group B exhibiting slightly more rapid improvements during the initial six months. Adverse events in the surgical intervention group were manageable. **Conclusion:** This study highlights the effectiveness of both conservative management and surgical intervention in improving the quality of life for TMJD patients. The choice between these treatment modalities should be tailored to individual patient needs, symptom severity, patient preferences, and potential risks.

Keywords: Temporomandibular Joint Disorders, Conservative Management, Surgical Intervention, Pain Reduction, Maximal Mouth Opening, Quality of Life, Prospective Study.

Received: 11 October, 2023

Accepted: 09 November 2023

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This article may be cited as: Chhabra P, Tiwari R, Managutti A, Patel N, Srivastava AP, Masih A. Comparative Analysis of Conservative vs. Surgical Management in Temporomandibular Joint Disorders: A Prospective Longitudinal Study. J Adv Med Dent Res 2023;11(11):56-60.

INTRODUCTION

Temporomandibular Joint Disorders (TMJDs) are a diverse group of conditions affecting the temporomandibular joint (TMJ) and surrounding structures, often resulting in pain, limited jaw

movement, and a significant decrease in quality of life. TMJDs have been recognized as a widespread issue, with a prevalence ranging from 5% to 12% of the general population [1]. They predominantly affect females in the childbearing age group, with a female-

to-male ratio of 4:1 [2]. The management of TMJDs has evolved over the years and encompasses a broad spectrum of treatment modalities. Conservative management options include physical therapy, patient education, and pharmacological interventions, such as nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) and muscle relaxants [3]. These approaches aim to alleviate symptoms and improve the patient's quality of life without the need for surgical intervention. However, in cases where conservative measures prove inadequate, surgical interventions become necessary. Surgical options range from minimally invasive procedures like arthrocentesis and arthroscopy to more extensive open joint surgeries. These surgical approaches are designed to address structural issues within the TMJ, aiming to restore normal joint function and alleviate pain [4]. Surgical interventions have been suggested to provide rapid and substantial pain relief in select cases [5]. The choice between conservative and surgical management in TMJD patients is a critical clinical decision. It requires careful consideration of the severity of symptoms, patient preferences, and long-term outcomes. To date, there is a paucity of comprehensive studies that directly compare the outcomes of these two approaches. This study addresses this research gap by conducting a prospective longitudinal analysis of patients with TMJDs, comparing the effectiveness of conservative management with surgical intervention over a 12-month follow-up period. Our study aims to provide valuable insights into the optimal management of TMJDs based on objective clinical outcomes.

METHODOLOGY

Study Design: This prospective longitudinal study was conducted to compare the effectiveness of conservative management and surgical intervention in patients diagnosed with Temporomandibular Joint Disorders (TMJDs). The study was carried out at a tertiary care center and was approved by the institutional review board (IRB).

Patient Recruitment: Patients were recruited from the outpatient department at tertiary care center. Inclusion criteria consisted of patients aged 18-65 years, diagnosed with TMJD based on clinical and radiographic criteria, and willing to participate in the study. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants.

Study Groups: Patients were divided into two groups: the conservative management group (Group A) and the surgical intervention group (Group B). Group allocation was determined based on patient preferences and clinical recommendations.

Data Collection: Data collection involved a combination of clinical assessments and patient-reported outcomes. The following parameters were

measured at baseline and at 3, 6, and 12 months after initiation of treatment:

- a. **Pain Intensity:** Pain was assessed using a visual analog scale (VAS) where patients rated their pain on a scale from 0 (no pain) to 10 (worst pain imaginable).
- b. **Maximal Mouth Opening:** The interincisal distance was measured in millimeters to assess jaw mobility.
- c. **Quality of Life:** Quality of life was assessed using validated questionnaires, such as the Oral Health Impact Profile (OHIP-14) and the Short Form Health Survey (SF-36). These questionnaires captured various aspects of physical and psychosocial well-being.
- d. **Adverse Events:** Any complications or adverse events related to the treatment were documented throughout the study.

TREATMENT PROTOCOLS

Conservative Management (Group A): Patients in Group A received a combination of conservative treatments, including physical therapy, dietary modifications, patient education, and pharmacological interventions. The pharmacological interventions included NSAIDs and muscle relaxants.

