REVIEW ARTICLE

Association between Pulp Stones and Kidney Stones: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis

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ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** A systematic review and meta-analysis were performed to evaluate the as­sociation between pulp stones and kidney stones. **Methods:** A search for observational studies was performed in PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, Biblioteca Virtual em Saude, and the gray literature. The Newcastle-Ottawa Scale for Risk of Bias criteria were used to evaluate the internal quality of the included studies. A fixed-effects meta-analysis was per­formed to evaluate the association between the conditions. **Results:** A total of 213 studies were identified after the removal of duplicates. Of these, 9 studies were selected after screening the titles and abstracts. Finally, after full-text reading for qualitative analysis, 7 studies were selected, and of these, 2 were used in the meta-analysis. A significant associ­ation was found between pulp stones and kidney stones (1.97 [95% confidence interval, 1.21-3.18]; *P <* .05). **Conclusions:** This study revealed an association between pulp stones and kidney stones. Further well-designed studies should be conducted in order to confirm whether pulp stones are predictive indicators of undiagnosed kidney stones. *(J Endod 2019;m:1-7.)*

Pulp stones are alterations commonly found in endodontic practice and have also been suggested as a clinical marker of systemic diseases; however, the existing literature does not fully support the association between pulp stones and kidney stones.

KEY WORDS

Dental pulp calcification; kidney calculi; kidney stones; meta-analysis; pulp stones; system­atic review

Pulp stones are regressive alterations in the pulp tissue, and they occur with higher frequency in the pulp chamber. The prevalence of pulp stones can reach up to 50% of surveyed samples1. The most affected teeth are molars1'2, and females are more affected than males3'5. Although the prevalence is higher in elderly patients, pulp stones can also be observed in young patients5. Commonly, pulp stones are considered incidental findings during imaging examinations2 because they are not related to painful symptoms. They occur in healthy teeth and even in unerupted teeth6.

Pulp stones can be classified according to their location as follows: “free,” which are completely surrounded by pulp tissue; “embedded,” which are surrounded by dentin; and “adherent,” which are continuous with the dentin. Pulp stones may complicate endodontic treatments, and their removal is often required to improve access to the root canals7.

The etiology of this condition has not yet been elucidated8. Pulp stones can be derived from the natural process of aging or in response to injuries, such as traumatic occlusion9, orthodontic movement10, and irritant factors that promote chronic inflammation11. Genetic causes12 and the identification of nanoparticles and nanobacteria have also been mentioned as etiologic factors13'14. Interestingly, these factors have also been associated with kidney stones.

Although some authors have proposed a relationship between pulp stones and kidney stones15-21, there is no consistent evidence to show that these conditions are associated. Therefore, this systematic review and meta-analysis aim to answer the following focus question: “Is there an association between pulp stones and kidney stones?”

JOE. Volume ■, Number ■ 2019

Pulp Stones and Kidney Stones **1**

**FIGURE 1** - A flow diagram of the study methods.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The methods described here follow the Meta­analysis of Observational Studies in

Epidemiology checklist for meta-analysis of observational studies22.

Protocol Registration

This study was undertaken from August to November 2018 at the Universidade Positivo, Curitiba, Parana, Brazil. Its registration number in the International Prospective Register of Systematic Reviews database is

CRD42018109036.

Eligibility Criteria

The focused question was formulated according to the “PECO (population, exposition, comparison, and outcome)” method in which P was the subjects withpermanent teeth, E was pulp stones, C was the presence or absence of pulp stones in permanent teeth, and O was the presence of kidney stones.

Inclusion Criteria

Cross-sectional, case-control, and cohort studies that compared the association between pulp stones in permanent teeth and kidney stones were included.

Exclusion Criteria

The exclusion criteria were as follows:

1. editorial letters, pilot studies, reviews, *in vitro* studies, and descriptive studies, such as case reports and case series, and
2. studies that examined an association

between pulp stones and other types of calculi.

Information Sources and Search Strategy

The PECO method guided the search strategy and formulation of the focused question. Within each concept, the controlled vocabulary (Medical Subject Headings terms) and free key words were combined with the Boolean operators “OR” and “AND” (Appendix 1).

