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Alters-, geschlechts- und subregionalspezifische Eigenschaften der Mikroarchitektur und simulierten Biomechanik der distalen Fibula

Dissertation

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1. Einleitung

Frakturen des Sprunggelenks betreffen meist die distale Fibula und zählen zu den häufigsten Knochenbrüchen des menschlichen Körpers (Beerekamp et al., Dabei weist die Inzidenz eine U-förmige Verteilung auf, Verteilungsspitzen in der jungen männlichen sowie in der älteren weiblichen 2018). Durchschnittsalter Bevölkerung (Elsoe et al.. Das bei Sprunggelenksfrakturen liegt bei etwa 37 Jahren (Scheer et al., 2020). Laut einer Schweden epidemiologischen Studie aus steigt die Inzidenz von Sprunggelenksfrakturen um 0,2% pro Jahr, was überwiegend auf einen Anstieg bei älteren Frauen zurückzuführen ist (Thur et al., 2012), wohingegen die Inzidenz bei Männern mit zunehmenden Alter konstant bleibt (Juto et al., 2018).

Eine klinisch weit verbreitete Klassifikation der Sprunggelenksfrakturen ist die Danis-Weber-Klassifikation, welche auf der Frakturhöhe der distalen Fibula in Bezug auf die Syndesmose beruht. Während Weber A-Frakturen als Brüche distal der intakten Syndesmose definiert werden, liegen Weber B-Frakturen auf Höhe der Syndesmose. Weber C-Frakturen stellen Brüche oberhalb der Syndesmose dar, gehen mit einer Ruptur dieser sowie einer relevanten Instabilität einher und stellen eine klare Operationsindikation dar, während Weber B-Frakturen je nach Ausmaß der Dislokation bzw. resultierenden Stabilität sowohl konservativ als auch operativ behandelt werden können. Weber A-Frakturen werden in der Regel konservativ behandelt. Eine weitere Einteilung der Sprunggelenksfrakturen ist die Klassifikation Lauge-Hansen (Lauge-Hansen, 1950), welche ausschließlich den nach Unfallmechanismus berücksichtigt und in der Klinik seltener Anwendung findet.

Weber B-Frakturen stellen mit 66,2% bei Weitem den häufigsten Frakturtyp dar, während die Weber A- und C-Frakturen mit je 19,8% und 10,6% wesentlich

seltener auftreten (Juto et al., 2018). Die hohe Anzahl an Weber B-Frakturen ist vor allem durch die steigende Inzidenz unter älteren Frauen nach Niedrigrasanztraumata (z.B. Distorsionstrauma oder Stolpersturz) bedingt (Juto et al., 2018), was womöglich auf osteoporotische Veränderungen des Knochens beruht.

Osteoporose ist eine systemische Skeletterkrankung, charakterisiert durch eine Reduktion der Knochenmasse und eine Verschlechterung der Mikroarchitektur des Knochengewebes, was eine erhöhten Frakturanfälligkeit zu Folge hat (Cosman et al., 2014). Neben der Diagnosestellung bei entsprechender klinischer Manifestation (z. B. multiple Wirbelkörperfrakturen nach inadäquatem Trauma) stellt die Knochendichtemessung in dual-energy X-ray absorptiometry (DXA)-Technik den zentralen Aspekt der Diagnosekriterien der Osteoporose dar. Anhand des T-scores, welcher die Standardabweichung sogenannten der Knochenmineraldichte (bone mineral density, BMD) in Relation zu 20-29 Jahre alten gesunden Frauen bzw. Männern darstellt, besteht laut WHO eine Osteoporose bei einem T-score von -2,5 oder weniger bzw. eine Osteopenie bei einem T-score -2.5 (Lewiecki zwischen -1,0 und et al., 2008). Bisher Sprunggelenksfrakturen nicht zu den typischen osteoporotischen Frakturen wie zum Beispiel Frakturen des Hüftgelenks, distalen Radius oder von Wirbelkörpern gezählt. Diesbezüglich ist die Studienlage im Schrifttum kontrovers: Während einige Studien keinen Zusammenhang zwischen Knöchelfrakturen und niedriger Knochenmineraldichte darstellten (Greenfield & Eastell, 2001; Pritchard et al., 2012), zeigte sich in anderen Untersuchungen eine Assoziation einer niedrigeren BMD mit Sprunggelenksfrakturen sowie mit Veränderungen der Knochenqualität im Vergleich zu Kontrollpersonen ohne Osteoporose (Biver et al., 2015; Stein et al., 2011).

ln der Zusammenschau mit dem rasanten Anstieg der Sprunggelenksfrakturen dem niederenergetischen sowie häufigen Unfallmechanismus bei älteren postmenopausalen Frauen lässt dies vermuten, dass osteoporotische Veränderungen in dieser Patientengruppe einen möglichen Einfluss haben könnten und unterstreicht die Wichtigkeit, knöcherne Eigenschaften der distalen Fibula zu charakterisieren.

Eine nicht zu vernachlässigende häufige Komplikation und Sprunggelenksfrakturen ist die Entwicklung einer posttraumatischen Arthrose (Valderrabano et al., 2009). Endgradige Sprunggelenksarthrosen führen zu einer deutlichen physischen Belastung, welche wiederum erheblichen Einfluss auf die mentale Gesundheit haben kann (Glazebrook et al., 2008). Die Entstehung der posttraumatischen Sprunggelenksarthrose wird vor allem durch folgende Faktoren bestimmt: Ausmaß der Dislokation der Fraktur, unzureichende Wiederherstellung der Gelenkskongruenz, Körpergewicht und einer zusätzlichen Fraktur des posterioren Malleolus (Volkmann-Dreieck) (Beak et al., 2022). Um das Risiko einer posttraumatischen Arthrose möglichst zu minimieren, sind eine exakte intraoperative Reposition, die Verwendung des richtigen Osteosynthesematerials zur Vermeidung sekundärer Dislokationen und eine adäquate postoperative Rehabilitation von entscheidender Bedeutung.

In Anbetracht der epidemiologischen Datenlage sowie der postoperativen Komplikationen ist die richtige Therapiestrategie bei Sprunggelenksfrakturen unerlässlich. Somit ist eine tiefgründige Charakterisierung der knöchernen Eigenschaften der distalen Fibula bei der Therapiewahl von bedeutsamer Rolle. Bisherige Studien schreiben der Fibula, im Gegensatz zu der anatomisch angrenzenden Tibia, eine stark abweichende biomechanische Rolle zu. So zeigte

eine Untersuchung zwischen Querschnittsgelähmten und der Kontrollgruppe einen deutlichen Rückgang der Knochenmasse der Tibia, während die Knochenmasse der Fibula vergleichsweise unverändert blieb (Ireland et al., 2017). Eine weitere Studie hatte mittels peripherer quantitativer Computertomografie (peripheral quantitative computed tomography, pQCT) kortikale Unterschiede entlang der Fibula festgestellt und auf eine heterogene Biomechanik des Knochens verwiesen. Während die Tibia den Großteil der axialen Belastung trägt, dürfte die Fibula im und distalen Diaphyse Bereich der proximalen vermehrt Biege-Torsionsspannungen erfahren, was proximal durch den Ursprung mehrere Muskeln und distal durch das Auseinanderweichen der Malleolengabel bei Dorsalextension erklärt werden kann (Cointry et al., 2016). Die knöcherne Mikroarchitektur anhand hochauflösender peripherer quantitativer Computertomografie (high-resolution peripheral quantitative computed tomography, HR-pQCT) der distalen Fibula wurde bis dato nur an der Höhe der Weber C-Region untersucht. Hier konnten signifikant niedrigere kortikale und trabekuläre Parameter bei Frauen als bei Männern und eine Abnahme der kortikalen Parameter bei Frauen im höheren Alter festgestellt werden (Stürznickel et al., 2021). Eine Charakterisierung der distalen Fibula auf allen klinisch relevanten Höhen nach der Danis-Weber-Klassifikation mittels HR-pQCT ist im momentanen Schrifttum nicht vorhanden und stellt den Schwerpunkt dieser Arbeit dar.

Darüber hinaus bietet die Mikrofinite-Elemente-Analyse (µFEA) eine wichtige Möglichkeit, neben strukturellen Eigenschaften mechanische auch Knocheneigenschaften zu errechnen (z.B. Knochenbruchlast). Die Mikrofinite-Elemente-Methode zeigte sich beispielsweise in der Vorherbestimmung der Knochenbruchlast Radius geschätzten des distalen gegenüber der Knochendichtemessungen überlegen (Pistoia et al., 2002; Varga et al., 2010).

Ziel dieser Studie war es, sowohl die knöcherne Mikroarchitektur als auch mechanische Eigenschaften der distalen Fibula entsprechend der klinisch verwendeten Danis-Weber Klassifikation zu charakterisieren und in weiterer Folge mit demographischen Parametern wie Alter, Geschlecht und BMI zu korrelieren.

2. Methoden

2.1 Studienkollektiv

Es wurden insgesamt 30 Fibulae und Tibiae des rechten Beins von Verstorbenen während der Autopsie entnommen (Frauen n=15, Männer n=15) (Püschel, 2016). Um Personen mit Erkrankungen, welche die Integrität des Knochens generell (z. B. Malignome, Diabetes mellitus, Glukokortikoidmedikation oder Immobilisation) sowie lokal (z. B. Frakturen oder chirurgische Rekonstruktion des distalen Wadenbeins) beeinflussen können auszuschließen, wurden Krankenhaus- und Autopsieberichte sorgfältig überprüft und demografische Daten wie Geschlecht, Alter und BMI erfasst. Darüber hinaus wurde jede Probe von einem erfahrenen Orthopäden untersucht, um sichtbare Pathologien wie Deformitäten und/oder degenerative Veränderungen auszuschließen. Alle Exemplare wurden innerhalb von 48 Stunden nach Eintreten des Todes in 3,7% Formaldehyd fixiert und anschließend mittels HR-pQCT gescannt. Diese Kadaverstudie wurde von der Ethikkommission der Ärztekammer Hamburg genehmigt (WF-165/20) und entspricht der Deklaration von Helsinki.

2.2 Hochauflösende periphere quantitative Computertomografie (HR-pQCT)

Messungen mit HR-pQCT (XtremeCT II®, Scanco Medical AG, Brüttisellen, Schweiz) wurden in einem 7 cm großen Abschnitt der distalen Fibulaspitze unter Verwendung des vom Hersteller bereitgestellten *in vivo*-Protokolls (60 kVp, 900 μA, 100 ms Integrationszeit, Voxelgröße von 61 μm) durchgeführt. Selbiges Vorgehen wurde in anderen Arbeiten bereits beschrieben (Keen et al., 2021; Schmidt et al., 2022). Um optimale Bedingungen zu gewähren, wurden alle Scans von demselben geschulten Untersucher durchgeführt. Zum Vermeiden von Bewegungsartefakten (Pialat et al., 2012) wurden alle Proben in der gleichen Ausrichtung positioniert und

in der vom Hersteller zur Verfügung gestellten Schiene fixiert. Für die Analyse der Subregionen nach der Danis-Weber-Klassifikation (Abb. 4) wurden drei Scanabschnitte mit jeweils 250 Schichten definiert. Für die Typ-B Subregion wurde eine distale Referenzlinie über dem Tibiaplafond gesetzt und 250 Schichten nach proximal ausgewertet. Anschließend wurde der Abstand d zwischen dem Tibiaplafond und der distalen Fibulaspitze gemessen, von welchem die Hälfte die Mitte des Scanabschnitts der Typ-A Subregion entspricht. Schließlich wurde die Mitte des Scanabschnitts der Typ-C Subregion als den Abstand d nach proximal von der Referenzlinie des Tibiaplafond definiert (Abb. 4).

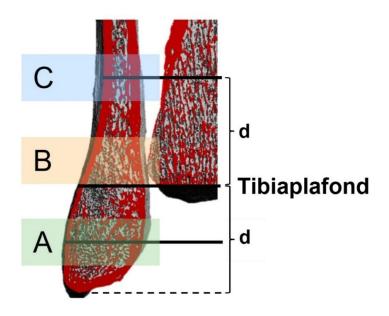


Abbildung 1: Grafische Veranschaulichung der Definition der Subgruppen nach der Danis-Weber-Klassifikation. Der Abstand von Tibiaplafond zur Fibulaspitze ist als dangegeben. A – Weber A, B – Weber B, C – Weber C.

