

Influence of body composition on the respiratory muscle strength of children exposed to antiretroviral therapy for human immunodeficiency virus

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955



Abstract

Highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART) for Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is important for suppressing HIV replication; however, adverse effects from prolonged use cause concern. With an increasing incidence of infection in children, the analysis of the maximum respiratory pressures of children exposed to HAART aims to observe possible changes related to continued use, such as: metabolic disorders, cardiovascular disorders, fat redistribution abnormalities and respiratory musculature. Thus, the aim of this study was to evaluate the influence of body composition on the respiratory muscle strength of Amazonian children exposed to HIV therapy. It is believed that these children may have some degree of malnutrition and difficulties in accessing health services. The sample was composed of 60 volunteers, both genders, mean age of 7.85 years, in two groups: experimental (EG) (n=29) - exposed to HIV and therapy, and control (CG) (n=31) - not exposed to HIV or to therapy. The subjects were submitted to respiratory muscle strength (RMS) measurement by manovacuometry and body composition: Body Mass Index (BMI) calculation; measurement of tricipital skinfolds (TS), subscapular skinfolds (SS) and waist circumference (WC), to subsequently calculate the WC to height ratio. Data were analyzed by Fisher's exact test which identified a statistical significance between genders on maximum inspiratory ($p = 0.01$) and expiratory ($p = 0.0008$) pressures, and SS ($p=0.04$), TS ($p=0.05$) and WC ($p=0.05$) on Maximum Inspiratory Pressure. There was an influence of body fat distribution on respiratory muscle strength of female Amazonian children exposed to antiretroviral therapy of human immunodeficiency virus.

Keywords: HAART (Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapy); AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome); Sex; Muscle weakness; BMI (Body Mass Index).

INTRODUCTION

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is the cause of Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS), which affects the immune system, whose function is to defend the body against opportunistic diseases. The discovery of AIDS was a major scientific advance and with that discovery an increase in the number of women, children and adolescents infected with

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the virus was observed¹.

In Brazil, between 2007 and 2018, 247,795 cases of HIV infection were reported, and 1,559 of which were aged up to 14 years old. In the northern region of the country, a total of 19,781 cases, of which 384 were pregnant women. In the ranking of detection rate (x1,000 live births) of pregnant women with HIV from 2005 to 2017, among 27 state capitals, 04 in the Northern region are in the top 10 (Belém, Manaus, Boa Vista and Porto Velho)².

The transmission of HIV can be through sexual intercourse (sperm and vaginal discharge), blood (parenteral and vertical) and breast milk³. Vertical transmission of the immunodeficiency virus is given when the pregnant woman transmits the virus to the fetus, which can occur in several ways: during pregnancy (intrauterine), during delivery and during breastfeeding⁴; such transmission has demonstrated a rate of 25.5%⁵.

According to data from the Brazilian Ministry of Health, from 2007 to 2018, 116,292 cases of pregnant women infected with HIV were registered. The notification rate in pregnant women with the virus in Brazil has significantly increased in recent years².

In Brazil, the prevalence of infection in parturients is approximately 12,000 cases per year. The Northern region was third (59.6%) with the highest percentage of reported cases compared to the expected number².

However, with the advent of antiretroviral therapy, patients' life expectancy and quality of life increased significantly, especially in young people and children, leading to a decline in mortality from opportunistic diseases (infections and neoplasms)⁶. This therapy aims to curb the reproduction of the virus in the body, where there is no elimination of HIV, but helps to contain the weakening of the immune system⁷.

As the therapy spread and its duration increased, toxicities became more evident. In the long term, the most common side effects are metabolic disorders such as dyslipidemia,

insulin resistance and cardiovascular risk. Abnormalities in fat redistribution may also occur, characterized as lipodystrophic syndrome⁸.

Individuals exposed to HIV also have muscle alterations, especially respiratory muscles, which leads to loss of functional capacity and dysfunction⁹.

Infected children have progressive skeletal muscle dysfunction, as well as mitochondrial dysfunction, both caused by biochemical changes due to infection and the use of HAART (High Activity Antiretroviral Therapy). This may be one of the factors that may clarify the origin of inspiratory muscle weakness in immunodeficient patients¹⁰.

Children exposed to HIV tend to start antiretroviral therapy very early, when possible, even during pregnancy. This prolongs the duration of antiretroviral use and, consequently, its adverse effects, as well as influences the changes caused by a vulnerable immune system which is susceptible to opportunistic diseases¹¹.