The electronic databases that were searched are also described in Appendix 1. The PubMed search strategy was adapted for each of the databases (Scopus, Web of Science, and Biblioteca Virtual em Saüde). The search was performed considering the population and exposures. To improve the search strategy, the population-related terms included dentition permanent, dental calculus, dental pulp calcification, pulp stones, and dental pulp stone. For exposures, the included terms were kidney calculi, urolithiasis,

**TABLE 1** - A Summary of the Studies Selected for This Systematic Review

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Study ID** | **Study design** | **Country** | **% of male** | **Subjects' age mean ± SD, y (range)** | **Total number of patients** | **Types of teeth included** | **Diagnostic**  **method of kidney stones** | **Diagnostic method**  **of pulp stones** | **Dental radiographic evaluation** |
| Aleksova et al15 | Cross-sectional | Republic of  Macedonia | NR | NR ± NR (20-60) | 200 | Maxillary and mandibular teeth | Ultrasonography | Panoramic and re tromolar  radiographies for suspicious teeth | NR |
| Tarim  Ertas et al16 | Cross-sectional | Turkey | 54.31 | Kidney stones:  42 ± NR (20-74) Control:  40 ± NR (20-69) | 232 | First and second molars and  premolars | History of renal colic confirmed with hematuria and voiding of the calculus, radiographic evidence, or previous surgical and endoscopic removal of stones | Bitewing radiographies | 2 experienced dentists |
| Galav et al17 | Cross-sectional | India | 55.00 | NR ± NR (20-60) | 100 | NR | Ultrasonography | Panoramic radiography | NR |
| Kumar et al18 | Cross-sectional | India | Kidney  stones:  56.67 Non­  kidney: 52.5 | Kidney stones:  33.9 ± 10.6 (NR)  Nonkidney:  34.8 ± 11.2 (NR) | 240 | Posterior and  anterior teeth | NR | Periapical radiography | 2 oral radiologists |
| Movahhedian  etal19 | Case-control | Iran | 45.45 | Kidney stones:   1. ± 11.52 (NR) Nonkidney: 2. ± 12.05 (NR) | 154 | Molars, premolars,  and anterior teeth | Ultrasonography | Panoramic radiography | 2 oral radiologists |
| Moudi et al20 | Cross-sectional | Iran | 70.00 | NR ± NR (15-50) | 130 | Posterior teeth | Ultrasonography | Digital bitewing radiography | 2 oral radiologists and one endodontist |
| Patil21 | Cross-sectional | Saudi Arabia | Kidney stones:  56.67 | Kidney stones:  33.9 ± 10.6 (NR) | 240 | Posterior and  anterior teeth | NR | Periapical radiography | 2 oral radiologists |

Nonkidney: Nonkidney:

52.5 34.8 ± 11.2 (NR)

ID, identification; NR, not reported; SD, standard deviation.

**TABLE 2** - A Summary of the Results Reported in the Included Studies in This Systematic Review

**Number of events/total**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Study ID**  Aleksova et al15 | **Group with kidney stones and pulp stones/total**  70 | **Group with kidney stones and nonpulp stones/total**  60 | **Group without kidney stones and with pulp stones**  NR | **Group without kidney stones and without pulp stones**  NR | **Total**  130 |
| Tarim Ertas et al16 | 84 | 32 | 86 | 30 | 232 |
| Galav et al17 | 20 | 80 | NR | NR | 100 |
| Kumar et al18 | 57 | 63 | 55 | 65 | 240 |
| Movahhedian et al19 | 38 | 39 | 28 | 49 | 154 |
| Moudi et al20 | 36 | 34 | 20 | 40 | 130 |
| Patil21 | 57 | 63 | 55 | 65 | 240 |

ID, identification; NR, not reported; SD, standard deviation.

nephrolithiasis, kidney stone, renal stone, renal colic, renal calcifications, renal calculi, nephrolith, and urinary lithiasis (Appendix 1).

The reference lists of all primary studies were hand searched for additional relevant publications as were links to related articles of each primary study in the PubMed database. No restrictions were placed on publication date or languages.

The gray literature was inspected in Google Scholar, the System for Information on Grey Literature in Europe, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Full Text, and the Periodicos Capes databases. In addition, abstracts from the International Association for Dental Research from 1990 to 2018 were searched. The references were managed by EndNote Basic software (Thomson Reuters, New York, NY), and duplicates were removed.

