

## PAPER DETAILS

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PAGES: 143-147

ORIGINAL PDF URL: <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/2444430>

# The role of dynamic thiol/disulfide homeostasis for the evaluation of oxidative stress in endometriosis patients

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**Submitted:** 20.11.2021

**Accepted:** 21.03.2022

## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To evaluate the role of oxidative stress in endometriosis patients by determining dynamic thiol/disulfide homeostasis and ischemia modified albumin (IMA) levels.

**Patients and Methods:** This prospective case-controlled study was conducted at a tertiary gynecology clinic in Istanbul, Turkey. 86 patients previously diagnosed with endometriosis and persistent endometriomas were included in the study group. 60 patients who visited the clinic during the study period for routine gynecological control were included in the control group. Thiol/disulfide parameters and IMA levels were determined from the serum samples.

**Results:** When the thiol/disulfide parameters were compared between the study and the control group no significant difference was observed ( $p=0.49$ ). Mean disulfide level in the control group was  $18.58 \pm 5.73 \mu\text{mol/L}$  and in the study group was  $18.61 \pm 7.37 \mu\text{mol/L}$ . Levels were statistically similar in both groups ( $p=0.98$ ). In addition, there were no differences between the groups in terms of IMA and albumin levels.

**Conclusion:** The results of this study revealed no significant difference in the dynamic thiol/disulfide homeostasis among the endometriosis patients. Although, it has been accepted as a potential oxidative stress marker in other chronic inflammatory diseases, its use in determining the systemic oxidative stress level in endometriosis patients is limited.

**Keywords:** Endometriosis, Endometrioma, Dynamic thiol/disulfide homeostasis, Ischemia modified albumin

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Endometriosis is a chronic inflammatory disease. It is characterized by the presence of endometrial-like tissue outside of the uterus elsewhere in the body [1]. It affects 10% of women of reproductive ages. Chronic pelvic pain, dysmenorrhea, dyspareunia, and infertility are symptoms that are associated with endometriosis [1]. The presence of endometriosis in the ovaries forming a cystic tumor was first identified by Sampson and termed endometrioma [2]. The etiology of endometriosis is not entirely clear. Sampson's implantation theory, Mayer's

coelomic metaplasia theory, and induction theory are among the accepted pathophysiological theories of endometriosis [3,4]. However, none of them sufficiently explain the mechanism of the disease.

It is known that oxidative stress, which occurs due to the imbalance between the production and destruction of reactive oxygen species, plays a role in the pathophysiology of endometriosis. It initiates a generalized inflammatory reaction in the peritoneum [5-8]. Reactive oxygen species are intermediary products of the

**How to cite this article:** Topbas Selcuki NF, Yalcin Bahat F, Kaya C. The role of dynamic thiol/disulfide homeostasis for the evaluation of oxidative stress in endometriosis patients. *Marmara Med J* 2022; 2; 35(2):143-147. doi: 10.5472/marumj.1120611

oxygen metabolism, and they are involved in modulating cell proliferation as a part of an inflammatory response [9]. For the reduction and the inactivation of reactive oxygen species, thiol-containing molecules are essential. During this reaction, thiol groups are oxidized and reactive oxygen species become inactive [10]. Then, the oxidized thiol groups form disulfide bonds. As a result of this reversible reaction, thiol/disulfide homeostasis forms, contributing to the antioxidant mechanism of the organism. Therefore, thiol/disulfide levels can be used as an indicator of oxidative stress [11,12].

Another potential oxidative stress marker is ischemia-modified albumin (IMA), an important marker in determining myocardial ischemia. Recently, its use in other organs has been reported [13]. Elevated levels of IMA have been observed in systemic sclerosis, diabetic ketoacidosis, acute ischemic stroke, and ectopic pregnancy. Therefore, its use as a biomarker is suitable [14-18].

