Review

A COMPREHENSIVE NARRATIVE REVIEW OF TEMPOROMANDIBULAR JOINT CONDYLAR FRACTURES: ETIOLOGY, CLASSIFICATION, DIAGNOSIS, AND CONTEMPORARY MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

V. Ronsivalle[1*], M.M. Marrapodi[2], M. Cicciù[1] and G. Minervini[3]

[1]Department of Biomedical and Surgical and Biomedical Sciences, Catania University, Catania, Italy;
[2]Department of Woman, Child and General and Specialist Surgery, University of Campania "Luigi Vanvitelli", Naples, Italy;
[3]Multidisciplinary Department of Medical-Surgical and Odontostomatological Specialties, University of Campania "Luigi Vanvitelli", Naples, Italy.

**Correspondence to:*
Vincenzo Ronsivalle, DDS
Department of Biomedical and Surgical and Biomedical Sciences
Catania University
Catania, Italy
e-mail: vincenzo.ronsivalle@hotmail.it

ABSTRACT

This narrative review aims to provide a comprehensive overview of temporomandibular joint (TMJ) condylar fractures, focusing on their etiology, classification, diagnostic approaches, and contemporary management strategies. The narrative synthesis encompasses current literature, emerging trends, and challenges in the field to guide clinicians and researchers in understanding the complexities associated with TMJ condylar fractures. A systematic search of databases, including PubMed, Scopus, and Lilacs, was conducted to identify pertinent articles published from inception to the present. The selected studies were screened for their contribution to the understanding of TMJ condylar fractures, and critical findings were synthesized to create a narrative overview. The etiology of TMJ condylar fractures involves a diverse range of traumatic incidents, including motor vehicle accidents, falls, and interpersonal violence. Comprehensive classification systems have been developed to categorize these fractures based on anatomical location, displacement, and associated injuries. Diagnostic modalities, such as clinical examination, radiography, and advanced imaging techniques, play pivotal roles in accurate assessment. The review outlines contemporary management strategies, including conservative approaches, open reduction and internal fixation (ORIF), and emerging technologies like 3D printing for personalized treatment plans. Additionally, the narrative explores the importance of rehabilitation and long-term follow- up in achieving optimal outcomes. This narrative review provides a holistic perspective on TMJ condylar fractures, encompassing their etiology, classification, diagnosis, and contemporary management strategies. Clinicians and researchers can use this comprehensive overview to enhance their understanding of these fractures, facilitating improved patient care and guiding future research endeavors in this evolving field.

KEYWORDS: *temporomandibular disorders, temporomandibular joint, TMD, TMJ, condylar fractures*

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INTRODUCTION

The temporomandibular joint (TMJ) is a pivotal and intricate component of the craniofacial anatomy, facilitating essential functions such as mastication, speech, and facial expression. Among the myriad challenges afflicting this crucial joint, condylar fractures stand out as a complex and multifaceted issue, demanding a nuanced understanding of effective management. As a typical sequel to traumatic injuries, these fractures not only pose immediate concerns for patients but can also have far-reaching implications on the long-term function and aesthetics of the craniofacial region (1, 2).

This narrative review embarks on a comprehensive exploration of temporomandibular joint condylar fractures, delving into the intricacies of their etiology, classification, clinical presentation, and contemporary management strategies. By synthesizing current research, clinical experiences, and evolving treatment paradigms, this review aims to provide a holistic perspective on the challenges posed by condylar fractures and the dynamic landscape of therapeutic interventions.

Throughout the narrative, we will navigate the historical evolution of understanding TMJ condylar fractures, addressing the shifting paradigms in their diagnosis and treatment (3). We will explore the impact of advancements in imaging modalities, surgical techniques, and the integration of emerging technologies in reshaping the landscape of patient care. Additionally, our journey will unravel the intricate interplay between anatomical considerations, biomechanics, and patient-specific factors that influence the diverse clinical presentations and outcomes associated with TMJ condylar fractures (4).

