Review

Anterior cervical discectomy and fusion without plate (ACDFWP) versus anterior cervical disc arthroplasty (ACDA) for cervical spondylosis: A meta-analysis and literature review

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1. Introduction

Cervical spondylosis is a common disease characterized by progressive degeneration in the cervical spine and is regarded as a natural process of aging. The main symptoms of cervical spondylosis are neck pain and neck stiffness. Recently, an increasing number of young people are experiencing cervical spondylosis. It has been a public health concern related to remarkable disease burden. Since the 1950s, anterior cervical discectomy and fusion (ACDF) with plate has been regarded as the gold standard of therapy for cervical spondylosis (*1-3*). Although it has been well documented regarding its satisfactory efficacy, some complications, such as dysphagia (*4*), hoarseness (2), and adjacent segment disease (ASD) (3) are also reported. Some authors believe that these complications are caused by the influence of anterior vertebral plate fixation (4). Kepler *et al.* found that the fusion itself may contribute to more pressure between the adjacent segmental discs (5). Moreover, ASD might also result from the progression of cervical degeneration (6,7). Thus, the conventional ACDF with plate has limitations, and the adverse events cannot be ignored. To prevent these adverse events, alternative surgeries, such as ACDF without plate (ACDFWP) and anterior cervical disc arthroplasty (ACDA) were developed against cervical spondylosis (Figure 1).

Currently, many studies have reported a comparison of the clinical outcomes of conventional ACDF (with

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SUMMARY This meta-analysis compared the clinical outcomes between two alternative surgeries for patients with cervical spondylosis, namely anterior cervical discectomy and fusion (ACDF) without plate (ACDFWP) vs. anterior cervical disc arthroplasty (ACDA). We searched databases, including PubMed, EMBASE, Cochrane Library, Google Scholar, and Web of Science (firstly available-2019). A standard metaanalysis was performed with the included studies. A Risk of Bias in Non-randomized Studies of Interventions (ROBINS-I) tool was used for the evaluation of the study quality of nonrandomizedcontrolled trials (nRCTs), while a Risk of Bias (RoB) battery was used for randomized controlled trials (RCTs). Eight studies involving 640 patients were included. No significant difference was found in the indices of Neck Disability Index (NDI) score, Visual Analog Score (VAS), Japanese Orthopaedic Association (JOA) score, operative time, blood loss, Swallowing Quality of Life Score (SWAL-QL), and complications. Cervical alignment was significantly better in the ACDFWP than in ACDA (mean difference (MD) = -0.67, 95% confidence interval (CI) [-1.11, -0.23], $P = 0.003, I^2 = 20\%$). Although the alternative ACDFWP was slightly superior in terms of the index of cervical alignment, the limited research on this subject present insufficient evidence. Further well-designed studies are warranted in the future.

Keywords cervical spondylosis, anterior cervical discectomy and fusion without plate, anterior cervical disc arthroplasty, cervical alignment, meta-analysis

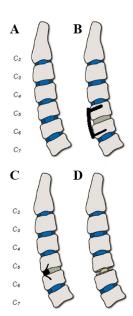


Figure 1. Schematic diagram of the surgeries for cervical spondylosis. A. Schematic diagram of the cervical spine. **B.** Conventional anterior cervical discectomy and fusion (ACDF) with plate. **C.** Anterior cervical discectomy and fusion without plate (ACDFWP). **D.** Anterior cervical disc arthroplasty (ACDA). Most of previous studies compared ACDF with plate and ACDA (B *vs.*D), in the present study we compared ACDFWP *vs.* ACDA (C *vs.* D).

plate) and alternative ACDFWP. Recently, Cheung et al. found that ACDFWP provides better clinical outcomes than conventional ACDF (with plate) (8). Other studies have also compared the clinical outcomes between conventional ACDF (with plate) and ACDA. Latka et al. reported that compared to conventional ACDF (with plate), ACDA significantly lowered the probability of ASD development at the 60-month follow-up. (9). And Maharaj et al. compared ACDA and ACDF (including with and without plate). They found that ACDA has superiority in terms of reoperation rate and reduction in neurological deficits (10). However, to our knowledge, no meta-analyses have compared the clinical outcomes between alternative surgeries, ACDFWP and ACDA. Thus, in order to provide a complete chain of evidence to enable the selection of an appropriate surgical technique for cervical spondylosis treatment by the clinicians, we designed this study to compare the clinical outcomes of the alternative ACDFWP and ACDA (Figure 1), strictly as per the guidelines of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) (11).

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Literature search strategy

English-language search of databases, including PubMed, EMBASE, Cochrane Library, Google Scholar, and Web of Science was performed with the keywords of "cervical spondylosis" AND "anterior cervical" AND "arthroplasty" AND "discectomy and fusion" OR "replacement". Studies from firstly available-2021 were included.

As per the inclusion criteria, (i) studies that compared the clinical outcomes between ACDA and ACDFWP in patients with cervical spondylosis, (ii) studies where complete data were available, (iii) randomized controlled trials (RCTs) and nonrandomized-controlled trials (nRCTs), and (iv) studies wherein at least one of the following assessments for clinical outcomes were reported: Neck Disability Index (NDI) score, Visual Analog Score (VAS), Japanese Orthopaedic Association (JOA) score, cervical alignment (The overall sagittal alignment of the cervical spine was calculated by the Cobb angle between the C2 and C7 vertebrae on the lateral radiograph), operative time, blood loss, complications, and Swallowing Quality of Life Score (SWAL-QL), were included. Furthermore, (i) non-English studies, (ii) review papers, (iii) meta-analyses, (iv) case reports and serious case reports, as well as (v) letters were excluded.

2.2. Data extraction

Three authors (JP, SL, XL) performed the literature search, read the title and abstract, and then screened the studies as per the inclusion/exclusion criteria. Subsequently, a senior scientist (TA) cross-checked and confirmed the quality of the included literature. Three authors (JP, SL, HS) extracted information (information of enrolled patients, therapy, experimental design, and outcome assessments) from the final selection of studies. We classified the assessments into two groups. One group contained indices that directly evaluated the clinical outcomes, including the NDI, VAS, JOA and cervical alignment; anther group contained the other factors associated with the surgeries, including operative time, blood loss, complications, and SWAL-QL. We discussed the data every day to reach consensus. Finally, all the data were checked by thirdparty authors (DZ, RZ, MH, PL) before submission for the meta-analysis.

2.3. Statistical analyses

We designed and performed this study strictly as per the PRISMA guidelines (11). We employed a RevMan 5.3 software (The Nordic Cochrane Center, The Cochrane Collaboration, Copenhagen, Denmark) for the metaanalysis. The odds ratio (OR) and the corresponding 95% confidence interval (CI) were calculated for the dichotomous outcomes. The mean difference (MD), and the 95% CI were calculated for the continuous data. During the homogeneity test, when $p \ge 0.1$ and $I^2 \le$ 50%, the studies were considered to be homogeneous, which were analyzed with a fixed-effect model; when p < 0.1 and $I^2 > 50\%$, the studies were regarded to be heterogeneous, which were analyzed with a randomeffects model. Subgroups analyses were performed for considering the subgroups in some groups, such as VAS (neck and arm), cervical alignment (whole and local) and complications (ASD is regarded as the most important adverse event).

