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Report from the Killer-cell Immunoglobulin-like Receptors (KIR) component of the 17th International HLA and Immunogenetics Workshop

Maneesh K. Misra1, **Danillo G. Augusto**1,2, **Gonzalo Montero Martin**3, **Neda Nemat-Gorgani**4, **Jürgen Sauter**5, **Jan A. Hofmann**5, **James A. Traherne**6, **Betsy González-Quezada**7, **Clara Gorodezky**7, **Will Bultitude**8, **Wesley Marin**1, **Cynthia Vierra-Green**9, **Kirsten M. Anderson**1, **Antonio Balas**10, **Jose L. Caro-Oleas**11, **Elisa Cisneros**12, **Francesco Colucci**13, **Ravi Dandekar**1, **Sally Elfishawi**14, **Marcelo A. Fernández-Viña**3, **Merhan Fouda**14, **Rafael González-Fernández**15, **Arend Große**16, **Maria J. Herrero-Mata**11, **Sam Q. Hollenbach**17, **Steven G. Marsh**8, **Alex Mentzer**18, **Derek Middleton**19, **Ashley Moffett**20, **Miguel A. Moreno-Hidalgo**10, **Ghada Mossallam**14, **Annettee Nakimuli**21, **Jorge R. Oksenberg**1, **Stephen J. Oppenheimer**22, **Peter Parham**4, **Maria-Luiza Petzl-Erler**2, **Dolores Planelles**23, **Florentino Sánchez-García**24, **Francisco Sánchez-Gordo**25, **Alexander H. Schmidt**5,16, **John Trowsdale**6, **Luciana B. Vargas**2, **Jose L. Vicario**10, **Carlos Vilches**12, **Paul J. Norman**#4,26, and **Jill A. Hollenbach**#1

¹Department of Neurology, University of California San Francisco, San Francisco, CA 94158, USA ²Department of Genetics, Universidade Federal do Paraná, Curitiba, Brazil³Department of Pathology, Stanford University School of Medicine, Stanford, CA 94304, USA ⁴Department of Structural Biology, Stanford University School of Medicine, Stanford, CA 94305, USA ⁵DKMS gGmbH, Tübingen, Germany ⁶Department of Pathology, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK ⁷Department of Immunology and Immunogenetics, InDRE, Secretary of Health, Francisco P. Miranda #177, Colonia Lomas de Plateros, Del. Álvaro Obregón, CP 01480; and, Fundación Comparte Vida, A.C. Galileo #92, col. Polanco, Del. Miguel Hidalgo, CP 11550, Mexico City, México. ⁸Anthony Nolan Research Institute, Royal Free Hospital, Pond Street, London NW3 2QG, UK ⁹Center for International Blood and Marrow Transplant Research, Minneapolis, MN, USA ¹⁰Histocompatibility, Centro de Transfusión de la Comunidad de Madrid, Madrid, Spain ¹¹ Histocompatibility and Immunogenetics, Banc de Sang i Teixits, Barcelona, Spain ¹²Immunogenetics and Histocompatibility, Instituto de Investigación Sanitaria Puerta de Hierro, Madrid, Spain ¹³Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, National Institute for Health Research Cambridge Biomedical Research Centre, University of Cambridge School of Clinical Medicine, Cambridge, UK and Centre for Trophoblast Research, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK ¹⁴National Cancer Institute, Cairo University, Cairo, Egypt ¹⁵Immunology, Hospital Universitario Reina Sofía, Córdoba, Spain ¹⁶DKMS Life Science Lab, Dresden, Germany

Corresponding author: Jill A. Hollenbach, Ph.D., M.P.H., Associate Professor, Department of Neurology, University of California San Francisco, San Francisco, CA 94158, USA, Phone: +1 415 502 7289, jill.hollenbach@ucsf.edu.

