



HLA-C variants associated with amino acid substitutions in the peptide binding groove influence susceptibility to Kawasaki disease

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ABSTRACT

Kawasaki disease (KD) is a pediatric vasculitis caused by an unknown trigger in genetically susceptible children. The incidence varies widely across genetically diverse populations. Several associations with HLA Class I alleles have been reported in single cohort studies. Using a genetic approach, from the nine single nucleotide variants (SNVs) associated with KD susceptibility in children of European descent, we identified SNVs near the HLA-C (rs6906846) and HLA-B genes (rs2254556) whose association was replicated in a Japanese descent cohort (rs6906846 $p = 0.01$, rs2254556 $p = 0.005$). The risk allele (A at rs6906846) was also associated with HLA-C*07:02 and HLA-C*04:01 in both US multi-ethnic and Japanese cohorts and HLA-C*12:02 only in the Japanese cohort. The risk A-allele was associated with eight non-conservative amino acid substitutions (amino acid positions); Asp or Ser (9), Arg (14), Ala (49), Ala (73), Ala (90), Arg (97), Phe or Ser (99), and Phe or Ser (116) in the HLA-C peptide binding groove that binds peptides for presentation to cytotoxic T cells (CTL). This raises the possibility of increased affinity to a “KD peptide” that contributes to the vasculitis of KD in genetically susceptible children.

1. Introduction

HLA class I molecules present peptide to CD8+ cytotoxic T-cells (CTL) that screen damaged cells and play a central role in vascular pathology in Kawasaki disease (KD), an acute pediatric vasculitis [1,2]. Each HLA type has specific amino acid sequences in the peptide binding groove and single amino acid substitutions at critical positions for

peptides and/or T cell receptors are known to influence disease susceptibility and response to antigens [3–5]. CTL infiltrate the arterial wall in KD vasculitis and may recognize peptides derived from the disease “trigger”. Therefore, finding specific HLA types that are associated with KD susceptibility and that share single amino acid substitutions at critical positions in the peptide-binding groove may contribute to defining the trigger for KD.

Abbreviations: KD, Kawasaki disease; SNV, Single nucleotide variant; GWAS, genome-wide association study

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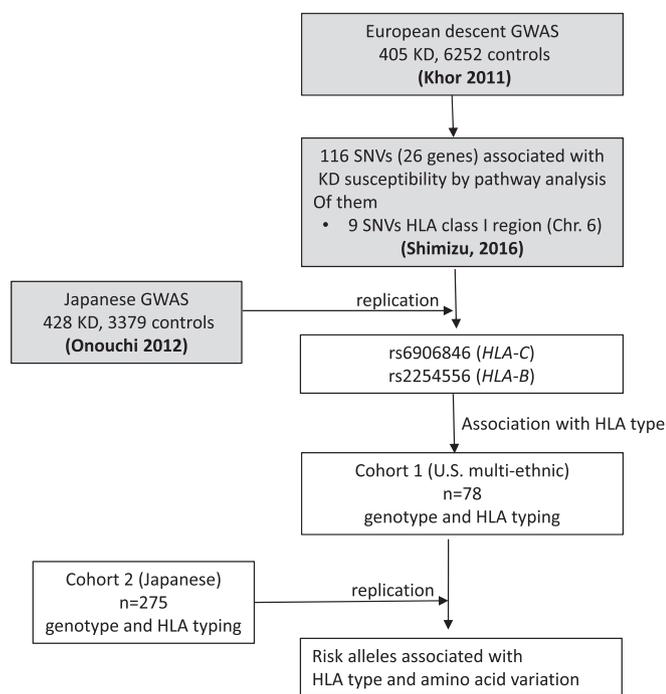


Fig 1. Study design. Summary of workflow including GWAS (Khor 2011 and Onouchi 2012), pathway analysis, gene stability selection (Shimizu 2016), and high-resolution HLA typing. GWAS: Genome-wide association study, SNV: single nucleotide variant, HLA: Human leukocyte antigen, Shadowed box: previously published analysis, Open box: analysis in this study.

