

Second to Fourth Digit Ratio and Exercise Performance in Untrained Adult Males

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Received 19/2/2012 Accepted 20/5/2012

Abstract

This study was based on a random sample from a Prospective Cohort study including one hundred healthy young untrained male volunteers, with mean age \pm standard deviation (SD) of 22.820 ± 2.271 years. The aim of this study was to evaluate the role of the digit ratio as an indicator for the performance of untrained adult males in endurance sports. The parameters that have been measured were: Index and ring fingers length of both right and left hand, body weight, height, waist and hip circumferences, body composition (including: fat, muscle and water percents) and exercise performance (including: distance and time). The descriptive analyses of this study showed that normative values of male 2D:4D ratio vary between 0.912-1.036. and it also revealed that there is a strong inverse relation-ship between digit ratio of the subjects and exercise performance according to the distance and time; as the subject briskly walked on the treadmill at fasting state.

نسبة طول الإصبع الثاني إلى الرابع والكفاءة الرياضية لدى الشباب البالغين غير المتدربين

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الملخص

أجريت هذه الدراسة بالاعتماد على نموذج عشوائي من دراسة جماعة مستقبلية متضمنة 100 شاب متطوع وغير متدرب جميعهم أصحاء. هدف هذه الدراسة هو اعتماد النسبة الإصبعية كدليل لأداء الأشخاص البالغين غير المتدربين في رياضة المطاولة. المتغيرات التي تم قياسها :- طول الإصبع الثاني و الرابع لليد اليمنى واليسرى ، وزن وطول الجسم ومحيط الخصر والورك، مكونات الجسم (وتتضمن نسبة الدهون، العضلات والماء) والانجاز الرياضي (ويتضمن الزمن ، المسافة). النتائج في هذه الدراسة أظهرت أن توزيع النسبة الإصبعية للمشاركين تتراوح بين 0.912-1.036 . كما وتظهر النتائج أن هنالك علاقة عكسية قوية بين النسبة الإصبعية و الانجاز الرياضي وفقا للزمن و المسافة المنجزة للشخص على جهاز الرياضة الحركي أثناء المشي السريع في حالة الصيام.

Introduction

The digit ratio is the ratio of the lengths of different digits, fingers or toes, typically as measured from the bottom crease where the finger joins the hand to the tip of the finger^(1,2). The length of the index finger divided by the length of the ring finger (2D:4D) has been proposed as a marker of prenatal androgen action⁽³⁾. The investigation of 2D:4D ratio as a possible marker of androgen action in early life began with the long-recognized observation that, compared with women, adult males tend to have longer ring fingers relative to other fingers^(4,5). According to Manning higher levels of testosterone during a critical fetal development stage (later part of the first trimester) facilitates the growth of the ring finger, while higher levels of estrogen facilitates the growth of the index finger⁽⁶⁾. Fetal and adult testosterone may be important in establishing and maintaining sex-dependent abilities associated with male physical competitiveness^(7,8). There is an evidence that 2D:4D ratio is a negatively correlate with prenatal and adult testosterone⁽⁹⁾. Dr John Manning reported in many studies that one simple physical feature offers an accurate means for predicting future footballing ability. It kicks in the womb and can be seen from birth⁽¹⁰⁾. Physical activity is a complicated process in which a trainer should closely watch all the minute changes in the subject during activity. Noticeable physiological changes take place in the body, when it is subjected to continuous physical or sports training program⁽¹¹⁾. In general, the best exercise for a specific sport is the sport itself. Additional exercises should condition the particular components of fitness specific to the sport. The specific muscles involved, type of muscular contraction, intensity, duration, recovery time, and motor skill must be considered⁽¹²⁾. However the relationship between D2:D4 ratio and exercise performance seems to be stronger for endurance sport and weaker for sprint, power and strength sport, although walking is much more preferable than running or jogging because it creates less stress on joints, including hips, knees, and ankles⁽¹³⁾.

Aim of the Study

To evaluate the role of the digit ratio as an indicator for the performance of untrained adult males in endurance sports.

