

Ultrasound Assessment of Portal Vein Diameter in Healthy Adult Women in South-South Nigeria

**Enefia Kelvin Kiridi ^{a,b}, Peter Chibuzor Oriji ^{c*},
Emily Gabriel Enefia Kiridi ^d, Obiora Chibundu ^{e,f},
Johnpatrick Uchenna Ugwoegbu ^g, Obinna Isidore Onyia ^h,
Panebi Yao Bosrotsi ⁱ, Isaac Joel Abasi ^j
and Adedotun Daniel Adesina ^{k,l}**

^a Department of Radiology, Niger Delta University Teaching Hospital, Okolobiri, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

^b Silhouette Radiodiagnostic Consultants, Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

^c Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Federal Medical Centre, Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

^d Department of Physiology, Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island, Amassoma, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

^e Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Asokoro District Hospital, Abuja, Nigeria.

^f Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Nile University of Nigeria, Abuja, Nigeria.

^g Department of Radiology, Federal Medical Centre, Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria.

^h Department of Internal Medicine, Federal Medical Centre, Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

ⁱ Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Diète Koki Memorial Hospital, Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

^j Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Niger Delta University Teaching Hospital, Okolobiri, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

^k Department of Medical Services, Nigerian Law School, Yenagoa Campus, Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

^l Oasis Public Health Consulting Ltd, Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. Author EKK conceptualised the study, performed ultrasound scans and collected. Author PCO designed the study, collated data, wrote the introduction, methodology and discussion. Authors EGEK, OC and OIO managed literature search.

Author JUJ performed ultrasound scans. Author OIO wrote the abstract. Authors PYB and IJA supervised data collection. Author ADA analysed data and wrote the results.

All the authors read and approved the final manuscript.

*Corresponding author: E-mail: chibuzor54@gmail.com;

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ABSTRACT

Background: About 75% of the liver blood flow is from the portal vein, while the remaining 25% comes from the hepatic artery. One of the main abnormalities of the portal system is portal hypertension, and the portal vein diameter is key in make this diagnosis.

Objectives: To assess the mean normal portal vein diameter in healthy women in South-South Nigeria.

Subjects and Methods: This descriptive, cross-sectional study was conducted at all the clinical departments of the two tertiary health facilities, one secondary facility and one radio-diagnostic facility in Bayelsa State, South-South Nigeria, between April, 2022 and December, 2022. Data analysis was done using Statistical Product and Service Solutions for Windows® version 25, SPSS Inc.; Chicago, United States of America (USA). Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentages) and Pearson product moment correlation were used for the analysis. The level of significance was considered at $p < 0.05$.

Results: Portal vein diameter ranged from 6.8 mm to 16.6 mm, with a mean of 10.46 ± 2.00 mm. Body mass index ($r = 0.41$), age ($r = 0.43$), parity ($r = 0.44$), weight ($r = 0.49$) and height ($r = 0.27$) had a significant relationship ($p = 0.001$) with portal vein diameter. The relationship between portal vein diameter and age/parity of participants was of positive increasing trend.

Conclusion: This research has established baseline values for normal range of PV diameter in healthy women in our region of Nigeria, and also revealed significant correlation of PV diameter with age, parity, weight, height and body mass index.

Keywords: Portal vein diameter; liver; women; age; parity; portal hypertension.

1. INTRODUCTION

The main sources of blood supply of the liver are the portal vein (PV) and hepatic artery. About 75% of the liver blood flow is from the portal vein, while the remaining 25% comes from the hepatic artery [1]. The superior mesenteric vein and splenic vein meet at the level of the second lumbar vertebra, behind the pancreatic neck, to form the portal vein [1]. The ultrasound measurement of the diameter of the portal vein is a crucial tool for making diagnosis of portal hypertension. Homeostasis is supported by the complex interaction between the liver and the portal vein [1].

