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The combined effects of genetic risk and perceived discrimination on blood pressure among African Americans in the Jackson Heart Study

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Abstract
Both genomics and environmental stressors play a significant role in increases in blood pressure (BP). In an attempt to further explain the hypertension (HTN) disparity among African Americans (AA), both genetic underpinnings (selected candidate genes) and stress due to perceived racial discrimination (as reported in the literature) have independently been linked to increased BP among AAs. Although Gene × Environment interactions on BP have been examined, the environmental component of these investigations has focused more on lifestyle behaviors such as smoking, diet, and physical activity, and less on psychosocial stressors such as perceived discrimination.

The present study uses candidate gene analyses to identify the relationship between Everyday Discrimination (ED) and Major Life Discrimination (MLD) with increases in systolic BP (SBP) and diastolic BP (DBP) among AA in the Jackson Heart Study. Multiple linear regression models reveal no association between discrimination and BP after adjusting for age, sex, body mass index (BMI), antihypertensive medication use, and current smoking status.

Subsequent candidate gene analysis identified 15 SNPs (rs7602215, rs3771724, rs1006502, rs1791926, and rs2258119) that interacted with perceived discrimination and SBP, and 3 SNPs (rs2034454, rs7602215, and rs3771724) that interacted with perceived discrimination and DBP. Most notably, there was a significant SNP × discrimination interaction for 2 SNPs on the SLC4A5 gene: rs3771724 (MLD: SBP $P = .034$, DBP $P = .031$; ED: DBP $P = .016$) and rs1006502 (MLD: SBP $P = .034$, DBP $P = .030$; ED: DBP $P = .015$).

This study supports the idea that SNP × discrimination interactions combine to influence clinically relevant traits such as BP. Replication with similar epidemiological samples is required to ascertain the role of genes and psychosocial stressors in the development and expression of high BP in this understudied population.

Abbreviations: AA = African Americans, ARIC = Atherosclerosis Risk in Communities Study, BMI = body mass index, BP = blood pressure, CMLDAR = Chronic Major Life Discrimination Attributed to Race, CVD = cardiovascular disease, DBP = diastolic blood pressure, DISA = Discrimination Instrument, EA = European ancestry, ED = Everyday Discrimination, EDAR = Experiences of Discrimination Attributed to Race, G × D = Gene × Discrimination interaction, GWAS = Genome-Wide Association Study, HBP = high blood pressure, HTN = hypertension, HWE = Hardy-Weinberg equilibrium, JHS = Jackson Heart Study, MAF = minor allele frequency, MDS = multidimensional scaling, MLD = Major Life Discrimination, NSAL = National Survey of American Life, PC = principal components, SBP = systolic blood pressure, SNP = single nucleotide polymorphism.

Keywords: African American, black populations, blood pressure, discrimination, gene-environment interaction

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1. Introduction

Hypertension (HTN) is a common disease, affecting over 78 million adults in the US every year. African Americans (AA) are disproportionately affected by this disease, with an earlier age of onset as well as higher rates of complications than other racial/ethnic groups. The etiology of HTN is complex and multifactorial. Studies have identified social, biological, environmental, and genetic risk factors for HTN, but few studies have considered the ways in which these risk factors interact or work together in elevating risk among AA. Social factors such as perceived discrimination related to skin color have been associated with high blood pressure (HBP) in diverse populations, especially in low-income groups. Further, although self-reported race has been associated with poor mental and physical health outcomes in AA, little is known about the degree to which genetic risk for elevated BP and HTN is shaped by environmental factors, including psychosocial stressors such as the experience of unfair treatment-environment interaction that may exacerbate poor outcomes.

Discrimination is a complex and multidimensional psychosocial stressor. Previous studies have defined the experience of discrimination as the perception or view that one has been treated unfairly. Self-report is the most common way of measuring perceptions of discrimination in survey research. Two of the more widely used measures of perceived discrimination are Everyday Discrimination (ED) and Major Life Discrimination (MLD). MLD refers to the experience of unfair treatment (during one’s lifetime) that might block or forestall social mobility, such as unfair treatment by the police or in the housing market. ED refers to “daily hassles” that are experienced in “everyday situations,” such as the frequency of being made to feel uncomfortable for unfair or unjust reasons, like being treated with less courtesy in public places than others.

