The Efficacy of Kinesiology Taping in Reducing Pain and Improving Function in Individuals with Patellofemoral Pain Syndrome

Abdulaziz O. Alharbi[1], Thamer M. Alshammary[2], Ahmed A. Alzahrani[3], Mohammed S. Aldakhil[4]

Physical Therapists
Health affairs at the Ministry of National Guard

Abstract:
Background: Patellofemoral pain syndrome (PFPS) is a common knee condition that causes significant pain and functional limitations. Kinesiology taping (KT) has been proposed as an effective intervention for PFPS, but its efficacy requires further exploration.
Objective: This study aimed to evaluate the efficacy of kinesiology taping in reducing pain and improving function in individuals with PFPS.
Methods: A randomized controlled trial was conducted with 100 participants diagnosed with PFPS. Participants were randomly assigned to either the KT group (n=50) or the standard care group (n=50). The KT group received kinesiology taping applied weekly for six weeks, while the standard care group received a structured physiotherapy program. Primary outcome measures were pain intensity (VAS) and knee function (Kujala Score). Secondary outcome measures included range of motion (ROM) and proprioception. Assessments were conducted at baseline, 6 weeks, and 12 weeks.
Results: The KT group demonstrated significantly greater reductions in pain ($p<0.01$) and improvements in knee function ($p<0.01$) compared to the standard care group at both 6 and 12 weeks. Proprioception also improved significantly more in the KT group ($p<0.01$), while no significant differences were observed in ROM between the groups.
Conclusion: Kinesiology taping significantly reduces pain and improves function in individuals with PFPS. It also enhances proprioception without restricting movement, making it a valuable adjunctive therapy in PFPS management. Further research is needed to confirm these findings and evaluate long-term effects.

Keywords: Patellofemoral pain syndrome, kinesiology taping, pain reduction, knee function, proprioception, randomized controlled trial.

Introduction

Patellofemoral pain syndrome (PFPS), often referred to as runner's knee, is a common condition characterized by pain around or behind the patella (kneecap). It is particularly prevalent among athletes and physically active individuals, but it can also affect the general population (Crossley et al., 2015). The etiology of PFPS is multifactorial, involving biomechanical, muscular, and anatomical factors that lead to maltracking of the patella and increased stress on the patellofemoral joint (Petersen et al., 2014).

The primary symptoms of PFPS include anterior knee pain exacerbated by activities such as running, squatting, climbing stairs, and prolonged sitting (Witvrouw et al., 2014). These symptoms can significantly impact an individual's ability to perform daily activities and maintain an active lifestyle. Consequently, effective management of PFPS is crucial for pain relief and functional improvement.

Conservative treatment approaches for PFPS typically include physical therapy, exercise programs focused on strengthening and stretching, patellar taping, bracing, and nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)

(Bolgla & Boling, 2011). Among these, kinesiology taping has gained popularity as a non-invasive and easily applicable intervention. Kinesiology tape (KT) is an elastic therapeutic tape that can be applied to the skin with the intent of providing support, reducing pain, and improving function without restricting the range of motion (Kalron & Bar-Sela, 2013).

The proposed mechanisms by which KT may benefit individuals with PFPS include proprioceptive facilitation, improved circulation, enhanced lymphatic drainage, and correction of patellar alignment (Mostafavifar et al., 2012). Several studies have investigated the effects of KT on pain and function in various musculoskeletal conditions, including PFPS, but the results have been mixed and often limited by methodological variability and small sample sizes (González-Iglesias et al., 2009; Campolo et al., 2013).

This study aims to systematically evaluate the efficacy of kinesiology taping in reducing pain and improving function in individuals with PFPS through a randomized controlled trial. By addressing the limitations of previous research and employing rigorous methodology, this study seeks to provide more definitive evidence regarding the role of KT in the management of PFPS.

Literature Review

Overview of Patellofemoral Pain Syndrome (PFPS)

Patellofemoral pain syndrome (PFPS) is a prevalent musculoskeletal condition that affects a wide range of individuals, particularly athletes and physically active people. It is characterized by anterior knee pain that is often exacerbated by activities such as running, squatting, and ascending or descending stairs (Petersen et al., 2014). The multifactorial etiology of PFPS includes biomechanical abnormalities, muscular imbalances, overuse, and improper alignment of the patella, leading to increased stress on the patellofemoral joint (Witvrouw et al., 2014).

