



Comparative Study - Retrospective Cohort

Indications, trends, and perioperative outcomes of minimally invasive and open liver surgery in non-obese and obese patients: An international multicentre propensity score matched retrospective cohort study of 9963 patients

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ABSTRACT

Background: Despite the worldwide increase of both obesity and the use of minimally invasive liver surgery (MILS), evidence regarding the safety and eventual benefits of MILS in obese patients is scarce. The aim of this study was therefore to compare the outcomes of non-obese and obese patients (BMI 18.5–29.9 and BMI ≥ 30, respectively) undergoing MILS and OLS, and to assess trends in MILS use among obese patients.

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Minimally invasive liver resection

Methods: In this retrospective cohort study, patients operated at 20 hospitals in eight countries (2009–2019) were included and the characteristics and outcomes of non-obese and obese patients were compared. Thereafter, the outcomes of MILS and OLS were compared in both groups after propensity-score matching (PSM). Changes in the adoption of MILS during the study period were investigated.

Results: Overall, 9963 patients were included (MILS: $n = 4687$; OLS: $n = 5276$). Compared to non-obese patients ($n = 7986$), obese patients ($n = 1977$) were more often comorbid, less often received preoperative chemotherapy or had a history of previous hepatectomy, had longer operation durations and more intraoperative blood loss (IOBL), paralleling significantly higher rates of wound- and respiratory-related complications. After PSM, MILS, compared to OLS, was associated, among both non-obese and obese patients, with less IOBL (200 ml vs 320 ml, 200 ml vs 400 ml, respectively), lower rates of transfusions (6.6% vs 12.8%, 4.7% vs 14.7%), complications (26.1% vs 35%, 24.9% vs 34%), bile leaks (4% vs 7%, 1.8% vs 4.9%), liver failure (0.7% vs 2.3%, 0.2% vs 2.1%), and a shorter length of stay (5 vs 7 and 4 vs 7 days). A cautious implementation of MILS over time in obese patients (42.1%–53%, $p < .001$) was paralleled by stable severe morbidity ($p = .433$) and mortality ($p = .423$) rates, despite an accompanying gradual increase in surgical complexity.

Conclusions: MILS is increasingly adopted and associated with perioperative benefits in both non-obese and obese patients.

1. Introduction

The prevalence of obesity is increasing worldwide, and conditions that occur more frequently in the obese population (e.g., diabetes mellitus, cardiovascular and respiratory diseases) may worsen outcomes following abdominal surgery [1,2]. Furthermore, metabolic changes induced by obesity can lead to parenchymal liver injury, such as steatohepatitis or fatty liver disease, potentially increasing the perioperative risks of liver surgery [3,4]. Considering that obesity increases the technical difficulty of abdominal surgery in general, and liver surgery in particular, obese patients are a challenging surgical population from both a technical and clinical standpoint [5,6]. However, studies investigating the impact of obesity on outcomes after liver surgery have shown contrasting results, probably related to selection bias and variable body weight class comparisons.

Numerous observational and randomized controlled studies, including OSLO-COMET and LapOpHuva, have reported benefits of minimally invasive liver surgery (MILS) in selected patients [7–10]. Moreover, recent research indicates advantages of MILS over open liver surgery (OLS) among vulnerable patients [11,12]. In this context, obese patients may represent a frail group of patients especially benefitting from a surgical approach that aims to reduce surgical stress and enhance postoperative recovery. However, as previously stated in the Southampton consensus guidelines, there is currently limited evidence on the feasibility and safety of MILS in obese patients [13]. A limited number of comparative studies, often single centre with a relatively small sample size, have been published. Moreover, most of these studies have included non-matched cohorts, possibly leading to a substantial degree of selection bias [14].

The primary aims of this retrospective multicentre cohort study were therefore to assess differences in the characteristics and perioperative outcomes of non-obese and obese patients undergoing a liver resection, to compare the short-term outcomes of MILS and OLS in these two groups, and to investigate trends in the implementation and results of MILS in obese patients. Secondary aims were to compare the characteristics and perioperative outcomes of MILS and OLS in obese patients stratified by their obesity class and to assess liver surgeons' attitudes towards liver surgery in obese patients.

2. Methods

The prospectively maintained databases of patients who underwent MILS or OLS at 20 hepatobiliary referral centres were bundled in a multicentre database and retrospectively assessed. Adult patients who underwent an elective liver resection between January 2009 and December 2019 with a known body mass index (BMI) were included in this study. Patients who underwent hand-assisted or robotic-assisted liver resection, did not undergo a liver resection (for example cyst

fenestration/deroofting, liver biopsies, or diagnostic laparoscopy) and those with a BMI lower than 18.5 were excluded. The report of this study was written following the guidelines outlined in the STROCSS statement [15].

3. Study design

Study patients were stratified in non-obese ($18.5 \leq \text{BMI} \leq 29.9$) and obese ($\text{BMI} \geq 30$) [16]. The characteristics and outcomes of non-obese and obese patients were compared. Thereafter, the characteristics and outcomes of patients undergoing MILS and OLS were compared in non-obese and obese patients, before and after propensity score matching (PSM) [17]. In addition, a subgroup analysis was performed in the obese patients: obese patients were stratified in three groups, according to the standard BMI classes (Class I ($30 \leq \text{BMI} \leq 34.9$), class II ($35 \leq \text{BMI} \leq 39.9$), and class III ($\text{BMI} \geq 40$)), and the characteristics and outcomes of patients treated by MILS or OLS in each of these BMI classes were compared after PSM.

A trend analysis was performed by dividing the overall study population into three groups according to the time period during which the procedure was performed, thereafter comparing the characteristics and outcomes of patients in these three periods. These time periods were chosen based on the moments when the International Consensus Guidelines on MILS were developed (Louisville: 2008; Morioka: 2014; Southampton: 2017) [13,18,19]. All the analyses were conducted on an intention-to-treat basis: patients in which an attempt to perform MILS required a conversion to OLS were included in the MILS group.

4. Definitions

Preoperative portal vein occlusion (PVO) included portal vein embolization, ligation or resection. The resection margin was considered positive when <1 mm. Concerning the type of liver resection performed: a traditional major hepatectomy is the resection of three or more contiguous segments (e.g., trisegmentectomy, hemi-hepatectomy, extended hepatectomy) [20]. A minor hepatectomy is the resection of one or two Couinaud segments, located in areas of the liver which are “easy” to access (S2, S3, S4b, S5, and S6); finally, a technically major resection is a resection that would be considered anatomically minor (involving only one or two Couinaud segments) but is located in areas of the liver that are difficult to access (the so called postero-superior segments: S1, S4a, S7, and S8) [21].

Major concurrent procedures included biliary and vascular (portal, hepatic artery, hepatic vein) reconstructions, colorectal, pancreatic, diaphragm, bladder, spleen, gastric, ileal and lung resections. Wound-related complications included wound dehiscence, surgical site infection, bleeding and wound hematoma. Respiratory-related complications included pleural effusion, atelectasis, respiratory insufficiency,

pneumonia, bronchitis, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) exacerbation, pneumothorax and pulmonary embolism. The International Study Group of Liver Surgery (ISGLS) definitions for postoperative bile leak and liver failure were used [22,23]. Postoperative morbidity was assessed and graded up till 30-day postoperatively using the Clavien-Dindo classification, and complications grade 3 or higher were considered severe [24]. Postoperative length of stay (LOS) was defined as the time from the surgical procedure until the discharge date.