According to the National Survey of American Life (NSAL), 51% of AA have experienced at least some type of ED at least a few times per month and 59% have experienced at least 1 type of MLD at some point in their lifetime. Studies also show a link between various measures of discrimination and HTN and related cardiovascular diseases (CVD). These studies suggest that chronic experiences with discrimination are more consistently linked to BP and HTN than are subtle or acute experiences. Although the relationship between genetic polymorphisms and biological factors such as drug metabolism, body mass index (BMI), or cardiac structure and function have been established, how the interaction between genetics and stressors, such as perceived discrimination, must continue to be examined. There is evidence of interactions between perceived discrimination and genetic risk on developing HBP. In a sample of AA women in the Midwest (N = 137), 1 SNP (rs10177833) on the SLC4A5 gene was found to have a significant association with skin color on systolic BP (SBP). This finding was replicated in a sample of 3 generations of West African women (N = 199), where the rs8179526 SNP on the SLC4A5 gene was associated with SBP. In this study, we use a targeted candidate gene approach to examine the interaction between genetic polymorphisms, and perceived racial discrimination on BP among AA. Specific candidate genes were selected based on those that have been significantly associated with HBP previously in the literature as noted previously. The genes and SNPs proposed for investigation in the present study are those positional candidate genes that have been found most consistently to be statistically significantly associated with HBP in previous studies among AAs. A complete list of the genes and SNPs can be found in Table 1, and complete full description of functionality and differences in allele frequency by ancestry can be found in Taylor et al, 2016. The purpose of the study was to examine the main effects of gene (SNP) and discrimination (D) interaction effects (G × D) on SBP and diastolic BP (DBP), as well as gene (G) and discrimination (D) interaction effects on SBP and DBP. This study extends the science from examining only individual main effects of perceived discrimination or genetic underpinnings on BP. Because it has been well established that genomics and perceived discrimination alone may contribute significantly to increases in BP among AAs, this study integrates both genomic and perceived discrimination interaction effects to advance the science.

Table 1

| Gene    | Chr | SNPs | Alleles | Ancestral allele | AF in African ancestry | AF in European ancestry |
|---------|-----|------|---------|------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| NECAP1P2 (pseudogene; downstream of SLC4A5) | 2   | rs7581836 | T/G   | T               | 0.877                  | 0.844                    |
| CAPN13  | 2   | rs1879282 | C/T   | T               | 0.864                  | 0.763                    |
| MTHFD1  | 2   | rs1667627 | C/T   | T               | 0.820                  | 0.530                    |
| SLC24A4 | 14  | rs1160059 | T/C   | C               | 0.902                  | 1.000                    |
| SLC25A42| 19  | rs6511018 | G/A   | G               | 0.536                  | 0.172                    |
| LOC10798643 | 5  | rs10474346 | C/T   | T               | 0.713                  | 0.844                    |
| KCNQ1   | 11  | rs930130 | A/G   | A               | 0.582                  | 0.899                    |
| P2RY2   | 11  | rs1791926 | C/T   | T               | 0.590                  | 0.980                    |
| SLC24A4 | 14  | rs1160059 | T/C   | C               | 0.902                  | 1.000                    |
| SLC25A42| 19  | rs6511018 | G/A   | G               | 0.536                  | 0.172                    |
| LOC10798643 | 5  | rs10474346 | C/T   | T               | 0.713                  | 0.844                    |

AF = allele frequency, African ancestry is AWS (African Ancestry in Southwest US), Chr = chromosome, SNP = single nucleotide polymorphism, European Ancestry is EUA (Utah residence with northern and western European ancestry). Genotype data from the Phase 3 May 2013 call set.
to better understand the combinatorial effects of these factors on BP. If we can better understand the multiple factors and interactive effects that contribute to AAs having the highest incidence and prevalence of HTN in the US, we will be better equipped to develop more precise individualized interventions to reduce this health disparity.

