

A Detailed Morphometric Characterization of Colombian Lower Limb Long Bones: Femur, Tibia and Fibula

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: morphometry enables a measurable analysis of the macroscopic structures of any part of the human body. Bone morphometry is essential for the performance of orthopedic surgeries as well as for the diagnosis and monitoring of certain pathologies. In this study, the three long bones of the lower limb - the femur, tibia and fibula - were measured employing a more comprehensive morphometry than conventional methods.

Methods: morphometric measurements were taken on dry human femurs, tibias and fibulae using anatomical landmarks to define proximal and distal epiphysis values in order to obtain lengths, widths and perimeters. Tibia and fibula weights were also taken.

Results: the morphometry of the lower limb long bones in the Colombian population is described. The tibias weighed 197.14 ± 52.75 grams and 167.368 ± 50.28 grams for the right and left tibias, respectively. The fibulae weighed 49.22 ± 11.346 and 49.451 ± 8.7 for the right and left, respectively. Distance from the femoral head to the greater trochanter $p=0.0193$, femoral neck perimeter $p=0.0272$, and tibia total length $p=0.0433$ were all statistically significant.

Conclusions: this paper is the first to present data regarding bone dimensions in lower limb long bones belonging specifically to the Colombian population.

Keywords: Anthropometry; Bone and bones; Femur; Leg bones; Osteology.

Introduction

The osteology of the lower limbs consists of three large bones: the femur, tibia and fibula. The femur is the largest and strongest bone in the human body, articulating proximally to the acetabulum of the coxal bone and distally to the patella and tibia forming the knee joint. The tibia is situated on the medial side of the leg and runs parallel to the fibula, connecting the knee joint to the ankle joint. The proximal epiphysis articulates with the femur bone to form the knee joint, while the distal epiphysis forms the inner part of the ankle joint. The fibula is located just behind the tibial head at the knee joint and it runs down the lateral side of the leg. The proximal epiphysis articulates with the tibia bone specifically inferior to its lateral condyle until it reaches the ankle joint with the distal epiphysis¹⁻³.

Morphological sciences determine the morphometric parameters of bones to establish limits between normality and pathology⁴. They enable a measurable analysis of the macroscopic structures of any part of the human body, contributing to the bone description precise numerical data on the analyzed structures^{5,6}. In the scientific literature, morphological studies have been carried out in forensic anthropology, medicine and many of its multiple pathologies⁷, and also in all research conducted in basic and clinical anatomy. Lower limb bone morphometry is essential in the

performance of orthopedic surgeries for deformity or fracture correction using implants. It helps surgeons to plan and perform surgical procedures with precision. This quantitative information also contributes to the diagnosis and the monitoring of pathologies using information related not only to the bone length but also to certain specific anatomical features, in order to determine a deformity or a bone disease⁶.

The aim of this study is to establish the morphometry of the long bones of the lower limbs from the Colombian population.

Materials and Methods

A total of 48 dried human adult bones of unknown ethnicity without any gross pathology or abnormality were analyzed. They comprised 16 femurs (eight left, eight right), 16 tibias (eight left, eight right) and 16 fibulae (six left, 10 right). Bones were obtained from the Laboratory of Anatomy at the Technological University of Pereira (UTP), in Risaralda, Colombia. The bones didn't belong to eight specific subjects, but were derived from multiple human cadaveric donors.

For bone morphometry, a digital caliper (Ubermann, Chile) was used to obtain lengths and widths, a measuring tape (Stanley Black & Decker, Inc., Seattle, USA) was used to calculate the perimeters, graph paper (Bico, Colombia) was used to establish lengths,

a digital scale (Goldtech, India) was used to weigh tibias and fibulae, and an iPhone 13 camera (Apple Inc., California, USA) was used to take the photographs. All data was recorded in a Microsoft Excel® spreadsheet (version 2205).

The morphological measurements of the lower limb bones were taken from anatomical landmarks illustrated in Figures 1-3 and each measurement type was given an abbreviation that relates to a fuller description provided in the Tables. The femur data is presented in Figure 1 and Table 1, the tibia data in Figure 2 and Table 2, and fibula in Figure 3 and Table 3.