With the increasing incidence of HIV infection in children, the analysis of the maximum respiratory pressures of children exposed to HAART aims to evaluate possible respiratory changes due to depletion caused by respiratory system disorders; which becomes vulnerable due to low immunity¹². It is hypothesized that opportunistic infections and prolonged exposure to antiretroviral treatments cause changes in body composition and therefore respiratory muscle strength.

Thus, this study aimed to analyze the distribution of body fat against the respiratory muscle strength of Amazonian children exposed to antiretroviral therapy of the human immunodeficiency virus. It is hypothesized that children exposed to HIV and antiretroviral therapy from birth and living in areas with less access to health services may present changes in body composition and, consequently, in RMS (Respiratory Muscle Strength).



METHODOLOGY

Type of study and ethical aspects

The study was designed as a cross-sectional, quantitative, prospective and nonrandomized study. It was approved by the Research Ethics Committee (CEP) of the University of Amazonia (UNAMA) under the registration number 364.864 and developed at the Maternal and Child Reference Center (UREMIA). Those responsible for the study participants signed an informed consent form.

Sampling

To be included in the study, participants must not have pulmonary or cardiovascular disease, disabling physical limitations, visual or hearing impairment, decompensated diabetes mellitus, recent upper or thoracoabdominal airway surgery or trauma, and obesity.

Initially, 78 volunteers of both sexes, aged 6 to 11 years were interviewed. Of the total individuals, 18 did not fit the inclusion criteria of the research; of these, 06 had asthma, 11 were in the viral process and 01 was obese.

Sixty individuals were selected, aged 7.85 ± 2.36 years, height 129.85 ± 13.22 cm and weight 28.52 ± 8.79 kg. They were divided into two groups: the experimental group (EG, $n=29$; 13 boys and 16 girls), those who were HIV-infected and exposed to antiretroviral therapy, enrolled at the State Coordination of Sexually Transmitted Diseases of the State of Pará and treated at UREMIA in the city of Belém-PA; and the control group (CG, $n=31$; 17 boys and 14 girls), those individuals not exposed to therapy.

Procedures

In the evaluation, participants were first screened, parents and/or guardians were interviewed to fill out identification

forms. Then, an assessment protocol was applied and respiratory muscle strength was measured using a Digital Manovacuometer $\pm 300\text{mm}/\text{H}_2\text{O}$ (GLOBALMED) and body composition was identified by calculating BMI (Filizola Stadiometer Scale), tricipital (TS), subscapular (SS) cutaneous skinfold and waist circumference (WC) measurements were taken, the ratio between WC and height was calculated. This ratio is considered a risk factor for the development of metabolic and cardiovascular diseases values when $\geq 0.5\text{cm}$ (according to Ashwell; Hsieh guidelines¹³).

The sitting patient used the nasal clip and disposable mouthpiece. To measure Maximum Inspiratory Pressure (MIP), the subject performs a maximum exhalation, followed by a forced inspiration. For maximum expiratory pressure (MEP) measurement, a maximum inhalation is required, followed by a forced expiration. The patient was instructed to close their lips against the mouth to avoid air leakage¹⁴.

To obtain satisfactory results, the technique was performed in three repetitions with rest interval of 30 seconds between maneuvers. According to the results obtained, the highest value among the three measurements was considered, provided that the difference between them was not greater than 10%; otherwise, the test would be performed again.

Skinfold measurements were performed using a Lange® adipometer. All measurements were performed according to the criteria and techniques standardized by Benedetti et al.¹⁵. Participants were asked to stand and relax. The folds were always made in the non-dominant hemibody. In all measurements, the evaluator followed the following technique: separate the adipose tissue from the muscle tissue with the thumb and index finger; adjust the ends of the adipometer over the anatomical point; place the skinfold forceps 1 cm above the anatomical point; wait 02 seconds for reading; perform 03 non-



consecutive measurements and, if there were differences in the results from 5% to 10%, make a fourth measurement, with the device perpendicular to the anatomical point.

Measurements of triceps brachii and subscapularis muscle folds were taken. For the triceps brachii flexion, tweezers were placed on the back of the arm at the midpoint between the scapula acromion and the ulna olecranon. For the subscapularis, tweezers were placed 2 cm below the inferior angle of the scapula with the adipometer at 45° in relation to the longitudinal axis of the body.