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¹⁷Macalester College, St. Paul, MN 55105, USA ¹⁸Wellcome Trust Centre for Human Genetics, and Jenner Institute, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK ¹⁹Royal Liverpool University Hospital, Liverpool, L7 8XP, UK ²⁰Department of Pathology, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK and Centre for Trophoblast Research, Cambridge, UK ²¹ Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, School of Medicine, Makerere University College of Health Sciences, Kampala, Uganda ²²School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK ²³Histocompatibility, Centro de Transfusión de la Comunidad Valenciana, Valencia, Spain ²⁴Immunology, Hospital Universitario de Gran Canaria Dr Negrín, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain ²⁵Histocompatibility, Centro de Transfusión de Málaga, Málaga, Spain ²⁶Division of Biomedical Informatics and Personalized Medicine, and Department of Immunology, University of Colorado, Denver, CO 80045

These authors contributed equally to this work.

Abstract

The goals of the KIR component of the 17th International HLA and Immunogenetics Workshop (IHIW) were to encourage and educate researchers to begin analyzing KIR at allelic resolution, and to survey the nature and extent of KIR allelic diversity across human populations. To represent worldwide diversity, we analyzed 1269 individuals from ten populations, focusing on the most polymorphic KIR genes, which express receptors having three immunoglobulin (Ig)-like domains (KIR3DL1/S1, KIR3DL2 and KIR3DL3). We identified 13 novel alleles of KIR3DL1/S1, 13 of KIR3DL2 and 18 of KIR3DL3. Previously identified alleles, corresponding to 33 alleles of KIR3DL1/S1, 38 of KIR3DL2, and 43 of KIR3DL3, represented over 90% of the observed allele frequencies for these genes. In total we observed 37 KIR3DL1/S1 allotypes, 40 for KIR3DL2 and 44 for KIR3DL3. As KIR allotype diversity can affect NK cell function, this demonstrates potential for high functional diversity worldwide. Allelic variation further diversifies KIR haplotypes. We determined *KIR3DL3~KIR3DL1/S1~KIR3DL2* haplotypes from five of the studied populations, and observed multiple population-specific haplotypes in each. This included 234 distinct haplotypes in European Americans, 191 in Ugandans, 35 in Papuans, 95 in Egyptians and 86 in Spanish populations. For another 35 populations, encompassing 642,105 individuals we focused on KIR3DL2 and identified another 375 novel alleles, with approximately half of them observed in more than one individual. The KIR allelic level data gathered from this project represents the most comprehensive summary of global KIR allelic diversity to date, and continued analysis will improve understanding of KIR allelic polymorphism in global populations. Further, the wealth of new data gathered in the course of this workshop component highlights the value of collaborative, community-based efforts in immunogenetics research, exemplified by the IHIW.

Keywords

KIR3DL1/S1; KIR3DL2; KIR3DL3

Introduction

The Killer-cell Immunoglobulin-like Receptor (KIR) region is located on human chromosome 19q13.4 [1–4]. KIR molecules are primarily expressed on natural killer (NK) cells [5] and a small percentage of T-cells [6]. KIR interact with specific amino acid motifs expressed by some human leukocyte antigen (HLA) class I molecules [5], and function to modulate the cytolysis of infected and/or otherwise altered cells, such as neoplastic cells. The *KIR* gene complex is characterized by structural variation that creates multiple genecontent haplotypes. In addition, each of the KIR genes exhibits allelic variability [7], which generates considerable intra- and inter-population diversity [8]. This diversity can influence immune responses against pathogens, which has the potential to alter the fitness of individuals [9, 10]. Specific combinations of KIR with their cognate HLA ligands are associated with autoimmunity [3, 11, 12], infectious diseases [13, 14], cancer [15, 16], pregnancy outcomes [17, 18], are crucial in determining clinical outcomes of hematopoietic stem cell transplantation (HCT), and solid organ transplants [19–22].

The allelefrequencies.net database (AFND) has collected *KIR* datasets from 245 populations across the globe [23]. A similar resource was recently developed called the KIR and Disease Database (KDDB), which gathered KIR associations from 204 published articles, and indicates a growing interest in KIR in epidemiological studies. These associations consisted of 32 autoimmune diseases, 19 infectious diseases, 16 cancer, eight chronic inflammatory diseases, three related to pregnancy, and one psychiatric disease. [24]. The complex polymorphism observed in this gene family, when combined with the high sequence similarity among KIR genes [25, 26], imposes technical difficulties for sequencing and genotyping to full allelic resolution. Thus, despite the fact that KIR gene content polymorphism has been extensively studied, KIR allelic diversity has been characterized in only a handful of well-defined populations [27–32].

