IJIMA International Journal of Medical Arts



VOLUME 6, ISSUE 10, OCTOBER 2024

P- ISSN: 2636-4174 E- ISSN: 2682-3780



Original Article

Available online at Journal Website https://ijma.journals.ekb.eg/ Main Subject [Pediatric Surgery]



Timing of Orchidopexy; Efficacy and Safety Outcomes in Patients with Cryptorchidism: Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis

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Article information Background: Cryptorchidism, or undescended testes, is the most common congenital **Received:** 02-09-2024 anomaly in newborn males, with a prevalence of 2% to 9% in full-term infants. There is a current debate regarding the optimal time to perform orchidopexy. Accepted: 13-10-2024 Methods: We searched PubMed, Scopus, and Web of Science [August 2024] using terms relating to cryptorchidism, orchidopexy, and the outcomes of interest. The DOI: 10.21608/ijma.2024.317706.2027. primary outcome was the incidence of testicular atrophy. Secondary outcomes included preoperative and postoperative testicular volume, the number of spermatogonia per tubule, and seminiferous tubular diameter. Data were analyzed *Corresponding author using fixed- or random-effect models based on the presence of heterogeneity. Email: mohahelal1995@gmail.com Results: Nine studies involving 5,494 patients were included. There was no significant difference in the incidence of testicular atrophy between early and late Citation: Hamdy MA, Shahin M, Mohammed orchidopexy groups [OR = 0.92, 95% CI [0.44 to 1.94], p = 0.83]. Early orchidopexy was associated with a significantly higher number of spermatogonia YA, Anwar M. Timing of Orchidopexy; per tubule [mean difference [MD] = 0.47, 95% CI [0.33 to 0.60], p = 0.00] and Efficacy and Safety Outcomes in Patients greater seminiferous tubular diameter [MD=9.92, 95% CI [3.34 to 16.40], with Cryptorchidism: Systematic Review p = 0.11]. and Meta-Analysis. IJMA 2024; October; 6 [10]: 4976-4983. DOI: 10.21608/ijma. 2024.245532.1850. Conclusion: Early orchidopexy had been suggested to offer better fertility outcomes. However, the current work showed that the timing of orchidopexy may not be critical in preventing testicular atrophy.

Keywords: Undescended Testis; Surgical Timing; Pediatrics; Urology.

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Abstract

INTRODUCTION

Among newborn boys, the most common congenital anomaly is the incomplete descent of the testes. Full-term newborns have a prevalence of between 2% and 9%, which declines with age because of spontaneous descent ^[1-5].

Long-term complications linked to cryptorchidism include infertility and an elevated risk of testicular cancer ^[6]. Even after a successful surgical correction, there is evidence that the chance of failed attempts at paternity is high in the unilateral and up to 6-fold in the bilateral cryptorchid group when compared to a control group of patients with normally descended testes ^[7].

Orchidopexy is the standard management for cryptorchidism as it prevents testicular damage that can impair testicular function and improve fertility outcomes ^[6].

A consensus statements was released by several medical associations recommend orchidopexy before age of 12 months and the British Association of Pediatric Urologists recommends performing orchidopexy before the age of 3 months, with surgery between 6 and 12 months of age also considered appropriate ^[8-11]. Despite this, the optimal time of orchidopexy is not universally agreed upon, and timing for orchidopexy in cryptorchidism is controversial, especially when estimating future fertility potential ^[12, 13].

Also, the number of spermatogonia per tubule and tubular diameter were used by several studies to assess fertility outcomes in children undergoing orchidopexy before 12 months of age [early orchidopexy] or after 12 months of age [late orchidopexy] ^[12, 14, 15]. However, there is a significant conflict between studies regarding these outcomes.

Chan et al.^[16] conducted a review that supports the decision for early orchidopexy. However, this review was designed to support mere early orchidopexy without considering any particular age cutoff.

On the other hand, **Allin** *et al.* ^[17] conducted a meta-analysis examining the effect of early vs. late orchidopexy, defining early as before 12 months and late as after 12 months. However, they did not include postoperative volume in their analysis, and additional evidence has emerged since their study.

