



Can monocyte to HDL cholesterol ratio and monocyte to lymphocyte ratio be markers for inflammation and oxidative stress in patients with vitiligo? A preliminary study

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Abstract

Both systemic inflammation and oxidative stress play crucial roles in the pathogenesis of vitiligo. In recent studies, monocyte to high-density lipoprotein cholesterol ratio (MHR), monocyte to lymphocyte ratio (MLR), neutrophil to lymphocyte ratio (NLR), platelet to lymphocyte ratio (PLR), mean platelet volume (MPV) and plateletcrit (PCT) have been shown to reflect inflammation and oxidative stress in chronic inflammatory and autoimmune diseases. In this study, we aimed to investigate the hematological and inflammatory parameters in patients with vitiligo and to evaluate their possible relationship with disease severity. The parameters including MHR, MLR, NLR, PLR, MPV, and PCT were retrospectively investigated in patients with vitiligo and healthy controls. Disease severity was evaluated using the vitiligo extent intensity index (VETI) score. A total of 180 patients with vitiligo, and age–gender-matched 180 healthy controls were enrolled in the study. MHR, MLR, PLR, PCT values were found to be significantly higher in patients with vitiligo ($p < 0.05$). MPV and NLR values showed no statistically significant difference between the two groups. A positive correlation was also detected between MHR and MLR values, disease duration, and VETI score ($p < 0.05$). We suggest that MHR and MLR can be used as markers of inflammation and oxidative stress in patients with vitiligo. Both markers may also reflect disease severity.

Keywords HDL cholesterol · Inflammation · Monocyte · Oxidative stress · Vitiligo · Vitiligo extent intensity index

Introduction

Vitiligo is an acquired skin disease characterized by depigmented macules with the loss of functional melanocytes in the skin [1]. The worldwide incidence varies between 0.5 and 2%. Although the average age of onset is around 20 years, it can occur at any age [2, 3]. The etiopathogenesis

of the entity is clearly unknown but it has been reported to be associated with various factors including genetic factors, autoimmune factors, oxidative stress, neuro-humoral, and auto-cytotoxic mechanisms [2, 4]. The interaction between oxidative stress and autoimmune factors has particularly been accused of causing melanocyte loss [5, 5]. It has been reported that reactive oxygen species (ROS) levels are found to be higher in the skin with active vitiligo. ROS reduces the formation of dendrites of melanocytes, weakens the adhesion of melanocytes to the basal layer, and causes their separation. Melanocyte migration caused by this separation has been shown to trigger the immune process starting in the epidermis. ROS has also been shown to increase the release of pro-inflammatory cytokines and mediators and to accelerate the separation of melanocytes from the basal layer [7].

Monocytes (MN) are the main sources of pro-inflammatory and oxidative cytokines [8]. High-density lipoprotein cholesterol (HDL-C) inhibits the oxidation of low-density lipoprotein cholesterol (LDL-C) and prevents its negative effects on the endothelium. For this reason, HDL-C shows anti-inflammatory and antioxidant effects [9–11]. Monocytes

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to HDL-C ratio (MHR) has been suggested as a marker of systemic inflammation and oxidative stress in many inflammatory diseases [12–14]. Inflammatory processes usually increase the number of monocytes while decreasing lymphocytes. In this context, monocyte–lymphocyte ratio (MLR) is another parameter used as an inflammatory and prognostic marker in many autoimmune disorders, cardiovascular diseases, cancer, and tuberculosis [15–18].

Neutrophils (NE), potent sources of neutrophil elastase, matrix metalloproteinase, and cytokines, are the key cells of inflammation. In contrast, lymphocytes (LY) have significant anti-inflammatory properties [19]. It has been suggested that the neutrophil–lymphocyte ratio (NLR) can be a simple and reliable indicator of the inflammation in various diseases.