KIR gene content variation was examined during previous International HLA and Immunogenetics Workshop (IHIW) studies. In the 15th and 16th IHIW, the *KIR* anthropology component (Population Global Distribution of KIR and Ligand) aimed to accumulate and examine the KIR and HLA frequencies in individuals recruited from distinct populations worldwide [33, 34], in order to replicate the earlier findings of coevolution of KIR and HLA [30, 33, 35, 36]. The preliminary studies conducted by Hiby et al. (2004) while investigating the role of maternal KIR and fetal HLA-C in preeclampsia, first raised the question whether KIR and HLA class I coevolution is related to reproductive fitness [17]. Single et al. (2007) demonstrated evidence of KIR-HLA coevolution, by showing a negative correlation of the frequency of KIR3DS1 with HLA-Bw4 [35], followed by several other studies corroborating the coevolution of KIR with HLA [30, 33, 36]. Further evidence of $KIR-HLA$ coevolution was demonstrated in the 16th IHIW, in which 105 populations were examined and a strong positive correlation of KIR2DL3 and its ligand HLA-C1 was observed [34].

The goal of the 17th IHIW *KIR* component was to collect *KIR* allelic data to characterize the nature and extent of allelic diversity across human populations using primarily next generation sequencing (NGS) technology. As NGS for KIR has not yet been implemented in

several laboratories that study KIR, Sanger sequencing was also welcomed [30, 37]. All the participants performing KIR genotyping were required to validate their method by genotyping a control panel, however, the reference laboratories performed most genotyping. Many investigators participated in the KIR component by providing DNA specimens sequenced by one of the reference laboratories. Here, we present a summary of the KIR component of the $17th$ HIW working group meeting, and the *KIR* allelic data generated from the 45 worldwide populations that were analyzed. Our preliminary analysis focused on the KIR genes that encode three Ig domain receptors because they have been most extensively characterized to the allelic level and their diversity has been shaped by natural selection [38].

Materials and methods

Participants from eleven laboratories submitted KIR allelic genotyping data from a total of 45 populations. Five populations were analyzed through the entire coding sequence for KIR3DL1/S1, KIR3DL2 and KIR3DL3 polymorphism, four for KIR3DL2 and one for KIR3DL1/S1. Exons 4 and 5 from KIR3DL2 were analyzed in the remaining 35 populations. The participants either used NGS platforms or Sanger sequencing to generate KIR allelic data locally, or contributed DNA samples to be sequenced at the workshop reference laboratory at Stanford University. The list of all populations, including sample size, KIR genes, sequencing method, sample contributor and the location where sequencing was performed is given in Table 1. Additionally, Single molecule real-time (SMRT) KIR gene sequencing was performed for 19 IHIW cell lines from populations including European, black southern African, Warao Amerindian and Chinese.

NGS genotyping of KIR genes containing three Ig-like domains

To determine the sequences of KIR genes containing three Ig-like domains, a previously described capture/enrichment method, followed by NGS [39] was applied. DNA isolated from healthy unrelated blood donors from the following populations was used: Ugandan (n $= 174$; Egyptian (n = 136); European American (USA) (n = 376); Papuan (n = 185); and Spanish ($n = 153$). The Ugandan, Egyptian and Spanish populations have been previously examined for KIR gene content [40–42]. Similarly, the European American sample was described in a recent HLA study [43]. The Papuan sample consists of individuals from both the highland and lowland regions, as described [44].

Sanger sequencing for genotyping KIR3DL1/S1 and KIR3DL2

KIR3DL2 was genotyped using sequence-based typing in samples from Brazil, which included Euro-descendants from Curitiba ($n = 42$), non-mixed Brazilians with Japanese ancestry ($n = 22$) and Amerindians from the Kaingang ($n = 30$) and Guarani ($n = 49$) populations. The Brazilian populations have been previously described for KIR gene-content [45–47]. Exons 3, 4, 5, 7–9 were amplified with gene-specific primers and the products were sequenced with Big Dye terminator kit (Applied Biosystems) according to the manufacturer's instructions. Specific PCR-SSP primers were designed to resolve two common ambiguities; where it was otherwise not possible to distinguish the genotype KIR3DL2*002+*010 from KIR3DL2*010+*015, and the genotype KIR3DL2*001+*007

from KIR3DL2*006+*010. Primer sequences are available upon request. KIR3DL1/S1 was genotyped using sequence-based typing as reported earlier [30] in unrelated healthy Mexican Mestizos ($n = 59$). The Mexican Mestizos population *KIR* gene-content variation was examined in an earlier report [37].