Ein vom Hersteller bereitgestelltes Auswertungsprotokoll wurde verwendet, um 3D-Mikroarchitekturdatensätze der kortikalen und trabekulären Kompartimente zu erstellen. Die gleichbleibende Qualität der Scans wurde durch die tägliche Kalibrierung sichergestellt und eine manuelle Korrektur der Konturen wurde bei

Bedarf vorgenommen. Folgende Parameter wurde gemäß der aktuellen Leitlinien (Whittier et al., 2020) erhoben: volumetrische Knochenmineraldichte (*volumetric bone mineral density*, vBMD) des gesamten Knochens (*total bone mineral density*, Tt.BMD, mg HA/cm³) und der Trabekel (*trabecular bone mineral density*, Tb.BMD, mg HA/cm³) als auch der Kortikalis (*cortical bone mineral density*, Ct.BMD, mg HA/cm³) sowie die Parameter der Knochenmikroarchitektur mit dem Verhältnis von Knochenvolumen zu Gesamtvolumen (*trabecular bone volume fraction*, BV/TV), der Trabekelanzahl (*trabecular number*, Tb.N, 1/mm), trabekulären Dicke (*trabecular thickness*, Tb.Th, mm) und Abstand (*trabecular separation*, Tb.Sp, mm), der Kortikalisdicke (*cortical thickness*, Ct.Th, mm) und Kortikalisporosität (*cortical porosity*, Ct.Po). Geometrische Parameter wie die Gesamtfläche (*total area*, Tt.Ar, mm²), Trabekelfläche (*trabecular area*, Tb.Ar, mm²), Kortikalisfläche (*cortical area*, Ct.Ar, mm²) und Kortikalisumfang (cortical perimeter, Ct.Pm, mm²) wurden ebenfalls bewertet.

2.3 Mikrofinite-Elemente-Analyse (µFEA)

Für die Mikrofinite-Elemente-Analyse (µFEA) wurde die vom Hersteller bereitgestellte Software angewendet und die mechanischen Eigenschaften direkt aus den HR-pQCT-Scans abgeleitet (Vilayphiou et al., 2011). Die HR-pQCT-Bilder wurden mit einem Laplace-Hamming-Filter gefiltert und mit dem Faktor 2 herunterskaliert. Für Druckversuche mit 1% Dehnung wurden axiale Randbedingungen festgelegt (Elastizitätsmodul von 10.000 MPa für alle Elemente, Poissonzahl von 0,3). Die geschätzte Bruchkraft (failure load) (kN) und die Gesamtsteifigkeit (stiffness) (kN/mm) des Knochens wurden von der Software berechnet (Versagenskriterien von Pistoia mit einem kritischen Volumen von 2% und einem kritischen Wert von 7000 ustrain).

3. Ergebnisse

3.1 Subregionale Unterschiede der Mikroarchitektur

Insgesamt wurden 30 Fibulae von je 15 Frauen und Männer untersucht. Das Durchschnittsalter bei Frauen lag bei 51,7 ± 20,0 (18-87) und bei Männern bei 51,5 ± 18,5 (24-76) Jahren (p=0,985). Gewicht, Größe und BMI unterschieden sich nicht signifikant zwischen Frauen und Männern (Tabelle 1 der Originalarbeit*). Beim Vergleich der densitometrischen und mikrostrukturellen Parameter zwischen beiden Geschlechtern wurden keine Unterschiede festgestellt, mit Ausnahme eines niedrigeren Werts der Parameter Tb.Ar in den Subregionen Typ-A und Typ-B, Tb.Th in der Subregion Typ-B und Ct.Pm in der Subregion Typ-C bei Frauen im Vergleich zu Männern (Tabelle 2*). Die ANCOVA-Analyse mit Anpassung für die Körpergröße ergab keine Unterschiede bei Tb.Ar, Ct.Ar oder Ct.Th in einer der Subregionen. Interessanterweise ergab der Vergleich von Frauen und Männern im Alter von über 50 Jahren, dass Männer höhere Werte bei einigen trabekulären und kortikalen Parametern aufwiesen, einschließlich Ct.Th in der Typ-C Subregion (ergänzende Abb. 1 der Originalarbeit*), was auf deutliche altersbedingte Veränderungen zwischen Frauen und Männern hinweist.

Die visuelle Inspektion ergab deutliche strukturelle Unterschiede beim Vergleich der verschiedenen Subregionen von distal nach proximal (d. h. Danis-Weber Typ-A bis C; Abb. 1B, C der Originalarbeit*). Die anschließende Auswertung ergab für die trabekulären Parameter höhere strukturelle und densitometrische Messwerte in der Subregion vom Typ-A im Vergleich zu den Frakturzonen des Typ-B und C bei Frauen und Männern (Abb. 1D, E*). Im Gegensatz dazu waren die kortikalen Parameter in der Subregion vom Typ-A niedriger und in der Subregion vom Typ-C am höchsten.

3.2 Altersbedingte Veränderungen der Mikroarchitektur

Als nächsten Schritt wurden mikroarchitektonische Parameter in Zusammenhang mit dem Alter untersucht (Abb. 2*). Bei Frauen nahmen die Parameter sowohl in der Typ-A als auch in der Typ-B Region mit dem Alter ab (Abb. 2A*). Im Gegensatz dazu konnte bei den Männern für keinen trabekulären Parameter in den Subregionen ein Zusammenhang mit dem Alter festgestellt werden (Abb. 2B*). Bei den kortikalen Parametern konnte eine Korrelation mit dem Alter vor allem in der Subregion Typ-C bei beiden Geschlechtern festgestellt werden. Insbesondere bei Frauen wurde eine altersbedingte Abnahme der Parameter Ct.BMD und Ct.Th in allen Regionen beobachtet. Im Gegensatz dazu war bei Männern vor allem in der Subregion Typ-C eine altersbedingte Abnahme der kortikalen Parameter zu bemerken.

Interessanterweise zeigte die kortikale Fläche (Ct.Ar) bei beiden Geschlechtern und in allen Subregionen nach der Danis-Weber-Klassifikation eine altersbedingte Abnahme. Bemerkenswerterweise war das Ausmaß des Zusammenhangs bei Männern noch größer (Abb. 2*). Im Allgemeinen wurde das höchste Bestimmtheitsmaß der Regressionsanalyse für kortikale Parameter beim Typ-C beobachtet, während trabekuläre Werte wenig stark mit dem Alter assoziiert waren. Beim Vergleich der Steigungen von Frauen und Männern wurden signifikante Unterschiede für Tb.Ar (p=0.024) und Ct.BMD (p= 0.038) innerhalb der Subregion Weber-C festgestellt.

3.3 Knochenfestigkeit in Abhängigkeit von Geschlecht, Subregion und Alter

Um einen tieferen Einblick in die Knochenfestigkeit der distalen Fibula zu erhalten, wurde die µFEA an der distalen Fibula angewendet (Abb. 3A*). Der Vergleich zwischen Frauen und Männern zeigte keine geschlechtsspezifischen

Unterschiede für die Subregionen Typ-A und B, aber eine höhere Steifigkeit und Bruchkraft für Männer in der Weber C-Subregion (Tabelle 3*). Nach Anpassung der Körpergröße war die Knochenfestigkeit in der Subregion Typ-C bei Männern weiterhin höher (Bruchkraft: F= 5,201, p= 0,031, partieller η^2 = 0,162). Beim Vergleich aller drei Subregionen konnte bei Frauen signifikant höhere Bruchkraftwerte in der Subregion Typ-C als in den Subregionen Typ-A und B (Abb. 3B*) beobachtet werden und in der Subregion Typ-B wurde ein signifikanter negativer Zusammenhang mit dem Alter festgestellt (Abb. 3C*). Im Gegensatz dazu zeigten Männer keine signifikanten Unterschiede zwischen den Subregionen (Abb. 3D*). Bei Männern wurde für die Subgruppe des Typen-B und C eine altersabhängige Abnahme, vor allem bei Letzteren, beobachtet (Abb. 3E*).

Die lineare Regressionsanalyse der kortikalen Querschnittsfläche und der Bruchkraft ergab einen positiven Zusammenhang, der bei Männern stärker ausgeprägt war als bei Frauen (ergänzende Abb. 2*). Schließlich wurde der Einfluss des Körpergewichts auf die Mikroarchitektur in den verschiedenen Subregionen der Fibula untersucht. Insgesamt wurden keine oder nur schwache Assoziationen zwischen dem BMI und der Knochenmikroarchitektur festgestellt, mit Ausnahme der kortikalen Parameter der Subregion Typ-C bei Männern (ergänzende Abb. 3*). Ebenso wurden keine Assoziationen zwischen BMI und μFEA-Parametern festgestellt, mit Ausnahme der Subregionen Typ-B und C bei Männern (ergänzende Abb. 4*).

3.4 Knöcherne Mikroarchitektur der proximalen Fibula

In einer weiteren Publikation wurde die knöcherne Mikroarchitektur der proximalen Fibula anhand von vier Höhenniveaus sowie die Knochenstruktur der Ein- und Austrittspositionen zweier Bohrkanaltechniken (anatomische Technik nach

LaPrade/Arciero und Larson-Technik) zur Rekonstruktion von Verletzungen der posterolateralen Ecke analysiert (siehe Anhang). Die Ergebnisse zeigten in den Subregionen bei beiden Geschlechtern eine Abnahme der trabekulären Werte bei stabilen kortikalen Parametern von proximal nach distal. Eine signifikant größere altersbedingte Abnahme der trabekulären Werte bei Frauen im Vergleich zu Männern wurde beobachtet. Mikroarchitektonische Parameter des anatomischen Bohrkanals (Technik nach LaPrade/Arciero) zeigten bessere Werte im Vergleich zur Larson-Technik (Mittelwert ± SD; Knochenvolumen zu Gesamtvolumen (BV/TV) an der Eintrittsposition, 0,273 ± 0,079 vs. 0,175 ± 0,063; p< 0,0001; kortikale Dicke (Ct.Th) an der Eintrittsposition, 0,501 ± 0,138 vs. 0,353 ± 0,081 mm; p< 0,0001).

*Hinweis: Die mit * gekennzeichneten Abbildungen und Tabellen entsprechen denen der Originalarbeit Abbildungen und Tabellen (Figure 1-3 and Table 1-3).

4. Diskussion

In dieser Studie wurde erstmalig die knöcherne Mikroarchitektur der distalen Fibula mittels hochauflösender peripherer quantitativer Computertomografie (HRpQCT) unter Berücksichtigung der Danis-Weber-Klassifikation charakterisiert. Darüber hinaus wurden Unterschiede zwischen Männern und Frauen evaluiert. Wir stellten fest, dass die Mikroarchitektur der distalen Fibula abhängig von der Lokalisation nach Weber erhebliche Unterschiede aufweist. So konnte ein geschlechtsunabhängiger Anstieg der kortikalen mit gleichzeitiger Abnahme der trabekulären Parameter von distal nach proximal beschrieben werden. In Zusammenschau mit dem Alter wurde beobachtet, dass vorrangig kortikale Parameter bei beiden Geschlechtern altersabhängig abnehmen, wobei Frauen davon stärker betroffen waren. Während Männer keinen altersbedingten Rückgang der trabekulären Werte aufwiesen, war eine Abnahme bei Frauen in den Subregionen Typ-A und B erkennbar. Eine wesentliche Assoziation zwischen dem Körpergewicht und mikrostrukturellen Parametern konnte, bis auf eine Zunahme der kortikalen Messwerte bei erhöhten BMI in der Subgruppe Typ-C, nicht festgestellt Mikrofinite-Elemente-Analyse werden. Mit Hilfe der konnte bei beiden Geschlechtern ein signifikanter Anstieg der Bruchkraft von distalen nach proximalen und ein, vor allem bei Männern beobachteter, Rückgang der Bruchkraft in der Subgruppe Typ-C mit dem Alter verzeichnet werden.

Frakturen der distalen Fibula stellen, vor allem in der älteren Bevölkerung, eine sehr häufige Entität dar. Im älteren Patientenkollektiv treten Sprunggelenksfrakturen häufig nach Niedrigrasanztraumata, wie zum Beispiel Stolperstürze, auf (Court-Brown & Caesar, 2006; Juto et al., 2018). Dieser Umstand lässt vermuten, dass die Knochenqualität eine wichtige Rolle bei der Pathogenese

von Sprunggelenksfrakturen im höheren Alter spielt. Neben anderen Untersuchungen die Knochendichtemessung ist in dual-energy X-ray absorptiometry (DXA)-Technik im Bereich der Lendenwirbelsäule, proximalen Femur und distalen Radius als Standarddiagnoseverfahren der Osteoporose etabliert ("Osteoporosis Prevention, Diagnosis, and Therapy.," 2001). Ob Sprunggelenksfrakturen als osteoporotische Frakturen angesehen werden können, wird in der Literatur kontrovers diskutiert. Während eine geringe Knochendichte des distalen Radius mit Sprunggelenksfrakturen assoziiert ist (Seeley et al., 1996), sind niedrige Knochendichtewerte an der Lendenwirbelsäule oder am proximalen Oberschenkelknochen nicht direkt mit einem erhöhten Risiko für Knöchelfrakturen verbunden (Lee et al., 2017; Valtola et al., 2002). Mit neusten bildgebenden Verfahren, wie der HR-pQCT, ist es möglich, die Mikroarchitektur des Knochens dreidimensional unter hoher Auflösung zu beurteilen. Pistoia et al. stellten fest, dass die HR-pQCT in Kombination mit der µFEA zu einer besseren Vorhersage der Bruchkraft Bereich des distalen Radius als die im herkömmliche Knochendichtemessung führt (Pistoia et al., 2002). Eine vorangegangene HRpQCT-Studie beobachtete, dass weibliches Geschlecht, Osteoporose und Alter einen negativen Einfluss auf die Mikroarchitektur der distalen Fibula auf Höhe der Subgruppe Typ-C haben (Stürznickel et al., 2021). Darüber hinaus zeigte eine Untersuchung des osteoporotischen distalen Radius mit HR-pQCT einen deutlichen Rückgang der trabekulären als auch kortikalen Parametern bei postmenopausalen Frauen (Dash et al., 2020), was diese Arbeit ebenfalls bei Frauen im höheren Altern feststellen konnte. Dies lässt Anlass zu der Vermutung, dass die hohe Inzidenz von Sprunggelenksfrakturen bei postmenopausalen Frauen mit osteoporotischen Veränderungen des Knochens erklärt werden kann. Dennoch sind weitere Studien von Nöten, eine adäquate Aussage treffen zu können, ob um

Sprunggelenksfrakturen bei älteren Frauen einen Risikofaktor für Osteoporose darstellen.