4.1. Preoperative assessment and surgical technique

Before undergoing liver resection, patients underwent routine blood tests and imaging with triphasic thoraco-abdominal Computed Tomography scans and Magnetic Resonance Imaging with liver specific contrast, when indicated. The indication for liver surgery was evaluated for each patient in a multidisciplinary meeting including surgeons, hepatologists, oncologists and radiologists. PVO was indicated when the future liver remnant would be less than 20–25% of liver volume in case of a healthy liver, less than 30% in case of a liver injured by chemotherapy or in obese patients, and less than 40% in case of patients receiving intensive (>6 cycles) preoperative chemotherapy or in case of a cirrhotic patient.

Liver resections at the participating centres were performed according to similar techniques, independently from the chosen approach: at the beginning of the operation the number, location and size of hepatic lesions and their proximity to major vascular structures were investigated through intraoperative ultrasonography. In the majority of cases, parenchymal transection was performed with an ultrasonic dissector or a bipolar vessel sealer for the superficial part of the liver and an ultrasonic aspirator for the deep parenchyma. Vascular and biliary structures, based on their diameter, were sealed and divided with the used dissector device or were divided between metallic clips, Hem-o-Lok clips (Weck Closure Systems, Research Triangle Park, USA) or sutures or were closed and transected with mechanic staplers as required. A restriction in intravenous fluid administration was used during the parenchyma transection step in order to maintain a low central venous pressure. An intermittent Pringle manoeuvre was performed during liver transection at the discretion of the operating surgeon.

4.2. Survey on perception of liver surgery in obese patients

A survey was developed using Google Forms® (Google; Mountain View, CA, USA) by three of the authors (GZ, JS, and MAH), and subsequently submitted to the chief liver surgeons of the participating centres. The survey included 10 multiple choice questions investigating the surgeon's perception of obesity, different type of body fat distribution in obese patients, its impact on the difficulty of liver resections (MILS or OLS), and surgeons' attitudes in choosing the surgical approach (minimally invasive vs. open) when dealing with obese patients. All responses were handled anonymously. The survey is reported in the [supplementary materials](#).

5. Statistical analysis

Data analysis was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics for Mac OS X version 27.0 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA) and R for Mac OS X version 3.6.3 (R Foundation for Statistical Computing, Vienna, Austria). Single imputation was used to impute missing baseline characteristics data. Categorical data was reported as percentages. When appropriate, comparisons of categorical data were performed using a Chi-square or Fisher's exact test. Continuous normally distributed variables were expressed as mean with the standard deviation and compared between groups using an unpaired T-test. Continuous not normally distributed variables were expressed as median with the interquartile range and compared between groups using a Kruskal-Wallis test. Normality was checked by visually inspecting histograms and Q-Q plots. A two-sided P-

value < .05 was considered statistically significant.

PSM was performed in each BMI-category (non-obese, obese, class I, class II, and class III) with the MatchIt package to decrease the effect of selection bias in the comparison of MILS and OLS [25]. Covariates for PSM were chosen based on their potential influence on treatment allocation, these covariates were: age (<75 vs. ≥75 years old), sex, ASA-grade (I-II vs. III-IV), history of previous liver surgery, presence of Cirrhosis, treatment with neoadjuvant chemotherapy, type of disease (benign vs. malignant), preoperative PVO, size of the largest lesion (<50 vs. ≥50 mm), number of lesions (single vs. multiple), association of a major concurrent procedure, and type of liver resection performed (minor vs. technically major vs. traditional major). Based on these propensity scores, patients who underwent MILS were matched to patients who underwent OLS in a 1:1 ratio without replacement using a caliper width ranging from 0.001 to 0.1 [26]. Standardized differences (SD) were calculated to assess balance between both groups, with a SD ≤ 0.1 indicating optimal balance [27]. After PSM, categorical data were compared using McNemar's test or Marginal Homogeneity, when appropriate. Continuous data were compared using Wilcoxon Signed Rank test. A complete case sensitivity analysis was conducted to analyse the impact of the imputation of missing baseline data: patients with missing covariate data were excluded, after which PSM was performed in a similar fashion as described previously.

6. Results

Overall, 9963 patients were included and subsequently categorized into the two groups, non-obese and obese. Thereafter, patients were further classified according to the chosen surgical approach and their characteristics and outcomes were compared (See [Fig. 1](#) for the study flowchart).

6.1. Comparison of the characteristics and outcomes of non-obese and obese patients

A comparison of the characteristics and outcomes of obese (n = 1977) versus non-obese (n = 7986) patients showed, among obese patients, significantly higher rates of ASA scores >2, an age higher than 75 years old (both p < .001), cirrhosis (p = .039), lower rates of preoperative chemotherapy (p < .001), a history of previous liver resection (p = .011), and use of MILS (p = .001), which paralleled longer operation durations (p < .001), more intraoperative blood loss (IOBL) (p = .003), and higher rates of wound- and respiratory related complications (p < .001 and p = .031, respectively). In contrast, among non-obese patients a significantly higher bile leak rate was observed, compared to obese patients (p = .019) ([Table 1](#)).

6.2. Comparison of the characteristics and perioperative outcomes of patients undergoing MILS versus OLS among non-obese and obese patients, before and after PSM

Among patients who underwent MILS, compared to OLS, significantly higher rates of liver cirrhosis and lower rates of previous extrahepatic surgery and preoperative PVO were observed (all p < .001). Among OLS patients, higher rates of malignant disease (mainly related to higher rates of colorectal liver metastases, cholangiocarcinoma, and gallbladder cancer), larger maximum tumour diameters, and higher rates of multiple resected lesions were observed, compared to MILS (all p < .001). All these differences were observed both among non-obese and obese patients.

Such differences paralleled, among OLS patients, significantly higher rates of complex procedures, in terms of major liver resections and major concurrent procedures (all p < .001), longer operation duration, higher IOBL, and a more frequent need for intraoperative blood transfusion. These differences translated in higher rates of overall, liver related, and severe complications and mortality, as well as a longer LOS and higher

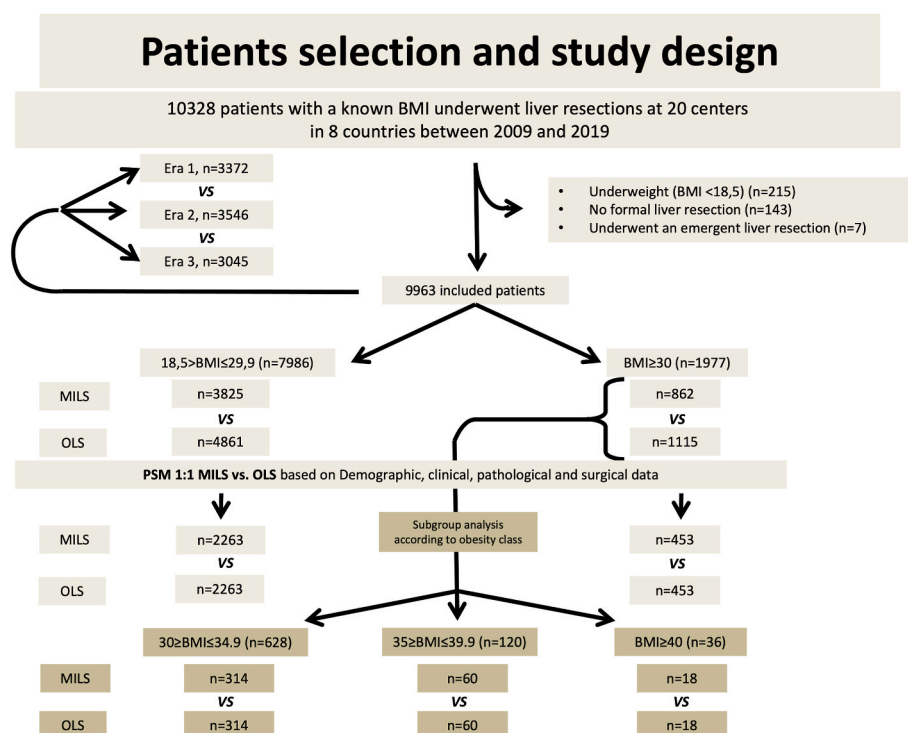


Fig. 1. Flow chart of patient selection and study design.

rates of positive surgical margins following OLS, compared to MILS, both among non-obese and obese patients (all $p < .001$) (Table 2).

