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SHORT REPORT



GSTT1, *GSTP1* and *XPC* genes are associated with longevity in an Italian cohort

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ABSTRACT

Longevity is a complex process controlled by environmental and genetic factors. We evaluated the association of seven drug metabolising and DNA-repair gene polymorphisms with longevity in an Italian cohort. A sample of 756 subjects aged 18–98 was genotyped for *CYP1A1* (rs1048943, A>G), *GSTM1* (rs 1183423000, presence/absence), *GSTT1* (rs1601993659, presence/absence), *GSTP1* (rs1695, A>G), *XRCC1* (rs1799782, C>T), *XRCC1* (rs25489, A>G) and *XPC* (rs2228001, A>C) gene polymorphisms. The association between the studied gene polymorphisms and longevity was evaluated by dividing the sample into three age groups: 18–50, 51–85, and 86–98. We observed a significant decrease in the frequency of the *GSTT1* null, *GSTP1* G and *XPC* C alleles in the oldest group with respect to the youngest one. We also obtained the same results when dividing the sample into 18–85 and 86–98 age groups. The general linear model analyses confirmed a significant decreasing trend with age of the above mentioned alleles. We hypothesised that these minor alleles, being important in the sensitivity against the development of different types of cancer, may reflect a reduced life-expectancy in carrier subjects and may explain their significantly lower frequency observed among subjects belonging to the oldest age group.

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1. Introduction

Longevity is a complex trait controlled by both environmental and genetic factors. Most of the published papers about the genetic basis of longevity are principally focussed on those gene polymorphisms related to susceptibility to cardiovascular diseases, such as *FTO*, *ACE* and *ApoE* (Santovito et al. 2019), while the relationship between drug metabolising and DNA-repair gene polymorphisms and longevity has been poorly studied (Debrabant et al. 2014; Dato et al. 2018; Kim et al. 2018).

Drug metabolising enzymes (DMEs) are involved in the metabolism and elimination of xenobiotic compounds to which humans are exposed, and include phase I and phase II metabolising enzymes and phase III transporter enzymes (Xu and Wei 2015). The first two classes of enzymes allow the biotransformation of lipid-soluble xenobiotic compounds into a more hydrophilic metabolite through oxidation reactions (phase I cytochrome P450 (CYP) superfamily enzymes) and conjugation reactions (phase II glutathione S-transferases (GST) enzymes) (Wauthier et al. 2007; Xu and Wei 2015). At the end of the process, phase III transporters help in transferring the more hydrophilic products outside the cells (Almazroo et al. 2017).

In order to prevent the deleterious consequences of mutagenic processes induced by environmental xenobiotics, cells evolved different mechanisms of DNA repair, depending on the specific type of DNA damage. DNA-repair genes,

being responsible for maintaining the integrity of the genome, may be considered as longevity-associated genes and the fact that a reduced repair capacity has been reported to be associated with cancer development should also be considered (Langie et al. 2015).

Given these premises, in the present study we decided to evaluate both the frequencies of seven polymorphic drug metabolising and DNA-repair genes and the variation of these frequencies in different age groups in a sample of a Northern Italian population. We considered the following most studied cancer-associated gene polymorphisms: *CYP1A1* (rs1048943), *GSTM1* (rs1183423000), *GSTT1* (rs1601993659), *GSTP1* (rs1695), X-ray repair cross-complementing group 1 (*XRCC1*) (rs1799782 and rs25489) and Xeroderma pigmentosum complementation group C (*XPC*) (rs2228001).

The *CYP1A1* gene is highly polymorphic and plays a central role in the metabolism of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (Androutsopoulos et al. 2009). In this study we considered the *CYP1A1* rs1048943 single nucleotide polymorphism (SNP) in which adenine is replaced by guanine, resulting in the amino acid substitution Ile(462)Val (Wei and Hu 2015).

GST genes codify for one of the major groups of phase II detoxifying enzymes, evolved to protect organisms against toxic substances (Nebert and Vasiliou 2004). The polymorphisms of *GSTM1* and *GSTT1* genes consist of a deletion of a segment of DNA, with the subsequent lack of protein synthesis in homozygous individuals (Nebert and Vasiliou 2004).