2.4. Assessment of study quality of the included studies

Three authors (SL, JP and RX) performed quality assessment for the study. A Risk of Bias (RoB) in Non-randomized Studies of Interventions (ROBINS-I) tool (*12*) was employed to assess the study quality of nRCTs. A RoB battery developed by the Cochrane Collaboration was used for the RCTs (*13*).

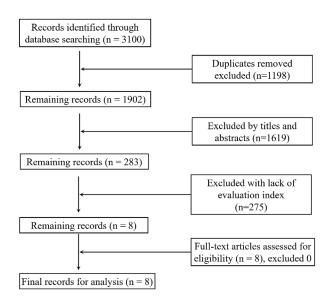


Figure 2. Flow chart of the searching strategy and selection of literature reports.

Table 1. Characteristics of the included studies	Table 1.	Characteristics	of the	included	studies
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3. Results

3.1. Literature searching results

Total 3100 studies were identified in the first search. First, duplicate studies (1,198) and those with an inappropriate title and abstract (1,619) were excluded. Thereafter, the remaining 283 studies were read and selected within which 275 items were excluded. Finally, 8 studies were included and submitted for the metaanalysis (Figure 2). The characteristics of the included studies are listed in Table 1.

3.2. Assessments of the study quality

Figure 3 shows the results of the assessments of study quality using a RoB tool (for RCTs) and a ROBINS-I tool (for nRCTs). Overall, three RCTs had low RoB. Only one study (Qizhi et al. 2016) had a high risk of blinding, and one study a had high risk of other bias (Donk et al. 2017b). The study quality of the included RCTs was satisfactory (Figure 3A). However, the study quality of the included nRCTs was weaker. The study by Park et al. 2008 had a serious RoB and that by Vorsic et al. 2010 had a critical RoB. Confounding bias was involved in 2 studies (14,15). One study had missing data (14). Overall, two studies were of low quality (14, 15), and other 3 studies were identified as having moderate study quality (Figure 3B). We could not evaluate the publication bias because only 3 RCTs and 5 nRCTs were included in this study.

3.3. Assessments of the postoperative clinical efficacy achieved with the ACDFWP and ACDA.

Figure 3 shows the results of the assessments of study quality using a RoB tool (for RCTs) and a ROBINS-I

Included Trials	Study Design	Sample size	Average age (\bar{y})	Gender (M/F)	Level	Implants
Park et al. 2008	R	ACDA: 21	45	11/10	1	Mobi-C
		ACDFWP: 32	47	20/12		Solis
Vorsic et al. 2010	Р	ACDA: 40	48.1	13/27	1/2	ProDisc-C
		ACDFWP: 40	51.3	12/28		ChronOS
Park et al. 2012	R	ACDA: 22	39.9	19/3	1	ProDisc-C
		ACDFWP: 21	44.3	11/10		Solis
Qizhi et al. 2016	RCT	ACDA: 14	46.79	9/5	2	Discover
		ACDFWP: 16	48.13	11/5		Zore-P
Shi et al. 2016a	R	ACDA: 60	46.5	24/36	1	Discover
		ACDFWP: 68	47.4	33/35		Zore-P
Shi et al. 2016b	Р	ACDA: 55	48.9 ± 7.0	30/25	1	Discover
		ACDFWP: 57	50.6 ± 7.2	37/20		Zore-P
Donk et al. 2017a	RCT	ACDA: 50	44.1 ± 6.4	24/26	1	Bryan
		ACDFWP: 47	43.1 ± 7.5	25/22		Brantigan
Donk et al. 2017b	RCT	ACDA: 50	53.6 ± 6.9	24/26	1	Bryan
		ACDFWP: 47	52.2 ± 8.1	25/22		Brantigan

ACDA: anterior cervical disc arthroplasty; ACDFWP: anterior cervical discectomy and fusion without plate; R: Retrospective; P: Prospective; RCT: Randomized controlled study.

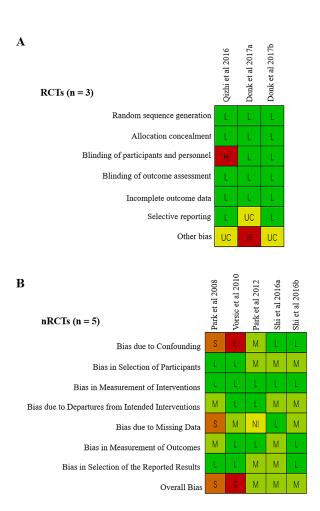


Figure 3. Quality assessment of the involved literatures with a **RoB tool for RCTs (A) and a ROBINS-I tool for nRCTs (B).** L = Low, UC = Unclear, H = High, M = Moderate, S = Serious, C = Critical, NI = No information.

tool (for nRCTs). Overall, three RCTs had low RoB. Only one study (Qizhi *et al.* 2016) had a high risk of blinding, and one study a had high risk of other bias (Donk *et al.* 2017b). The study quality of the included RCTs was satisfactory (Figure 3A). However, the study quality of the included nRCTs was weaker. The study by Park *et al.* 2008 had a serious RoB and that by Vorsic *et al.* 2010 had a critical RoB. Confounding bias was involved in 2 studies (*14,15*). One study had missing data (*14*). Overall, two studies were of low quality (*14,15*), and other 3 studies were identified as having moderate study quality (Figure 3B). We could not evaluate the publication bias because only 3 RCTs and 5 nRCTs were included in this study.

3.3.1. NDI

From among the studies that have reported postoperative NDI scores, one study (14) was excluded owing to lack of data on standard deviation of NDI. The remaining five studies (15-19) reported the postoperative NDI for 378 patients. No significant difference was observed in the NDI scores of the ACDFWP and ACDA (MD = 0.15,