After PSM, OLS remained associated, both among non-obese and obese patients, with a longer operation duration ($p < .001$ and $p = .002$, respectively), more IOBL ($p < .001$ for both), a more frequent need for intraoperative blood transfusion ($p < .001$ and $p = .009$, respectively), and higher rates of positive surgical margins ($p < .001$ and $p = .003$, respectively), overall postoperative complications ($p < .001$ and $p = .002$, respectively), bile leak ($p < .001$ and $p = .014$), liver failure ($p < .001$ and $p = .046$, respectively), and a longer LOS ($p < .001$ for both), compared to MILS (Table 3).

6.3. Comparison of the characteristics and outcomes of MILS versus OLS in different obesity classes

After stratification of obese patients in class I ($30 \leq \text{BMI} \leq 34.9$, $n = 1499$), class II ($35 \leq \text{BMI} \leq 39.9$, $n = 366$), and class III obesity ($\text{BMI} \geq 40$, $n = 112$), patients in each BMI class were classified according to the surgical approach used (MILS or OLS) and PSM was performed to improve the comparability of MILS and OLS in each group of patients (Fig. 1). The comparison of MILS versus OLS after PSM showed that, despite a similarity in terms of demographic, clinical, pathological and operative characteristics, MILS was associated with significantly less IOBL among patients with class I and class II obesity ($p < .001$ and $p = .016$, respectively), with a shorter median operation duration among patients with class I and III obesity ($p < .001$ and $p = .006$) and with a shorter LOS in all three obesity classes ($p < .001$ for obesity class I and II, $p = .003$ for obesity class III) (Table 4). In addition, among MILS patients in obesity class I, significantly lower rates of overall complications, bile leak, positive surgical margins, and of postoperative mortality were observed, compared to OLS.

6.4. Sensitivity analysis

After exclusion of the patients with missing covariate data, 3622 and 822 patients could be matched in the non-obese and obese cohorts,

respectively. Similar differences between patients that underwent MILS and OLS were observed. However, in obese patients, MILS was no longer associated with a significantly lower liver failure rate (Supplementary table 1). In non-obese patients, MILS was no longer associated with a significantly lower rate of liver failure and respiratory related complications. In the subgroups, 526, 94, and 32 patients could be matched in the respective obesity classes. The differences in the perioperative outcomes following MILS and OLS were similar to those observed in the imputed cohort (Supplementary table 2).

6.5. Trend analysis of used surgical approaches and postoperative outcomes during the study period

When assessing trends over the study period, the proportion of obese patients remained similar (19.5% vs. 20.2% vs. 19.9%, respectively, $p = .757$) (Fig. 2 and Table 5). The rate of patients who underwent MILS however increased among both non-obese (40.6%, 45%, and 59.4%, respectively; $p < .001$) and obese patients (42.1%, 37.1%, 53%, respectively; $p < .001$). Furthermore, the rate of complex liver resections, defined as anatomically and technically major hepatectomies, increased over time in both non-obese and obese patients undergoing MILS and OLS, although this increase was not statistically significant in the group of obese patients undergoing MILS [28]. Interestingly, the rate of complex liver resections performed by MILS mainly seemed to increase in the third time period.

These trends paralleled an increasing rate of overall complications (38.1%, 46.3%, and 41.8%, $p < .001$) and, although not-significant, mortality (3%, 4.5%, 4.2%, $p = .061$) among non-obese patients who underwent OLS. In contrast, the rates of overall morbidity (non-obese: 22%, 22.9%, 22.9%, $p = .839$; obese: 25%, 27.5%, 25%, $p = .733$), severe morbidity (non-obese: 7%, 8.1%, 8.7%, $p = .282$; obese: 6.9%, 9.4%, 6.8%, $p = .433$) and mortality (non-obese 1.8%, 1.1%, 1.4%, $p = .342$; obese 1.5%, 0.4%, 0.9%, $p = .423$) remained relatively stable over time among all patients who underwent MILS (Supplementary figure 1 and Table 5).

Table 1

Comparison of baseline characteristics and perioperative outcomes of non-obese and obese patients.

Characteristics	Overall (n = 9963)	Non-obese (n = 7986)	Obese (n = 1977)	P
Sex, Male	5829 (58.5)	4638 (58.1)	1191 (60.2)	0.085
Age, years	64.5 [55.2, 72.1]	64.7 [55, 72.6]	64 [56, 71]	0.136
Age ≥75 years old	1751 (17.6)	1472 (18.4)	279 (14.1)	<0.001
ASA-score 3&4	3581 (35.9)	2722 (34.1)	859 (43.4)	<0.001
Cirrhosis	1473 (14.8)	1151 (14.4)	322 (16.3)	0.039
Non HBV/HCV related	965 (9.7)	730 (9.1)	235 (11.9)	0.001
Previous extrahepatic surgery	4359 (43.8)	3480 (43.6)	879 (44.5)	0.493
Previous hepatic surgery	1052 (10.6)	875 (11)	177 (9)	0.011
Preoperative PVO	896 (9)	726 (9.1)	170 (8.6)	0.522
Preoperative CHT	2944 (29.5)	2486 (31.1)	458 (23.2)	<0.001
<i>Pathologic characteristics</i>				
Malignant disease	8710 (87.4)	6994 (87.6)	1716 (86.8)	0.369
Disease				0.003
CRLM	4954 (49.7)	4010 (50.2)	944 (47.7)	
HCC	1690 (17.0)	1319 (16.5)	371 (18.8)	
Cholangiocarcinoma	857 (8.6)	699 (8.8)	158 (8)	
Gallbladder cancer	248 (2.5)	187 (2.3)	61 (3.1)	
Benign	1253 (12.6)	992 (12.4)	261 (13.2)	
Non-CRLM	719 (7.2)	597 (7.5)	122 (6.2)	
Other	242 (2.4)	182 (2.3)	60 (3)	
Size largest lesion, millimetres	32 [20, 55]	32.00 [20, 55]	35 [20, 52.2]	0.196
Largest lesion ≥51 mm	2635 (26.4)	2138 (26.8)	497 (25.1)	0.148
Multiple lesions	3743 (37.6)	3025 (37.9)	718 (36.3)	0.209
<i>Operative characteristics</i>				
Minimally invasive approach	4687 (47)	3825 (47.9)	862 (43.6)	0.001
Type of resection				0.658
Minor	4073 (40.9)	3248 (40.7)	825 (41.7)	
Technically major	2739 (27.5)	2210 (27.7)	529 (26.8)	
Traditional major	3151 (31.6)	2528 (31.7)	623 (31.5)	
Major concurrent procedure(s)	1490 (15)	1207 (15.1)	283 (14.3)	0.391
Median operation duration, minutes	235.2 [165, 315]	232 [160, 314.1]	241.4 [180, 325.5]	<0.001
Median IOBL, ml	270 [100, 550]	260 [100, 510]	300 [100, 682.8]	0.003
Perioperative PRBC transfusion	789 (11.1)	635 (10.8)	154 (12.3)	0.137
Pedicle clamping	3661 (39.9)	2938 (39.9)	723 (39.9)	0.998
Conversion to laparotomy (in case of MI approach)	335 (7.3)	267 (7.1)	68 (8)	0.397
<i>Postoperative outcomes</i>				
Overall complications	3285 (33.1)	2608 (32.8)	677 (34.3)	0.195
Bile leak	600 (6.1)	504 (6.4)	96 (4.9)	0.019
Ascites	217 (2.3)	185 (2.5)	32 (1.7)	0.070
Liver failure	202 (2.2)	163 (2.2)	39 (2.1)	0.924
Wound related	158 (1.7)	102 (1.4)	56 (3)	<0.001
Respiratory related	550 (5.9)	421 (5.6)	129 (7)	0.031
Major complications	1162 (11.8)	947 (12)	215 (11)	0.227
90-day mortality	268 (2.7)	213 (2.7)	55 (2.8)	0.821
Positive surgical margin*	1922 (23.5)	1528 (23.2)	394 (24.5)	0.295
Median LOS, days	6 [4,9]	6 [4,9]	6 [4,9]	0.667