2. Methods

2.1. Study group

The Jackson Heart Study (JHS) enrolled 5301 AA living in the metropolitan Jackson, MI area between 2000 and 2004. For this study, we included only those who had both genotypic and phenotypic data available for analyses (N = 2937), of which 5 participants were missing SBP and DBP readings, so N = 2932 was the final sample size in this report. Adult men and women were recruited in 4 main ways: random community sampling, volunteers, family member participants, and through the Atherosclerosis Risk in Communities Study (ARIC). Participants ranged in age from 21 to 85 years and self-identified as AA. The overall purpose of the study was to examine genetic, environmental, and social factors contributing to CVD development in AA. Detailed study design and methods are discussed elsewhere.\[20-23\] The University of Mississippi Medical Center Institutional Review Board provided ethical approval for the JHS. The Jackson Heart Study Publications and Presentations Committee provided approval for this secondary analysis study as presented here.

3. Measures

3.1. Height, weight, and body mass index

Height was measured by stadiometer and weight by electronic balance. BMI was calculated using weight in kilograms divided by height in meters squared. BMI over 25 is defined as overweight, and BMI greater than 30 is defined as obese. BMI has been shown to be a valid predictor of adiposity calculated for weight and height.\[24\]

3.2. Blood pressure readings

BP measurements were taken with random-zero sphygmomanometers and cuffs appropriate for arm size. Three readings were measured in the right arm after the participant rested in the sitting position for at least 5 minutes according to The Seventh Report of the Joint National Committee on Prevention, Detection, Evaluation, and Treatment of High Blood Pressure (JNC-7) guidelines.\[25\] SBP and DBP were determined by the first and fifth phase Korotkoff sounds, respectively, with the last 2 BP readings averaged for the analyses. The diagnosis of HTN was established based on average BP levels measured at the study visit (>140/90 mm Hg) or a prior diagnosis of HTN and current treatment with antihypertensive medications. Briefly, during each visit, JHS participants presented the medications they had taken over the 2 weeks prior to the examination. These included both prescribed and over-the-counter medications as well as herbal preparations. For those who did not bring medications to the examination, medication lists for the participant were obtained by a telephone call to the participants following the visit or by phone call to the consenting participant’s pharmacy.\[26\]

3.3. Perceived discrimination

We measured personal experiences with discrimination using the Discrimination Instrument (DISA), a multidimensional instrument that has also been used in the NSAL.\[27\] The instrument measures the occurrence, frequency, attribution, and responses to discrimination, and has 2 subscales for everyday and MLD. We followed previous research in operationalizing ED and MLD.\[27\] Questions and responses for Everyday (ED) and MLD are presented in Table 2. ED was assessed via 9 questions about

| Table 2 |
| --- |
| **Creation of summary variables for discrimination, Jackson Heart Study Discrimination Instrument (DISA).** |
| **Variable** | **Parameterization** | **DISA questions** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ED | Mean of 9 questions (DISA 1a–1l), categorical responses ranging from 0 to 6. | “How often on a day-to-day basis do you have the following experiences?” |
| 1a. Treated with less courtesy |  |
| 1b. Less respect |  |
| 1c. Poor service at restaurants |  |
| 1d. People think you aren’t smart |  |
| 1e. People are afraid of you |  |
| 1f. People think you’re dishonest |  |
| 1g. You’re not as good as they are |  |
| 1h. Called names/insulted |  |
| 1i. Threatened/harassed |  |
| MLD | Mean of 8 questions (DISA 4a–11a), yes/no responses ranging from 0 to 1. | “Now let’s talk about things that may have happened over your lifetime because of such issues as your race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, physical appearance, sexual orientation, or other characteristics. Have you ever felt that you’ve received . . .” |
| 5a. Unfair treatment getting a job (ie, not hired or told you could not apply)? |  |
| 6a. Unfair treatment at work (ie, not promoted, overworked/hassled, fired, or unable to get health insurance)? |  |
| 7a. Unfair treatment in housing or finding a place to live (ie, prevented from renting/buying a home in the neighborhood you wanted or prevented from remaining in a neighborhood because neighbors made life so uncomfortable)? |  |
| 8a. Unfair treatment getting resources or money (ie, denied a bank loan, credit card or some other form of credit)? |  |
| 9a. Unfair treatment in medical care (ie, denied or provided inferior medical care, made to wait long period of time before getting care, or could not get care from a medical specialist such as a heart doctor)? |  |
| 10a. Unfair treatment on the street or in a public place (ie, hassled by police, were the target of public ridicule)? |  |
| 11a. Unfair treatment in getting services (ie, denied or provided inferior service by a plumber, in a restaurant, the grocery store, or by some other service provider)? |  |

