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Original article

Study of the role of IL-17F gene polymorphism in the development of immune thrombocytopenia among the Egyptian children

Shahira K.A. Botros^a, Ola M. Ibrahim^b, Alaa A. Gad^{a,*}

^a Department of Clinical and Chemical Pathology, Faculty of Medicine, Cairo University, Egypt ^b Department of Child Health, National Research Centre, Egypt

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ABSTRACT

Background: Interleukin 17F (IL-17F) is a pro-inflammatory cytokine that is recently proved to have a crucial role in the emergence of autoimmune diseases; it induces the expression of various cytokines, chemokines, and adhesion molecules. IL-17F polymorphism is subsequently related to enhanced IL-17F expression and activity; which may result in susceptibility to many autoimmune diseases including primary immune thrombocytopenia (PIT).

Aim of the study: This case-control study aimed to investigate the possible association between IL and 17F gene single nucleotide polymorphism (SNP) at rs 7488A/G and PIT susceptibility in Egyptian pediatric patients.

Subjects and methods: A total of 50 children with PIT with a mean age of 7 years, together with 50 age and sexmatched healthy controls were enrolled in the study for evaluation. Polymerase chain reaction-restriction fragment length polymorphism (PCR-RFLP) was used for detection of IL-17F polymorphism at rs7488A/G.

Results: Regarding the genotypes distribution, the frequencies of the AA, AG and GG genotypes were 96, 2, and 2% in PIT patients and 90, 10 and 0% in the control group respectively. The A and G allele frequencies were 97 and 3% in the patients' group versus 95 and 5% in the control group. There was no significant difference in either genotypes or allelic distribution between PIT patients and the controls.

Conclusion: Our study suggests that IL17F gene polymorphism at rs7488A/G may not contribute to the susceptibility in development of primary immune thrombocytopenia in the Egyptian children.

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1. Introduction

Primary immune thrombocytopenia (PIT) is an acquired autoimmune disorder characterized by a low platelet count that occurs in the absence of underlying disease; which is attributed to the vagueness of the disease's pathogenesis. Decreased platelet count usually results from increased platelet destruction together with inadequate platelet production [1].

PIT is considered the most common autoimmune cytopenia in the childhood; 2.2–5.3 per 100,000 children aged 18 years or less are diagnosed with PIT every year [2]. Fortunately, childhood PIT is known to have a favorable prognosis [3].

Though the pathogenesis of PIT is still rendered unclear, yet there are many theories that emphasize the involvement of multiple mechanisms comprising antiplatelet antibodies secreted by

Peer review under responsibility of Ain Shams University. * Corresponding author.

E-mail address: Aag0121@my.londonmet.ac.uk (A.A. Gad).

auto-reactive B lymphocytes, platelet destruction mediated by T cells, poor functionality of regulatory T cells accompanied with their reduced number [4].

Innovative data had supported the hypothesis of CD4 T cell plasticity which in turn leads to diverse immune responses, based on the type of impact made by the inflammatory environment; this could be exemplified in T helper 17 (Th17) cell that can easily become an Interferon γ (IFN- γ) producer [5].

CD4 T cells are capable to modify their profile for which interleukin they are going to produce; in addition they can attain "mixed" phenotype features in a classically defined lineage [6]. Thus, nowadays their role is now interpreted as network of responses rather than distinctive elements [7], since the balance between these subsets has been involved in the regulation of several immune responses [1]. Ogawara et al. [8] had shown that increased T helper 1/T helper 2 (Th1/Th2) ratio was correlated with PIT development. Moreover, another study made by Ji et al. [9] had shown the role of up-regulated Th 17 cells in the pathogenesis of PIT.

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IL-17F is a signature cytokine secreted from Th17 cells, apart from playing a crucial role in the defensive mechanism against pathogens and autoimmunity; it has shown to function differently from other members of the IL-17 cytokine family, especially IL-17A. Hence IL-17F is considered a principal mediator of cellular immunity by preserving the expression of essential cytokines that induce pro-inflammatory responses [10].

IL-17F gene is located on chromosome No. 6p 12.3, it has 3 exons interposed with 2 introns [11]. IL-17F rs763780 polymorphism affects the coding region of the gene by causing Histidine to Arginine (His-to-Arg) substitution at amino acid 161, this SNP leads to up-regulation of IL-17F and consequently the development of autoimmune diseases comprising PIT [12].

2. Aim of the study

This is a case-control study aiming to analyze IL-17F polymorphism at rs7488A/G among Egyptian children diagnosed with PIT and healthy children to evaluate its contribution to PIT susceptibility.