One of the main disease conditions of the portal system is portal hypertension. It mainly occurs as a result of a rise in portal venous pressure, which

in turn causes resistance to blood flow into the hepatic circulation through the portal vein [2–5]. Splenomegaly, portal vein enlargement, and the opening up of portal systemic collaterals at different sites, all result from portal hypertension. Portal hypertension causes significant mortality and morbidity, because it is the most frequent complication and the leading cause of death in people with chronic liver disease [2,6,7]. The normal PV diameter may vary from 7 mm to 15 mm, and the normal portal venous pressure varies between 5 mmHg and 10 mmHg [8]. A portal venous pressure of more than 15 mmHg (30 cmH₂O) may suggest portal hypertension [8]. The upper limit of the portal vein diameter has been documented as 13 mm by some authors, and a value greater than that suggests portal hypertension [4,5,9,10].

Portal hypertension may result from pre-hepatic, hepatic, or post-hepatic causes. The most common causes of portal hypertension are liver cirrhosis (usually in the developed countries), [6,10,11] schistosomiasis (which occurs more in endemic regions) [11,12] and hepatic vascular abnormalities [5]. In addition to these conditions, other predisposing factors which include alcohol abuse and hepatitis, lead to scarring of the liver, which in turn cause liver cirrhosis [11].

Some diagnostic imaging techniques like portal venography, splenoportography and arteriography have been used in the past to evaluate patients suspected to have portal hypertension; but these procedures are invasive and risky for the patient, costly and time-consuming. Magnetic resonance imaging and computed tomographic scan on the other hand, have the merit of providing better cross-sectional images. However, they are both costly, and the latter exposes the patient to ionizing radiation [13,14]. Ultrasonography which does not use ionizing, plays a major role in the diagnosis and follow-up of patients with portal hypertension due to its low cost, availability, accessibility, non-invasive nature, mobility, and less time-consuming. Therefore, the objective of this study was to assess the mean normal portal vein diameter using ultrasound scan in healthy women in South-South Nigeria.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study design and setting: This descriptive, cross-sectional study recruited and enrolled healthy women from all the clinical departments at the Niger Delta University Teaching Hospital, Okolobiri, Federal Medical Centre, Yenagoa, Silhouette Radiodiagnostic Consultants, Yenagoa and Diete Koki Memorial Hospital, Yenagoa, all in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. These facilities offer radiological, obstetric and gynaecological care services to the people of Bayelsa State and nearby Rivers and Delta States, all of which are located in the South-South geopolitical region of Nigeria. This study was conducted between April, 2022 and December, 2022.

Sample size calculation: This was calculated using the formula: $n = Z\alpha^2 \times \sigma^2 / \delta^2$ [15,16].

Where: $Z\alpha = 95\%$ CI, which is 1.96, $\sigma =$ mean of 10.65 mm from a previous study.[11] $\delta =$ level of precision for our study ($\sigma/\sqrt{63}$).

Calculation:

$$\begin{aligned}n &= (1.96)^2 \times 10.65^2 / \sigma/\sqrt{63} \\n &= 3.8416 \times 113.42 / 1.34 \\n &= 432.81 / 1.34 \\n &= 322.993 \\n &= 323\end{aligned}$$

Considering attrition of 5% (16.15), n was adjusted to 339. For this study, 339 consecutive healthy women were enrolled.

Inclusion criteria: Healthy adult women without any medical condition.

Exclusion criteria: Women with liver disease and other medical conditions.

Following counseling, written informed consent was obtained from all the women enrolled in the study. Sociodemographic information was obtained, including any presenting complaints that the patients may have. With the patient standing on the Frankfort plane, the height of the patient was measured using a wall-mounted stadiometer. A weighing scale was used to determine weight. Patients were asked to take off their bulky outerwear and shoes and stand in the middle of the scale to evenly distribute their weight across both feet. Body mass index (BMI) was determined as the weight in kilograms (kg) divided by height in meters (m) squared. Urinalysis, liver function tests and serum electrolytes, urea and creatinine, were done for the women, and if these were normal, they were then referred to the Radiology Units of the study centres for ultrasound scan.