Subjects, Apparatus and Methods

This study was conducted during the period from November 2010 to March 2012 at the Researches Laboratory in the Collage of Pharmacy / University of Mosul. This study was based on a random sample from a Prospective Cohort Study, 100 healthy untrained male volunteers took part in this study (Table 1 and 2). Any subjects who had history of diabetes, cardiovascular, respiratory, renal diseases, smoking and taken any anabolic drugs, also any subject who reported injuries to the second or fourth digits were excluded from the study.

Apparatus

Sport Treadmill 2008; made in Germany, Vernier Caliper, Beurer Body Fat Analyzer, model GmbH, 89077 UIm, BG 39; made in Germany and Tape measure.

Methods

1. Familiarization

During their first visit to the laboratory, participants were familiarized with the equipment and exercise protocol in order to be cooperative during conducting the exercise test.

2. Baseline appointment

Participant body weight was determined by measuring weight to the nearest 0.1 kg using an electronic scale. Subject in light clothing without shoes was asked to stand erect on the scale with both arms at the sides. Participant height was determined by measuring height to the nearest 0.1 cm using a standard tape measure. BMI was derived by Quetelet's index from body weight/(height)². Participant waist circumference and hip circumference were measured in centimeters (cm) at a standing position with a standard tape measure within ± 1 cm. The waist to hip ratio (WHR) was calculated as the waist measurement divided by the hip

measurement. Participant body composition (body fat %, body muscle% and body water%) were assessed using the leg-to-leg bioelectrical impedance method [Beurer Body Fat Analyzer, model GmbH, 89077 UIm, BG 39; Germany].

3. Digit Length Measurement

Second- and fourth-digit lengths for each hand were recorded with a Vernier Caliper using the methodology described by Manning⁽¹⁴⁾. Digit length was measured on the ventral surface of the hand from the most proximal

crease when there was a band of creases at the base of the digit to the finger tip, to the nearest 0.01 mm. The digit was held extended throughout and care was taken not to compress the fingertip (Figure 1). Digits lengths were easily and reliably measured, and they were readily accessible. To minimize measurement error, each measurement was done twice and the mean value calculated for each finger of the right and left hand. The length of the index finger divided by the length of the ring finger giving D2:D4 ratio

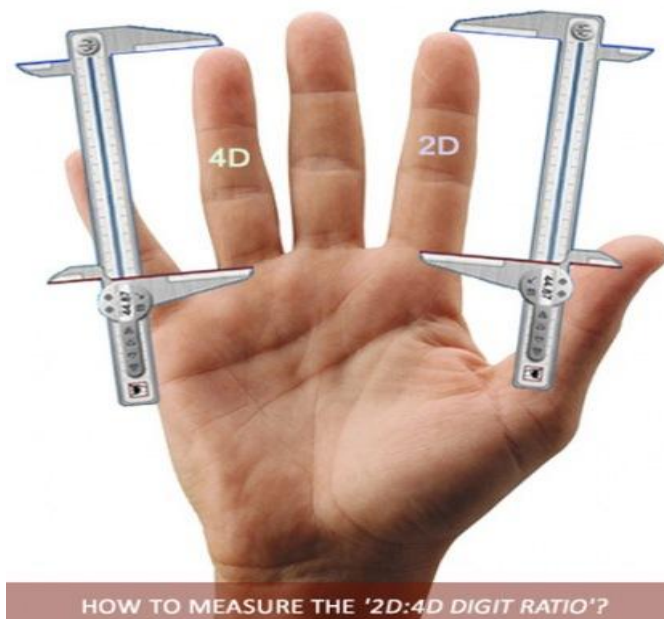


Figure (1): How to measure the D2:D4 digit ratio.

5. Exercise Testing

The test done on a motorized treadmill during the same morning hour to prevent individual diurnal variation between exercise tests. On the morning of the exercise trial, subjects reported to the laboratory after an 8 to 12 hour overnight fasting. Each subject was asked to refrain from vigorous exercise 24 h prior to the test and consume his usual family diet. No food or fluid was allowed during either laboratory treadmill exercise test. Laboratory temperature (20–25°C) and relative humidity was maintained constant over all the trials by an air conditioner. The subject had a 5-minute warm-up period before doing the exercise test. Then allowed to briskly walking on the treadmill with speed held constant at 7 km/hr with zero inclination; until volitional exhaustion, or the subject could no longer

keep pace with the treadmill speed. At this moment we stop the treadmill and record the time and distance that appear on the screen of the treadmill.