Diese Studie zeigte auf, dass kortikale Parameter von distal nach proximal zunehmen, während trabekuläre Messwerte abnehmen. Zudem ergab die μFEA Untersuchung mittels signifikant bessere mechanische Knocheneigenschaften in der diaphysären Region Typ-C nach Weber als in der distalen Fibula (d.h. Typ-A). Dies deutet darauf hin, dass größere Kräfte von Nöten sind, um Brüche in der Region Typ-C zu verursachen. Hjelle et al. zeigten eine Übergewicht positive Assoziation zwischen und dem Auftreten Sprunggelenksfrakturen der Regionen Typ-B und C (Hjelle et al., 2021). Eine mechanische Erklärung dafür wäre, dass ein schweres Körpergewicht bei Distorsionstraumata die Krafteinwirkung auf das Sprunggelenk erhöht und daher eher zu Fibulafrakturen in der Lokalisation des Typ-B und C führt. Isolierte Weber A-Frakturen hingegen, treten nach der Beschreibung von Lauge-Hansen bei geringerer Krafteinwirkung auf (Lauge-Hansen, 1950).

Eine altersabhängige Verschlechterung der Knochenfestigkeit konnte vor allem in der Subregion Typ-B bei beiden Geschlechtern und Subregion Typ-C bei Männern festgestellt werden. In Anbetracht der epidemiologischen Datenlage, welche eine vergleichsweise wesentlich höhere Inzidenz der Weber B-Frakturen bei Frauen im höheren Alter aufweist (Juto et al., 2018), wären die vorliegenden Daten eine Erklärung für die Häufigkeit der Typ-B Frakturen. Die guten kortikalen Eigenschaften auf der Höhe der Weber C-Frakturen könnten einen Schutz vor Brüchen bieten. Darüber hinaus könnte die altersassoziierte Abnahme der Bruchkraft bei Männern innerhalb der Subgruppe des Typ-C ohne entsprechenden epidemiologischen Anstieg der Weber C-Frakturen dadurch erklärt werden, dass

Weber C-Frakturen a. e. mit Hochrasanztraumata assoziiert sind und diese im älteren Patientenkollektiv seltener auftreten (Juto et al., 2018). Der ursprüngliche von Lauge-Hansen beschriebene Traumamechanismus für distale Fibulafrakturen beruht auf einem Supination/Außenrotation-Trauma, während Pronationstraumata primär zu Frakturen des Innenknöchels und diaphysären Fibulafrakturen (d.h. Weber C-Fraktur) führen (Tartaglione et al., 2015). Obwohl Lauge-Hansen-Klassifikation nach wie vor als wegweisend für das Verständnis der Biomechanik von Knöchelfrakturen gilt, ist ihre Qualität, Gültigkeit und Reproduzierbarkeit kritisch zu betrachten (Gardner et al., 2006; Kwon et al., 2015; Michelson et al., 1997). Beispielsweise konnten distale Fibulafrakturen in biomechanischen Kadaverstudien auch von einem Pronation/Außenrotation-Trauma resultieren (Haraguchi & Armiger, 2009). Möglicherweise ist somit die altersabhängige Zunahme der Weber B-Frakturen nicht allein von der beobachteten Abnahme der Knochenmikroarchitektur und -festigkeit erklärt, sondern ebenso durch den Traumamechanismus und der Einwirkung von ligamentären Strukturen wie beispielsweise des kräftigen Bandapparats der Syndesmose auf Höhe von Weber B-Frakturen (Rodriguez et al., 2013).

Die Wiederherstellung der anatomischen Verhältnisse der distalen Fibula bei Sprunggelenksfrakturen entscheidende Rolle für spielt eine das Behandlungsergebnis von Patientinnen und Patienten. Eine minimale Abweichung der korrekten anatomischen Position der distalen Fibula kann bereits erhebliche Folgen haben. Ein Versatz von mehr als 2 mm sowie eine Malrotation größer als 5° sind mit einer höhere Gelenksbelastung (Harris & Fallat, 2004; Thordarson et al., 1997) und einem konsekutiven schlechteren Ergebnis assoziiert (de Souza et al., Darüber Entwicklung 1985). hinaus stellt die einer posttraumatischen Sprunggelenksarthrose ein ernstes Problem dar, weswegen eine adäquate

Primärbehandlung von großer Bedeutung ist (Glazebrook et al., 2008; Valderrabano et al., 2009). Osteoporotische Frakturen neigen zur Lockerung des eingebrachten Osteosynthesematerials (Zahn et al., 2012), was wiederum zu einer sekundären Abweichung von dem intraoperativen Repositionsergebnis führen kann. In diesem Fall ist in der Regel eine Revisionsoperation für eine stabile Osteosynthese und ein gutes Ergebnis von Nöten. Die Entwicklung der winkelstabilen Osteosynthese hat die Versorgung von Frakturen bei Patientinnen und Patienten mit Osteoporose erheblich verbessert. Herkömmliche Plattenosteosynthesen sind auf eine gute Haftreibung angewiesen, um eine stabile Fixierung zu erreichen. Winkelstabile Systeme hingegen schaffen ein stabiles Konstrukt und bieten dadurch auch bei reduzierter Knochendichte oder -struktur einen Vorteil. Unsere Daten zeigten eine schlechtere Knochenqualität bei gesunden Älteren, weswegen bei Osteosyntheseplanung winkelstabile Platten gegenüber herkömmlichen Drittelrohrplattensystemen bevorzugt werden sollten, eine stabile um Osteosynthese zu erhalten und damit das Risiko weitere Komplikationen zu verringern.

Trotz der Neuartigkeit der vorliegenden Analyse müssen einige Limitationen berücksichtigt werden. Erstens ist die Anzahl der inkludierten Proben gering, was Einschränkungen bezüglich der Aussagekraft der Ergebnisse mit sich bringt. Zweitens dieser Studie biomechanischen wurden in keine Tests Belastungsproben für distale Fibulafrakturen durchgeführt. Drittens wurden keine Proben von Personen mit Knöchelfrakturen eingeschlossen, was wiederum die Frage aufwirft, ob die knöcherne Mikroarchitektur von Patientinnen und Patienten mit stattgehabter Sprunggelenksfraktur bestimmte Besonderheiten aufweisen bzw. ob die Frakturmorphologie mit lokalen Defiziten in der Mikroarchitektur der distalen Fibula verbunden ist. Ähnliche Ansätze wurden bereits bei Patientinnen und Patienten mit distalen Radiusfrakturen durchgeführt (Daniels et al., 2019). Viertens standen keine Daten zum Hormon- und Östrogenstatus (z. B. Menopause) zur Verfügung, obwohl dies ein wichtiger Faktor für den Knochenumbau ist.

5. Zusammenfassung

Das Ziel dieser Studie war es, alters-, geschlechtsund subregionalspezifische Unterschiede in Mikroarchitektur der sowie der mechanischen Eigenschaften der distalen Fibula anhand von 30 Proben mit Hilfe der hochauflösenden peripheren quantitativen Computertomografie (HR-pQCT) einschließlich der Analyse mikrofiniter Elemente (µFEA) zu evaluieren. Die Scans der distalen Fibula wurden in drei Subregionen nach der Danis-Weber-Frakturklassifikation ausgewertet. Von distal nach proximal wurde eine Zunahme der kortikalen Parameter und eine Abnahme der trabekulären Parameter beobachtet. Bei Frauen wurde eine altersbedingte Abnahme der kortikalen Parameter in allen Subregionen (Typ-A, B und C) festgestellt. Während bei Frauen eine stärkere Abnahme zu beobachten war, wiesen auch Männer bei einigen Parametern einen altersbedingten Abfall auf, beispielsweise bei der Kortikalisfläche der Kortikalisdicke in der Subregion Typ-C. Die und Knocheneigenschaften waren bei Frauen und bei Männern in der Typ-C Subregion am höchsten. Eine Erklärung für die hohe Inzidenz von Typ-B Frakturen bei älteren Frauen nach Niedrigrasanztraumata kann mit der beobachteten altersbedingten Abnahme der Knochenfestigkeitsparameter zumindest teilweise begründet werden. Zusammengefasst erweitern diese Ergebnisse das derzeitige Verständnis der Mikroarchitektur der distalen Fibula, bieten eine Erklärung der epidemiologischen Datenlage unterstreichen die Notwendigkeit altersangepasster und Behandlungsstrategien.

Summary

The aim of this study was to evaluate age-, sex-, and subregion-specific differences of distal fibular microarchitecture and strength in 30 cadaveric donors by using high-resolution peripheral quantitative computed tomography (HR-pQCT) including micro-finite element analysis (µFEA). Scans of the distal fibula were performed and three subregions according to the Danis-Weber fracture classification were evaluated. From distal to proximal, we observed an increase of cortical parameters and a decrease of trabecular parameters. Age was primarily associated with a cortical decrease in all subregions (type A, B and C) in women. While women showed a greater magnitude of decline, men also exhibited an ageassociated decrease for some parameters, including cortical area and cortical thickness in the type C subregion. Stiffness and failure load were highest in the type C subregion in both women and men. An age-related decline in bone strength parameters in the type B subregion was observed in women, providing an explanation for the increased incidence of low-traumatic type B fractures in the elderly. Together, these findings extend the current understanding of distal fibular microarchitecture, likely explaining the epidemiologic features of distal fibula fractures and emphasizing the need for age-adapted treatment algorithms.

6. Abkürzungsverzeichnis

ANCOVA analysis of covariance

BMD bone mineral density

BMI body-mass-index

BV/TV trabecular bone volume fraction

Ct.Ar cortical area

Ct.BMD cortical bone mineral density

Ct.Pm cortical perimeter

Ct.Po cortical porosity

Ct.Th cortical thickness

DXA dual-energy X-ray absorptiometry

HR-pQCT high-resolution peripheral quantitative computed

tomography

pQCT peripheral quantitative computed tomography

Tb.N trabecular number

Tb.Ar trabecular area

Tb.BMD trabecular bone mineral density

Tb.Sp trabecular separation

Tb.Th trabecular thickness

Tt.Ar total area

Tt.BMD total bone mineral density

vBMD volumetric bone mineral density

μFEA micro-finite element

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RESEARCH ARTICLE



Age-, sex-, and subregion-specific properties of distal fibular microarchitecture and strength: An ex vivo HR-pQCT study

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Abstract

Despite its clinical relevance in the context of ankle fractures, little is known about the bone microarchitecture and strength of the distal fibula, especially regarding age-, sex-, and subregion-specific effects. To address this gap of knowledge, we obtained fibulae from 30 skeletally intact donors at autopsy (each 15 male and female), which were analyzed by high-resolution peripheral quantitative computed tomography including micro-finite element analysis. Scans were performed in a 7-cm volume of interest and evaluated in three subregions according to the Danis-Weber fracture classification. Group comparisons and linear regression analyses were applied to evaluate the effects of age, sex, and subregion. From distal to proximal, we observed an increase of cortical parameters and a decrease of trabecular parameters. Age was primarily associated with a cortical decrease in all subregions (Danis-Weber type A, B, and C) in women. While women showed a greater magnitude of decline, men also exhibited an age-associated decrease for some parameters, including cortical area and cortical thickness in the type C subregion. Stiffness and failure load were highest in the type C subregion in both women and men. A critical age-related decline in bone strength parameters in the type B subregion was observed in women, providing an explanation for the increased incidence of low-traumatic type B fractures in the elderly. Together, these findings extend the current understanding of distal fibular microarchitecture, likely explaining the epidemiologic features of distal fibula fractures and emphasizing the need for age-adapted treatment algorithms.