Study Selection and Data Collection Process

The selection process occurred in 2 phases to minimize bias. In phase 1, possible eligible articles were selected by 2 reviewers (R.M.L. and J.S.R.) based on the title and abstract. Any study that did not meet the inclusion criteria was discarded. In phase 2, full-text articles were obtained and classified according to the inclusion criteria by the same reviewers (R.M.L. and J.S.R.). In cases of disagreements regarding inclusion/exclusion criteria, a third reviewer (L.M.W.) was consulted to finalize the decision.

Pilot-tested, customized extraction forms were used to register the details about the studies, such as study design, participants, diagnostic methods, and results. Each study received an identification number (study ID), which was created by combining the first author's name and the publication year. Information was cross-checked and confirmed for accuracy.

**Risk of Bias in Individual Studies** The risk of bias among the included studies was evaluated by 2 independent reviewers (J.S.R. and L.M.W.) using the Newcastle- Ottawa Scale for Risk of Bias ([www.ohri.ca/](http://www.ohri.ca/) programs/clinical\_epidemiology/oxford.

asp)23'24.

Discrepancies among the 3 examiners were solved through a consensus. The evaluation criteria yielded a maximum score of 9 points. These score points were divided among the following domains: patient selection (case definition, representativeness of the cases, selection of controls, and definition of controls) for a maximum of 4 points, comparability of groups (comparability of the cases and controls) for a maximum of 2 points, and exposure (ascertainment of exposure, method of ascertainment for cases and controls, and nonresponse rate) for a maximum of 3 points. The studies were later categorized as a “high risk of bias” (0-3 points), “moderate risk of bias” (4-6 points), and “low risk of bias” (>7 points)23.

Summary Measures and Synthesis of the Results

Data from eligible studies were classified dichotomously as being present or absent. Only studies classified as low risk of bias were included in the meta-analysis.

A fixed-effects model was selected, and a meta-analysis was performed to estimate the pooled odds ratio for the association between pulp stones in permanent teeth and kidney stones. All analyses were conducted using RevMan 5.3 (Review Manager v. 5.3; The Cochrane Collaboration, Copenhagen, Denmark).

RESULTS

Study Selection

After the database screening and the removal of duplicates, 213 studies were identified (Fig. 1). After screening the titles, 14 studies were left. This was further reduced to 9 studies after the abstracts were examined, and then the full texts were assessed to check eligibility. Among them, 2 were excluded because they were brief reports25 and did not examine the association between pulp stones and kidney stones26 (Appendix 2).

**Pulp stones Non pulp stones Odds Ratio**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Study or Subgroup** | **Events** | **Total** | **Events** | **Total** | **Weight** | **M-H, Fixed, 95% Cl** |
| Moudi et al. (20) | 36 | 54 | 34 | 74 | 40.3% | 2.35 [1.14, 4.87] |
| Movahhedian et al. (19) | 38 | 66 | 39 | 88 | 59.7% | 1.71 [0.90, 3.25] |
| **Total (95% Cl)** |  | 120 |  | 162 | **100.0%** | **1.97 [1.21, 3.18]** |
| Total events | 74 |  | 73 |  |  |  |

Heterogeneity: Chi2 = 0.42, df = 1 (P = 0.52); I2 = 0% Test for overall effect: Z = 2.75 (P = 0.006)

**FIGURE 2 -** Forest plots of the association between pulp stones and kidney stones.

JOE. Volume ■, Number ■ 2019

4 Gabardo et al.

**Characteristics of Included Articles** All studies included in this review were in English. The characteristics of the 7 selected studies are listed in Tables 1 and 2. Six of the studies included in this systematic review were cross-sectional15'18’20’21, and 119 was a case­control study.

The countries of origin of the studies are as follows: 2 from India17’18, 2 from Iran19’20,1 from the Republic of Macedonia15, 1 from Turkey16, and 1 from Saudi Arabia21.

The percentage of male subjects in the studies ranged from 45%-70%, and only 1 study15 did not report this information. The age of the participants varied between 15 and 74 years, with the mean being 37.4 years. The number of participants ranged from 100-240.

The type of teeth included in the primary studies varied. Three studies18’19’21 included anterior and posterior teeth, 115 included maxillary and mandibular teeth, 216’20 included posterior teeth, and 117 did not report these data.

The diagnostic method for kidney stones also varied among the studies and included ultrasonography15’17’19’20 and a history of renal colic with confirmed hematuria and voiding of the calculus, radiographic evidence of stones, or previous surgical and endoscopic removal of stones16. Two studies did not report such data18’21.