Conservative Management Approaches

Conservative treatment is the first line of management for PFPS. It typically includes physical therapy focused on strengthening and stretching exercises, especially targeting the quadriceps, hamstrings, and hip muscles to correct muscle imbalances and improve patellar tracking (Bolgla & Boling, 2011). Other interventions include patellar bracing, foot orthotics, and various taping techniques aimed at reducing pain and improving function (Crossley et al., 2016).

Kinesiology Taping (KT)

Kinesiology taping (KT) is an increasingly popular therapeutic modality used in the management of PFPS. KT is an elastic cotton strip with an acrylic adhesive that can be applied to various parts of the body to provide support without restricting range of motion. The proposed mechanisms by which KT may benefit individuals with PFPS include proprioceptive facilitation, enhanced circulation and lymphatic drainage, improved muscle activation, and correction of patellar alignment (Kalron & Bar-Sela, 2013).

Evidence on KT in PFPS

Several studies have investigated the effects of KT on pain and function in individuals with PFPS, with mixed results. A randomized controlled trial by Campolo et al. (2013) compared the effects of KT and McConnell taping on anterior knee pain during functional activities. The study found that both taping techniques were effective in reducing pain, but KT provided similar pain relief with less discomfort and greater patient satisfaction. However, the study was limited by a small sample size and short follow-up period.

In contrast, a study by Kaya et al. (2011) evaluated the immediate effects of KT on pain and functional performance in patients with PFPS. The results indicated significant improvements in pain and functional

performance immediately after the application of KT. These findings suggest that KT may have beneficial short-term effects, although long-term efficacy remains unclear.

A systematic review by Mostafavifar et al. (2012) examined the effectiveness of KT for various musculoskeletal conditions, including PFPS. The review concluded that while some studies reported positive outcomes, the overall quality of evidence was low, and further high-quality research is needed to establish the efficacy of KT in the management of PFPS.

Mechanisms of Action

The theoretical mechanisms by which KT may alleviate symptoms of PFPS are multifaceted. Proprioceptive feedback is believed to play a key role, as the tape may enhance sensory input to the central nervous system, leading to improved motor control and joint stability (González-Iglesias et al., 2009). Additionally, the elasticity of KT allows it to lift the skin, potentially increasing space in the subcutaneous tissue, which may enhance blood flow and reduce swelling (Mostafavifar et al., 2012).

Comparative Studies

Comparative studies have highlighted the potential benefits of KT over other taping techniques and interventions. For instance, a study by Bicici et al. (2012) compared the effects of KT and non-elastic tape on knee joint position sense in healthy individuals. The results showed that KT had a more favorable impact on proprioception, suggesting its potential advantage in managing conditions like PFPS where proprioceptive deficits are common.

Clinical Implications

The mixed results of existing studies underscore the need for further research to clarify the role of KT in PFPS management. While some evidence supports its short-term benefits, the long-term efficacy and optimal application techniques remain uncertain. Clinicians should consider individual patient needs and preferences when incorporating KT into treatment plans and should be cautious in interpreting the current evidence.

Conclusion

In summary, while kinesiology taping shows promise as a non-invasive intervention for reducing pain and improving function in individuals with PFPS, the existing literature presents mixed findings. High-quality, large-scale studies are needed to better understand the mechanisms and long-term benefits of KT. This study aims to contribute to the growing body of evidence by systematically evaluating the efficacy of KT in the management of PFPS through a rigorous randomized controlled trial.

Methodology

Study Design

This study employed a randomized controlled trial (RCT) design to evaluate the efficacy of kinesiology taping (KT) in reducing pain and improving function in individuals with patellofemoral pain syndrome (PFPS). Participants were randomly assigned to either the intervention group (KT group) or the control group (standard care group).

Participants

A total of 100 participants diagnosed with PFPS were recruited from outpatient physiotherapy clinic at military hospital . Inclusion criteria were: age between 18 and 45 years, anterior knee pain persisting for at

least 3 months, and a diagnosis of PFPS confirmed by a physiotherapist. Exclusion criteria included previous knee surgery, concurrent lower limb injuries, or other knee pathologies such as patellar tendinopathy or osteoarthritis.

Randomization and Blinding

Participants were randomly assigned to the KT group (n=50) or the standard care group (n=50) using a computer-generated randomization schedule. Allocation concealment was maintained using sealed opaque envelopes. Assessors who conducted outcome measurements were blinded to group allocation to minimize bias.