C1	why or Subgroup	ACDA	SD 1	fotal		DFW	'P Total	Moigh	Mean Difference		
	ndy or Subgroup		85	fotal 40	38.7	16.1	10tal 40				
	i 2016a		24	60	5.66	1.24	68				
	hi 2016		.94	14	3.25	0.93	16				
	rk 2012	12.9 1	2.5	22	12.2	13.1	21	0.29			_
	nk 2017a		6.7	50	7.1	8.3	47	1.49			
	al (95% Cl)			186			192	100.09	6 0.15 [-0.21, 0.5	51] 🕴	
	terogeneity: Chi ² = 1				l ^a = 0%	,				-10 -5 0 5	1
Tes	st for overall effect: 2	Z = 0.83 (F	° = 0.4	40)						ACDA ACDFWP	
		ACDA			۵	CDF	NP				
3									lean Difference	Mean Difference	
۰.	Study or Subgroup	Mean	SD	Total	Mean	SD 1	otal V	Neight	IV, Fixed, 95% CI	IV, Fixed, 95% Cl	_
	2.3.1 VAS-arm										
	Vorsic 2010	3.3	2.2	40	3.5	1.8	40	24.1%	-0.20 [-1.08, 0.68]		
	Park 2012	2.3	2.1	22	2.6	2.5	21	9.8%	-0.30 [-1.68, 1.08]		
	Donk 2017a	1.5	2.5	50	1.9	2.6	47	18.1%	-0.40 [-1.42, 0.62]		
	Subtotal (95% CI)			112			108		0.29 [-0.89, 0.31]		
	Heterogeneity: Chi*	- 0 00 df	- 2/P	- 0.96): IF = 0;	x.					
	Test for overall effect				/1-0	~					
	2.3.2 VAS-neck									_	
	Vorsic 2010	4.3	1.8	40	4.7	1.8	40	30.0%	-0.40 [-1.19, 0.39]		
	Donk 2017a	1.5	2.4	50	2.2	2.7	47	18.0%	-0.70 [-1.72, 0.32]		
	Subtotal (95% CI)			90			87	48.0%	0.51 [-1.14, 0.11]		
	Heterogeneity: Chi*	= 0.21, df	= 1 (P	= 0.65); l ² = 0'	%					
	Test for overall effect										
	Total (95% CI)			202			195 '	100.0%	0.40 [-0.83, 0.04]	-	
	Heterogeneity: Chi ²); I² = 0'	%			-	-1 -0.5 0 0.5 1	-
	Test for overall effer									ACDA ACDFWP	
	Test for subaroup d	ifferences	∴ Chi²	= 0.26.	df = 1 (P = 0.6	61), I²=	:0%		ACDA ACDITIF	
~		ACD	A			ACD	WP		Mean Difference	Mean Difference	
2	Study or Subgroup			Total	Mean		Total	Weight		IV. Fixed, 95% CI	
	Qizhi 2016	13.79					16			10,1160,357 G	_
	Shi 2016a	14.28			13.69 14.24		68				
	Total (95% CI)			74			84	100.0%	0.05 [-0.36, 0.46]		
	Heterogeneity: Chi ²	² = 0.01, df	= 1 (P); ² = 0'	%	54				_
	Test for overall effe				//· ·					-1 -0.5 0 0.5 1 ACDA ACDFWP	
			DA			ACE	FWP		Mean Difference	Mean Difference	
D	Churche or Cultureum		cn.	Total	Heen	cn.			B/ Fixed OFV CI		
)	Study or Subgroup	Mean		Total	Mean	SD		Weight	IV, Fixed, 95% CI	IV, Fixed, 95% Cl	
C	4.5.1 cervical over	<u>Mean</u> all alignme	ent				Total	Weight			_
C		Mean	ent		<u>Mean</u> 10.39				IV, Fixed, 95% CI 0.12 [-1.58, 1.82]		_
C	4.5.1 cervical over	<u>Mean</u> all alignme 10.51	ent 4.46		10.39	4.71	Total	Weight 6.8%	0.12 [-1.58, 1.82]		_
D	4.5.1 cervical overa Shi 2016b Shi 2016a	<u>Mean</u> all alignme 10.51 7.98	ent 4.46 2.92	55 60	10.39 8.36	4.71 2.42	<u>Total</u> 57 68	Weight 6.8% 22.2%	0.12 [-1.58, 1.82] -0.38 [-1.32, 0.56]		
C	4.5.1 cervical over Shi 2016b Shi 2016a Qizhi 2016	<u>Mean</u> all alignme 10.51 7.98 17.07	ent 4.46 2.92 2.59	55 60 14	10.39 8.36 16.88	4.71 2.42 2.85	<u>Total</u> 57 68 16	Weight 6.8% 22.2% 5.1%	0.12 (-1.58, 1.82) -0.38 (-1.32, 0.56) 0.19 (-1.76, 2.14)		
C	4.5.1 cervical over Shi 2016b Shi 2016a Qizhi 2016 Donk 2017b	<u>Mean</u> all alignme 10.51 7.98 17.07	ent 4.46 2.92	55 60 14 50	10.39 8.36 16.88	4.71 2.42	Total 57 68 16 47	Weight 6.8% 22.2% 5.1% 0.8%	0.12 [-1.58, 1.82] -0.38 [-1.32, 0.56] 0.19 [-1.76, 2.14] -2.60 [-7.68, 2.46]		
C	4.5.1 cervical over Shi 2016b Shi 2016a Qizhi 2016 Donk 2017b Subtotal (95% CI)	<u>Mean</u> all alignme 10.51 7.98 17.07 14	4.46 2.92 2.59 12.7	55 60 14 50 179	10.39 8.36 16.88 16.6	4.71 2.42 2.85 12.8	<u>Total</u> 57 68 16	Weight 6.8% 22.2% 5.1%	0.12 (-1.58, 1.82) -0.38 (-1.32, 0.56) 0.19 (-1.76, 2.14)		
)	4.5.1 cervical over Shi 2016b Shi 2016a Qizhi 2016 Donk 2017b Subtotal (95% CI) Heterogeneity: Chi ²	<u>Mean</u> all alignme 10.51 7.98 17.07 14 ² = 1.28, df	ent 4.46 2.92 2.59 12.7 = 3 (P	55 60 14 50 179 = 0.74	10.39 8.36 16.88 16.6	4.71 2.42 2.85 12.8	Total 57 68 16 47	Weight 6.8% 22.2% 5.1% 0.8%	0.12 [-1.58, 1.82] -0.38 [-1.32, 0.56] 0.19 [-1.76, 2.14] -2.60 [-7.68, 2.46]		
)	4.5.1 cervical over Shi 2016b Shi 2016a Qizhi 2016 Donk 2017b Subtotal (95% CI)	<u>Mean</u> all alignme 10.51 7.98 17.07 14 ² = 1.28, df	ent 4.46 2.92 2.59 12.7 = 3 (P	55 60 14 50 179 = 0.74	10.39 8.36 16.88 16.6	4.71 2.42 2.85 12.8	Total 57 68 16 47	Weight 6.8% 22.2% 5.1% 0.8%	0.12 [-1.58, 1.82] -0.38 [-1.32, 0.56] 0.19 [-1.76, 2.14] -2.60 [-7.68, 2.46]		
C	4.5.1 cervical over Shi 2016b Shi 2016a Qizhi 2016 Donk 2017b Subtotal (95% Cl) Heterogeneity: Chi ² Test for overall effer 4.5.2 operative seg	Mean all alignme 10.51 7.98 17.07 14 3= 1.28, df ct Z = 0.65 gmental ali	ent 4.46 2.92 2.59 12.7 = 3 (P 5 (P = 0 ignme	55 60 14 50 179 = 0.74 0.52)	10.39 8.36 16.88 16.6	4.71 2.42 2.85 12.8	Total 57 68 16 47	Weight 6.8% 22.2% 5.1% 0.8%	0.12 [-1.58, 1.82] -0.38 [-1.32, 0.56] 0.19 [-1.76, 2.14] -2.60 [-7.68, 2.46]		
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S	4.5.1 cervical over: Shi 2016b Shi 2016a Qizhi 2016 Donk 2017b Subtotal (95% CI) Heterogeneity: Chi ² Test for overall effer 4.5.2 operative seg Shi 2016b Shi 2016a	Mean all alignme 10.51 7.98 17.07 14 ² = 1.28, df ct Z = 0.65 gmental ali 3.84 3.71	ent 4.46 2.92 2.59 12.7 = 3 (P 5 (P = 0 2.05 2.07	55 60 14 50 179 := 0.74 0.52) ant 55 60	10.39 8.36 16.88 16.6); P= 09 4.59 4.47	4.71 2.42 2.85 12.8 6 2.51 2.28	Total 57 68 16 47 188 57 68	Weight 6.8% 22.2% 5.1% 0.8% 34.9% 27.1% 34.3%	0.12 [-1.58, 1.82] -0.38 [-1.32, 0.56] 0.19 [-1.76, 2.14] -2.60 [-7.68, 2.48] -0.25 [-0.99, 0.50] -0.75 [-1.60, 0.10] -0.76 [-1.51, -0.01]		