Values are expressed in percentages or in median (IQR).

Abbreviations: ASA, American Society of Anaesthesiologists; HBV, Hepatitis B virus; HCV, Hepatitis C virus; PVO, portal vein occlusion; CHT, chemotherapy; CLRM, colorectal liver metastases; HCC, hepatocellular carcinoma; IOBL, intraoperative blood loss; PRBC, packed red blood cell; MI, minimally invasive; LOS, length of stay.

*Analysis only performed for patients operated for a malignant lesion.

Missing values in overall cohort before single imputation of baseline data (if ≥ 2%): age, 250; ASA, 354; cirrhosis, 225; previous extrahepatic surgery, 267; preoperative PVO, 762; surgical margin, 527; size largest lesion, 1398; uni/multiple lesions, 462; operation duration, 2428; IOBL, 3608; transfusion, 2826; pedicle clamping, 791; ascites, liver failure, wound related & respiratory related morbidity, 636; LOS, 251.

6.6. Survey regarding liver surgery in obese patients

Supplementary table 3 shows the results of the survey conducted among the chief surgeons of the participating centres (n = 18). Almost half of the surgeons (n = 8) mentioned that they were more inclined to perform MILS in obese patients due to the perception that this approach can have several advantages in this patient population. Nevertheless, all but one of the participating surgeons stated that they experienced obesity as a factor which increases the technical difficulty both during MILS and OLS. The majority of surgeons (n = 15) considered a different fat distribution pattern (predominantly subcutaneous or intraperitoneal) associated with different grades of technical difficulty. During

MILS, a 'predominant intraperitoneal fat phenotype' was perceived as most challenging by a majority of the participating surgeons (n = 11). While during OLS most surgeons (n = 7) considered the two types of fat distribution equally responsible for increased surgical difficulty.

Half of the respondents (n = 9) believed that the benefits of MILS over OLS differed according to the body fat distribution of a patient. When queried about adaptations in surgical technique during MILS in obese patients, most surgeons (n = 11) reported modifications in the trocar position: a more cranial placement of the trocars was the most frequently mentioned change (n = 9). Only a quarter of the respondents (n = 5) used different instruments in obese patients (Supplementary table 3).

Table 2

Baseline characteristics and perioperative outcomes for non-obese and obese patients stratified by the used surgical approach, before PSM.

	Non-obese		P	SD	Obese		P	SD
	(n = 7986)				(n = 1977)			
Characteristics	MILS	OLS			MILS	OLS		
	(n = 3825)	(n = 4161)			(n = 862)	(n = 1115)		
Sex, Male	2148 (56.2)	2490 (59.8)	0.001	0.075	522 (60.6)	669 (60)	0.838	0.011
Age, years	65 [55.2, 73]	64.3 [55, 72]	0.019	0.039	64 [55.8, 71]	64 [56.4, 71.3]	0.881	0.020
Age >75 years old	763 (19.9)	709 (17)	0.001	0.075	115 (13.3)	164 (14.7)	0.423	0.039
ASA-score 3&4	1271 (33.2)	1451 (34.9)	0.128	0.035	403 (46.8)	456 (40.9)	0.011	0.118
Cirrhosis	665 (17.4)	486 (11.7)	<0.001	0.162	204 (23.7)	118 (10.6)	<0.001	0.353
Previous extrahepatic surgery	1567 (41)	1913 (46)	<0.001	0.101	321 (37.2)	558 (50)	<0.001	0.260
Previous hepatic surgery	370 (9.7)	505 (12.1)	<0.001	0.079	79 (9.2)	98 (8.8)	0.833	0.013
Preoperative PVO	135 (3.5)	591 (14.2)	<0.001	0.382	25 (2.9)	145 (13)	<0.001	0.380
Preop CHT	1211 (31.7)	1275 (30.6)	0.338	0.022	196 (22.7)	262 (23.5)	0.731	0.018
Pathologic characteristics								
Malignant disease	3263 (85.3)	3731 (89.7)	<0.001	0.132	724 (84)	992 (89)	0.001	0.146
Disease			<0.001	0.348			<0.001	0.439
CRLM	1855 (48.5)	2155 (51.8)			353 (41)	591 (53)		
HCC	752 (19.7)	567 (13.6)			226 (26.2)	145 (13)		
Cholangiocarcinoma	200 (5.2)	499 (12)			48 (5.6)	110 (9.9)		
Gallbladder cancer	45 (1.2)	142 (3.4)			15 (1.7)	46 (4.1)		
Benign	562 (14.7)	430 (10.3)			138 (16)	123 (11)		
N-CRLM	315 (8.2)	282 (6.8)			52 (6)	70 (6.3)		
Other	96 (2.5)	86 (2.1)			30 (3.5)	30 (2.7)		
Size largest lesion, millimetres	30 [18, 50]	35 [20, 60]	<0.001	0.221	30 [20, 47.8]	35 [22, 58]	<0.001	0.196
Largest lesion ≥51 mm	891 (23.3)	1247 (30)	<0.001	0.151	179 (20.8)	318 (28.5)	<0.001	0.181
Multiple lesions	1199 (31.3)	1826 (43.9)	<0.001	0.261	245 (28.4)	473 (42.4)	<0.001	0.296
Operative characteristics								
Type of liver resection			<0.001	0.751			<0.001	0.798
Minor	2161 (56.5)	1087 (26.1)			505 (58.6)	320 (28.7)		
Technically major	1030 (26.9)	1180 (28.4)			240 (27.8)	289 (25.9)		
Traditional major	634 (16.6)	1894 (45.5)			117 (13.6)	506 (45.4)		
Major concurrent procedure(s)	292 (7.6)	915 (22)	<0.001	0.413	51 (5.9)	232 (20.8)	<0.001	0.449
Intraoperative outcomes								
Median operation duration, min	195 [128, 272]	265.7 [205.8, 353]	<0.001		217 [150, 292.1]	270 [200.6, 350]	<0.001	
Median IOBL, ml	200 [100, 400]	380 [173.8, 723]	<0.001		200 [100, 412.8]	490 [200, 864.5]	<0.001	
Intraoperative PRBC transfusion	183 (5.4)	452 (18.1)	<0.001		44 (6.1)	110 (20.8)	<0.001	
Pedicle clamping	1385 (37.7)	1553 (42.1)	<0.001		315 (38)	408 (41.5)	0.142	
Conversion	267 (7.1)				68 (8)			
Postoperative outcomes								
Overall complications	864 (22.7)	1744 (42.1)	<0.001		222 (25.8)	455 (41)	<0.001	
Bile leak	129 (3.4)	375 (9.2)	<0.001		17 (2)	79 (7.2)	<0.001	
Ascites	35 (1)	150 (3.9)	<0.001		7 (0.9)	25 (2.4)	0.023	
Liver failure	28 (0.8)	135 (3.5)	<0.001		6 (0.8)	33 (3.1)	0.001	
Wound related	25 (0.7)	77 (2)	<0.001		17 (2.1)	39 (3.7)	0.066	
Respiratory related	141 (3.9)	280 (7.2)	<0.001		49 (6.1)	80 (7.6)	0.253	
Major complications	305 (8)	642 (15.6)	<0.001		66 (7.7)	149 (13.5)	<0.001	
Positive surgical margin*	546 (17.5)	982 (28.3)	<0.001		134 (19.5)	260 (28.2)	<0.001	
90-day or in-hospital mortality	54 (1.4)	159 (3.8)	<0.001		8 (0.9)	47 (4.3)	<0.001	
Median LOS, days	4 [3,6]	8 [6,12]	<0.001		4 [3,6]	7 [6,11]	<0.001	