As we embark on this exploration, it is our endeavor to provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of knowledge and stimulate dialogue and reflection within the medical and dental communities (5-7). By fostering a deeper understanding of temporomandibular joint condylar fractures, we aim to contribute to the ongoing refinement of clinical approaches, ultimately enhancing the quality of care provided to individuals grappling with this intricate facet of craniofacial trauma (5).

In pursuing this comprehensive review, we will scrutinize the various classifications of TMJ condylar fractures, acknowledging the importance of precision in characterizing these injuries for optimal treatment planning. From simple fractures amenable to conservative measures to complex fractures requiring surgical intervention, each subclassification poses unique challenges and considerations that demand the clinician's attention. We will delve into the intricacies of diagnostic modalities, emphasizing the role of advanced imaging techniques, such as cone-beam computed tomography (CBCT) and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), in enhancing our ability to assess the extent of the injury (8) precisely. An essential facet of this exploration involves an in-depth analysis of the clinical manifestations associated with TMJ condylar fractures. Beyond the immediate pain and dysfunction, we will scrutinize the impact on occlusion, mandibular mobility, and the potential development of temporomandibular joint disorders (TMDs). Understanding the spectrum of presentations is paramount for tailoring individualized treatment plans that address the acute and long-term consequences of these fractures (8).

As we progress, the review will scrutinize the dynamic landscape of therapeutic interventions, encompassing conservative measures, such as intermaxillary fixation and physical therapy, as well as surgical approaches ranging from open reduction and internal fixation (ORIF) to emerging minimally invasive techniques. The evolving role of tissue engineering and regenerative medicine in promoting functional recovery and mitigating long-term sequelae will also be explored, highlighting the potential for cutting-edge innovations to redefine the treatment paradigm for TMJ condylar fractures (9).

In traversing the historical, diagnostic, and therapeutic dimensions of temporomandibular joint condylar fractures, this narrative review aspires to consolidate existing knowledge and stimulate further research and collaboration. By fostering a comprehensive understanding of these fractures, we endeavor to empower clinicians, researchers, and educators to contribute to the evolution of best practices, ultimately improving the quality of care and outcomes for individuals navigating the intricate challenges of TMJ condylar fractures (10).

This review thoroughly explores condylar fractures in the temporomandibular joint (TMJ). It concentrates on elucidating their origins, classification, diagnostic methods, and modern approaches to management. The synthesis of this narrative incorporates up-to-date literature, emerging patterns, and the challenges encountered in the realm, aiming to assist clinicians and researchers in comprehending the intricate aspects associated with TMJ condylar fractures.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Search strategy

A comprehensive literature search was conducted to identify relevant articles about temporomandibular joint (TMJ) condylar fractures. The following electronic databases were searched: PubMed/MEDLINE, Scopus, and Lilacs. The search strategy included keywords such as "temporomandibular joint," "condylar fractures," "mandibular fractures," and related terms. Boolean operators (AND, OR) were used to refine the search and ensure inclusivity (Table I).

Table I. *Search strategy.*

PubMed *Search: temporomandibular joint AND condylar fractures AND mandibular fractures*
Scopus *TITLE-ABS-KEY (temporomandibular joint AND condylar fractures AND mandibular fractures)*
Lilacs *ALL=(temporomandibular joint)) AND ALL=(condylar fractures) AND ALL= (mandibular fractures)*

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Articles were included if they met the following criteria:

- Published in English.
- Primary focus on temporomandibular joint condylar fractures.
- Included diagnosis, classification, treatment modalities, outcomes, and information on complications.

The exclusion criteria were as follows:

- Non-English language articles.
- Irrelevant to temporomandibular joint condylar fractures.
- Duplicate publications.

Study selection

Two independent reviewers screened the titles and abstracts of identified articles to assess their relevance. Full texts of potentially relevant articles were then examined to determine eligibility based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Any discrepancies between the reviewers were resolved through discussion and, if necessary, consultation with a third reviewer.

Data extraction

Data were extracted from eligible articles using a standardized form. Key information included study design, sample size, patient demographics, fracture classifications, diagnostic methods, treatment approaches, and outcomes. Emphasis was placed on recent and high-impact studies and those providing novel insights or perspectives.