The data are expressed as mean ± standard deviation (SD). The student's t-test was used to compare mean values from the bones of each side of the body for all measurements and $p \leq 0.05$ was considered significant.

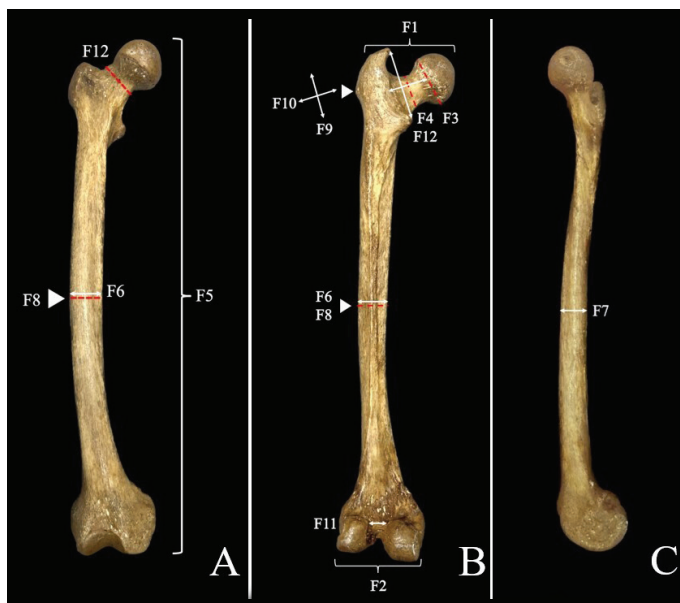


Figure 1. Femur morphometry. A: Ventral view. B: Dorsal view. C: Medial view. For abbreviations refer to table 1.



Figure 2. Tibia morphometry. A: Proximal epiphysis inferior view. B: Distal epiphysis superior view. C: Ventral view. D: Medial view. For abbreviations refer to table 2.

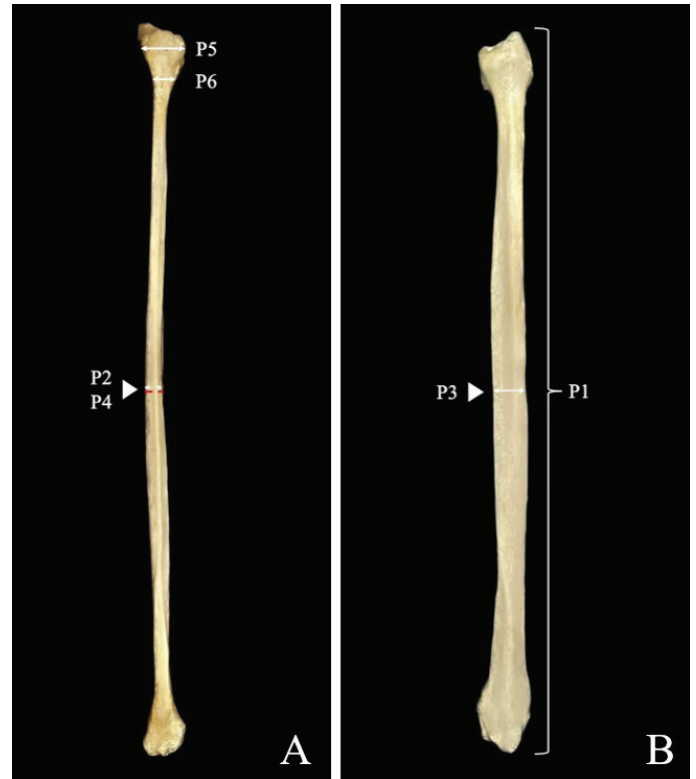


Figure 3. Fibula morphometry. A: Ventral view. B: Lateral view. For abbreviations refer to table 3.

Table 1. Femur morphometry.