Statistical analysis

The reference values for respiratory pressures were obtained through the BioEstat 5.3 program, with parameter estimation by the mean values of the control group, to then analyze the experimental group in comparison with the estimated normal values.

Data were tabulated in Excel database and analyzed in EpiInfo program. Statistical analysis was performed for categorical data (P-value \leq 0.05), considering normal values

equal to or better than those estimated in the control group and abnormal values below those estimated in the control group. The control group mean was taken as the reference.

The reference values for respiratory pressures were obtained through the program BioEstat 5.3, with an estimation of parameters from the mean values of the control group.

Fisher's exact test, considering significant variables with p-value \leq 0.05, evaluated the differences between the two independent groups, differing the proportions in which each group is included in each of the evaluated parameters (normal or altered respiratory forces, normal or altered body composition).

Therefore, it was possible to cross-check the data of each of the evaluated parameters (skinfold measurements, circumferences, height and maximum inspiratory or expiratory pressures) with the sample characteristics (age, sex, exposure to therapy). Crossing these data allows the statistical significance of each variable to be evaluated within the sample characteristics.

RESULTS

The results described below show the most significant data from the study, highlighted in their respective tables.

Inspiratory muscle weakness was present in 55% of participants, and expiratory weakness in 45% (Table 1). In the analysis performed using Fisher's Exact test, correlating the analyzed body composition and RMS variables with the characteristics of the sample, there was significance

concerning the MEP (Table 2) between genders (0.0008), and concerning MIP (Table 3) with 04 variables: gender (0.01), SS (0.04), TS (0.05) and WC (0.05).

Among the characteristics for body composition (SS, TS and WC) related to inspiratory muscle weakness, data show that body composition measurements remained within the normal range but were predictive of a lower MIP (table 4).



Table 1 – Characterization of the sample regarding maximum respiratory pressures, anthropometric measurements and gender. Feb. to Dec. 2014. UREMIA, Belém (PA).

Variables	No.	%	C.I. %
MIP			
Normal	27	45	32.1 to 58.4
Altered	33	55	41.6 to 67.9
MEP			
Normal	33	55	41.6 to 67.9
Altered	27	45	32.1 to 58.4
Sex			
Female	30	50	36.8 to 63.2
Male	30	50	36.8 to 63.2
Weight			
≤ 25 kg	31	51.7	38.4 to 64.8
> 25 kg	29	48.3	35.2 to 61.6
Height			
≤ 130 cm	44	73.3	60.3 to 83.9
> 130 cm	16	26.7	16.1 to 39.7

Quantitative and percentage values. MIP: Maximum inspiratory pressure; MEP: Maximum expiratory pressure. CI: Confidence Index. Sample distribution according to the studied characteristics.

Table 2 – Influence of variables on expiratory muscle weakness. Feb. to Dec. 2014. UREMIA, Belém (PA).

Variables	Nº	%	C.I. %	P-value
HAART				0.22
Not Exposed (CG)	12	44.4	25.5 to 64.7	
Exposed (EG)	15	55.6	35.3 to 74.5	
Sex				0.0008*
Female	20	74.1	53.7 to 88.9	
Male	7	25.9	11.1 to 46.3	
Weight				0.59
≤ 25 kg	14	51.9	31.9 to 71.3	
> 25 kg	13	48.1	28.7 to 68.1	
Height				0.08
≤ 130 cm	17	63	42.4 to 80.6	
> 130 cm	10	37	19.4 to 57.6	
Weight for age				0.24
Normal	5	18.5	6.3 to 38.1	
Below	15	55.6	35.3 to 74.5	
Above	7	25.9	11.1 to 46.3	
Height to age				0.49
Normal	22	81.5	61.9 to 93.7	
Below	5	18.5	6.3 to 38.1	
BMI				0.07
Normal	18	66.7	46.0 to 83.5	
Below	6	22.2	8.6 to 42.3	
Above	3	11.1	2.4 to 29.2	
Subscapular Bending				0.18
Normal	20	74.1	53.7 to 88.9	
Below	7	25.9	11.1 to 46.3	
Triceps Bending				0.06
Normal	23	85.2	66.3 to 95.8	
Below	3	11.1	2.4 to 29.2	
Above	1	3.7	0.1 to 19.0	
Circ. Waist				0.43
Normal	25	92.6	75.7 to 99.1	
Altered	2	7.4	0.9 to 24.3	

Quantitative and percentage values. HAART: Highly active antiretroviral therapy; BMI: Body mass index. C.I.: Confidence Index. P-value ≤ 0.05 (*). Distribution of participants with altered maximal expiratory pressure.