S	4.5.1 cervical over: Shi 2016b Shi 2016a Qizhi 2016 Donk 2017b Subtotal (95% Cl) Helerogeneity: Chi ² Test for overall effer 4.5.2 operative seg Shi 2016b Shi 2016b Shi 2016b Shi 2016b	Mean all alignme 10.51 7.98 17.07 14 *= 1.28, df ct Z = 0.65 gmental ali 3.84	ent 4.46 2.92 2.59 12.7 = 3 (P 5 (P = 0 2.05 2.07	55 60 14 50 179 = 0.74 0.52) ant 55 60 50	10.39 8.36 16.88 16.6); P= 09 4.59	4.71 2.42 2.85 12.8 6	Total 57 68 16 47 188 57 68 47	Weight 6.8% 22.2% 5.1% 0.8% 34.9% 27.1% 34.3% 3.6%	0.12 [-1.58, 1.82] -0.38 [-1.32, 0.56] 0.19 [-1.76, 2.14] -2.60 [-7.68, 2.46] -0.25 [-0.99, 0.50] -0.75 [-1.60, 0.10] -0.76 [-1.51, -0.01] -3.30 [-5.62, -0.96]		
S	4.5.1 cervical over: Shi 2016b Shi 2016b Ook 2017b Subtotal (95% CI) Heterogeneity, Chi [*] Test for overall effer 4.5.2 operative seg Shi 2016b Shi 2016b Shi 2016b Shi 2016b	 Mean. all alignme 10.51 7.98 17.07 14 2 = 1.28, df ct Z = 0.65 gmental ali 3.84 3.71 1.4 	ent 4.46 2.92 2.59 12.7 = 3 (P 5 (P = 0 2.05 2.07 5.5	55 60 14 50 179 = 0.74 0.52) ant 55 60 50 165	10.39 8.36 16.88 16.6); I ² = 09 4.59 4.47 4.7	4.71 2.42 2.85 12.8 6 2.51 2.28 6.1	Total 57 68 16 47 188 57 68	Weight 6.8% 22.2% 5.1% 0.8% 34.9% 27.1% 34.3% 3.6%	0.12 [-1.58, 1.82] -0.38 [-1.32, 0.56] 0.19 [-1.76, 2.14] -2.60 [-7.68, 2.48] -0.25 [-0.99, 0.50] -0.75 [-1.60, 0.10] -0.76 [-1.51, -0.01]		
D	4.5.1 cervical over: Shi 2016b Shi 2016a Qizhi 2016 Donk 2017b Subtotal (95% Cl) Helerogeneity: Chi ² Test for overall effer 4.5.2 operative seg Shi 2016b Shi 2016b Shi 2016b Shi 2016b	 Mean. all alignme 10.51 7.98 17.07 14 * 1.28, df ct Z = 0.65 gmental ali 3.84 3.71 1.4 * 4.38, df 	ent 4.46 2.92 2.59 12.7 5 (P = (ignme 2.05 2.07 5.5 = 2 (P	55 60 14 50 179 (= 0.74) 0.52) ant 55 60 50 165 (= 0.11)	10.39 8.36 16.88 16.6); I ² = 09 4.59 4.47 4.7	4.71 2.42 2.85 12.8 6 2.51 2.28 6.1	Total 57 68 16 47 188 57 68 47	Weight 6.8% 22.2% 5.1% 0.8% 34.9% 27.1% 34.3% 3.6%	0.12 [-1.58, 1.82] -0.38 [-1.32, 0.56] 0.19 [-1.76, 2.14] -2.60 [-7.68, 2.46] -0.25 [-0.99, 0.50] -0.75 [-1.60, 0.10] -0.76 [-1.51, -0.01] -3.30 [-5.62, -0.96]		
D	4.5.1 cervical over; Shi 2016b Shi 2016b Donk 2017b Subtotal (95% CI) Helerogeneity: Chi ^T Test for overall effer 4.5.2 operative seg Shi 2016b Shi 2016b Shi 2016b Shi 2016b Shi 2017b Subtotal (95% CI) Helerogeneity: Chi ^T Test for overall effer	 Mean. all alignme 10.51 7.98 17.07 14 * 1.28, df ct Z = 0.65 gmental ali 3.84 3.71 1.4 * 4.38, df 	ent 4.46 2.92 2.59 12.7 5 (P = (ignme 2.05 2.07 5.5 = 2 (P	55 60 14 50 179 = 0.74; 0.52) ant 55 60 50 165 50 165 = 0.11; 0.001)	10.39 8.36 16.88 16.6); I ² = 09 4.59 4.47 4.7	4.71 2.42 2.85 12.8 6 2.51 2.28 6.1	Total 57 68 16 47 188 57 68 47 172	Weight 6.8% 22.2% 5.1% 0.8% 34.9% 27.1% 34.3% 34.3% 65.1%	0.12 [-1.59, 1.82] -0.38 [-1.32, 0.56] -0.19 [-1.76, 2.14] -2.00 [-7.68, 2.46] -0.25 [-0.99, 0.50] -0.75 [-1.60, 0.10] -0.76 [-1.51, -0.01] -3.30 [-5.62, -0.98] -0.90 [-1.44, -0.35]		
C	4.5.1 cervical over; Shi 2016b Shi 2016b Oizhi 2017b Subtotal (95% C1) Heterogeneity; Chi ⁷ Test for overall effe 4.5.2 operative seg Shi 2016b Shi 2016b Shi 2016b Subtotal (95% C1) Heterogeneity; Chi ⁷ Test for overall effe Total (95% C1)	Mean all alignme 10.51 7.98 17.07 14 3 = 1.28, df ct Z = 0.65 gmental ali 3.84 3.71 1.4 3 = 4.38, df ct Z = 3.21	ent 4.46 2.92 2.59 12.7 = 3 (P = (2.05 2.07 5.5 = 2 (P (P = (55 60 14 50 179 = 0.74; 0.52) nt 55 60 50 165 50 165 105 105 105 105 105 105 105 10	10.39 8.36 16.88 16.6 (; P= 09 4.59 4.47 4.7 (; P= 54	4.71 2.42 2.85 12.8 6 2.51 2.28 6.1	Total 57 68 16 47 188 57 68 47 172	Weight 6.8% 22.2% 5.1% 0.8% 34.9% 27.1% 34.3% 34.3% 65.1%	0.12 [-1.58, 1.82] -0.38 [-1.32, 0.56] 0.19 [-1.76, 2.14] -2.60 [-7.68, 2.46] -0.25 [-0.99, 0.50] -0.75 [-1.60, 0.10] -0.76 [-1.51, -0.01] -3.30 [-5.62, -0.96]	M. Fixed, 95% Cl	
D	4.5.1 cervical over; Shi 2018b Shi 2018b Oonk 2017b Subtotal (95% CI) Heterogeneity: Chi ² Test for overall effer 4.5.2 operative seg Shi 2018b Shi 2018b Shi 2018b Shi 2018b Shi 2017b Subtotal (95% CI) Heterogeneity: Chi ² Test for overall effer Total (95% CI)	 Mean Mean all alignme 10.51 7.98 17.07 14 *= 1.28, df ct Z = 0.65 gmental ali 3.84 3.84	ent 4.46 2.92 2.59 12.7 = 3 (P = (ignme 2.05 2.07 5.5 = 2 (P = ((P = (= 6 (P	55 60 14 50 179 = 0.74; 0.52) ant 55 60 55 60 165 165 165 165 165 165 165 165	10.39 8.36 16.88 16.6 (; P= 09 4.59 4.47 4.7 (; P= 54	4.71 2.42 2.85 12.8 6 2.51 2.28 6.1	Total 57 68 16 47 188 57 68 47 172	Weight 6.8% 22.2% 5.1% 0.8% 34.9% 27.1% 34.3% 34.3% 65.1%	0.12 [-1.59, 1.82] -0.38 [-1.32, 0.56] -0.19 [-1.76, 2.14] -2.00 [-7.68, 2.46] -0.25 [-0.99, 0.50] -0.75 [-1.60, 0.10] -0.76 [-1.51, -0.01] -3.30 [-5.62, -0.98] -0.90 [-1.44, -0.35]	M. Fixed, 95% Cl	+10
2	4.5.1 cervical over; Shi 2016b Shi 2016b Oizhi 2017b Subtotal (95% C1) Heterogeneity; Chi ⁷ Test for overall effe 4.5.2 operative seg Shi 2016b Shi 2016b Shi 2016b Subtotal (95% C1) Heterogeneity; Chi ⁷ Test for overall effe Total (95% C1)	 Mean all alignme 10.51 7.98 17.07 14 * 1.28, df ct Z = 0.65 gmental ali 3.84 3.84 1.4 * 4.38, df ct Z = 3.21 * = 7.55, df ct Z = 2.98 	ent 4.46 2.92 2.59 12.7 = 3 (P = (ignme 2.05 2.07 5.5 = 2 (P = ((P = (= 6 (P = (55 60 14 179 = 0.74; 0.52) ant 55 60 50 165 50 165 50 165 50 165 50 165 50 165 50 165 50 165 50 10.001)	10.39 8.36 16.88 16.8 (); P= 09 4.59 4.47 4.7 4.7 (); P= 54	4.71 2.42 2.85 12.8 6 2.51 2.28 6.1 %	Total 57 68 16 47 188 57 68 47 172 360	Weight 6.8% 22.2% 5.1% 0.8% 34.9% 27.1% 34.3% 65.1%	0.12 [-1.59, 1.82] -0.38 [-1.32, 0.56] -0.19 [-1.76, 2.14] -2.00 [-7.68, 2.46] -0.25 [-0.99, 0.50] -0.75 [-1.60, 0.10] -0.76 [-1.51, -0.01] -3.30 [-5.62, -0.98] -0.90 [-1.44, -0.35]	M. Fixed, 95% Cl	+10

