International Journal of Life Sciences, Biotechnology and Pharma Research Vol. 13, No. 12, December 2024 Online ISSN: 2250-3137
Print ISSN: 2977-0122

DOI: 10.69605/ijlbpr_13.12.2024.37

ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Role of Magnetic Resonance Imaging in Non Ischaemic Dilated Cardiomyopathies

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Received Date: 19 October, 2024 Accepted Date: 23 November, 2024

ABSTRACT

Aim: This study aimed to evaluate the role of magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) in diagnosing, characterizing, and risk stratifying non-ischemic dilated cardiomyopathy (NIDCM) by assessing ventricular function, myocardial fibrosis, and tissue characteristics. **Materials and Methods:** A prospective analysis was conducted on 110 patients diagnosed with NIDCM based on left ventricular (LV) dilation and systolic dysfunction (LVEF <45%) without significant coronary artery disease (CAD). Exclusion criteria included significant CAD, contraindications to MRI, and secondary causes of cardiomyopathy. Cardiac MRI was performed using standardized protocols, including cine imaging, T1/T2-weighted imaging, late gadolinium enhancement (LGE), and parametric mapping. **Results:** The study population included predominantly male (70%) patients with a mean age of 48–51 years. Functional impairment (NYHA Class III/IV) was significantly higher in severe cases (70%, $p = 0.022$). LVEF and RVEF were uniformly reduced across groups, indicating severe systolic dysfunction, while LV mass and end-diastolic volumes showed a trend of progression with disease severity. LGE analysis revealed comparable fibrosis extent across groups (~25%), but fibrosis mass was significantly higher in severe cases (21.7 ± 7.8 g, $p = 0.045$). Parametric mapping demonstrated significantly elevated extracellular volume (ECV) in severe cases ($30.2 \pm 4.3\%$, $p = 0.041$) and an increased edema index (2.3 ± 0.7, $p = 0.031$), highlighting the roles of diffuse fibrosis and inflammation. Biomarkers such as NT-proBNP and troponin did not significantly differ across groups, whereas creatinine levels were elevated in severe cases (1.2 ± 0.3 mg/dL, $p = 0.045$). Regression analysis identified no significant predictors of LVEF, underscoring the multifactorial nature of systolic dysfunction in NIDCM. **Conclusion:** MRI is a critical tool in diagnosing and managing NIDCM, offering comprehensive insights into structural, functional, and tissue-level abnormalities. The study highlights the significance of fibrosis and inflammation in disease progression, emphasizing the utility of advanced imaging techniques like LGE and parametric mapping. MRI's integration into clinical practice enhances personalized treatment strategies, although challenges like accessibility persist.

Keywords: Non-ischemic dilated cardiomyopathy, magnetic resonance imaging, late gadolinium enhancement, myocardial fibrosis, parametric mapping

INTRODUCTION

Non-ischemic dilated cardiomyopathy (NIDCM) is a significant global health issue characterized by left ventricular (LV) dilation and systolic dysfunction in the absence of significant coronary artery disease. This condition leads to impaired myocardial contractility, progressive heart failure, and an increased risk of arrhythmias and sudden cardiac death. Despite advancements in diagnostic and therapeutic strategies, the management of NIDCM remains a clinical challenge, largely due to the heterogeneity in its etiology, pathophysiology, and progression.[1] Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) has emerged as a powerful non-invasive tool for evaluating the structural and functional aspects of the heart in patients with NIDCM. Traditional imaging modalities such as echocardiography, though widely used, often have limitations in accurately assessing myocardial tissue characteristics and subtle structural abnormalities. In contrast, cardiac MRI provides comprehensive insights into ventricular geometry, myocardial fibrosis, and tissue composition, making it a cornerstone in the evaluation of cardiomyopathies.[2] One of the key advantages of MRI in NIDCM is its ability to quantify ventricular volumes, ejection fraction, and myocardial mass with high accuracy and reproducibility. These parameters are essential for assessing the degree of systolic dysfunction and ventricular remodeling, which are critical markers of disease severity and progression. Moreover, MRI offers superior visualization of right ventricular (RV) function, often affected in advanced stages of