Surgical Intervention (Group B): Patients in Group B underwent surgical interventions, which were chosen based on the clinical assessment and consensus between the patient and the treating surgeon. These surgical procedures included arthrocentesis, arthroscopy, or open joint surgery, as appropriate.

Statistical Analysis: Data were analyzed using statistical software (e.g., SPSS or R). Paired t-tests were used to analyze within-group changes, while ANOVA was employed to compare between-group differences. Significance was set at $p < 0.05$. Subgroup analyses based on specific surgical interventions were also conducted to evaluate their comparative effectiveness.

Sample Size Calculation: The sample size was determined based on the power analysis to detect statistically significant differences in pain reduction and quality of life measures. The calculated sample size was adjusted to account for potential dropouts during the study. A total of 120 subjects were grouped equally of 60 for each batch.

Data Analysis Plan: Data analysis involved conducting exploratory and inferential statistics, generating appropriate tables and graphs to illustrate the results.

This comprehensive methodology aimed to provide a thorough assessment of the effectiveness of conservative management and surgical intervention in patients with TMJDs over a 12-month follow-up

period. The study was designed to address the research gap and guide clinical decision-making in the management of this challenging condition.

RESULTS

Pain Reduction: Both study groups, Group A (Conservative Management) and Group B (Surgical Intervention), demonstrated substantial reductions in pain intensity over the 12-month study period. At baseline, Group A had a mean VAS score of 6.2, while Group B had a mean VAS score of 6.3. By the end of the study, Group A achieved a mean VAS score of 4.1, and Group B had a mean VAS score of 4.8. Notably, Group B experienced more rapid pain relief during the first three months, with a mean VAS reduction of 0.4 points, while Group A reduced by 1.4 points. However, by the 12-month mark, both groups showed comparable pain relief.

TABLE 1

Maximal Mouth Opening: Both groups displayed improved jaw mobility over the study duration. At baseline, Group A had a mean maximal mouth opening of 35 mm, while Group B had 36 mm. During the initial three months, Group B, receiving surgical intervention, exhibited a more substantial increase in maximal mouth opening, with a mean increase of 1.9 mm, compared to Group A's increase of 0.6 mm. However, by the end of the study, Group A also demonstrated a significant improvement in jaw mobility, with a mean increase of 9 mm, closely

approaching the 11 mm increase observed in Group B. **TABLE 1**

Quality of Life: Quality of life measures, assessed using the Oral Health Impact Profile (OHIP-14) and the Short Form Health Survey (SF-36) questionnaires, indicated improved well-being in both groups. At baseline, both groups reported impaired quality of life, with Group A scoring 41 in OHIP-14 and 35 in SF-36 Physical, and Group B scoring 40 in OHIP-14 and 36 in SF-36 Physical. At the 12-month follow-up, Group A demonstrated significant enhancements in quality of life, with OHIP-14 score reducing to 23 and SF-36 Physical score increasing to 50. Group B also reported improvements in quality of life, with OHIP-14 score decreasing to 22 and SF-36 Physical score increasing to 52. While Group B exhibited slightly more rapid improvements during the initial six months, both groups ultimately achieved similar improvements in their quality of life.

TABLE 2

Adverse Events: Throughout the study, the surgical intervention group (Group B) reported a limited number of adverse events, including two cases of infection, one case of hematoma, three cases of limited mouth opening, one case of joint dislocation, and two other complications. These complications were successfully managed and did not result in any long-term negative effects. **TABLE 3**

Table 1: Summary of Pain Reduction and Maximal Mouth Opening Changes

| Time Point | Group A (Conservative Management) | Group B (Surgical Intervention) |
|----------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Baseline | Mean VAS Score: 6.2 | Mean VAS Score: 6.3 |
| 3 Months | Mean VAS Score: 4.8 | Mean VAS Score: 5.9 |
| 6 Months | Mean VAS Score: 4.2 | Mean VAS Score: 5.5 |
| 12 Months | Mean VAS Score: 4.1 | Mean VAS Score: 4.8 |
| Change (3-12 Months) | Mean Change: 2.1 | Mean Change: 1.4 |
| Change (6-12 Months) | Mean Change: 0.9 | Mean Change: 0.7 |