We conducted this meta-analysis to compare testicular atrophy, preoperative and postoperative testicular volumes, the number of spermatogonia per tubule, and tubular diameter in patients undergoing early [≤ 12 months of age] vs. late [> 12 months of age] orchidopexy.

METHODS

We conducted this systematic review and meta-analysis following the PRISMA and Cochrane Handbook guidelines ^[18].

Randomized controlled trials and observational studies, compared orchidopexy before the age of 12 months as the interventional group and orchidopexy after the age of 12 months in patients with unilateral or bilateral cryptorchidism were included in our study. We excluded studies on animals, non-English publications, unpublished data, and conference abstracts.

This review focused on patients who had undergone orchidopexy and been diagnosed with unilateral or bilateral cryptorchidism.

We considered testicular atrophy as our primary outcome. Secondary outcomes included preoperative and postoperative testicular volume, the number of spermatogonia per tubule, and the diameter of seminiferous tubules.

Using this search query: ["ascending testes" OR "undescended testes" OR cryptorchidism] AND ["orchidopexy" OR orchidopexy] AND ["testicular atrophy" OR "testicular cancer" OR "testicular neoplasms" OR fertility OR infertility] OR ["Child Development" OR "Developmental Disabilities" OR "Neurodevelopment" OR "Neurodevelopmental Disorders" OR "Musculoskeletal Development" OR "Human Development" OR development], a thorough literature search was performed on PubMed, Scopus, and Web of Science [August 2024].

We employed a two-step process to screen the literature. We conducted abstract and title screening and then full-paper screening for studies that met our inclusion criteria throughout title and abstract screening.

We extracted and recorded data from the included studies on a standard extraction sheet. We categorized the data into three main aspects: Characteristics of the population and included studies, Risk of bias domains, and Outcome measures, which included testicular atrophy, preoperative testicular volume, postoperative testicular volume, the number of spermatogonia per tubule, and the tubular diameter of seminiferous tubules.

We pooled the frequency of events and the total number of testes in each group, using the Mantel-Haenszel fixed-effect model, to calculate the odds ratio [OR] and its 95% confidence interval [CI] for testicular atrophy, which involved dichotomous data. A p-value of less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant. For continuous outcomes, we calculated the mean differences and 95% CIs. The usage of a fixed-effect or random-effects model was based on heterogeneity, assessed using the I-square statistic. A random-effects model was applied if I-square was greater than 50%, indicating substantial heterogeneity; otherwise, a fixed-effect model was used. Statistical analyses were performed with STATA statistical software.

We used the Chi-square test, also known as the Cochrane Q test, to assess for statistical heterogeneity. Then, I-squared was calculated using the Chi-square statistic, Cochrane Q. Significant heterogeneity was defined as a Chi-square P value of less than 0.1. I-square values of more than 50% were regarded as highly heterogeneous. In addition, the Galbraith plot was employed to identify any heterogeneity across pooled studies of the primary outcome.

We used the Cochrane RoB 2 tool for randomized controlled trials to evaluate the quality of the included trials ^[19]. The selection, performance, detection, attrition, and reporting bias domains are the five domains in which bias risk is evaluated by this tool. A "High risk of bias," "Some concerns," or "Low risk of bias" was assigned to each study. We employed the Newcastle–Ottawa Scale [NOS] for observational studies, which assesses studies according to three domains: outcome, comparability, and selection ^[20].

RESULTS

Literature Search: We included nine studies in our metaanalysis after abstract, title, and full-text screening from the 2,539 papers yielded by our search across the three databases. **Figure [1]**, the PRISMA flow diagram, depicts the flowchart of the included studies.

Characteristics of Included Studies: We included nine studies with a total of 1,525 undescended testes in our analysis. Seven of the included studies were observational ^[6, 12, 14, 21-24] and only two studies [of the same population] were randomized controlled trials ^[1, 25]. **Table** [1] summarizes the baseline characteristics of the included studies.

Risk of Bias Assessment: We used Cochrane RoB 2 and NOS to evaluate the risk of bias. Both of the included RCTs were from the same population and had an overall high risk of bias. Observational studies were assessed using NOS, and three out of seven studies showed good quality, as shown in **Table [2]**.

