



Changes in Cytokines, Biomarkers of Bone Turnover and Hormones Are Associated With Bone Loss in Postmenopausal Indian Women

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ABSTRACT

Background: The pro-inflammatory cytokines that are associated with the decline in ovarian function during menopause are involved in the pathophysiology of postmenopausal bone loss, which has not been examined in Indian postmenopausal women.

Objectives: This study assessed the extent of changes in pro-inflammatory cytokines in relation to bone turnover markers, hormones, and bone mineral density (BMD) during menopausal transition in Indian women.

Materials and Methods: Levels of interleukin 1 (IL1 β), interleukin 6 (IL6), and tumor necrosis factor (TNF α); the bone markers osteocalcin (OC), bone-specific alkaline phosphatase (BSAP), carboxy terminal telopeptide (CTX), and deoxypyridoniline (DPD); and the hormones parathyroid hormone (PTH), follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH), and estrone glucuronide (E1G) were measured by enzyme linked immunosorbant assay (ELISA) in blood and urine samples of premenopausal (age: 21-40 years, n=124) and menopausal women (41-70 years, n=256) without fractures. Bone mineral density (BMD) in the femur and spine was measured by dual energy x-ray absorptiometry (DXA).

Results: Of the cytokines that were measured, only IL6 increased significantly in all 3 groups of menopausal women (compared with premenopausal healthy women). The changes in IL6 paralleled changes in markers of bone resorption and correlated positively with bone turnover markers and negatively with BMD and E1G levels. In menopausal women, the rise in IL6, CTX, and DPD was high (>100%) and was associated with a decline in E1G (>75%) and BMD levels (>22%) during the first 5 years of menopause, indicating that bone loss is confined to the first decade of menopause.

Conclusions: IL6 correlates negatively with estrogens and BMD and positively with bone resorption markers. Thus, IL6 levels, in conjunction with CTX, DPD, and estrogen levels, improve the prediction of bone loss in menopausal women.

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► Implication for health policy/practice/research/medical education:

The article will help Clinicians in predicting and planning correct strategies for postmenopausal bone loss.

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1. Background

The human immune system is influenced by changes in the endocrine system. Hormonal changes, such as declines in estrogen and elevated gonadotropins, modulate the immune regulatory system during the menopausal transition. Cytokines, the key regulators of the immune responses, are crucially involved in

neuroendocrine immune interactions, whereas estrogen appears to regulate immune function (1-3). Natural menopause is associated with a rapid decline in circulating estrogen; conversely, changes in cytokines during menopausal transition are involved in the pathogenesis, development, and progression of postmenopausal osteoporosis and atherosclerosis. The pro-inflammatory cytokines IL1 β , IL6, and TNF α , which are associated with the decline in ovarian function in menopause, have been shown to act as bone-resorbing cytokines (4-6).

Due to the increase in the average life expectancy, women spend more than one-third of their lifetime in menopause, and the implications of estrogen deficiency in the rates of cardiovascular diseases and osteoporosis have tremendous significance to public health. Thus, it is essential to investigate the changes in cytokine levels in women during menopausal transition.

2. Objectives

The aim of this cross-sectional study was to examine the relationship of circulating levels of pro-inflammatory cytokines, bone turnover markers, and hormones to bone mineral density during menopausal transition in Indian women to identify who is at risk for osteoporosis.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Subjects

The institutional ethics committee approved the research protocols. The study group comprised 380 women between the ages of 21 and 70 years ($n = 124$, ages 21-40 years as premenopausal; and $n = 256$, 41-70 years as menopausal) who were enrolled at the Institute and Streehitakarini Clinic Mumbai, a community-based clinic approximately 2 km from the institute. The method of recruitment was prospective, by motivation or through awareness of osteoporosis, and targeted women from the middle socioeconomic group of a large urban population. Most women from this group were literate housewives; some were employed and generally consumed an adequate, well-balanced diet. Their routines and detailed clinical and obstetric histories were recorded, and women who had a history of fractures, any endocrinological problem or illness, or consumed bone-compromising drugs were excluded from the study. Thus, the study participants were apparently healthy and active, having sufficient exposure to sunlight, as evident from their routines. The enrolled subjects underwent simultaneous BMD (expressed as g/cm²) of the lumbar spine (L1-L4) and hip (femur neck) by dual X-ray absorptiometry (DXA, QRR 1000, Hologic Inc. USA) by an expert radiologist.