KEYWORDS

ankle, bone microarchitecture, distal fibula, FEA, fracture, HR-pQCT

Carsten Schlickewei and Conradin Schweizer contributed equally to this study and therefore share first authorship

Tim Rolvien and Julian Stürznickel jointly supervised this study and therefore share last authorship.

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1 | INTRODUCTION

The distal fibula is among the most frequent fracture sites. The epidemiology of such fractures is described by a U-shaped distribution, peaking in males during adolescence or early adulthood and in females above the age of 40 years.2-4 Whereas the first peak is attributed to high-energy trauma in men, the second peak is primarily caused by low-energy trauma in women,5 pointing toward a possible association of increasing age, and decreasing bone quality.6 For the classification of ankle fractures, several classification systems are available and have been evaluated in the literature.^{7,8} The Danis-Weber classification is widely used, purely anatomic and based on the fibula's fracture height in relation to the syndesmosis (i.e., type A-C from distal to proximal). Most ankle fractures are type B fractures (66%), while type Weber A and C fractures account for approximately 20% and 11%, respectively. Furthermore, it has been noted that the frequency of especially type B fractures increases with age.5

Indication for surgery is made, among other factors, upon the resulting ankle or syndesmotic stability. Danis-Weber type A fractures, being located distal to the intact syndesmosis, are usually treated conservatively. Type B fractures, occurring at the level of the ankle joint, may cause an injury of the syndesmotic complex and type C fractures, located proximal to the syndesmosis, often result in a rupture of the syndesmotic ligaments with an unstable fracture. Depending upon stability, type B fractures can be treated either conservatively or surgically, whereas type C fractures often require surgical treatment. §

In addition to the immediate impairment of quality-of-life by distal fibula fractures, 10 long-term complications such as secondary osteoarthritis pose a relevant concern. 11 Regardless of its great potential effect on fracture prevention or treatment, the current knowledge concerning the bone microarchitecture of the distal fibula is scarce, reflecting the ongoing debate upon optimal osteosynthesis technique.9 In a previous peripheral quantitative computed tomography (pQCT) study, topographical differences in bone structure were attributed to the local biomechanics. 12 Compared to the distal tibia, the differential influence of weight-bearing on fibular microarchitecture was highlighted by a recent study in immobilized individuals who showed comparably less affected parameters. 13 While this report was based on relatively low-resolution analyses, the bone microarchitecture was recently also investigated by high-resolution peripheral quantitative computed tomography (HR-pQCT) at a standardized location corresponding to Danis-Weber type C fractures, revealing lower microarchitecture parameters in women compared to men, as well as a cortical pronounced decrease with age and general decrease with osteoporosis. 14

To extend the clinically relevant implications, micro-finite element analysis (μ FEA) provides a useful tool with deeper understanding of mechanical properties of the bone (e.g., stiffness or failure load). ¹⁵ μ FEA has been reported to be superior in the prediction of experimental bone failure load compared to bone density measures of the distal radius. ^{16,17} However, neither microarchitectural nor

mechanical properties of the distal fibula according to Danis-Weber subregions have been investigated so far. Therefore, the aim of this study was to assess the subregion-specific bone microarchitecture and strength using HR-pQCT and including μ FEA. In addition, the results were correlated to various demographic characteristics such as age, sex, and body mass index (BMI).

2 | MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 | Specimens

Thirty whole fibular and distal tibial bones of the right leg were collected from 30 individuals during autopsy in cases where detailed leg preparation was necessary for case reasons (women: n = 15, men: n = 15). Hospital and autopsy reports were reviewed to exclude individuals with diseases potentially affecting overall skeletal integrity (e.g., cancer, diabetes, glucocorticoid medication, or periods of immobilization) or fibular integrity (e.g., history of fracture or surgical reconstruction involving the distal fibula). Furthermore, each specimen was checked by an experienced orthopedic surgeon to exclude any visible pathologies including deformities and/or degenerative changes. Demographic data such as sex, age, and BMI were recorded. All specimens were fixed in 3.7% formaldehyde within 48 h after death and scanned immediately. This cadaveric study was approved by the local ethics committee (WF-165/20) and complied with the Declaration of Helsinki.

2.2 | HR-pQCT

HR-pQCT measurements (XtremeCT II®; Scanco Medical AG) were performed in a 7-cm volume of interest (VOI) from the distal fibular tip using the in vivo protocol (60 kVp, 900 μ A, 100 ms integration time, voxel size of $61\,\mu\text{m}$) as described before. 19,20 A single measurement scan was performed to avoid stack shift. For optimal standardization, all scans were acquired by the same trained researcher. All specimens were positioned with the same orientation and fixed within the manufacturer's cast to prevent motion artifacts. 21 For the analysis of specific subregions according to the Danis-Weber fracture classification (Figure 1A), three VOIs with 250 slices each were defined (Figure 1B). For the type B subregion, a distal reference line was set at the distal tibial plafond and 250 slices were evaluated in the proximal direction. Subsequently, the distance between the tibial plafond and the distal fibular tip was measured, and the VOI corresponding to the type A subregion was set at half this distance. Finally, the center of the type C subregion was determined with a proximal offset from the distal tibial plafond that corresponds to the distance between the tibial plafond and the fibular tip. A standard evaluation protocol provided by the manufacturer was used to generate 3D microarchitectural datasets of the cortical and trabecular compartments. The consistent quality of the scans was ensured by the daily use of the calibration phantom, and

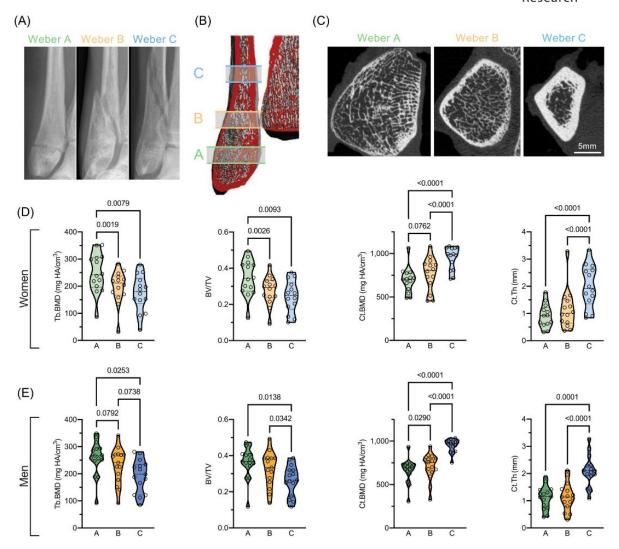


FIGURE 1 Comparison of bone microarchitecture patterns between different subregions (i.e., heights) in the distal fibula. (A) Representative radiographs of the three types of distal fibula fractures according to the AO-Danis-Weber classification. (B) Representative reconstructed image and schematic drawing of the analyzed subregions according to the AO-Danis-Weber classification. Virtual cut-section is colored red. (C) Axial high-resolution peripheral quantitative computed tomography (HR-pQCT) images of the distal fibula in the different subregions. White bar represents 5 mm. (D) Trabecular and cortical parameters of women. (E) Trabecular and cortical parameters of men. Analysis of variance with Tukey's post hoc test was performed. Exact *p*-values are given until <0.0001. A, Weber A; B, Weber B; BV/TV, bone volume per tissue volume; C, Weber C; Ct.BMD, cortical bone mineral density distribution; Ct.Th, cortical thickness; mg HA/cm³, milligram hydroxyapatite per cm³; Tb.BMD, trabecular bone mineral density distribution [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

manual correction of the contours was performed if required. Volumetric bone mineral density (vBMD) including total BMD (Tt.BMD, mg HA/cm³), trabecular BMD (Tb.BMD, mg HA/cm³), and cortical BMD (Ct.BMD, mg HA/cm³) as well as bone microarchitecture parameters including bone volume to total volume (BV/TV), trabecular number (Tb.N, 1/mm), thickness (Tb.Th, mm), and separation (Tb.Sp, mm), cortical thickness (Ct.Th, mm) and porosity (Ct.Po) were assessed according to current guidelines.²² Geometric parameters including total area (Tt.Ar, mm²), trabecular area (Tb.Ar, mm²), cortical area (Ct.Ar, mm²), and cortical perimeter (Ct.Pm, mm²) were also evaluated.

2.3 | μFEA

We applied μ FEA using the software provided by the manufacturer to derive mechanical characteristics directly from segmented HR-pQCT scans. The HR-pQCT images were filtered using a Laplace-Hamming filter and down-scaled (factor 2). Axial boundary conditions were assigned for compression tests with 1% strain (Young's modulus of 10,000 MPa for all elements, Poisson's ratio of 0.3). Estimated failure load (kN) and total bone stiffness (kN/mm) were calculated by the software (Pistoia's failure criteria with critical volume of 2% and critical value of 7000 μ strain).

TABLE 1 Demographic parameters of the included women and men.

Parameter	Women (n = 15)	Men (n = 15)	p Value
Age (years)	51.7 ± 20.0	51.5 ± 18.5	0.985
Weight (kg)	78.3 ± 19.6	78.9 ± 16.5	0.931
Height (cm)	170.8 ± 5.9	175.9 ± 9.4	0.085
Body mass index (kg/m²)	26.8 ± 6.7	25.5 ± 5.0	0.530

association between age and bone microarchitectural parameters, linear regression analysis was performed and the coefficient of determination R^2 and the regression slopes with confidence intervals (CIs) were calculated. Results are given as absolute values or the mean \pm standard deviation (SD). The dashed lines of the truncated violin plots represent the median and quartiles. The level of significance was defined as p < 0.05. Exact p-values are reported unless p < 0.0001.

2.4 | Statistical analysis

Statistical analysis was performed using GraphPad Prism (version 8.4.0; GraphPad Software Inc.). Data were analyzed by ROUT test and significant outliers (Q = 0.1%) were excluded from further analysis. Normality-distribution of the data was tested using Shapiro–Wilk test. As all data were normally distributed, t-test was used for analysis of two groups. If three groups were compared, one-way analysis of variance and repeated measures with Tukey correction was carried out. A one-way analysis of covariance was performed to evaluate sex differences on selected parameters (Tb.Ar, Ct.Ar, Ct.Th, failure load) while controlling for the covariate height. Homogeneity of regression slopes was not violated regarding the dependent variable, as the interaction terms were not statistically significant (p > 0.05). For the analysis of an

3 | RESULTS

3.1 | Subregional variations in microarchitecture

Distal fibulae of 30 White individuals were assessed, comprising each 15 women and men (age 51.7 ± 20.0 [18–87] and 51.5 ± 18.5 [24–76] years, p=0.985). Weight, height, and BMI did not differ significantly between women and men (Table 1). Comparing densitometric and microstructural parameters between both sexes, no differences were observed except for lower Tb.Ar in the subregion corresponding to Danis-Weber type A and type B, lower Tb.Th in the type B subregion, and lower Ct.Pm in the type C subregion in women compared to men (Table 2). When adjusted for body height, no differences in Tb.Ar, Ct.Ar, or Ct.Th could be detected in any of the subregions. Of note, when comparing women and men above the age

TABLE 2 High-resolution peripheral quantitative computed tomography (HR-pQCT) data for women and men in the three different distal fibula subregions (i.e., heights) according to the Danis-Weber classification.

Α			В		С				
Parameter	Women (n = 15)	Men (n = 15)	p Value	Women (n = 15)	Men (n = 15)	p Value	Women (n = 15)	Men (n = 15)	p Value
HR-pQCT									
Tt.BMD (mg HA/cm³)	312.9 ± 101.6	321.1 ± 83.38	0.814	332.4 ± 117.9	322.8 ± 113.4	0.825	582.4 ± 211.6	584.9 ± 132.3	0.970
Tb.BMD (mg HA/cm³)	248.5 ± 73.9	259.2 ± 64.7	0.680	197.0 ± 62.5	229.1 ± 66.4	0.192	174.7 ± 67.3	192.3 ± 60.9	0.465
BV/TV (1)	0.35 ± 0.10	0.36 ± 0.09	0.634	0.28 ± 0.08	0.32 ± 0.10	0.169	0.24 ± 0.09	0.26 ± 0.08	0.549
Tb.N (mm ⁻¹)	1.26 ± 0.21	1.18 ± 0.24	0.311	1.25 ± 0.28	1.26 ± 0.24	0.905	0.97 ± 0.26	0.94 ± 0.18	0.905
Tb.Th (mm)	0.34 ± 0.05	0.37 ± 0.06	0.095	0.27 ± 0.04	0.31 ± 0.04	0.017	0.29 ± 0.05	0.32 ± 0.04	0.072
Ct.BMD (mg HA/cm³)	694.6 ± 146.8	664.5 ± 139.6	0.575	767.7 ± 189.6	706.5 ± 154.3	0.347	945.9 ± 133.9	948.4 ± 76.4	0.950
Ct.Th (mm)	0.91 ± 0.44	1.11 ± 0.43	0.227	1.16 ± 0.74	1.14 ± 0.51	0.960	1.99 ± 0.78	2.11 ± 0.57	0.651
Ct.Po (1)	0.02 ± 0.02	0.03 ± 0.02	0.327	0.02 ± 0.01	0.02 ± 0.01	0.122	0.02 ± 0.01	0.02 ± 0.01	0.180
Ct.Pm (mm)	69.46 ± 8.71	74.44 ± 14.57	0.278	54.49 ± 6.93	59.49 ± 6.47	0.055	43.17 ± 4.79	47.11 ± 4.07	0.024
Tb.Ar (mm ²)	237.2 ± 44.1	288.0 ± 43.1	0.004	144.7 ± 48.5	185.9 ± 43.7	0.026	58.1 ± 33.5	64.3 ± 22.5	0.563
Ct.Ar (mm ²)	44.7 ± 19.4	50.3 ± 20.6	0.454	43.9 ± 16.7	43.8 ± 19.6	0.987	54.7 ± 17.0	67.7 ± 17.6	0.053

Note: Bold indicates significant differences (p < 0.05).