3. Subjects and methods

3.1. Subjects

This case-control study involved a total of 50 Egyptian pediatric patients diagnosed with ITP (28 acute and 22 chronic) who attended the Pediatric Hematology outpatient clinic - Abu El Rish - Cairo University Hospital, as well as 50 age and sex matched healthy children as controls. Thereafter an informed consent was attained from each participant or from his/her guardians. The study was approved by Ethical Committee of Clinical Pathology, Cairo University. An informed written consent was obtained from all the patients participating in the study. The work has been carried out in accordance with the code of ethics of the World Medical Association (Declaration of Helsinki) for experiments in humans. PIT diagnosis was established via history taking together with physical examination and laboratory investigations. Inclusion criteria were obtained for these patients and incorporated a Complete Blood Count (CBC) results that revealed an isolated thrombocytopenia ($<100 \times 10^9$ /l), without anemia or leucopenia and Bone Marrow Aspirate (BMA) that showed a megakaryocytic morphology compatible with the diagnosis of PIT. Furthermore; patient's history showed no concomitant autoimmune disorders, no medications known to cause thrombocytopenia, no associated viral disorders or suspicion of malignancy. Exclusion criteria comprised infants with age <6 months, manifestations of active infection, splenomegaly and secondary causes of PIT, such as systemic lupus erythematosis (SLE). Nonetheless, a further classification was done on our PIT patients based on the duration of the disease. They were divided into acute "newly diagnosed" cases as well as chronic cases of more than 12 months duration. The disease duration in our PIT chronic patients ranged from 13 to 48 months with a median of 30 months. Peripheral blood samples were withdrawn from all the acute cases before starting any medications. On the other hand, PIT chronic cases were receiving Glucocorticoids as the main line of treatment in such cases, but none of them had been treated with it at least 4 months prior to sampling.

3.2. Methods

3.2.1. Genomic DNA extraction

Two ml of anti-coagulated peripheral venous blood were withdrawn from all ITP cases as well as controls for Genomic DNA extraction using Prime-Prep Genomic DNA Isolation Kit (GENET BIO, Korea), manufacturers' instructions were followed and extracted DNA samples were stored at -20° .

3.2.2. Genotyping

IL-17F + A/G genotyping was carried out by polymerase chain reaction-restriction fragment length polymorphism (PCR-RFLP) technique using TECHNE, Thermal Cycler instruments (TECHNE, Version 3.1) and the following pairs of primers were used: forward primer: 5' GTTCCCATCCAGCAAGAGAC-3', reverse primer: 5-AGCTGGGAATGCAAACAAAC-3'[13,14].

The PCR cycles conditions were as follows: 94 °C for 3 min; 35 cycles at 94 °C for 30 s, 60 °C for 30 s and 72 °C for 30 s; and a final elongation step at 72 °C for 7 min. The PCR products were visualized after electrophoresis in 2% agarose gel and ethidium bromide staining under UV light (Uvitec). The amplified PCR products were digested with the NlaIII restriction endonuclease (New England BioLabs Inc.) and analyzed in 2% agarose gel. Three patterns were observed following digestion and electrophoresis: a single 412 bp fragment (individuals homozygous for the IL-17F G allele, lacking the NlaIII site), three fragments of 412, 288 and 124 bp in length (heterozygous individuals) or two fragments of 288 and 124 bp (individuals homozygous for the IL-17F A allele).

3.2.3. Statistical methods

Data management and analysis were performed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS-17). Numerical data were summarized using means and standard deviations or medians and ranges. Categorical data were summarized as percentages. Comparisons between the two groups with respect to numeric variables were done by the Mann-Whitney test. To compare more than two groups with respect to numeric variables, Kruskal-Wallis test followed by the post hoc Dunn test for non-parametric data was performed. The chi-square test was used to compare the groups with respect to categorical data. To assess the degree of association between the numeric variables, the Spearman correlation for nonparametric data was used. P values ≤ 0.05 were considered significant.

4. Results

The study involved 50 patients suffering from ITP; 22 (44%) of them fulfilled the criteria of chronic PIT [11 (50%) boys and 11 (50%) girls]; their mean age was 7.91 ± 3.37 . 28 (56%) children had acute ITP [16 (57.1%) boys and 12 (57.1%) girls]; their mean age was 6.29 ± 3.49 years. In addition, 50 age and Sex-matched healthy children [28 (57.0%) boys and 22 (43.0%) girls] were included as a control group. Their mean age was 7.42 ± 3.21 years. The descriptive data of the studied subjects are illustrated in Table 1 and 2.

Regarding genotypes distribution, the wild genotype (AA) frequency was 96% in the PIT patients compared to 90% in the control group. The heterozygous mutant (AG) genotype frequency was 2% in PIT group compared to 10% in the control group while the homozygous mutant (GG) genotype frequency was 2% and 0% respectively in patients and control groups, The difference in genotypes distribution (AG, AA, GG) was not statistically significant (p = 0.1, 0.3, 0.5 respectively).

Similarly, the frequency of both homozygous GG and heterozygous AG mutant genotypes was comparable between both groups (4% vs 10% in cases and control groups respectively, p = 0.24).

On the other hand, our study showed no statistically significant difference between the allelic distribution of the IL17F (A7488G) SNP in the studied groups; where the mutant allele G frequency was 3% and 5% in patients and control groups respectively, (p = 0.47). Data are presented in Table 3 and 4 and Fig. 1.

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