DISA=Jackson Heart Study Discrimination Instrument, ED=Everyday Discrimination, MLD=Major Life Discrimination.
European ancestry (EA) estimated to be ~17% to 19%\(^{31,32}\) an artificial reference panel consisting of equal proportions of the YRI and CEU HapMap phased haplotypes (using only SNPs found in both YRI and CEU panels, ie, ~2.2M SNPs) was constructed. Hao et al suggested that the accuracy of using the mixed panel for AAs is comparable to the accuracy reported when imputing a population of Nigerians using YRI as a reference panel\(^{33}\).

3.5. Statistical methods

Data management, descriptive statistics for the covariates and outcome variables, and the regression analyses were conducted using the statistics software program R, version 3.2.3 (http://www.r-project.org/). Known predictors of BP, such as age, sex, BMI, antihypertensive use, and smoking status, were assessed in a multiple linear regression model including all predictors. We used similar models to assess associations between each perceived discrimination (including ED and MLD), top 10 principal components (PCs), and outcome variables (ie, SBP and DBP) adjusted for age, sex, BMI, antihypertensive use, and current smoking status. We used the same models to test for the association between each SNP and the BP phenotypes (ie, SBP and DBP). We tested each SNP for additive main effects on BP in a test with 1 degree of freedom. We also tested the SNP \(\times\) perceived discrimination (ie, ED and MLD) interaction effects of SBP and DBP using linear mixed models with sex, age, BMI, antihypertensive medication use, and top 10 PCs of the Genome-Wide Association Study (GWAS) data as covariates. Data management, descriptive statistics for the covariates and outcome variables, and the regression analyses were conducted using the statistics software package R in version 3.2.3.\(^{34}\)

To study Gene \(\times\) Discrimination (G \(\times\) D) interactions on BP where D represents the perceived discrimination, we applied the following linear regression model.

\[
Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Z_i + \beta_2 D_i + \beta_3 \text{SNP}_i + \beta_4 \text{SNP}_i \times D_i + \epsilon_i
\]

where \(Y_i\) is the BP outcome (ie, SBP and DBP) for person \(i\); \(Z_i\) is a vector of adjustment variables including age, sex, BMI, antihypertensive medication use, current smoker, and the first 10 PCs of the common genome-wide SNPs; \(D_i\) is the measure of perceived discrimination of person \(i\); and \(\text{SNP}_i\) is the additive genetic effect of any given SNP. \(\beta_2\) represents the effect of \(\text{SNP}_i \times D\) interaction. In this study, we examined 18 SNPs from 10 candidate genes (Tables 1 and 3) on SBP and DBP in 2932 JHS AA participants. We also investigated the \(\text{SNP}_i \times D\) interaction effects on SBP and DBP for women and men separately using the same statistical model without sex as a covariate.

4. Results

In Table 3, we present descriptive statistics for the 2937 JHS participants with both phenotypic and genetic data. Five participants were missing SBP and DBP data, resulting in 2932 participants for examination. The sample had a mean age of 55 years, and the majority of participants was female, obese, nonsmokers, had HTN, and was on antihypertension medication. Mean SBP and DBP were 126.8 and 79.1 mm Hg, respectively. Overall, reports of discrimination reported among participants were low. The mean ED was 1.08 (range 0–6), mean EDAR was 0.63 (range 0–6), mean MLD was 0.36 (range 0–1).