Abbreviations: BV/TV, bone volume per tissue volume; Ct.Ar, cortical area; Ct.BMD, cortical bone mineral density; Ct.Pm, cortical perimeter; Ct.Po, cortical porosity; Ct.Th, cortical thickness; HA, hydroxyapatite; Tb.Ar, trabecular area; Tb.BMD, trabecular bone mineral density; Tb.N, trabecular umber; Tb.Th, trabecular thickness; Tt.BMD, total bone mineral density.

of 50 years, men showed higher values in some of the trabecular and cortical parameters, including Ct.Th in the type C subregion (Supporting Information: Figure 1), pointing to distinct age-related alterations in women and men.

Visual inspection suggested profound structural differences when comparing the different subregions (i.e., heights) from distal to proximal (i.e., Danis-Weber type A to C; Figure 1B,C). Subsequent quantification revealed higher trabecular densitometric and structural parameters in the type A subregion compared to the more proximal regions corresponding to type B and C fractures in women and men (Figure 1D,E). In contrast, cortical parameters were comparably lower within the type A and the highest within the type C subregion.

3.2 | Age-related changes in microarchitecture

Next, we analyzed whether microarchitectural parameters were associated with age (Figure 2). In women, parameters at both type A (e.g., BV/TV, -0.3%, 95% CI -0.6% to -0.02%, $R^2 = 0.31$, p = 0.037) and type B (e.g., BV/TV, -0.3%, 95% CI -0.5% to -0.06%, $R^2 = 0.40$, p = 0.016) subregions decreased with age (Figure 2A), contrasting men, in whom no associations with age were observed for trabecular parameters in any region (Figure 2B). For cortical parameters, associations with age were predominantly detected within the region corresponding to type C. Specifically, women showed negative agerelated associations in Ct.BMD and Ct.Th in all regions. In contrast, men showed an age-associated decrease only in the type C subregion. Interestingly, cortical area (Ct.Ar, mm2) showed an ageassociated decline in all individuals and in all subregions. Of note, the extent of the association was even greater in men. Overall, the highest coefficient of determination for cortical parameters was observed in type C, which were in general associated to a higher degree with age than trabecular values. Comparing the slopes of women and men, significant differences were detected for Tb.Ar (p = 0.024) and Ct.BMD (p = 0.038), both within the region corresponding to Weber-Danis type C.

3.3 | Bone strength according to sex, subregion, and age

To gain deeper insight into the bone strength of the distal fibula, μ FEA was applied to the HR-pQCT scans of the distal fibula (Figure 3A). Comparison between women and men showed no sex differences for the Danis-Weber type A and B subregion but higher stiffness and failure load for men in the subregion corresponding to the type C fractures (Table 3). After adjustment for body height, bone strength was still higher in the type C subregion in men (failure load: F = 5.201, p = 0.031, partial $\eta^2 = 0.162$). When comparing the three subregions, women showed significantly higher values of failure load in the type C than in the type A and B subregion (Figure 3B), and a significant negative association with age was found in the type B

subregion (Figure 3C). In contrast, no significant differences between the subregions were observed in men (Figure 3D), while strong negative associations with age were observed for the type B and type C subregion in men (Figure 3E).

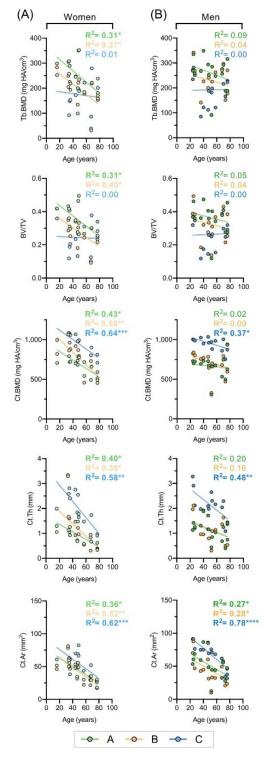


FIGURE 2 (See caption on next page)

Notably, linear regression analysis of the cross-sectional cortical area and failure load revealed a positive association, which was stronger in men than in women (Supporting Information: Figure 2). Lastly, we aimed to elaborate the influence of weight-bearing on the microarchitecture in the different fibular subregions. Overall, no, or only weak associations between BMI and bone microarchitecture were revealed except for cortical parameters in the Danis-Weber type C subregion in men (Supporting Information: Figure 3). Likewise, no associations were detected between BMI and μFEA parameters except for the type B and C subregion in men (Supporting Information: Figure 4).

4 | DISCUSSION

In the present study, we assessed the bone microarchitecture and derived bone strength in different subregions of the distal fibula using HR-pQCT. While the subregions were chosen according to the Danis-Weber classification, differences between females and males were also assessed. We were able to provide insights into the trabecular and cortical features of these different subregions in a sexdependent manner, which are characterized by a specific increase in cortical thickness and decrease in trabecular microarchitecture from distal to proximal. An age-related decrease occurred predominantly in the cortical compartment and was prevalent in both women and men, albeit men were less affected by age-related deterioration of microarchitecture. Furthermore, women also showed an age-related decline in trabecular parameters in the Weber type A and B subregion. Using µFEA, we were able to show that mechanical properties differed in the most proximal subregion (i.e., type C) between women and men, but not in the type A and B subregions. Overall, stiffness and failure load were the highest in the type C subregion; and distinct age-related changes of bone strength were revealed. Together, we provide clinically relevant insight into the skeletal microarchitecture and strength of the distal fibula in relation to different subregions.

The distal fibula is among the most common fracture sites²⁴ posing both acute and chronic clinical challenges.^{10,11} Albeit the annual incidence remained stable over the past years, a persistent increase among women above the age of 40 years can be observed.²⁵

FIGURE 2 Age-related, subregional changes of bone microarchitecture in the distal fibula. (A) Linear regression analysis of age and trabecular and cortical parameters of women in different subregions. (B) Linear regression analysis of age and trabecular and cortical parameters of men in different subregions. Linear regression analysis was performed and the coefficient of determination R^2 was calculated. Significant results are printed bold. *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001, ****p < 0.0001. A, Weber A; B, Weber B; BV/TV, bone volume per tissue volume; C, Weber C; Ct. Ar, cortical area; Ct.BMD, cortical bone mineral density distribution; Ct.Th, cortical thickness; mg HA/cm³, milligram hydroxyapatite per cm³; Tb.BMD, trabecular bone mineral density distribution [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

In the latter patient group, most fractures can be attributed to lowenergy trauma, ⁵ suggesting a relevant age-associated deterioration of bone quality. Along with this observation, a previous HR-pQCT study reported that postmenopausal women with ankle fractures had impaired bone microarchitecture and strength in the distal radius and tibia, but local differences in the distal fibula were not investigated. ²⁶ Fracture resistance is based on the bone's cortical and trabecular geometry, mineralization, microarchitecture, and other bone quality factors. In this context, we have previously demonstrated that age, female sex, and osteoporosis have a negative effect on the bone microarchitecture of the distal fibula in the subregion corresponding to type C fractures. ¹⁴ Specifically, here we found a greater decrease in Ct.BMD in females than in males, with similar trends previously also noted in the distal tibia and radius, ²⁷ as well as in the distal fibula in vivo. ¹⁴

Despite its clinical relevance, no studies investigating the bone quality or mechanical characteristics of the distal fibula in different subregions were available to date. We here demonstrated that the increase in the proportion of cortical bone was accompanied by a decrease in trabecular bone from distal to proximal associated with improved mechanical competence. It has been proposed that type A and B fractures are initiated by supination while type C fractures are initiated by pronation.8 However, the fracture mechanisms initially defined by Lauge and Hansen, including the mechanism by which the distal fibula breaks in supination external rotation injuries, could not be fully recapitulated in more recent biomechanical approaches.²⁸ For instance, a short oblique fracture of the distal fibula could also be produced with the foot in pronation position.²⁹ This makes the importance of an intact skeletal integrity appear even more important. Overall, the superior mechanical competence of the diaphyseal subregion (corresponding to Weber C) may provide an adequate protection against fracture. Regarding the age-related changes, a compartment-specific, age-related decrease in microarchitecture was primarily associated with a decrease in estimated bone strength in the type B subregion in females and the type B and C subregions in males. In other words, our data may provide an explanation why type B fractures are the most common fracture type, possibly due to an unfavorable combination of inadequate mechanical competence and exposure to the highest shear forces irrespective of the sex and only partly influenced by the age of the patients. Overall, our findings are also relevant for osteosynthesis planning in distal fibula fractures, as locking compression plates should be favored over one-third tubular plates in individuals with poor bone quality.

Taking a closer look at the epidemiology of the affected subregions (i.e., heights) of distal fibula fractures, it is noticeable that the general increase in incidence is mainly represented by the increase in Danis-Weber type B fractures, with a moderate increase in type A and type C fractures. This observation is in line with the significant decrease in fibula strength, which was significant in females only in the Weber B subregion. Whereas the age-related decline in bone microarchitecture likely explains the rise of distal fibula fractures in general, the increase of Weber B fractures with age

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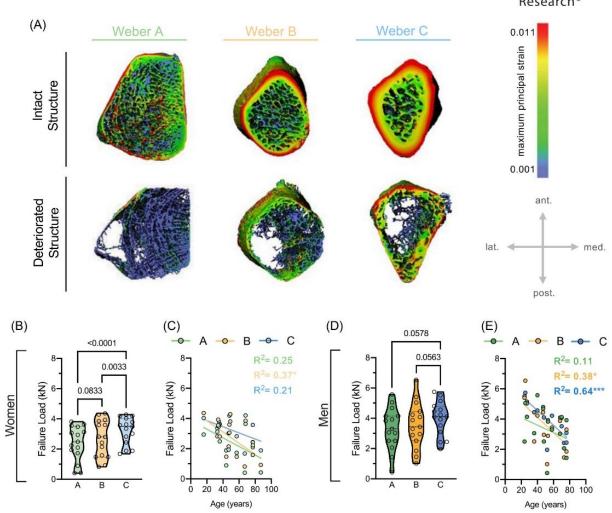


FIGURE 3 Bone strength assessed by micro-finite element analysis (μ FEA) in different distal fibular subregions. (A) Representative reconstructed and color-mapped images of the maximum principal strain in the subregions according to the Danis-Weber classification with intact bone structure (upper row) and deteriorated bone structure (lower row). (B) Comparison of failure load derived from μ FEA according to the Danis-Weber classification in women. (C) Linear regression analysis of age and failure load derived from μ FEA of women at different subregions. (D) Comparison of failure load derived from FEA according to the Danis-Weber classification in men. (E) Linear regression analysis of age and failure load derived from μ FEA of men at different subregions. Analysis of variance with Tukey's post hoc test was performed in panels (B) and (D). Exact p-values are given until <0.0001. Linear regression analysis was performed and the coefficient of determination R^2 was calculated in panels (C) and (E). Significant results are printed bold and indicated by asterisks. *p < 0.005, ***p < 0.001. A, Weber A; B, Weber B; C, Weber C [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

TABLE 3 Micro-finite element analysis (μ FEA) for women and men in the three different subregions according to the Danis-Weber classification.