Table 3 – Influence of variables on inspiratory muscle weakness. Feb. to Dec. 2014. UREMIA, Belém (PA).

Variables	Nº	%	I.C. %	P-value
HAART				0.09
Not exposed (CG)	14	42.4	25.5 to 60.8	
Exposed (EG)	19	47.6	39.2 to 74.5	
Sex				0.01*
Female	21	63.6	45.1 to 79.6	
Male	12	36.4	20.4 to 54.9	
Weight				0.40
≤ 25 kg	18	54.5	36.4 to 71.9	
> 25 kg	15	45.5	28.1 to 63.6	
Height				0.15
≤ 130cm	22	66.7	48.2 to 82.0	
>130 cm	11	33.3	18.0 to 51.8	
Weight for age				0.17
Normal	6	18.2	7.0 to 35.5	
Below	18	54.5	36.4 to 71.9	
Above	9	27.3	13.3 to 45.5	
Height to age				0.49
Normal	5	15.2	5.1 to 31.9	
Below	28	84.8	68.1 to 94.9	
BMI				0.12
Normal	21	63.6	45.1 to 79.6	
Below	7	21.2	9.0 to 38.9	
Above	5	15.2	5.1 to 31.9	
Subscapular Bending				0.04*
Normal	25	75.8	57.7 to 88.9	
Below	8	24.2	11.1 to 42.3	
Triceps Bending				0.05*
Normal	26	78.8	61.1 to 91.0	
Below	7	21.2	9.0 to 38.9	
Circ. Waist				0.05*
Normal	32	97	84.2 to 99.9	
Altered	1	3	0.1 to 15.8	

Quantitative and percentage values. HAART: Highly active antiretroviral therapy; BMI: Body mass index. C.I.: Confidence Index. P-value ≤ 0.05 (*). Distribution of participants with altered maximal inspiratory pressure.





Table 4 – Altered sample distribution in statistically significant variables. Feb. to Dec. 2014. UREMIA, Belém (PA).

Altered MIP (33)	SS Normal	SS Below	Female	Male
CG	13 (39.4%)	1 (3.01%)	9 (27.2%)	5 (15.1%)
EG	12 (36.3%)	7 (21.2%)	12 (36.3%)	7 (21.2%)
P-value	0.04*		0.01*	
Altered MEP (27)				
CG			10 (37%)	2 (7.4%)
EG			10 (37%)	5 (18.5%)
P-value			0.0008*	

Quantitative and percentage values. MIP: Maximum inspiratory pressure; MEP Maximum expiratory pressure; CG: Control Group; EG: Experimental Group. P-value ≤ 0.05 (*). Distribution of participants with altered maximal inspiratory and/or expiratory pressure in their respective groups and variables with statistical significance.

DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to evaluate RMS and body composition in children exposed to antiretroviral therapy for HIV. The results indicate that there is an influence of SS on inspiratory muscle strength, as well as gender on inspiratory and expiratory muscle strength.

Antiretroviral therapy has revolutionized the treatment of HIV-infected individuals because it is highly effective in suppressing viral replication and restoring immune function in these individuals¹⁶. However, its consumption correlates with mitochondrial dysfunction, resulting in decreased RMS¹⁷.

In this study, inspiratory muscle weakness was observed in 55% of participants and expiratory muscle weakness in 45%. In the study by Oliveira et al.,¹⁸ it was pointed out that 61% and 40% of AIDS patients were deficient in their maximum expiratory and inspiratory pressures, respectively, for their age group. Similar result found in the study by Jerônimo¹⁹, where inspiratory muscle strength was altered in 58% of patients infected with HIV.

In the current study, data on body composition and respiratory muscle strength were cross-linked, making it possible to attribute the respiratory muscle weakness of children exposed to the therapy to the appearance of lipodystrophic characteristics.

However, only one of the body composition measurements was correlated with a statistically significant reduction in respiratory muscle strength. Body composition had an influence on inspiratory muscle weakness when the variables SS (P-value 0.04), TS (P-value 0.05) and WC (P-value 0.05) were analyzed.

