



Malaria protection due to sickle haemoglobin depends on parasite genotype – but why?

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Laboratory of malaria & vector research NIAID 14th May 2024

Oxford















GWAS of severe malaria susceptibility - MalariaGEN Nature Communications 2019

O blood type frequency ~ 50% RR ~ 0.75 (recessive)

ATP2B4 calcium pump variation frequency ~ 50% RR ~ 0.66 (recessive) Dantu blood type frequency ~ 0-10% RR ~ 0.6 (additive)

> Sickle haemoglobin (HbS) Frequency ~ 2-20% RR ~ 0.1-0.2 (heterozygote)

> > Allison Br Med. J. (1954)



Estimates from our GWAS of severe malaria susceptibility - MalariaGEN Nature Communications 2019

O blood type

Dantu blood type

ATP2B4 calcium pump variation

Sickle haemoglobin (HbS)

P.falciparum 23Mb genome >5,000 genes millions of variants



Parasite image: Miller et al J. Exp. Med. 1979 (with apologies!)

O blood type

Dantu blood type

ATP2B4 calcium pump variation

Sickle haemoglobin (HbS)

P.falciparum 23Mb genome >5,000 genes millions of variants

Have parasite populations adapted? (And is this detectable in current populations?)

Talk outline

 Malaria protection due to sickle haemoglobin depends on parasite genotype

Pfsa population genetics

Pfsa biology











Plan of our analysis:

 Sequence the *P.falciparum* genome in severe malaria cases selected from our previously published human GWAS*

2. Test for association between human and parasite genetic variants



*MalariaGEN human GWAS, Nature Communications 2019

Investigating human-parasite genetic interaction in severe malaria cases

 Sequence the *P.falciparum* genome in severe malaria cases from the published human GWAS









Variant calling and quality control

Previously generated human genome-wide genotypes and imputation

Overlap with human data N = 3,346 samples

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2. Test for association pairwise between human and *Pf* variants using a simple logistic regression framework:

 $g_{Pf} \sim g_{human} + country$

Software at: www.well.ox.ac.uk/~gav/hptest



Focus on candidates:

- Known protective mutations
- Further putative associations
- Blood group gene variants
- HLA alleles

Focus on 'easy' parts:

- Biallelic variants in core genome
- Seen in at least 25 infections across the sample.
- 51,552 variants in total

(...excludes multiallelics and complex regions)

Three regions of the Pf genome are associated...

ciation variants ariants) $\begin{pmatrix} 16\\12\\10\\4\\2\\0 \end{pmatrix}$ 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14

P.falciparum genetic variants

Evidence for association for *P.falciparum* variants (averaged over human variants)

Three regions of the Pf genome are associated with...



Three regions of the Pf genome are associated with HbS



"Plasmodium falciparum sickle-associated"

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Three regions of the Pf genome are associated with HbS



The protective effect of HbS varies with Pfsa genotype



N = 4,071 severe malaria cases

45 of 49 severe infections of individuals with HbS genotypes were with *Pfsa+* parasites

The protective effect of HbS varies with Pfsa genotype



Pfsa+ parasites may have overcome HbS protection



https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-021-04288-3 + caveats!







Original study

Joseph Saelens, Mahamadou Diakité, Steve M. Taylor mSphere 2021



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Lucas Amenga-Etego, Will Hamilton bioRxiv 2023



Original study

Joseph Saelens, Mahamadou Diakité, Steve M. Taylor mSphere 2021

Lucas Amenga-Etego, Will Hamilton bioRxiv 2023

Annie Forster, Alfred Amambua-Ngwa, unpublished

Three regions of the *Pf* genome are associated with HbS



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Will Hamilton, ... Lucas Amenga-Etego bioRxiv. doi.org/10.1101/2023.09.14.557461

Three Four regions of the *Pf* genome are associated with HbS







Three Four regions of the Pf genome are associated with HbS







Three Four regions of the *Pf* genome are associated with HbS





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Will Hamilton, ... Lucas Amenga-Etego bioRxiv. doi.org/10.1101/2023.09.14.557461



An exported kinase family mediates speciesspecific erythrocyte remodelling and virulence in human malaria

