

# NIH Public Access

**Author Manuscript**

Cleft Palate Craniofac J. Author manuscript; available in PMC 2014 January 01.

#### Published in final edited form as:

Cleft Palate Craniofac J. 2013 January ; 50(1): 96–103. doi:10.1597/11-132.

## **The** *FGF & FGFR* **Gene Family and Risk of Cleft Lip with/without Cleft Palate**

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#### **Abstract**

**Background—Isolated, non-syndromic cleft lip with or without cleft palate (iCL±P) is a** common human congenital malformation with a complex and heterogeneous etiology. Genes coding for fibroblast growth factors and their receptors (FGF/FGFR genes) are excellent candidate genes.

**Methods—**We tested single nucleotide polymorphic (SNP) markers in 10 *FGF/FGFR* genes (including FGFBP1, FGF2, FGF10, FGF18, FGFR1, FGFR2, FGF19, FGF4, FGF3, and FGF9) for genotypic effects, interactions with one another, and with common maternal environmental exposures in 221 Asian and 76 Maryland case-parent trios ascertained through a child with iCL±P.

**Results—**Both FGFR1 and FGF19 yielded evidence of linkage and association in the transmission disequilibrium test, confirming previous evidence. Haplotypes of three SNPs in FGFR1 were nominally significant among Asian trios. Estimated ORs for individual SNPs and haplotypes of multiple markers in FGF19 ranged between1.31-1.87. We also found suggestive evidence of maternal genotypic effects for markers in FGF2 and FGF10 among Asian trios. Tests for gene-environment  $(GxE)$  interaction between markers in  $FGFR2$  and maternal smoking or multivitamin supplementation yielded significant evidence of GxE interaction separately. Tests of gene-gene (GxG) interaction using Cordell's method yielded significant evidence between SNPs in FGF9 and FGF18, which was confirmed in an independent sample of trios from an international consortium.

**Conclusion—**Our results suggest several genes in the *FGF/FGFR* family may influence risk to iCL±P through distinct biological mechanisms.

#### **Keywords**

FGF/FGFR; oral clefts; maternal effects; gene-environment interaction; gene-gene interaction

Isolated, non-syndromic cleft lip with or without cleft palate (iCL±P) represents one of the most common human birth defects (Mossey and Little, 2002) and has a complex and heterogeneous etiology that remains poorly understood (Jugessur and Murray, 2005). There is a strong genetic component to the etiology of this common birth defect. A multifactorial threshold model of inheritance reflecting multiple distinct causal genes is often assumed (Grosen et al., 2010). Genome-wide linkage screens in multiplex families have shown multiple regions of the genome may harbor causal genes with a high degree of linkage heterogeneity (Marazita et al., 2004; 2009). Recently, genome wide association studies (GWAS) have identified a region on chromosome 8q24 as strongly associated with risk to

iCL±P; although it is relatively devoid of genes, raising the possibility that non-coding genetic regions are also critical (Birnbaum et al., 2009; Grant et al., 2009; Beaty et al., 2010). Several studies have also shown suggestive evidence for interaction between candidate genes and environmental risk factors, especially maternal smoking (Zeiger et al., 2005; Shi et al., 2007a) and nutrient intake (Shaw et al., 1998) in controlling risk for iCL±P, although the evidence for gene environment (GxE) interaction remains difficult to confirm. Therefore, genes and regulatory elements outside of coding regions, plus their possible interactions with one another (GxG interaction) and with environmental factors, should be considered when searching for potential causal genes for iCL±P.

Genes in the fibroblast growth factor (*FGF*) signaling pathway are excellent candidate genes for iCL±P (Nie et al., 2006; Riley et al., 2007a; 2007b; 2007c; Menezes et al., 2008). Here we tested markers in 10 *FGF* and *FGF* receptor (*FGFR*) genes for their potential role in controlling risk to iCL±P using 297 case–parent trios from four populations.

#### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

#### **Sample description**

As part of an international study, we collected peripheral blood, environmental exposures, and other data on iCL±P case-parent trios recruited through treatment centers in Maryland (MD), (Johns Hopkins and University of Maryland), Chang Gung Memorial Hospital in Taiwan (TW), KK Women's and Children's Hospital in Singapore (SP), and Yonsei Medical Center in South Korea (KR). History of maternal exposure to cigarette smoking, alcohol consumption, and vitamin supplementation was collected from a personal interview of mothers covering the peri-conceptual period (three months before conception through the first trimester). All probands underwent clinical genetic evaluation (including checking for other congenital anomalies or major developmental delays) and were classified as having an isolated, non-syndromic iCL±P. Research protocols were reviewed and approved by institutional review boards (IRBs) at each participating institution.

