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RESEARCH NOTE

Predicted protein interactions of IFITMs which inhibit Zika virus infection [version 1; peer review: 1 approved, 1 approved with reservations, 1 not approved]

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Abstract

After the first reported case of Zika virus in Brazil, in 2015, a significant increase in the reported cases of microcephaly was observed. Microcephaly is a neurological condition in which the infant's head is significantly smaller with complications in brain development. Recently, two small membrane-associated interferon-inducible transmembrane proteins (IFITM1 and IFITM3) have been shown to repress members of the flaviviridae family which includes the Zika virus. However, the exact mechanisms leading to the inhibition of the virus are yet unknown. Here, we assembled an interactome of IFITM1 and IFITM3 with known protein-protein interactions (PPIs) collected from publicly available databases and novel PPIs predicted using High-confidence Protein-Protein Interaction Prediction (HiPPIP) model. We analyzed the functional and pathway associations of the interacting proteins, and found that there are several immunity pathways (interferon signaling, cd28 signaling in T-helper cells crosstalk between dendritic cells and natural killer cells), neuronal pathways (axonal guidance signaling, neural tube closure and actin cytoskeleton signaling) and developmental pathways that are associated with these interactors. These results could help direct future research in elucidating the mechanisms underlying the viral immunity to Zika virus and other flaviviruses.

Keywords

Zika, virus infection, protein interaction, interferon-inducible transmembrane proteins

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Introduction

The Zika virus (ZIKV) is a flavivirus that was initially isolated from rhesus monkeys in 1947 and was first reported in humans in 1952¹. Until recently, reports of this virus had been limited to Africa and Asia² but currently there is an ongoing, wide-spread Zika epidemic³. The virus has rapidly spread across the Americas and has been declared a ‘global emergency’ by the World Health Organization⁴. It is mostly transmitted by mosquitoes and clinical manifestations include rash, mild fever, arthralgia, conjunctivitis, myalgia, and headaches. In addition, it has been reported recently that the virus can be transmitted sexually, with the risk of infection persisting for several months after initial contact⁵. Earlier, the symptoms of ZIKV had been reported to be mild¹, but, the virus has been recently linked to two more serious afflictions: Guillen-Barré syndrome^{6,7} and microcephaly^{8–12}, both of which are serious neurological conditions. Microcephaly results in reduced head circumference measurement in infants, exhibiting complications in brain development. Of particular concern is the attribution of microcephaly to infection with ZIKV occurring between the first two trimesters of pregnancy^{11,12}. Evidence linking ZIKV to microcephaly includes detection of ZIKV RNA in tissue such as the placenta and amniotic fluid of pregnant women with ZIKV, as well as in the brains of stillborn infants with microcephaly¹³. In a study with human induced pluripotency stem cells, the mechanism of ZIKV related cell death has been elucidated. This study demonstrated that ZIKV infects human embryonic cortical neural progenitor cells (hNPCs), ultimately leading to attenuated population growth mediated by virally induced caspase-3-mediated apoptosis and cell-cycle dysregulation¹⁴. Mice studies showed that ZIKV infection can lead to nerve degeneration, softening of the brain and porencephaly¹⁵.

Very recently, two small membrane-associated interferon-inducible transmembrane proteins (IFITMs) IFITM1 and IFITM3 were discovered to have a protective role against the Zika virus infection by inhibiting replication of the virus and preventing cell death induced by Zika virus⁵. IFITMs were shown to have an inhibitory role against other flaviviruses also, such as West Nile and dengue virus. Type 1 interferon (IFN) signaling inhibits Zika virus pathogenesis. Prior to induction of IFN-stimulated genes, IFITMs may provide initial defense against the infection⁵. However, since the exact mechanism of IFITM1 and IFITM3 mediated restriction are yet unknown, computational methods could accelerate research by presenting testable hypotheses.

In our earlier work, we developed a computational model called ‘High-confidence Protein-Protein Interaction Prediction’ (HiPPIP) model that identifies novel protein-protein interactions (PPIs) in the human interactome¹⁶, motivated by the fact that PPIs prove to be valuable in understanding the function of a gene, and specifically in how it plays a role in causing or preventing disease. One example of the impact of these computational predictions is the PPI that we predicted between OASL and RIG-I¹⁶, which was validated to be a true PPI through co-immunoprecipitation^{16,17}. This led to the formulation of a hypothesis about its significance and led to the discovery of its functional relevance, namely that upon viral infection, OASL triggers the immune system by activating the RIG-I pathway, thus inhibiting virus replication¹⁸. functional studies initiated solely by this predicted PPI showed that human OASL binds to dsRNA to

enhance RIG-I signaling, and that boosting OASL can help inhibit viral infection¹⁸. In this work, we applied HiPPIP model to discover novel PPIs of IFITM1 and IFITM3, to potentially accelerate the discovery of the mechanism by which they inhibit ZIKV and other viral infections.

