Fecundity in an infertile man with r(15) – a challenge to the current paradigm

Hamid Kalantari, Hamideh Karimi, Seyed Navid Almadani, Mostafa Fakhri, Pegah Mokhtari, Hamid Gourabi, Anahita Mohseni Meybodi *

Department of Genetics, Reproductive Biomedicine Research Centre, Royan Institute for Reproductive Biomedicine, ACECR, Tehran, Iran

Hamid Kalantari obtained his master’s degree in Cell and Molecular Biology from the University of Tehran at the end of September 2007. After graduation, he started working as a life scientist. His current research interest is within the field of reproductive cytogenetics and prenatal diagnosis.

KEY MESSAGE
To offer exhaustive genetic counselling to families and pave the way for detection of those genes whose hemizygosity influences the phenotype, determining the haploinsufficiency of genes is of great importance. Regarding three OMIM genes, SNRPA1, PCSK6 and TM2D3, our findings do not support the gene-dosage sensitivity.

ABSTRACT
Ring chromosome 15 [r(15)] is a rare condition with a mild-to-severe growth failure, mental disabilities, café-au-lait spots, specific facial features, fertility difficulties and other minor dysmorphic stigmata. Of almost 50 affected individuals reported in the literature, none were assessed for the precise breakpoint positioning, which creates uncertainty in defining a specific phenotype for the deleted segment. This study reports for the first time the vertical transmission of r(15) in three consecutive generations of a family, including a subfertile man, his mother and his newborn infant. Array comparative genomic hybridization results revealed a 563 kb deletion of 15q26.3, overlapping the OMIM genes SNRP1, PCSK6 and TM2D3. The hemizygosity was confirmed with real-time quantitative PCR. Regarding haploinsufficiency in 15q26.3, based on phenotypic characteristics of the carriers, the only rational conclusion is that SNRPA1, PCSK6 and TM2D3 are not gene-dosage sensitive and are probably inherited in an autosomal-recessive manner. Given growth deficiency in r(15) carriers, this shows that the growth retardation cannot be attributed entirely to IGF1R. The predominance of female patients with r(15) is the next as yet unanswered question; incomplete penetrance and/or variable expression of gene(s) in different genders may be involved, but further evidence is needed to support this idea.

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* Corresponding author.
E-mail address: anahitamohseni@royaninstitute.org (AM Meybodi).
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Introduction

Ring chromosome 15 [r(15)] syndrome is an extremely rare finding, with fewer than 50 cases reported in the literature, commonly associated with mild-to-severe failure to thrive, mental disabilities, café-au-lait spots, specific facial features and fertility difficulties, along with other minor dysmorphic stigmata. More than half a century from the first report of r(15) (Jacobsen, 1966) there is still little known about the various aspects of this disorder. The limited number of reported cases of r(15), mostly at pre-pubertal age, has made assessment of the ring chromosome inheritance, as well as the reproductive ability of the affected subjects, very difficult. Another aspect is that there appears to be within-gender phenotypic inconsistency in the fertility of ring chromosome carriers. Whilst females with r(15) have normal gonadal function (Horigome et al., 1992; Moreau and Teyssier, 1982), affected males are unlikely to be fertile (Table 1). Hence, the paternal inheritance of ring chromosome is an extremely rare phenomenon (Rajesh et al., 2011a). To date, there have been only three reports [four cases] of paternal ring transmission of which none were bearing r(15) (Rajesh et al., 2011b); and regarding the vertical transmission of r(15), there are also three reports [all maternal] (Fujimaki et al., 1987; Horigome et al., 1992; Nikitina et al., 2003). Here we present a rare hereditary case of the syndrome in a three-generation family, including a mother, her subfertile son, and her newborn grandchild. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first family study of its kind.

Materials and methods

Cases

Three consecutive generations of a family harbouring r(15), including a subfertile man, his mother and his newborn infant (Figure 1) were investigated. The index case presented with primary infertility after failing to cause pregnancy after 1 year of unprotected coitus. The patient’s initial semen analysis revealed oligoasthenozoospermia (Table 2).

Family history and clinical report

I-2 was an asymptomatic 71-year-old female (Figure 1). She had no facial or physical dysmorphic features, with unaffected fecundity [having had her last child at 37]. Indeed, abnormal findings in the proband led to her evaluation and diagnosis. Owing to the unavailability of her family history, it is unclear whether the ring was inherited or arose de novo. Her menstruation started normally at age 13 and stopped

Table 1 – The fecundity status in all reported ‘adults’ with r(15).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>Siblings</th>
<th>Reproductivity</th>
<th>Respective karyotypes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jacobsen [1966]</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>♂</td>
<td>de novo</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>Infertile, azoospermic, bilateral cryptorchidism</td>
<td>46,XY,r(D)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emberger et al. [1971]</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>♂</td>
<td>de novo</td>
<td>Three healthy sisters</td>
<td>Infertile, right side cryptorchidism</td>
<td>46,XY,r(15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meinecke and Keske-Westphal [1980]</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>♂</td>
<td>de novo</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Infertile with small penis, the left testis is not palpable, and the right is small</td>
<td>46,XY,r(15) [p11q26.3] [41] / 45,XY,-15 [4]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moreau and Teyssier [1982]</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>♂</td>
<td>de novo</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>Infertile with normal pilosity and external genitalia, severe oligoasthenozoospermia</td>
<td>46,XY(5)/45,XY,-15(2)/47,XY,+ idic r(15)x2[1]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fryns et al. [1986]</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>♂</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>Normal</td>
<td>46,XX,r(15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horigome et al. [1992]</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>♂</td>
<td>de novo</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>Infertile, azoospermic, bilateral cryptorchidism</td>
<td>46,XY,r(15) [p11q26.3]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matsuishi et al. [1996]</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>♂</td>
<td>de novo</td>
<td>Two healthy siblings</td>
<td>Menstruation commenced at age 17 years</td>
<td>46,XX,r(15) [p11q26.3]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith et al. [1991]</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>♂</td>
<td>de novo</td>
<td>One healthy sister</td>
<td>Menses began at age 15 years and were regular and ceased by age 48 Severe oligoasthenoteratozoospermia A son with r(15)</td>
<td>46,XX,r(15) [p13q26.3] / 45,XX,-15[2]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-2</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>♂</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>Six pregnancies; two spontaneously aborted, three normal and one with r(15) children</td>
<td>46,XX,r(15) [p13q26.3]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NR= not reported.

* Age at diagnosis [years].

b Parental origin; de novo [spontaneous] or familial.

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