Values are expressed in percentages or in median (IQR).

Abbreviations: MILS, minimally invasive liver surgery; OLS, open liver surgery; SD, standardized difference; PSM, propensity score matching; ASA, American Society of Anaesthesiologists; PVO, portal vein occlusion; CHT, chemotherapy; CLRM, colorectal liver metastases; HCC, hepatocellular carcinoma; IOBL, intraoperative blood loss; PRBC, packed red blood cell; LOS, length of stay.

*Analysis only performed for patients operated for a malignant lesion.

7. Discussion

This international study confirms an increasing trend in the use of MILS for the management of liver lesions in both non-obese and obese patients. It also shows a steady increase in the number of patients undergoing complex MILS (anatomically and technically major resections), especially following the Southampton consensus guidelines. These guidelines have specifically focused on the implementation and wider expansion of MILS in challenging clinical situations, of which obesity represents a good paradigm. Indeed, this was the first consensus meeting where the role of MILS in patients with a high BMI was specifically discussed and it was agreed that MILS may be feasible and safe for obese patients, but only in highly selected cases [13]. The observed increase in MILS use was however gradual and cautious, which may have led to the remarkably stable severe morbidity and mortality rates observed during

this wide implementation phase. Notably, when comparing the perioperative outcomes of the minimally invasive approach with the traditional open approach, MILS offered advantages in both non-obese and obese patients.

Previous studies on the outcomes of liver resections in patients within different BMI-classes ranged between single centre experiences and large national databases analyses and have reported contrasting results. This may be due to differences in study populations, the used surgical approach, the baseline disease, and the utilization of different BMI cut-offs. These studies have alternatively associated an elevated BMI with higher rates of postoperative morbidity, wound-complications, need for blood transfusions, and a longer operation duration [29–33].

In our study, the incidence of obesity (20%) was similar to that observed among European adults (17%) and the rates of class II and III obesity (3.7% and 1.1%) mirrored those observed worldwide (3.1% and

Table 3

Baseline characteristics and perioperative outcomes for non-obese and obese patients stratified by the used surgical approach, after PSM.

	Non-obese		P	SD	Obese		P	SD
	(n = 4526)				(n = 906)			
Characteristics	MILS	OLS			MILS	OLS		
	(n = 2263)	(n = 2263)			(n = 453)	(n = 453)		
Sex, Male	1364 (60.3)	1347 (59.5)	0.068	0.015	292 (64.5)	289 (63.8)	0.579	0.014
Age, years	67.7 [61, 73]	66.9 [58, 73]	<0.001	0.112	66.5 [59, 71]	66 [58.1, 71.4]	0.278	0.060
Age >75 years old	373 (16.5)	377 (16.7)	0.775	0.005	43 (9.5)	45 (9.9)	0.683	0.015
ASA-score 3&4	747 (33)	758 (33.5)	0.136	0.010	191 (42.2)	190 (41.9)	1	0.004
Cirrhosis	289 (12.8)	285 (12.6)	0.643	0.005	58 (12.8)	63 (13.9)	0.131	0.032
Previous extrahepatic surgery	991 (43.8)	1111 (49.1)	<0.001	0.106	196 (43.3)	225 (49.7)	0.037	0.129
Previous hepatic surgery	233 (10.3)	220 (9.7)	0.801	0.019	29 (6.4)	26 (5.7)	0.505	0.028
Preoperative PVO	104 (4.6)	104 (4.6)	1	<0.001	13 (2.9)	10 (2.2)	0.371	0.042
Preop CHT	753 (33.3)	740 (32.7)	0.208	0.012	112 (24.7)	104 (23)	0.080	0.041
Pathologic characteristics								
Malignant disease	2022 (89.4)	2001 (88.4)	0.002	0.030	398 (87.9)	397 (87.6)	1	0.007
Disease			0.907	0.252			0.487	0.280
CRLM	1231 (54.4)	1226 (54.2)			222 (49)	236 (52.1)		
HCC	392 (17.3)	342 (15.1)			93 (20.5)	73 (16.1)		
Cholangiocarcinoma	134 (5.9)	131 (5.8)			26 (5.7)	22 (4.9)		
Gallbladder cancer	26 (1.1)	117 (5.2)			9 (2)	30 (6.6)		
Benign	241 (10.6)	262 (11.6)			55 (12.1)	56 (12.4)		
N-CRLM	179 (7.9)	148 (6.5)			31 (6.8)	19 (4.2)		
Other	60 (2.7)	37 (1.6)			17 (3.8)	17 (3.8)		
Size largest lesion, millimetres	30 [19, 50]	33 [20, 50]	<0.001	0.098	30 [20,45]	33 [20, 50]	0.145	0.080
Largest lesion ≥51 mm	544 (24)	544 (24)	1	<0.001	89 (19.6)	95 (21)	0.149	0.033
Multiple lesions	919 (40.6)	929 (41.1)	0.332	0.009	152 (33.6)	150 (33.1)	0.773	0.009
Operative characteristics								
Type of resection			0.004	0.027			0.008	0.082
Minor	926 (40.9)	912 (40.3)			228 (50.3)	222 (49)		
Technically major	791 (35)	779 (34.4)			152 (33.6)	144 (31.8)		
Traditional major	546 (24.1)	572 (25.3)			73 (16.1)	87 (19.2)		
Major concurrent procedure(s)	227 (10)	227 (10)	1	<0.001	30 (6.6)	33 (7.3)	0.628	0.026
Intraoperative outcomes								
Median operation duration, min	210 [139.8, 300]	240.3 [189.5, 310]	<0.001		215 [150, 296]	240 [180, 320.4]	0.002	
Median IOBL, ml	200 [100, 450]	320 [150, 610.8]	<0.001		200 [100, 400]	400 [180, 800]	<0.001	
Intraoperative PRBC transfusion	133 (6.6)	170 (12.8)	<0.001		18 (4.7)	33 (14.7)	0.009	
Pedicle clamping	847 (38.9)	801 (40.1)	0.258		154 (35.2)	165 (41.2)	0.073	
Conversion	175 (7.9)				39 (8.7)			
Postoperative outcomes								
Overall complications	589 (26.1)	789 (35)	<0.001		113 (24.9)	156 (34.5)	0.002	
Bile leak	91 (4)	155 (7)	<0.001		8 (1.8)	22 (4.9)	0.014	
Ascites	23 (1.1)	51 (2.4)	0.001		1 (0.2)	7 (1.6)	0.131	
Liver failure	15 (0.7)	49 (2.3)	<0.001		1 (0.2)	9 (2.1)	0.046	
Wound related	18 (0.9)	29 (1.4)	0.155		10 (2.4)	9 (2.1)	0.814	
Respiratory related	98 (4.6)	134 (6.3)	0.018		25 (6)	35 (8.2)	0.488	
Major complications	212 (9.4)	239 (10.7)	0.159		30 (6.6)	47 (10.4)	0.058	
Positive surgical margin*	358 (18.4)	460 (24.6)	<0.001		67 (17.9)	96 (26.2)	0.003	
90-day or in-hospital mortality	39 (1.7)	53 (2.4)	0.175		2 (0.4)	15 (3.4)	0.003	
Median LOS, days	5 [3,7]	7 [5,10]	<0.001		4 [3,6]	7 [5,10]	<0.001	