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Table 1. Allele and Genotype Frequencies of seven gene polymorphisms in an Italian sample ($n = 756$).

Gene polymorphisms	Allele	<i>N</i>	Frequency	Genotype	<i>N</i>	Frequency	HWE <i>p</i> Value
<i>CYP1A1</i> (rs1048943)	A	1274	0.843	AA	543	0.718	0.305
	G	238	0.157	AG	188	0.249	
				GG	25	0.033	
<i>GSTM1</i> (rs1183423000)	+	1054	0.697	+	527	0.697	Not done
	-	458	0.303	-	229	0.303	
<i>GSTT1</i> (rs1601993659)	+	1088	0.720	+	544	0.720	Not done
	-	424	0.280	-	212	0.280	
<i>GSTP1</i> (rs1695)	A	1267	0.838	AA	537	0.710	0.193
	G	245	0.162	AG	193	0.255	
				GG	26	0.035	
<i>XRCC1</i> (rs1799782)	C	1294	0.856	CC	559	0.739	0.215
	T	218	0.144	CT	176	0.233	
				TT	21	0.028	
				AA	591	0.782	
<i>XRCC1</i> (rs25489)	A	1331	0.880	AG	149	0.197	0.204
	G	181	0.120	GG	16	0.021	
				AA	553	0.731	
<i>XPC</i> (rs2228001)	A	1286	0.851	AC	180	0.238	0.217
	C	226	0.149	CC	23	0.031	

HWE: Hardy-Weinberg Equilibrium (χ^2 -test).

Not done: the HWE was not calculated because the used genotyping procedure does not consent to discriminate the heterozygotes from homozygotes.

GSTP1 is the major isoenzyme expressed in human lung tissue. The SNP changes an adenine with a guanine in codon 105, resulting in the replacement of an isoleucine with a valine in the enzyme (López-Cima et al. 2012).

The *XRCC1* gene, involved in the Base Excision Repair (BER) pathway, encodes enzymes having an important role in the repair of single-strand DNA breaks associated with exposure to free oxygen radicals, radiation, ultraviolet, and alkylating agents (Caldecott 2019). In the present study, we evaluated the frequencies of the two most common SNPs, rs1799782 and rs25489.

Finally, an important key gene belonging to the Nucleotide Excision Repair (NER) pathway is *XPC* encoding a 940 amino-acid protein involved in DNA damage recognition and apoptosis (Fontana et al. 2008). We analysed one of the most common polymorphisms of this gene, represented by A>C transition in exon 15 (rs2228001), resulting in a lysine-to-glutamine substitution at position 939 (Fontana et al. 2008).

Given the above-mentioned role of metabolic and DNA-repair gene polymorphisms in the modulation of genomic damage and in the maintenance of DNA integrity, the aim of this work was to evaluate the possible role of these gene polymorphisms in longevity. The hypothesis was that some variants of these genes, being associated with a different efficiency in both metabolising potentially harmful environmental xenobiotics and in repairing genomic damage, may be differentially represented in elderly individuals, giving them an advantage or a disadvantage in terms of longevity.

2. Subjects and methods

2.1. Subjects

We recruited healthy subjects (persons not hospitalised on the date of the sampling and without familiar history of genetic pathologies), who were natives of Piedmont localities for

at least two generations, and voluntarily joined the project. In order to avoid selection bias, subjects were sampled without *a priori* exclusions, for example in terms of age and sex. The nutritional status was evaluated by the body mass index (BMI). Since obesity is considered as a pathological status (Lu et al. 2018), we excluded obese subjects from the sampling (subjects with BMI ≥ 30 Kg/m²).

All data from each participant, including ancestry, were collected during an interview in an open-ended manner. We excluded the subjects who claimed to be natives of other Italian regions or who belonged to religious ethnic groups. All subjects received detailed information about the study and gave their written informed consent. Personal data were collected in an anonymous manner and participants were informed about their right to privacy and about the management procedures of their personal data.