Platelets (PLT) have been shown to play remarkable roles in inflammatory reactions and immune response. Platelet–lymphocyte ratio (PLR) and NLR have been reported to show a correlation in chronic inflammatory conditions. Mean platelet volume (MPV), an indicator of platelet function and activation, has been reported to reflect immunological and inflammatory status [19–22]. Plateletcrit (PCT) refers to the percentage of platelet volume in the blood and has been considered as a better prognostic factor than MPV in inflammatory conditions [23]. The effectivity and reliability of these markers have been investigated in various dermatological diseases including psoriasis, Behçet's disease, recurrent aphthous stomatitis, and pemphigus vulgaris [20, 24–26].

In this study, we aimed to investigate these hematological and inflammatory parameters in patients with vitiligo and to evaluate their possible relationship with disease severity.

Materials and methods

Subjects

This study included patients diagnosed with vitiligo, and age- and gender-matched healthy volunteers, between January 2019 and December 2019. The parameters including age, gender, disease duration, vitiligo extent tensity index (VETI) score and laboratory results (MN (K/ μ L), HDL-C (mg/dl), NE (K/ μ L), PLT, (K/ μ L), LY (K/ μ L), MPV (K/ μ L), PCT (%), MHR, MLR, NLR and PLR) were retrospectively reviewed for each patient. The same laboratory parameters were also reviewed for each control.

Patients with any systemic disease or another cutaneous disorder, and those who received any topical and systemic treatment in the last six months were excluded.

Calculation of VETI score

A total of five different affected body areas (head, upper extremities, trunk, lower extremities, genital), and five different stages reflecting the severity of the disease were evaluated to calculate VETI score.

Stage 0 = Normal skin.

Stage 1 = Hypopigmentation.

Stage 2 = Complete depigmentation with black hairs and perifollicular pigmentation.

Stage 3 = Complete depigmentation with black hairs without perifollicular pigmentation.

Stage 4 = Complete depigmentation with white and black hairs, and with or without perifollicular pigmentation.

Stage 5 = Complete depigmentation with significant whitening in hairs.

The extent of the lesional area was assessed using the rule of nines. The total body VETI was calculated using the following formula.

VETI score: (Percentage of head involvement \times stage) + (Percentage of trunk involvement \times stage) 4 + (Percentage of upper extremity involvement \times stage) 2 + (Percentage of lower extremity involvement \times stage) 4 + (Percentage of genital organ involvement \times stage) 0.1 [27].

Statistical analysis

The data obtained were analyzed using SPSS (statistical package for social sciences) 23.0 statistical software. The data were described as number and percentage or mean and standard deviation unless stated otherwise. Student's *t* test was used to compare quantitative data between two independent groups. Spearman correlation analysis was applied to assess the continuous variables. All data were measured at 95% confidence intervals, and the threshold for statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

Ethics approval

All the procedures followed the Helsinki declaration and the study was approved by the KTO Karatay University Institutional Review Board (Decision date and number: 2020/006). Written Informed consent was also obtained from all the subjects.

Results

A total of 180 patients (93 females, 87 males) with vitiligo and 180 (90 females, 90 males) age- and gender-matched healthy controls were included in the study. The mean ages of the patients and controls were 29.56 ± 9.8

and 29.61 ± 9.66 , respectively ($p > 0.05$). The mean disease duration was 7.42 ± 7.48 years. The mean VETI score was 2.8 ± 3.13 . MN, PCT, MHR, MLR, and PLR values were found to be statistically significantly higher in the patients compared to the control group ($p < 0.05$) (Figs. 1, 2). On the other hand, HDL-C, NE, and LY values were statistically significantly higher in the control group ($p < 0.05$). PLT, MPV, and NLR values showed no statistically significant difference between the groups ($p > 0.05$).

There was a moderate positive correlation between MHR, and MLR, VETI, and disease duration. MLR, NLR, and PLR values also showed a moderate positive correlation. A weak negative correlation was detected between MHR and PLR. All demographic and laboratory parameters have been shown in Tables 1, 2 and 3. The correlations between laboratory parameters, disease duration, and VETI scores have been presented in Table 4.