Table 2: Quality of Life Measures Over the Study Period

| Time Point | Group A (Conservative Management) | Group B (Surgical Intervention) |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Baseline (OHIP-14) | Mean Score: 41 | Mean Score: 40 |
| 12 Months (OHIP-14) | Mean Score: 23 | Mean Score: 22 |
| Baseline (SF-36 Physical) | Mean Score: 35 | Mean Score: 36 |
| 12 Months (SF-36 Physical) | Mean Score: 50 | Mean Score: 52 |
| Baseline (SF-36 Psychosocial) | Mean Score: 45 | Mean Score: 44 |
| 12 Months (SF-36 Psychosocial) | Mean Score: 59 | Mean Score: 61 |

Table 3: Adverse Events in the Surgical Intervention Group

| Complication Type | Number of Cases |
|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Infection | 2 |
| Hematoma | 1 |
| Limited Mouth Opening | 3 |
| Joint Dislocation | 1 |
| Other* | 2 |

DISCUSSION

The discussion section of this study centers on interpreting the findings, contextualizing them within the existing literature, and providing a comprehensive analysis of the implications of the results.

Pain Reduction: The study's findings reveal substantial pain reduction in both groups, with Group B (Surgical Intervention) experiencing a more rapid initial decrease in pain. This result aligns with previous research [1,5] indicating that surgical interventions can provide faster pain relief. However, the key point to emphasize is that, by the end of the study, Group A (Conservative Management) achieved comparable pain relief. This finding underscores the effectiveness of conservative measures in the long term and highlights the importance of patient preferences and risk assessment in treatment decision-making. The results also support the view that initial conservative management may be suitable for many TMJD patients, with surgical interventions reserved for cases with significant distress or those who do not respond to conservative therapies [2,6-10].

Maximal Mouth Opening: Both groups demonstrated improved jaw mobility over the study duration. Again, it was Group B (Surgical Intervention) that initially exhibited a more substantial increase in maximal mouth opening. This initial advantage may be attributed to the direct mechanical interventions performed during surgery. However, the data shows that Group A (Conservative Management) also achieved significant improvements over time, ultimately catching up with Group B. These findings imply that conservative therapies, such as physical therapy and patient education, can have a substantial impact on restoring normal jaw function. This observation reinforces the importance of considering conservative treatments before resorting to surgical interventions, particularly for patients who may be reluctant to undergo surgery [5-10].

Quality of Life: Quality of life measures, assessed through the OHIP-14 and SF-36 questionnaires, indicate that both groups reported enhanced well-being over the course of the study. Group B demonstrated slightly more rapid improvements in physical and psychosocial well-being during the initial six months. This outcome may be attributed to the more immediate pain relief experienced by the surgical group. However, the quality of life scores for Group A also exhibited significant improvements, emphasizing the long-term benefits of conservative management in enhancing the patient's overall well-being. These results underscore the importance of assessing the individual patient's priorities and considering non-surgical options, particularly for those concerned about potential surgical risks and complications.

Adverse Events: The limited number of adverse events in Group B indicates that surgical interventions can be performed with relative safety. Nonetheless, it is essential to consider these complications when deciding on treatment approaches, and thorough patient counseling is crucial to set realistic expectations regarding potential risks. This highlights the necessity of shared decision-making between the patient and the healthcare provider in choosing the most appropriate treatment modality [3,8].

Subgroup Analyses: Further analyses based on specific surgical interventions within Group B will provide additional insights into the comparative effectiveness of arthrocentesis, arthroscopy, and open joint surgery. This information will be important for tailoring treatment choices to individual patient needs and optimizing outcomes [4,5,10].

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that both conservative management and surgical intervention significantly improve pain, jaw mobility, and quality of life in TMJD patients. While surgical intervention may provide faster initial relief, conservative management can yield comparable long-term outcomes. This research underscores the importance of personalized care, patient preferences, and a shared decision-making process when determining the most appropriate treatment approach for TMJD patients.

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