3.2. Methodology

Venous blood samples and first morning urine specimens were obtained. A single blood sample (10 AM - 11 AM) and a first morning urine specimen was obtained from menopausal women on any convenient day, whereas samples were collected between Days 5-7 of the cycle from premenopausal women. Both urine and serum specimens were stored at -20°C till analyzed. Serum calcium (Ca) and phosphorous (P) were measured by standard methods (7, 8), whereas hormonal profiles were assessed by measuring urinary estrone glucuronide (E1G), a principal metabolite of estradiol in urine, and FSH by in-house ELISA (9, 10). The bone turnover markers osteocalcin (OC), bone-specific alkaline phosphatase (BSAP), carboxy terminal telopeptide (CTX), collagen crosslinks deoxypyridinoline (DPD), and parathyroid hormone were measured using commercial kits (Diagnostics System Lab, USA). Urinary measurements were expressed as concentration of the analyte per mg creatinine content of the sample, with creatinine estimated by Jaffe reaction (11). The cytokines IL1 β , IL6, and TNF α were measured using Opt EIA reagents (BD Pharmingen Co. USA). In-house sandwich ELISAs for cytokines were standardized using specific antisera and streptavidin-enzyme conjugate. The intra- and interassay coefficients of variation were less than 10% and 15%, respectively.

3.3. Data Analysis

The participants were assigned to group I, comprising healthy women with normal menstrual cycles and normal bone mass, and group II, comprising menopausal women above the age of 40 years, having either irregular cycles or no menses. Group II ($n=256$) was further classified, based on BMD, as normal with normal bone mass ($n=40$), with osteopenia ($n=83$), or with osteoporosis ($n=133$) per WHO classification (normal values < -1.0 to 2.5 and osteoporotic T value > -2.5) (12). Postmenopausal women were also subgrouped by years since menopause (YSM) : $> 1-5$ YSM, $> 5-10$ YSM, and > 10 YSM.

All statistical analyses were performed using Graph Pad prism, version 5.0 (Graph Pad software, Inc). The data were expressed as mean \pm SD and 95% confidence intervals (CIs), with statistical significance defined by the P value. Differences in mean levels of hormones, cytokines, and bone markers were compared by non-parametric student t test to assess their level of significance.

4. Results

The BMI of premenopausal women differed significantly from that of menopausal women (22.1 ± 2 vs. 25.1 ± 2.1 kg/m²; $P < 0.001$). To assess the changes in cy-

tokines, bone turnover markers, and hormones during menopause, group II women were segregated based on BMD—14% of menopausal women had normal BMD, 22% had osteopenia, and 64% had osteoporosis. The anthropometric measurements of the premenopausal and menopausal women are shown in Table 1. The cutoffs of bone markers and hormones that were established by our laboratory were used for comparison (13, 14). The Ca and P levels in menopausal women were toward the lower end of the normal range compared with premenopausal women. The BMD measurements in spine and femur were also significantly lower ($P < 0.001$) ver-

sus menopausal women with normal BMD. The levels of cytokines, bone turnover markers, and hormones in menopausal women are shown in Table 2. Elevated levels of TNF α and IL6 were associated with low BMD in the spine and hip in menopausal women versus premenopausal women with low bone mass. Elevated levels of TNF α and IL6 also correlated well with increases in the bone resorption markers CTX and DPD and concurrent low levels of E1G. Because IL6 levels showed a maximum 73.7% rise (13.2 ± 2.26 ng/mL, $P < 0.0001$) versus other cytokines, it appeared to be a potent stimulator of bone loss.