Intervention

Kinesiology Taping Group: Participants in the KT group received kinesiology taping applied by a certified physiotherapist. The KT application was based on standard protocols for PFPS, aimed at supporting the patella and enhancing proprioception. The tape was applied once a week for six weeks. Additionally, participants were instructed on proper self-application techniques and provided with tape for home use.

Standard Care Group: Participants in the control group received standard care, which included a structured physiotherapy program consisting of strengthening and stretching exercises tailored to address muscle imbalances and improve patellar tracking. Sessions were held twice a week for six weeks.

Outcome Measures

Primary and secondary outcome measures were assessed at baseline (pre-intervention), at 6 weeks (post-intervention), and at 12 weeks (follow-up).

Primary Outcome Measures:

1. Pain Intensity: Assessed using the Visual Analog Scale (VAS), a reliable and valid measure for pain assessment in musculoskeletal conditions.
2. Knee Function: Evaluated using the Kujala Patellofemoral Score, a validated questionnaire assessing symptoms and functional limitations associated with PFPS.

Secondary Outcome Measures:

1. Range of Motion (ROM): Measured using a goniometer to assess knee flexion and extension.
2. Proprioception: Evaluated using joint position sense tests to determine the accuracy of knee joint positioning.

Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS software (version 25.0). Descriptive statistics were used to summarize baseline characteristics of participants. Independent t-tests and chi-square tests were used to compare baseline characteristics between groups. Repeated measures ANOVA was conducted to assess within-group and between-group differences over time. A p-value of <0.05 was considered statistically significant.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol was approved by the ethics committee. All participants provided written informed consent prior to participation.

Findings

Participant Characteristics

A total of 100 participants were enrolled in the study, with 50 participants in each group. The baseline characteristics of participants in the kinesiology taping (KT) group and the standard care group are presented in Table 1. No significant differences were found between the groups in terms of age, gender, or baseline outcome measures.

Table 1: Baseline Characteristics of Participants

Characteristic	KT Group (n=50	Standard Care Group (n=50)	p-value
Age (years)	28.4 ±6.3	29.1 ±5.9	0.51
Gender (Male/Female)	22/28	20/30	0.67
VAS Pain Score (0-10)	6.8 ±1.2	6.9 ±1.3	0.78
Kujala Score (0-100)	55.6 ±7.5	54.9 ±7.8	0.64

Primary Outcome Measures

Pain Intensity (VAS Scores)

The Visual Analog Scale (VAS) scores for pain intensity showed significant reductions in both groups over time, with a greater reduction observed in the KT group. The mean VAS scores at baseline, 6 weeks, and 12 weeks are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: VAS Pain Scores Over Time

Time Point	KT Group (Mean ±SD	Standard Care Group (Mean ±SD)	p-value (Between Groups
Baseline	6.8 ±1.2	6.9 ±1.3	0.78
6 Weeks	3.4 ±1.0	4.5 ±1.2	0.01*
12 Weeks (Follow-up)	2.9 ±0.9	3.9 ±1.1	0.01*

Significant difference ($p < 0.05$) between groups

Knee Function (Kujala Scores)

Kujala scores showed significant improvements in both groups, with the KT group demonstrating a greater increase in functional scores compared to the standard care group. The mean Kujala scores at baseline, 6 weeks, and 12 weeks are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Kujala Scores Over Time

Time Point	KT Group (Mean ±SD	Standard Care Group (Mean ±SD)	p-value (Between Groups
Baseline	55.6 ±7.5	54.9 ±7.8	0.64
6 Weeks	71.3 ±6.2	65.8 ±6.5	0.01*
12 Weeks (Follow-up)	74.5 ±5.8	68.9 ±6.0	0.01*

Significant difference ($p < 0.05$) between groups

Secondary Outcome Measures

Range of Motion (ROM)

Both groups showed improvements in knee flexion and extension range of motion (ROM), with no significant differences between the groups. The mean ROM values at baseline, 6 weeks, and 12 weeks are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Range of Motion (ROM) Over Time

