Characterization of Inhibin Alpha Gene in Patients of Polycystic Ovary Syndrome

Farkhanda Haroon*, Ayesha Maqbool, Rabia Rafiq, Fatima Azhar and Muhammad Nazer Ul Islam Haroon
Virtual University, Pakistan

Abstract
Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) is multi-symptomatic gynecological disorder with high prevalence (5-10%) among human females. Primarily it affects female reproductive system resulting in infrequent menstrual cycles. Visceral adiposity, insulin resistance, hirsutism and infertility are other consequences of PCOS. Genetic as well as environmental factors contribute for the progression of PCOS. Multiple studies revealed association of PCOS with mutations in different genes specifically expressing androgens and androgen receptors. PCOS is an autosomal and X-linked disease. Inhibin A downregulates the follicle stimulating hormone (FSH) to promote ovulation and normal menstrual cycle. Inhibin A is a hetero dimer of INHA and inhibin INHB subunits. INHA along with Anti-mullerian hormone can be used as a diagnostic marker for PCOS. This study has been conducted using data of fifty participants. They were classified into two groups, control and experimental group. Out of total 50 participants, 30 were PCOS patients and 20 were healthy control subjects. Blood samples of PCOS patients were collected from Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences. Extracted DNA from blood was used for amplification of exon 2 of INHA subunit of Inhibin A and B gene. Restriction digestion of Amplified gene segment was carried out with restriction endonuclease. Restriction fragment length polymorphism (RFLP) results showed 30% (p 0.0178) of PCOS patients having heterozygous mutation (G769A/ rs12720062). Results revealed positive risk of developing PCOS when having A allele at position 769bp in heterozygous state. So, we concluded that there is an association between heterozygosity at rs12720062 and risk of development of PCOS.

Keywords: Hirsutism; Anti-mullerian hormone; Heterozygous mutation

Abbreviations: PCOS: Polycystic Ovary Syndrome; FSH: Follicle Stimulating Hormone; RFLP: Restriction Fragment Length Polymorphism; LH: Luteinizing Hormone; PCR: Polymerase Chain Reaction; POF: Premature Ovarian failure; AMH: Anti-Mullerian hormone

Introduction
Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) also called as Stein Leventhal syndrome is one of the most common gynecological disorders. It is one of the main reasons of infertility or poor fertility among females. It is a multi-symptomatic disorder that is a result of elevated androgens in females. Hyperandrogenism, insulin resistance and irregular menstrual cycles are consequences of PCOS. During menstrual cycle, follicles are ruptured to release egg for fertilization in a process called as ovulation. If follicles fail to rupture, eggs absorb fluid and turn into follicular cysts. On the other hand, after normal ovulation, follicles are dissolved. If follicles are not dissolved and their opening is closed than follicles will turn into corpus luteum cysts. Other types of ovarian cysts include dermoid, cystadenomas and endometriomas cysts. Sometimes ovaries contain large number (12 or more than 12) cysts. In this case, this disorder is called as polycystic ovary syndrome.

Symptoms of cystic ovaries include abdominal bloating, painful bowl movement, pelvic pain, painful intercourse, breast tenderness, nausea and vomiting. If this disorder becomes severe, symptoms like faintness, rapid breathing and sharp pelvic pain are added. 60 to 70 % of PCOS patients suffer from clinical hyperandrogenism [1] which is actually steroidogenic defect of theca cells. In this case follicle stimulating hormone (FSH) and Luteinizing Hormone (LH) level is increased.

Another consequence of PCOS is insulin resistance. Variable number of tandem repeat polymorphism in insulin gene promoter regions is involved in its expression [2]. There is a strong association between class III allele of insulin gene VNTR in 5’ region of insulin gene in case of PCOS [3]. This allele is preferentially transmitted from heterozygous fathers. Later studies revealed no association between insulin gene, PCOS and hyperandrogenemia. One of the reasons of these opposing results is ethnic and geographical differences.