Abbreviation	Measurement Description
F1	Distance from the femoral head to the greater trochanter
F2	Distance from medial to lateral condyle
F3	Femoral head width: measured from the most medial point to the most lateral point
F4	Femoral neck width: measured from medial to lateral
F5	Femur total length in ventral view: measured from the femoral head to the lower border of the medial condyle
F6	Femoral diaphysis width: measured in the middle of the axis from medial to lateral
F7	Femoral diaphysis width: measured in the middle of the axis from ventral to dorsal
F8	Femoral diaphysis perimeter: measured in the middle of the axis
F9	Intertrochanteric line distance in dorsal view
F10	Femoral neck length: measured from the midpoint of the intertrochanteric line to the midpoint of the femoral head total width (F3)
F11	Intercondylar fossa width: measured in the upper portion of the inner border from medial to lateral condyle
F12	Femoral neck perimeter

Table 2. Tibia morphometry.

Abbreviation	Measurement Description
T1	Distance from medial to lateral condyle
T2	Distance from the most caudal point of the medial malleolus to the fibular notch of the tibia
T3	Tibia total length: measured from the intercondylar eminence to the most caudal point of the medial malleolus, viewed dorsally
T4	Tibial diaphysis width: measured in the middle of the axis from medial to lateral
T5	Tibial diaphysis width: measured in the middle of the axis from dorsal to ventral
T6	Tibial diaphysis perimeter: measured at the midpoint of the axis
T7	Transverse diameter of the joint surface of the medial condyle
T8	Transverse diameter of the joint surface of the lateral condyle
T9	Middle transverse measure of intercondylar area

Table 3. Fibula morphometry.

Abbreviation	Measurement Description
P1	Fibular total length: measured from the apex to the most caudal portion of the lateral malleolus
P2	Fibular diaphysis width: measured in the middle of the axis from medial to lateral
P3	Fibular diaphysis width: measured in the middle of the axis from dorsal to ventral
P4	Fibular diaphysis perimeter: measured in the middle of the axis
P5	Fibular head width: measured from the most medial point to the most lateral point, in ventral view
P6	Fibular neck width: measured from medial to lateral

RESULTS

The descriptive statistics for the measurements are shown in Tables 4, 5 and 8 for the femurs, Tables 6 and 9 for the tibias, and Tables 7 and 10 for the fibulae. The tibias weighed 197.14 ± 52.75 grams (right tibias) and 167.368 ± 50.28 grams (left tibias). The fibulae weighed 49.22 ± 11.346 grams (right fibulae) and 49.451 ± 8.7

Table 4. Different studies regards femur morphometry.

Author	F2 Obtained Value		F11 Obtained Value	
	(Mean \pm SD in Milliliters)		(Mean \pm SD in Milliliters)	
	Right Side	Left Side	Right Side	Left Side
Present study	71.04 \pm 3.33	70.58 \pm 5.429	19.74 \pm 2.41	20.3 \pm 4.16
Santosh <i>et al.</i> 2022 ²³	69.31 \pm 6.72	70 \pm 6.23	19.98 \pm 3.24	19.82 \pm 3.14
Phombut <i>et al.</i> 2021 ²⁴	-	-	20.06 \pm 2.72*	
Mahalakshmi <i>et al.</i> 2020 ²⁵	72.82 \pm 3.89	71.62 \pm 5.67	21.66 \pm 2.69	21.5 \pm 4.64
Chavda <i>et al.</i> 2019 ²⁶	69.6 \pm 5.04	69.8 \pm 4.96	20.4 \pm 3.17	18.7 \pm 2.52
Shweta <i>et al.</i> 2017 ²⁷	73.1 \pm 6.14	72.16 \pm 6.58	20.82 \pm 2.57	21.0 \pm 3.13
Biswas <i>et al.</i> 2017 ²⁸	71.71 \pm 4.50	70.71 \pm 5.25	20.86 \pm 2.52	19.45 \pm 2.57
Zalawadia <i>et al.</i> 2017 ²⁹ ♂	74.48 \pm 1.90	74.59 \pm 2.75	20.31 \pm 2.94	20.91 \pm 1.32
♀	67.42 \pm 1.93	66.7 \pm 2.59	19.42 \pm 2.3	19.27 \pm 2.74
Ameet <i>et al.</i> 2014 ³⁰	72.5 \pm 5.3	73.3 \pm 5.3	18.0 \pm 3.0	17.9 \pm 2.5
Terzidis <i>et al.</i> 2012 ³¹ ♂	88.6 \pm 0.42*		22.0 \pm 0.18*	
♀	78.5 \pm 0.30*		18.7 \pm 0.10*	
Ravichandran <i>et al.</i> 2010 ³²	74.58 \pm 0.57	73.97 \pm 0.61	18.89 \pm 0.29	18.65 \pm 0.27
Murshed <i>et al.</i> 2005 ³³ ♂	-	-	21.3 \pm 2.4*	
♀	-	-	19.1 \pm 2.0*	