In the study by Raso et al.²⁰ it was concluded that HIV induces muscle mass reduction, which causes loss of muscle strength and affects anaerobic exertion and oxygen fraction. The cause of reduced RMS may also be involved with the class of drugs called Nucleoside Analog Reverse Transcriptase Inhibitors (NRTIs). Its prolonged use may result in mitochondrial toxicity, affecting highly oxygen-dependent tissues, such as cardiac, skeletal and smooth muscles, the central and peripheral nervous system, among others²¹.

As in Ramalho et al.²², it was observed that children and adolescents infected with HIV showed greater impairment in body composition, nutritional status, low levels of physical activity and physical fitness. This finding raises the need for cardiorespiratory training for this group of children and adolescents affected by HIV; given that just as in the present study, other authors corroborate the reduced strength in this population.



As for the comparison between the sexes, the females (75.1% MEP; 63.6% MIP) presented lower values in the maximal respiratory pressures, when compared to the males (24.9% MEP; 36.4% MIP). In females, these pressures may have been influenced by the shape of the rib cage and respiratory muscles, and in males by the cross-sectional muscle area²³.

Morphological changes such as the decreased cross section of the diaphragm muscle and rib cage are some of the mechanisms that contribute to this respiratory weakness. There is also the duration of HIV infection, frequent associated respiratory infections and the duration of HAART use¹⁹. In turn, anthropometric indicators are strongly associated with body fat and may assist health professionals in monitoring the health of children and adolescents with HIV²⁴.

With prolonged use of antiretroviral therapy, HIV-infected children tend to develop chronic problems in linear growth and weight gain due to the direct influence of viral load on growth and nutritional status. The high viral load of HIV influences the reduction of fat mass and disease progression²². Even with its adverse effects, HAART is crucial for improving the quality of life of infected people, significantly reducing viral load and the incidence of opportunistic infections^{25,26,27}.

The study by Miller *et al.*²⁶ suggested that the combination of antiretroviral therapy has a positive and significant effect on weight, height, growth rate, appetite and well-being, i.e. reduced viral load improved nutritional status. These results agree with the present study, in which children exposed to therapy did not present statistically significant changes in weight for age, height for age, BMI and waist-to-height ratio.

In the study by Werner *et al.*²⁸, which analyzed the body composition profile in HIV-infected children and adolescents treated

with antiretroviral therapy, it was found that nutritional status was adequate (81.3%), both in BMI and body composition by TS. These results are similar to the findings in the present study, where the group that used HAART did not exhibit significant statistical variation in BMI as well as in TS.

However, in the study by Remteke *et al.*²⁹, a cohort of HIV-infected and uninfected South African children was conducted. Unfavorable changes in lipid profile were detected in HIV-infected children, regardless of treatment regimen compared to uninfected ones.

In contrast, in the present study, there was an influence of SS, TS and CC on inspiratory muscle weakness. Of 33 children who had a deficit in inspiratory muscle strength, 25 had an SS within normal limits, 39.4% from CG and 36.3% from EG.

This result may be related to the benefits of HAART on body composition and the cellular alterations of individuals with immunodeficiency, such as mitochondrial excitotoxicity, which would lead to the maintenance of body composition, but with a reduction in RMS¹⁹. This finding shows that measurements of SS, TS and CC may be related to lower inspiratory muscle strength in both healthy children and those exposed to antiretroviral therapy.

Considering that most of the participants who presented a decrease in MIP with a normal SS belonged to the CG (39.4%) with an isolated average age of 6.8 years and the EG with an average of 8.9 years, it is noteworthy that children under 8 years of age may express a low level of understanding and cooperation, which may cause changes in the reproduction of measurements³⁰.

It is necessary to consider that the changes associated with antiretroviral therapy result from a set of interactions between HIV infection, specific antiretroviral agents, age, gender and, mainly, factors such as lifestyle and genetics²⁹.

CONCLUSION

According to the results presented, the evaluation of the influence of body composition on the RMS indicated an interference of SS and gender variables on the maximal respiratory pressures.

The data found are relevant for understanding and acting on the reduced respiratory muscle strength in patients exposed to HAARTS and, above all, for the establishment of treatment protocols, in order to reduce the deleterious effects of antiretroviral therapy and provide a

better quality of life.

Given that children would be mostly affected by the long-term effects of antiretroviral therapy due to the exposure time, this population needs more targeted care, not just for the immune system, but for holistic care considering functionality and quality of task execution.

Further studies should be conducted to ratify the results found and increase credibility and knowledge about the researched subject.

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