Hyperandrogenism is also a major problem of PCOS patients. Some cases of hyperandrogenism have been reported in patients with aromatase deficiency [4]. CYP17A1 enzyme over production and other intracellular signaling defects are responsible for excessive androgen synthesis. GATA6 mRNA was found at high level as it regulates the expression of STAR in procrine ovary. This transcription factor enhances the steroid synthesis in theca cells [5]. Earlier studies have revealed that PCOS is an X linked disorder in which it affects multiple members of successive generations [6]. 47 % female offspring of affected females are affected while all the daughters of affected males (Elevated FSH/LH) are affected [7].

First relatives of patients of hirsutism and enlarged ovaries are at higher risk as compared to first degree relatives of normal females [8]. Later on, studies revealed PCOS as an autosomal as well as X linked inherited disease [9].

A study has shown that healthy sisters of affected females showed evidence of insulin resistance despite of absence of clinical

*Corresponding author: Farkhanda Haroon, Virtual University, Pakistan, Tel: 00923045447368; E-mail: haroonfarkhanda@gmail.com

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hyperandrogenism. It shows that in PCOS affected families, insulin resistance is a dominant trait [10].

Inhibin is a peptide hormone that is synthesized and secreted by ovaries and testis. It has two isoforms named inhibin A and inhibin B. Inhibin is involved in suppression of FSH level through negative feedback during luteal to follicular phase transition of menstrual cycle [11]. Welt and his colleagues investigated levels of inhibin A and B through ELISA and find elevated levels of inhibin A and B in PCOS patients as compared to the regular subjects [12]. Other researchers have shown slightly elevated inhibin A and unaffected inhibin B levels in women suffering from PCOS [13]. In case of PCOS, increased level of circulating Inhibin B was found in persistent small follicles [14]. Kumar et al. worked on transgenic models and concluded that INHA mutant mice possessed higher concentration of FSH [15].

Abnormalities and mutations in inhibin genes are associated with male and female reproductive cancers and reproductive disorders such as premature ovarian failure [16]. Women with variants of INHA suffer from severe symptoms of premature ovarian failure [17]. One of the variants of inhibin A allele named p. A257T is found abundant in women suffering from PCOS [13]. In case of PCOS, increased level of circulating Inhibin B was found in persistent small follicles [14]. Kumar et al. worked on transgenic models and concluded that INHA mutant mice possessed higher concentration of FSH [15].

Results

We analyzed total 50 subjects including 30 PCOS patients and 20 control subjects. PCR product digestion through RFLP showed heterozygous genotype (AG) in 9 experimental subjects and 01 control subject. On the other hand homozygous mutated genotype (AA) was observed in only one experimental subject. Table 1 shows Frequency of different genotypes found in control & experimental subjects (Figure 2).

RFLP analysis for 769G<A mutation (rs12720062) results show linkage of heterozygosity with PCOS. Lane 1 showing marker (10000bp-250bp). Lane 2-4 representing control group samples with wild genotype GG. Lane 5-8 showing wild genotype GG as well as heterozygous genotype AG.

Statistical analysis

Data resulted from RFLP was subjected to statistical analysis to confirm statistical significance. Data was analyzed in terms of p value Chi-square.

As shown in Table 2 Chi square calculations of RFLP results (expected values are displayed in square brackets and individual χ²values are displayed in parentheses)

Table 1: Frequency of different genotypes found in control & experimental subjects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>GG (wild genotype)</th>
<th>AG+GG</th>
<th>AA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control group</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diseased group</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Chi square calculations of RFLP results (expected values are displayed in square brackets and individual χ²values are displayed in parentheses).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>GG (wild genotype)</th>
<th>AG+GG</th>
<th>Marginal row total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>19 [15.6] [0.74]</td>
<td>01 [4.4] [2.63]</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diseased</td>
<td>20 [24.3] [0.49]</td>
<td>10 [6.6] [1.75]</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginal column total</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>50</td>
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</tbody>
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The chi-square statistic ($\chi^2/df$) is $5.6138$. The p-value ($\chi^2=5.6138$) is $0.017819$. This result is significant at $p < .05$.