In order to evaluate the possible association of some alleles with longevity, we decided to divide our sample into three age groups: 18–50, 51–85, and 86–98, representing individuals in reproductive, post-reproductive and long-lived phases, respectively (Santovito et al. 2019). The study was conducted with the formal approval of the Bioethical Committee of the University of Turin ethical committee and was performed in accordance with the ethical standards laid down in the 2013 Declaration of Helsinki.

2.2. DNA Extraction and genotyping

Blood collection, DNA extraction and PCR reactions were performed according to the protocol described in Santovito et al. (2017). We analysed the following gene polymorphisms: *CYP1A1* (rs1048943, A>G), *GSTM1* (rs 1183423000, presence/absence), *GSTT1* (rs1601993659, presence/absence), *GSTP1* (rs1695, A>G), *XRCC1* (rs1799782, C>T), *XRCC1* (rs25489, A>G) and *XPC* (rs2228001, A>C). Primer sequences, annealing temperatures, PCR methodologies and expected PCR product sizes are reported in Supplementary Material 1.

2.3. Statistical analysis

All statistical analyses were performed using the SPSS software statistical program (version 25.0, SPSS Inc., Chicago, USA). Pearson's χ^2 test contingency table was used to evaluate the Hardy-Weinberg equilibrium (HWE), whereas comparison of genotype frequencies between age groups was carried out using the Fisher's exact test. The correlation between age and a specific genotype was analysed using a multivariate general linear model with Bonferroni's correction. All p values were two-tailed, and the level of statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$ for all tests.

3. Results

We recruited 756 subjects (mean age \pm SD: 55.88 \pm 22.68), including 335 males (mean age \pm SD: 47.499 \pm 17.65) and 421

females (mean age \pm SD: 46.08 \pm 21.62). The 18–50 age group comprised 538 subjects (mean age \pm SD: 35.80 \pm 7.80), whereas the 51–85 age group included 151 subjects (mean age \pm SD: 66.42 \pm 11.57) and 67 subjects (mean age \pm SD: 89.87 \pm 2.64) belonged to the 86–98 age group.

Allele and genotype frequencies are reported in Table 1. All gene polymorphisms were in HWE. The frequencies of the studied gene polymorphisms among age groups are shown in Table 2.

We observed a significant decrease in the frequency of *GSTT1* null, *GSTP1* G and *XPC* C alleles in the oldest group with respect to the youngest one ($p = 3.72 \times 10^{-2}$, $p = 1 \times 10^{-4}$ and $p = 4.2 \times 10^{-3}$, respectively) and with respect to the 51–85 age group ($p = 8 \times 10^{-4}$, $p = 1 \times 10^{-4}$ and $p = 5.9 \times 10^{-3}$, respectively). For *GSTT1* null and *GSTP1* G alleles significant differences were also found between age groups 51–85 and 18–50 ($p = 2 \times 10^{-2}$ and $p = 5.7 \times 10^{-3}$,

Table 2. Frequencies of the studied metabolic gene polymorphisms among different age groups ($n = 756$).