	Α			В			С		
Parameter	Women (n = 15)	Men (n = 15)	p Value	Women (n = 15)	Men (n = 15)	p Value	Women (n = 15)	Men (n = 15)	p Value
μFEA									
Stiffness (N/mm)	42.4 ± 21.8	59.2 ± 26.5	0.068	47.0 ± 21.9	62.6 ± 26.7	0.092	54.7 ± 14.9	68.2 ± 19.1	0.039
Failure load (kN)	2.39 ± 1.14	3.31 ± 1.38	0.055	2.67 ± 1.23	3.53 ± 1.51	0.096	3.22 ± 0.89	4.00 ± 1.13	0.044

Note: Bold indicates significant differences (p < 0.05).

appears not to be solely dependent upon the observed decreased bone microarchitecture and strength, highlighting the importance of trauma mechanism and especially the forces of the ligamentous structures (including the syndesmosis) exerting on the distal fibula.⁷

Despite novelty of the present analysis, some limitations need to be considered. First, the included number of samples is relatively small, potentially limiting the generality of the findings. Second, although µFEA provides estimates of bone strength in the respective regions of interest simulating compressive loads, no traditional biomechanical testing with loading conditions specific to distal fibular fractures was performed in this study. Third, respecting our inclusion criteria, no specimens of individuals with ankle fractures were enrolled, thus raising the question whether individuals with distal fibula fractures display impaired microarchitectural features and, most importantly, if the fracture type or morphology are associated with local deficits in fibular microarchitecture. Similar approaches have already been conducted in patients with distal radius fractures. 15 Fourth, detailed data on hormonal and estrogen status (e.g., menopause) were not available, although being a relevant factor contributing to bone remodeling.

Taken together, we here present data on the bone microarchitecture and estimated bone strength of the distal fibula revealing distinct characteristics in different subregions. Specifically, a critical age-associated decrease of bone microarchitecture and estimated bone strength was observed in the type B subregion in females, reflecting epidemiological data of ankle fractures and calling for specific treatment strategies. Future studies should investigate how these bone quality characteristics, in combination with specific trauma patterns, explain the occurrence and morphology of distal fibula fractures.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Carsten Schlickewei: Conceptualization, writing—original draft, writing—review & editing. Conradin Schweizer: Investigation, data curation, writing—original draft, writing—review & editing. Klaus Püschel: Investigation, writing—review & editing. Benjamin Ondruschka: Investigation, writing—review & editing. Holger Kleinertz: Conceptualization, writing—review & editing. Alexej Barg: Conceptualization, investigation, writing—review & editing. Tim Rolvien: Conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, investigation, data curation, writing—original draft, writing—review & editing, visualization, supervision, project administration. Julian Stürznickel: Conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, investigation, data curation, writing—original draft, writing—review & editing, visualization, project administration. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ETHICS STATEMENT

This study was approved by the local ethics committee (WF-165/20).

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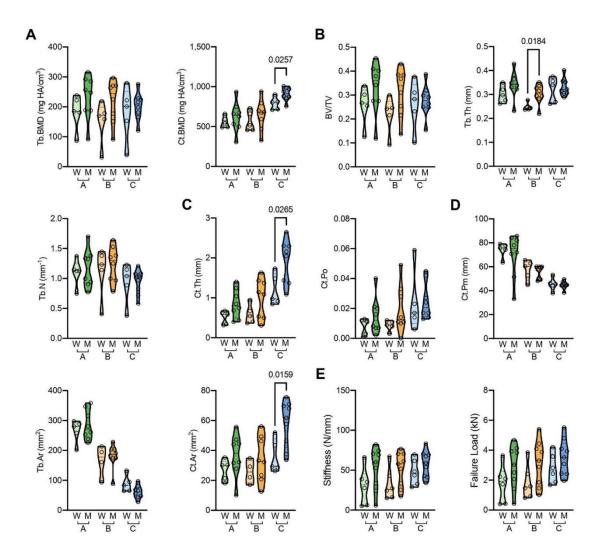
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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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Ergänzende Abbildung 1: Vergleich der Parameter der Mikroarchitektur der distalen Fibula zwischen Frauen und Männern im Alter von über 50 Jahren. (A) Quantifizierung und Vergleich der densitometrischen Parameter. (B, C) Quantifizierung und Vergleich der mikroarchitektonischen Parameter im (B) trabekulären und (C) kortikalen Knochenabschnitt. (D) Quantifizierung und Vergleich der geometrischen Parameter. (E) Quantifizierung und Vergleich der μFEA-Parameter. A – Weber A, B – Weber B, C – Weber C.

Tb.BMD – trabekuläre Knochenmineraldichte (trabecular bone mineral density)

Ct.BMD – kortikale Knochenmineraldichte (cortical bone mineral density)

BV/TV – Verhältnis von Knochenvolumen zu Gesamtvolumen (trabecular bone volume fraction)

Tb.Th - trabekuläre Dicke (trabecular thickness)

Tb.N – Trabekelanzahl (trabecular number)

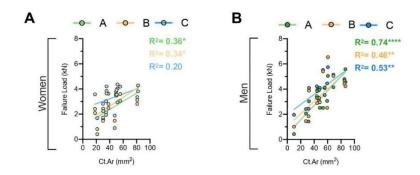
Ct.Th - kortikale Dicke (cortical thickness).

Ct.Po – Kortikalisporosität (cortical porosity)

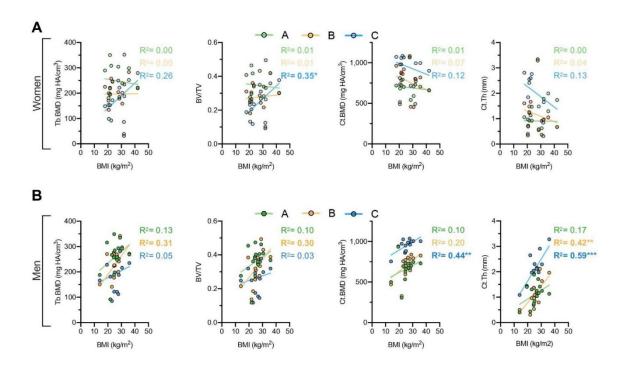
Ct.Pm - Kortikalisumfang (cortical perimeter)

Tb.Ar – Trabekelfläche (trabecular area)

Ct.Ar - Kortikalisfläche (cortical area)



Ergänzende Abbildung 2: Lineare Regressionsanalysen zwischen der Querschnittsfläche der Kortikalis und der abgeleiteten Bruchkraft der Analyse mikrofiniter Elemente (µFEA). (A, B) Zusammenhänge zwischen kortikaler Fläche (Ct.Ar, mm²) und Bruchkraft bei (A) Frauen und (B) Männern. Das Bestimmtheitsmaß R² ist angegeben. *p<0,05, **p<0,01, ****p<0,0001. Signifikante Ergebnisse sind fett gedruckt.

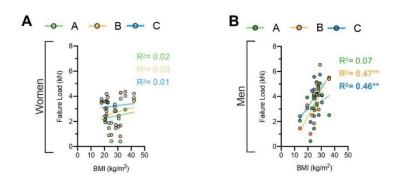


Ergänzende Abbildung 3: Lineare Regressionsanalysen zwischen dem Body-Mass-Index (BMI) und Parametern der Knochenmikroarchitektur. (A) Lineare Regressionsanalysen zwischen dem BMI und mikrostrukturellen Parametern bei (A) Frauen und (B) Männern. Das Bestimmtheitsmaß R² ist angegeben. *p<0,05, **p<0,01, ***p<0,001. Signifikante Ergebnisse sind fett gedruckt.

Tb.BMD – trabekuläre Knochenmineraldichte (trabecular bone mineral density) BV/TV – Verhältnis von Knochenvolumen zu Gesamtvolumen (trabecular bone volume fraction

Ct.BMD – kortikale Knochenmineraldichte (cortical bone mineral density)

Ct.Th – kortikale Dicke (cortical thickness)



Ergänzende Abbildung 4: Lineare Regressionsanalysen zwischen dem Body-Mass-Index (BMI) und der abgeleiteten Bruchkraft der Analyse mikrofiniter Elemente (μ FEA). (A, B) Zusammenhänge zwischen BMI (kg/m²) und Bruchkraft bei (A) Frauen und (B) Männern. Das Bestimmtheitsmaß R² ist angegeben. ** p<0,01. Signifikante Ergebnisse sind fett gedruckt.

9. Erklärung des Eigenanteils

Mein Eigenanteil an der geteilten Erstautorenschaft umfasst die gesamte Datenakquise der oben angeführten Publikation "Age-, sex-, and subregion-specific properties of distal fibular microarchitecture and strength: An ex vivo HR-pQCT study". Die Messungen erfolgten mit der Hilfe von Dr. rer. nat. Felix Nikolai Schmidt. Anschließend führte ich die statistische Analyse durch und erstellte die Abbildungen. Die daraus resultierende vorgelegte Veröffentlichung fand in Zusammenarbeit mit Privatdozent Dr. med. Dr. rer. biol. hum. Tim Rolvien und Dr. med. Julian Stürznickel statt. Die Konzeption der vorgelegten Studie wurde von mir in Abstimmung mit Dr. med. Carsten Schlickewei, Professor Dr. med. Alexej Barg, Privatdozent Dr. med. Dr. rer. biol. hum. Tim Rolvien sowie Dr. med. Julian Stürznickel getroffen. Die Akquise der Proben erfolgte in Zusammenarbeit mit Herrn Professor Dr. med. Klaus Püschel sowie Professor Dr. med. Benjamin Ondruschka. Die Interpretation geschah primär in Zusammenarbeit mit Dr. med. Carsten Schlickewei, Privatdozent Dr. med. Dr. rer. biol. hum. Tim Rolvien und Dr. med. Julian Stürznickel. Die Betreuung dieser Arbeit und Korrektur des Manuskripts erfolgte primär durch Privatdozent Dr. med. Dr. rer. biol. hum. Tim Rolvien und Dr. med. Julian Stürznickel. Darüber hinaus akquirierte ich im Zuge meiner Doktorarbeit eigenständig die Mikrostruktur-Daten für eine weitere Publikation ("Superior Bone Microarchitecture in Anatomic Versus Nonanatomic Fibular Drill Tunnels for Reconstruction of the Posterolateral Corner of the Knee") und war an der Verfassung des Manuskripts beteiligt (siehe Anhang).

10. Danksagung

Meinen außerordentlichen Dank möchte ich an Herrn Privatdozent Dr. med. Dr. rer. biol. hum. Tim Rolvien für die hervorragende Betreuung während der gesamten Durchführung meiner Dissertation aussprechen. Sein hohes Engagement und konstruktive Kritik waren über diese Zeit eine große Hilfe.

Darüber hinaus gilt Herrn Dr. med. Julian Stürznickel besonderen Danke für die Betreuung und Unterstützung während des gesamten Projekts.

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Weiteren Dank gilt auch Herrn Dr. med. Carsten Schlickewei für die gute Zusammenarbeit.

Außerdem möchte ich allen Kolleginnen und Kollegen der Klinik für Unfallchirurgie und Orthopädie sowie des Instituts für Osteologie und Biomechanik für deren Engagement und Unterstützung danken. Besonderen Dank gilt Herrn Dr. rer. nat. Felix Nikolai Schmidt, der als technische Unterstützung zur Akquise der Daten eine große Hilfe war.

An letzter Stelle bedanke ich mich bei meinen Eltern, Geschwistern und Partnerin für die liebevolle Unterstützung während der Arbeit an dieser Doktorarbeit.

11. Curriculum vitae

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Studie"

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Publikationsliste

Schweizer C, Hanreich C, Tscholl PM, et al. *Nineteen percent of meniscus repairs are being revised and failures frequently occur after the second postoperative year: a systematic review and meta-analysis with a minimum follow-up of 5 years.* Knee Surg Sports Traumatol Arthrosc. 2021

Schlickewei C*, **Schweizer C***, Püschel K, et al. *Age-, sex-, and subregion-specific properties of distal fibular microarchitecture and strength: An ex vivo HR-pQCT study.* J Orthop Res. 2022

Stürznickel J*, Schmidt FN*, **Schweizer C**, et al. Superior Bone Microarchitecture in Anatomic Versus Nonanatomic Fibular Drill Tunnels for Reconstruction of the Posterolateral Corner of the Knee. Orthop J Sports Med.

Schweizer C, Hanreich C, Tscholl PM, et al. *Meniscus repair failures in 3829 patients with a minimum follow-up of 2 years: A meta-analysis on the overall failure rate and failure influencing factors.* Submitted to Am J Sports Med (under review)

Savarese-Brenner B, Heugl M, **Schweizer C**, et al. *MUC1 and CD147 Are Promising Markers for the Detection of Circulating Tumor Cells in Small Cell Lung Cancer*. Anticancer Res. 2022

Arbeitserfahrungen

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^{*} Geteilte Erstautorenschaft

12. Eidesstattliche Versicherung

Ich versichere ausdrücklich, dass ich die Arbeit selbständig und ohne fremde Hilfe

verfasst, andere als die von mir angegebenen Quellen und Hilfsmittel nicht benutzt

und die aus den benutzten Werken wörtlich oder inhaltlich entnommenen Stellen

einzeln nach Ausgabe (Auflage und Jahr des Erscheinens), Band und Seite des

benutzten Werkes kenntlich gemacht habe.

Ferner versichere ich, dass ich die Dissertation bisher nicht einem Fachvertreter an

einer anderen Hochschule zur Überprüfung vorgelegt oder mich anderweitig um

Zulassung zur Promotion beworben habe.

Ich erkläre mich einverstanden, dass meine Dissertation vom Dekanat der

Medizinischen Fakultät mit einer gängigen Software zur Erkennung von Plagiaten

überprüft werden kann.

