SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

Imaging Techniques for Assessment of Cranio-maxillofacial Complications of Covid-19, A Systematic Review

Osama Abu-Hammad1,2,*, Ebtihal Zain-Alabedeen1, Nebras Althagafi1, Rawah Eshky1, Ismail Abdouh1, Safa Jambi1, Yosra Ayed1,3, and Najla Dar-Odeh1,2

1 College of Dentistry, Taibah University, Al Madinah Al Munawara 43353, Saudi Arabia
2 School of Dentistry, The University of Jordan, Amman 11942, Jordan
3 Laboratory for Research on Biologically Compatible Compounds, Faculty of Dentistry, Monastir University, Monastir, Tunisia.

Abstract:
Objectives: The aim of this review was to summarize and describe the reported imaging techniques used for COVID-19 patients who have developed cranio-maxillofacial complications.

Methods: A systematic review of the literature was conducted using MEDLINE/PubMed, Google Scholar, and Scopus databases. Included articles were case reports/series, clinical trials and cross-sectional studies on adult COVID-19 patients that were written in English. Excluded articles were those discussing the radiological assessment of COVID-19 complications manifested in the oral mucosa or the extra-maxillofacial areas. Combinations of the following keywords were used: “COVID-19”, “Maxillofacial,” “complications,” “imaging,” “radiological,” “Mandible,” “Jaw,” “Osteonecrosis,” “cavernous sinus thrombosis,” and “mucormycosis.”

Results: A total of 13 articles were included. Imaging techniques used were: magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), computerized tomography (CT), multislice CT (MSCT), contrast-enhanced MRI, contrast-enhanced CT, and cone beam CT. These imaging techniques were used in the diagnosis of cranio-maxillofacial complications of COVID-19, including sinusitis, cavernous sinus thrombosis, jaw osteomyelitis, cellulitis, vision loss, and mucormycosis. CT and its variants were the most commonly used techniques.

Conclusion: Within the limitations of the included studies, which were mainly case reports, it can be concluded that imaging techniques that were employed in the diagnosis of cranio-maxillofacial complications of COVID-19 were limited to MRI, CT and their variants. Despite the efficiency of the utilized imaging techniques, clinicians worldwide should be aware of the most effective and least risk-associated methods used in such circumstances.

Keywords: Complications, COVID-19, Craniofacial, Diagnostic imaging, Maxillofacial, Magnetic resonance imaging.

1. INTRODUCTION

Among viral respiratory tract infections, coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) represents the most recently emerging type of non-localized respiratory infection that may present with severe disease outcomes. The disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2) is characterized by a wide range of extrapulmonary manifestations whereby several vital organs may sustain chronic or permanent injury. Despite a small minority of patients who develop an asymptomatic illness, a substantial proportion develop acute and chronic complications that affect almost all tissues. Vital organs affected include, among others, the heart, blood vessels, liver, kidneys and cranio-macillofacial structures [1]. Surgeons may encounter patients who have recovered from COVID-19 but are still lying under the burden of long-term morbidities, which scientists have warned against in anticipation of a multiorgan injury burden following COVID-19 infections [2]. Within the context of cranio-maxillofacial region, numerous complications have been described, including cavernous sinus thrombosis (CST),
sinusitis, osteomyelitis, osteonecrosis, vision loss, and cellulitis of the face [3]. These complications are quite diverse and present in various forms according to the type of blood vessels affected by thrombosis/occlusion, location and severity of the inflammatory process, disease duration, history of comorbidities, immune response, and age of the patient, among other factors [4]. The severe morbidity associated with these complications necessitates early diagnosis to initiate timely management and prevention of irreversible outcomes of chronic tissue injury. Therefore, it is necessary to accurately differentiate and promptly diagnose disorders of the regional blood supply to the jaw and face when examining patients who develop these interrelated complications. It is also necessary to consider the diverse nature of involved structures, including bone and associated soft tissues, in the evaluation of inflammatory and necrotic changes associated with disease outcomes. On the other hand, it is important to appreciate the necessary indications and balance them with the possible disadvantages of performing such diagnostic techniques, which can entail increasing costs and adverse health risks of radiation. A wide variety of medical imaging tests are available for diagnosing bone disorders, such as radiography, ultrasound, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), single-photon emission computed tomography (SPECT) and positron emission tomography (PET) [5, 6]. Other imaging tests are effective for identifying problems in blood flow and the condition of hard and soft tissues, such as multislice computed tomography (MSCT), computed tomography (CT) and magnetic resonance angiography (MR angiography).