DOI: 10.69605/ijlbpr_13.12.2024.37

NIDCM, contributing to a holistic assessment of biventricular involvement.Beyond functional assessment, cardiac MRI excels in tissue characterization, a crucial aspect of understanding the underlying pathophysiology of NIDCM. The late gadolinium enhancement (LGE) technique has revolutionized the ability to detect and quantify myocardial fibrosis, a hallmark of NIDCM that correlates with adverse outcomes such as ventricular arrhythmias and reduced survival. The presence, extent, and pattern of LGE provide valuable prognostic information and help distinguish NIDCM from other myocardial diseases.[3]Recent advancements in parametric mapping techniques, including T1 and T2 mapping, have further expanded the diagnostic capabilities of MRI. These techniques allow the quantification of diffuse myocardial fibrosis and edema, providing insights into inflammatory processes and myocardial remodeling that are not detectable with conventional imaging. Extracellular volume (ECV) quantification derived from T1 mapping has become particularly valuable in identifying subtle fibrotic changes that may precede overt structural abnormalities, enabling early diagnosis and intervention.[4] MRI also plays a critical role in risk stratification and guiding management strategies in NIDCM. The presence and extent of fibrosis detected by LGE have been shown to predict the risk of arrhythmic events, heart failure progression, and mortality. This information is instrumental in identifying high-risk patients who may benefit from implantable cardioverter-defibrillators (ICDs) or other advanced therapies. Furthermore, the ability of MRI to track changes in myocardial tissue and ventricular function over time makes it an invaluable tool for monitoring disease progression and evaluating treatment efficacy.[5] The versatility of MRI extends to its application in identifying specific subtypes of NIDCM, such as those associated with genetic mutations, inflammatory processes, or metabolic disorders. For instance, distinct patterns of LGE can help differentiate NIDCM from myocarditis, infiltrative cardiomyopathies, or other non-ischemic cardiac conditions. This capability not only enhances diagnostic accuracy but also informs tailored treatment approaches based on the underlying etiology.[6] Despite its numerous advantages, the use of MRI in NIDCM is not without challenges. Accessibility and cost remain significant barriers, particularly in resource-limited settings. Additionally, contraindications such as the presence of certain metallic implants or severe claustrophobia can limit its applicability in some patients. Nonetheless, ongoing advancements in MRI technology, including faster imaging sequences and improved hardware, are addressing these limitations and expanding its utility in clinical practice.[7] In conclusion, cardiac MRI has established itself as an indispensable modality in the evaluation of NIDCM, offering unparalleled insights into ventricular function, myocardial tissue characterization, and disease progression. Its ability to integrate structural, functional, and tissue-level information makes it a comprehensive tool for diagnosis, risk stratification, and treatment planning. As technological advancements continue to enhance its capabilities and accessibility, MRI is poised to play an increasingly central role in the personalized management of NIDCM, ultimately improving outcomes for this complex and heterogeneous condition.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This prospective study was conducted to evaluate the role of magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) in diagnosing and characterizing non-ischemic dilated cardiomyopathy (NIDCM). A total of 110 patients clinically diagnosed with dilated cardiomyopathy (DCM) were enrolled during study period. Inclusion criteria included patients aged 18 years or older with left ventricular (LV) dilation and systolic dysfunction (left ventricular ejection fraction [LVEF] <45%) not attributable to coronary artery disease (CAD) after clinical evaluation. Exclusion criteria included patients with significant CAD, contraindications to MRI (e.g., implanted pacemakers, severe claustrophobia), and those with acute myocarditis or peripartum cardiomyopathy.The study was approved by the institutional ethics committee, and written informed consent was obtained from all participants.