Clinical Outcomes

Testicular Atrophy: Testicular atrophy, our main endpoint, was evaluated in four studies [14, 21, 22, 24]. The incidence rate for the early orchidopexy group was 5.17% [9 of 174], while the late orchidopexy group had a higher incidence rate of 5.34% [41 of 767]. The combined OR did not show a statistically significant difference in

testicular atrophy between the two groups [OR = 0.92, 95% CI [0.44 to 1.94], p = 0.83]; the pooled studies were homogeneous [I² = 0.00%, p = 0.62], as indicated by **Figure [2].** As demonstrated in **Figure [3]**, we used the Galbraith plot to test statistical heterogeneity. All studies fell within the 95% CI of the precision area, suggesting that there was no heterogeneity across the studies.

Secondary Outcomes

There was no significant difference between early orchidopexy and late orchidopexy regarding postoperative testicular volume [mean difference [MD] = -0.11, 95% CI [-0.56 to 0.34], p = 0.65] [1] [23] or preoperative testicular volume [MD = -0.06, 95% CI [-0.22 to 0.11], p = 0.51] [6] [23] [25]; the pooled studies were not homogeneous with the following values, respectively [I² = 96.42%, p = 0.00; and I² = 93.15%, p = 0.00], as shown in **Figures [4 and 5].**

However, our pooled analysis showed a superior effect of early orchidopexy compared to late orchidopexy regarding the number of spermatogonia per tubule [MD = 0.47, 95% CI [0.33 to 0.60], p = 0.00] ^[6, 12, 14] and tubular diameter of seminiferous tubules [MD = 9.92, 95% CI [3.34 to 16.40], p = 0.11] ^[6, 14, 25]. The number of spermatogonia per tubule pooled studies were homogeneous [I² = 49.91%, p = 0.14], but the pooled studies of the tubular diameter of seminiferous tubules were not homogeneous [I² = 91.28%, p = 0.00], as shown in **Figures [6 and 7].**

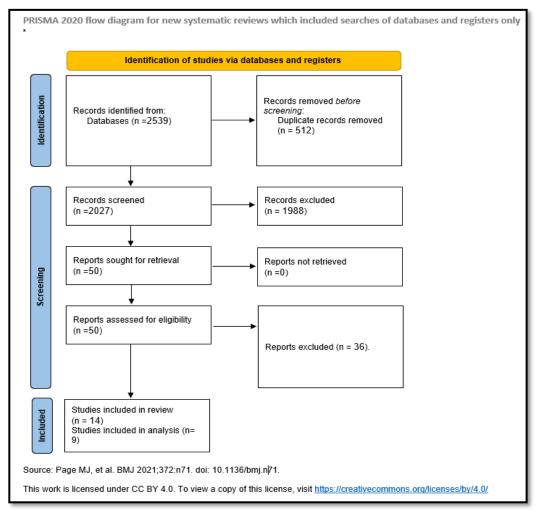


Figure [1]: PRISMA flow diagram

Study title	Study type	Age at orchidopexy		No. of testes*		Number of intrabdmoinal tastes	Outcomes reported Postoperative complication, testicular atrophy, testicular retraction, anesthetic complication, mean seminiferous tubule diameter, mean number of germ cells per tubule		
		Intervention	Comparator	Intervention	Comparator	lastes			
Kogan 1990	Prospective cohort	<12 months	12–46 months	13	64	0 [0]			
McAleer1995	Retrospective cohort study	<12 months	1–16 years	51‡	189‡	25 [9·3] in entire cohort	Fertility index [mean number of spermatogonia per tubule]		
Kollin 2012	RCT	9 months	3 years	127¶	92¶	Intervention group 22 [17·3] Control group 10 [11]	Mean testicular volume at surgery, Sertoli cells per 100 cords, germ cells per 100 cords, cord diameter, percentage interstitial tissue, serum FSH, LH, inhibin B and testosterone levels		
Kollin 2013	Follow-up of Kollin 2012	9 months	3 years	[78]#	[85]#	n.r. [assumed the same as Kollin et al. 25]	Testicular volume at follow-up		
Park 2007	Retrospective cohort	<12 months	>12 months	20 [20]	45 [45]	n.r.	Number of germ cells per tubule, interstitial peritubular fibrosis, mean tubular fertility index, germ cell count, testicular volume at surgery, mean tubular diameter, Sertoli cell index		
Carson 2014	Retrospective cohort study	<12 months	1–16 years	64	285	50 [14·3] in entire cohort	Testicular atrophy, postoperative complications		
ORCHESTRA 2021	Prospective cohort study	<12 months	≥12 months	39 [39]	303 [303]	0 [0]	Postoperative testicular atrophy		
Tseng 2017	Retrospective cohort study	≤12 months	>12 months	84 [58]	149 [124]	n.r.	PreOP UDT volume, PostOP UDT volume, Growth Percentage of UDT, PreOP NDT volume, PostOP NDT volume, Growth Percentage of NDT, Growth Percentage Ratio [UDT/NDT]		