Statistical Analysis

The SPSS statistical package (version 19) was used for statistical analysis. Standard statistical methods were used to determine the mean, standard deviation (SD), minimum, maximum and range, Pearson correlation between digit ratio and exercise performance and Regression equation for digit ratio and exercise performance. The results were considered highly significant at $P \leq 0.001$; significant at $P \leq 0.05$ and non- significant at $P > 0.05$ ⁽¹⁵⁾.

Results

1. Descriptive Statistics of the Subjects

Table (1):- Anthropometric measurements and body composition analysis of the participants.

	Age(year)	Wt (kg)	Height (cm)	BMI	Waist (cm)	Hip (cm)	WHR
Mean	22.8	67.1	172.9	22.4	77.9	96.9	0.80
S.D.	2.2	6.2	5.5	1.4	5	4.9	0.028
Min	19	54	161	19.3	67	81	0.75
Max	26	83	186	24.4	90	109	0.87
Range	7	29	25	5.1	23	28	0.12

	Body Fat %	Body Water %	Body Muscle%
Mean	17.28	59.8	46.8
S.D.	2.65	1.9	1.6
Min	12.5	56.2	42.1
Max	20.7	64	50.8
Range	8.2	7.8	8.7

	Right D2 (cm)	Right D4 (cm)	Right D2:D4 ratio	Left D2 (cm)	left D4 (cm)	Left D2:D4 ratio
Mean	7.316	7.538	0.970	7.330	7.561	0.970
S.D.	0.843	0.447	0.029	0.445	0.460	0.030
Min	6.190	6.600	0.912	6.000	6.410	0.912
Max	8.600	8.730	1.032	8.710	8.810	1.036
Range	2.410	2.130	0.120	2.710	2.400	0.124

Table (2):- Distribution of the digit ratio within participants

Left digit ratio	percent
1.036-1.000	18%
0.997-0.990	5%
0.989-0.980	13%
0.979-0.970	14%
0.969-0.960	13%
0.959-0.950	10%
0.949-0.940	11%
0.936-0.931	6%
0.929-0.923	5%
0.918-0.912	5%

Right digit ratio	percent
1.032-1.000	17 %
0.997-0.990	4 %
0.989-0.980	14 %
0.979-0.970	17 %
0.969-0.960	13 %
0.959-0.950	12 %
0.949-0.940	5 %
0.936-0.931	9 %
0.929-0.923	5 %
0.918-0.912	4 %

2. Correlations of Digit Ratio with Exercise Performance

Table (3):- Pearson correlation between digit ratio and exercise performance.

A- for Right Digit Ratio

		Distance at Fasting	Time at Fasting
Right D2:D4 ratio	Pearson Correlation	-.985**	-.985**
	P value	< 0.001	< 0.001
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Correlation value $r = -98.5\%$ indicate a strong inverse relation-ship between right D2:D4 ratio and exercise performance according to the distance and time.

B- for Left Digit Ratio

		Distance at Fasting	Time at Fasting
Left D2:D4 ratio	Pearson Correlation	-.985**	-.985**
	P value	< 0.001	< 0.001
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Correlation value $r = -98.5\%$ indicate a strong inverse relation-ship between left D2:D4 ratio and exercise performance according to the distance and time.

3. Regression of Digit Ratio with Exercise Performance

1. Regression Equation for Right Hand

A- Distance at fasting = $100.604 - 96.517 * (Right\ D2:D4\ ratio)$

This indicating that distance at fasting = 100.604 when the right D2:D4 ratio = zero and any increase in this ratio by about 0.01 leading to decrease the distance at fasting by about 0.96517 .

For example:

If right D2:D4 = 1, then

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Distance at fasting} &= 100.604 - 96.517 * (1) \\ &= 4.087 \text{ kilometers} \end{aligned}$$

If right D2:D4 = 0.91, then

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Distance at fasting} &= 100.604 - 96.517 * (0.91) \\ &= 12.774 \text{ kilometers} \end{aligned}$$

Model Summary		
r	R Square	Adjusted R Square
-.985	.971	.971
The independent variable is Right D2:D4 ratio.		