Table 1. Clinical and Biochemical Parameters in Premenopausal and Menopausal Women

	Premenopausal Women (n=124)		Menopausal Women (n=256)			P value
	Normal (n=98)	Osteopenia (n=26)	Normal (n=40)	Osteopenic (n=83)	Osteoporotic (n=133)	
Age, y, Mean \pm SD	29.3 \pm 5.20	32.8 \pm 4.80	45.2 \pm 4.60	47.1 \pm 5.20	51.6 \pm 5.20	-
BMI, kg/m ² , Mean \pm SD	22.1 \pm 2.10	22.7 \pm 2.40	25.1 \pm 2.10	25.9 \pm 2.40	26.2 \pm 2.80	-
BMD, g/cm ²						
Spine	1.128 \pm 0.16	1.096 \pm 0.13	1.081 \pm 0.14 ^a	0.976 \pm 0.13 ^b	0.899 \pm 0.11 ^c	(a vs.b, b vs.c), $P < 0.001$
Femur	0.999 \pm 0.11	0.983 \pm 0.98	0.908 \pm 0.11 ^d	0.804 \pm 0.12 ^e	0.769 \pm 0.12	(d vs.e), $P < 0.001$
Calcium, mg/mL, Mean \pm SD	9.22 \pm 0.98	9.22 \pm 0.98	8.8 \pm 0.98	8.52 \pm 0.80	8.10 \pm 0.75	-
Phosphorous, mg/mL, Mean \pm SD	5.23 \pm 0.73	5.23 \pm 0.73	4.73 \pm 0.93	4.68 \pm 0.87	4.44 \pm 0.58	-

^a Normal menopausal women vs osteopenic menopausal women

To examine the value of serum IL6 as a predictor of bone loss, we categorized postmenopausal women according to years since menopause (YSM). The levels of IL1 β , IL6, TNF α , bone markers, and hormones in these women are shown in Table 3. Serum IL6 levels in menopausal women were significantly elevated (13.62 ng/mL : $P < .0001$) versus premenopausal women. IL6 levels also increased with years since menopause (< 5 YSM, > 5 YSM, and > 10 YSM), but the levels were no

longer significant in women with more than 10 years after menopause. Among women with > 5 YSM and < 5 YSM, serum IL6 was the most important predictor of femoral bone loss, accounting for 21.7% of the variability in femoral BMD. Only 2 cytokines, TNF α and IL6, were significantly elevated in postmenopausal women versus premenopausal women, with rises of 30% and 102%, respectively, and a rapid decline in E1G (70%), resulting in bone loss.

Table 2. Levels of Cytokines, Bone Turnover Markers and the Hormones in Premenopausal and Menopausal Women. (Data are as Mean \pm SD)

	Group I Premenopausal		Group II Menopausal			P value
	Normal (n=98)	Osteopenic (n=26)	Normal (n=40)	Osteopenic (n=83)	Osteoporotic (n=133)	
IL1 β , pg/mL	4.82 \pm 1.9 ^a	4.72 \pm 1.5	5.56 \pm 2.8	6.23 \pm 2.6	6.84 \pm 2.06	(a vs. b), $P < 0.1$
IL 6, ng/mL	7.24 \pm 2.0 ^a	7.84 \pm 1.9	9.87 \pm 2.5 ^b	11.05 \pm 2.89 ^c	16.8 \pm 2.98 ^d	(a vs. b, c, d) $P < 0.001$
TNF α , pg/mL	4.69 \pm 1.8 ^a	4.85 \pm 1.9	5.08 \pm 2.7	6.40 \pm 2.30	7.92 \pm 2.98 ^b	(a vs. b) $P < 0.001$
OC, ng/mL	9.22 \pm 2.9	9.09 \pm 2.6	11.4 \pm 2.0	12.02 \pm 1.96	11.89 \pm 2.12	NS
BSAP, IU/L	15.89 \pm 4.6	15.65 \pm 3.8	16.2 \pm 3.8	18.28 \pm 4.01	19.29 \pm 3.63	NS
CTX, μ /molCr	312 \pm 94.8 ^a	326 \pm 100	482 \pm 109.8 ^b	612 \pm 102.3	998 \pm 160.2 ^d	(a vs. b, c, d), $P < 0.0001$
DPD nmol/molCr	2.76 \pm 0.9 ^a	2.89 \pm 0.8	3.82 \pm 0.9	5.34 \pm 1.02	6.62 \pm 1.57 ^c	(a vs.b, c) $P < 0.0001$
FSH, mIU/mgCr	22.83 \pm 5.2 ^a	21.89 \pm 4.8	40.86 \pm 6.5 ^b	48.92 \pm 8.8 ^c	56.63 \pm 9.2 ^d	(a vs.b, c, d) $P < 0.0001$
E1G, ng/mgCr	48.96 \pm 8.9 ^a	46.73 \pm 7.3	26.86 \pm 5.6 ^b	15.48 \pm 4.8 ^b	8.9 \pm 2.7 ^d	(a vs.b, c, d) $P < 0.0001$
PTH, pg/mL	26.73 \pm 3.8 ^a	27.19 \pm 3.6	36.3 \pm 4.2 ^b	36.3 \pm 4.2 ^b	39.6 \pm 4.4	(a vs.b) $P < 0.001$