Time Point	KT Group (Mean ±SD	Standard Care Group (Mean ±SD)	p-value (Between Groups
Baseline (Flexion)	135.2 ± °5.3°	134.7 ± °5.1°	0.71
6 Weeks (Flexion)	140.6 ± °4.8°	139.9 ± °4.6°	0.49
12 Weeks (Flexion)	142.1 ± °4.5°	141.5 ± °4.3°	0.57
Baseline (Extension)	-1.8 ± °1.0°	-1.7 ± °1.1°	0.76
6 Weeks (Extension)	-0.9 ± °0.8°	-1.0 ± °0.9°	0.64
12 Weeks (Extension)	-0.5 ± °0.7°	-0.6 ± °0.8°	0.72

Proprioception

Proprioception, as assessed by joint position sense tests, improved significantly in both groups. However, the KT group showed a greater improvement compared to the standard care group. The mean proprioception errors at baseline, 6 weeks, and 12 weeks are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Proprioception Errors Over Time

Time Point	KT Group (Mean ±SD	Standard Care Group (Mean ±SD)	p-value (Between Groups
Baseline	4.8 ± °1.2°	4.9 ± °1.3°	0.78
6 Weeks	2.3 ± °1.0°	3.4 ± °1.2°	0.01*
12 Weeks (Follow-up)	1.9 ± °0.9°	2.9 ± °1.1°	0.01*

Significant difference ($p < 0.05$) between groups

Discussion

The results of this study demonstrate that kinesiology taping (KT) significantly reduces pain and improves function in individuals with patellofemoral pain syndrome (PFPS) compared to standard care alone. This discussion will interpret these findings in the context of existing literature, address potential mechanisms of action, and highlight the clinical implications and limitations of the study.

Interpretation of Findings

Pain Reduction

Participants in the KT group experienced significant reductions in pain intensity, as measured by the Visual Analog Scale (VAS), at both 6 and 12 weeks post-intervention compared to the standard care group. These findings align with previous studies that have reported the pain-relieving effects of KT in PFPS (Campolo et al., 2013; Kaya et al., 2011). The proprioceptive feedback provided by KT may contribute to reduced pain by enhancing neuromuscular control and decreasing abnormal patellar movements that cause pain (Kalron & Bar-Sela, 2013).

Functional Improvement

The KT group also showed greater improvements in knee function, as assessed by the Kujala Patellofemoral Score, compared to the standard care group. These improvements are consistent with the results of Bicici et al. (2012), who found that KT enhanced functional performance in athletes with PFPS. The support and proprioceptive input provided by KT may improve patellar tracking and alignment, leading to better functional outcomes (Mostafavifar et al., 2012).

Proprioception and Range of Motion

Significant improvements in proprioception were observed in the KT group, suggesting that KT may enhance sensory input and joint position sense. This finding is supported by previous research indicating that KT can improve proprioception and joint stability (González-Iglesias et al., 2009). While both groups showed improvements in range of motion (ROM), there were no significant differences between the groups, indicating that KT does not restrict movement and may support dynamic activities (Bolgla & Boling, 2011).

Mechanisms of Action

The exact mechanisms by which KT exerts its effects remain a topic of investigation. Proposed mechanisms include:

1. Proprioceptive Feedback: KT may enhance sensory input to the central nervous system, improving motor control and joint stability (Kalron & Bar-Sela, 2013).
2. Enhanced Circulation: The elasticity of KT can lift the skin, potentially increasing space in the subcutaneous tissue, enhancing blood flow, and reducing swelling (Mostafavifar et al., 2012).
3. Neuromuscular Activation:** KT may facilitate or inhibit muscle activity, contributing to improved muscle function and pain relief (González-Iglesias et al., 2009).

Clinical Implications

The findings of this study suggest that KT is a valuable adjunctive therapy in the conservative management of PFPS. Clinicians can consider incorporating KT into treatment plans for patients with PFPS to enhance pain relief, improve functional outcomes, and support proprioception without restricting movement. The non-invasive nature and ease of application make KT a practical option for both clinical and home use.

Limitations

Despite the positive findings, this study has several limitations. The sample size, while adequate, could be larger to increase the generalizability of the results. Additionally, the follow-up period was limited to 12 weeks, and longer-term effects of KT were not assessed. Future studies should aim to include larger sample sizes and longer follow-up periods to better understand the long-term efficacy of KT in PFPS management.

Conclusion

In conclusion, kinesiology taping significantly reduces pain and improves function in individuals with PFPS compared to standard care. The improvements in proprioception further support the use of KT as a beneficial therapeutic modality. Further research with larger sample sizes and longer follow-up periods is needed to confirm these findings and elucidate the long-term effects of KT.

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