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Sinclair, Jonathan Kenneth, Bottoms, Lindsay, Taylor, Paul John and Mahmood, Khizar

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Influence of minimalist footwear on knee and ankle loads during the squash lunge

Jonathan Sinclair¹, Lindsay Bottoms², Paul John Taylor³ and Khizar Mahmood¹

¹ Centre for Applied Sport and Exercise Sciences, School of Sport Tourism and Outdoors, University of Central Lancashire, Preston, United kingdom

² Department of Human and Environmental Sciences, School of Life and Medical Sciences, University of Hertfordshire, United kingdom

³ School of Psychology, University of Central Lancashire, United kingdom

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Abstract. Squash is associated with a high incidence of knee and ankle joint injuries. The aim of this work was to examine the effects of squash specific, running shoes and minimalist footwear on knee and ankle loads during the lunge movement in squash players. Twelve male squash players performed lunge movements whilst wearing squash specific, running shoes and minimalist footwear. The loads experienced by the knee and ankle joints were calculated. Patellofemoral forces were significantly greater in running shoes (5.10 B.W) compared to minimalist footwear (4.29 B.W). Achilles tendon forces were significantly larger in the minimalist footwear (3.10 B.W) compared to the running shoes (2.64 B.W) and squash specific footwear (2.88 B.W). This shows that whilst minimalist footwear may reduce the incidence of knee pathologies in squash players corresponding increases in ankle loading may induce an injury risk at this joint.

Key words: Biomechanics, squash, knee, ankle, footwear

Résumé. Influence de la chaussure minimaliste sur les charges du genou et de la cheville lors de la fente de squash.

La pratique du squash est associée à des lésions articulaires au niveau du genou et de la cheville. Le but de ce travail était d'examiner les effets du port de chaussures de course à pied, de chaussures spécifiques de squash et de chaussures minimalistes sur les contraintes au niveau du genou et de la cheville pendant le mouvement de fente chez des joueurs de squash. Les contraintes aux articulations du genou et de la cheville ont été calculées pour douze joueurs de squash avec les différents types de chaussures. Les forces fémoro-patellaires étaient significativement plus grandes avec les chaussures de course (5,10 × poids de corps) par rapport aux chaussures minimalistes (4,29 × poids de corps). Les forces au niveau du tendon d'Achille étaient significativement plus grandes avec les chaussures minimalistes (3,10 × poids de corps) par rapport aux chaussures de course (2,64 × poids de corps) et aux chaussures spécifiques de squash (2,88 × poids de corps). En conclusion, les chaussures minimalistes pourraient réduire les pathologies du genou chez les joueurs de squash, cependant une augmentation des contraintes au niveau du tendon d'Achille pourrait induire parallèlement un risque de blessure au niveau de l'articulation de la cheville.

Mots clés : Biomécanique, squash, genou, cheville, chaussures

1 Introduction

Squash is an extremely popular sport with millions of players in over 100 countries worldwide. Competitive squash is a physically demanding sport characterised by a series of accelerations and decelerations which involve both lunging and side-stepping (Vuckovic & James, 2010).

The repetitive nature and intensity of squash means that squash players are at risk from injuries.

Injuries of a chronic nature are commonplace in both recreational and competitive squash players (Clavisi & Finch, 2000), with an occurrence rate of 45% (Berson, Rolnick, Ramos, & Thornton, 1981). Chronic musculoskeletal pathologies in squash players occur in both the

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1 upper and lower limbs and also the lower back (Finch
2 & Eime, 2001). Lower extremities injuries are most com-
3 mon, with the knee and ankle joints being the most com-
4 monly injured sites (Finch & Eime, 2001).