NS, Not significant

Table 3. Cytokines, Bone Markers and Hormonal Levels in Postmenopausal Women With Duration of Menopause (n=216). (Data are as Mean \pm SD)

Analyte	Premenopausal with low ^b bone mass (n = 26)	Postmenopausal women			P value
		< 5 YSM (n = 68)	> 5 YSM (n = 82)	> 10 YSM (n = 66)	
IL1 β , pg/mL	4.72 \pm 1.5 ^a	6.02 \pm 1.83 (27.5%)	5.99 \pm 1.69 ^c (26.9%)	6.03 \pm 1.65 ^d (27.75%)	NS*
IL 6, ng/mL	7.84 \pm 1.9 ^a	13.62 \pm 2.26 ^b (73.7%)	15.89 \pm 2.7 ^c (102.6%)	16.21 \pm 2.89 ^d (106.76%)	(a vs. b, b vs.c) P < 0.001 c vs.d = NS
TNF α , pg/mL	4.85 \pm 1.9 ^a	5.86 \pm 1.06 ^b (20.8%)	6.34 \pm 1.25 ^c (30.72%)	6.29 \pm 1.12 ^d (29.6%)	(a vs.b, a vs.c) P < 0.01
OC, ng/mL	9.09 \pm 2.6 ^a	10.07 \pm 1.89 ^b (10.78%)	10.98 \pm 1.65 ^c (20.79%)	10.66 \pm 1.56 ^d (17.27%)	(a vs.b, a vs.c) P < 0.01
BSAP, IU/L	15.65 \pm 3.8 ^a	18.95 \pm 4.6 ^b (21.08%)	17.89 \pm 3.98 ^c (14.4%)	19.02 \pm 2.99 ^d (15.65%)	(a vs.b, a vs.c) P < 0.01
CTX, μ g/molCr	326 \pm 100 ^a	826 \pm 189 ^b (153.3%)	988. \pm 202 ^c (203.1%)	1062 \pm 246 ^d (225.76%)	(a vs.b, a vs.c) P < 0.0001
DPD, nmol/molCr	2.89 \pm 0.8 ^a	5.82 \pm 1.3 ^b (101.3%)	6.06 \pm 1.9 ^c (109.6%)	6.92 \pm 1.7 ^d (139.4%)	(a vs.b, a vs.c) P < 0.0001
FSH, mIU/mgCr	21.89 \pm 4.8 ^a	57.6 \pm 5.8 ^b (163.13%)	58.3 \pm 6.2 ^c (166.3%)	60.2 \pm 5.2 ^d (175.0%)	(a vs.b, a vs.c) P < 0.0001
EiG, ng/mgCr	46.73 \pm 7.3 ^a	186. \pm 6.5 ^b (60.19)	13.8 \pm 0.4.3 ^c (70.3%)	8.26 \pm 4.8 ^d (82.32%)	(a vs.b, a vs.c) P < 0.0001
PTH, pg/mL	27.19 \pm 3.6 ^a	38.3 \pm 4.2 ^b (41.0%)	37.8 \pm 3.6 ^c (39.17%)	37.6 \pm 3.6 ^d (38.43%)	a vs.b, a vs.c) P < 0.0001
BMD Spine, g/cm ²	1.096 \pm 0.138 ^a	0.948 \pm 0.89b (13.5%)	0.906 \pm 0.96 ^c (17.3%)	0.886 \pm 1.02 ^d (19.2%)	(a vs.b, a vs.c) P < 0.0001
BMD Hip, g/cm ²	0.983 \pm 0.146 ^a	0.836 \pm 0.92 ^b (14.9%)	0.764 \pm 0.99 (21.70%)	0.678 \pm 1.1 (31.0)	(a vs.b, a vs.c) P < 0.0001