Methods

PPIs were assembled by collecting known PPIs from the Human Protein Reference Database (HPRD)¹⁹ and Biological General Repository for Interaction Datasets (BioGRID)²⁰, and by computing novel PPIs using the HiPPIP model that we developed¹⁶. Computationally discovered PPIs have been shown to be highly accurate by computational evaluations and experimental validations of a few PPIs¹⁶. Interactome figures were created using Cytoscape²¹. Pathways associated with proteins in the interactome were collected using Ingenuity Pathway Analysis® suite (www.ingenuity.com). Gene Ontology terms enriched among the interacting partners (including the candidate genes IFITM1 and IFITM3) were computed using the BiNGO plugin of Cytoscape²².

Results and discussion

We assembled the PPIs of IFITM1 and IFITM3 (Figure 1) by computing novel PPIs using HiPPIP model and collecting known PPIs from publicly available databases, Human Protein Reference Database (HPRD) and Biological General Repository for Interaction Dataset (BioGRID)^{23,24}. We found that both proteins have known PPIs with proteins involved in immunity, and several novel (predicted) PPIs with proteins that seem to have relevant functions. DEAF1 is involved in neural tube closure, embryonic skeletal development and anatomic structure morphogenesis, and other functions. FNDC3B was found to be associated with heart rate, height and corneal structure through genome-wide association studies. It is a membrane protein, and, while its own functions are unknown, its interactors are involved in regulation of glial cell apoptotic process, regulation of ion transport (sodium, potassium, calcium) and several cardiac processes. SPTA1 is involved in neural functions of actin filament organization, neurite outgrowth and axon guidance. RASSF7 is localized to microtubule organizing center. While its function is unknown, it interacts with proteins that are involved in cell proliferation in brain, regulation of neuroblast proliferation, nervous system development, synaptic vesicle fusion to presynaptic membrane, and viral budding and assembly. TSSC4 interacts with both IFITM1 and IFITM3. TSSC4’s functions are unknown but its

Figure 1. Protein-protein interactions (PPIs) of IFITM1 and IFITM3: Known PPIs were assembled from HPRD and BioGRID databases and novel PPIs were predicted using HiPPIP model. Novel interactors of IFITM1 and IFITM3 are shown as red colored nodes while previously known interactors are shown as light blue colored nodes.

own interactions suggest that it may be involved in viral penetration into host nucleus, protein import into nucleus and immune response signaling, among other processes. TLR7 is involved in several functions and pathways related to innate immunity. ARPC1B is part of actin related protein 2/3 complex; its interactions suggest that it may be involved in neuronal development such as axonogenesis and development, neuron differentiation, nervous system development, and immune related terms such as innate immune

response, regulation of immune response, etc. These functional annotations are sourced from Schizo-Pi^{16,25}; for example, see: <http://severus.dbmi.pitt.edu/schizo-pi/index.php/gene/view/10522>.

Pathways associated with IFITM interactome computed with Ingenuity Pathway Analysis Suite® are given in **Table 1**. Gene Ontology biological process terms associated with the interactome, compiled with BiNGO²² are shown in **Figure 2** and **Table 2**.

Table 1. Pathways associated with IFITMs and their interactor. Pathway associations were computed with Ingenuity Pathway Analysis Suite®. Novel interactors are shown in bold.