Discussion

Patients with vitiligo have high levels of pro-inflammatory cytokines such as tumor necrosis factor-alpha (TNF- α), interleukin-2 (IL-2), IL-6, and IL-8, and oxidative factors including ROS and free radicals. Autoimmune, oxidative, and cytotoxic mechanisms have been accused of causing increased levels of these inflammatory parameters [31, 32]. Tue et al. found that serum IL-6, IL-1 β , and granulocyte-macrophage colony-stimulating factor (GM-CSF) levels were significantly higher in patients vitiligo compared to healthy controls [33]. In the study of Ala et al., the levels of interferon- γ (IFN- γ), a pro-inflammatory cytokine, were found to be higher in patients with vitiligo compared to controls. In the same study, the levels of IL-10, an anti-inflammatory cytokine, were reported to be lower [34]. These studies support the role of systemic inflammation in vitiligo [31–35].

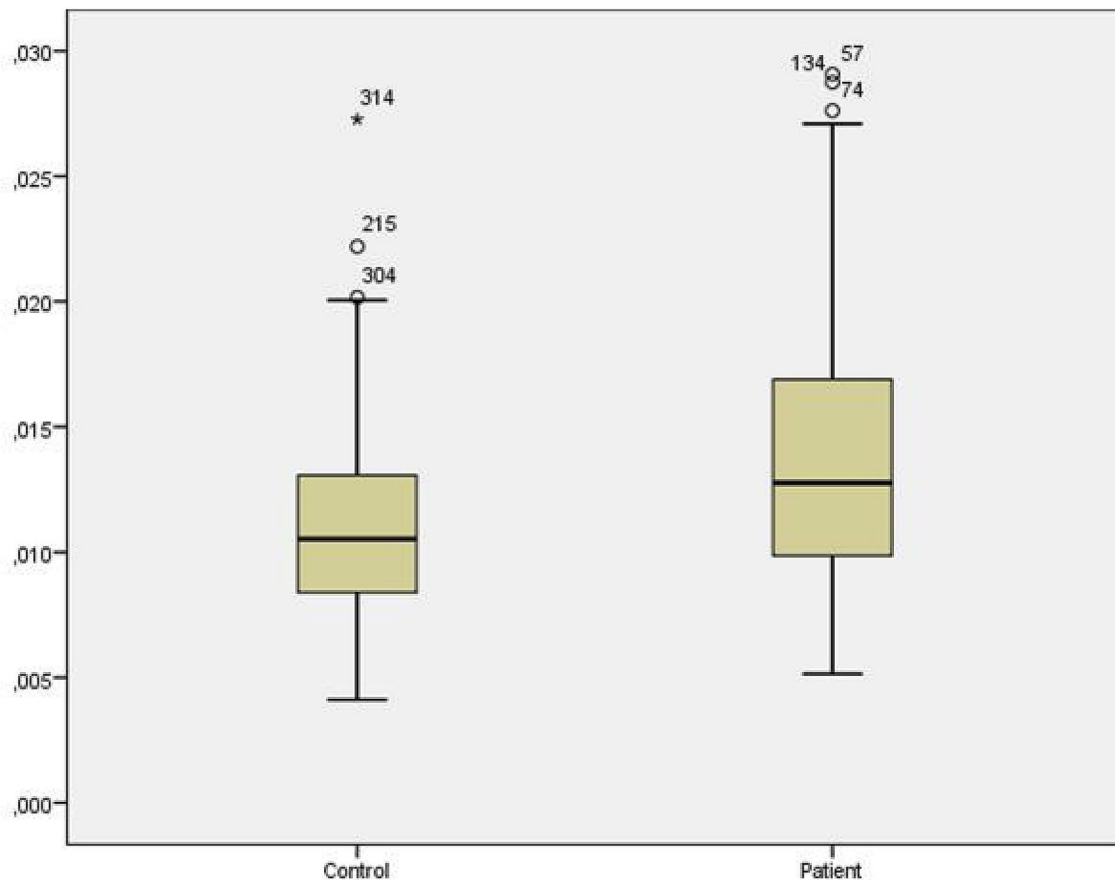


Fig. 1 Monocyte/HDL cholesterol ratio (MHR) for the patients and controls

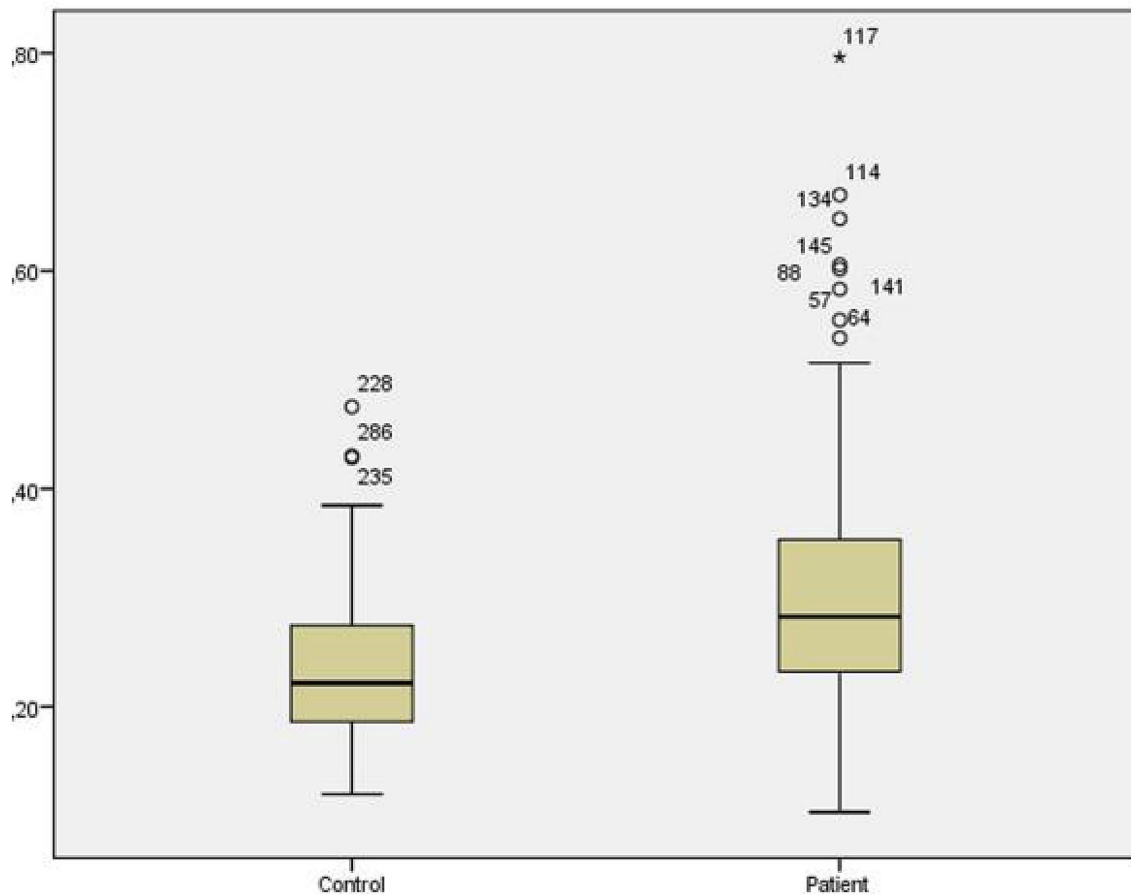


Fig. 2 Monocyte/lymphocyte ratio (MLR) for the patients and controls

MHR, MLR, NLR, PLR, MPV, and PCT are considered as cost-effective and simple laboratory parameters indicating systemic inflammation in many diseases [36, 37]. Anti-inflammatory and antioxidant effects of HDL-C are well described. On the contrary monocytes have a crucial role in inflammatory and oxidative processes. Therefore, MHR is considered as a new prognostic marker indicating oxidative stress and inflammation in cardiovascular diseases [38, 39]. Kanbay et al. suggested that high level of MHR is a bad prognostic factor for cardiovascular events in patients with chronic kidney disease [14]. Açıkgöz et al. reported that MHR may be a marker of inflammation and an early predictor of vascular involvement in Behçet's disease [40]. Another study showed that MHR can be considered as a reliable marker of systemic inflammation in patients with psoriasis [41]. Similarly, it has been suggested that MLR can be a marker of systemic inflammation in several diseases including Behçet's