5 Clavisi & Finch (2000) proposed that inappropriate
6 footwear is a potential contributing factor to the aeti-
7 ology of lower extremity injuries in squash players. In-
8 deed Shorten (1993) suggests that through appropriate
9 footwear design/ selection athletes may be able to regu-
10 late their susceptibility to chronic injuries. There is cur-
11 rently a lack of published research investigating the effects
12 of different footwear on the biomechanical parameters
13 linked to the aetiology of injury development in squash.
14 There is a trend in a number of sporting disciplines for
15 athletes to choose minimalist footwear as opposed to
16 sport specific or running shoes (Sinclair, Atkins, Taylor,
17 & Vincent, 2015a), based on the supposition that running
18 in minimalist footwear is associated with a reduced inci-
19 dence of lower extremity injuries (Sinclair, Greenhalgh,
20 A., Brooks, Edmundson, & Hobbs, 2013a).

21 Research in other sports has examined the effects of
22 minimalist footwear on the loads experienced by the knee
23 and ankle joints. Sinclair (2014) investigated the effects of
24 barefoot and minimalist footwear on knee and ankle loads
25 during running compared to running shoes. Running
26 barefoot and in minimalist footwear reduced the loads
27 experienced by the knee but also increased the loads on
28 the ankle compared to running shoes. Bonacci, Vicenzino,
29 Spratford, & Collins (2013) showed that running bare-
30 foot reduced the loads experienced by the knee com-
31 pared to running in conventional running shoes. Sinclair,
32 Chockalingam, Naemi, & Vincent (2015b) showed that
33 minimalist footwear reduced the loads experienced by the
34 knee during depth jumping compared to running shoes,
35 but there were no differences in ankle loads. Finally Sin-
36 clair, Hobbs, & Selfe (2015c) showed that minimalist
37 footwear reduced the load on the knee but increased the
38 load experienced by the ankle compared to netball spe-
39 cific footwear. However, there is currently no research
40 which has investigated the effects of different footwear
41 in squash players. This indicates further study regarding
42 the effects of different footwear on the loads experienced
43 by the knee and ankle joints in squash specific movements
44 is warranted.

45 The lunge is a movement that is used regularly in
46 competitive squash, and the ability to quickly execute a
47 controlled lunge is a key component of the game (Cronin,
48 McNair, & Marshall, 2003). The aim of the current in-
49 vestigation was therefore to examine the effects of squash
50 specific, running shoes and minimalist footwear on the
51 loads experienced by the knee and ankle during the
52 squash lunge. An investigation of this nature may pro-
53 vide key information to squash players regarding selection
54 of appropriate footwear. This study tests the hypothesis
55 that the minimalist footwear will be associated with de-
56 creased knee loading in comparison to the squash specific
57 and running shoes

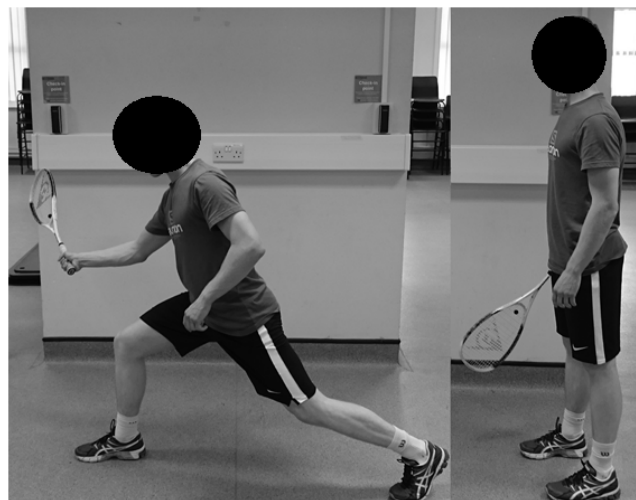


Fig. 1. Example of the squash lunge movement.

2 Methods

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2.1 Participants

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Twelve male participants (Age 21.59 ± 2.28 years; height
1.74 \pm 0.07 m; mass 68.12 \pm 4.54 kg) volunteered to take
part in the current investigation. Participants were all
competitive university level squash players. Ethical ap-
proval for this project was obtained from the University
ethics committee, and each participant provided written
consent in accordance with the declaration of Helsinki.