The role of oxidative stress in endometriosis pathophysiology has already been established. However, data on the utilization of dynamic thiol/disulfide homeostasis and IMA as oxidative stress markers in endometriosis patients are limited.

The objective of this study was to assess the use of dynamic thiol/disulfide homeostasis and IMA levels as oxidative stress biomarkers in endometriosis by measuring the native thiol, total thiol, and IMA levels in serum samples of endometriosis patients and the control group. In addition, an evaluation was carried out to determine whether these parameters showed any changes according to the severity of endometriosis-related pelvic pain and/or endometrioma size.

## 2. PATIENTS and METHODS

This study was designed as a prospective case-controlled study. It was conducted at a tertiary center of obstetrics and gynecology in Istanbul between March 17 and August 1, 2020. This study was approved by the Clinical Research Ethical Committee of Bakirkoy Dr. Sadi Konuk Training and Research Hospital (approval number: 2019/490), and all subjects gave their written informed consent.

A total of 146 women who visited the outpatient gynecological clinic between March 17 2020 and August 1, 2020 were enrolled in the study. Out of these 146 patients, 86 endometriosis patients who were aged between 18 and 45 years and who had endometriomas were included in the study group. All patients had received their endometriosis diagnosis previously either by laparoscopy or by ultrasonography. The control group consisted of 60 patients who visited the outpatient clinic for routine gynecological control. Exclusion criteria were previous ovarian surgeries; endocrinological, rheumatologic and/or metabolic comorbidities; intake of hormonal medications for the previous three months; current antioxidant treatment; smoking; and alcohol abuse.

Following a thorough anamnesis, all patients underwent gynecological examination with transvaginal ultrasound (TVUS). An endometrioma was diagnosed by the presence

of a unilocular ovarian cyst with homogeneous ground-glass echogenicity either with TVUS or with magnetic resonance imaging [19]. The volume of the endometrioma volume was calculated using the Orsini formula (length x width x diameter x 0.5235) [20]. TVUS was performed by the same gynecologist using an 8.5-MHz transvaginal transducer (ATL 5000 HDI, Philips, Netherlands). Endometriosis-related pelvic pain severity was self-evaluated by patients with a visual analogue scale (VAS); a score of 0 being no pain and 9 being extreme pain.

## Biochemical Analysis

Venous blood samples from the patients were collected before they received any medical treatment. Serum was separated by 1200 x g centrifugation for 10 min. Dynamic thiol/disulfide parameters were measured using an automated methodology with a Cobas c501 chemical analyzer (Roche Diagnostics, Mannheim, Germany) [11]. All results were given in  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ . To summarize the methodology, sodium borohydride was first used to reduce disulfide bonds to thiol groups. Then, formaldehyde was added to the reaction to remove excess sodium borohydride. After reacting with 5,5'-dithiobis, reduced total thiol and native thiol groups were measured, and disulfide levels were calculated as described in the methodology. IMA levels were also measured from the same serum samples using the cobalt binding test defined by Bar-Or et al. [13]. IMA levels were recorded as absorbance units (ABSU).

## Statistical Analysis

Patients' demographic data were evaluated using descriptive statistics. Comparative statistics was performed using the Mann-Whitney *U* test or Student's *t*-test depending on the distribution of the variables. Spearman or Pearson correlation analysis was used to evaluate the association between variables. A *p*-value of  $<0.05$  was accepted as statistically significant. All statistical analyses were done using SPSS version 20.0 (IBM Corporation, Armonk, NY, USA).

## 3. RESULTS

Patients were compared based on their age, endometrioma volumes, VAS scores, thiol/disulfide parameters, and IMA and albumin levels (Table I). There were no significant age differences between the groups ( $p = 0.507$ ). The mean endometrioma volume of the study group was calculated to be  $7.2 \pm 6.05 \text{ cm}^3$ . When groups were compared based on pelvic pain severity, a significant difference based on the VAS scores was observed ( $p < 0.001$ ).