Large scale KIR3DL2 sequencing

Sequence data for exons 4 and 5 of KIR3DL2 was generated from a total of 642,105 individuals from 35 populations (Table 1). PCR amplicons were generated from these exons individually, and then sequenced using Illumina paired-end technology (HiSeq or MiSeq). Alleles were called using the neXtype algorithm [48] and IPD-KIR library version 2.7.0 (Release, 14th July 2017) as the reference [7].

SMRT KIR gene sequencing for IHIW cell lines

In addition to the populations described above, KIR allele sequences were also generated for a small panel of IHIW cell lines. Briefly, samples underwent PCR targeting individual KIR genes to amplify full-length alleles ($5'$ UTR to $3'$ UTR). Amplicons of the same locus were pooled together and sequenced on Pacific Biosciences' RSII platform using a movie time of six hours to obtain maximum read depth. A combination of Pacific Biosciences' SMRTAnalysis and Anthony Nolan's AlleleTeaSet software (Anthony Nolan Research Institute, London, UK) were used to demultiplex and analyze the sequences. For the purposes of this study, the coding domain sequences were extracted from the phased, fulllength sequence for further analysis.

Data analysis

All data analysis including allele counts, and frequency estimations were performed in the R environment for statistical computing and visualization [49]. The haplotype analysis was carried out using the R 'haplo.stats' package [50].

The KIR Component Meeting

The KIR component meeting of the 17th IHIW was held during two breakout sessions. Each participant presented the results of the population data submitted by their group. Additionally, updates on the state of KIR haplotype reference sequences, KIR in Allelefrequencies.net database, KIR nomenclature, and the IPD-KIR database were presented. Finally, there was an overview of PING (Pushing Immunogenetics to the Next Generation) software package [39], which is a bioinformatics pipeline for the analysis of next-generation sequencing KIR data. A supplementary file describes the schedule of the KIR component meeting, titles of the presentation and details of the presenters (Supplementary File S1).

Results

Allelic diversity of KIR3DL1/S1, KIR3DL2 and KIR3DL3

We analyzed *KIR3DL1/S1, KIR3DL2* and *KIR3DL3*, which encode receptors having three Ig domains. These genes have been the most extensively characterized to date, and their

allelic diversity has been shown to be shaped by natural selection [38]. We observed 33 previously identified alleles of KIR3DL1/S1, 38 of KIR3DL2 and 43 of KIR3DL3. We also identified 13 novel alleles for *KIR3DL1/S1*, 13 for *KIR3DL2* and 18 for *KIR3DL3* genes. The validation of these novel alleles is underway. Thus, the total numbers of alleles identified in the workshop samples were 46 for KIR3DL1/S1, 51 for KIR3DL2 and 61 for KIR3DL3 (Table 2), and these encode 37, 40 and 44 distinct KIR allotypes respectively (Table 2). Considering the modest sample sizes analyzed compared with HLA (more than 30 million to date [51]), this suggests that there are many more alleles remaining to be discovered and that the extent of KIR polymorphism identified in human populations could ultimately equal or exceed the extent of HLA polymorphism.