Gene	Associated pathways
AGTR2	Gαi Signaling Renin-Angiotensin Signaling
ARPC1B	Axonal Guidance Signaling Signaling by Rho Family GTPases Actin Cytoskeleton Signaling Integrin Signaling Clathrin-mediated Endocytosis Signaling Ephrin Receptor Signaling RhoGDI Signaling Cdc42 Signaling Epithelial Adherens Junction Signaling RhoA Signaling CD28 Signaling in T Helper Cells fMLP Signaling in Neutrophils Rac Signaling Fcγ Receptor-mediated Phagocytosis in Macrophages and Monocytes Regulation of Actin-based Motility by Rho Remodeling of Epithelial Adherens Junctions Actin Nucleation by ARP-WASP Complex
CD81,CR2	PI3K Signaling in B Lymphocytes
CR2	IL-8 Signaling NF-κB Activation by Viruses Complement System
GLP1R	Gαs Signaling GPCR-Mediated Integration of Enteroendocrine Signaling Exemplified by an L Cell
GLP1R AGTR2	G-Protein Coupled Receptor Signaling cAMP-mediated signaling
IFITM3, IFITM1	Interferon Signaling
NME5	Salvage Pathways of Pyrimidine Ribonucleotides Pyrimidine Ribonucleotides <i>De Novo</i> Biosynthesis Pyrimidine Ribonucleotides Interconversion Pyrimidine Deoxyribonucleotides <i>De Novo</i> Biosynthesis I
SPTA1	Sertoli Cell-Sertoli Cell Junction Signaling
TLR7	Role of Macrophages Fibroblasts and Endothelial Cells in Rheumatoid Arthritis Colorectal Cancer Metastasis Signaling Systemic Lupus Erythematosus Signaling NF-κB Signaling Role of Pattern Recognition Receptors in Recognition of Bacteria and Viruses phagosome formation Communication between Innate and Adaptive Immune Cells Crosstalk between Dendritic Cells and Natural Killer Cells Altered T Cell and B Cell Signaling in Rheumatoid Arthritis TREM1 Signaling Toll-like Receptor Signaling
UIMC1	Role of BRCA1 in DNA Damage Response

There is only one study that presents altered gene expression under ZIKV infection available in Gene Expression Omnibus¹⁴. The study with eight samples (four infected and four control samples) showed that the infection of human neural progenitor cells (hNPCs) with the virus caused increased cell death and cell-cycle dysregulation¹⁴. We examined whether any of the interacting genes were differentially expressed in that study and found five genes that were differentially expressed with a small fold-change but with significant p-value (< 0.005) (Table 2): CD81, NME5, and RASSF7 were found to be under-expressed and FNDC3B and UIMC1 were found to be over-expressed (Table 3).

Other resources

See <http://severus.dbmi.pitt.edu/schizo-pi> for annotations of individual proteins that are compiled from various databases. Also see the following link to our LENS webserver, where we present annotations of all the genes in the IFITM1-IFITM3 interac-

tome and also annotations of proteins that further interact with interactors (*i.e.* 2nd level connectors of IFITMs). Under each tab, ‘candidate genes’ refers to IFITMs and their interactors shown in Figure 1 of the paper, while entire interactome includes all of their interactors. Note that the database behind LENS does not include novel protein-protein interactions; therefore, they are not shown as edges in the network diagram. The sources of the pathways and disease associations shown on this website are given in 25,26.

http://severus.dbmi.pitt.edu/LENS/index.php/results/view/57649c2516f9a/admin_57649c251737d

Data availability

All pertaining data are provided in the manuscript.

Competing interests

No competing interests were disclosed.

Grant information

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The funders had no role in study design, data collection and analysis, decision to publish, or preparation of the manuscript.

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Table 3. Interacting genes that are differentially-expressed under Zika virus infection, along with fold-change and significant p-values.

Interactor	Log2 Fold Change	p-value
FNDC3B	0.92	0.00005
NME5	-1.55	0.00005
RASSF7	-0.46	0.00215
UIMC1	0.73	0.00005
CD81	-0.28	0.00325

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Sandeep Chakraborty

Plant Sciences Department, University of California, Davis, CA, USA

This manuscript presents a use model of the a protein-protein interaction method developed by the author along with other collaborators, focused on a very important pathogen (Zika) in the present circumstances. It is lucidly written and well presented.

The biggest shortcoming of this manuscript is the failure to cite several previous work related to the interferon-inducible transmembrane protein 3 ("The Antiviral Effector IFITM3 Disrupts Intracellular Cholesterol Homeostasis to Block Viral Entry" - Amini-Bavil-Olyaei, et. al, 2013, "The antiviral effector IFITM3 disrupts intracellular cholesterol homeostasis to block viral entry", Amini-Bavil-Olyaei, et. al, 2013 to name a couple).

Furthermore, the current manuscript and its stated methodology does not find two proteins (VAPA and OSBP) that have been shown to have interactions with IFITM3. This would have been a clincher. It would also be proper to mention other work related to IFITM mechanism ("IFITM Proteins Restrict Viral Membrane Hemifusion": Li et. al, 2013) - and focus on the viral membrane hemifusion mentioned there.