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2.2 Procedure

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Participants completed five lunges in each footwear con-
dition starting from a stationary position facing forward
(Fig. 1). Following each lunge they were required to re-
turn to a starting point which was determined by each
participant prior to the commencement of data collec-
tion. This allowed the lunge distance to be maintained for
each condition. Participants were also required to contact
a force platform (Kistler, Kistler Instruments Ltd., Alton,
Hampshire) embedded into the floor of the biomechanics
laboratory with their right (lead) foot. The force platform
sampled at 1000 Hz. The lunge movement was considered
to begin at the point of foot contact, this was taken as
the point at which > 20 N of vertical force was applied
to the force platform. The end of the lunge movement
was taken as the point of maximum knee flexion (Sinclair
& Bottoms, 2013). The peak linear velocity (m/s) of the
lunge movement was quantified using the centre of mass
of the pelvis segment (Sinclair, Toth, & Hobbs, 2015d).

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Kinematic information was obtained using an eight
camera optoelectric system capture system (Qualisys
Medical AB, Goteburg, Sweden) using a capture fre-
quency of 250 Hz. Kinematics and force platform data
were synchronized using an analogue to digital interface

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1 board. To model the lower extremity segments in six de-
 2 grees of freedom the calibrated anatomical systems tech-
 3 nique was utilized (Cappozzo, Catani, Leardini, Benedeti,
 4 & Della, 1995). To define the segment co-ordinate axes
 5 of the right; foot, shank and thigh, retroreflective mark-
 6 ers were placed unilaterally onto 1st metatarsal, 5th
 7 metatarsal, calcaneus, medial and lateral malleoli, me-
 8 dial and lateral epicondyles of the femur. To define the
 9 pelvic segment, additional markers were placed on the an-
 10 terior (ASIS) and posterior (PSIS) superior iliac spines.
 11 The centres of the ankle and knee joints were delineated
 12 as the mid-point between the malleoli and femoral epi-
 13 condyle markers (Graydon, Fewtrell, Atkins, & Sinclair
 14 2015; Sinclair Hebron, & Taylor 2015e). The hip joint cen-
 15 tre was delineated using a regression equation in accor-
 16 dance with Sinclair, Taylor, Currrigan, & Hobbs (2014a)
 17 (Fig. 2).

18 The Z (transverse) axis was oriented vertically from
 19 the distal segment end to the proximal segment end. The
 20 Y (coronal) axis was oriented in the segment from pos-
 21 terior to anterior. Finally, the X (sagittal) axis orienta-
 22 tion was determined using the right hand rule and was
 23 oriented from medial to lateral. Carbon fibre tracking
 24 clusters were positioned onto the shank and thigh seg-
 25 ments. The foot was tracked using the 1st metatarsal,
 26 5th metatarsal and calcaneus markers. Static calibration
 27 trials were obtained allowing for the anatomical mark-
 28 ers to be referenced in relation to the tracking markers/
 29 clusters. Previous work has confirmed that the reliability
 30 of this marker configuration is very high (Sinclair, *et al.*,
 31 2012).

32 2.3 Data processing

33 Ground reaction force (GRF) and marker data were fil-
 34 tered at 50 Hz and 12 Hz using a low-pass Butter-
 35 worth 4th order filter and processed using Visual 3-D
 36 (C-Motion, Germantown, MD, USA). Joint kinetics were
 37 computed using Newton-Euler inverse-dynamics, allow-
 38 ing net knee and ankle joint moments to be calculated. To
 39 quantify joint moment's segment mass, segment length,
 40 GRF and angular kinematics were utilized using the pro-
 41 cedure previously described by Sinclair (2014).