Procedure: Transabdominal ultrasound examination was performed for all the patients by consultant radiologists, using a 2012 Philips HD11 device with a 3.5 MHz curvilinear probe. Before data collection commenced, the consultant radiologists discussed, assessed for interobserver variability and reliability, and reached an agreement on the standard operative procedure of ultrasonography to ensure data quality. After an overnight fast, the individuals were placed in the supine and right anterior oblique positions for the ultrasound examination. When the main portal vein could be seen best, the patients were exposed from the xiphisternum to the suprapubic region, ultrasound gel was applied to the right upper quadrants of the abdomen, and the transducer was placed in the epigastrium in both the

transverse and longitudinal planes. Measurements were taken at the location where the portal vein crosses anterior to the inferior vena cava, with the calipers placed between the inner margins of the echogenic walls of the vessel at the location where the portal vein crosses prior to the inferior vena cava (Fig. 1).

Data analysis: A pre-designed proforma was used to record all the measurements obtained. Data analysis was done using Statistical Product and Service Solutions for Windows® version 25, SPSS Inc.; Chicago, USA. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentages) and Pearson product moment correlation were used for the analysis. Interobserver and intraobserver variations were calculated with the use of the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) and documented. Statistical significance was set at $P < 0.05$.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Baseline Characteristics

A total of 339 healthy women with a mean age of 32.5 ± 11.2 years, were assessed for portal vein diameter. The modal (35.7%) age-group was 20 – 29 years. Women aged ≥ 40 years were 28.6%, while those 15 – 19 years were 13.0%. The mean body mass index was 23.9 ± 4.6 kg/m^2 . More than half (57.8%) of participants had

normal weight. Others were underweight (6.5%), overweight (22.7%) and obese (13.0%). Majority (38.9%) of the women were nulliparous. The median parity was 1; with a range 0 to 5 (Table 1).

3.2 Relationship between Baseline Characteristics and Portal Vein Diameter

Portal vein diameter ranged from 6.8 mm to 16.6 mm, with a mean of 10.46 ± 2.00 mm (Fig. 2). Body mass index ($r = 0.41$), age ($r = 0.43$), parity ($r = 0.44$), and weight ($r = 0.49$), had a fairly strong, significant relationship ($p = 0.001$) with portal vein diameter. Height also had a statistically significant (although weak) relationship with portal vein diameter ($r = 0.27$; $p = 0.001$) (Table 2). The relationship between portal vein diameter and age/parity of participants was of positive increasing trend. There was a gradual increase in the portal vein diameter of participants 15 years to greater than 40 years. The difference in the mean portal vein diameter between the age groups was significant ($f\text{-stat} = 22.11$; $p = 0.001$). A similar trend was seen with parity (Table 3). Results for the intraobserver and interobserver correlation coefficients are shown in Table 4. Table 5 shows results of normal mean portal vein diameter observed by previous studies across the globe.



Fig. 1. Longitudinal view of the abdomen showing the levels of measurement of the portal vein (green dotted lines)

Table 1. Baseline characteristics of the participants

Characteristics	Frequency, n = 339	Percent (%)
Age group (years)		
15 – 19	44	13.0
20 – 29	121	35.7
30 – 39	77	22.7
≥ 40	97	28.6
Age in years – mean ± SD	32.5 ± 11.2	
Anthropometric measurements		
Weight in kg – mean ± SD	63.8 ± 13.8	
Height in metres – mean ± SD	1.63 ± 0.07	
Body mass index in kg/m ² – mean ± SD	23.9 ± 4.6	
Body mass index		
Underweight	22	6.5
Normal weight	196	57.8
Overweight	77	22.7
Obese	44	13.0
Parity		
Nulliparity	132	38.9
Primiparous	55	16.2
Multiparous	109	32.2
Grand multiparous	43	12.7
Parity – Median (range)	1 (0 – 5)	