Figure 4. Meta-analysis for the clinical assessments of ACDA and ACDFWP. A. Forest plot for the scores of NDI. B. Forest plot for the scores of VAS. C. Forest plot for the scores of JOA. D. Forest plot for the scores of cervical alignment.

95% CI [-0.21, 0.51], P = 0.40, $I^2 = 0\%$) (Figure 4A).

3.3.2. VAS

Four studies (14-16,19) reported the postoperative VAS scores, within one study (14) was withdrawn for analysis because they did not report the standard deviation. The remaining three studies suggested non-significant differences in the VAS scores of the two groups (MD = -0.40, 95% CI [-0.83, 0.04], $P = 0.07, I^2 = 0\%$). We also introduced subgroups analysis and found no difference between the subgroups (Figure 4B).

3.3.3. JOA

Two studies reported the postoperative JOA scores (17,18), with 158 patients being enrolled. The pooled analysis showed no significant difference in the postoperative JOA scores of the ACDFWP and ACDA (MD = 0.05, 95% CI [-0.36, 0.46], P = 0.80, $I^2 = 0\%$) (Figure 4C).

3.3.4. Cervical alignment

Study or Subgroup	ACDA Mean S	D Total		SDFWF			Mean Differenc V, Random, 95%	
Shi 2016a	79.2 8			6.9		50.7%	-7.30 [-9.94, -4	
Shi 2016b	98.4 7					9.3%	1.20 [-2.14, 4	
Total (95% CI)		115			125 10	00.0%	-3.11 [-11.44, 5.	22]
Heterogeneity: Tau ² =	33.76; Ch	i ² = 15.29	3. df = 1 (P < 0.0	001); l²=	93%	• •	-20 -10 0 10 20
Test for overall effect:								-20 -10 0 10 20 ACDA ACDFWP
В	ACDA			ACDF			Mean Differend	
Study or Subgroup	Mean						IV, Fixed, 95%	
Shi 2016a	78.4 1			1 14.5	68		1.30 [-3.68, 6.	
Shi 2016b	89.8 1	4.4 5	55 86.	2 12.3	57	50.1%	3.60 [-1.37, 8.	57]
Total (95% CI)		11			125	100.0%	2.45 [-1.06, 5.9	97]
Heterogeneity: Chi ² =				1%				-10 -5 0 5 10
Test for overall effect:								ACDA ACDFWP
С	ACI				FWP		Mean Differenc	
Study or Subgroup							IV, Fixed, 95%	
Qizhi 2016	67.36		4 66.9			14.8%	0.42 (-1.99, 2.8	
Shi 2016b	65.4 2	.83 5	5 64.53	2.58	57	85.2%	0.87 (-0.13, 1.8	3/]
Total (95% CI)		6			73	100.0%	0.80 [-0.12, 1.7	73]
Heterogeneity: Chi ² =			74); I²= (%				-2 -1 0 1 2
Test for overall effect:	Z=1.70 (P = 0.09)						ACDA ACDFWP
D A	CDA		ACD	FWP		Od	ds Ratio	Odds Ratio
Study or Subgroup	Events	Total	Events	Total	Weight	M-H,	Fixed, 95% Cl	M-H, Fixed, 95% Cl
8.1.1 ASD								
Shi 2016a	2	60	2	68	5.9%	1.1	4 [0.16, 8.34]	
Qizhi 2016	0	14	3	16	10.3%	0.1	3 [0.01, 2.82]	
Qizhi 2016 Park 2012	0 11	14 22	3 9		10.3% 14.9%		3 (0.01, 2.82) 33 (0.40, 4.44)	
		22 50		16 21 47	14.9% 18.2%	1.3		
Park 2012	11	22	9	16 21	14.9%	1.3	3 [0.40, 4.44]	
Park 2012 Donk 2017a	11	22 50	9	16 21 47	14.9% 18.2%	1.3	3 [0.40, 4.44] 8 [0.00, 1.42]	
Park 2012 Donk 2017a Subtotal (95% CI) Total events Heterogeneity: Chi ² =	11 0 13 4.95, df=	22 50 146 : 3 (P = 0	9 5 19 1.18); F=	16 21 47 152	14.9% 18.2%	1.3	3 [0.40, 4.44] 8 [0.00, 1.42]	
Park 2012 Donk 2017a Subtotal (95% CI) Total events	11 0 13 4.95, df=	22 50 146 : 3 (P = 0	9 5 19 1.18); F=	16 21 47 152	14.9% 18.2%	1.3	3 [0.40, 4.44] 8 [0.00, 1.42]	•
Park 2012 Donk 2017a Subtotal (95% CI) Total events Heterogeneity: Chi ² =	11 0 13 4.95, df= Z= 1.23	22 50 146 : 3 (P = 0	9 5 19 1.18); F=	16 21 47 152	14.9% 18.2%	1.3	3 [0.40, 4.44] 8 [0.00, 1.42]	•
Park 2012 Donk 2017a Subtotal (95% Cl) Total events Heterogeneity: Chi [#] = Test for overall effect:	11 0 13 4.95, df= Z= 1.23	22 50 146 : 3 (P = 0	9 5 19 1.18); F=	16 21 47 152	14.9% 18.2%	1.3 0.0 0.6	3 [0.40, 4.44] 8 [0.00, 1.42]	
Park 2012 Donk 2017a Subtotal (95% Cl) Total events Heterogeneity: Chi [#] = Test for overall effect 8.1.2 other complica	11 0 13 4.95, df= :Z= 1.23 tions	22 50 146 : 3 (P = 0 (P = 0.22	9 5 19 1.18); *= 2)	16 21 47 152 : 39%	14.9% 18.2% 49.3%	1.3 0.0 0.6 0.6	33 (0.40, 4.44) 18 (0.00, 1.42) 0 (0.26, 1.36)	
Park 2012 Donk 2017a Subtotal (95% CI) Total events Heterogeneity: Chi ² = Test for overall effect: 8.1.2 other complica Vorsic 2010	11 0 13 4.95, df= Z = 1.23 tions 1 20 3	22 50 146 : 3 (P = 0 (P = 0.22 40 60 14	9 5 19 1.18); *= 2) 0 10 4	16 21 47 152 : 39% 40 68 16	14.9% 18.2% 49.3 % 1.6%	1.3 0.0 0.6 3.08 2.9	33 (0.40, 4.44] 18 (0.00, 1.42) 0 (0.26, 1.36) 8 (0.12, 77.80)	
Park 2012 Donk 2017a Subtotal (95% CI) Total events Heterogeneity: Chi [#] = Test for overall effect: 8.1.2 other complica Vorsic 2010 Shi 2016a	11 0 13 4.95, df= Z = 1.23 tions 1 20	22 50 146 : 3 (P = 0 (P = 0.22 40 60	9 5 19 1.18); *= 2) 0 10	16 21 47 152 : 39% 40 68	14.9% 18.2% 49.3 % 1.6% 20.3%	1.3 0.0 0.6 3.08 2.9 0.8	33 (0.40, 4.44) 18 (0.00, 1.42) 0 (0.26, 1.36) 8 (0.12, 77.80) 10 (1.23, 6.85)	
Park 2012 Donk 2017a Subtotal (95% CI) Total events Heterogeneity: Chi ² = Test for overall effect: 8.12 other complica Vorsic 2010 Shi 2016a Qizhi 2016 Park 2008 Donk 2017a	11 0 13 4.95, df= Z = 1.23 tions 1 20 3	22 50 146 3 (P = 0 (P = 0.22 40 60 14 21 50	9 5 19 1.18); *= 2) 0 10 4	16 21 47 152 39% 40 68 16 32 47	14.9% 18.2% 49.3% 1.6% 20.3% 9.5%	1.3 0.0 0.6 0.6 3.08 2.9 0.8 0.8	33 (0.40, 4.44) 18 (0.00, 1.42) 0 (0.26, 1.36) 8 (0.12, 77.80) 10 (1.23, 6.85) 12 (0.15, 4.51)	