42 Knee loading was examined through extrac-
 43 tion of peak knee extensor/ abduction moments,
 44 peak patellofemoral contact force (PTCF) and peak
 45 patellofemoral contact pressure (PTS). PTCF during the
 46 lunge was estimated using knee flexion angle (*kfa*) and
 47 knee extensor moment (KEM) through the biomechanical
 48 model of Ho Blanchette, and Powers (2012). This
 49 model has been utilized previously to resolve differences
 50 in PTCF and PTS in during the lunge movement and
 51 when different footwear (Bonacci, *et al.*, 2013; Sinclair,
 52 2014; Sinclair & Bottoms, 2015). In addition to this
 53 previous work has confirmed the robustness of this model
 54 through sensitivity analyses for each of the measures
 55 (Sinclair, Taylor, & Atkins, 2015f).

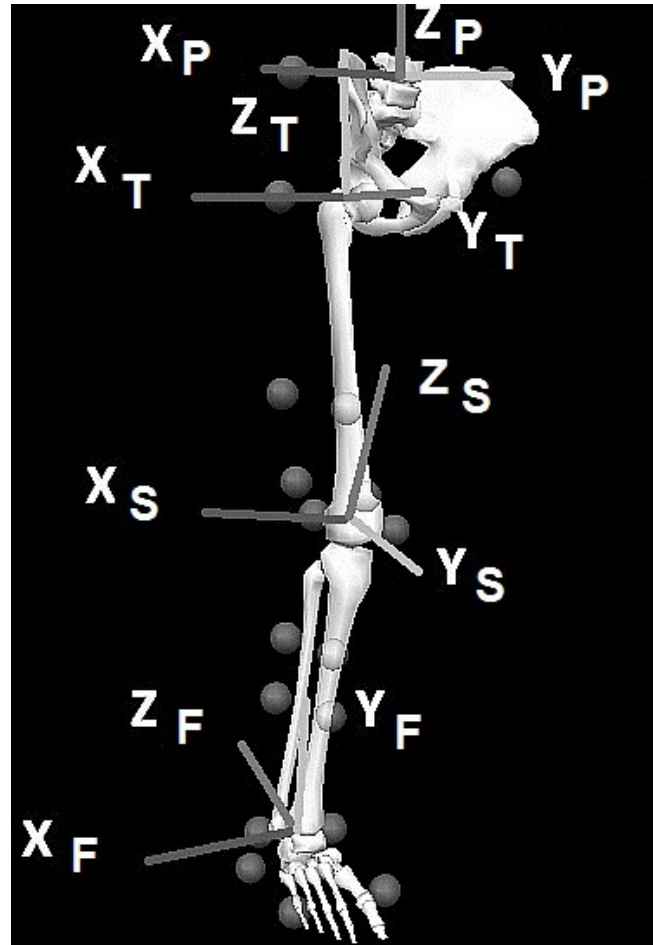


Fig. 2. Pelvic, thigh, tibial and foot segments, with anatomical axes. P = Pelvis, S = Shank, T = tibia and F = foot.

The effective moment arm distance (m) of the quadri- 56
 cepts muscle (QM) was calculated as a function of *kfa* using 57
 a non-linear equation, based on information presented by 58
 Van Eijden, Kouwenhoven, Verburg, & Weijs (1986): 59

$$QM = 0.00008 kfa^3 - 0.013 kfa^2 + 0.28 kfa + 0.046 \quad 60$$

The force (N) of the quadriceps (QF) was calculated using 61
 the below formula: 62

$$QF = KEM/QM \quad 63$$

Net PTCF was estimated using the QF and a con- 64
 stant (*C*): 65

$$PTCF = QF * C \quad 66$$

The *C* was described in relation to *kfa* using a curve fit- 67
 ting technique based on the non-linear equation described 68
 by Van Eijden, *et al.* (1986): 69

$$C = (0.462 + 0.00147 * kfa^2 - 0.0000384 * kfa^2) / \quad 70$$

$$(1 - 0.0162 * kfa + 0.000155 * kfa^2 - 0.000000698 * kfa^3) \quad 71$$

Table 1. Abbreviations of input parameters for knee and ankle load models.