Discussion

INHA gene encodes Inhibin a subunit of peptide hormones Inhibin A and Inhibin B. This peptide binds with other INH βA to make dimeric Peptide hormone Inhibin A. In case INH α makes a dimer with INH βB, a peptide hormone called as Inhibin B forms. Inhibins are crucial peptide hormones for proper regulation of menstrual cycle. Inhibin A down regulates the FSH through negative feedback mechanism in late follicular phase (follicular-luteal phase transition) [19]. Inhibin B regulates the development of follicles during follicular phase of menstrual cycle. In response to FSH, Inhibin B is released by antral ovarian follicles in response to FSH during early follicular phase, and indicates the follicular growth [20].

According to a study mutation in INHA at position 769bp converts alanine into threonine and hence changes Inhibin α peptide structure. G769A (p.A257Th) is involved in pathogenesis of Premature Ovarian failure (POF) in Italian, Indian and Iranian ethnicities [17-20]. While other studies showed no significance of such type of linkage of mutation G769A with POF in other ethnicities [21,22].

Pigny et al. [23] measured inhibin alpha levels in 72 PCOS & 61 control subjects. The findings proved high level of circulating Inhibin alpha in serum. A recent study considering comparison of plethora of androgens levels conducted in 2016 showed high level of FSH and INHA in amenorrheic and oligo-amenorrheic patients of PCOS. It suggested that INHA and Anti-mullerian hormone (AMH) together can be used as a biomarker for diagnosis of PCOS. As researchers found elevated level of LH, FSH and LH: FSH in PCOS patients [24].

According to Inhibin level in serum can be used as a diagnostic marker of ovarian cancer. Inhibin A level along with that of CA125 can be used as perfect biomarker of different types of ovarian carcinoma with very high specificity [25]. Another study revealed that Inhibin A level in serum of patients with differentiated carcinoma is higher as compared to that of non-differentiated carcinoma. High Inhibin B level can be used to predict probability of survival. These studies reveal the potential role of Inhibin A and B in carcinoma proliferation [26].

Li W et al. [27] conducted a study on 48 big white sows with ovarian cysts and 60 healthy normal sows. This genetic study was performed using techniques like SSCP-PCR and RFLP. They found association between ovarian follicular cysts and mutations in inhibin α in white big sows. They concluded that sows with two significant mutations c.G42A and c.G322A are at higher risk of developing ovarian cysts while sows with wild alternatives of same locus 42GG & 322GG are at lower risk of cyst development. As Inhibin alpha is one of the most conserved genes among mammals, these mutations and inhibin alpha gene should be taken under consideration. This type of studies in human females can give insight of pathogenesis of cyst formation in PCOS patients.

Münzker J first ever investigated INHA polymorphism rs12720062 in PCOS patients and found heterozygosity (AG genotype) in 10 out of 233 patients (4.29%). Inhibin corresponds to the level of LH and AMH. Author explains the low level of LH and AMH as a consequence of affected bioreactivity of INHA in patients with heterozygous genotype. Author reported G769A mutation in PCOS patients and found this heterozygous polymorphism in 10 out of 223 diseased subjects. Author suggested that further studies should consider control group along with experimental to confirm statistical significance of this mutation as compared to control subjects and confirm linkage with PCOS [28].

Conclusion

We conducted this study to find association of Inhibin alpha subunit gene with pathogenesis of PCOS. We selected controversial SNP rs12720062 (G769A). Polymorphism in this gene has already been reported as missense mutation in POF patients of different ethnicities. This study included 30 PCOS subjects and 20 healthy control subjects.

We found this mutation in heterozygous state (AG) in 30% (p-value 0.026254) of PCOS patients. We found one patient with mutated homozygous genotype (AA). Her mother was also suffering from PCOS. She is infertile and never conceived. As this genotype has already been proved as a biomarker of POF in different ethnicities so having a patient PCOS patient with this genotype is unique and provokes a lot of questions. On the other hand, we also came across a healthy control subject having heterozygous genotype (AG). Consequences of this mutation in heterozygous condition might include less bio-reactive inhibin and in turn impaired function on down regulation of FSH. Our study shows potential association of missense mutation in heterozygous condition at SNP rs12720062 of INHA with pathogenesis of PCOS.

References

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