Imaging Protocol

All patients underwent cardiac MRI using a [1.5T/3.0T MRI scanner]. The imaging protocol included the following sequences:

1. **Steady-state free precession (SSFP)** cine imaging for functional assessment and quantification of LV and right ventricular (RV) volumes, LVEF, and wall motion abnormalities.
2. **T1-weighted imaging** for tissue characterization.
3. **T2-weighted imaging** to detect myocardial edema.
4. **Late gadolinium enhancement (LGE)** imaging acquired 10–15 minutes after intravenous injection of gadolinium-based contrast agent ([dose] mmol/kg) to identify myocardial fibrosis or scarring.
5. **T1 and T2 mapping** (if available) for quantitative tissue characterization.

Diagnostic Evaluation

The diagnosis of non-ischemic dilated cardiomyopathy (NIDCM) was confirmed based on the absence of significant coronary artery disease (CAD), verified through prior coronary angiography, computed tomography coronary angiography, or negative stress testing. Additional criteria included the presence of left ventricular (LV) dilation, defined as an end-diastolic diameter indexed to body surface area

DOI: 10.69605/ijlbpr_13.12.2024.37

exceeding normal limits, and reduced left ventricular ejection fraction (LVEF) as assessed by echocardiography and/or MRI. Specific MRI findings, such as myocardial fibrosis patterns characterized by mid-wall or patchy late gadolinium enhancement (LGE), further supported the diagnosis of NIDCM.Demographic data, clinical history, and laboratory results, including biomarkers like NT-proBNP and troponin, were systematically collected. MRI parameters, including LV and right ventricular (RV) volumes, myocardial mass, LVEF, the presence and extent of LGE, and T1/T2 mapping values, were meticulously recorded for comprehensive assessment.

Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS, version 25.0. Continuous variables were expressed as mean ± standard deviation or median (interquartile range), and categorical variables were presented as frequencies and percentages. Group comparisons were performed using Student's t-test or Mann-Whitney U test for continuous variables and chi-square or Fisher's exact test for categorical variables. Multivariate logistic regression analysis was conducted to identify predictors of adverse outcomes. A p-value <0.05 was considered statistically significant.

RESULTS

Table 1: Demographic and Clinical Characteristics

The demographic parameters such as age, gender distribution, and BMI were comparable across the three groups (mild, moderate, and severe NIDCM) with no statistically significant differences ($p > 0.05$). The mean age ranged between 48 and 51 years across the groups, indicating a middle-aged population commonly affected by NIDCM. Male predominance was noted, with approximately 70% of the patients being male, consistent with the higher prevalence of cardiomyopathy in men.

In contrast, a significant difference was observed in NYHA Class distribution ($p = 0.022$), with 70% of patients in the severe group being in Class III/IV, compared to 35% in the mild group. This underscores the progressive nature of NIDCM, with worsening symptoms and functional capacity correlating with disease severity. Heart rate, systolic blood pressure, and diastolic blood pressure showed no significant variation across the groups, suggesting that hemodynamic stability might not differ substantially with severity in a chronic setting.

Table 2: Left and Right Ventricular Function

The left ventricular ejection fraction (LVEF) was uniformly reduced across all groups ($p = 0.712$), reflecting the hallmark systolic dysfunction characteristic of NIDCM. The mean LVEF values, ranging from 34.8% to 35.1%, indicated severe impairment in systolic function, consistent with the inclusion criteria of LVEF <45%. Right ventricular ejection fraction (RVEF) also showed no significant differences ($p = 0.692$), with values between 41.2% and 42.5%, suggesting biventricular involvement.

Structural changes such as increased LV mass and end-diastolic volumes for both LV and RV were more pronounced in the severe group, although the differences did not reach statistical significance. The mean LV mass increased from 109 g/m² in the mild group to 115 g/m² in the severe group ($p = 0.440$). LV and RV dilation, as measured by end-diastolic volumes, also showed a trend of progression with disease severity ($p = 0.523$ and $p = 0.490$, respectively). These findings reflect the progressive remodeling and dilation of the ventricles associated with disease advancement.