Key	
Patellofemoral contact force	PTCF
Patellofemoral contact pressure	PTS
Knee flexion angle	<i>kfa</i>
Knee extensor moment	KEM
Quadriceps moment arm	QM
Quadriceps force	QF
Constant	C
Achilles tendon force	ATF
Ankle plantarflexor moment	MPF
Achilles tendon moment arm	mat
Sagittal ankle angle	<i>ak</i>

1 PTS (MPa) was calculated using the net PTCF divided
 2 by the patellofemoral contact area. The contact area was
 3 described using the Ho, *et al.* (2012) recommendations by
 4 fitting a 2nd order polynomial curve to the data of Powers,
 5 Lilley, & Lee (1998) showing patellofemoral contact areas
 6 at varying levels of *kfa*.

$$PTS = PTCF / \text{contact area}$$

8 Ankle loading was examined through extraction of the
 9 peak plantar flexion moment and peak Achilles tendon
 10 force (ATF). ATF was determined by dividing the plan-
 11 tarflexion moment (MPF) by the estimated Achilles ten-
 12 don moment arm (mat). The moment arm was quantified
 13 as a function of the ankle sagittal plane angle (*ak*) using
 14 the procedure described by Self & Paine (2001):

$$ATF = MPF / \text{mat}$$

$$\text{mat} = -0.5910 + 0.08297 \text{ ak} - 0.0002606 \text{ ak}^2$$

17 The net joint moments were normalized by dividing by
 18 body mass (Nm/kg). PTCF and ATF were also normal-
 19 ized by dividing by body weight (B.W). These variables
 20 were extracted from each of the five trials and the data
 21 was then averaged within participants for statistical anal-
 22 ysis. In accordance with Sinclair, Isherwood, & Taylor
 23 (2014b) GRF’s in all three axes and sagittal knee/ an-
 24 kle angles at the instances of peak PTCF and ATF were
 25 also obtained. GRF’s were normalized by dividing by
 26 bodyweight.

27 2.4 Experimental footwear

28 The footwear used during the current investigation con-
 29 sisted of a running shoe (New balance 1260 v2), mini-
 30 malist footwear (Vibram five-fingers, ELX) and squash
 31 specific shoe (Asics Mens GEL Rocket 7 Indoor), (shoe
 32 size 8-10 UK men’s).

33 2.5 Statistical analysis

34 Differences between footwear were examined using one-
 35 way repeated measures ANOVA with significance ac-
 36 cepted at the $p \leq 0.05$ level (Sinclair, Taylor, & Hobbs,

2013b). Post-hoc pairwise comparisons were conducted on 37
 all significant main effects using a Bonferroni adjustment. 38
 Effect sizes were calculated for each significant main effect 39
 using partial eta² ($p\eta^2$). The normality assumption was 40
 calculated using a Shapiro-Wilk test, which confirmed 41
 that all data were normally distributed. All statistical 42
 procedures were conducted using SPSS v22.0 (SPSS Inc, 43
 Chicago, USA). 44

45 3 Results

46 Figure 3 and Tables 2–3 show GRFs and knee/ ankle
 47 loads as a function of footwear. The statistical findings
 48 indicate that both knee and ankle loads were significantly
 49 influenced as a function of footwear.

50 3.1 Lunge velocity

51 No significant ($p > 0.05$) differences in lunge velocity were
 52 found between running shoe (1.65 ± 0.32 m/s), minimal-
 53 alist (1.63 ± 0.32 m/s) and squash specific footwear ($1.64 \pm$
 54 0.27 m/s).