Taking into consideration the wide variety of imaging techniques available and the urgency required for diagnosis and prompt management of COVID-19-associated craniomaxillofacial complications, indications and guidelines for the use of proper diagnostic imaging techniques should be highlighted. Due to the increasing number of reported cases of craniomaxillofacial complications of COVID-19 [7], diagnostic methods that help identify and determine the severity of pathologies in the craniomaxillofacial region are warranted. Therefore, this systematic review aims at examining the relevant studies conducted among COVID-19 patients who developed craniomaxillofacial complications to describe and highlight the most commonly used imaging techniques in the diagnosis of these complications.

2. METHODS

The review was conducted in accordance with PRISMA 2020 (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-analysis) guidelines [8]. The primary outcome was identifying types of imaging techniques used, and the secondary outcome was describing types of craniomaxillofacial complications diagnosed by these imaging techniques in COVID-19 patients.

2.1. Information Sources and Search Strategy

MEDLINE/PubMed, Google Scholar, and Scopus databases were systematically and thoroughly searched to identify published data on craniomaxillofacial complications of COVID-19 using the following combinations of keywords and Boolean Operators ‘AND’ and ‘OR’ as follows: “COVID-19” AND “Imaging” OR “Radiological” AND “Maxillofacial” OR “Mandible” OR “Jaw” AND “Complications” OR “Osteomyelitis” OR “Osteonecrosis” OR “Cavernous Sinus Thrombosis” OR “Mucormycosis.” References of retrieved articles were manually searched for the same keywords.

2.2. Selection Process

The Mendeley Reference Manager was used to select articles. Two reviewers (N.D-O and E.Z-A.) independently selected the eligible studies. Any disagreement between reviewers was resolved by consensus or by a third reviewer (O.A.-H.). Articles included in the review were assessed for quality by two researchers (N.D-O and E.Z-A.) who worked independently. The Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) critical appraisal tool was used to assess the quality of articles for this review [9]. According to this appraisal tool, methodological quality (risk of bias) for case series employed ten criteria, while that for case reports and cross-sectional studies employed eight criteria that were evaluated as a “yes,” “no,” “unclear,” and “not applicable.”

2.3. Data Synthesis

Quantitative synthesis was not employed in this study for two reasons. Most included studies were case reports and series. Further, the studies were clinically heterogeneous; therefore, narrative synthesis was considered the most appropriate approach for this study.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Study Selection

A total of 13 articles were determined to be appropriate for inclusion in this review. The flowchart that describes the selection process is presented in Fig. (1).

3.2. Study Characteristics

A total of 13 studies (two cross-sectional and 11 case reports/series were included Table 1).

3.3. Methodological Quality (risk of bias)

All case reports have satisfactorily addressed the JBI Critical Appraisal Checklist for case reports. In all case series, it was not possible to determine whether they had consecutive inclusion of participants. There were two cross-sectional studies included. In Rao et al., strategies to deal with confounding factors were not stated [13], and in Moorthy et al. [15], it was unclear if the study has addressed this item. Therefore all case series and cross-sectional studies were assessed to have a low risk of bias taking into consideration that one item (out of 10 in the case of series and out of eight in cross-sectional studies) was either missing or unclear (Table 2).
Fig. (1). Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses (PRISMA) flowchart showing the identification process of studies via MEDLINE/PubMed, Scopus and Google Scholar databases.