Values are expressed in percentages or in median (IQR).

Abbreviations: MILS, minimally invasive liver surgery; OLS, open liver surgery; SD, standardized difference; PSM, propensity score matching; ASA, American Society of Anaesthesiologists; PVO, portal vein occlusion; CHT, chemotherapy; CLRM, colorectal liver metastases; HCC, hepatocellular carcinoma; IOBL, intraoperative blood loss; PRBC, packed red blood cell; LOS, length of stay.

*Analysis only performed for patients operated for a malignant lesion.

1.1%), suggesting a similarity in the distribution of BMI values in the overall population and the patients undergoing a liver resection in our study population [34,35]. The comparison of study patients according to BMI showed a certain grade of heterogeneity in patients' demographical and clinical characteristics, reflecting differences in operative technique and perioperative outcomes. An increasing BMI was associated with a worsening of patients' clinical conditions, independently from the used surgical approach (MILS or OLS), as suggested by higher rates of ASA-score >2 and cirrhosis among obese patients, compared to non-obese. In particular, this association, probably in addition to a perceived increase in surgical difficulty and risks related to operating obese patients, accounted for a less frequent use of MILS in these patients. The sum of these differences may account for the better intra- and postoperative outcomes observed among non-obese patients, compared to those with obesity, in line with previously published results.

Concerning the impact of the used surgical approach on the perioperative outcomes of obese patients, previously published studies have indicated that MILS is feasible, safe, and associated with non-inferior or even superior results in terms of a shorter LOS, lower IOBL, and need for perioperative blood transfusions [36–43]. These findings are in line with the findings in our study: when taking into account the whole study population, before PSM, MILS displayed superior perioperative outcomes both among non-obese and obese patients. However, this was the result of an evident unbalance in favour of MILS in terms of patients' pathological and surgical characteristics, reflecting a selection bias, with MILS preferentially being used in patients affected by benign disease or by less extensive disease and needing less technically challenging surgeries. Indeed, when specifically focusing on tumor type (malignant versus benign), it should be highlighted that one of the aims during the surgical treatment for malignant liver disease is to obtain a negative

Table 4

Baseline characteristics and perioperative outcomes per obesity-class stratified by the used surgical approach, after PSM.