55 3.2 Ground reaction forces and joint angles

56 No significant ($p > 0.05$) differences in GRF’s at the in-
 57 stances of PTCF of ATF were shown between footwear. A
 58 significant main effect was shown ($P < 0.05$, $p\eta^2 = 0.33$)
 59 for knee flexion angle at the instance of PTCF. Post-hoc
 60 pairwise comparisons showed that knee flexion was signif-
 61 icantly larger in the running shoes ($P = 0.014$) compared
 62 to the minimalist condition.

63 3.3 Knee loads

64 A significant main effect was shown ($P < 0.05$, $p\eta^2 =$
 65 0.32) for peak knee extensor moment. Post-hoc pairwise
 66 comparisons showed that peak extensor moment was sig-
 67 nificantly larger in the running shoes ($P = 0.04$) com-
 68 pared to the minimalist condition. In addition a sig-
 69 nificant main effect was found for PTCF ($P < 0.05$,
 70 $p\eta^2 = 0.42$). Post-hoc analysis indicated that PTCF was
 71 significantly larger in the running shoes ($P = 0.03$) com-
 72 pared to the minimalist condition. Finally a significant
 73 main effect was found for PTS ($P < 0.05$, $p\eta^2 = 0.41$).
 74 Post-hoc analysis indicated that PTS was significantly
 75 larger in the running shoes ($P = 0.03$) compared to the
 76 minimalist condition.

77 3.4 Ankle loads

78 A significant main effect was shown ($P < 0.05$, $p\eta^2 =$
 79 0.46) for peak ankle plantarflexor moment. Post-hoc pair-
 80 wise comparisons showed that peak plantarflexor moment