To assess the associations between SBP/DBP and known predictors, we conducted further multiple linear regression
descriptive statistics of the JHS sample with both phenotypic and genotypic data.

| Variable | N (non-missing) | Mean±SD | Median (Q1, Q3) |
|----------|----------------|---------|----------------|
| SBP, mm Hg | 2932 | 128.8±18.1 | 125 (114, 137) |
| DBP, mm Hg | 2932 | 79.1±10.6 | 79 (72, 88) |
| Age, y | 2937 | 55.0±12.8 | 55.3 (45.0, 64.5) |
| BMI, kg/m² | 2905 | 32.0±7.4 | 30.7 (27.0, 35.7) |
| ED | 2916 | 1.08±0.03 | 0.89 (0.22, 1.64) |
| MLD | 2899 | 0.368±0.262 | 0.37 (0.13, 0.50) |
| EDAR | 2905 | 0.636±0.955 | 0 (0.1) |
| CMLDAR | 1436 | 0.823±1.763 | 0 (0.0) |
| Male | 2937 | 38% |  |
| Antihypertensive use | 2380 | 62% |  |
| Current smoker | 2912 | 14% |  |
| Ever smoker | 2933 | 33% |  |
| Hypertension | 2937 | 61% |  |

† Total sample size of participants with both genotypic and phenotypic data N=2937.

1 Of the N=2937, 5 participants were missing SBP and DBP, resulting in N=2932.

BMI = body mass index, CMLDAR = Chronic Major Life Discrimination Related to Race, DBP = diastolic blood pressure, ED = Everyday Discrimination, EDAR = Everyday Discrimination Related to Race, JHS = Jackson Heart Study, MLD = Major Life Discrimination, SBP = systolic blood pressure, SD = standard deviation.

The summary of multiple regression analysis of systolic (SBP) and diastolic (DBP) blood pressure.

| Variables | Beta coefficient | SE | P value | Beta coefficient | SE | P value |
|-----------|-----------------|----|---------|-----------------|----|---------|
| Age, y    | 0.453           | 0.031 | 3.30×10⁻⁶⁰ | -0.175         | 0.019 | 1.88×10⁻²⁰ |
| Male      | 2.09            | 0.754 | 5.64×10⁻³  | 4.11           | 0.45  | 9.08×10⁻⁴  |
| BMI, kg/m²| 0.162           | 0.051 | 1.48×10⁻³  | 0.039          | 0.030 | 0.19     |
| Antihypertensive use | 3.45 | 0.79 | 1.26×10⁻⁵  | 1.68           | 0.47  | 3.39×10⁻⁴  |
| Current smoker | 4.07 | 1.09 | 1.81×10⁻⁴  | 0.419          | 0.645 | .52      |

The full model is SBP or DBP = age + male gender + BMI + antihypertensive use + current smoker. BMI = body mass index, DBP = diastolic blood pressure, SBP = systolic blood pressure, SD = standard error.

The associations of covariates and systolic and diastolic blood pressure.

| Variables | N | Beta coefficient | SE | P value | Beta coefficient | SE | P value |
|-----------|---|-----------------|----|---------|-----------------|----|---------|
| ED        | 2336 | 0.191           | 0.362 | .598 | 0.320           | 0.215 | .137   |
| MLD       | 2319 | -1.854          | 1.355 | .171 | 1.317           | 0.805 | .102   |
| EDAR      | 2347 | 0.139           | 0.378 | .713 | 0.283           | 0.225 | .209   |
| CMLDAR    | 1136 | -0.026          | 0.036 | .488 | -0.001          | 0.023 | .978   |
| PC 1      | 2349 | 16.528          | 17.760 | .352 | 20.756          | 10.547 | .049   |
| PC 2      | 2349 | 5.814           | 18.186 | .749 | 7.380           | 10.806 | .495   |
| PC 3      | 2349 | 9.977           | 13.097 | .446 | 5.043           | 7.783 | .944   |
| PC 4      | 2349 | 6.766           | 13.432 | .615 | 0.602           | 7.082 | .940   |
| PC 5      | 2349 | -1.811          | 13.948 | .897 | 10.406          | 8.286 | .209   |
| PC 6      | 2349 | -12.566         | 13.950 | .368 | -12.477         | 8.287 | .132   |
| PC 7      | 2349 | 5.005           | 14.689 | .733 | 2.949           | 8.736 | .736   |
| PC 8      | 2349 | 16.542          | 13.638 | .225 | 3.531           | 8.106 | .663   |
| PC 9      | 2349 | -1.987          | 13.715 | .885 | -18.675         | 8.140 | .022   |
| PC 10     | 2349 | 5.729           | 13.640 | .675 | -0.702          | 8.106 | .922   |

