Trophoblast Stem Cells Rescue Placental Defect in SOCS3-deficient Mice

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Stem cells have important clinical and experimental potentials. Trophoblast stem (TS) cells possess the ability to differentiate into trophoblast subtypes in vitro and contribute to the trophoblast lineage in vivo. Suppressor of cytokine signaling 3 (SOCS3) is a negative regulator of cytokine signaling. Targeted disruption of SOCS3 revealed embryonic lethality on E12.5; it was caused by placental defect with enhanced leukemia inhibitory factor receptor signaling. A complementation of the wild-type (WT) placenta by using tetraploid rescue technique showed that the embryonic lethality in SOCS3-deficient embryo was due to the placental defect. Here we demonstrate that TS cells supplementation rescues placental defect in SOCS3-deficient embryos. In the rescued placenta, TS cells were integrated into the placental structure, and a substantial structural improvement was observed in the labyrinthine layer that was disrupted in the SOCS3-deficient placenta. Importantly, by supplying TS cells, living SOCS3-deficient embryos were detected at term. These results indicate a functional contribution of TS cells in the placenta and their potential application.

In mammals, trophoblast cells in the placenta are essential for the growth and survival of the embryo. Trophoblast stem (TS) cells have been established from either blastocysts or early postimplantation trophoblasts in the presence of fibroblast growth factor 4 (FGF4) (1). These cell lines differentiated into trophoblast subtypes in vitro and have the potential to contribute to the placenta in chimeras in vivo. However, it remains to be clarified whether the in vivo differentiated trophoblasts from TS cells are functional.

SOCS3 is an essential negative regulator of leukemia inhibitory factor receptor signaling in trophoblast differentiation (2). Targeted disruption of SOCS3 demonstrates embryonic lethality with placental defect (2, 3). In the SOCS3-deficient placenta, an excess status of trophoblast giant cell differentiation is observed. The embryonic lethality in SOCS3−/− embryos is rescued by the complementation of wild-type tetraploid embryos, thus demonstrating an essential role of SOCS3 in placental development and a non-essential role in embryo development (2). To explore the potential of TS cells in rescuing the placental defect in SOCS3-deficient mice, we attempted to prepare a chimera by using SOCS3−/− embryo and WT TS cells.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Mice—The generation of SOCS3-disrupted mice was described in a previous study (2). Using tail biopsies, genotyping was performed by PCR as described. Mutant phenotypes were analyzed in a mixed 129SvE, C57Bl/6 background.

TS Cell Injections—TS cell lines were derived from B5/enhanced green fluorescent protein (EGFP) transgenic mice (4) (kindly supplied by Dr. J. Rossant) that ubiquitously express EGFP. These cells had already been cultured for more than 30 passages and showed a typical colony (Fig. 1, left). TS cells were maintained in the presence of FGF4 and conditioned medium from mouse embryonic fibroblast cells (1). On E2.5, morula stage embryos were collected from SOCS3 heterozygous intercrosses, the zona was removed, and embryos were aggregated with 10–15 TS cells in drop culture. After overnight culture, the developed blastocysts were transferred to the uteri of pseudopregnant females. In the injection method, 10–15 TS cells were injected into the blastocysts from the SOCS3 heterozygous intercrosses. Blastocysts in which only the injection medium were used as the control. After injection, 8–10 blastocysts per pseudopregnant female were transferred into the uteri. Tetraploid rescue experiments were performed as described previously (2).

Histological Analysis—Freshly isolated placenta were fixed in 4% paraformaldehyde, dehydrated, embedded in paraffin, and sectioned (4 μm). Sections were analyzed by hematoxylin/eosin staining.

Immunohistochemistry—Immunohistochemical staining of cells was performed according to standard protocols as described previously (5). In brief, GFP expression in sections of the placenta was identified by overnight incubation of formalin-fixed, decalcified, paraffin-embedded sections at 4°C with a rabbit anti-GFP antibody (1:300) (Molecular Probes, Eugene, OR). The primary antibody was visualized with a biotinylated goat anti-rabbit secondary antibody (1-h incubation, room temperature, dilution of 1:200), and peroxidase-conjugated avidin (ABC kit, Vector Laboratories) by using NovoRED (Vector Laboratories) as the substrate; counterstaining was performed with Harris hematoxylin (Surgipath Medical Industries, Richmond, IL).

RESULTS

To produce a chimera with SOCS3−/− embryos and TS cells, we first attempted an aggregation method (6). To visualize and monitor the TS cells, we used GFP-positive TS cells. However, the ability of the TS cells to integrate into the blastocysts was poor and the ratio of chimerism in the placenta varied among TS-cell injected embryos (Fig. 1, middle, arrows) where the trophoblast giant cell (TGC) occupies the labyrinth, and there was no intact labyrinthine layer that is sown (2). Next, histological analysis of the placentas was performed (Fig. 2, middle, arrows). The sizes of the rescued placenta was correlated to the embryo weight (data not shown). In contrast, in tetraploid rescue experiments, the sizes of the rescued SOCS3−/− embryo were significantly impaired, four out of five pups were alive. In contrast, in tetraploid rescue experiments, the sizes of the rescued SOCS3−/− embryo was comparable with that of +/+ and +/− (data not shown) (2). Next, histological analysis of the placenta was performed (Fig. 2). In the SOCS3 deficient placenta, trophoblast giant cells (TGCs) occupied in the labyrinth, and there was no intact labyrinthine layer that is essential for the exchange of oxygen and nutrition (Fig. 2, right). In contrast, in the rescued SOCS3−/− placenta, intact labyrinthine layer was detected (Fig. 2, middle, arrows) despite the presence of aberrant TGCs in the labyrinth (Fig. 2, middle, asterisk). The degree of improvement in the rescued placenta was correlated to the embryo weight (data not shown).

Immunohistochemistry using anti-GFP antibody demonstrated diffuse contribution of GFP-positive trophoblasts (Fig. 3A). Particularly, many GFP-positive cells were detected in the intact labyrinthine structure (Fig. 3A, panel a, arrow) and chorion (Fig. 3A, panel c, arrow) where the trophoblast stem cells reside (7). Interestingly, some eutopic TGCs were also

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**DISCUSSION**

Our results provided compelling evidence that there was a functional contribution of TS cells to the placenta in vivo. Although, the rescued SOCS3−/− embryos demonstrated intrauterine growth retardation, indicating partial rescue of placental function comparing with tetraploid rescue experiments, the embryos demonstrated intrauterine growth retardation, indicating partial rescue of placental function comparing with tetraploid rescue experiments. However, based on our results, and theoretical knowledge, it is strongly speculated that trophoblast stem cells could rescue other mutations with placental defect. The potential of TS cells to rescue placental defect indicates a new possible application in the treatment of placental abnormality.

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