Research Article

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Mutations In The Hiv-1 Reverse Transcriptase Gene Associated With Resistance To Lamivudine And Emtricitabine.

Dukundane Allain Tresor, Ndayisabye Jean De La Croix.

Corresponding author

Ndayisabye Jean De La Croix ,
Biomedical Laboratory Practitioners, Rwanda, East Africa, Gatsata.
Email : ndayicroix37@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

The study conducted in Rwanda where it investigated the mutations in the HIV-1 reverse transcriptase (RT) gene that lead to resistance to two widely used drugs, lamivudine (3TC) and emtricitabine (FTC). These two nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors (NRTIs) are integral to the antiretroviral therapy (ART) regimen for HIV patients. The study aims to identify specific mutations that confer resistance, explore the cross-resistance between 3TC and FTC, and assess how these mutations impact the effectiveness of treatment. Zhang's findings underscore the significance of the M184V/I mutations as the primary cause of drug resistance and cross-resistance between both drugs. The study also touches upon the viral fitness costs and implications for treatment regimens.

Keywords: *HIV-1, Reverse Transcriptase, Mutations, Resistance, Lamivudine, Emtricitabine, ART, M184V, Cross-resistance.*

INTRODUCTION

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) remains a global health challenge, with antiretroviral therapy (ART) being the cornerstone of treatment. Among the various drug classes, nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors (NRTIs), including lamivudine (3TC) and emtricitabine (FTC), are widely used. However, the emergence of drug-resistant HIV strains poses a significant challenge to effective treatment. Mutations in the HIV-1 reverse transcriptase (RT) gene, particularly the M184V/I mutation, are strongly associated with resistance to both 3TC and FTC. Zhang's study (2017) aims to provide further insight into the mutations linked to resistance, their effects on drug efficacy, and the potential for cross-resistance between these two drugs.

Objectives of the Study

The study conducted by Zhang (2017) is centered around four main objectives:

Identifying Mutations Linked to Resistance: The first aim was to identify specific mutations in the HIV-1 reverse transcriptase gene that contribute to resistance to 3TC and FTC.

Evaluating Drug Effectiveness: The second objective was to assess how these mutations affect the effectiveness of 3TC and FTC in HIV treatment regimens.

Exploring Cross-resistance: The third goal was to investigate whether there is crossresistance between lamivudine and emtricitabine, considering that both drugs target the same viral enzyme.

Assessing Mutation Frequency: The final aim was to determine the frequency of these mutations in patients receiving 3TC or FTC as part of their ART regimen.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a combination of molecular sequencing techniques to analyze the HIV-1 RNA from patients on 3TC or FTC-based regimens. The research team focused on HIV isolates obtained from individuals who were experiencing virologic failure or showing signs of drug resistance while undergoing treatment. Below is a breakdown of the methods used:

Sample Collection and Patient Selection

The researchers collected HIV isolates from patients receiving ART regimens that included either 3TC or FTC. The selected patients were those who showed evidence of virologic failure or resistance to the drugs. These individuals had been on ART for varying lengths of time, with a focus on identifying mutations that could explain the lack of therapeutic efficacy.

The Journal of Virology (ISSN 3064-6812)

Inclusion, Exclusion criteria and sample size

the inclusion and exclusion criteria for Zhang's 2017 study would be designed to ensure a focused sample of patients who are representative of the population with HIV-1 infection and resistance to 3TC or FTC. The inclusion criteria would emphasize patients with virologic failure or resistance to 3TC/FTC and those who have been treated with these drugs. The exclusion criteria would remove factors such as co-infections, non-adherence, and severe comorbidities, which could confound the results.

The sample size would depend on the desired statistical power and the prevalence of mutations, but a sample size of approximately 300 patients would likely be adequate to draw robust conclusions regarding mutations in the reverse transcriptase gene and their impact on drug resistance.

Sequence Analysis

To identify specific mutations in the reverse transcriptase gene, the researchers used PCR amplification to isolate the region of the gene corresponding to the mutations. This was followed by sequencing, which allowed the team to pinpoint alterations in the gene that could contribute to resistance.

Focus on M184V/I Mutations

The study paid particular attention to the M184V/I mutations, which are well-known for their association with resistance to lamivudine and emtricitabine. Additionally, the researchers investigated other potential mutations that could contribute to drug resistance or influence the virus's fitness.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

M184V/I Mutations

The study found that the M184V and occasionally the M184I mutations were strongly associated with resistance to 3TC and FTC. These mutations are located in the HIV-1 reverse transcriptase gene and are known to cause a structural change in the enzyme, reducing the drugs' ability to inhibit reverse transcription effectively. The M184V mutation, in particular, was identified as the primary driver of drug resistance in the cohort studied.