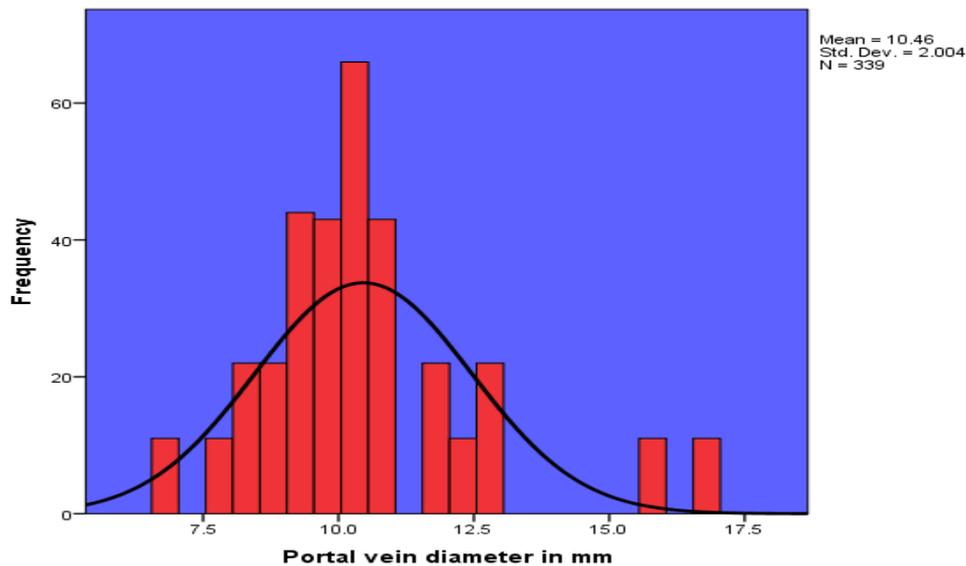


Fig. 2. Histogram showing the measurements of portal vein diameter

Table 2. Correlation between portal vein diameter and age, parity and the anthropometric measures of participants

Characteristics	Correlation coefficient - r (p-value)
Age	0.43 (0.001*)
Parity	0.44 (0.001*)
Weight	0.49 (0.001*)
Height	0.27 (0.001*)
Body mass index	0.41 (0.001*)

*Statistically significant

Table 3. Mean portal vein diameter at the different age groups and parity

Characteristics	Frequency	Portal vein diameter Mean ± SD	F-stat (p-value)
Total population	339	10.46 ± 2.00	
Age group (years)			
15 – 19	44	9.40 ± 1.32	22.11 (0.001*)
20 – 29	121	9.74 ± 0.73	
30 – 39	77	10.97 ± 2.25	
≥ 40	97	11.43 ± 2.51	
Parity			
Nulliparity (0)	132	8.50 ± 0.76	35.57 (0.001*)
Primiparous (1)	55	9.66 ± 0.99	
Multiparous (2)	54	9.90 ± 0.73	
Multiparous (3)	44	10.30 ± 2.17	
Multiparous (4)	11	11.53 ± 2.36	
Grand-multiparous (≥5)	43	12.94 ± 2.32	

*Statistically significant

Table 4. Interobserver and intraobserver intraclass correlation coefficient results

Ultrasound parameter	Intraclass correlation coefficient	
	Interobserver	Intraobserver
Portal vein diameter	0.99 (95% CI 0.51–0.99)	0.98 (95% CI 0.56–0.99)

Table 5. Results of normal mean portal vein diameter observed by previous studies across the globe

Authors	Year	Country	PVD in millimeters
Weinreb et al.[4]	1982	United States of America	11.00 ± 2.00
Bellamy et al. [17]	1984	England	7.20 ± 2.30
Rahim et al.[18]	1985	England	8.76 ± 1.50
Mildenberger et al.[19]	1987	Germany	9.70 ± 1.70
Wiersema et al.[20]	1995	United States of America	10.70 ± 1.70
Tasu et al.[21]	2002	France	11.00 ± 2.60
Cosar et al.[22]	2004	Türkiye (Turkey)	11.68 ± 0.26
Rokni et al.[23]	2005	Iran	8.90 ± 1.08
Rokni et al.[24]	2006	Iran	9.36 ± 1.65
Anakwue et al.[2]	2009	Nigeria	11.45 ± 1.49
Hawaz et al.[6]	2012	Ethiopia	7.90 ± 2.00
Adeyekun et al.[14]	2014	Nigeria	10.30 ± 1.50
Saha et al.[25]	2015	India	8.83 ± 2.12
Usman et al.[11]	2015	Nigeria	10.87 ± 0.81
Luntsi et al.[1]	2016	Nigeria	9.60 ± 1.41
Geleto et al.[8]	2016	Ethiopia	10.60 ± 1.80
Gareeballah et al.[26]	2017	Sudan	10.73 ± 1.47
Lal et al.[27]	2018	India	10.20 ± 1.47
Akanni et al.[28]	2019	Benin	9.83 ± 0.95
Orijj et al.[29]	2023	Nigeria	10.43 ± 1.58
Present study	2023	Nigeria	10.46 ± 2.00