Table 3: Extent of Late Gadolinium Enhancement (LGE)

LGE extent, indicative of myocardial fibrosis, was similar across groups, with mean values around 25% of the myocardium in all three groups ($p = 0.799$). However, myocardial fibrosis quantified by weight (grams) was significantly higher in the severe group (21.7 ± 7.8 g) compared to the mild group (18.2 ± 7.1 g) ($p = 0.045$). This finding highlights the increasing burden of myocardial fibrosis as a critical pathophysiological feature of advanced NIDCM.

The percentage of LV segments affected by LGE increased with severity (30% in mild to 35% in severe), but this difference was not statistically significant ($p = 0.310$). These results indicate that while the extent of fibrosis does not differ significantly, the severity of fibrosis, as represented by myocardial mass, is an important differentiator of disease progression.

Table 4: T1 and T2 Mapping

T1 and T2 mapping values, reflecting myocardial tissue characteristics, showed no significant differences across groups ($p = 0.828$ and $p = 0.726$, respectively). The mean T1 values were slightly elevated in all groups, consistent with diffuse fibrosis. T2 values, representing edema, were also mildly increased across all groups.

The extracellular volume (ECV) fraction, a quantitative measure of diffuse fibrosis, was significantly higher in the severe group (30.2 ± 4.3%) compared to the mild group (28.5 ± 4.0%) ($p = 0.041$). This finding highlights the importance of ECV in capturing the diffuse fibrotic burden that contributes to disease severity. Additionally, the edema index, indicative of myocardial inflammation, was significantly higher in the severe group (2.3 ± 0.7) compared to the mild group (1.8 ± 0.5) ($p = 0.031$). These findings suggest that both fibrosis and inflammation are integral to the progression of NIDCM.

Table 5: Biomarker Analysis

Biomarkers such as NT-proBNP and troponin did not significantly differ between the groups ($p = 0.949$ and

DOI: 10.69605/ijlbpr_13.12.2024.37

p = 0.889, respectively). The elevated NT-proBNP levels in all groups reflect chronic myocardial stress, but its inability to differentiate between severity levels suggests that it may have limited utility in stratifying disease progression in this context. Similarly, troponin levels, indicative of myocardial injury, remained comparable across groups, likely due to the chronic nature of the disease.

Serum creatinine levels were significantly higher in the severe group (1.2 ± 0.3 mg/dL) compared to the mild group (1.0 ± 0.3 mg/dL) (p = 0.045). This finding points to a potential relationship between worsening cardiac function and renal impairment, a common comorbidity in advanced heart failure.

Table 6: Regression Analysis

The regression analysis identified no significant predictors of LVEF among the tested variables, including NT-proBNP, troponin, LV mass, age, and extracellular volume (all p > 0.05). While the intercept was significant (p < 0.001), reflecting a baseline contribution to LVEF, none of the independent variables showed a direct association with LVEF.

These results highlight the multifactorial nature of systolic dysfunction in NIDCM, where no single parameter can independently predict LVEF. The interplay of diffuse fibrosis, inflammation, ventricular remodeling, and other mechanisms likely contributes to the observed dysfunction, necessitating a multimodal approach for comprehensive assessment.

Table 1: Demographic and Clinical Characteristics

Parameter	Mild (n=40)	Moderate (n=40)	Severe (n=30)	p-value
Age (years)	51.1 ± 20.3	49.2 ± 20.6	48.7 ± 17.1	0.851
Male (%)	70%	72%	68%	0.910
Body Mass Index (BMI)	24.5 ± 4.1	24.8 ± 3.9	24.9 ± 4.0	0.840
NYHA Class III/IV (%)	35%	52%	70%	0.022 (significant)
Heart Rate (bpm)	78 ± 12	80 ± 14	82 ± 13	0.490
Systolic BP (mmHg)	120 ± 15	122 ± 14	124 ± 16	0.560
Diastolic BP (mmHg)	76 ± 10	78 ± 11	79 ± 9	0.580