When the thiol/disulfide parameters were compared, the mean native thiol level in the control group was  $313.92 \pm 70.02 \mu\text{mol/L}$  and in the study group was  $322.52 \pm 78.31 \mu\text{mol/L}$ . No significant difference was observed ( $p = 0.49$ ). Similarly, the comparison of total thiol levels did not reveal any significant difference ( $p = 0.48$ ) (control group =  $351.11 \pm 67.49 \mu\text{mol/L}$ , study group =  $359.71 \pm 75.37 \mu\text{mol/L}$ ). The mean disulfide level in the control group was  $18.58 \pm 5.73 \mu\text{mol/L}$  and in the study group was  $18.61 \pm 7.37 \mu\text{mol/L}$ . The difference was statistically insignificant.

Also, there were no significant differences between IMA and albumin levels ( $p=0.11$  and  $p=0.62$ , respectively).

The relationships between thiol/disulfide levels and age, endometrioma volume, and VAS scores in the study group were analyzed with a correlation analysis (Table II). Although, a negative correlation between age and native thiol ( $r = -0.07$ ,  $p=0.38$ ), total thiol ( $r = -0.06$ ,  $p=0.44$ ), and IMA levels ( $r = -0.01$ ,  $p=0.81$ ) and a positive correlation between disulfide ( $r = 0.11$ ,  $p=0.17$ ) and albumin ( $r = 0.01$ ,  $p=0.88$ ) levels were observed, none of these correlations were statistically significant. In the correlation analysis of endometrioma volume, the correlation coefficient with native thiol was  $r = 0.12$ , total thiol was  $r = 0.09$ , disulfide was  $r = -0.06$ , IMA was  $r = -0.015$  and albumin  $r = 0.07$ . None of these were statistically significant. Similarly, a comparison of VAS scores and thiol/disulfide parameters did not reveal a significant association (Table II).

**Table I.** Comparison of clinical, dynamic thiol/disulfide parameters, albumin and IMA levels between the control and the study group

	Control group (n=60)	Study group (n=86)	p-value
Age (years)	32.24±4.56	32.84±4.97	0.507
Endometrioma volume (cm <sup>3</sup> )	0	7.2± 6.05	<0.001
VAS score	3(1-4)	6(4-9)	<0.001
Native thiol (μmol/L)	313.92 ± 70.02	322.52 ± 78.31	0.49
Total thiol (μmol/L)	351.11±67.49	359.71±75.37	0.48
Disulfide (μmol/L)	18.58±5.73	18.61±7.37	0.98
IMA (ABSU)	1.06±0.24	0.98±0.33	0.11
Albumin (g/dl)	2.44±0.79	2.51±0.8	0.62

VAS: visual analogue scale; IMA: ischemia-modified albumin; ABSU: absorbance units

**Table II.** Correlation analysis between dynamic thiol/disulfide parameters, IMA, albumin and mean age, mean endometrioma volume and mean VAS score of the study group

	Age		Endometrioma volume		VAS score	
	r	p	r	p	r	p
Native thiol	-0.07	0.38	0.12	0.146	0.04	0.56
Total thiol	-0.06	0.44	0.09	0.27	0.03	0.71
Disulfide	0.11	0.17	-0.06	0.45	0.03	0.66
IMA	-0.01	0.81	-0.15	0.06	-0.11	0.17
Albumin	0.01	0.88	0.07	0.34	0.03	0.71

IMA: ischemia-modified albumin, VAS: visual analogue scale

#### 4. DISCUSSION

Oxidative stress plays an important role in the mechanism of cell migration and proliferation. This mechanism is also an essential part of endometriosis pathophysiology [21-23]. In this study, we evaluated dynamic thiol/disulfide homeostasis and IMA as potential biomarkers of oxidative stress in endometriosis

patients. Since, the levels of these markers were determined in serum samples, oxidative stress was assessed in a systemic manner rather than local. According to our results, a significant difference among the endometriosis patients in terms of dynamic thiol/disulfide homeostasis and IMA was not observed.