	30 ≥ BMI ≤34.9		P	SD	35 ≥ BMI ≤39.9		P	SD	BMI ≥40		P	SD
	(n = 628)				(n = 120)				(n = 56)			
Characteristics	MILS	OLS			MILS	OLS			MILS	OLS		
	(n = 314)	(n = 314)			(n = 60)	(n = 60)			(n = 18)	(n = 18)		
Sex, Male	220 (70.1)	220 (70.1)	1	<0.001	29 (48.3)	32 (53.3)	0.371	0.100	5 (27.8)	7 (38.9)	1	0.237
Age, years	67 [59.6, 71.2]	65.2 [58, 71]	0.035	0.106	62.7 [54, 69]	62.3 [54.7, 68.7]	0.520	0.116	60.5 [55.5, 66.8]	64.2 [59.3, 70.6]	0.130	0.487
Age >75 years old	28 (8.9)	30 (9.6)	0.480	0.022	3 (5)	5 (8.3)	0.683	0.134	1 (5.6)	2 (11.1)	1	0.202
ASA score 3&4	123 (39.2)	122 (38.9)	1	0.007	21 (35)	23 (38.3)	0.683	0.069	13 (72.2)	14 (77.8)	1	0.129
Cirrhosis	46 (14.6)	46 (14.6)	1	<0.001	7 (11.7)	7 (11.7)	1	<0.001	3 (16.7)	2 (11.1)	1	0.161
Previous extrahepatic surgery	150 (47.8)	162 (51.6)	0.311	0.076	21 (35)	28 (46.7)	0.248	0.239	6 (33.3)	6 (33.3)	1	<0.001
Previous hepatic surgery	19 (6.1)	20 (6.4)	1	0.013	0	0	1	<0.001	1 (5.6)	1 (5.6)	1	<0.001
Preoperative PVO	8 (2.5)	8 (2.5)	1	<0.001	1 (1.7)	0	1	0.184	0	1 (5.6)	1	0.343
Preop CHT	79 (25.2)	82 (26.1)	0.371	0.022	11 (18.3)	11 (18.3)	1	<0.001	1 (5.6)	2 (11.1)	1	0.202
Pathologic characteristics												
Malignant disease	281 (89.5)	282 (89.8)	1	0.010	50 (83.3)	50 (83.3)	1	<0.001	15 (83.3)	15 (83.3)	1	<0.001
Disease			0.364	0.276			0.459	0.526			0.872	0.660
CRLM	162 (51.6)	178 (56.7)			22 (36.7)	28 (46.7)			7 (38.9)	5 (27.8)		
HCC	70 (22.3)	52 (16.6)			14 (23.3)	7 (11.7)			3 (16.7)	3 (16.7)		
Cholangiocarcinoma	19 (6.1)	13 (4.1)			3 (5)	4 (6.7)			0	2 (11.1)		
Gallbladder cancer	6 (1.9)	19 (6.1)			2 (3.3)	5 (8.3)			2 (11.1)	3 (16.7)		
Benign	33 (10.5)	32 (10.2)			10 (16.7)	10 (16.7)			3 (16.7)	3 (16.7)		
N-CRLM	15 (4.8)	13 (4.1)			8 (13.3)	3 (5)			2 (11.1)	2 (11.1)		
Other	9 (2.9)	7 (2.2)			1 (1.7)	3 (5)			1 (5.6)	0		
Size largest lesion, millimetres	30 [20, 45]	30 [20, 45]	0.702	0.004	35 [20, 59]	39 [24.9, 56.3]	0.824	0.034	23.5 [15, 43.8]	31 [15, 43.8]	0.459	0.275
Largest lesion ≥51 mm	55 (17.5)	54 (17.2)	1	0.008	18 (30)	18 (30)	1	<0.001	2 (11.1)	1 (5.6)	1	0.202
Multiple lesions	111 (35.4)	107 (34.1)	0.221	0.027	18 (30)	15 (25)	0.248	0.112	1 (5.6)	3 (16.7)	0.480	0.359
Operative characteristics												
Type of resection			0.149	0.041			0.392	0.090			0.317	0.133
Minor	162 (51.6)	159 (50.6)			29 (48.3)	28 (46.7)			10 (55.6)	11 (61.1)		
Technically major	97 (30.9)	95 (30.3)			22 (36.7)	21 (35)			5 (27.8)	4 (22.2)		
Traditional major	55 (17.5)	60 (19.1)			9 (15)	11 (18.3)			3 (16.7)	3 (16.7)		
Major concurrent procedure(s)	15 (4.8)	17 (5.4)	0.480	0.029	3 (5)	4 (6.7)	1	0.071	0	0	1	<0.001
Intraoperative outcomes												
Median operation duration, min	215 [149, 289.1]	240 [180, 319.7]	<0.001		190 [152, 255]	262.3 [169.3, 312.4]	0.107		159 [114, 214.4]	264 [222, 330.6]	0.006	
Estimated blood loss	200 [100, 400]	400 [180, 800]	<0.001		150 [100, 350]	700 [220, 800]	0.016		400 [75, 550]	450 [277.5, 2075]	0.461	
Intraoperative PRBC transfusion	16 (5.9)	24 (15.5)	0.019		3 (5.8)	3 (11.1)	0.617		0	3 (23.1)	0.250	
Pedicle clamping	105 (34.7)	115 (43.1)	0.063		16 (27.6)	21 (40.4)	0.118		3 (16.7)	7 (38.9)	0.450	
Conversion	27 (8.7)				6 (10.3)				0			
Postoperative outcomes												
Overall complications	86 (27.4)	114 (36.3)	0.019		13 (21.7)	15 (25.4)	0.823		2 (11.1)	6 (33.3)	0.289	
Bile leak	4 (1.3)	17 (5.5)	0.009		0	2 (3.4)	0.500		0	1 (5.6)	1	
Ascites	0	4 (1.3)	0.250		0	1 (1.8)	1		0	1 (5.9)	1	
Liver failure	1 (0.4)	8 (2.7)	0.221		1 (1.8)	1 (1.8)	1		0	0	1	
Wound related	4 (1.4)	8 (2.7)	0.387		2 (3.5)	0	0.500		0	1 (5.9)	1	
Respiratory related	17 (6.0)	23 (7.7)	0.596		4 (7)	3 (5.3)	1		1 (5.6)	0	1	
Major complications	24 (7.6)	36 (11.5)	0.127		5 (8.3)	5 (8.5)	1		0	2 (11.1)	0.500	
Positive surgical margin*	46 (17.4)	76 (28.9)	0.002		5 (11.1)	11 (25)	0.450		2 (15.4)	2 (13.3)	1	
90-day or in-hospital mortality	2 (0.6)	10 (3.3)	0.043		2 (3.3)	1 (1.7)	1		0	1 (5.6)	1	
Median LOS, days	4 [3,6]	7 [5,10]	<0.001		4 [3,6]	7 [5,8]	<0.001		4 [3,5]	7 [6, 10.5]	0.003	

Values are expressed in percentages or in median (IQR).

Abbreviations: MILS, minimally invasive liver surgery; OLS, open liver surgery; SD, standardized difference; PSM, propensity score matching; ASA, American Society of Anaesthesiologists; PVO, portal vein occlusion; CHT, chemotherapy; CLRM, colorectal liver metastases; HCC, hepatocellular carcinoma; IOBL, intraoperative blood loss; PRBC, packed red blood cell; LOS, length of stay.

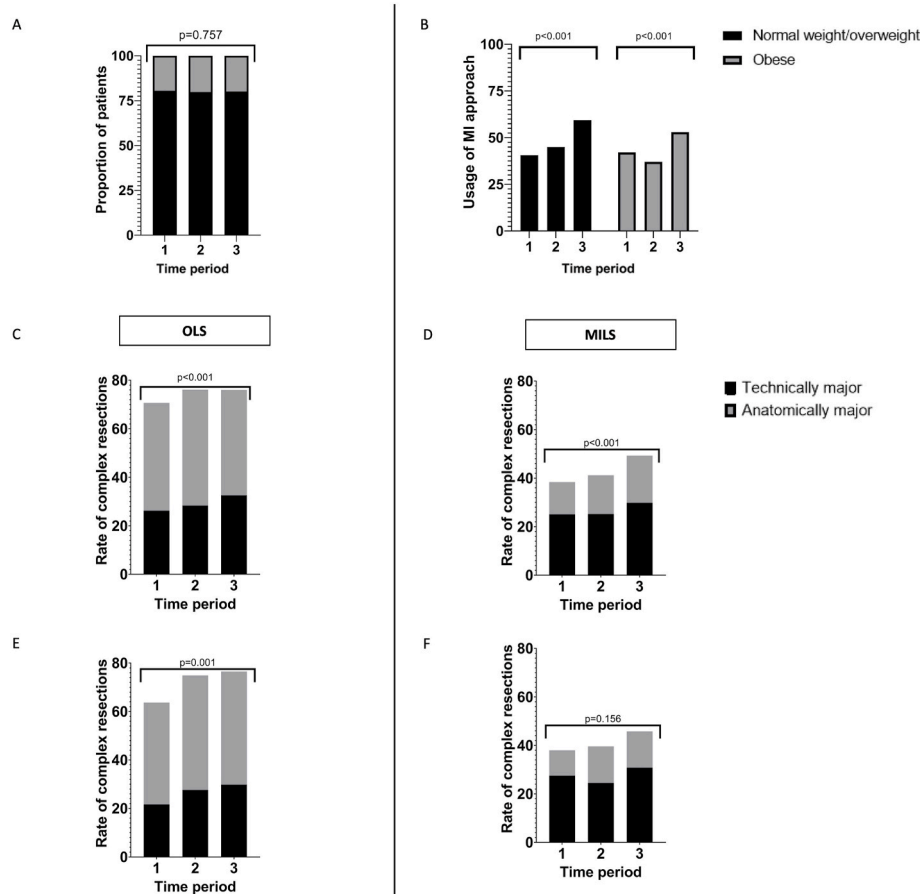


Fig. 2. Trend analysis of patients characteristics during the three chosen time periods: A) proportion of non-obese and obese patients; B) proportion of patients operated by a MI approach; C) rate of complex resections performed in non-obese patients by OLS; D) rate of complex resections performed in non-obese patients by MILS; E) rate of complex resections performed in obese patients by OLS; F) rate of complex resections.