Heledd Davies^{1,8}, Hugo Belda^{1,8}, Malgorzata Broncel¹, Xingda Ye^{1,2}, Claudine Bisson³, Viola Introini⁴, Dominique Dorin-Semblat^{5,6,7}, Jean-Philippe Semblat^{5,6,7}, Marta Tibúrcio¹, Benoit Gamain^{5,6,7}, Myrsini Kaforou² and Moritz Treeck¹

There is lots of work on FIKKs e.g. Davies et al 2020



- Four regions of the *Pf* genome are associated with sickle
- Four genes: PfACS8, 0020300, FIKK4.2, 1127000, are implicated
- Almost all infections of HbAS/HbSS individuals carry these mutations
- But there's also complicated variation across populations.

Talk outline

 Malaria protection due to sickle haemoglobin depends on parasite genotype

Pfsa population genetics

Pfsa biology



Pfsa global frequencies

MalariaGEN Pf7 (MalariaGEN Wellcome Open 2023)











Pfsa+ frequencies are explained by HbS



HbS frequency

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(HbS data from the Malaria Atlas Project - Piel et al Lancet 2013)





All the HbS allele frequency data That exists across Africa

All the *Pf* allele frequency data we could gather across Africa



Estimate the relationship at local scales





All the HbS allele frequency data That exists across Africa

All the *Pf* allele frequency data we could gather across Africa

Analysis by Andre Python (Zheijiang University) Thanks to: MalariaGEN, Jeffrey Bailey, Robert Verity, Deus Ishengoma for data





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HbS frequency

Hypothesis: Pfsa+ mutations are +vely selected for by HbS but prevented from spreading by a balancing fitness cost

Simple model of parasite evolution





 f_+ (= frequency of *Pf*+ allele)







Simulation: start at 10% frequency, see what happens.

Does not produce polymorphism in independent pops...



...but does in spatially related pops.



...but stable polymorphism in spatially related pops



With 5% migration between neighbouring populations

5% migration between neighbouring populations

...but stable polymorphism in spatially related pops



What happens if we overlay this model on the real map of HbS frequency?



































Caution: this is a *very* simple model of parasites evolving on the real HbS map.

However, it converges to a steady state (with frequencies between ~5% and ~80% everywhere, for the right choice of parameters)

The Pfsa alleles are in strong linkage disequilibrium i.e. they co-occur

r=0.80

🗏 Kenya:

r=0.75 r=0.66



r=0.43

Pfsa1+vs Pfsa3+

Country	Ń	r
Sambia	169	0.20
Guinea	133	0.79
Mali	379	0.84
Shana	807	0.86
Cameroon	174	0.52
Congo	241	0.64
Malawi	239	0.79
Fanzania	282	0.59
Kenya	89	0.71

Gambia:

MalariaGEN Pf6





In Kenya, *Pfsa* variants account for all of the strongest between-chromosome LD Other genes like CLAGs and REX1 turn up with elevated LD



In Gambia, the strongest between-chromosome LD is for drug resistance mutations - CRT vs AAT1 Next down the list is Pfsa1 vs Pfsa3.

Questions

Does between-locus LD imply that there is functional epistasis between the genes?

Or is it just an emergent feature of the population genetics and natural selection?
Talk outline

 Malaria protection due to sickle haemoglobin depends on parasite genotype

Population genetics and host-parasite coevolution

Pfsa biology

How does sickle provide protection?

Theory 1: sickle induces alterations to the red cell cytoskeleton, that reduce the ability of parasites to put their molecules (notably PfEMPs) on the surface.

Theory 2: parasites are unable to grow in sickle trait erythrocytes, in the low-oxygen conditions likely to be found in real infections.





PfACS8 is an Acyl co-A0020300 is an exported
protein, unknown
function.synthetase family
member. To my
knowledge it has not been
observed exported (unlike
other family members)protein, unknown
function.Has been observed in
cytosol
Tamira Butler PhD Thesis
Daniel Golberg labcheck
protein, unknown
function.