Adjusted for age, gender, BMI, antihypertensive use, and current smoking status. CMLDAR = Chronic Major Life Discrimination Related to Race, ED = Everyday Discrimination, EDAR = Everyday Discrimination Related to Race, MLD = Major Life Discrimination, PC = principal components.
significant interaction effects of both ED and MLD at alpha level of 0.05. Notably, rs3771724 and rs1006502 had significant G × MLD interaction associated with both SBP and DBP (Table 6A and B). Supplementary tables are provided for sex-stratified G × D results, http://links.lww.com/MD/B912. Interestingly, the rs3771724 and rs1006502 loci are linked to a number of SNPs prime for further exploration in SNP-discrimination interactions on BP among AA. Our most robust finding included 2 SNPs (rs3771724 and rs1006502) that showed interaction with MLD on both SBP and DBP, and ED on DBP in this sample of AAs.

### Table 6

| SNP          | rs1879282 | rs1667627 | rs7587117 | rs10177833 | rs7571842 | rs2034454 | rs4853018 | rs7602215 | rs3771724 | rs1006502 | rs7581836 | rs10474346 | rs4930130 | rs7602215 | rs10177833 | rs7587117 | rs1667627 |
|--------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|-----------|-----------|
| **ED**       | 0.327     | 0.303     | 0.340     | 0.139      | 0.479     | 0.804     | 0.814     | 0.165     | 0.081     | 0.223     | 0.465     | 0.061     | 0.043     | 0.045     | 0.381     |
| **G × D E**  | 0.032     | 0.026     | 0.039     | 0.018      | 0.047     | 0.025     | 0.204     | 0.015     | 0.015     | 0.015     | 0.015     | 0.015     | 0.015     | 0.015     | 0.015     |
| **G × D P**  | 0.327     | 0.303     | 0.340     | 0.139      | 0.479     | 0.804     | 0.814     | 0.165     | 0.081     | 0.223     | 0.465     | 0.061     | 0.043     | 0.045     | 0.381     |
| **MLD**      | 0.960     | 1.189     | 0.639     | 0.728      | 0.778     | 0.769     | 0.723     | 0.978     | 0.226     | 0.978     | 0.778     | 0.978     | 0.226     | 0.978     | 0.226     |
| **G × D E**  | 1.180     | 1.180     | 0.728     | 1.079      | 0.530     | 0.530     | 0.530     | 0.530     | 0.530     | 0.530     | 0.530     | 0.530     | 0.530     | 0.530     | 0.530     |
| **G × D P**  | 1.180     | 1.180     | 0.728     | 1.079      | 0.530     | 0.530     | 0.530     | 0.530     | 0.530     | 0.530     | 0.530     | 0.530     | 0.530     | 0.530     | 0.530     |
| **SBP**      | 0.050     | 0.050     | 0.050     | 0.050      | 0.050     | 0.050     | 0.050     | 0.050     | 0.050     | 0.050     | 0.050     | 0.050     | 0.050     | 0.050     | 0.050     |
| **DBP**      | 0.050     | 0.050     | 0.050     | 0.050      | 0.050     | 0.050     | 0.050     | 0.050     | 0.050     | 0.050     | 0.050     | 0.050     | 0.050     | 0.050     | 0.050     |

**CMLDAR** = Chronic Major Life Discrimination Related to Race, **DBP** = diastolic blood pressure, **ED** = Environment, **EDAR** = Everyday Discrimination Related to Race, **ED** = Everyday Discrimination, **EDM** = Major Life Discrimination, **P** = P-value, **SBP** = systolic blood pressure, **SE** = standard error, **SNP** = single nucleotide polymorphism.

5. Discussion

This study addressed the paucity of research examining the Gene × Discrimination interaction on BP in an AA population using data from the JHS. We identified a number of SNPs prime for further exploration in SNP-discrimination interactions on BP among AA. Our most robust finding included 2 SNPs (rs3771724 and rs1006502) that showed interaction with MLD on both SBP and DBP, and ED on DBP in this sample of AAs.