Table 2: Left and Right Ventricular Function

Parameter	Mild (n=40)	Moderate (n=40)	Severe (n=30)	p-value
Left Ventricular EF (%)	35.1 ± 6.4	34.9 ± 7.0	34.8 ± 6.8	0.712
Right Ventricular EF (%)	42.5 ± 8.2	41.7 ± 8.5	41.2 ± 7.9	0.692
LV Mass (g/m²)	109 ± 20	112 ± 18	115 ± 21	0.440
LV End-Diastolic Volume (mL/m²)	145 ± 30	148 ± 32	151 ± 29	0.523
RV End-Diastolic Volume (mL/m²)	98 ± 25	101 ± 27	104 ± 28	0.490

Table 3: Extent of Late Gadolinium Enhancement (LGE)

Parameter	Mild (n=40)	Moderate (n=40)	Severe (n=30)	p-value
LGE Extent (%)	25.1 ± 10.9	24.7 ± 11.0	25.4 ± 9.9	0.799
Myocardial Fibrosis (g)	18.2 ± 7.1	20.4 ± 8.2	21.7 ± 7.8	0.045 (significant)
LV Segments with LGE (%)	30 ± 12	32 ± 14	35 ± 13	0.310

Table 4: T1 and T2 Mapping

Parameter	Mild (n=40)	Moderate (n=40)	Severe (n=30)	p-value
T1 Mapping (ms)	1102 ± 125	1099 ± 119	1105 ± 130	0.828
T2 Mapping (ms)	50.7 ± 8.1	50.1 ± 7.9	50.5 ± 8.0	0.726
Extracellular Volume (%)	28.5 ± 4.0	29.1 ± 3.9	30.2 ± 4.3	0.041 (significant)
Edema Index	1.8 ± 0.5	2.0 ± 0.6	2.3 ± 0.7	0.031 (significant)

Table 5: Biomarker Analysis

Parameter	Mild (n=40)	Moderate (n=40)	Severe (n=30)	p-value
NT-proBNP (pg/mL)	2415 ± 1374	2513 ± 1356	2409 ± 1268	0.949
Troponin (ng/mL)	0.055 ± 0.025	0.056 ± 0.027	0.057 ± 0.026	0.889
Creatinine (mg/dL)	1.0 ± 0.3	1.1 ± 0.4	1.2 ± 0.3	0.045 (significant)

Table 6 Regression Analysis

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	t-Statistic	p-Value
Constant (Intercept)	26.861	6.561	4.094	<0.001 (significant)
NT-proBNP (pg/mL)	-0.000217	0.000506	-0.429	0.668
Troponin (ng/mL)	6.214	29.215	0.213	0.832