Adjusted R Square (0.971) indicating the percent effect of right D2:D4 ratio = 97.1% on distance at fasting with significance at $p\ value < 0.001$.

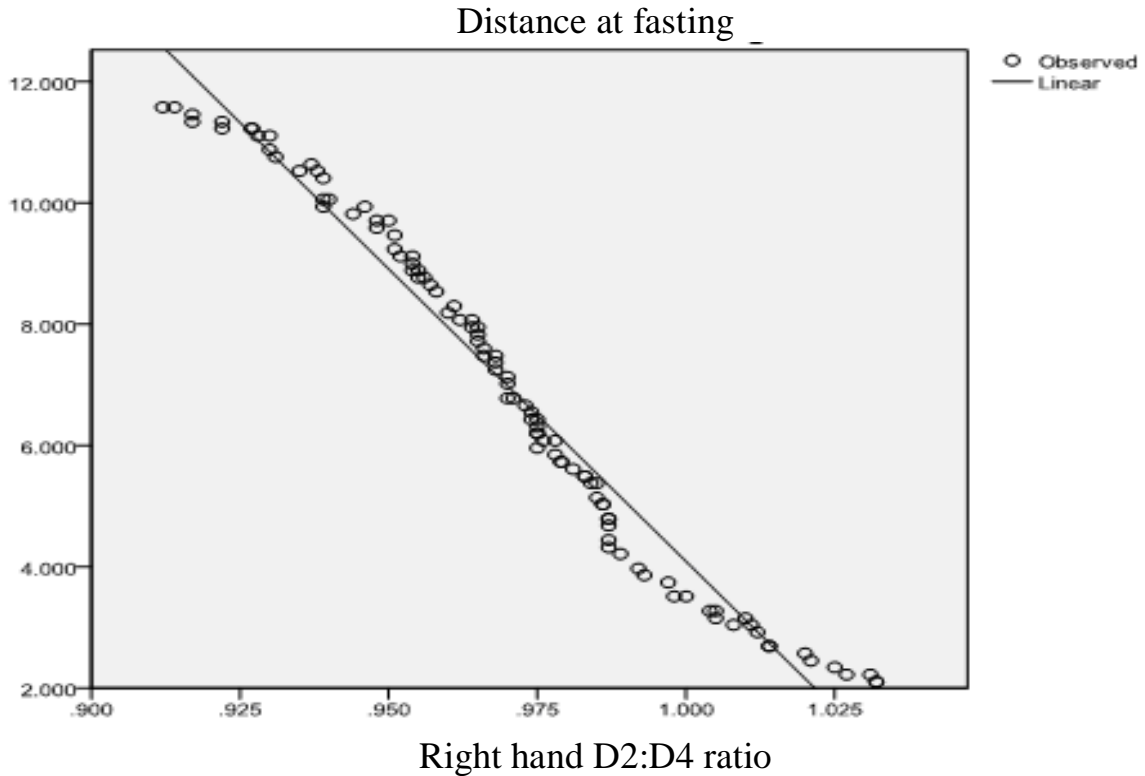


Figure (2):- Regression curve for right hand D2:D4 ratio with distance at fasting.

B- Time at fasting = 859.902 - 824.930 *
 (Right D2:D4 ratio)
 This indicating that time at fasting = 859.902 when the right D2:D4 ratio = zero and any increase in this ratio by about 0.01 leading to decrease the distance at fasting by about 0.824930 .

For example:
 If right D2:D4 = 1, then
 Time at fasting = 859.902 - 824.930 * (1)
 = 34.972 minutes
 If right D2:D4 = 0.91, then
 Time at fasting = 859.902 - 824.930 * (0.91)
 = 109.215 minutes

Model Summary		
r	R Square	Adjusted R Square
-.985	.971	.971
The independent variable is Right D2:D4 ratio.		

Adjusted R Square (0.971) indicating the percent effect of right D2:D4 ratio = 97.1% on time at fasting with significance at p value < 0.001 .