#### **SNP selection, DNA & genotyping**

SNPs were selected in 10 FGF/FGFR genes (including FGFBP1, FGF2, FGF10, FGF18, FGFR1, FGFR2, FGF19, FGF4, FGF3, and FGF9) with a goal of identifying one SNP per 5kb of physical distance. Because Hapmap data were not fully available at the time our SNPs were chosen, we could not identify all possible tagging SNPs. Variants with "SNP scores" > 0.6 (an assessment of design quality of the Illumina assay based on a proprietary algorithm), high validation levels in dbSNP (including validation on multiple platforms), and high heterozygosity levels (particularly in multiple populations) were given priority. SNP markers were genotyped using Illumina's Golden-Gate chemistry at the Genetic Resources Core Facility (GRCF) at Johns Hopkins. Two duplicates and four controls from the Centre d'Etude du Polymorphisme Humain (CEPH) collection were included on each plate to evaluate genotyping consistency within and between plates.

#### **Statistical analysis**

Genotyping rate, minor allele frequency (MAF), pairwise linkage disequilibrium (LD) and Hardy-Weinberg equilibrium (HWE) were evaluated within each population and in three Asian populations combined. LD was measured as  $r^2$  for all SNPs using Haploview (Barrett et al., 2005). SNPs were tested when the following criteria were satisfied: MAF > 1%, compatibility with HWE at  $p > 0.01$  in each group and overall genotyping rate  $>80\%$ . None of the SNPs between different FGF/FGFR genes on the same chromosome were in LD (data not shown), so the 10 FGF/FGFR genes were analyzed separately.

Statistical significance of transmission distortion from parents to the affected offspring was evaluated using the family based association test (FBAT; [http://www.biostat.harvard.edu/](http://www.biostat.harvard.edu/~fbat/fbat.htm) [~fbat/fbat.htm](http://www.biostat.harvard.edu/~fbat/fbat.htm)) for each individual SNP and for haplotypes of multiple SNPs (Laird and Lange, 2006). Numbers of transmitted and non-transmitted alleles for both single SNPs and haplotypes were generated using PLINK (v1.07;<http://pngu.mgh.harvard.edu/purcell/plink/>, Purcell et al., 2007). The 95% confidence interval (95%CI) for estimated odds ratios (ORs) of over-transmission were calculated by a binomial exact test in STATA (v 10.0).

Analysis of maternally mediated in utero effects was tested using TRIad Multi-Marker (TRIMM) package under an assumption of mating symmetry in the population (Shi et al., 2007b). Paired difference counts (D) of the number of target alleles carried by father and mother is a key component in constructing standardized normal (Z) statistics for the mean D across all markers, and the maximum  $Z^2$  served as a test statistic. Empiric significance of maternal genotypic effects was evaluated by permuting these max $Z^2$  values over random reassignments of "father" and "mother". To optimize power, max\_ $Z^2$  and Hotelling's  $T^2$ tests were used to generate a combined P-value (sum\_logP) from these two tests. If the global max\_ $Z^2$  test gave a p < 0.1, the apparent risk allele or haplotype was used in the loglinear framework originally proposed by Weinberg et al. (1998) to estimate relative risks. ORs and their significance associated with the mother's carrying one copy  $(S_1)$  of the risk allele/haplotype was assessed by a likelihood ratio test (LRT) under the log-additive model (where ORs associated with carrying two copies is simply  $S_1^2$ ) as implemented in the Triad Multi-Marker relative risk Estimation program (TRIMMEST) ([www.niehs.nih.gov/research/](http://www.niehs.nih.gov/research/atniehs/labs/bb/staff/weinberg) [atniehs/labs/bb/staff/weinberg;](http://www.niehs.nih.gov/research/atniehs/labs/bb/staff/weinberg) Shi et al., 2009). A general model was used to estimate the OR for FGF2, where 4 haplotypes were present, but a more restricted model assuming HWE was used for FGF10 where 11 haplotypes were observed (because the more general model would have required too many parameters).