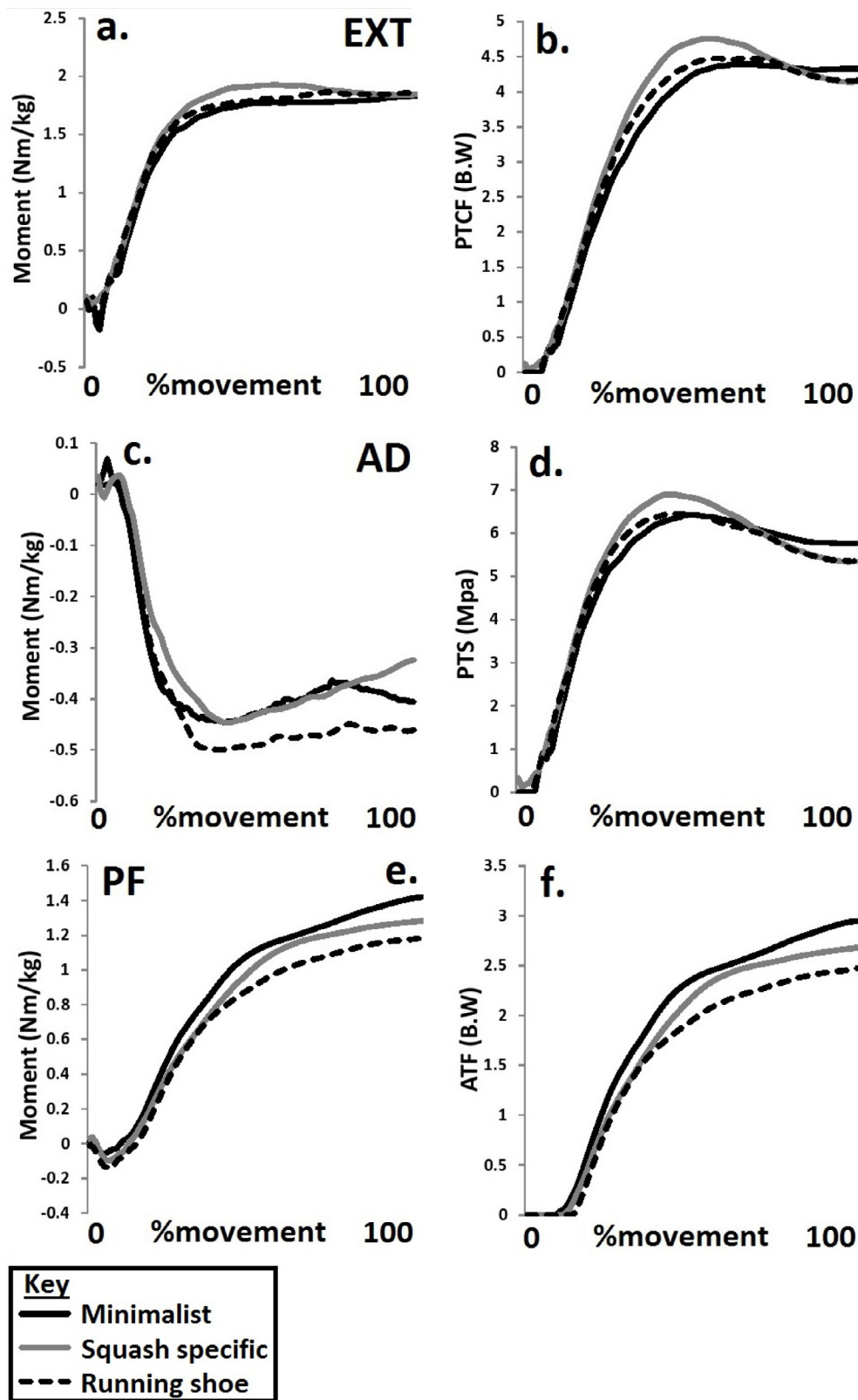


Fig. 3. Knee and ankle loads as a function of footwear (a. = knee extensor moment, b. = PTCF, c. = knee abduction moment, d. = PTS, e. = plantarflexor moment, f. = ATF) (EXT = extensor, AD = adductor, PF = plantarflexor).

Table 2. GRF's and knee/ ankle angles as a function of footwear.

	Running shoe		Minimalist		Squash footwear		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Medial force at PTCF (B.W)	0.05	0.07	0.04	0.07	0.04	0.07	
Anterior force at PTCF (B.W)	0.29	0.09	0.29	0.09	0.27	0.11	
Vertical force at PTCF (B.W)	1.19	0.17	1.18	0.17	1.19	0.18	
Knee angle at PTCF (°)	145.25	A 36.36	137.07	35.35	142.85	37.31	*
Medial force at ATF (B.W)	0.06	0.02	0.03	0.06	0.02	0.05	
Anterior force at ATF (B.W)	0.22	0.10	0.24	0.10	0.26	0.09	
Vertical force at ATF (B.W)	1.17	0.17	1.19	0.16	1.16	0.17	
Ankle angle at ATF (°)	19.75	9.29	21.04	8.82	19.82	4.65	

* = significant main effect.

A = significantly different from minimalist.

Table 3. Knee and ankle loads as a function of footwear.

	Running shoe		Minimalist		Squash footwear		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Peak knee extensor moment (Nm/kg)	2.16	A 0.58	2.03	0.52	2.13	0.56	*
Peak knee abduction moment (Nm/kg)	0.71	0.37	0.67	0.38	0.64	0.32	
Peak PTCF (B.W)	5.10	A 1.36	4.29	1.49	4.66	1.45	*
Peak PTS (Mpa)	6.94	A 2.10	5.67	2.38	6.04	2.24	*
Peak plantarflexor moment (Nm/kg)	1.26	A 0.21	1.49	0.29	1.38	A 0.22	*
Peak ATF (B.W)	2.64	A 0.47	3.10	0.63	2.88	A 0.48	*

* = significant main effect.

A = significantly different from minimalist.

1 was significantly larger in the minimalist footwear compared to the squash specific ($P = 0.026$) and running shoes ($P = 0.005$). A significant main effect was also found ($P < 0.05$, $p\eta^2 = 0.40$) for ATF. Post-hoc pairwise comparisons showed that ATF was significantly larger in the minimalist footwear compared to the squash specific ($P = 0.029$) and running shoes ($P = 0.007$).