*Value without laterality

grams (left fibulae). For the femurs, F1 was statistically significant $p=0.0193$, as was F12 $p=0.0272$. For the tibias T3 was statistically significant $p=0.0433$.

Table 5. Different studies regards femoral head morphometry.

Authors	F3 Obtained Value (Mean ± SD in Milliliters)
Present study	45.02 ± 1.41
Verma <i>et al.</i> 2017 ¹¹	42.32 ± 4.11
Umer <i>et al.</i> 2015 ¹³	45.50 ± 3.39
Menezes <i>et al.</i> 2015 ¹⁴	44.2 ± 4.4
Lin <i>et al.</i> 2014 ¹²	45.4
Polgug <i>et al.</i> 2013 ¹⁰ ♂	43.7 ± 4.1
♀	40.9 ± 4.9
Baharuddin <i>et al.</i> 2013 ³⁴	40.81 ± 3.43
Unnanuntana <i>et al.</i> 2010 ³⁵	52.09 ± 4.43
Umer <i>et al.</i> 2010 ³⁶	50.1 ± 3.8
Mahaisavariya <i>et al.</i> 2002 ³⁷	43.98 ± 3.47

Table 6. Different studies regards tibia morphometry.

Author	T1 Obtained Value (Mean ± SD in Milliliters)		T7 Obtained Value (Mean ± SD in Milliliters)		T8 Obtained Value (Mean ± SD in Milliliters)		T9 Obtained Value (Mean ± SD in Milliliters)	
	Right Side	Left Side	Right Side	Left Side	Right Side	Left Side	Right Side	Left Side
Present study	70.553 ± 5.069	66.99 ± 5.153	30.395 ± 2.493	29.423 ± 1.69	30.261 ± 2.843	28.084 ± 2.703	11.147 ± 2.905	11.82 ± 2.565
Gharehdaghi <i>et al.</i> 2018 ⁹	77.2 ± 3.5	77.3 ± 3.7	-	-	-	-	-	-
Lucena-Dos-Santos <i>et al.</i> 2018 ²⁰ ♂	-	-	30.24 ± 0,307*		34.05 ± 0,323*		11.67 ± 0,279*	
♀	-	-	27.02 ± 0,298 *		29.91 ± 0,281*		10.54 ± 0,262*	
Kang <i>et al.</i> 2017 ¹⁸	70.70 ± 6.37*		-	-	-	-	-	-
Gandhi <i>et al.</i> 2014 ¹⁹ ♂	65.98 ± 7.07	65.61 ± 7.21	30.18 ± 2.83	29.38 ± 3.14	28.62 ± 3.10	28.82 ± 3.12	7.18 ± 1.14	7.41 ± 0.95
♀	60.11 ± 6.62	59.34 ± 6.03	27.25 ± 3.05	26.96 ± 2.18	26.14 ± 2.51	26.00 ± 3.06	6.72 ± 1.06	6.38 ± 0.79

*Value without laterality

Table 7. Different studies regards fibula morphometry.