Oxidative stress associated with endometriosis, which is observed in the peritoneal tissue or the abdomen, occurs due to the inflammatory response to the ectopic endometrial cells. Furthermore, reactive oxygen species are formed as intermediary products of the metabolic reactions in the erythrocytes, macrophages and apoptotic endometrial tissue accumulating in ectopic implants [24]. In addition, elevated levels of oxidatively modified low-density lipoproteins and nitric oxide radicals, which are also oxidative stress indicators, were reported in the peritoneal fluid of endometriosis patients [25,26]. However, in most studies, oxidative stress has been evaluated in local tissue samples or peritoneal fluid. Systemic evaluation of oxidative stress in endometriosis is limited [27]. In our study, we evaluated oxidative stress by determining the thiol and disulfide levels in serum samples of endometriosis patients. Since, these parameters were measured from serum samples, our results reflected systemic oxidative stress levels of the patients. Although, the data in the literature have pointed out the role of oxidative stress in the pathophysiology of endometriosis, our results did not show any significance. This could be because either oxidative stress observed in endometriosis patients could only be detected at the local ectopic endometriotic loci without altering the systemic oxidative homeostasis of the individuals or thiol/disulfide as biomarkers might not be appropriate in detecting endometriosis-related oxidative stress.

Among the most important nonenzymatic antioxidant molecules that play an essential role in the oxidative stress defense mechanism are glutathione, carotenoids, tocopherols and ascorbates. Glutathione, which contains thiol groups, is an important intracellular antioxidant [28]. When the oxidative-antioxidative balance is disrupted, thiol groups form disulfide bonds in a reversible reaction. The resultant increase in disulfide bonds indicates that the equilibrium in the body has shifted to the side of oxidative stress. Furthermore, the association between the severity of endometriosis and glutathione peroxidase, superoxide dismutase, and lipid peroxidase, which are a part of the enzymatic antioxidative mechanism, has been reported [29]. However, to the best of our knowledge the role of dynamic thiol/disulfide homeostasis in endometriosis has not yet been evaluated.

The prospective design of this study and the evaluation of all the recruits by a single gynecologist who is specialized in endometriosis are among the strengths of this study. Although, the statistically insignificant nature of the results could be seen as a limitation, they could be of importance when designing future studies. As mentioned above, oxidative stress was evaluated at a systemic level in this study. Therefore, the status of local dynamic thiol/disulfide homeostasis in ectopic endometrial implants is still unclear. Therefore, these results can be considered as preliminary outcomes when designing future studies on related topics.

## Conclusion

In this study, the change in the parameters of dynamic thiol/disulfide homeostasis in endometriosis patients was not significant. Although, dynamic thiol/disulfide homeostasis has been shown as a potential oxidative stress marker in several other chronic inflammatory conditions, it does not seem to be suited for evaluating oxidative stress in endometriosis patients on a systemic level. However, local changes in dynamic thiol/disulfide homeostasis should still be evaluated. Therefore, future studies using peritoneal fluid or ectopic endometrial tissue can be meaningful.

## Compliance with the Ethical Standards

**Ethical Approval:** This study was approved by the Clinical Research Ethical Committee of Bakirkoy Dr. Sadi Konuk Training and Research Hospital (approval number: 2019/490), and all subjects gave their written informed consent.

**Financial Support:** The authors have no relevant financial information to close.

**Conflict of Interest:** The authors have no potential conflicts of interest to disclose.

**Author Contributions:** NFTS: Study construction and manuscript writing, CK: Manuscript writing and statistical analysis, MK: Data collection, MG: Data collection and interpretation, SN: Laboratory analysis, OE: Laboratory and statistical analysis, KB: Statistical analysis, PYB: Critically revised the article and supervised the study.

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