Table [1]: Summary characteristics of the included studies in the analysis.

Values in parentheses are *number of infants and †percentage of total testes unless indicated otherwise. ‡A total of 268 testes were recruited, but only 240 were analyzed in primary study owing to inadequacy of samples; ¶number of testes per group clear, but number of infants in each group unclear; #exact numbers of patients and testes unclear as text differs from tables. UDT: undescended testis; NDT: normal descended testis.

Study Title		Selec	tion		Comparability		Outcome			
	Representativeness of the exposed cohort	Selection of the non- exposed cohort	Ascertainment of exposure	Demonstration that outcome of interest was not present at start of study	Comparability of cohorts on the basis of the design or analysis	Assessment of outcome	Was follow- up long enough for outcomes to occur	Adequacy of follow up of cohorts	score	
Tseng 2017	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	good	
ORCHESTRA	*	*	*		*	*			poor	
Tseng 2019	*	*	*			*	*	*	poor	
Park 2007	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	good	
McAleer 1995	*	*	*	*		*	*	*	poor	
Carson 2014	*	*	*	*		*	*	*	poor	
Kogan 1990	*	*	*	*	*	*		*	good	

Table [2]: NOS scale for observational studies

E	Early orchic Event	lopexy Total	Late or Event	rchidopexy Total				Odds ratio Weigh with 95% CI (%)	
	Lvent	TOLAI	Lvent	TOtal				With 95 % Ci (78)	
Kogan 1990	0	13	2	64 —					9
Carson 2014	3	64	24	285			-	0.56 [0.16, 1.91] 55.74	1
ORCHESTRA study	1	39	9	294				0.84 [0.10, 6.79] 13.96	6
Tseng 2019	5	58	6	124				1.78 [0.52, 6.08] 24.61	1
Overall							•	0.92 [0.44, 1.94]	
Heterogeneity: $I^2 = 0$.	00%, H ² =	1.00							
Test of $\theta_i = \theta_j$: Q(3) = 1.76, p = 0.62									
Test of θ = 0: z = -0.2	2, p = 0.83								
				1/1	5 1/4	1	4	16	
Fixed-effects Mantel-H	laenszel m	nodel							

Figure [2]: Forest plot comparing testicular atrophy in boys with cryptorchidism who underwent orchidopexy at less than 1 year of age with those who had the operation at or after the age of 1 year. A Mantel–Haenszel fixed-effect model was used. Risk ratios are shown with 95 per cent confidence intervals

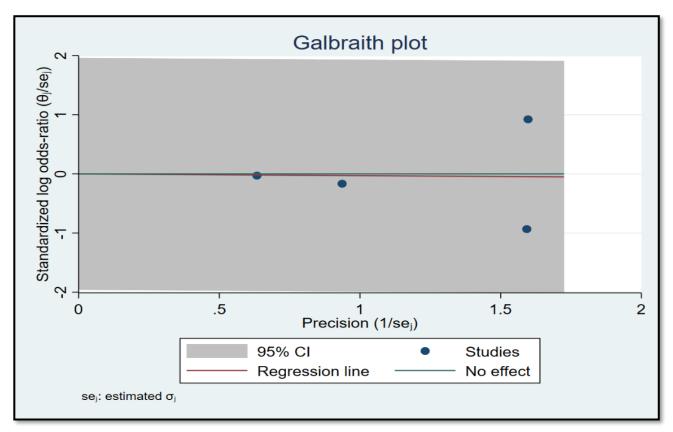


Figure [3]: Galbraith plot assessing heterogeneity across studies assessed testicular atrophy