Authors	P1 Obtained Value (Mean ± SD in Milliliters)	
	Right Side	Left Side
Present study	396.926 ± 20.623	375.667 ± 9.638
Mukhia <i>et al.</i> 2022 ³⁸	332.1 ± 14.2	330.6 ± 15.2
Albani <i>et al.</i> 2021 ²¹	358.6 ± 24.41	366.4 ± 25.37
Gharehdaghi <i>et al.</i> 2018 ⁹	367.4 ± 18.2	368.4 ± 17.9
Kaur <i>et al.</i> 2015 ³⁹	355.8 *	

*Value without laterality

Table 8. Femur results.

Measurement	Obtained Value (Mean ± SD in Milliliters)	
	Right Side	Left Side
F1	81.74 ± 5.64	7.554 ± 8.54
F4	32.58 ± 1.56	29.66 ± 3.66
F5	452.83 ± 12.2	447.47 ± 27.4
F6	25.63 ± 1.2	25.29 ± 2.79
F7	27.71 ± 1.63	26.87 ± 2.23
F8	87.38 ± 5.01	85.1 ± 6.8
F9	59.79 ± 6.32	60.19 ± 7.14
F10	4.078 ± 0.317	39.16 ± 4.48
F12	100.92 ± 4.75	92.92 ± 7.85

Table 9. Tibia results.

Measurement	Obtained Value (Mean ± SD in Milliliters)	
	Right Side	Left Side
T2	42.315 ± 4.008	40.169 ± 2.811
T3	368.083 ± 19.77	344.208 ± 24.317
T4	22.991 ± 3.29	20.769 ± 0.822
T5	28.212 ± 2.663	27.918 ± 2.707
T6	77.542 ± 6.387	74.208 ± 3.788

Table 10. Fibula results.

Measurement	Obtained Value (Mean ± SD in Milliliters)	
	Right Side	Left Side
P2	12.319 ± 1.226	11.582 ± 1.559
P3	16.039 ± 1.756	14.429 ± 1.245
P4	45 ± 3.849	41.444 ± 4.178
P5	26.137 ± 2.244	24.813 ± 3.14
P6	15.915 ± 1.701	14.399 ± 1.599

Discussion

The current study is the first to morphometrically measure the long bones of the lower limbs in Colombia, although the authors acknowledge the limitation of the small quantity of bones included in the sample. A further limitation is that such precise measurements can vary according to the individual researcher's experience, the instruments used, and the location of the bone-based landmarks.

In the case of the femur, the most commonly fractured bone in the human body⁸, it is important for surgeons to be informed of the normal femur measurements in a population in order to perform reconstructive surgery. With this in mind, femur total length (measurement F5) was found to be similar to the results of Gharehdaghi *et al.* 2018 who reported right femur length to be 448.2±21.5 millimeters (mm) and the left length to be 448.9±22.2 mm⁹. Similar findings were reported by Polgug *et al.* 2013 for male bones (456.3±27.3 mm)¹⁰. In the present study, measurements are higher than those of the Polgug *et al.* 2013 study for female bones (421.1±33.7 mm)¹⁰, and those of Verma *et al.* 2017 who report right femur lengths of 42.94±2.77 centimeters (cm) and left femur lengths of 42.70±3.01 cm¹¹. The higher measurements in this current study could indicate that most of our samples were male bones (See Table 8).

Concerning the proximal epiphysis, femoral head width (measurement F3) is similar to those reported by Lin *et al.* 2014¹², and Umer *et al.* 2015¹³ (See Table 5). Intertrochanteric line distance (measurement F9) measured by Menezes *et al.* 2015 had mean values of 47.9±6.2 mm¹⁴ which are lower than the values found by the present study.

Total width of the femoral neck (measurement F4) are lower than the results of Lin *et al.* 2014 who reported values of 35.71±3.27 mm for male bones and 31.2±2.80 mm for female bones¹², and the results of Verma *et al.* 2017 who reported values of 34.23±4.395 mm for the right side and 31.73±3.662 mm for the left.¹¹ The measurements reported by Menezes *et al.* 2015 are similar to those obtained in the present study with an average of 3.10±0.35 cm¹⁴. It is likely that the measurements from Lin *et al.* 2014 and Verma *et al.*

2017 had higher results because the landmark was placed closer to the femoral head^{11,12}, while in the present study and the study conducted by Menezes *et al.* 2015, the measurements was taken establishing the landmark as the narrowest point of the neck¹⁴, thus resulting in smaller values (See Table 8).