	INIAI CONTIII	
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45

Superior Bone Microarchitecture in Anatomic Versus Nonanatomic Fibular Drill Tunnels for Reconstruction of the Posterolateral Corner of the Knee

Julian Stürznickel,*† MD, Felix N. Schmidt,† MD, PhD, Conradin Schweizer,* MD, Herbert Mushumba,‡ MD, Matthias Krause,*§ MD, Klaus Püschel,‡ MD, and Tim Rolvien,*§ MD, PhD

Investigation performed at the University Medical Center Hamburg-Eppendorf, Hamburg, Germany

Background: Several fibula-based reconstruction techniques have been introduced to address ligamentous injuries of the posterolateral corner of the knee. These techniques involve a drill tunnel with auto- or allograft placement through the proximal fibula.

Purpose: To determine the skeletal microarchitecture of the proximal fibula and its association with age and to compare the microarchitecture within the regions of different drill tunnel techniques for reconstruction of the posterolateral corner.

Study Design: Descriptive laboratory study.

Methods: A total of 30 human fibulae were analyzed in this cadaveric imaging study. High-resolution peripheral quantitative computed tomography measurements were performed in a 4.5 cm-long volume of interest at the proximal fibula. Three-dimensional microarchitectural data sets of cortical and trabecular compartments were evaluated using customized scripts. The quadrants representing the entry and exit drill tunnel positions corresponding to anatomic techniques (LaPrade/Arciero) and the Larson technique were analyzed. Linear regression models and group comparisons were applied.

Results: Trabecular microarchitecture parameters declined significantly with age in women but not men. Analysis of subregions with respect to height revealed stable cortical and decreasing trabecular values from proximal to distal in both sexes. Along with a structural variability in axial slices, superior values were found for the densitometric and microarchitectural parameters corresponding to the fibular drill tunnels in the anatomic versus Larson technique (mean \pm SD; bone volume to tissue volume at the entry position, 0.273 \pm 0.079 vs 0.175 \pm 0.063; P < .0001; cortical thickness at the entry position, 0.501 \pm 0.138 vs 0.353 \pm 0.081 mm; P < .0001).

Conclusion: Age represented a relevant risk factor for impaired skeletal microarchitecture in the proximal fibula in women but not men. The region of drill tunnels according to anatomic techniques showed superior bone microarchitecture versus that according to the Larson technique.

Keywords: bone microarchitecture; HR-pQCT; knee; posterolateral corner; proximal fibula

The posterolateral corner (PLC) of the knee contributes to stabilization against varus forces as well as external tibial rotation and posterior tibial translation.³¹ Injuries of the PLC are often undiagnosed, although they have been reported to occur in around 16% of all knee injuries.¹⁸ The PLC is often involved in cruciate ligament injuries.³¹ Clinically, a PLC injury may result in posterolateral

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rotational instability, chronic pain, failure of cruciate ligament reconstruction, and osteoarthritis. 31

The proximal fibula (ie, fibular head) represents the attachment point of the lateral collateral ligament and the popliteofibular ligament. While a variety of PLC reconstruction options have been proposed, several fibula-based surgical techniques have been introduced to address PLC injuries. ¹⁰ These techniques involve a drill tunnel with auto- or allograft placement through the proximal fibula. Two of the most performed techniques for PLC reconstruction are the Arciero (fibula based) and LaPrade (tibia

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and fibula based), representing nearly anatomic reconstruction techniques with an ascending fibular drill tunnel in the anterolateral-to-posteromedial direction. ^{1,11,28} Another commonly performed fibula-based reconstruction technique is the isometric Larson technique, in which a nonascending drill tunnel is positioned more distally and in the anterior-to-posterior direction. ¹⁹

Although PLC reconstruction techniques are well established and have been shown to adequately restore varus and external rotation stability to the knee, 9 bone-related failure may occur (eg, intraoperative fracture, tunnel widening, cutout of the graft). 21,24 However, micro-architectural data on the proximal fibula overall are not available, let alone derived recommendations of fibula-based tunnel orientation. High-resolution peripheral quantitative computed tomography (HR-pQCT) represents an established technique to evaluate the microarchitectural features of different skeletal regions at a high spatial resolution (31 μm voxel size), which has been used in clinical practice and experimental cadaveric studies. 16,29

The aim of the present study was to characterize the overall bone microarchitecture of the proximal fibula by HR-pQCT with respect to age and sex and to provide the underlying microarchitectural basis for drill tunnel orientation of nearly anatomic (ie, anatomic) and nonanatomic fibula-based PLC reconstruction techniques. The hypothesis was that age is a relevant risk factor for poor microarchitecture and that trabecular and cortical parameters vary within subregions of the proximal fibula, which may have implications for optimal drill tunnel positions.

METHODS

In total, 30 whole fibulae of the right leg were collected from 30 individuals during autopsy, consisting of 15 women and 15 men (mean \pm SD; age, 51.7 \pm 20.0 years [range, 18-87 years] and 51.5 \pm 18.5 years [range, 24-76 years], respectively; P=.985). Hospital and autopsy reports were reviewed to exclude individuals with diseases potentially affecting skeletal integrity (eg, cancer, diabetes, glucocorticoid medication, or periods of longer immobilization) as well as previous surgical procedures around the knee joint. ²⁵ Demographic data were recorded, including sex, age, and body mass index (BMI). All specimens were fixed in 3.7% formaldehyde within 48 hours after death. Informed consent was obtained from the relatives. This cadaveric study was approved by the local ethics committee and complied with the Declaration of Helsinki guidelines.

High-Resolution Peripheral Quantitative Computed Tomography

HR-pQCT measurements (XtremeCT II; Scanco Medical AG) were performed at a volume of interest (VOI) along the most proximal 4.5 cm of the proximal fibular tip with respect to the long axis of the bone using an ex vivo protocol (60 kVp, 900 μA , 100-ms integration time, 42- μm voxel size). 14 For optimal standardization, all scans were acquired by the same trained researcher (J.S.). All specimens were positioned with the same orientation and fixed within the manufacturer's cast to prevent motion artifacts. A standard evaluation protocol provided by the manufacturer was used to generate 3-dimensional microarchitectural data sets of the cortical and trabecular compartment. Consistent quality of the scans was controlled daily by using the manufacturer's calibration phantom.

We assessed the following parameters according to current guidelines 32 :

Densitometric—volumetric total bone mineral density (Tt.BMD), trabecular BMD (Tb.BMD), and cortical BMD (Ct.BMD)

Bone microarchitectural—bone volume to tissue volume (BV/TV), trabecular number (Tb.N), trabecular thickness, cortical thickness (Ct.Th), and cortical porosity

Geometric—total area, trabecular area, cortical area, and cortical perimeter.

VOI Analysis and Simulation of Tunnel Positions

Next to the measurement of bone microarchitecture parameters in the whole proximal fibula, 4 VOI subregions within the metaepiphysis representing different heights (ie, proximal to distal) were generated. The most proximal slice with a visible trabecular structure and the slice at the most distal point of the former growth line were identified. The number of slices between these points was measured and divided by 3 to get the number of slices for VOIs 1 to 3 proximal of the former growth line. For VOI 4, the same number of slices was added distal to the identified growth line.

Within each VOI, the corresponding slices from the proximal 25% to the distal 75% were selected for final analysis. Densitometric and microarchitectural parameters in the VOI subregions were analyzed using customized Pythonbased scripts. Moreover, specific quadrants representing the entry and exit points of drill tunnels according to the anatomic techniques and nonanatomic fibula-based

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J.S. and F.N.S. contributed equally to this article and therefore share first authorship. Final revision submitted July 12, 2022; accepted July 27, 2022.

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Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Ethik-Kommission der Ärztekammer-Hamburg (WF-165/20).

technique^{1,19,28} were analyzed. For this purpose, each fibular scan was oriented with respect to the anteroposterior rotation around the long axis, and the center of mass was automatically calculated for each axial slice. Four neighboring columns were created out of the fibular stack. A combined analysis of the heights (VOIs) and columns allowed a determination of individual quadrants, with each quadrant being cropped respecting the Cartesian coordinate system with its origin aligned to the center of mass per slice. Finally, the bone microarchitecture parameters of the automatically segmented individual quadrants representing the entry and exit positions of the drill tunnels were compared: anatomic (anterolateral quadrant of VOI 2 to posteromedial quadrant of VOI 1) and nonanatomic (anterior quadrant of VOI 2 to posterior quadrant of VOI 2). Customized Python scripts were handled with the workflow manager XamFlow (Version 1.7.5.0; Lucid Concepts AG).

Statistical Analysis

Statistical analysis was performed using Prism (Version 8.4.0; GraphPad Software, Inc). Data were analyzed by ROUT test and significant outliers (Q = 0.1%) excluded from further analysis. Normality distribution of the data was tested using the Shapiro-Wilk test, and for comparison between 2 groups, the Student t test or Mann-Whitney U test was used for parametric or nonparametric data, respectively. For the analysis of an association between age and bone microarchitectural parameters, linear regression analysis was performed, and the coefficient of determination (R^2) was calculated, as well as the regression slopes with confidence intervals. For comparisons of ≥3 groups, 1-way analysis of variance was carried out, including repeated measures with Tukey correction for parametric data or the Kruskal-Wallis test with the Dunn multiplecomparison test for nonparametric data. Repeated measures analysis of variance was used for paired analysis of bone microarchitecture parameters. Results are given as absolute values or mean and standard deviation. The level of significance was defined as P < .05. Exact P values are reported unless P < .0001.

RESULTS

Weight, height, and BMI did not differ significantly between women and men (Table 1). Most densitometric and microarchitectural parameters were not different between women and men. Only trabecular thickness was significantly lower in women than men $(0.216 \pm 0.015 \text{ vs } 0.236 \pm$ 0.020 mm; P = .004). Geometric indices were also significantly lower in women than men.

Evaluation of the age-related associations (Figure 1A) revealed a moderate to strong linear decline in volumetric BMD for the trabecular and cortical compartments in women (Tb.BMD, $R^2 = 0.698$, P = .0002; Ct.BMD, $R^2=0.361, P=.023$) (Figure 1B). In contrast, no association with age was observed in men for either densitometric or microarchitectural parameters except for Ct.BMD $(R^2 = 0.300; P = .034)$ (Figure 1C). Regarding BMI-related

TABLE 1 Demographic and Bone Microarchitecture Parameters of the Proximal Fibula by Sex^a

	$Women\ (n=15)$	$Men\ (n=15)$	P Value
Demographics			
Age, y	51.7 ± 20.0	51.5 ± 18.5	.985
Weight, kg	78.3 ± 19.6	78.9 ± 16.5	.931
Height, cm	170.8 ± 5.9	175.9 ± 9.4	.085
BMI	26.8 ± 6.7	25.5 ± 5.0	.530
Bone microarchitecture			
Tt.BMD, mg HA/cm ³	165.0 ± 62.7	162.5 ± 38.7	.897
Tb.BMD, mg HA/cm ³	106.6 ± 40.0	118.5 ± 34.2	.389
Ct.BMD, mg HA/cm ³	636.7 ± 112.1	658.1 ± 58.9	.522
BV/TV	0.155 ± 0.048	0.183 ± 0.054	.146
Tb.N, mm^{-1}	0.981 ± 0.244	0.943 ± 0.217	.651
Tb.Th, mm	0.216 ± 0.015	0.236 ± 0.020	.004
Ct.Th, mm	0.479 ± 0.140	0.497 ± 0.079	.679
Ct.Po	0.009 ± 0.007	0.008 ± 0.003	.769
Tt.Ar, mm ²	256.1 ± 73.9	353.7 ± 55.7	.0003
Tb.Ar, mm ²	233.2 ± 72.3	312.9 ± 62.6	.004
Ct.Ar, mm ²	24.6 ± 8.2	30.2 ± 5.4	.041
Ct.Pm, mm	65.4 ± 8.2	80.2 ± 6.7	.003

^aData are presented as mean \pm SD. Bold P values indicate statistically significant difference between women and men (P < .05). BMI, body mass index; BV/TV, bone volume to tissue volume; Ct.Ar, cortical area; Ct.BMD, cortical bone mineral density; Ct.Pm, cortical perimeter; Ct.Po, cortical porosity; Ct.Th, cortical thickness; Tb.Ar, trabecular area; Tb.BMD, trabecular bone mineral density: Tb.N. trabecular number: Tb.Th. trabecular thickness; Tt.Ar, total area; Tt.BMD, total bone mineral density.

changes, there were some positive associations in men, including Ct.BMD and Tb.N, whereas no associations between BMI and proximal fibular microarchitecture could be detected in women (Supplemental Figure S1, available online).