The allele frequencies of KIR receptors having three immunoglobulin (Ig)-like domains namely; KIR3DL1/S1, KIR3DL2, and KIR3DL3 as well as the duplication/deletion polymorphism of $KIR3DL1/S1$ detected in the 10 populations analyzed are given in Figures 1 and 2, respectively. These frequencies are deposited in the allele frequency net database (AFND) database ([http://www.allelefrequencies.net/default.asp\)](http://www.allelefrequencies.net/default.asp). Data were examined at the polypeptide sequence resolution, which is equivalent to the first three digits in the allele name, as described in IPD/KIR Database (<https://www.ebi.ac.uk/ipd/kir/>). The frequencies range from 0.1% to 48.7% for the various alleles of KIR3DL1/S1 (Figure 1A), 0.1% to 61.7% for KIR3DL2 (Figure 1B) and 0.1% to 33% for KIR3DL3 (Figure 1C) in total across all populations. The number of those alleles classified as rare (those with a frequency of <1% in any given population) was 31 for KIR3DL1/S1 (67.4%), 38 for KIR3DL2 (74.5%), and 38 for $KIR3DL3$ (62.3%). Thus, both common and rare alleles contributed substantially to the rich worldwide diversity of KIR. In addition to allelic variation, deletions and duplications of the entire *KIR3DL1/S1* gene were also observed (Figure 2). The highest frequency of deletions and duplications were observed in the Papuan population (13.5% and 8.4%, respectively). Meanwhile, no deletions and/or duplications were observed for KIR3DL2 (except for KIR3DL1/2v, a fusion gene derived from KIR3DL1 and KIR3DL2) [52].

Haplotypic diversity of KIR3DL1/S1, KIR3DL2 and KIR3DL3 genes

Specific KIR alleles and haplotypes are associated with better education of NK cells and/or control of specific pathogens [14, 53]. Diversity in KIR haplotypes may therefore contribute to improved population survival. To estimate the extent of haplotype diversity we analyzed the five populations that were genotyped for *KIR3DL3*, *KIR3DL1/S1* and *KIR3DL2*; European American, Ugandan, Papuan, Egyptian and Spanish (Table 2)**.**ld> KIR3DL3 is located in the segment of the *KIR* region oriented towards the centromere of chromosome 19, and KIR3DL1/S1 and KIR3DL2 in the telomere oriented segment [4]. Since, the centromeric and telomeric KIR genes are separated by a region that contain a recombination hotspot [54, 55], we analyzed both full and telomeric-only haplotypes. We observed 503 distinct population-specific KIR3DL3~KIR3DL1/S1~KIR3DL2 haplotypes and 158 distinct population-specific KIR3DL1/S1~KIR3DL2 haplotypes. Additionally, we found six shared haplotypes, five of which, $3DL1*001~3DL2*001$, $3DL1*005~3DL2*010$, 3DS1*013~3DL2*007, 3DL1*015~3DL2*002, and 3DL3*003~3DS1*013~3DL2*007

were present in all five populations (Table 3), and one $(\overline{3DL}3*\overline{002} \sim \overline{3DS1*013} \sim \overline{3DL} \sim \overline{3007})$ was present in all except the Egyptian population (Table 3).

Our analysis of allelic variation in KIR3DL3~KIR3DL1/S1~KIR3DL2 haplotypes revealed 234 distinct haplotypes in European Americans, 191 in Ugandans, 35 in Papua New Guineans, 95 in Egyptians, and 86 in the Spanish population (Table 2). The top ten most frequent KIR3DL3~KIR3DL1/S1~KIR3DL2 haplotypes are listed in Table 2. Limiting to $KIR3DL1/S1 \sim KIR3DL2$ haplotypes, we identified 66 distinct haplotypes in European Americans, 81 in Ugandans, 16 in Papuans, 40 in Egyptians, and 24 in the Spanish population (Table 4). The top 10 most frequent $KIR3DL1/S1 \sim KIR3DL2$ haplotypes in each population are listed in Table 4.

KIR3DL2 single nucleotide variations in exons 4 and 5

To achieve a high-depth analysis in an extremely large sample size, we focused on exons 4 and 5 from KIR3DL2, which encode for the extracellular D1 and D2 domains of the KIR3DL2 molecule, which are most likely to contact the HLA ligand directly [56]. We targeted 642,105 individuals from 35 populations and examined single nucleotide variations. We observed SNP variation in 78.5% (467 of 595) of all nucleotides that comprise these two exons. Among the observed single nucleotide substitutions, 67.4% (315 of 467) are nonsynonymous, and the reminders encode for either synonymous (31.3%) or premature stop codons (1.3%) (Table 5). Almost half of these nucleotide variations were observed in more than one individual, and the remainder in a single individual each (singletons). As expected, the number of these singletons increases with sample size (Supplementary Figure S1). Out of 375 KIR3DL2 allelic variants identified in this study, 275 were populationspecific and 221 were found in the German population, which is the population with the largest sample size.