Data synthesis and analysis

Due to the narrative nature of this review, a formal meta-analysis was not conducted. Instead, findings from the included studies were synthesized and presented thematically. Emphasis was placed on identifying trends, controversies, and gaps in the existing literature related to diagnosing and managing temporomandibular joint condylar fractures. Fig. 1 explains the results of this narrative review.

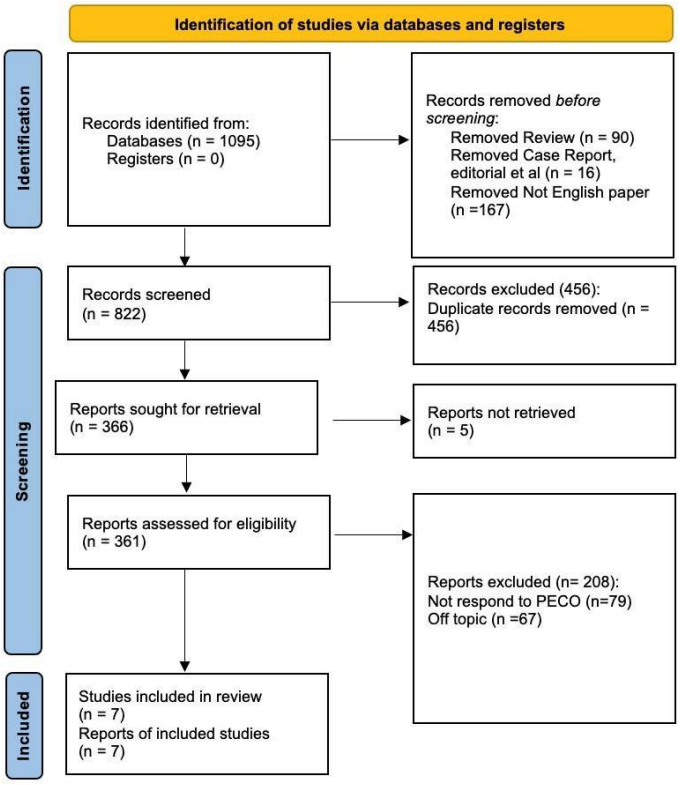

Fig. 1. *Prisma flowchart.*

RESULTS

Classification of TMJ condylar fractures

TMJ condylar fractures are commonly classified based on the extent and location of the fracture. The traditional classification divides condylar fractures into subgroups such as intracapsular and extracapsular fractures. However, more recent classifications consider the specific anatomical location and severity of the fracture, providing a more nuanced understanding that aids in treatment planning (11-13).

Diagnostic modalities

Accurate diagnosis is crucial for appropriate management. Imaging modalities, including conventional radiography, computed tomography (CT), and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), play pivotal roles in assessing the extent and displacement of condylar fractures. Recent advancements in three-dimensional imaging have further enhanced the precision of diagnosis, allowing for better preoperative planning (14).

Treatment modalities

The management of TMJ condylar fractures has evolved significantly over the years. While conservative approaches such as closed reduction and intermaxillary fixation were once prevalent, surgical interventions have gained prominence, particularly in cases of displaced or complex fractures. Open reduction and internal fixation (ORIF) techniques, including mini plates and screws, have demonstrated favorable outcomes, promoting early functional recovery and reducing the risk of long-term complications (10, 15, 16).

Outcomes and complications

Studies assessing the outcomes of different treatment modalities have reported varying success rates. While surgical interventions generally result in satisfactory functional and aesthetic outcomes, complications such as infection, malocclusion, and hardware-related issues are not uncommon. Long-term follow-up studies are crucial to understanding

the durability of the interventions and the potential for late-onset complications.

DISCUSSION

The temporomandibular joint (TMJ) is a complex and crucial hinge that connects the jawbone to the skull, facilitating essential functions such as chewing, speaking, and facial expressions. While it plays a pivotal role in daily activities, the TMJ is susceptible to a range of injuries, with condylar fractures emerging as a noteworthy concern. Temporomandibular joint condylar fractures present a multifaceted clinical challenge that demands a nuanced understanding of their causes, symptoms, diagnosis, and treatment modalities.