Table 1. Studies that describe imaging techniques used for diagnosis of craniomaxillofacial complications encountered in COVID-19 patients.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No</th>
<th>Author (year)/Refs</th>
<th>Study Type</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Patient(s)</th>
<th>Imaging Technique/s</th>
<th>CMF Complications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Eswaran et al (2021) [10]</td>
<td>Case report</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>31, M</td>
<td>CE MRI, CE CT</td>
<td>Fungal sinusitis (maxillary, ethmoid, sphenoid sinus), Thickening of recti muscles, Retrobulbar fat stranding, CST, Diffuse thrombosis with complete obstruction of the Right internal carotid artery, Diffuse erosion of the frontal bone, Underlying meningeal thickening.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Boymuradov et al-2 (2021) [12]</td>
<td>Case series</td>
<td>Uzbekistan</td>
<td>Two M (65 and 68 years), Two F (62 and 67 years)</td>
<td>MSCT, MR angiography</td>
<td>Maxillary osteomyelitis, Cellulitis of the face, Vision loss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Rao et al. (2021) [13]</td>
<td>Cross-sectional</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>28 patients Mean age (49.1±10.8), M=78.6%</td>
<td>MRI, CT</td>
<td>Mucormycotic pansinusitis, Maxillary osteomyelitis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Shires et al. (2021) [14]</td>
<td>Case report</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>76 M</td>
<td>CT, MRI</td>
<td>Sinusitis, left orbital and peri orbital abscess cellulitis, Maxillary osteomyelitis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. Studies that showed a low risk of bias in methodological quality, and reasons for this assessment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No</th>
<th>Author (year)/Refs</th>
<th>Study Type</th>
<th>Level of Risk</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Moorthy et al. (2021) [15]</td>
<td>Cross-sectional</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Did the case series have consecutive inclusion of participants?</td>
<td>Unclear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Chouhan et al. (2021) [16]</td>
<td>Case series</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Were strategies to deal with confounding factors stated?</td>
<td>Unclear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Arewar et al. (2021) [17]</td>
<td>Case report</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Did the case series have consecutive inclusion of participants?</td>
<td>Unclear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Dave et al. (2021) [18]</td>
<td>Case series</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Were strategies to deal with confounding factors stated?</td>
<td>Unclear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Ambereen et al. (2021)</td>
<td>Case report</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Did the case series have consecutive inclusion of participants?</td>
<td>Unclear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Arafat et al. (2021) [20]</td>
<td>Case report</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Were strategies to deal with confounding factors stated?</td>
<td>Unclear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Sai Krishna et al. (2021)</td>
<td>Case report</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Did the case series have consecutive inclusion of participants?</td>
<td>Unclear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Desai et al. (2021) [22]</td>
<td>Case series</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Did the case series have consecutive inclusion of participants?</td>
<td>Unclear</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. DISCUSSION

This review summarized and highlighted the imaging methods used to diagnose craniomaxillofacial diseases that arise in association with COVID-19 as a complication of the disease itself or its treatment modalities. It reported studies that were mostly case reports and series originating mainly from India. This was expected considering the notable 2-fold increase in rhino-orbital mucormycosis in India during the COVID-19 era [23]. From a global perspective, literature published on mucormycosis has exponentially increased, with more than one thousand articles published since the emergence of the pandemic, which reflects the great interest in understanding and reporting this opportunistic invasive infection. Therefore, it is important, before discussing the utilized imaging techniques, to highlight the close pathogenic relationship of mucormycosis, jaw osteomyelitis, and CST. In susceptible COVID-19 patients, rhino-orbital-cerebral mucormycosis is reportedly the most common type of mucormycosis [24]. It is initiated by inhalation of the fungal spores, and owing to the angioinvasive and thrombotic characteristics of these micro-organisms spread to neighboring structures ensues. This spread involves the paranasal sinuses, the nasal mucosa, turbinates, and palate, and eventually, it progresses to maxillary osteomyelitis, orbital involvement and vascular involvement of the carotid artery and cavernous sinus [24, 25].