Family based association tests for individual SNPs or 2-3 SNP sliding window haplotypes incorporating a GxE interaction term with maternal smoking and vitamin supplementation were performed in a combined 2 degree of freedom (df) score test for main effects of genotype (G) and GxE interaction together, followed by a 1 df score test for GxE interaction alone using PBAT (v3.6;<http://www.biostat.harvard.edu/~clange/default.htm>).

We used Cordell's (2002) LRT for possible GxG interaction assessment among markers in these 10 *FGF/FGFR* genes. Using a conditional logistic regression model, the observed 2locus genotype of the case was compared to the 15 possible 'pseudo-sib' control genotypes, generating a 4 df test. To address the issue of multiple comparisons, we carried out permutation tests where case vs. pseudo-sib control status was randomly shuffled 1000 times for each trio to generate new sets of data under the null hypothesis. An empirical P-value for the most significant SNP was determined by comparing the observed test statistic to these 1000 replicates.

Although markers in these 10 *FGF/FGFR* genes were typed as part of a candidate gene study conducted before the international consortium described by Beaty et al. (2010), 157 of these 297 (52.9%) case-parent trios went into that genome wide study. In a confirmatory analysis of GxG interaction, we removed these overlapping trios from the international consortium data set and used all remaining case-parent trios (n=1434) which represents an independent replication sample of iCL±P case-parent trios.

#### **RESULTS**

A total of 297 trios were collected from four populations (MD, TW, SP and KR), and Table 1 lists gender and race of all iCL±P probands. Among the 122 SNPs genotyped in these 10

When analyzing transmission distortion of individual SNPs among these 10 *FGF/FGFR* genes, two independent markers in FGF19 showed nominally significant evidence of linkage and association ( $P<0.05$ ) with iCL $\pm P$  among Asian trios, and another SNP was significant only among MD trios (Table 2). Estimated ORs for carrying the apparent high-risk allele at each of these three FGF19 SNPs ranged from 1.37 to 1.87.Analysis of sliding window haplotypes using 2-5 SNPs together confirmed the significance of markers in FGF19 among Asian trios, and a 3-SNP haplotype in FGFR1 (rs6987534, rs6474354and rs10958700) gave  $p = 0.04$  (corrected  $p=0.30$ ) among Asian trios.

In testing for possible maternal genotype effects, one 4-SNP haplotype in FGF2 and another 6-SNP haplotype in FGF10 showed significant empiric evidence of an increased risk of iCL  $\pm P$  in offspring that depended solely upon maternal genotype among Asian trios. The corresponding ORs for the child being affected were estimated as 1.72 ( $\chi^2$  =11.47, empiric p=0.0007) and 1.61 ( $\chi^2$  =7.29, empiric p=0.0069), if the mother carried one copy of the risk haplotype (Table 3).

Although the rate of maternal alcohol consumption was too low to permit separate analysis, about 5% and 25% Asian mothers reported smoking and taking vitamin supplements, respectively, during the critical peri-conceptional period (Sull et al., 2009). Significant evidence of GxE interaction was seen among Asian populations for  $FGFR2$  (Figure 1). For GxSmoking analysis, the most significant evidence was seen in a 2-SNP haplotype ( $rs2981428$  and  $rs3750817$ ) which yielded a  $p = 0.0058$  in a 1 df test (Figure 1) which is not significant after strict Bonferroni correction. For GxVitamin interaction, the strongest evidence in FGFR2was seen both in 1df test for a single SNP (rs2912771;  $p = 0.00027$ , corrected  $p = 0.042$ ) and in the 2 *df* test for a 3-SNP haplotype (involving  $rs4752566$ , *rs2912760*, and *rs3135761*;  $p = 0.00021$ , corrected  $p = 0.033$ ). These P-values for GxVitamin interaction remained significant after strict Bonferroni correction for all 156 tests conducted on the 27 markers and their haplotypes in FGFR2. As seen in the lower panel of Figure 1, several other SNPs and haplotypes also showed nominal significance in either the 1 *df* or the 2 *df* test for GxVitamin interaction.

A total of 16 pairs of SNPs in different FGF genes attained nominal significance in tests of GxG interaction (Table 4). The most significant LRT was generated by  $rs2043278$  in  $FGF18$ and  $rs12870202$  in  $FGF9$  (p = 0.0001), which remained significant (p = 0.019) after correcting for multiple comparisons via permutation tests. Only 1.9% of replicates (across the 338 separate tests for GxG interactions) generated under the null hypothesis exceeded this observed test statistic (Table 4 and Figure 2).