The term "condylar fracture" refers to a break in the condylar region of the mandible, the lower jawbone's rounded, knob-like prominence that articulates with the skull's temporal bone. These fractures can result from a variety of traumatic events, including automobile accidents, falls, or sports-related injuries. Furthermore, the condylar region is particularly vulnerable due to its anatomical characteristics and biomechanical functions. It is crucial to delve into the intricacies of TMJ anatomy and its role in oral health (17).

To comprehend temporomandibular joint condylar fractures comprehensively, it is imperative to explore the underlying anatomy of the TMJ. The temporomandibular joint comprises several components, with the condyle being a vital element. Situated at the lower end of the mandible, the condyle interacts with the temporal bone's glenoid fossa to facilitate smooth jaw movement. Ligaments, muscles, and a disc within the joint further contribute to its intricate functioning. This biomechanical complexity makes the TMJ susceptible to a range of injuries, particularly in the condylar region, where fractures can disrupt the delicate balance of the joint (18).

The causes of temporomandibular joint condylar fractures are diverse, often stemming from traumatic incidents that exert significant force on the jaw. Motor vehicle accidents falls from heights, and sports-related injuries are common scenarios that can lead to condylar fractures (11). Understanding the mechanisms behind these fractures is essential for prevention and effective management. Furthermore, certain medical conditions, such as osteoporosis, may weaken the bone structure, increasing the susceptibility to fractures even with minor trauma. Exploring the interplay of external forces and internal vulnerabilities provides a comprehensive perspective on the etiology of temporomandibular joint condylar fractures.

Recognizing the symptoms associated with condylar fractures is crucial for timely diagnosis and intervention. Patients with these fractures often experience pain, swelling, and restricted jaw movement. As the condyle is integral to the joint's articulation, fractures can lead to abnormalities in jaw function, affecting everyday activities like chewing and speaking. Additionally, patients may report clicking or popping sounds in the joint, further underscoring the need for a detailed examination. Understanding these symptoms and their variations is pivotal for healthcare professionals to accurately diagnose temporomandibular joint condylar fractures and formulate tailored treatment plans (19).

Diagnosing temporomandibular joint condylar fractures involves a combination of clinical evaluation, imaging studies, and advanced diagnostic tools. Clinical assessment includes a thorough examination of the patient's medical history, a physical examination of the jaw, and an evaluation of symptoms. Imaging studies, such as X-rays and computed tomography (CT) scans, play a crucial role in visualizing the extent and nature of the fracture. These diagnostic modalities enable healthcare providers to make informed decisions regarding the most appropriate course of treatment.

Treatment options for temporomandibular joint condylar fractures are diverse, ranging from conservative approaches to surgical interventions. Treatment choice depends on various factors, including the severity of the fracture, the patient's overall health, and individualized considerations. Conservative management may involve immobilizing the jaw through orthodontic appliances or intermaxillary fixation, allowing the fracture to heal without surgical intervention. Surgical options, on the other hand, may include open reduction and internal fixation (ORIF), where the fractured segments are repositioned and stabilized using screws, plates, or other hardware.

In conclusion, temporomandibular joint condylar fractures represent a significant clinical entity that requires a comprehensive understanding of their anatomy, causes, symptoms, diagnosis, and treatment options (20). As the delicate balance of the TMJ is disrupted by these fractures, healthcare professionals must navigate the intricate interplay of external forces and internal vulnerabilities to provide optimal care. This article aims to delve into the depths of temporomandibular joint condylar fractures, offering a valuable resource for healthcare practitioners and individuals seeking insights into this complex facet of oral health (21). Through thoroughly exploring the subject, we aim to shed light on the nuances of these fractures and contribute to a greater awareness of their impact on individuals' lives and the broader field of maxillofacial medicine.