Park 2012 Donk 2017a Subtotal (95% CI) Total events Heterogeneity: Chi₹= Test for overall effect 8.1.2 other complica Vorsic 2010 Shi 2016a Qizhi 2016 Park 2008	11 0 13 4.95, df= Z = 1.23 tions 1 20 3 0	22 50 146 : 3 (P = 0 (P = 0.22 40 60 14 21	9 5 19 1.18); *= 2) 0 10 4 0	16 21 47 152 39% 40 68 16 32	14.9% 18.2% 49.3% 1.6% 20.3% 9.5%	1.3 0.0 0.6 0.6 3.08 2.9 0.8 0.8	33 (0.40, 4.44) 18 (0.00, 1.42) 0 (0.26, 1.36) 8 (0.12, 77.80) 10 (1.23, 6.85) 12 (0.15, 4.51) Not estimable	
Park 2012 Donk 2017a Subtotal (9%, CI) Total events Heterogeneity, Chi ²² = 8.1.2 other complica Vorsic 2010 Shi 2016a Olchi 2016 Park 2008 Donk 2017a Subtotal (9%, CI) Total events	11 0 13 4.95, df= Z = 1.23 tions 1 20 3 0 2 26	22 50 146 3 (P = 0 (P = 0.22 40 60 14 21 50 185	9 5 19 1.18); *= 2) 0 10 4 0 6 20	16 21 47 152 39% 40 68 16 32 47 203	14.9% 18.2% 49.3% 1.6% 20.3% 9.5%	1.3 0.0 0.6 0.6 3.08 2.9 0.8 0.8	33 (0.40, 4.44) 18 (0.00, 1.42) 0 (0.26, 1.36) 8 (0.12, 77.80) 10 (1.23, 6.85) 12 (0.15, 4.51) Not estimable 18 (0.05, 1.49)	
Park 2012 Donk 2017 a Subtotal (95% CI) Total events Heterogeneity: Chi ² = Test for overall effect 8.1.2 other complica Vorsic 2010 Shi 2016a Otchi 2016 Park 2008 Donk 2017 a Subtotal (95% CI)	11 0 13 4.95, df= Z = 1.23 tions 1 20 3 0 2 26	22 50 146 3 (P = 0 (P = 0.22 40 60 14 21 50 185	9 5 19 1.18); *= 2) 0 10 4 0 6 20	16 21 47 152 39% 40 68 16 32 47 203	14.9% 18.2% 49.3% 1.6% 20.3% 9.5%	1.3 0.0 0.6 0.6 3.08 2.9 0.8 0.8	33 (0.40, 4.44) 18 (0.00, 1.42) 0 (0.26, 1.36) 8 (0.12, 77.80) 10 (1.23, 6.85) 12 (0.15, 4.51) Not estimable 18 (0.05, 1.49)	
Park 2012 Donk 2017a Suthotal (95% CI) Total events Heterogeneily, Chi ²⁷ = Test for overall effect: 8.1.2 other complica Vorsic 2010 Shi 2016 Park 2008 Donk 2017a Suthotal (95% CI) Total events	11 0 13 4.95, df= Z = 1.23 tions 1 20 3 0 2 26 6.80, df=	22 50 146 : 3 (P = 0 (P = 0.22 40 60 14 21 50 185 : 3 (P = 0	9 5 19 1.18); *= 2) 0 10 4 0 6 20 1.08); *=	16 21 47 152 39% 40 68 16 32 47 203	14.9% 18.2% 49.3% 1.6% 20.3% 9.5%	1.3 0.0 0.6 0.6 3.08 2.9 0.8 0.8	33 (0.40, 4.44) 18 (0.00, 1.42) 0 (0.26, 1.36) 8 (0.12, 77.80) 10 (1.23, 6.85) 12 (0.15, 4.51) Not estimable 18 (0.05, 1.49)	
Park 2012 Donk 2017a Suthotal (95% C) Total events Heterogeneity: Chi ² = Test for overall effect: 8.1.2 other complica Vorsis: 2016 Othi 2016 Othi 2016 Donk 2017a Suthotal (95% C) Total events	11 0 13 4.95, df= Z = 1.23 tions 1 20 3 0 2 26 6.80, df=	22 50 146 : 3 (P = 0 (P = 0.22 40 60 14 21 50 185 : 3 (P = 0	9 5 19 1.18); *= 2) 0 10 4 0 6 20 1.08); *=	16 21 47 152 39% 40 68 16 32 47 203	14.9% 18.2% 49.3% 1.6% 20.3% 9.5%	 1.3 0.0 0.6 0.6 2.9 0.8 № 0.2 0.8 № 0.15 	33 (0.40, 4.44) 18 (0.00, 1.42) 0 (0.26, 1.36) 8 (0.12, 77.80) 10 (1.23, 6.85) 12 (0.15, 4.51) Not estimable 18 (0.05, 1.49)	
Park 2012 Donk 2017a Suthotal (9% CI) Total events Heterogeneilty, Chi ² = Test for overall effect 8.1.2 other complica Vorsic 2010 Shi 2016a Qizhi 2016 Park 2008 Donk 2017a Suthotal (95% CI) Total events Heterogeneilty, Chi ² = Test for overall effect	11 0 13 4.95, df= Z = 1.23 tions 1 20 3 0 2 26 6.80, df=	22 50 146 : 3 (P = 0 (P = 0.22 40 60 14 21 50 185 : 3 (P = 0 (P = 0.20	9 5 19 1.18); *= 2) 0 10 4 0 6 20 1.08); *=	16 21 47 152 39% 40 68 16 32 47 203	14.9% 18.2% 49.3% 1.6% 20.3% 9.5% 19.3% 50.7%	 1.3 0.0 0.6 0.6 2.9 0.8 № 0.2 0.8 № 0.15 	13 (0.40, 4.44) 18 (0.00, 1.42) 0 (0.26, 1.36) 10 (1.23, 6.85) 12 (0.15, 4.51) 140 estimable 18 (0.05, 1.49) 2 (0.81, 2.86)	
Park 2012 Donk 2017a Subitotal (9% CI) Total events Heterogeneity: CHP ² = Test for overall effect 8.1.2 office complica Vorsic 2010 Sh 2016a Ochi 2016 Park 2008 Donk 2017a Subitotal (9% CI) Total events Total events	11 0 13 4.95, df= Z = 1.23 tions 1 20 3 0 2 26 6.80, df= Z = 1.30 39	22 50 146 (P = 0.22 40 60 14 135 185 : 3 (P = 0 (P = 0.22 331	9 5 19 118); I ^a = 2) 0 10 4 0 6 20 6 20 0 0.08); I ^a = 39	16 21 47 152 39% 40 68 16 32 47 203 556% 355	14.9% 18.2% 49.3% 1.6% 20.3% 9.5% 19.3% 50.7%	 1.3 0.0 0.6 0.6 2.9 0.8 № 0.2 0.8 № 0.15 	13 (0.40, 4.44) 18 (0.00, 1.42) 0 (0.26, 1.36) 10 (1.23, 6.85) 12 (0.15, 4.51) 140 estimable 18 (0.05, 1.49) 2 (0.81, 2.86)	
Park 2012 Donk 2017a Suthotal (9% C) Total events Heterogeneity: Chi ² = Test for overall effect 8.1.2 other complica Vorsis: 2010 Shi 2016a Othi 2016 Donk 2017a Suthotal (95% C) Total events Heterogeneity: Chi ² = Test for overall effect Total (95% C)	11 0 13 4.95, df = 7 2 = 1.23 tions 1 20 3 0 2 2 6 6.80, df = 1 20 3 0 2 2 6 6.80, df = 7 1 30 0 2 2 13.21, df 9 5 13.21, df 9 5 13.21, df 9 5 12 13 12 13 12 12 12 12 12 12 12 12 12 12 12 12 12	22 50 146 (P = 0.22 40 60 14 21 50 5185 :3 (P = 0 (P = 0.22 331 := 7 (P =	9 5 19 118); ² = 20 10 10 10 10 10 10 10 10 10 10 10 10 10	16 21 47 152 39% 40 68 16 32 47 203 556% 355	14.9% 18.2% 49.3% 1.6% 20.3% 9.5% 19.3% 50.7%	 1.3 0.0 0.6 0.6 2.9 0.8 № 0.2 0.8 № 0.15 	13 (0.40, 4.44) 18 (0.00, 1.42) 0 (0.26, 1.36) 10 (1.23, 6.85) 12 (0.15, 4.51) 140 estimable 18 (0.05, 1.49) 2 (0.81, 2.86)	