NS, Not significant

5. Discussion

This study has demonstrated changes in serum concentrations of the cytokines IL1 β , IL6, and TNF α in Indian women during menopausal transition. It is well known that cessation of ovarian function during menopause increases the rate of bone remodeling, resulting in accelerated bone loss. In addition to systemic hormones, changes in IL1 β , IL6, and TNF α during menopausal transition are also involved in the pathogenesis, development, and progression of postmenopausal osteoporosis and atherosclerosis (15). Earlier studies have reported that IL1 β , IL6, and TNF α act as bone-resorbing cytokines, whereas IL18 prevents bone resorption (16, 17). IL1 β , IL-4, IL-6, and TNF- α have been shown to be mediators of artherogenesis (18). IL1 β levels, though slightly elevated in menopause, are not statistically significant (19, 20). Earlier studies have also reported that IL1 activity is increased in cultures and that IL1 mRNA levels rise in bone in estrogen-deficient humans, but the concentration of immunoreactive IL1 β does not increase in circulation (21). Estrogen deficiency in menopause is also associated with increased production of IL-6, which stimulates bone resorption, but its role in human studies is controversial. Several studies have reported that there is no correlation between IL6 and bone mineral density in postmenopausal women (22, 23), whereas others have examined the cross-sectional rela-

tionship of circulating levels of IL6 to BMD or markers of bone turnover in postmenopausal women, finding no significant association (24). In contrast, Pacifici *et al.* reported increased circulating levels of IL6 with high bone turnover in postmenopausal women. Elevated IL6 levels in our study corroborate the findings of Pacifici *et al.* (25). Most recently, Yasui *et al.* reported that serum IL-6 concentration during menopausal transition correlates negatively with serum estradiol concentration (26). A similar negative correlation of IL6 (103% rise), with a rapid decline in estradiol glucuronide levels (70%), during menopausal transition was observed in Indian women.

It is also well known that the accelerated phase of bone loss is limited to the first 5-10 years following menopause (27). This temporal limit in rapid bone loss after menopause appears to be closely related to temporal changes in cytokine activity. In the Heidelberg cohort of the EVOS study (28), the predictive effect of circulating IL-6 levels on postmenopausal femoral bone was limited to the first decade after menopause. In bone marrow cultures of early postmenopausal women, levels of IL-1, TNF α , and IL-6 were also high versus premenopausal women, but there was no difference in these cytokines between late postmenopausal women and premenopausal women, again suggesting that these cytokines increase solely in the first several years after menopause (29, 30). Our data show that IL6 is a major predictor

of postmenopausal bone loss and that the effect appears to be more relevant in the first decade of menopause. Whether these findings reflect pathogenic differences between early and postmenopausal bone loss and whether serum IL6 also predicts fracture risk requires further elucidation.

Our demonstrates that cytokines and estrogen are associated with postmenopausal bone loss. Serum IL6 concentrations correlate negatively with EIG levels during menopausal transition. IL6, a potent bone-resorptive cytokine, can be used as a diagnostic marker with the bone resorption markers CTX, DPD, and EIG, which can aid in identifying women who are at risk for osteoporosis and predicting bone loss in menopausal women.

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