Gene Variants	18–50 N = 538	51–85 N = 151	86–98 N = 67	18–85 N = 689	86–98 N = 67
<i>CYP1A1</i> (rs1048943)					
AA	389	106	48	495	48
AG	128	41	19	169	19
GG	21	4	0	25	0
Allele A	906 (0.842)	253 (0.838)	115 (0.858)	1159 (0.841)	115 (0.858)
Allele G	170 (0.158)	49 (0.162)	19 (0.142)	219 (0.159)	19 (0.142)
<i>GSTM1</i> (rs1183423000)					
+	378 (0.703)	97 (0.642)	52 (0.176)	475 (0.689)	52 (0.776)
–	160 (0.297)	54 (0.358)	15 (0.224)	214 (0.311)	15 (0.224)
<i>GSTT1</i> (rs1601993659)					
+	392 (0.729)	95 (0.629)	57 (0.851)	487 (0.707)	57 (0.851)
–	146 (0.271)	56 (0.371) ^a	10 (0.149) ^{b,c}	202 (0.293)	10 (0.149) ^d
<i>GSTP1</i> (rs1695)					
AA	360	117	60	477	60
AG	154	32	7	186	7
GG	24	2	0	26	0
Allele A	874 (0.812)	266 (0.881)	127 (0.948)	1140 (0.827)	127 (0.948)
Allele G	202 (0.188)	36 (0.119) ^e	7 (0.052) ^{f,g}	238 (0.173)	7 (0.052) ^h
<i>XRCC1</i> (rs1799782)					
CC	395	109	55	504	55
CT	128	36	12	164	12
TT	15	6	0	21	0
Allele C	918 (0.853)	254 (0.841)	122 (0.910)	1172 (0.851)	122 (0.910)
Allele T	158 (0.147)	48 (0.159)	12 (0.090)	206 (0.149)	12 (0.090)
<i>XRCC1</i> (rs25489)					
AA	430	110	52	539	52
AG	97	36	15	134	15
GG	11	5	0	16	0
Allele A	957 (0.889)	256 (0.848)	119 (0.888)	1213 (0.880)	119 (0.888)
Allele G	119 (0.111)	46 (0.152)	15 (0.112)	165 (0.120)	15 (0.112)
<i>XPC</i> (rs2228001)					
AA	389	106	58	495	58
AC	130	41	9	171	9
CC	19	4	0	23	0
Allele A	908 (0.844)	253 (0.838)	125 (0.933)	1161 (0.843)	125 (0.933)
Allele C	168 (0.156)	49 (0.162)	9 (0.067) ^{i,j}	217 (0.157)	9 (0.067) ^k

^a $p = 2 \times 10^{-2}$ significant with respect to 18–50 age group.

^b $p = 3.72 \times 10^{-2}$ significant with respect to 18–50 age group.

^c $p = 8 \times 10^{-4}$ significant with respect to 51–85 age group.

^d $p = 1.05 \times 10^{-2}$ significant with respect to 18–85 age group.

^e $p = 5.7 \times 10^{-3}$ significant with respect to 18–50 age group.

^f $p = 1.0 \times 10^{-4}$ significant with respect to 18–50 age group.

^g $p = 3.58 \times 10^{-2}$ significant with respect to 51–85 age group.

^h $p = 1.0 \times 10^{-4}$ significant with respect to 18–85 age group.

ⁱ $p = 4.2 \times 10^{-3}$ significant with respect to 18–50 age group.

^j $p = 5.9 \times 10^{-3}$ significant with respect to 51–85 age group.

^k $p = 3.4 \times 10^{-3}$ significant with respect to 18–85 age group.

respectively). For the other studied gene polymorphisms, no significant differences were found between the different age groups.

The sample was also subdivided into two age groups, 18–85 and 86–98, and we obtained the same results, with the oldest age group showing a significant decrease of the *GSTT1* null ($p = 1.05 \times 10^{-2}$), *GSTP1* G ($p = 1 \times 10^{-4}$) and *XPC* C ($p = 3.4 \times 10^{-3}$) allele frequencies with respect to the 18–85 age group.

Finally, the multivariate general linear model confirmed this significantly decreasing trend with age for the *GSTT1* null ($p = 3.2 \times 10^{-2}$), *GSTP1* G ($p = 8 \times 10^{-3}$) and *XPC* C ($p = 3.4 \times 10^{-2}$) alleles.

4. Discussion

Although longevity is due to a complex interaction of genetic and environmental factors, a strong genetic component appears to have an important role in survival to extreme ages (Franceschi et al., 2020; Brooks-Wilson, 2013; Gems and Partridge 2013).