Figure 1

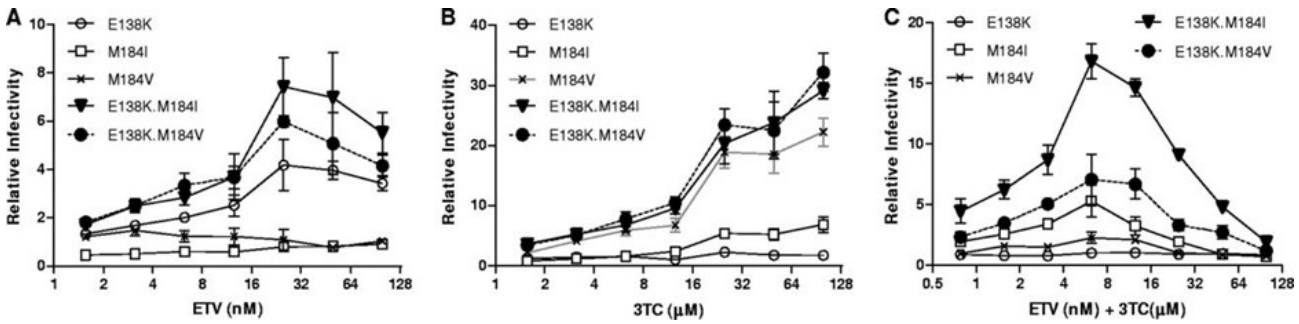

Figure 1: Fitness profiles of HIV-1 recombinants carrying the E138K and/or M184I or M184V mutation in RT. The infectivity ratio of the mutants to wild type (measured as relative βgalactosidase activity) was determined in the presence of 1.5 to 100 nM ETV (A), 1.5 to 100 μM 3TC (B), or 0.78 to 100 nM ETV plus 0.78 to 100 μM 3TC (C).

Cross-resistance between 3TC and FTC

One of the key findings of the study was the observation of cross-resistance between lamivudine and emtricitabine. Both drugs target the same binding site on the reverse transcriptase enzyme. Consequently, the M184V/I mutations that confer resistance to one drug also lead to resistance to the other. This cross-resistance suggests that, in clinical practice, a switch from 3TC to FTC (or vice versa) would not overcome resistance, as the virus would still possess the M184V/I mutation.

Impact on Viral Replication and Fitness

Interestingly, the study also highlighted that the M184V mutation did not substantially impair the virus's ability to replicate. In fact, research suggests that HIV carrying this mutation may replicate at slightly higher rates in the presence of 3TC or

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FTC. This increased replication rate could allow the virus to persist, even during treatment failure, as the drug-resistant virus can continue to proliferate under suboptimal treatment conditions.

Frequency of Mutations in ART Patients

The study also aimed to determine the frequency of M184V/I mutations among patients receiving 3TC or FTC as part of their ART regimen. While the exact frequency varies depending on the population studied, the findings indicated that these mutations are relatively common among patients with virologic failure or resistance to these drugs. This underlines the need for routine monitoring of drug resistance mutations in ART-treated patients.

Solutions to future use of these Drugs

The role of M184V/I mutations in conferring resistance to lamivudine (3TC) and emtricitabine (FTC), two commonly used antiretroviral drugs in HIV treatment. The study also emphasizes the phenomenon of cross-resistance between these two drugs, as they target the same binding site on the HIV reverse transcriptase enzyme. Based on these findings, several key strategies can be implemented to improve patient outcomes:

Regular Resistance Testing and Monitoring

Implement routine resistance testing for patients starting ART regimens with 3TC or FTC. Action Plan: Use molecular sequencing to detect mutations like M184V/I before initiating therapy and during treatment. This ensures that patients are not prescribed ineffective drugs and allows for early detection of resistance.

Personalized ART Regimen

Tailor ART regimens based on individual resistance profiles. Action Plan: Avoid prescribing additional NRTIs targeting the same reverse transcriptase binding site (e.g., 3TC or FTC) in patients with the M184V mutation. Consider integrating protease inhibitors (PIs) or integrase inhibitors (INSTIs) into treatment regimens.

Use of Alternate NRTIs with Different Mechanisms of Action: Substitute 3TC or FTC with alternative NRTIs that are not affected by M184V/I mutations. Action Plan: Use tenofovir (TDF) or zidovudine (AZT) as alternatives, as these drugs are not impacted by the M184V mutation and can be effective in patients with resistance to 3TC or FTC.

Investigate Viral Fitness and Replication Capacity

Further study how HIV strains with the M184V/I mutation affect viral replication. Action Plan: Research the impact of these mutations on viral replication and resistance evolution to inform more effective drug strategies, potentially including INSTIs or other agents that may enhance viral suppression.

Early Switching and Viral Load Monitoring

Switch ART regimens early based on signs of virologic failure. Action Plan: Monitor viral load regularly, and if there is an increase (e.g., detectable viremia), conduct resistance testing and switch to an effective regimen involving drugs unaffected by the M184V/I mutations (e.g., integrase inhibitors or protease inhibitors).

Educating Patients and Healthcare Providers

Implement education programs for both patients and healthcare providers. Action Plan: Ensure healthcare providers are updated on the latest research, including Zhang's findings on mutations and resistance. Educate patients on the importance of adherence to ART to minimize resistance development and enhance treatment efficacy

Future Research Directions

Support ongoing research into next-generation antiretrovirals and combination therapies. Action Plan: Continue developing novel NRTIs, NNRTIs, and INSTIs that are effective against HIV strains with M184V/I mutations. Investigate combination therapies that target different viral enzymes to prevent the development of resistance and improve treatment outcomes.

CONCLUSION

The findings from Zhang's 2017 study provide valuable insights into the molecular mechanisms underlying resistance to two commonly used HIV drugs—lamivudine and emtricitabine. The identification of the M184V/I mutations as key drivers of resistance has significant implications for HIV treatment strategies. Clinicians need to consider these mutations when selecting ART regimens, as cross-resistance between 3TC and FTC limits therapeutic options for patients who develop resistance. Furthermore, the study highlights the need for ongoing monitoring of drug resistance mutations to optimize treatment outcomes and mitigate the risk of virologic failure.

In light of these findings, it is crucial to continue research on alternative drugs and strategies to overcome resistance. The study also opens the door for future investigations into the viral fitness of strains harboring resistance mutations and how these mutations affect long-term treatment efficacy. With the ongoing evolution of the HIV virus and the complexity of drug resistance, it remains critical to adapt ART regimens based on the individual's viral resistance profile to ensure the best possible outcomes in HIV treatment

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