Figure 5. Meta-analyses of the other outcome indices of ACDA and ACDFWP. A. Forest plot for the operative time. B. Forest plot for the scores of blood loss. C. Forest plot for the scores of SWAL-QL. D. Forest plot for the scores of complications.

Six studies (14, 16-18, 20, 21) reported the cervical alignment, while two (14, 16) were excluded because they did not report the standard deviation. We conducted subgroups analyses to decrease the potential heterogeneity, and no significant differences were observed between the subgroups. Overall, the remaining four studies indicated that the cervical alignment was better in the ACDFWP (vs. ACDA, MD = -0.67, 95% CI [-1.11, -0.23], P = 0.003, $I^2 = 20\%$) (Figure 4D).

The assessment of postoperative clinical efficacy showed that the ACDFWP exhibited better efficacy only in the cervical alignment. No other significant difference was found in the other 3 indices.

3.4. Assessments of other clinical factors

3.4.1. Operation time

Four studies reported the operation time; two studies (14,16) were excluded owing to lack of data on standard deviation. Analysis of the remaining two studies (18,20) that included 240 patients found no difference between the ACDFWP and ACDA (MD = -3.11, 95% CI (-11.44,

5.22), P = 0.46, $I^2 = 93\%$) (Figure 5A).

3.4.2. Blood loss

Two studies reported blood loss (18,20). Total 240 patients were enrolled. However, no significant difference was identified between the ACDFWP and ACDA (MD = 2.45, 95% CI [-1.06, 5.97], P = 0.17, $I^2 = 0\%$) (Figure 5B).