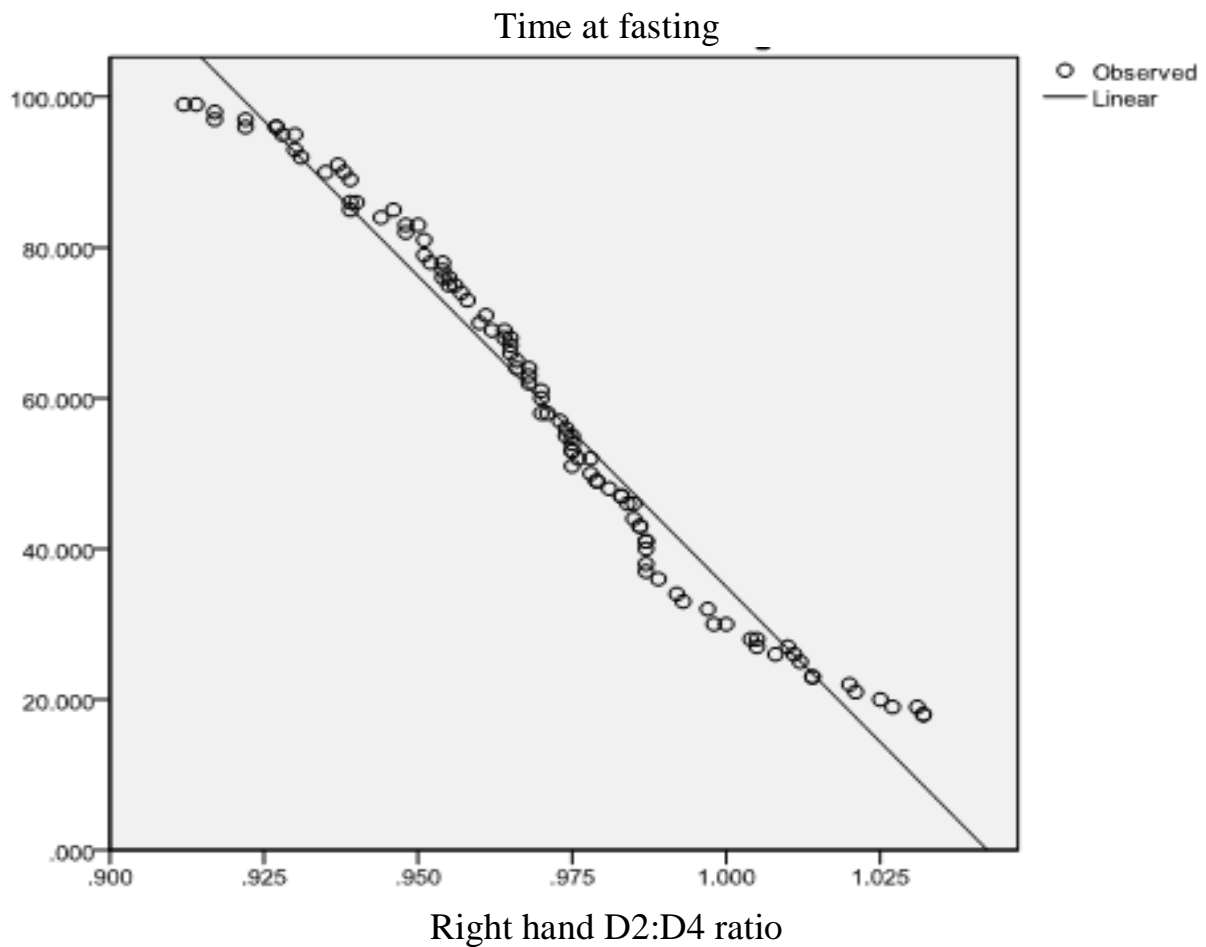


Figure (3): Regression curve for right hand D2:D4 ratio with time at fasting.

2. Regression Equation for Left Hand

A- Distance at fasting = 98.012 - 93.912 * (left D2:D4 ratio)

This indicating that distance at fasting = 98.012 when the left D2:D4 ratio = zero and any increase in this ratio by about 0.01 leading to decrease the distance at fasting by about 0.93912 .