Temporomandibular joint (TMJ) condylar fractures are complex injuries that require careful management to prevent long-term complications (17). The treatment options for mandibular condyle fractures have been the subject of extensive research and a systematic review and meta-analysis, highlighting temporomandibular joint prosthesis as a viable treatment option for mandibular condyle fractures. This emphasizes the importance of considering joint prostheses as a potential intervention in managing such fractures. Furthermore, the influence of impacted mandibular third molars on mandibular angle and condyle fractures has been investigated. Their findings revealed a significant association between impacted third molars and condyle fractures, shedding light on a potential risk factor that should be considered in assessing and managing these fractures. The surgical management of condylar head fractures has been a topic of controversy. This controversy underscores the need for further research to establish consensus and best practices in the surgical treatment of condylar head fractures to minimize post-traumatic TMJ ankylosis. In the context of pediatric patients, the implications of combined symphyseal-condylar fractures on TMJ function, facial growth, and long-term dental development were emphasized. This underscores the importance of tailored approaches for pediatric patients with combined fractures to mitigate potential long-term consequences. We conducted a retrospective chart review on pediatric patients with mandibular condylar fractures, providing valuable insights into treating these fractures in pediatric populations (15, 22, 23). Understanding the specific considerations for pediatric condylar fractures is crucial for optimizing treatment outcomes in this patient group. In addition, the clinical significance of condyle-fossa relationships in the temporomandibular joint has been controversial (12, 14, 20, 24, 25). This highlights the need for further research to elucidate the clinical implications of condyle-fossa relationships in the context of temporomandibular joint dysfunction. In summary, managing temporomandibular joint condylar fractures is a multifaceted area that requires a comprehensive understanding of risk factors, treatment options, and long-term implications. The existing literature provides valuable insights into various aspects of these fractures, emphasizing the need for further research to optimize treatment strategies and improve patient outcomes.

Managing temporomandibular joint (TMJ) condylar fractures is critical to oral and maxillofacial surgery. The treatment options for these fractures have been the subject of extensive research. We conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis, highlighting temporomandibular joint prosthesis as a viable treatment option for mandibular condyle fractures (15). This emphasizes the importance of considering joint prostheses as a potential intervention in managing such fractures. Furthermore, the influence of impacted mandibular third molars on mandibular angle and condyle fractures was investigated. Their findings revealed a significant association between impacted third molars and condyle fractures, shedding light on a potential risk factor that should be considered in assessing and managing these fractures and, in the context of pediatric patients, emphasizing the implications of combined symphyseal-condylar fractures on TMJ function, facial growth, and long-term dental development. This underscores the importance of tailored approaches for pediatric patients with combined fractures to mitigate potential long-term consequences. In summary, the existing literature provides valuable insights into various aspects of TMJ condylar fractures, emphasizing the need for further research to optimize treatment strategies and improve patient outcomes, especially in pediatric populations.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this narrative review has delved into the intricate and multifaceted realm of temporomandibular joint (TMJ) condylar fractures. By comprehensively exploring the current literature, we have gained insights into the various classifications, diagnostic modalities, and treatment approaches for this complex pathology. The diverse nature of condylar fractures, ranging from conservative management to surgical interventions, underscores the importance of a tailored approach based on individual patient characteristics.

As we navigate the nuanced landscape of TMJ condylar fractures, it becomes evident that the optimal management strategy requires a delicate balance between preserving joint function and achieving anatomical restoration. The advancements in imaging techniques and surgical technologies have enhanced our ability to accurately diagnose and treat these fractures, fostering improved outcomes and minimizing complications.

Nevertheless, challenges persist in patient-specific factors, such as age, comorbidities, and associated injuries, which necessitate a nuanced and personalized treatment plan. Collaborative efforts among oral and maxillofacial surgeons, orthodontists, and other allied healthcare professionals must ensure a holistic and patient-centered approach.

In the ever-evolving landscape of craniofacial trauma, continued research, and technological innovations will undoubtedly shape the future of TMJ condylar fracture management. By staying abreast of emerging evidence and

embracing a multidisciplinary perspective, clinicians can aspire to optimize patient outcomes and quality of life in this intricate and challenging clinical scenario.

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