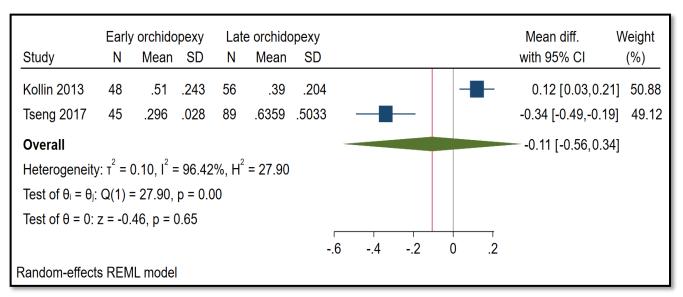


Figure [4]: Forest plot comparing postoperative testicular volume in boys with cryptorchidism who underwent orchidopexy at less than 1 year of age with those who had the operation at or after the age of 1 year. An inverse-variance random-effects model was used. Mean differences are shown with 95 per cent confidence interval

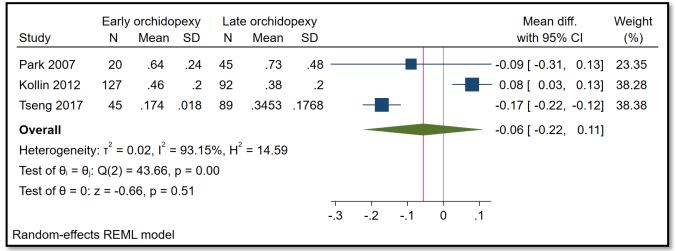


Figure [5]: Forest plot comparing preoperative testicular volume in boys with cryptorchidism who underwent orchidopexy at less than 1 year of age with those who had the operation at or after the age of 1 year. An inverse-variance random-effects model was used. Mean differences are shown with 95 per cent confidence intervals

Otrada	-	orchido									Mean diff.		Weight	
Study	N	Mean	50	N	wean	50		1				with 95%		(%)
Kogan 1990	13	58	10.7	64	45.7	5.8			_	_		12.30 [8.23,	16.37]	32.29
Park 2007	20	53.73	7.64	45	50.7	8.7						3.03 [-1.39,	7.45]	31.57
Kollin 2012	121	55.3	7.3	92	41.5	3.9				_	-	13.80 [12.15,	15.45]	36.14
Overall												9.92 [3.43,	16.40]	
Heterogeneity	и: т ² = 2	29.60, I ²	= 91.2	8%, H	² = 11.47	7								
Test of $\theta_i = \theta_j$:	Q(2) =	= 20.02,	p = 0.0	0										
Test of $\theta = 0$:	z = 3.0	0, p = 0.	.00											
								5	1(0	15			
Random-effect	s REM	L model		Favor	s late or	chidop	exy	Favors e	arly	orchio	lopex	х у		

Figure [6]: Forest plot comparing tubular diameter in boys with cryptorchidism who underwent orchidopexy at less than 1 year of age with those who had the operation at or after the age of 1 year. An inverse-variance random-effects model was used. Mean differences are shown with 95 per cent confidence intervals

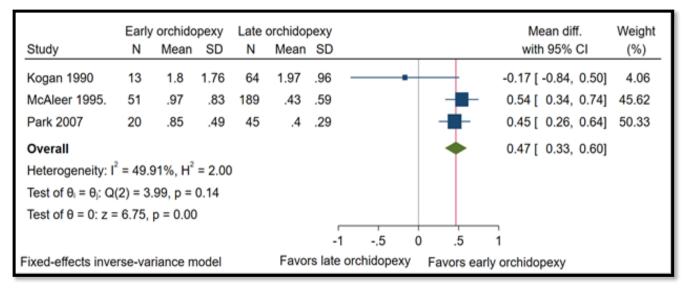


Figure [7]: Forest plot comparing the number of spermatogonia per tubule in boys with cryptorchidism who underwent orchidopexy at less than 1 year of age with those who had the operation at or after the age of 1 year. An inverse-variance fixed-effect model was used. Mean differences are shown with 95 per cent confidence intervals.