For example:

If left D2:D4 = 1, then

$$\text{Distance at fasting} = 98.012 - 93.912 * (1) = 4.10 \text{ kilometers}$$

If left D2:D4 = 0.91, then

$$\text{Distance at fasting} = 98.012 - 93.912 * (0.91) = 12.55 \text{ kilometers}$$

Model Summary		
r	R Square	Adjusted R Square
-.985	.970	.970
The independent variable is Left D2:D4 ratio.		

Adjusted R Square (0.970) indicating the percent effect of left D2:D4 ratio = 97 % on distance at fasting with significance at p value < 0.001 .

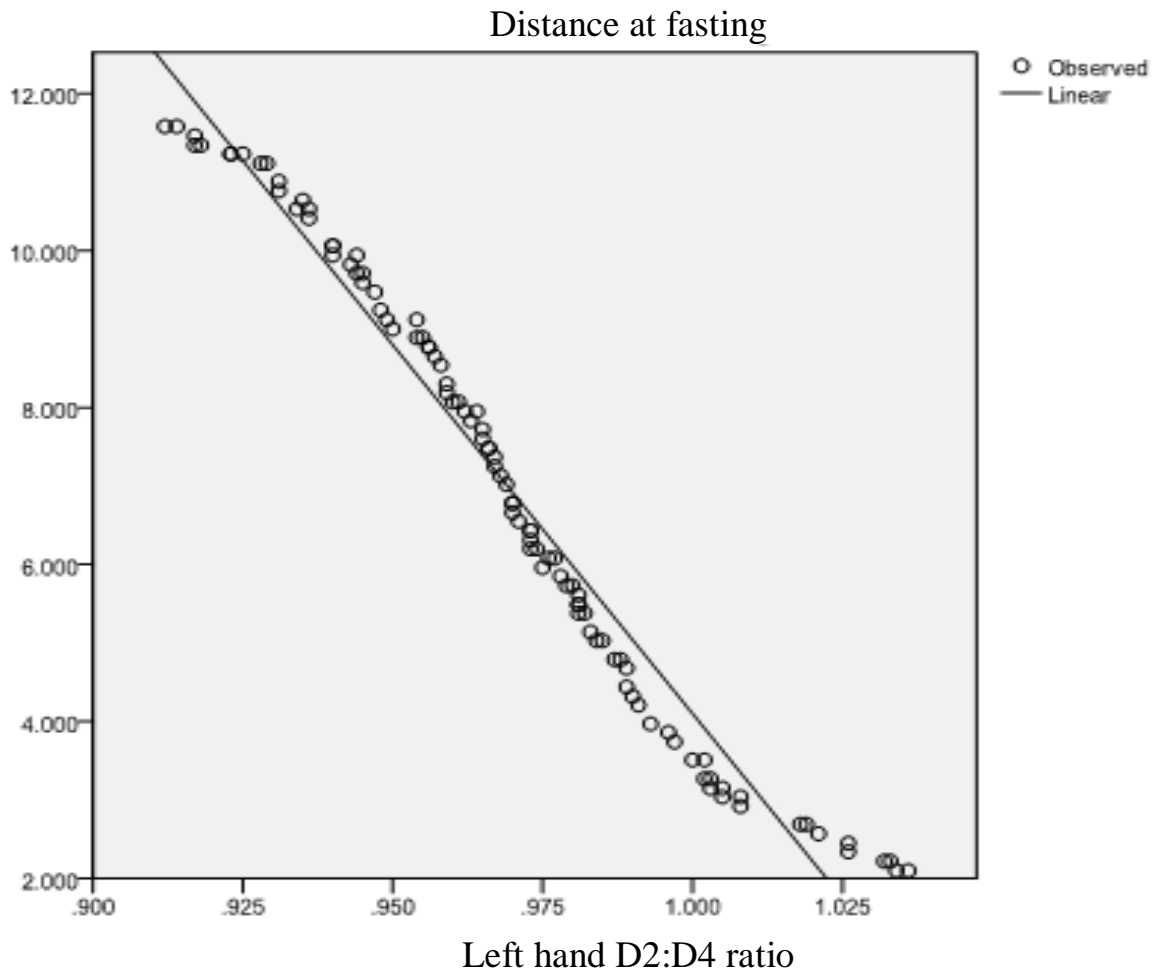


Figure (4): Regression curve for left hand D2:D4 ratio with distance at fasting.