Although association of single nucleotide variants (SNVs) in the HLA region with KD susceptibility has been reported [6–12], only a SNV in the HLA class II region (rs2857151) discovered by a Japanese genome-wide association study (GWAS) [9] was successfully replicated in both Chinese and European descent cohorts [10,13]. We previously performed a pathway analysis using European descent GWAS data and reported several genetic variants associated with KD susceptibility in the HLA class I region [14]. In the current study, we focused on the subset of KD risk-associated SNVs that were also validated in a Japanese cohort. We postulated that risk-associated SNVs are associated with certain HLA types that share amino acid substitutions in the peptide binding domain resulting in preferential peptide binding to the antigen trigger of KD.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Patient enrollment and sample collection

The patient cohorts are described in the study flow diagram (Fig. 1). Diagnosis of KD was made according to American Heart Association criteria as previously reported [15]. Detailed information of the subjects for European descent Cohort for GWAS was previously described [16]. Multi-ethnic Cohort 1 ($n = 78$, enrolled during 2002–2014) was enrolled at UCSD and enriched for carriers of the risk allele at rs6906846 (HLA-C) and/or rs2254556 (HLA-B) in order to analyze the relationship between SNVs, high-resolution HLA typing results, and HLA amino acid variation. Cohort 2 contained Japanese KD subjects ($n = 275$) who were a subset of the published Japanese GWAS [9] and were typed for HLA Class I at high resolution. Demographic, clinical, and laboratory data were summarized for Cohort 1 (Supplementary Table 1) but were not available for Japanese Cohort 2. The Institutional Review Boards of the participating centers (UCSD and RIKEN) reviewed and approved this study and parental consent and assent as appropriate were obtained from parents and participants.

2.2. Genotyping

For Cohort 1, DNA was collected from either whole blood or mouthwash samples as previously described [16] and genotyping for rs6906846 (HLA-C) and rs2254556 (HLA-B) was performed using TaqMan SNP genotype assays following the manufacturer's instructions (Life Technologies, USA).

2.3. Pathway analysis and gene stability selection

The pathway analysis followed by gene stability selection to find the responsible SNVs/genes driving the pathway association using European descent GWAS data (405 KD subjects and 6252 controls) [16] was previously reported [14]. From this analysis, 116 SNVs in 26 genes were selected as drivers of the top 100 pathways associated with KD (Fig. 1). In the current study, we focused on the nine SNVs in the HLA class I region. Since no other European descent GWAS dataset was available for replication, each SNV was evaluated for association with KD susceptibility (t -test, $p < 0.05$) in a published Japanese GWAS dataset (428 KD subjects and 3379 controls) [9]. Meta-analysis was performed with PLINK.

2.4. High-resolution HLA typing and evaluation of amino acid variation

High-resolution typing for HLA-B and C was performed on Cohort 1 (mixed ethnicity). The sequence-specific oligonucleotide probe (SSO) method, sequence-specific primer method, and/or Sanger sequence-based typing methods were used. HLA-B and HLA-C high resolution typing for Japanese Cohort 2 was conducted by the SSO method using the WAKFlow (R) HLA Typing kit (Wakunaga Pharmaceutical) according to the manufacturer's instructions.

Linkage between SNVs and HLA high-resolution types or amino acid sequence was identified in KD subjects who were homozygous for each SNV. The amino acid sequence encoded by HLA class I genes was aligned using the IMGT/HLA database (<http://www.ebi.ac.uk/ipd/imgt/hla/>).

2.5. Association between SNVs (rs6906846 (HLA-C) and rs2254556 (HLA-B)) and high resolution HLA types and amino acid sequence

Linkage between SNVs and HLA high-resolution types or amino acid sequences was restricted to KD subjects who were homozygous for each SNV since we were unable to assign SNV alleles and HLA sequences to the same chromosome. The amino acid sequence encoded by HLA class I genes was aligned using the IMGT/HLA database (<http://www.ebi.ac.uk/ipd/imgt/hla/>). For Cohorts 1 and 2, association between alleles and each HLA-type or amino acid sequence was calculated using the Chi-square test.

2.6. Statistical analysis

Association between genetic variants and clinical parameters was performed using non-parametric tests due to the non-normal distribution. P-values were calculated by Mann–Whitney U test for continuous variables and Chi square test or Fisher's exact test for categorical variables. For the comparison of ≥ 3 variants, the Kruskal–Wallis test was used.