disease, spondylarthritis, and cancer [42, 43]. In our study, MHR and MLR were found to be higher in patients with vitiligo compared to healthy controls. Besides, both parameters showed positive correlations with the VETI score. In this context, we suggest that both parameters may reflect disease severity.

NLR, PLR and MPV are the other markers of systemic inflammation which have been shown to be predictors of prognosis in chronic inflammatory diseases [19, 21, 22]. These parameters have been reported to reflect disease activity and prognosis in patients with systemic lupus erythematosus, rheumatoid arthritis, and psoriasis [22, 44, 45]. NLR values have been shown to be higher in patients with vitiligo compared to controls [46]. In our study, NLR and MPV showed no statistically significant difference between the patients and controls. PLR levels, however, were found to be significantly higher in the patients group.

Table 1 The distributions of gender

Gender	Patients (n, %)	Controls (n, %)
Male	87 (48.3)	90 (50)
Female	93 (51.7)	90 (50)
Total	180 (100.0)	180 (100.0)

Table 2 Demographic features of the patients and controls

Group	N	Mean	S.D	P value
Age (year)				
Patient	180	29.56	9.8	0.82
Male	87	30.34	1.05	
Female	93	28.82	1.02	
Healthy control	180	29.61	9.66	
Male	90	30.01	1.001	
Female	90	29.2	1.04	
Disease duration (year)				
Patient	180	7.42	7.48	–
VETI score				
Patient	180	2.8	3.13	–

VETI vitiligo extent tensivity index