Minor comments:

1. "functional studies initiated solely" - capitalize functional.
2. Widespread use of "we" with only a single author.
3. "Computationally discovered PPIs have been shown to be highly accurate by computational evaluations and experimental validations of a few PPIs'." - overstated and speculative.
4. It is also speculative to correlate the expression changes of predicted interactors to these IFITMs, since there can be multiple other reasons for such expression changes ("whether any of the interacting genes were differentially expressed in that study and found five genes that were differentially expressed").

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to state that I do not consider it to be of an acceptable scientific standard, for reasons outlined above.

Reviewer Report 08 December 2016

<https://doi.org/10.5256/f1000research.10083.r17909>

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Nicholas Eyre

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This manuscript reports a number of novel protein interactions of IFITM1 and IFITM3 proteins, as determined using a 'High-confidence Protein-Protein Interaction Prediction (HiPPIP)' computational prediction model of protein-protein interactions. Analysis of functional and pathway associations of the putative interacting proteins is also reported, as they may relate to IFITM-mediated restriction of Zika virus infection. The manuscript is generally well-written and the title is appropriate. However, there are several ways in which the study and manuscript could be improved:

1. The report is largely based upon the predictions generated by the HiPPIP model. As this model is not well-described here and has not been extensively validated experimentally in the literature, it would be helpful if the criteria/rules employed by the model were described (Are predictions based purely on structural features? Does the model take into account protein localization, regulation, tissue distribution, known interactions etc.?). In the Methods section it is simply stated that 'Computationally discovered PPIs have been shown to be highly accurate by computational evaluations and experimental validations of a few PPIs'. This statement is not well-justified and may be misleading. In support of the HiPPIP model, the author refers to the successful prediction of OASL interaction with RIG-I ('Functional studies initiated solely by this predicted PPI showed...'). However in the cited publication (on which Dr. Ganapathiraju is an author)¹ the HiPPIP model (and associated publications) was not referred to. The HiPPIP model should be more clearly described here, including some analysis/discussion of its success rate in predicting protein-protein interactions that have been experimentally validated.
2. As this report focuses on IFITM1 and IFITM3 antiviral functions and predicted interactions, it would be useful if the features and properties of these proteins were at least briefly described (domains, membrane topology, post-translational modifications, sub-cellular localization, tissue distribution and regulation). This would help to interpret the significance of the predicted interactions.

3. In the Results and Discussion some of the roles/properties of the predicted interacting partners are listed. It would be helpful if references were provided for these functions/properties (even if only to reviews). Furthermore, it would be helpful if these properties were discussed in the context of Zika virus and/or IFITM biology (e.g. commonalities in tissue/sub-cellular distribution and/or regulation and features of these proteins [e.g. domains] that may support their predicted interactions).
4. The manuscript should be carefully edited to clarify interactions that are purely predicted and not supported by experimental evidence (e.g. statements like 'TSSC4 interacts with IFITM1 and IFITM3' are misleading).
5. A conclusion/summary paragraph that briefly summarizes the major findings and their significance and potential future directions may be appropriate.

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Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however I have significant reservations, as outlined above.

Reviewer Report 08 August 2016

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Judith Klein-Seetharaman

Division of Metabolic and Vascular Health, University of Warwick, Warwick, UK

The title, abstract and article overall are well written and clear. The design, methods and analysis are mostly well described, although some detail could be added. In particular, given that the IFITM interactome contains a large number of previously unknown PPI's, it would be useful to give a little more detail on the methodology on how these predictions were obtained, rather than just stating that HiPPIP was used. In particular, it would be useful to understand what cut-off was used and a brief mentioning of the prediction methodology in general. An estimate of false positive and false negative errors for the prediction in Figure 1 would be particularly helpful.

In the analysis, the legend for Figure 2 needs expansion. It is not clear what the edges signify and in particular what is the meaning of directionality in the arrows.

I object to the wording used on page 2 “which was validated to be a true PPI”, as any PPI evidence is debatable. I would reword to “which was experimentally validated”.

I also object to the wording used on page 2 “Computationally discovered PPIs have been shown to be highly accurate”. Such a blanket statement is clearly not true, as there are many predictions out there that are highly inaccurate. A more specific example needs to be provided here.

A minor suggestion is to replace “HiPPIP model” with “the HiPPIP model”.

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard.

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