1127000 is a predicted exported, putative Tyrosine phosphatase

FIKK4.1/4.2 are exported Serine/Threonine Kinases

None are thought to be essential (for parasite growth in vitro)



Evidence that FIKKs affect var2csa expression:

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Davies et al 2023



FIKK4.1/4.2 are exported Serine/threonine Kinases









Davies et al 2023

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Both ACSs and FIKKs are part of large gene families that have expanded in laverania (The sub-clade of ape-infecting malaria that includes *P.falciparum*)

Otto et al, "Genomes of all known members of a Plasmodium subgenus reveal paths to virulent human malaria", Nat. Microbiol 2018 Davies et al, "An exported kinase family mediates species- specific erythrocyte remodelling and virulence in human malaria", Nat. Microbiol 2020





PF3D7_0215300 A PF3D7_0220300 V PF3D7_1127000 other genes

A different hypothesis: the *Pfsa+* mutations increase expression of Pfsa genes

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Joseph Saelens, Mahamadou Diakité, Steve M. Taylor, mSphere 2021

Parasite gene expression (RNA levels)

sickle-associated (*Pfsa+*) parasite





The parasite takes about 48 hours to replicate within red cells (then they burst and the parasites reinvade). What does gene expression look like across this cycle?



Pfsa-parasite

T=15

Hours post-invasion



Pfsa-parasite

T=21

Hours post-invasion



Pfsa-parasite

T=24

Hours post-invasion

▼ PF3D7_1127000 • other genes

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Pfsa-parasite

T=27

Hours post-invasion



Pfsa-parasite



Hours post-invasion



Pfsa-parasite



Hours post-invasion



Pfsa-parasite



Hours post-invasion



Pfsa-parasite

T=45

Hours post-invasion





Hours post-invasion





Hours post-invasion

• PF3D7_1127000 • other genes

1127000 (Pfsa3) is over-expressed at Troph stage in Pfsa+ parasites.

Structural variation at *Pfsa3*



However.

The *Pfsa*3+ mutation (/) is linked to a set of structural variants.



Annie Forster

...?

Jason Hendry Anna Jeffreys Katie Healey

Prelim work – MSIF funded



Tom Williams



Silvia Kariuki



Alex Macharia



Patrick Ombati



Julian Rayner (CIMR)

Revive parasites from 30-year old frozen stocks, and conduct functional assays under controlled conditions.

James Docker, Katie Healey long-read assemblies



Prototype invasion expt.

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Medical Sciences Internal Fund ⁹⁵





KEMRI Wellcome Trust







Genetic association study work

MRC The Gambia @ LSHTM Muminatou Jallow Fatoumatta Sisay-Joof Kalifa A. Bojang David J. Conway Giorgio Sirugo Umberto d'Alessandro

Wellcome Sanger Institute

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USTTB Mali: Mahamadou Diakite

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Parasite revival / functional work

Patrick Ombati Silvia Kariuki Julian Rayner

Dominic Kwiatkowski 1953-2023

BILL& MELINDA

GATES foundation

Annie Forster Jason Hendry Spatial mapping work: Andre Python

Pfsa+ structural variation work:

MIP data: Deus Ishengoma Robert Verity Jeffrey Bailey

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MalariaGE

GENOMIC EPIDEMIOLOGY NETWORK

Publication at: doi.org/10.1038/s41586-021-04288-3









MSIF



Pfsa1+ haplotypes: (Observed in infections of *HbAA*, *HbAS*, and *HbSS individuals*)

Pfsa1- haplotypes:

(Largely only observed in infections of *HbAA individuals*)



Ancestral allele

Derived (i.e. mutant) allele



Ancestral allele

Derived (i.e. mutant) allele



Ancestral allele

Genome-wide scan for balancing selection



Pfsa3 Pfsa1 Benin Benin mul Cameroon Cameroon mark DRC Democratic_Republic_of_the_Congo -Gambia Gambia and a Ghana Ghana mak Kenya Kenya mil Malawi Malawi Mali Mali mak Senegal Senegal and a Tanzania Tanzania and the 0.0e+00 4.0e+06 6.0e+06 8.0e+06 1.0e+07 1.2e+07 1.4e+07 1.6e+07 1.8e+07 2.0e+07 2.2e+07 2.0e+06 2.4e+07 2.6e+07 plot_position

Evidence for balancing selection



(5kb window)



Distribution of genome-wide $\sum r^2$ at same frequency (5kb window)

There is some evidence for balancing selection.

Evidence for... balancing selection?



Distribution of genome-wide Beta at same frequency (5kb window)