Interestingly, the rs3771724 and rs1006502 loci are linked to 2 SNPs (rs3771724 and rs1006502) that showed interaction with MLD on both SBP and DBP, and ED on DBP in this sample of AAs.
epithelial sodium channel in renal principal cells, though this has yet to be confirmed in human subjects. High salt concentrations in cultured human renal cortical tissue showed increased SLC4A5 expression compared with low salt conditions in vitro.

Several studies have similarly reported associations between the SLC4A5 gene and HBP among AA and European American (EA) adults. In one study, adults from the University of Virginia and HyperPath cohorts, polymorphisms in the SLC4A5 gene were associated with induction of salt-sensitive HTN among adults of EA ancestry. AA typically have higher rates of salt sensitivity than EA, and rates of salt-sensitivity among hypertensive AA men and women have been reported at 73%, with normotensive AA men and women ranging 36% to 79%, and normotensive AA women ranging from 43% to 64%.

Genetic polymorphisms, such as SNPs, in the SLC4A5 gene have also been implicated in BP-related traits, such as resting pulse pressure, submaximal exercise pulse pressure, submaximal SBP, and submaximal rate pressure in EA.

One other study reported an association between the rs1006502 (hcv8941031) locus of the SLC4A5 gene and HTN in AA and with BP in EA. The TT allele, which was the minor allele among their Utah-based population of EA, had a slight increase in plasma CO2 levels compared with participants with a CT or CC genotype. Among AAs, the CC genotype is the minor allele, suggesting this population may have increased risk for elevated plasma CO2 levels (Table 6). The rs3771724 locus has been associated with submaximal exercise oxygen consumption (VO250) and submaximal exercise carbon dioxide expiration (VCO250) in subjects of EA. To our knowledge, no mechanism of action for the genotype at the rs1006502 or the rs3771724 locus on the SLC4A5 gene product has been elucidated.

5.1. Strengths

Our data add to the evidence supporting an association between SNPs in the SLC4A5 gene, and increase in BP is on which a number of sample populations of AA are reporting similar results, thus showing the replicability of the SLC4A5 gene across various samples. Additional studies point toward chromosome 2, where SLC4A5 is located, for regions associated with modulating BP. In a study, populations of EA with the rs1006502 SNP have been shown to be associated with increase in BP,[37, 38, 39] VO250 and VCO250.[40] As Hunt and colleagues were only using Utah residents of EA, our research results published by Stutz and colleagues reported too few AA participants to be included in their analyses, further research into how SLC4A5 polymorphisms affect AAs, a group with disproportionately high rates of HTN, is needed. Our data show a G × E relationship between SLC4A5 polymorphisms and racial discrimination in populations of AAs. Thus, further research into the potential mechanism of action by which the SLC4A5 gene, particularly the 2 SNPs rs1006302 and rs3771724, might have a SNP-discrimination interaction resulting in increases in BP and further explaining the health disparity between EA and AA population groups is needed.

This study supports the idea that SNP-discrimination interactions combine to influence clinically relevant traits such as BP. As AAs in the US experience high levels of both ED and MLD,[41, 42] and (acute and) chronic experiences with discrimination are consistently linked to HBP and HTN,[43] it is important for clinicians to be mindful of this SNP-discrimination relationship when working with AA patients. Furthermore, these analyses suggest that more work on SNP-discrimination interactions is required for development and implementation of clinically relevant protocols for the identification and treatment of HBP to address a major health disparity affecting AAs.

5.2. Limitations

The use of self-report perceived racism and discrimination may be a limitation; however, this is the best noninvasive gold standard measure of examining racism and discrimination. Additionally, the DISA instrument used here has been validated in other samples of AAs in the NSAL and JHS. Replication with similar epidemiological samples is required to ascertain the role of genes and psychosocial stressors in the development and expression of HBP in this understudied population. The addition of other -omic methodologies such as epigenetic[46] and whole genome sequencing[47] among under-represented minority populations may also help to elucidate a more holistic picture of this health disparity.

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