To follow-up on the intriguing evidence for GxG interaction between FGF9 and FGF18 seen here, an independent replication sample of 1,434 case-parent trios was examined in a confirmatory test of GxG interaction using markers in these two genes. Only rs2043278 in FGF18 was included in the genome wide marker panel, but 11 different SNPs in or near FGF9 gave a nominally significant evidence of GxG interaction with this one SNP (Table 5). When all 38 SNPs in FGF18 were examined with the 140 SNPs mapping to FGF9, several additional pairs of SNPs in these two genes showed further evidence of possible GxG interaction (see Figure 3). The most significant pairs involved SNPs in the intergenic region 3' of the gene, some are as far as 500kb away.

#### **DISCUSSION**

In our analysis of 111 markers in 10 FGF/FGFR genes using 297 case−parent trios collected from an international study, SNPs in seven of these genes gave some evidence of linkage and association with unobserved causal variants for  $iCL<sub>+</sub>P$ . Genes in the *FGF/FGFR* pathway are considered good candidates for iCL±P because they play important roles in craniofacial development (Kurose et al., 2004; Rice et al., 2004; Jugessur et al., 2009) and several of them (FGFR1, FGFR2, and FGF10) control Mendelian malformation syndromes which can include oral clefts as a hallmark feature (Slaney et al., 1996; Dodéet al., 2003; Entesarian et al., 2005). Genes can contribute to the etiology of non−syndromic forms of oral clefts as well as Mendelian malformation syndromes, e.g. interferon regulatory factor 6 (Kondo et al., 2002; Zucchero et al., 2004).

Fine mapping linkage scans in the 8p11−23 chromosomal region (Riley et al., 2007c), association and sequencing studies (Riley et al., 2007a; 2007b) offered further support for  $FGFR1$  as a good candidate for iCL $\pm$ P. Our analysis of markers in FGFR1 gene confirmed these previous reports. However, neither results from our or Riley's studies would retain statistical significance if strict Bonferroni correction for multiple testing were used. Although there is no previous evidence that  $FGF19$  influences risk to iCL $\pm$ P, our results combined with evidence from animal models (Kurose et al., 2004) suggest further investigation of this gene may be warranted.

Mutations in non–coding regions of  $FGF2$  and  $FGF10$  can result in impaired transcription (Riley et al., 2007b). Our analysis showed intriguing evidence for maternal genotypic effects controlling the offspring's risk of  $iCL \pm P$  for markers in these two genes among Asians, though fetal effects identified in two previous studies for SNPs in  $FGF10$  (Riley et al., 2007b; Menezes et al., 2008) were not confirmed here. Maternal genes control the in utero environment, so potential maternal genotype effects of markers in FGF2 and FGF10 genes seen among our Asian trios may be important (Boyles et al., 2009).

Sequence analysis identified several rare mutations in coding regions of FGFR2, which may be causal (Riley et al., 2007a; 2007b). In our study, SNPs in FGFR2 showed suggestive evidence of GxE interaction with maternal smoking and significant evidence of interaction with vitamin supplementation (even after Bonferroni correction). Evidence from association studies with markers inFGFR2 across studies has been inconsistent (Riley et al., 2007a; Menezes et al., 2008), but our suggestion of GxE interaction deserves further investigation given the potential for public health intervention with modifiable environmental risk factors.

Potentially important mutations in non-coding regions of FGF9 were identified in a separate sequencing study (Riley et al., 2007a; 2007b). Our analysis of 297 trios showed intriguing evidence for possible GxG interaction between FGF18 and FGF9 that may be important for iCL±P. Using independent trios from the International Cleft Consortium described by Beaty et al. (2010), we confirmed the significance of GxG interaction between markers in FGF9 and FGF18 identified in these 297 trios, although the strongest evidence was seen for markers distal to the 3' end of FGF9 (well away from coding regions). The combination of statistical evidence from these 297 trios and from the 1434 independent trios from the GWAS makes it more likely these findings are biologically meaningful. Very few GWAS signals are actually found in coding sequences (Hindorff et al., 2009) and the strongest association signal for iCL±P in Europeans lies in an apparent "gene desert" on chromosome 8q24 (Birnbaum et al., 2009; Grant et al., 2009, Beaty et al., 2010). Similar regulators may underlie these associations, and one can imagine a shared enhancer sequence could explain the suggested interaction between these two FGF genes.

