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Morphological asymmetry of the superior Cervical facets from C3 through C7 due to Degeneration

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Introduction: Knowledge about facet morphology has already been discussed extensively in literature but is limited regarding asymmetry and its relation to facet degeneration.

Method: Facet dimensions, surface area, curvature, and degeneration of the superior facets were measured in 85 dried human vertebrae from the anatomical collection of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel. The vertebrae were analysed using the Microscribe G2X digitizer (Immersion Co., San Jose, CA) and a grading system for the evaluation of cervical facet degeneration. Coordinates were processed mathematically to evaluate articular tropism. The statistical analysis includes the paired t-test and the Pearson correlation.

Results: On average, no systematic differences between the left and right facets were found concerning morphology and degeneration. However, there were significant differences regardless of the side-occurrence. There was a significant correlation between the dimensions of the total facet surface and the degree of degeneration but not for the recognizable joint surface.

Conclusions: Facet tropism of the upper joint facets occurred often in the cervical spine but without side preference. A bigger difference in degeneration asymmetry was associated with a bigger difference in facet joint dimension asymmetry.

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