Craniomaxillofacial inflammatory and necrotic diseases such as fungal osteomyelitis of the jaw predominantly involve the maxilla more often than the mandible due to the high susceptibility of the maxillary sinus to mucormycosis [24]. There is obviously a higher male gender prevalence in the studies reported in this review, probably because of the associated comorbidities such as diabetes mellitus [26]. Except for two studies that report mandibular involvement [17, 19], all studies included in this review reported lesions involving the maxilla in the form of sinusitis, osteomyelitis, and mucormycosis. Therefore, it is necessary to utilize imaging techniques that identify diseases in hard and soft tissues as well as vascular involvement.

Abbreviations: CT: computed tomography; MRI: Magnetic resonance imaging; CE MRI: Contrast-enhanced MRI; CE CT: Contrast-enhanced CT; MSCT: Multislice CT; CBCT: Cone beam CT; CMF: Craniomaxillofacial, IFI: invasive fungal infection (mucormycosis, aspergillosis); CST: cavernous sinus thrombosis; F: Female; M: Male
Imaging Techniques for Assessment of Cranio-maxillofacial Complications of Covid-19

The findings of this study show that MRI (and its variants) and CT (and its variants) were the only methods used as diagnostic imaging methods for patients developing cranio-maxillofacial complications. However, CT and related techniques (MSCT and CBCT) were collectively considered the most popular methods. Therefore, it is expected for healthcare systems, particularly in communities burdened by the cranio-maxillofacial complications of COVID-19, to face a rise in risks associated with the use of CT in the future. Avoiding the use of other valid diagnostic methods, such as PET and SPECT, may highlight the unavailability and underuse of these techniques, particularly in countries that showed a high burden of cranio-maxillofacial complications of COVID-19.

This review reported important findings with implications on the diagnostic process of COVID-19's immediate and long-term complications; however, it has limitations attributed to the nature of included studies. Included studies were in the main case reports/series due to the characteristic geographic distribution of COVID-19 cranio-maxillofacial complications, particularly CST, mucormycosis and osteomyelitis. This necessitated the use of the JBI critical appraisal tool. This tool has been described by Ma et al. (2020) to be the only tool for the assessment of methodological quality or risk of bias for case reports and series [42]. On the other hand, this tool is also recommended by the same researchers for the assessment of
cross-sectional studies. Therefore, all studies included were assessed by this tool, and it was shown that items of assessment were satisfactorily addressed. It is recommended that future studies on this topic to employ analytic methods to compare the effectiveness of various imaging techniques in diagnostic accuracy for cranio-maxillofacial morbidities such as osteomyelitis, mucormycosis, cellulitis of the face and CST.

CONCLUSION

Healthcare personnel directly responsible for the treatment of patients with CMF complications of COVID-19 have to take into consideration the urgent nature of these complications as well as the possible risks posed by ionizing radiation exposure. The selected imaging modalities have to ensure accurate diagnostic imaging examination and design the ideal management plan with the lowest possible radiation exposure.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- COVID-19: Coronavirus disease-2019
- SARS-CoV-2: Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus Virus-2
- CST: Cavernous Sinus Thrombosis
- IFI: Invasive Fungal Infection
- CMF: Cranio-maxillofacial
- MRI: Magnetic Resonance Imaging
- CT: Computed Tomography
- MSCT: Multi-slice Computed Tomography
- CBCT: Cone Beam Computed Tomography
- SPECT: Single-Photon Emission Computed Tomography
- PET: Positron Emission Tomography
- PRISMA: Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-analysis
- JBI: The Joanna Briggs Institute

CONSENT FOR PUBLICATION

Not applicable.

STANDARDS OF REPORTING

PRISMA guideline has been followed.

AVAILABILITY OF DATA AND MATERIALS

This was a systematic review, therefore data is available in the manuscript as written in the proof.

FUNDING

None.

CONFlict OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest, financial or otherwise.

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Declared none.

REFERENCES


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