The role of the NLRP1 gene in systemic sclerosis: a replication study

Sirs.

Systemic sclerosis (SSc) is an autoimmune disease of the connective tissue characterized by excessive fibrosis of the dermis and vascular damage (1), in which environmental and genetic factors are involved in its susceptibility. Despite the fact that the whole genetic component of SSc remains unknown, in the last decade several genes have been described to influence SSc predisposition and main clinical characteristics (2). In this regard, the NLRP1 (NLR family, pyrin domain containing 1) gene, a regulator of the innate response, has been recently reported as a new SSc susceptibility locus, mainly as a risk factor for SSc-related lung fibrosis and anti-topoisomerase positive SSc phenotypes (3). Given the importance to validate the association report through independent replication studies to establish new SSc susceptibility loci, we sought to replicate the NLRP1 rs8182352 variant in an independent large European population.

A total of 2,000 SSc patients and 3,802 controls from four European populations (Spain, The Netherlands, Germany and Italy) were included. All the patients fulfilled the classification criteria for SSc by LeRoy et al. (4). The main features of all the populations have been described previously (5, 6).

Genotype frequencies were in HWE in cases and controls. No significant differences were detected between rs8182352 and SSc susceptibility or SSc-related subphenotypes (Table I). A combined meta-analysis was subsequently performed including the previous results reported by Dieudé et al. (3), comprising a total of 3,929 SSc patients and 5,731 controls. Similarly, no significant differences were observed for allele frequencies and controls were observed in the pooled analysis (P_HWE = 0.55 OR=1.02, 95% CI= 0.96 to 1.08, P_HWE=0.23).

In addition, we analysed whether rs8182352 was a susceptibility locus for ATA production and the development of fibrosing alveolitis, as described previously (3). Our results showed heterogeneous differences between populations in both comparisons; hence, the combined OR was calculated under random effects. However, the overall allelic distribution in the combined analysis revealed no evidence of association with ATA and lung fibrosis (Table I). Additionally, we compared SSc patients positive for ATA or lung fibrosis with those patients without these clinical features. The meta-analysis including the French population showed no evidence of association for ATA under random model (P_ATA=0.535, OR=1.08 95% CI=0.85-1.36, P_HWE=0.01) and for fibrosis alveolitis under fixed model (P_Fibrosis=0.940, OR=0.99 95% CI=0.88-1.12, P_HWE=0.212).

In agreement with previous data (3), our results firmly establish that the NLRP1 gene does not confer risk to SSc or the two major clinical forms of the disease: limited cutaneous (lcSSc) and diffuse cutaneous subtype (dcSSc). In addition, we cannot confirm the recent reported association of the NLRP1 rs8182352 variant with SSc-related fibrosis alveolitis or anti-topoisomerase-positive SSc, which is probably due to the differences in the phenotype measurement, difference in the genotype and population stratification. A homogeneous genetic background is necessary in order to limit the possibility of this bias. However, SSc patients show a high phenotypical heterogeneity between populations (2) and, a new revision of the current classification criteria for SSc would be desirable to better characterise this disease and its major subtypes-specific clinical features (2).

In summary, our results do not support the previously suggested role of the NLRP1 rs8182352 in the development of specific features of SSc.

Table I. Combined analyses of the NLRP1 rs8182352 variant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample sets</th>
<th>Statistical Power*</th>
<th>T/T (%)</th>
<th>T/C (%)</th>
<th>C/C (%)</th>
<th>C (%)</th>
<th>p-value**</th>
<th>OR [95% CI]**</th>
<th>P_BD††</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SSc (n=2,000)</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>48.0</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>47.3</td>
<td>0.684</td>
<td>0.98 [0.91–1.06]</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>icSSc (n=1,361)</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>48.2</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>47.8</td>
<td>0.983</td>
<td>1.00 [0.92–1.09]</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dCSSc (n=631)</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>47.1</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>46.4</td>
<td>0.402</td>
<td>0.95 [0.84–1.07]</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACA + (n=784)</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>47.8</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>47.4</td>
<td>0.726</td>
<td>0.98 [0.88–1.09]</td>
<td>0.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATA + (n=524)</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>45.4</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>46.4</td>
<td>0.353</td>
<td>0.93 [0.83–1.07]</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controls (n=3,802)</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>49.6</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>49.9</td>
<td>0.258</td>
<td>0.93 [0.82–1.06]</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All comparisons are against controls.

*Independent analysis in each population is showed in Supplementary Table I.

††The patients fulfilled the classification criteria for SSc by LeRoy et al. (4). ACAs were determined by their under fixed model (P_ATA=0.940, OR=0.99 95% CI=0.88-1.12, P_HWE=0.212).

**The estimation of the power was calculated with OR of 1.2 at the 5% significance level, assuming a SSc prevalence of 0.01% and considering a minor allele frequency (MAF) of 0.48.