DOI: 10.69605/ijlbpr_13.12.2024.37

LV Mass (g)	0.0109	0.0205	0.531	0.596
Age (years)	-0.0269	0.0385	-0.699	0.486

DISCUSSION

The demographic findings in this study, including the mean age of 48-51 years and a male predominance of 70%, align with existing literature. Studies such as Gulati et al. (2017) and Halliday et al. (2018) reported similar demographic profiles in patients with NIDCM, emphasizing the midlife onset and higher prevalence in males due to genetic predisposition and hormonal differences.[8,9] Male predominance is well-documented and often linked to the protective effects of estrogen in females, as noted in studies by Heymans et al. (2016).[10]While BMI and hemodynamic parameters (e.g., heart rate and blood pressure) showed no significant differences across severity groups, the NYHA Class correlated significantly with disease severity ($p = 0.022$). This finding is consistent with Halliday et al. (2018), who highlighted that functional impairment, as assessed by NYHA Class, serves as a critical marker of disease progression and adverse outcomes.[9]The uniformly reduced LVEF (approximately 35%) across all groups reflects severe systolic dysfunction, a hallmark of NIDCM. Raman et al. (2020) similarly observed that reduced LVEF is a consistent feature in NIDCM, regardless of disease severity, as systolic dysfunction typically precedes significant ventricular remodeling.[11] The absence of significant differences in RV function (RVEF) across groups, with mean values ranging from 41.2% to 42.5%, supports the notion of early biventricular involvement, as described by Heymans et al. (2016).[10]The trend of increasing LV mass and end-diastolic volumes, though not statistically significant, aligns with findings by Tayal et al. (2017), who reported that progressive remodeling in NIDCM manifests as ventricular hypertrophy and dilation. This structural progression, though not directly reflected in functional parameters, underscores the importance of early intervention to mitigate adverse remodeling.[12]The finding of similar LGE extent across groups (approximately 25% of the myocardium) but a significant increase in myocardial fibrosis mass in severe cases ($p = 0.045$) is noteworthy. Puntmann et al. (2016) demonstrated that the severity of fibrosis, rather than its extent, correlates better with functional impairment and adverse outcomes in NIDCM. This study supports those findings by showing that fibrosis burden increases in severe disease, reflecting its pathophysiological impact.[13]The lack of significant differences in the percentage of LV segments affected by LGE echoes findings by Gulati et al. (2017), who suggested that while LGE extent is a useful marker of fibrosis, its clinical implications depend on the distribution and severity of the fibrotic burden. These results underscore the role of advanced imaging in characterizing myocardial fibrosis.[8]T1 and T2 mapping, which provide non-invasive insights into myocardial tissue characteristics, showed no significant differences across groups, consistent with findings by Wong et al.[14] (2018). However, the extracellular volume (ECV) fraction was significantly elevated in the severe group ($30.2 \pm 4.3\%$, $p = 0.041$), consistent with the work of Schelbert et al. (2017), who reported that diffuse fibrosis (as measured by ECV) correlates strongly with disease severity and prognosis in NIDCM.[15]The significant increase in the edema index in severe cases ($p = 0.031$) highlights the role of myocardial inflammation in disease progression, as identified by McDonagh et al. (2021). This aligns with the hypothesis that inflammation is a driver of ventricular remodeling and fibrosis, contributing to the clinical deterioration observed in NIDCM.[16]While NT-proBNP and troponin levels were elevated across all groups, they failed to distinguish between severity levels. This is consistent with studies by Januzzi et al. (2018) and Ferreira et al. (2020), which found that while these biomarkers reflect overall myocardial stress, their sensitivity to incremental changes in chronic disease is limited.[17,18]Serum creatinine levels were significantly higher in the severe group ($p = 0.045$), suggesting a potential link between worsening cardiac function and renal impairment. Boerrigter et al. (2017) similarly reported that renal dysfunction is a frequent comorbidity in advanced heart failure, contributing to a higher risk of adverse outcomes.[19]The regression model revealed no significant predictors of LVEF among the studied variables, including NT-proBNP, troponin, LV mass, age, and extracellular volume. This finding aligns with Tayal et al. (2017), who argued that LVEF in NIDCM reflects the combined effects of multiple factors, including fibrosis, inflammation, and hemodynamic load.[12]The non-significant association of NT-proBNP and troponin with LVEF underscores the need for comprehensive imaging-based assessments rather than reliance on isolated biomarkers. The significant intercept suggests that other unmeasured factors, such as genetic predisposition or microvascular dysfunction, may contribute to variability in LVEF. This is consistent with findings by Halliday et al. (2018), who emphasized the complexity of predicting systolic dysfunction in NIDCM.[9]

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the pivotal role of magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) in the comprehensive assessment of non-ischemic dilated cardiomyopathy (NIDCM). MRI provides unparalleled insights into ventricular function, myocardial fibrosis, and tissue characterization, aiding in diagnosis, risk stratification, and disease monitoring. Key findings emphasize the significance of fibrosis and inflammation in disease progression, underscoring the

DOI: 10.69605/ijlbpr_13.12.2024.37

value of advanced imaging techniques like late gadolinium enhancement (LGE) and parametric mapping. While challenges such as accessibility remain, MRI's ability to guide personalized treatment strategies makes it an indispensable tool in managing NIDCM.

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