3.4.3. Swallowing Quality of Life Score

SWAL-QL was reported in two studies (17,20) that involved 142 patients enrolled. No significant difference was found in the SWAL-QL of the two groups (MD = 0.80, 95% CI [-0.12, 1.73], P = 0.09, $I^2 = 0\%$) (Figure 5C).

3.4.4. Complications

Complications were reported in 6 studies (14-19) that involved 431 patients enrolled. No significant difference was observed in the complications between the two groups (MD = 1.06, 95% CI [0.65, 1.74], P = 0.81, $I^2 = 47\%$) (Figure 5D). Particularly, with regard to the frequency of occurrence of ASD, there were 19 cases in the ACDFWP and 13 cases in the ACDA, no significant difference was found between two groups (Z =1.23, P =0.22) (Figure 5D).

No significant difference was found in the other clinical-related indices.

4. Discussion

The present study compared the efficacy and other factors associated with the clinical outcome of ACDFWP and ACDA. To our knowledge, this is the first metaanalysis to compare these two alternative surgeries. We found that the ACDFWP seems had better efficacy in terms of cervical alignment than that ACDA. No significant difference was found in the other indices. Our results suggest a slight superiority of ACDFWP. These findings might contribute to the selection of surgery type in patients with cervical spondylosis. However, the relatively small number of included studies lowered the evidence level.

In the present study, 8 studies (3 RCTs and 5 nRCTs, 640 patients enrolled) were evaluated. Although 3 RCTs were included, the quality of the included RCTs were satisfactory, and the quality of the included nRCTs was moderate (Figure 3). Evidence-based comparison of the studies has limited worthiness.

With respect to the comparisons of clinical efficacy, the indices of NDI (MD = 0.15, 95% CI [-0.21, 0.51], P = 0.40, $I^2 = 0\%$), VAS (MD = -0.40, 95% CI [-0.83, 0.04], P = 0.07, $I^2 = 0\%$), and JOA (MD = 0.05, 95% CI [-0.36, 0.46], P = 0.80, $I^2 = 0\%$) showed the same tendency. The homogeneity of the involved studies was high. We did not find any difference between the two surgeries. However, the results of the cervical alignment (MD = -0.67, 95% CI [-1.11, -0.23], P = 0.003, $I^2 = 20\%$) indicated better efficacy of ACDFWP (Figure 4). Under the support of cage, ACDF could achieve good operative alignment recovery.

With regard to the indices of other factors, we found no difference between the operation time [MD = -3.11, 95% CI (-11.44, 5.22), P = 0.46, $I^2 = 93\%$], blood loss $[MD = 2.45, 95\% CI (-1.06, 5.97), P = 0.17, I^2 = 0\%],$ SWAL-QL [MD = 0.80, 95% CI (-0.12, 1.73), P = 0.09, $I^2 = 0\%$], and complications [MD = 1.06, 95% CI (0.65, 1.74), P = 0.81, $I^2 = 47\%$]. There was no difference in the operation time and blood loss, postoperative QOL, and complications. ASD is the most important complication that must be considered while selecting the surgery. The aim of developing these alternative surgeries was to reduce the risk of complications, particularly, the onset of ASD because placing the anterior plate during the conventional ACDF is risky (22,23). It was reported that the incidence of ASD in ACDFWP was significantly lower than that in conventional ACDF (24). ACDA is another alternative surgery that is believed to lower the incidence of ASD onset. Previous evidence shows that ACDA contributes to maintain the motion at the involved segments and had a lower reoperation rate than those in conventional ACDF (1,25-27); a current study proved the long-term efficacy of ACDA in reducing the risk of ASD (9). However, our study found no difference between the ACDFWP and ACDA ($X^2 = 4.95$, P = 0.18, $I^2 = 39\%$) (Figure 5).

However, conventional ACDF (with plate), alternative ACDFWP, and ACDA, all the existing surgeries have their specific advantages and disadvantages. *i*) Conventional ACDF vs. alternative ACDF: Although alternative ACDF achieved low onset of ASD, the conventional ACDF (with plate), as the gold standard therapy for cervical spondylosis, also has its merits. Current two studies indicated that conventional ACDF is good for ensuring greater restoration of alignment in the operative segment (21,28). A long-term follow-up study found that the operative segmental alignment gradually decreased, and the overall alignment increased with time (21). ii) Convention ACDF vs. ACDA: In addition to the low risk of ASD, ACDA has good efficacy. According to the results of several meta-analyses (29,30), the efficacy and safety of ACDA were superior to those of conventional ACDF. After a long-term follow-up, Ma et al. reported that ACDA was superior to conventional ACDF in terms of VAS and the overall success rate (30). Zhao et al. found that ACDA achieved a higher SF-36, a larger range of movement, a higher rate of neurological improvement, a lower VAS, a lower NDI, and a lower reoperation rate than conventional ACDF (29). Other studies have also indicated that ACDA was slightly better than the conventional ACDF in terms of the VAS score

(15,16,19) and SWAL-QL (17,20). However, ACDA also has its disadvantages. Tian et al. reported that ACDA might contribute to promote the progression of heterotopic ossification, especially for patients who had been preoperatively developed (31). Latka et al. reported that ACDA involved a longer operation time and more blood loss than the conventional ACDF. A longer traction on the structures of the soft neck is a major disadvantage of ACDA (9). iii) Alternative ACDF vs. ACDA (the present study): We found that only the alternative ACDF exhibited a slight benefit in the cervical alignment as compared to ACDA. No significant difference was found in the other indices between alternative ACDF and ACDA. In sum, both the conventional and alternative surgeries have their strengths and weaknesses. Based on the evidence available today, they cannot replace each other. The appropriate surgery should be seriously selected according to the individual pathophysiological state of each patient.

There are certain limitations of this study, as follows: i) The small number of included studies; only 3 RCTs were included; only studies published in English were included. Two studies by the same authors were included, namely Shi 2016a (20) and Shi 2016b (18), and Donk 2017a (19) and Donk 2017b (21). Although we have investigated the studies and excluded the possibility of overlap of patients, but the data sources were too narrow, which lowered the reliability of the evidence. ii) The study quality of some the included studies was low. iii) The heterogeneity of some items (operation time, complications) was high, lowering the level of evidence. iv) Long-term observation was not performed in all included literatures, which is required on the study of ASD. More rigorous studies with long-term followup are expected to compare the alternative ACDF and ACDA, particularly for the onset of ASD.

5. Conclusions

In this study, we compared the clinical outcomes between the alternative ACDFWP and ACDA. We found that the ACDFWP exhibited slightly better cervical alignment than ACDA. No significant difference was found in the other items, including NDI, VAS, JOA, operation time, blood loss, SWAL-QL, and complications. These findings may contribute to the selection of the appropriate surgery for patients with cervical spondylosis. However, limited studies exist; thus, the evidence level is low. Larger, better-planned studies are required in the future.

Funding: This work was supported by Fujian Natural Science Foundation (2016J01560), grant from the Youth Program of the Health Commission of Fujian Province (2016-ZQN-73).

Conflict of Interest: The authors have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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30:E179-E188.

Received July 26, 2022; Revised August 9, 2022; Accepted August 10, 2022.

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Released online in J-STAGE as advance publication August 12, 2022.