Analysis of microarchitectural differences in relation to height (ie, 4 VOIs from proximal to distal) (Figure 2, A and B) showed decreasing trabecular mineralization (Tb.BMD) and microarchitecture (BV/TV), while cortical parameters increased (Ct.BMD) or remained stable (Ct.Th, cortical porosity) from proximal to distal (Figure 2, C and D). Geometric parameters showed distinct differences of the trabecular and cortical area at the different heights (Figure 2E), with the smallest area located at the fibular tip. These findings could be replicated in both sexes (Supplemental Tables S1 and S2 and Figure S2, available online). Assessment of specific age-related patterns within the different heights revealed a decline of trabecular parameters within all heights, whereas cortical values declined predominantly at the most distal VOI 4 in women (Supplemental Figure S3A). In men, no significant associations with age were observed except for Ct.BMD in VOI 4 (Supplemental Figure S3B).

Evaluation of the bone microarchitecture according to axial quadrants corresponding to the regions used for drill tunnel positions during PLC reconstruction (Figure 3, A and B) showed superior values for densitometric and microarchitectural parameters in the anatomic fibular drill tunnel when comparing entry or exit drill regions with the Larson

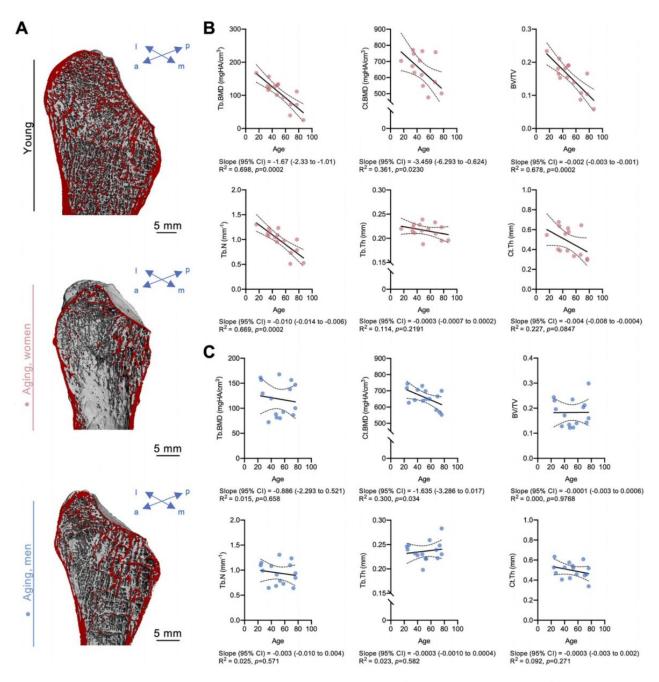


Figure 1. Age-related changes in trabecular and cortical bone microarchitecture in women vs men. (A) Representative 3-dimensional reconstructions of the proximal fibula in a young individual (top panel) and in a woman (middle panel) and a man (bottom panel) during aging. The virtual cut section is indicated in red. Associations between age and microarchitectural parameters in (B) women and (C) men. a, anterior; BV/TV, bone volume to tissue volume; Ct.BMD, cortical bone mineral density; Ct.Th, cortical thickness; I, lateral; m, medial; p, posterior; Tb.BMD, trabecular bone mineral density; Tb.N, trabecular number; Tb.Th, trabecular thickness.

technique (eg, BV/TV $_{\rm entry}$, P<.0001; Tb.N $_{\rm exit}$, P<.0001; Ct.Th $_{\rm entry}$, P<.0001) (Figure 3C). For the exit point of the Larson technique, significant negative associations with age

were revealed for BV/TV and Tb.N, whereas no associations were observed for the exit point of the anatomic procedures (Supplemental Figure S4, available online).

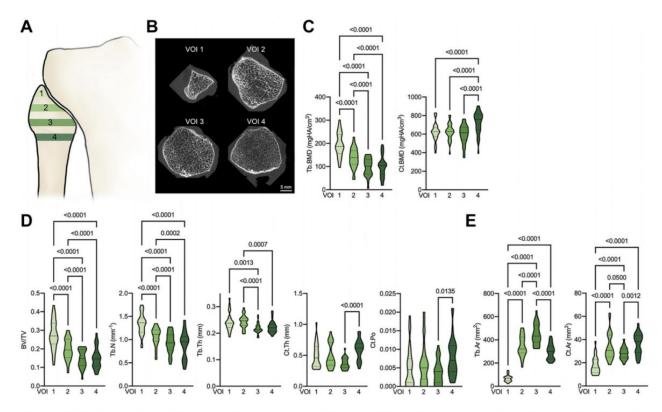


Figure 2. Fibular head microarchitecture parameters among different heights. (A) Schematic drawing (anterolateral view) with the 4 volumes of interest (VOIs 1-4) defined from proximal to distal and relative to the distance between the fibular tip and the distal end of the growth plate. (B) Examples of high-resolution peripheral quantitative computed tomography slices from the VOIs with visible differences in cortical and trabecular microarchitecture. Quantification and comparison of (C) densitometric parameters, (D) microarchitectural parameters, and (E) geometric parameters. The dashed lines of the truncated violin plots represent the median and quartiles. BV/TV, bone volume to tissue volume; Ct.Ar, cortical area; Ct.BMD, cortical bone mineral density; Ct.Po, cortical porosity; Ct.Th, cortical thickness; Tb.Ar, trabecular area; Tb.BMD, trabecular bone mineral density; Tb.N, trabecular number: Tb.Th. trabecular thickness.

DISCUSSION

Although the complexity of the PLC of the knee and its surgical care have been highlighted by previous reports, 5,17,31 no microarchitectural data existed on the proximal fibular microarchitecture and specific anatomy-based recommendations for fibula-based drill tunnel orientations until now. Significant differences were observed between women and men for the underlying association with age. Namely, moderate to strong negative associations between age and trabecular parameters were observed in women, whereas these associations were absent in men. Our findings further revealed distinct alterations in microarchitecture with respect to axial VOIs and columns. Importantly, microarchitecture parameters, including trabecular bone volume and Ct.Th, showed superior values in the fibular drill tunnel regions corresponding to the anatomic reconstruction techniques versus in the nonanatomic technique.

While an age-related decrease in bone microarchitecture is considered to occur in the skeleton in general, site-specific characteristics of the bone microarchitecture have been

elaborated for different skeletal regions. In the clinical setting, the distal tibia and distal radius are routinely measured, 3,20,23,30,33 but also other skeletal sites or bones, such as the proximal tibia13 or calcaneus,22 have been investigated by HR-pQCT in the past. Only recently, the bone microarchitecture of the distal fibula has been studied by HR-pQCT by our group, demonstrating an age-related loss of bone microarchitecture in women but not men, which likely explains the higher susceptibility to distal fibular fractures in elderly women. 27,29 Consistent with these previous findings, women in this study showed a moderate to strong age-associated decrease in bone microarchitecture, which is in line with the high prevalence of osteoporosis in older women. However, the observed microarchitecture decline in the fibular head observed here was predominantly within the trabecular compartment, while the bone microarchitecture in the distal fibula showed cortical deterioration.²⁹ A reason for the compartment-specific decrease in microarchitecture could be the divergent mechanical environment in proximal versus distal regions. Overall, it appears likely that impaired microarchitecture

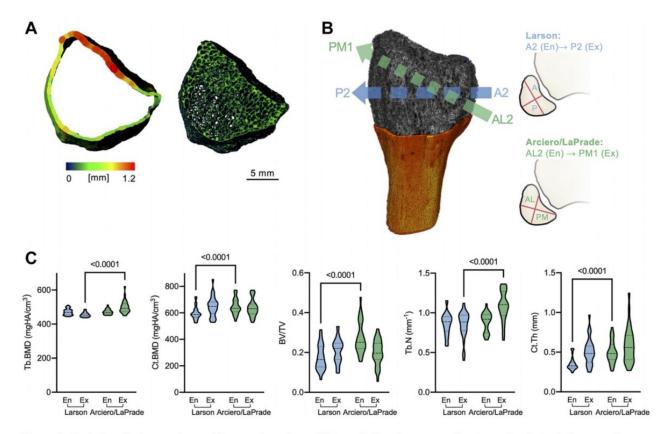


Figure 3. Variations in bone microarchitecture based on drill tunnel directions according to anatomic techniques vs Larson. (A) Representative axial view of segmentations of the cortical (left) and trabecular (right) bone compartments. The color coding indicates the thickness. (B) Demonstration of entry (En) and exit (Ex) points of the drill tunnels (left) in a 3-dimensional segmented scan and schematic axial slices. The letter and number (eg, A2) indicate the orientation and height (see Figure 2A). (C) Densitometric and microarchitectural parameters between En and Ex in the regions according to drill tunnels corresponding to anatomic techniques vs Larson. The dashed lines of the truncated violin plots represent the median and quartiles. A, anterior; AL, anterolateral; BV/TV, bone volume to tissue volume; Ct.BMD, cortical bone mineral density; Ct.Th, cortical thickness; P, posterior; PM, posteromedial; Tb.BMD, trabecular bone mineral density; Tb.N, trabecular number.

of the proximal fibula, as observed in older women, could increase susceptibility to, for example, arcuate fractures ¹² and especially contribute to failure in surgical reconstruction of the PLC.

Specific subregions were analyzed to characterize the site-specific microarchitecture within the proximal fibula. The proximal fibular tip showed significantly lower bone area but overall preserved microarchitecture, illustrating that the skeletal quality in this region is likely not the leading reason for the skeletal-related failure of PLC reconstruction, such as graft cutout. Based on microarchitecture outcomes and regardless of the surgical technique, the ideal drill tunnel positions would most likely be in VOI 1 and VOI 2, given the favorable combination of preserved trabecular and cortical microarchitecture. Notably, cortical thickness was relevantly higher only in the region inferior to VOI 4 (ie, the diaphyseal region). Simulation of specific drill tunnel positions frequently used in PLC reconstruction was performed afterward. For the Larson technique, 19 a horizontal anteroposterior tunnel was simulated, contrasting the LaPrade or Arciero technique with an ascending tunnel from anterolateral to posteromedial. 1,28 While initial visualization suggested topographic differences in cortical and trabecular microarchitecture, customized segmentation with regional analysis revealed superior results for entry and exit quadrants for several microarchitecture parameters in the anatomic techniques (LaPrade/Arciero) as compared with the nonanatomic Larson technique. A reason for this difference could be that ligamentous attachments led to locally higher loading forces and thus represented a bone-anabolic stimulus. As the microarchitecture parameters corresponding to the Larson technique especially declined with age, older individuals might be at additional risk for failure with this technique. Given the growing functional demands of older individuals, these results appear clinically important.

Although anatomic PLC reconstruction techniques involving fibular drill tunnels as described by LaPrade or Arciero²¹ may provide higher rotational stabilization than a nonanatomic technique, as in the Larson technique,⁸

anatomic reconstructions may also fail. A systematic review indicated a mean failure rate of 9.4% in PLC reconstruction or repair cases and 3 intraoperative fractures,21 although the individual causes for failure were not often reported. Graft slippage and tunnel widening are acknowledged problems of transplant fixation in the proximal tibia in anterior cruciate ligament reconstruction, which has been attributed to decreased BMD, 2,16 large tunnel diameter, 4,26 and bone impaction. 15 From the collective results of previous studies and the present investigation, the clinical implication is that, although bone-related failure may occur, fibular drill tunnels have favorable microarchitectural support in anatomic reconstruction, possibly resulting in the observed low bone-related complication rates in young individuals. In this context, it should be noted that fibular fixation strength is only 1 reason for failure and that the biomechanical function of the grafts is highly dependent on their location.

Limitations

Our study has a few limitations. While HR-pQCT is a stateof-the-art technique with the best possible resolution in the context of a clinical microarchitecture analysis, no biomechanical tests could be performed in the current study setup. Additional biomechanical studies should evaluate cutout and/or tunnel widening in different drill tunnel positions, for example, by applying a defined cyclic tensile load. The individual contribution of the trabecular and cortical compartments within the fibular drill tunnels regarding stability as well as skeletal-related complications is not known. While we hypothesize that cortical thickness may be the major contributor to stability, this merits further investigation, including finite element modeling and biomechanical testing. Moreover, reproducibility in terms of intra- or interrater reliability was not assessed in this study. Nonetheless, excellent reproducibility of secondgeneration HR-pQCT regarding geometry, BMD, trabecular bone, and cortical thickness has been reported in a previous study. 6 Another limitation is that other surgical techniques or alternative drill tunnel positions for PLC reconstruction were not investigated. Although anatomic reconstructions (ie, LaPrade or Arciero) were associated with superior microarchitecture, this technique might not be applicable in all patients owing to intraoperative factors.

CONCLUSION

This study revealed that age represents a relevant risk factor for impaired skeletal microarchitecture in the proximal fibula in women but not men. Since the skeletal subregions around drill tunnels for PLC reconstruction according to LaPrade or Arciero showed superior bone microarchitecture as compared with those per Larson, it should now be explored whether this implies improved stability and lower failure rates attributed to skeletal complications such as fractures, graft cutout, or tunnel widening.

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