In the present paper we found a negative association of *GSTT1* rs1601993659 null, *GSTP1* rs1695 G and *XPC* rs2228001 C alleles with human longevity in an Italian sample. A possible explanation for our findings is that polymorphisms of the metabolic and DNA-repair genes could play an important role in determining the incidence of diseases associated with genomic damage and, consequently, in modulating the life span. For example, many studies have shown that variants of *GSTs* genes are significantly associated with disease risk, including cancer, cardiovascular and allergic diseases (Di Pietro et al. 2010; Esalmi and Sahebrak 2014; Dar et al. 2017). The lowest frequency of *GSTT1* null genotypes found in subjects aged between 86 and 98 years seems to suggest a selective disadvantage of the possible detrimental genotypes in this age group.

Vice versa, this association with longevity was not observed for *GSTM1* polymorphism. This result is not surprising and agrees with what other authors have observed. For example, a lack of association between human longevity and *GSTM1* gene polymorphism was already observed by Muir et al. (1998). Similarly, Ruiz et al. (2012), in a Spanish sample, observed a significantly higher frequency for the *GSTT1*-positive allele in a sample of centenarians (age range 100–108) than in a control group (age range 19–43), while the frequency of the *GSTM1*-positive allele was similar in both groups.

Differently to *GSTT1* and *GSTM1* gene polymorphisms, no data are present in the literature about the relationships between *GSTP1* rs1695 (A>G) gene polymorphism and longevity. However, like *GSTT1*, *GSTP1* also has a corresponding rationale for an association with age. In subjects carrying the variant G-allele, substrate-specific catalytic activity becomes less effective, resulting in increased risk for the development of chronic and malignant diseases, such as cardiovascular diseases and neoplasms (Khabaz 2014; Chielle et al. 2016) and, consequently, in a reduced longevity.

In the literature a relationship between *CYP1A1* variants and cancer was observed (Liu et al. 2016), however we found no differences between age groups in the frequency of *CYP1A1* rs1048943 genotypes. These data seem to be concordant with other studies, such as the one conducted by Taioli et al. (2001), that did not find any difference in the frequency of *CYP1A1* alleles in centenarians, as compared to younger control subjects. However, published data evaluating the possible association between phase I enzyme polymorphisms and ageing reported conflicting results (Wauthier et al. 2007; Seripa et al. 2010).

Several investigations have demonstrated that subjects showing compromised repair capacity have increased mutation rates, an increased risk of cancer and a reduced life-expectancy (Tian et al. 2017; Kim et al. 2018). We hypothesised that polymorphisms in the *XPC* gene, being important in the sensitivity against the development of different types of cancer (Bahceci et al. 2015), may reflect a reduced life-expectancy in carrier subjects and may explain the significant lower frequency of *XPC* exon 15 C-allele we observed among subjects belonging to oldest age group.

Conversely, there is no consensus regarding the possible association between *XRCC1* rs1799782 and rs2228001 polymorphisms with different types of cancer (Moghaddam et al. 2016; Dylawerska et al. 2017), data that may explain the lack of association of these gene polymorphisms with longevity, as observed in our study.

In conclusion, with this study we highlighted a role for *GSTT1*, *GSTP1* and *XPC* gene polymorphisms in longevity. We hypothesised that the minor alleles of these metabolic genes, playing an important role in the susceptibility to different types of cancer, may reflect a reduced life-expectancy in carriers, explaining their significantly lower frequency observed among subjects belonging to the oldest age group. Conversely, an optimum activity of repair processes may favour longevity, justifying the significant reduced frequency of *XPC* C allele in elderly subjects.

Finally, we would like to emphasise that, considering that the number of centenarians in the world will drastically increase in the next few decades (Nijati et al. 2013), studies on longevity will play an important role, and will also allow us to analyse any pleiotropic effects of analysed genes.

Informed consent

Written informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study. Participants were also informed about their right to privacy and about the management procedures of their personal data, as required by the Italian law (art. 13 of Legislative Decree n. 196/2003).

Author contributions

Manuel Scarfò, Chiara Sciandra and Stefano Ruberto extracted DNA, performed genotyping and drafted manuscript. Alfredo Santovito designed the project, collected the samples, performed genotyping, drafted and edited the manuscript.

Disclosure statement

The Authors declare that they have no competing financial interests in relation to the present work.

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Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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