PCT is another marker of systemic inflammation [23]. However, there are only a few studies investigating the relationship between PCT and dermatological diseases. In a recent study, in which we investigated the possible relationship between platelet parameters and discoid lupus erythematosus, PCT values showed no statistically significant difference between patients with discoid lupus erythematosus and healthy controls [47]. In the present study, PCT levels were found to be significantly higher in patients with vitiligo compared to the controls.

Although the relationship between NLR, PLR, and MPV with vitiligo has been previously investigated, to the best of our knowledge, this is the first study investigating the relationship between MHR, PCT, and MLR with vitiligo [46, 48]. In this study, we also investigated the relationship between these parameters, and the disease tensivity and severity.

The main limitation of our study is its retrospective nature. So, we were not able to evaluate the possible co-effects of some of the patient's characteristics such as smoking history and dietary habits, which may also affect MHR.

Table 3 The mean values of the laboratory parameters for the patients and controls

Group	N	Mean	S.d	P value
MN (K/ μ L)				
Patient	180	0.58	0.13	0.0001
Healthy control	180	0.53	0.12	
HDL-C (mg/dl)				
Patient	180	45.1	8.38	0.000008
Healthy control	180	49.24	8.53	
NE (K/ μ L)				
Patient	180	4.6	1.28	0.003
Healthy control	180	4.95	1.19	
PLT (K/ μ L)				
Patient	180	284.99	53.61	0.068
Healthy control	180	275.87	51.28	
LY (K/ μ L)				
Patient	180	2.03	0.51	0.0002
Healthy control	180	2.32	0.48	
MPV (K/ μ L)				
Patient	180	8.64	1.19	0.614
Healthy control	180	8.59	1.31	
PCT (%)				
Patient	180	0.24	0.04	0.015
Healthy control	180	0.23	0.04	
MHR				
Patient	180	0.013	0.004	0.0025
Healthy control	180	0.011	0.003	
MLR				
Patient	180	0.3	0.1	0.00004
Healthy control	180	0.23	0.06	
NLR				
Patient	180	2.39	0.86	0.124
Healthy control	180	2.19	0.66	
PLR				
Patient	180	148.84	47.31	0.00004
Healthy control	180	123.253	35.58	