8 4 Discussion

9 The aim of the current investigation was to examine the effects of different footwear on the loads experienced by the knee and ankle joints during the squash lunge. This represents the first investigation to study the effects of different footwear on knee and ankle loads in squash players. As the knee and ankle joints are the most frequently injured sites in squash players, this work may provide important information to squash players regarding the selection of appropriate footwear.

18 From these findings the first important observation is that peak knee loads were significantly larger in the running shoes in comparison to the minimalist footwear. This observation concurs with previous work investigating knee loading in runners. Sinclair (2014), Bonacci, *et al.* (2013), Sinclair, *et al.* (2015b, 2015c) each showed that knee loading in runners was significantly larger in running shoes footwear compared to barefoot and in minimalist footwear. This may be attributable to the significant increase in peak knee extensor moment and decrease

in knee flexion angle at PTCF. Increases in knee flexion are linked to a shortening of the quadriceps moment arm, which ultimately leads to an increase in the load borne by the patellofemoral joint (Sinclair, 2014). This finding may have clinical significance regarding the aetiology of injury in squash players as the consensus regarding the development of knee pathologies is that symptoms are the function of excessive knee joint kinetics (LaBella, 2004). Therefore it appears that for squash players susceptible to knee injuries that minimalist footwear may be more appropriate than running shoes although they do not appear to provide any advantage compared to squash footwear.

Of further importance is the finding that peak ankle loads were significantly greater in the minimalist footwear in comparison to the squash specific and running shoe conditions. This observation also concurs with the findings of Sinclair (2014) and Sinclair, *et al.* (2015c) who showed in runners that ankle loading was significantly larger when wearing minimalist footwear in comparison to conventional athletic trainers. It is proposed that this observation relates to the increase plantarflexion moment contribution observed in minimalist footwear as no differences in ankle angle were shown between footwear. This finding may also have relevance clinically as the development of Achilles tendon pathology is mediated by excessive and habitual loading of the tendon during dynamic activities (Magnusson, Langberg, & Kjaer, 2010). When the load experienced exceeds levels that are tolerable by the tendon itself this causes degeneration of the

1 tendon and eventually leads to injury (Selvanetti, Cipolla,
2 & Puddu, 1997). Based on this observation this study in-
3 dicates that for squash players who are predisposed to
4 ankle pathologies, that squash specific and running shoes
5 are most appropriate.

6 A potential drawback of the current study is that
7 only male squash players were tested. Sinclair & Bottoms
8 (2014), and Sinclair & Bottoms (2015) showed that knee
9 loads were significantly larger in females and ankle loads
10 were significantly greater in males during the lunge. As
11 such it appears that the findings from this study may not
12 be generalizable to female squash players. Future research
13 should seek to repeat this study using a sample of female
14 squash players. A further limitation is that only the lunge
15 movement was investigated. The lunge was chosen as it
16 represents a high impact movement (Sinclair, Bottoms,
17 Taylor, & Greenhalgh, 2010), which exposes the mus-
18 culoskeletal system to high forces. Competitive squash
19 also requires other motions for success including sprint-
20 ing, pivot turning and side stepping. Therefore future re-
21 search should investigate the effects of different footwear
22 when performing different squash movements.

23 In conclusion, the observations of the current investi-
24 gation show that performing the lunge movement in min-
25 imalist footwear produced significant reductions in knee
26 loading compared to running shoes. Given the proposed
27 relationship between knee loading and knee joint pathol-
28 ogy, squash players may be able to attenuate their risk
29 of the developing knee injuries by wearing minimalist
30 footwear as opposed to running shoes. However, taking
31 into account the corresponding increase in ankle loading
32 in minimalist footwear in comparison to the running shoes
33 and squash specific footwear, this may also enhance the
34 likelihood of chronic ankle injuries. Additional analyses
35 are required in order to expand the current investigation
36 to squash specific movements in addition to the lunge.

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