4. DISCUSSION

This study revealed a mean PV diameter of 10.46 ± 2.00 mm (with a range of 6.8 mm to 16.6 mm). This finding is in consonance with the mean PV diameter of 10.43 ± 1.58 mm reported

by Oriji et al., in South-South Nigeria, [29] 11.5 ± 0.15 mm reported by Anakwue et al. in South-East Nigeria, [2] 10.9 ± 0.81 mm reported by Usman et al. in Maiduguri, North-East Nigeria, [11] 10.6 ± 1.8 mm reported by Geleto et al., in South-West Ethiopia, [8] 11.7 ± 0.3 mm reported

by Cosar et al., in Turkey,[22] and 11.0 ± 2.6 mm reported by Tasu et al. in France [21]. It is possible that the reason for these similarities is that ethnic and racial variations do not significantly influence PV diameter. Conversely, our mean PV diameter was slightly higher than the 7.9 ± 2.0 mm reported by Hawaz et al., in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, [6] 9.83 ± 0.95 mm reported by Akanni et al. in Parakou, Benin, [28] and 9.6 ± 1.9 mm reported by Rokni-Yazdi and Sotouden in Iran [24]. This may be a result of the different sample sizes, methodologies and measuring techniques of these different studies.

Age correlated significantly ($r = 0.43$; $p = 0.001$) with portal vein diameter in this study. PV diameter increased with increase in the age of the women. This finding is in agreement with the reports of Oriji et al. [29] Anakwue et al. [2] Usman et al. [11] Hawaz et al. [6] Shikha et al. [30] and Geleto et al. [8] However, Adeyekun and Tsebi,[14] Cosar et al. [22] and Weinreb et al.,[4] did not find any correlation between PV diameter and age. This may have also resulted from the difference in sample size, methodology and measuring technique of the studies.

Our study observed a significant correlation between PV diameter and parity. This finding is in tandem with that of Oriji et al. [29] The reason for this is not readily understood. This study also observed a significant correlation between PV diameter and weight, height, and body mass index. This observation agrees with the findings of Ayele et al. [31] Akanni et al. [28] in Parakou, Benin, Gareeballah et al. [26] in Sudan, and Saha et al. [25] and Lal et al. [27] both in India, who reported that weight and height were associated with PV diameter. This was, however, in disagreement with the reports of Oriji et al. [29] Usman et al. [11] and Moriyasu et al. [32] who did not observe any relationship between PV diameter and weight, height, and body mass index. The relatively small sample size of these studies and the measuring techniques for PV diameter may have contributed this variable correlation with PV diameter.

The ICC was employed in our study to reduce interobserver and intraobserver variability for measurements of portal vein diameter. It assesses the consistency of measurements for the same parameter [33] and takes into account both interobserver variability and the variance of all measurements [33,34]. A value above 0.8 indicates nearly perfect agreement, with the standard range being 0 to 1 [35,36]. In our study,

the results for the inter- and intraobserver variance were 0.99 and 0.98, respectively, showing nearly perfect agreement.

This study's strength comes from the fact that it was a multicenter study that only included healthy female participants. As a result, confounding factors that might have altered the measurements of the portal vein diameter, such as liver diseases or other medical disorders, were eliminated. The limitation of this study is that it is hospital-based, and may therefore, not reflect what is obtainable in the general population of women.

5. CONCLUSION

This research has established baseline values for normal range of PV diameter in healthy women in our region of Nigeria, and also revealed significant correlation of PV diameter with age, parity, weight, height and body mass index. A nomogram showing the value of portal vein diameter at different age-groups and parity was produced. More researches on the relationship between PV diameter and age and parity are therefore recommended.

CONSENT

As per international standard or university standard, patient(s) written consent has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

ETHICAL APPROVAL

The protocol for this study was approved by the Research and Ethics Committee of the Federal Medical Centre Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, Nigeria (FMCY/REC/ECC/2022/683).

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COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that they have no known competing financial interests OR non-financial interests OR personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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