MN monocyte, HDL-C high-density lipoprotein cholesterol, NE neutrophil, PLT platelet, LY lymphocyte, MPV mean platelet volume, PCT plateletcrit, MHR monocyte to high-density lipoprotein cholesterol ratio, MLR monocyte to lymphocyte ratio, NLR neutrophil to lymphocyte ratio, PLR platelet to lymphocyte ratio, S.d standard deviation, $P < 0.05$ is defined statistically significant and shown in bold

The second limitation is the relatively small sample size. Therefore, more studies with larger sample sizes are needed to empower conclusions deduced in the present study.

Table 4 The correlation analysis between the disease durations, VETI score, and laboratory parameters

	MN	HDL	NE	PLT	LY	MPV	PCT	MHR	MLR	NLR	PLR	VETI	Disease duration
MN	1	−0.41	0.24	0.07	0.11	0.05	0.08	0.85	0.59	0.12	−0.05	0.46	0.43
HDL-C	−0.41	1	−0.06	0.04	−0.09	0.01	0.06	−0.81	−0.21	0.06	0.1	−0.34	−0.3
NE	0.24	−0.06	1	−0.05	0.12	0.02	−0.002	0.19	0.08	0.68	−0.09	0.02	0.04
PLT	0.07	0.04	−0.05	1	0.81	−0.39	0.69	0.01	−0.01	−0.11	0.55	−0.01	−0.02
LY	0.11	−0.09	0.12	0.81	1	−0.03	0.08	0.12	−0.69	−0.59	−0.75	0.03	0.08
MPV	0.05	0.01	0.02	−0.39	−0.03	1	0.23	0.03	0.06	0.03	−0.22	0.05	0.01
PCT	0.08	0.06	−0.002	0.69	0.08	0.23	1	0.004	−0.01	−0.07	0.36	−0.002	−0.01
MHR	0.85	−0.81	0.19	0.01	0.12	0.03	0.004	1	0.49	0.04	−0.09	0.49	0.43
MLR	0.59	−0.21	0.08	−0.01	−0.69	0.06	−0.01	0.49	1	0.55	0.54	0.29	0.25
NLR	0.12	0.06	0.68	−0.11	−0.59	0.03	−0.07	0.04	0.55	1	0.44	−0.00016	−0.01
PLR	−0.05	0.1	−0.09	0.55	−0.75	−0.22	0.36	−0.09	0.54	0.44	1	−0.03	−0.05
VETI	0.46	−0.34	0.02	−0.01	0.03	0.05	−0.002	0.49	0.29	−0.000163	−0.03	1	0.52
Disease duration	0.43	−0.3	0.04	−0.02	0.08	0.01	−0.01	0.43	0.25	−0.01	−0.05	0.52	1

MN monocyte, HDL-C high-density lipoprotein cholesterol, NE neutrophil, PLT platelet, LY lymphocyte, MPV mean platelet volume, PCT plateletcrit, MHR monocyte to high-density lipoprotein cholesterol ratio, MLR monocyte to lymphocyte ratio, NLR neutrophil to lymphocyte ratio, PLR platelet to lymphocyte ratio, VETI vitiligo extent density index

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Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest financial or otherwise related to the material presented herein.

Ethical approval All the procedures followed the Helsinki declaration and the study was approved by the KTO Karatay University Institutional Review Board (Decision date and number: 2020/006).

Informed consent Written Informed consent was also obtained from all the subjects.

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