For the distal epiphysis, intercondylar fossa width (measurement F11) was found to be similar to most comparable studies. Distance from medial to lateral condyle (measurement F2) was also found to be similar to comparable results, such as those of Biswas *et al.* 2017¹⁵ (See Table 4).

Of all the long bones, the tibia can be used in the estimation of stature as it displays marked inter-individual and sexual differences, and it is also very important in sex determination, orthopedic surgery and radiology for the knee joint^{9,16}. For tibia total length (measurement T3), the mean results of 356.146±24.705 mm, without laterality discrimination, are similar to those of Kaloo *et al.* 2019 with 35.73±1.84 cm.¹⁶ However, the results regarding laterality were statistically significant, which could be related to the sex of the bone samples. The present study results are lower than those from Gharehdaghi *et al.* 2018 which reported 377.4±20.2 mm for right tibias and 377.7±19.5 mm for the left⁹, but were greater than the 302.64 mm reported by Robinson *et al.* 2008¹⁷. (See Table 9).

For the proximal epiphysis, the distance from medial to lateral condyle (measurement T1) was considerably lower than the findings of Gharehdahgi *et al.* 2018, a study in which only male bones were measured⁹. The results of the present study are similar to those obtained by Kang *et al.* 2017 for female bones but are markedly different from the results recorded for the male bones¹⁸. Finally, the results obtained by Gandhi *et al.* 2014 conducted in India¹⁹ are lower than those of the present study. Transverse diameter of the joint surface of the medial condyle (measurement T7) and the middle transverse measure of intercondylar area (measurement T9) are similar to the measurements obtained by Lucena-Dos-Santos *et al.* 2018 for male bones²⁰, while T7 and Transverse diameter of the joint surface of the lateral condyle (measurement T8) are similar to the results of Gandhi *et al.* 2014 for male bones.¹⁹ The results for T9 are higher than those reported by Gandhi *et al.* 2014 due to the difference in the landmarks used in each study. Gandhi measured specifically the narrowest part of the intercondylar area which could be the reason why lower values were obtained¹⁹. (See Table 6).

In relation to the distal epiphysis, distance from the most caudal point of the medial malleolus to the fibular notch of the tibia (measurement T2) was found to be lower than the distances measured by Gharehdaghi *et al.* 2018 (namely, 51.5±2.8 mm for the right, and 50.5±3 mm for the left)⁹, and the mean measurement reported by Robinson *et al.* 2008 of 52.46 mm¹⁷.

The fibula is the donor bone of choice for grafting

procedures for the subsequent reconstruction of skeletal, soft tissue and growth plate defects due to its anatomic accessibility, its independent blood supply, and the fact that its removal have minimal effects on the gross function of lower extremity²¹. Right fibular total length (measurement P1) values are greater than those reported by other authors. Left fibular lengths, however, are similar to the studies of Albani *et al.* 2021, and Gharehdaghi *et al.* 2018^{9,21} (See Table 7).

For the weights and the remainder of the morphometric measurements shown in Tables 8, 9 and 10, no literature could be found to carry out comparisons. The weight between bones in this current study presented a large standard deviation, likely due to a combination of factors including gender, the bone conservation method, and the time that the bones have been in the laboratory.

Conclusions

The present study describes bone parameters for the femur, tibia and fibula, and provides data on bone dimensions in lower limb long bones from

the Colombian population. Variations in the bone parameters obtained in this study can be helpful for future studies in orthopedic surgery, radiology, forensic science and anatomy. The present morphometry follows a simple and easily replicable method. For future studies, researchers are encouraged to weigh dry bones to establish a mean for this parameter.

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Ethics statement

The authors state that every effort was made to follow all local and international ethical guidelines and laws that pertain to the use of human cadaveric donors in anatomical research²².

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