The diagnostic method for pulp stones used different radiographic techniques and included panoramic and retromolar radiographs for teeth considered to have pulp stones15, bitewing radiographs16’20, panoramic radiographs17’19, and periapical radiographs18’21.

The professionals who performed the radiographic diagnoses varied widely among the studies, including 116 that was performed by 2 experienced dentists, 318-19-21 that were performed by 2 oral radiologists, 120 that was performed by 2 oral radiologists and an endodontist, and 215’17 that did not report this information.

The results reported in the included studies in this systematic review were as follows: a group with kidney stones and pulp stones, a group with kidney stones and nonpulp stones, a group without kidney stones and with pulp stones, and a group without kidney stones and without pulp stones (Table 2).

**Assessment of the Risk of Bias** The assessment of the risk of bias of the included studies is presented in Table 3. Three studies17’18’21 presented a high risk of bias because they did not evaluate the criteria for comparability, and their data analyses were weak in the areas of patient selection and exposure measurements. Two studies15’27 presented a moderate risk of bias because they did not evaluate the criteria for comparability, and they did not meet certain criteria for the data in the areas of patient selection and exposure measurements. Only 2 studies19’20 presented a low risk of bias according to the quality assessment Newcastle-Ottawa Scale.

Meta-analysis

A meta-analysis was performed on the studies classified as a low risk of bias19’20. This analysis was based on 2 studies19’20 and presented an odds ratio = 1.97 (95% confidence interval, 1.21-3.18; *P <* .05). The results of this analysis showed an association between pulp stones and kidney stones (Fig. 2). Heterogeneity of the data was not observed (%2 test, *P =* .52; /2 = 0).

DISCUSSION

Oral and systemic interrelationships are not a new subject in the dental research field. Some researchers have been focusing on evaluating the associations between several different conditions and oral outcomes28’29. In this context, endodontic medicine, which addresses the associations between endodontic conditions and systemic diseases, has gained prominence. Although it is still controversial30, it has been reported that pulp stones can serve as an important diagnostic marker for systemic diseases5.

In the past decade, some studies15’16’18-21 have raised the question of whether there is a relationship between pulp stones and kidney stones and examined the association between these 2 conditions. Although a few studies have shown that pulp stones and kidney stones are associated15’20 others have failed to demonstrate the same results16’18’19’21. Therefore, the present study aimed to perform a systematic review and meta-analysis with primary studies in order to investigate this association.

Notably, meta-analysis is a quantitative epidemiologic study design. The statistical approach to this method combines the results from multiple studies, instead of undertaking an individual study, in an effort to increase statistical power. This method also serves to resolve reports of uncertainty and disagreement between primary studies and draw a conclusion based on the assessed studies31. In the current meta-analysis, an association between pulp stones and kidney stones was observed in which patients with pulp stones were almost twice as likely to present with kidney stones.

An important aspect to be highlighted here is that although 7 studies were initially screened, only 2 were included in the meta­analysis19’20 because of the fact that the other studies were considered to have low methodological quality. These facts emphasize the point that future studies should be performed with a focus on the study design in order to decrease the risk of bias.

Another observation in the present systematic review was that all studies were performed in Asian populations15’21. This is an important issue that should be carefully discussed because of the possible genetic background that regulates both pathologic calcifications. It is well established that race and genes are implicit in the likelihood of disease risk32, and these results could differ in other populations and ethnic groups. Therefore, more studies that aim to evaluate the association between pulp stones and kidney stones in different populations are also necessary.

Pathologic calcification is an important subject to be explored in different health research areas. The present study supports the fact that pathologic calcifications share similar etiologic aspects. However, the impact or causality of this relationship cannot be shown here because of the fact that the temporal factor and dose association are not present in the original included studies. Therefore, the connection between them should be further shown through experimental animal studies and observational epidemiologic studies. A recent review in the endodontic medicine field examined the bidirectional relationship between endodontic infections and systemic diseases (33). However, it is possible that the endodontic medicine field is broader, including all endodontic conditions and not only infections.

CONCLUSIONS

Briefly, this study showed an association between pulp stones and kidney stones. Further well-designed studies including cohort studies should be conducted in order to confirm whether pulp stones can predict undiagnosed kidney stones.

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