DISCUSSION

The study showed that there was no difference between early vs. late orchidopexy regarding testicular atrophy, preoperative, and postoperative testicular volume, but there was a statistically significant difference regarding the number of spermatogonia per tubule and tubular diameter of seminiferous tubules. Previous studies showed similar results with no conflict regarding testicular atrophy. However, Kollin et al. showed a positive association between early orchidopexy and higher preoperative and postoperative testicular volumes, respectively. However, there was a difference in the percentage of patients with intra-abdominal testes in the compared groups, which might have been a confounder in these results ^[1, 25]. In fact, in **Carson** et al., their initial results showed an association between age at orchidopexy and rates of testicular atrophy. However, when they adjusted for the location of the undescended testes, there was no longer any association between age at orchidopexy and rates of testicular^[21]. So, the location of the undescended testis might have affected the outcome of testicular volumes in Kollin et al. as well. Additionally, Kogan et al. and Park et al. linked early orchidopexy to a smaller number of spermatogonia per tubule and tubular diameter of seminiferous tubules, respectively [14] [6]. However, the number of testes in the intervention group was much smaller than the control group, which may not be representative of the real mean value in the population of early orchidopexy.

Limitations:

The results of this study may suggest that early orchidopexy has better fertility outcomes compared to late orchidopexy. However, the included studies have several limitations. All of them, except Kollin *et al.* [with a high risk of bias], are observational studies. Another main limitation is the unbalanced testicular locations between intervention and control groups. Many of the included studies did not report the location of undescended testes, making it difficult to know whether they accounted for the effect of location on fertility or not ^[6, 22, 23].

As mentioned previously, when Carson *et al.* adjusted [according to testicular location] the positive association [between

early orchido-pexy and fertility], the results became statistically insignificant $^{\left[21\right] }.$

Another limitation is the discrepancy in the definition of testicular atrophy. For example, the ORCHESTRA study assessed testicular atrophy 6 months after orchidopexy, while most of the included studies assessed atrophy perioperatively [14,21 24]. Another limitation is that none of the included studies assessed testicular malignancy between the cohorts of the two interventions. Although there is evidence of increased developmental complications in children receiving anesthesia, the data was insufficient to compare anesthetic complications. LaLa et al. reported anesthetic complications, but the cohort of this study did not meet our inclusion criteria as they compared patients <12 months [whether they failed LH and HCG therapy or not] with patients >12 months, after failed LH and HCG therapy ^[26]. Our study is not the first to compare early vs. late orchidopexy. Allin et al. showed results similar to our metaanalysis, but they linked early orchidopexy to a larger preoperative testicular volume ^[17]. This conflict might be because they included Canavese et al. and Feyles et al. However, we excluded both studies due to the discrepancy of using LH and HCG between the intervention and control groups [27, 28]. Additionally, we are the first to pool postoperative testicular volume. Although a recent follow-up study by Kollin et al. reported postoperative testicular volumes of a previously recruited cohort at ages 11 and 16 years, we did not include this study because there is more than a 10-year difference between the age of Kollin et al. 2024 and our pooled studies, which may introduce more heterogeneity [29].

Conclusion: Although the pooled outcomes of this study may indicate better outcomes of early orchidopexy, there is significant heterogeneity between the included studies that does not ensure robust evidence of this assumption. We recommend the future multiple randomized controlled trials to reach solid evidence regarding the safety and efficacy of early orchidopexy in comparison to late orchidopexy.

Disclosure: None to be disclosed

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IJIMA International Journal of Medical Arts



VOLUME 6, ISSUE 10, OCTOBER 2024

P- ISSN: 2636-4174 E- ISSN: 2682-3780