Combined ORs were calculated according to a fixed-effects model (Mantel-Haenszel meta-analysis) or random effects (DerSimonian-Laird meta-analysis), when necessary. p-values lower than 0.05 were considered as statistically significant.

The homogeneity of OR among all populations was calculated by Breslow-Day test.

SSc: sclerosis systemic; lcSSc: limited cutaneous subtype; dcSSc: diffuse cutaneous subtype; ACA: anti-centromere antibodies; ATA: anti-topoisomerase I antibodies; PF: pulmonary fibrosis; +: positive; OR: odds ratio; CI: confidence intervals; P_BD: p-value by Breslow-Day method; HWE: Hardy-Weinberg Equilibrium.

Letters to the editor

Hebron, Barcelona, Spain; Dept. of Rheumatology, Radboud University Nijmegen Medical Centre, Nijmegen, The Netherlands; Dept. of Rheumatology, Hospital 12 de Octubre, Madrid, Spain; Dept. of Rheumatology, Hospital Universitario Madrid Norte Sanchinarro, Madrid, Spain; Dept. of Rheumatology, Hospital Reina Sofia, Córdoba, Spain; Referral Center for Systemic Autoimmune Diseases, Fondazione IRCCS Ca’ Granda Ospedale Maggiore Policlinico and University of Milan, Milan, Italy; Clinic for Immunology and Rheumatology Medical School, Hannover, Germany; Dept. of Dermatology, Allergology, and Venerology, Ruhr University Bochum, Bochum, Germany; Dept. of Rheumatology, VU University Medical Center, Amsterdam, The Netherlands; Dept. of Rheumatology, Leiden University Medical Centre, Leiden, The Netherlands; Dept. of Rheumatology and Clinical Immunology, Utrecht Medical Centre, The Netherlands.

The Spanish Scleroderma Group: Norberto Ortiz-Centeno, José Luis Callejas and Raquel Ríos, Systemic Autoimmune Diseases Unit, Dept. of Internal Medicine, Hospital Clinico Universitario San Cecilio, Granada; Nuria Navarrete and Antonio Garcia, Dept. of Internal Medicine, Hospital Virgen de las Nieves, Granada; María Teresa Camps, Dept. of Internal Medicine, Hospital Carlos Haya, Málaga; Antonio Fernández-Nebro, Dept. of Rheumatology, Hospital Carlos Haya, Málaga; Rosa García-Portales, Dept. of Rheumatology, Hospital Virgen de la Victoria, Málaga; Marisa F. González-Exbrizzio, Dept. of Immunology, Hospital Virgen del Rocío, Sevilla; Julio Sánchez-Román and M. Jesús Castillo, Dept. of Internal Medicine, Hospital Virgen del Rocío, Sevilla; Immaculada Gómez-Gracia, Dept. of Immunology, Hospital Reina Sofía, Córdoba, Spain.
Letters to the editor

Rheumatology, Hospital Reina Sofía, Córdoba; Benjamín Fernández-Gutiérrez and Luis Rodríguez-Rodríguez, Dept. of Rheumatology, Hospital Clínico San Carlos, Madrid; Esther Vicente, Dept. of Rheumatology, Hospital La Princesa, Madrid; Mónica Fernández Castro and José Luis Andreu, Dept. of Rheumatology, Hospital Puerta del Hierro, Madrid; Francisco Javier López-Longo and Lina Martínez-Estapíñan, Dept. of Rheumatology, Hospital General Universitario Gregorio Marañón, Madrid; Anna Pros, Dept. of Rheumatology, Hospital del Mar, Barcelona; Vicente Fonollona, Dept. of Internal Medicine, Hospital Vallé de Hebrón, Barcelona; Gerard Espinosa, Department of Autoimmune Diseases, Hospital Clinic, Barcelona; Carlos Tolosa, Dept. of Internal Medicine, Hospital Parc Taulí, Sabadell; Mónica Rodríguez Carballé, Dept. of Internal Medicine, Hospital de Cruces, Vizcaya; Luis Sáez-Comet, Systemic Autoimmune Medicine, Hospital de la Princesa, Madrid; María Victoria Egurbide, Dept. of Internal Medicine, Hospital Universitario Marqués de Valdecilla, Santander; Bernardino Díaz, Luis Trapiella and María Gallego, Dept. of Internal Medicine, Hospital Central de Asturias, Oviedo; Federico Díaz, Vanesa Hernández and Esmeralda Delgado-Frias, Dept. of Rheumatology, Hospital Universitario de Canarias, Tenerife; Emma Beltrán, Dept. of Rheumatology, Hospital del Doctor Peset Aleixandre, Valencia; José Andrés Román-vokeva, Dept. of Rheumatology, Hospital Universitari i Politecnic La Fe, Valencia.

Address correspondence to:
Maria Ternel, PhD, Instituto de Parasitología y Biomedicina ‘López-Neyra’, IPBLN-CSIC, Avenida del Conocimiento s/n, 18106 Armilla (Granada), Spain.
E-mail: mteruel@ipb.csic.es

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