B- Time at fasting = $837.758 - 802.671 * (\text{left D2:D4 ratio})$
 This indicating that time at fasting = 837.758 when the left D2:D4 ratio = zero and any increase in this ratio by about 0.01 leading to decrease the distance at fasting by about 0.802671 .

For example:
 If left D2:D4 = 1, then
 Time at fasting = $837.758 - 802.671 * (1)$
 = 35.087 minutes
 If left D2:D4 = 0.91, then
 Time at fasting = $837.758 - 802.671 * (0.91)$
 = 107.327 minutes

Model Summary		
r	R Square	Adjusted R Square
-.985	.971	.970
The independent variable is Left D2:D4 ratio.		

Adjusted R Square (0.970) indicating the percent effect of left D2:D4 ratio = 97 % on

time at fasting with significance at p value < 0.001 .

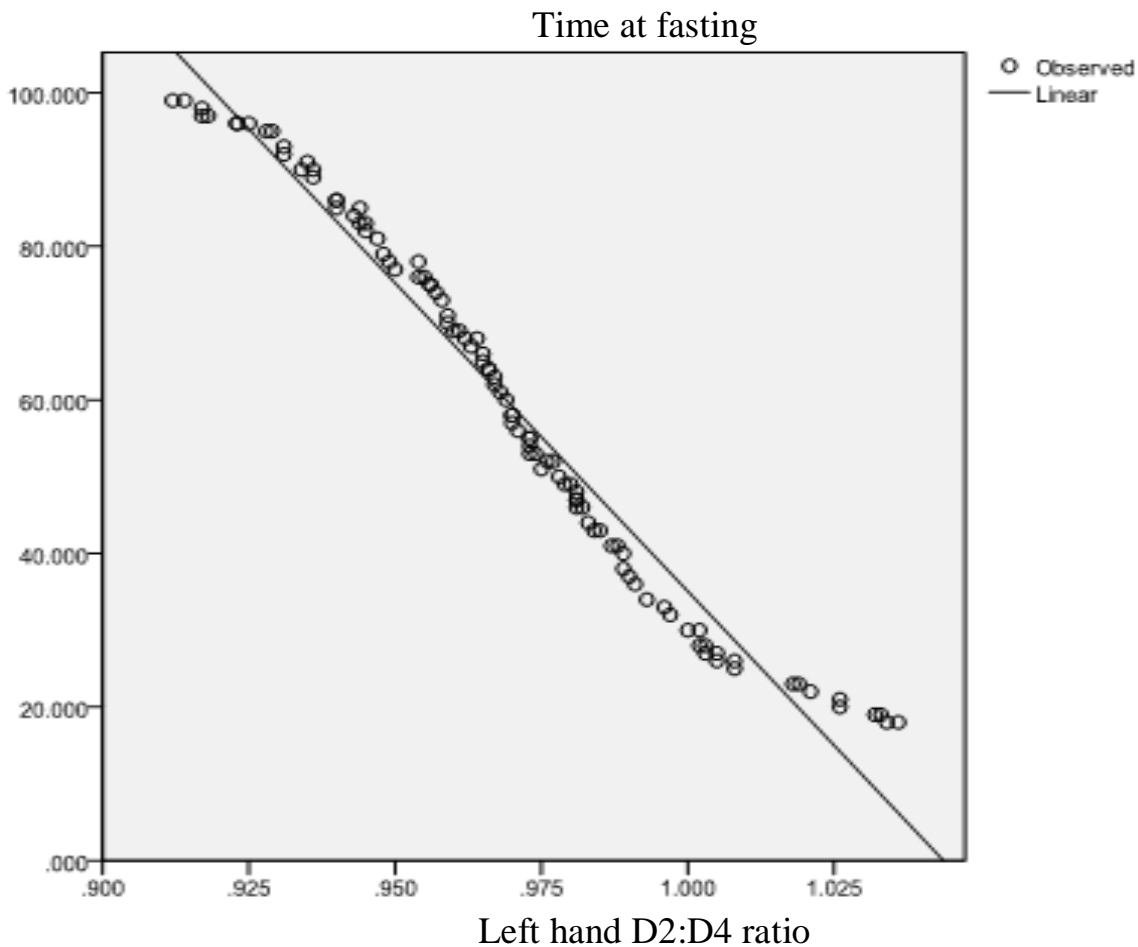


Figure (5): Regression curve for left hand D2:D4 ratio with time at fasting.