Our association results confirmed some previous findings from published linkage, association and sequencing analysis for various FGF/FGFR genes, and provided new clues about how these different genes may act through potential maternal genotypic effects, GxE and GxG interactions to control risk of  $iCL<sub>+</sub>P$ . Although some of the statistical evidence presented here did not retain significance after strict Bonferroni correction, mechanisms of GxG interaction in particular require further investigation.

#### **Acknowledgments**

We thank all participants who donated samples for this multi−center study of oral clefts, as well as the staff at each participating site and institution.

This research was supported by R21−DE−013707 and R01−DE−014581 from the National Institute of Dental & Craniofacial Research, and D43-TW006176 from Fogarty Institution.

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#### **Figure 1.**

Testing for main effects (G) of individual SNPs (haplotypes) of FGFR2 and gene– environment interaction (GxE) for two common maternal exposures in 221CL/P case–parent trios from Asian populations. Triangles represent the 2 df test of G and GxE interaction, squares represent the 1 df test of G x E only. Haplotypes of 2- and 3-SNPs are connected by solid lines for 2dftest and dotted lines for 1 df test (only nominally significant haplotypes are shown here).  $rs2912762^*$ : The distance between  $rs3135761$  and  $rs2912762$  were drawn for clarity (true distance between these two SNPs is 199 base pairs).





#### **Figure 2.**

Distribution of maximum LRT values over 1000 replicates. Histograms represent the frequency of maximum test statistics generated under the null hypothesis of no GxG interaction. The vertical line shows the position of observed test statistic of GxG interaction between rs12870202 and rs2043278. About 1.9% of permutated test statistics exceeded this observed value, giving an empiric p-value corrected for multiple testing (p=0.019).



#### **Figure 3.**

Significance [as -log<sub>10</sub>(p)] from 4df LRT for Cordell's test of GxG interaction between markers in FGF18 and FGF9 plotted against the physical position in FGF9. SNP (rs2043278) in FGF18 is an intronic marker located at 170,815,212 (Build 36) and showed moderately significant p-values for 11 different SNPs in FGF9 (solid circles), most of which were located in the 3'UTR (some as far as 500 Kb away from the coding region of FGF9). Five additional SNPs in FGF18 also yielded strong evidence of GxG interaction with SNPs in the intergenic region 3' of the FGF9 coding region (open symbols).

# **TABLE 1**

Gender and racial origin of 297 CL/P probands from 4 populations Gender and racial origin of 297 CL/P probands from 4 populations



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# **TABLE 2**

SNPs yielding significant or marginally significant associations from analysis of 111 markers in 10 FGF/FGFR genes from family based association tests<br>for single SNPs and 2-5 SNP haplotypes in analysis of 76 MD trios and 2 SNPs yielding significant or marginally significant associations from analysis of 111 markers in 10 FGF/FGFR genes from family based association tests for single SNPs and 2-5 SNP haplotypes in analysis of 76 MD trios and 221 Asian trios separately



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Maternal risk haplotypes identified by TRIMM from analysis of 28 markers in the FGF2 and FGF10 genes under an additive modelwhere maternal<br>genotype alone (S<sub>1</sub>) controls risk to CL/P in offspring from TRIMMEST analysis in Maternal risk haplotypes identified by TRIMM from analysis of 28 markers in the FGF2 and FGF10 genes under an additive modelwhere maternal genotype alone (S1) controls risk to CL/P in offspring from TRIMMEST analysis in 221 Asian trios.



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# **TABLE 4**

Significant tests for G×G interaction among 111 markers in 10 different FGF/FGFR genes in 297 CL/P case-parent trios from 4 populations based on 4*df*<br>LRT testing for 2-way interaction Significant tests for G×G interaction among 111 markers in 10 different FGF/FGFR genes in 297 CL/P case-parent trios from 4 populations based on 4*df* LRT testing for 2-way interaction



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Only this 2-SNP interaction remained significant after 1,000 permutations with Pvalue of 0.019. Only this 2–SNP interaction remained significant after 1,000 permutations with P value of 0.019.

#### **TABLE 5**

Tests for G×G interaction between RS2043278 in FGF18 and 11 SNPs in FGF9 that achieved nominal significance in 1434 case-parent trios from the International Cleft Consortium