KIR diversity in IHIW cell lines

Data from a total of 19 IHIW cell lines from populations including European, black southern African, Warao Amerindian and Chinese were submitted for analysis. Different subsets of genes were investigated for each sample, resulting in the definition of 105 allele types in total, including 45 distinct alleles. The use of long read sequencing allowed the resolution of previous phase ambiguity over the large intron $5/6$ ($>$ 5 Kbp) in *KIR3DL3*. In addition, novel KIR3DL3 and KIR2DL1 alleles were characterized in the cell lines AKIBA and SPO010, respectively, correcting previous allele typing [57]. Further characterization of a broader panel of IHIW cell lines using SMRT DNA sequencing is ongoing, helping to maintain the functionality of this valuable resource.

Future directions

The 17th IHIW *KIR* component has effectively applied the IHIW paradigm as a model for studying global KIR allelic diversity. Collaboration and multi-centric efforts were essential both to encourage the adoption of high-resolution KIR genotyping, and to generate KIR allelic data in an unprecedented scale from diverse ancestries. These data will be the basis of a more thorough examination of the KIR diversity in order to improve our understanding of KIR in human health and disease, as well as to provide a resource for immunogenetic

databases for future research. The KIR allelic data gathered in this project represents the most comprehensive summary of global *KIR3DL1/S1, KIR3DL3* and *KIR3DL2* allelic diversity to date and provides an increased understanding of KIR allelic polymorphism and KIR evolution. The intention of the organizers is to continue this work during the $18th$ IHIW that will be held in Amsterdam in 2021, with the hope that more laboratories will adopt KIR allelic genotyping approaches and that a greater number of populations will be analyzed for all KIR genes.

Supplementary Material

Refer to Web version on PubMed Central for supplementary material.

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Figure 1: Allele frequency distribution in workshop populations for KIR receptors having three immunoglobulin (Ig)-like domains.

Figure 1A: KIR3DL1/S1 allele frequency distribution in workshop populations. Figure 1B: KIR3DL2 allele frequency distribution in workshop populations. Figure 1C: KIR3DL3 allele frequency distribution in workshop populations.

Figure 2: KIR3DL1/S1 structural variations in workshop populations.

Table 1:

Details of KIR allele-level sequencing of workshop populations, including sample size, KIR genes, KIR typing method, sample contributor and sequencing location

GETHIT means for Spanish Working Group in Histocompatibility and Transplant Immunology study;

\$ **Local sequencing** means KIR genotyping was performed by the participant's lab either using a NGS exome capture method [38] for KIR genes containing three Ig receptors (Traherne/Moffett lab) or Sanger sequencing for KIR3DL1S1 (Gorodezky lab) and KIR3DL2 (Augusto/Petzl-Erler) or an in-house developed NGS short amplicon approach for KIR3DL2 (DKMS lab). For **Stanford Sequencing**,KIR genotyping was performed at Stanford using a NGS exome capture method [38].

Table 2:

Allelic variations of one centromeric (KIR3DL3) and two telomeric (KIR3DL1/S1 and KIR3DL2) genes diversifies KIR haplotypes in European American, Ugandan, Papuan, Egyptian and Spanish populations

 $\frac{4}{3}$ The number of distinct haplotypes identified by analyzing one centromeric (*KIR3DL3*) and two telomeric (*KIR3DL1/S1* and *KIR3DL2*) genes;

Number of distinct alleles (including novel alleles);

\$ Number of distinct allotypes (including novel allotypes);

 ${}^a_{L1}$ *059 is an allele of KIR3DL1/2v, a fusion gene derived from KIR3DL1 and KIR3DL2.

Table 3:

A summary of six haplotypes shared across five populations analyzed

Table 4:

The 10 most frequent KIR3DL1/S1 and KIR3DL2 haplotypes in European American, Ugandan, Papuan, Egyptian and Spanish populations

[¥]The number of distinct haplotypes identified by analyzing two telomeric genes (*KIR3DL1/S1* and *KIR3DL2)*;

 aL_1*059 is an allele of KIR3DL1/2v, a fusion gene derived from KIR3DL1 and KIR3DL2.

Table 5:

KIR3DL2 variation in exons 4 and 5 (D1 and D2 domains) among 642,105 individuals from 35 populations