4. Discussion

Sporting achievement is certainly related to several factors apart from personality. These include age of the subject, BMI, WHR, body composition (including body fat %, body muscle %, and body water %), training program (trained or untrained), health status, and nutrition before doing exercise test^(16,17). These factors were measured in the present study in order to evaluate the role of 2D:4D ratio as an indicator for sports achievement when other influencing factors are controlled (Table 1).

The descriptive analyses of our study showed that normative values of male 2D:4D ratio vary between 0.912-1.036 which distributed within the participants (Table 2). Variation in finger length ratio is thought to reflect the influence of prenatal exposure to the sex hormones like testosterone and estrogen during fetal development⁽¹⁸⁾; There are two

causes have been suggested for this variation:- First, is that common genes (Hox a and Hox d) underlie development of both fingers and gonads. Second, is that allelic variation in androgen receptor sensitivity influences digit ratio⁽¹⁹⁾. The androgen receptor gene contains a polymorphic trinucleotide repeat in the terminal domain region that codes for a polyglutamine chain⁽⁶⁾. Increased number of such repeats produces receptors with lower androgen sensitivity^(20,21). In other words, when polyglutamine chain is low, transactivation of the androgen receptor gene is high and is associated with higher sensitivity to androgens leading to more masculine finger ratio (low D2:D4)⁽⁶⁾. There is evidence in humans that the length ratio of the index and ring finger (D2:D4) is negatively correlated with prenatal testosterone and higher genetic sensitivity to androgen. Prenatal testosterone and androgen receptor gene are both known to vary between

human population ⁽²²⁾. The results of our study show that a strong inverse relationship between 2D:4D ratio of the subjects and exercise performance according to the distance and time; as the subject briskly walked on the treadmill (Table 3, Figures 2,3,4 and 5). This observation of increased exercise performance as much as decreasing the digit ratio is probably due to a higher prenatal androgen exposure that relatively causing longer fourth finger than second finger indicating a lower D2:D4 ratio. Our finding revealed that D2:D4 ratio significantly affect performance in endurance sports. On going with our results many studies also showed that D2:D4 ratio could affect exercise performance in various types of sports as (Manning and Taylor, 2001 ⁽²³⁾; Pokrywka et al, 2005 ⁽²⁴⁾; Paul et al, 2006 ⁽²⁵⁾; Voracek et al, 2006 ⁽²⁶⁾; Van den Bergh and Dewitte, 2006 ⁽⁸⁾). In many study ⁽²⁷⁾ ⁽²⁸⁾ researchers found that males achievement in sports and athletics is correlated with the 2nd to 4th digit ratio (2D:4D) as a putative measure of prenatal testosterone. Thus, 2D:4D ratio in males may show negative correlation with frequent exercise which then predict success in highly competitive sports. Manning and his coworkers in 2007 ⁽²⁹⁾ showed that individuals with smaller 2D:4D ratios tend to have greater athletic abilities. That is, those with longer ring fingers are more often the better athletes. The relationship seems to be stronger for endurance athletes and weaker for sprint, power and strength athletes. For example, the 2D:4D correlates better with 10km race performance than with 50m sprint time. Voracek et al, 2010 ⁽³⁰⁾ suggested that second-to-fourth digit ratio (2D:4D), a widely studied putative marker for masculinization through prenatal androgen exposure, is lower (more masculinized) in athletes than in general population controls, and athletes with lower 2D:4D have higher sporting success.

Conclusions

- 1- The normative values of male 2D:4D ratio vary between 0.912-1.036 which distributed within the participants.
- 2- There is a strong inverse relationship between digit ratio of the subjects and exercise performance according to the

distance and time; as the subject briskly walked on the treadmill.

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