(more or less extended, according to the tumor characteristics) surgical margin. To achieve this, an anatomical liver resection may be required, translating in a more extensive and challenging operation compared to liver resections performed for benign disease, which usually do not require an extended surgical margin and for which, except than for cases with an undetermined diagnosis, a narrow margin is usually acceptable. Nevertheless, even after selection bias mitigation through PSM, MILS remained associated with several benefits, namely with less IOBL, a less frequent need for intraoperative blood transfusions, lower rates of overall morbidity and bile leak, and a shorter LOS. Notably, these benefits were evident among both non-obese and obese patients. In this context, our results strengthen the hypothesis that the benefits of reduced wall trauma in MILS may translate into an earlier postoperative rehabilitation and may facilitate cardiopulmonary recovery in obese patients. The additional subgroup analysis aiming at investigating and comparing the characteristics and outcomes of MILS and OLS among obese patients stratified in three different obesity classes allowed us to overcome the limitations of including obese patients in a single study group and to expand on MILS benefits in different obesity classes. The results of this subgroup analysis showed, despite a significant sample size reduction limiting the statistical power, a persisting benefit of MILS over OLS in terms of a shorter LOS, supporting the idea that MILS may also be of benefit in severely obese patients.

The increasing experience in and confidence with MILS when operating on obese patients is deducible from the earlier mentioned trends and from the results of the conducted survey, wherein it was clear that the majority of surgeons have increased their adoption of MILS in obese patients during their own clinical practice. This widening of indications

was based on a strong belief that obese patients may benefit from a minimally invasive approach when undergoing liver surgery. However, all surgeons recognized that obesity is an important challenging factor that increases the difficulty of both MILS and OLS.

Our study has several limitations that need to be acknowledged and discussed. The first is the study's observational and retrospective nature, with its associated loss of data. However, the imputation methods strengthened by the sensitivity analysis allowed us to include all patients in the PSM analysis. Second, the low number of patients included in the subgroup analysis of obesity class 3 accounted in the statistical power reduction for the comparison between MILS and OLS, possibly leading to type 2 errors. Nevertheless, we believe that the stratification of obese patients in three obesity classes allows for a more precise and in-depth assessment of the characteristics and outcomes of obese patients. In particular, this methodology and the large available cohort in this study made it possible to present an interesting overview of the characteristics and results of patients in obesity classes II and III, which are frequently not specifically assessed. Third, the retrospective nature of the study did not allow for the collection of data which may have affected the choice of the used surgical approach. Specifically, the lack of data concerning the tumor deepness and proximity to intrahepatic major vessels may have determined a selection bias in the choice of performing a MILS or OLS and may have contributed to an unbalance between the two groups of patients, both among normal weight and obese patients. The lack of data concerning the ethnicity of the patients may also represent a potential study limitation. The impact of patient ethnicity on the characteristics and outcomes of patients affected by a liver tumor, mainly for HCC, has been widely assessed by research groups in the United States.

Table 5
Trend analysis.

Characteristics	Jan. 2009	Jan. 2014	Jan. 2017	P
	Dec. 2013	Dec. 2016	Dec. 2019	
	(n = 3372)	(n = 3546)	(n = 3045)	
	%	%	%	
Proportion of obese patients	19.5	20.2	19.9	0.757
Usage of MI approach				
Non-obese	40.6	45	59.4	<0.001
Obese	42.1	37.1	53	<0.001
Surgical complexity				
Laparoscopic liver surgery				
Non-obese				<0.001
Minor	61.6	58.8	50.6	
Technically major	25.1	25.2	29.8	
Traditional major	13.3	16	19.5	
Obese				0.156
Minor	62	60.4	54.2	
Technically major	27.5	24.5	30.8	
Traditional major	10.5	15.1	15	
Open liver surgery				
Non-obese				<0.001
Minor	29.2	23.8	23.7	
Technically major	26.2	28.3	32.5	
Major	44.5	47.8	43.5	
Obese				0.001
Minor	36.1	25	23	
Technically major	21.6	27.6	29.8	
Major	42.1	47.3	46.7	
Postoperative outcomes				
Laparoscopic liver surgery				
Overall morbidity rate				
Non-obese	22	22.9	22.9	0.839
Obese	25	27.5	25	0.733
Open liver surgery				
Overall morbidity rate				
Non-obese	38.1	46.3	41.8	<0.001
Obese	38.1	40.4	45.6	0.147
Laparoscopic liver surgery				
Severe morbidity rate				
Non-obese	7	8.1	8.7	0.282
Obese	6.9	9.4	6.9	0.433
Open liver surgery				
Severe morbidity rate				
Non-obese	15.1	16.5	15.2	0.482
Obese	12.5	12.5	16.5	0.242
Laparoscopic liver surgery				
Mortality rate				
Non-obese	1.8	1.1	1.4	0.342
Obese	1.5	0.4	0.9	0.423
Open liver surgery				
Mortality rate				
Non-obese	3	4.5	4.2	0.061
Obese	3.9	4.1	4.9	0.806

These research groups have suggested that patients belonging to an ethnic minority (African, Asian, or Hispanic) have poorer outcomes, compared to caucasian patients, probably due to social-economic disparities (affecting the healthcare access) among different ethnicities [44, 45]. However, we believe that the low rates of people belonging to ethnic minorities in European countries, which represented the majority of countries participating to the current study, in association with the regulations for healthcare access in place for European citizens, may make an analysis of ethnicity impact on characteristics and outcomes of operated patients clinically irrelevant in the current study. Similarly, the lack of laboratory, imaging, and histologic tests needed for diagnosing non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) prevented us from investigating eventual associations between NAFLD and cirrhosis among patients included in the current study. However, the statistically significant higher rates of cirrhosis among obese patients, compared to non-obese, and the persistence of such difference even after the exclusion of patients with chronic hepatitis B or C related cirrhosis (Table 1),

suggests a possible association between NAFLD and cirrhosis among obese patients. Additionally, the lack of specific intraoperative data, as well as of in-depth histologic data in patients resected for malignancies, prevented us from assessing the feasibility and safety of techniques for selective vascular inflow occlusion among obese patients and from comparing its outcomes with Pringle maneuver, as well as from assessing eventual association of tumor histologic characteristics, like lymphovascular invasion, with obesity. We strongly believe that this is an interesting area for future research. Finally, data concerning the pattern of fat distribution was not available for the patients included in this study, precluding the investigation of its impact on perioperative outcomes. The prevalence of a visceral fat distribution may be associated with sarcopenia and can negatively affect the postoperative outcomes of patients undergoing a liver resection [46]. In this context, further studies are needed to investigate this association and its impact. However, the results of our survey conducted among the chief surgeons of the participating centres may partially fill this knowledge gap.

8. Conclusion

This large international multicentre study has found a gradual and cautious adoption of MILS in the surgical management of liver lesions in both non-obese and obese patients. Additionally, it has confirmed the safety, feasibility, and perioperative benefits of this approach in patients within different BMI classes, despite the fact that obesity remains a factor that may increase the technical difficulty of liver surgery, as objectified by longer operative times, more IOBL and the results of our survey.

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned, externally peer-reviewed.

Conflicts of interest and source of funding

No conflicts of interest or funding.

Data statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, MAH, upon reasonable request. The data are not publicly available since this could compromise the privacy of research participants.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Giuseppe Zimmitti: Formal analysis, Conceptualization, Data curation, Investigation, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Jasper P. Sijberden:** Formal analysis, Conceptualization, Data curation, Investigation, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Mohammed Abu Hilal:** Formal analysis, Conceptualization, Methodology, Supervision, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijssu.2022.106957>.

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