3. Results

3.1. Identification of KD-associated SNVs in the HLA region

Of the 116 SNVs in 26 genes recently published as potential drivers of the top 100 pathways associated with KD susceptibility in a European GWAS dataset [14] (Fig. 1), nine SNVs were located within a 100 kb stretch in the HLA class I region (6p21.33) (association $p < 0.05$, Supplementary Fig. 1). Five SNVs clustered upstream or downstream of

Table 1
HLA class I SNVs discovered in a pathway/gene stability analysis on a European descent GWAS followed by validation in a Japanese GWAS dataset.

SNV	European descent GWAS (405 KD and 6252 controls)										Japanese GWAS (428 KD and 3379 controls)						Meta-analysis			
	KD					Control					KD			Control			OR	P		
	Number of alleles										Number of alleles			Number of alleles						
	A1	A2	AF	OR	P	A1	A2	AF	OR	P	A1	A2	AF	OR	P	A1	A2	AF	OR	P
rs2844623	T	107	701	0.13	2315	10,065	0.19	0.7	1.0E-04	213	641	0.25	1.1	1.1E-01	0.9	5211	0.23	1.1	1.1E-01	2.4E-01
rs2524099	A	350	460	0.43	5917	6517	0.48	0.8	1.6E-02	562	294	0.66	1.1	7.5E-02	1.0	2532	0.63	1.1	7.5E-02	6.1E-01
rs2524070	A	111	699	0.14	2338	10,096	0.19	0.7	2.9E-04	75	781	0.09	1.0	8.4E-01	0.8	6173	0.09	1.0	8.4E-01	7.8E-03
rs6906846	A	271	539	0.33	3536	8898	0.28	1.3	2.2E-03	280	576	0.33	1.2	1.1E-02	1.2	4831	0.29	1.2	1.1E-02	7.5E-05
rs7382297	T	152	658	0.19	1936	10,490	0.16	1.3	1.6E-02	112	744	0.13	1.1	3.9E-01	1.2	5942	0.12	1.1	3.9E-01	1.8E-02
rs2596551	C	116	694	0.14	2480	9954	0.20	0.7	9.3E-05	46	808	0.05	0.7	6.2E-02	0.7	6268	0.07	0.7	6.2E-02	1.9E-05
rs2844575	C	342	464	0.42	5728	6592	0.46	0.8	2.5E-02	438	418	0.51	1.0	7.3E-01	0.9	3253	0.52	1.0	7.3E-01	6.9E-02
rs2523535	G	293	517	0.36	5322	7112	0.43	0.8	2.2E-04	98	758	0.11	0.8	7.2E-02	0.8	5832	0.14	0.8	7.2E-02	4.5E-05
rs2254556	T	172	636	0.21	2210	10,202	0.18	1.2	1.3E-02	65	791	0.08	1.5	4.9E-03	1.3	6401	0.05	1.5	4.9E-03	3.3E-04

p: nominal p-value, A1: Reported in forward orientation to genome, Bonferroni corrected p value threshold: 0.05/(9 SNVs in HLA-B and C region) = 5.0E-03, **Bold** indicates SNVs with p < 0.05 in both European descent and Japanese GWAS, AF: A1 allele frequencies, OR: odds ratio.

the HLA-C gene, while the other four SNVs clustered upstream of the HLA-B gene. Since there was no European GWAS data with which to validate these results, we used a previously published Japanese GWAS dataset [9] to test the association with KD susceptibility. Association of two of the nine SNVs (rs6906846 and rs2254556, Linkage disequilibrium (LD): $r^2 < 0.2$) was replicated (428 KD subjects and 3,379 controls; $p = 1.1 \times 10^{-2}$ for rs6906846 and $p = 4.9 \times 10^{-3}$ for rs2254556) (Table 1 and Supplementary Table 2). Meta-analysis confirmed significant association for these SNVs ($p = 7.5 \times 10^{-5}$ and OR 1.2 for rs6906846; $p = 3.0 \times 10^{-4}$ and OR 1.3 for rs2254556). Risk allele frequencies of these SNVs in different populations were as follows: rs6906846 (A allele): Hispanic 0.32, Asian 0.26, and European 0.31 and rs2254556 (T allele): Hispanic 0.08, Asian 0.07, and European 0.16. Although two additional alleles (rs2596551 and rs2523535) were significantly associated in the meta-analysis, genotyping of the 78 individuals at these loci yielded only three homozygotes. Therefore, we confined our further analysis to the alleles that were individually associated in each cohort at $p < 0.05$.

3.2. Association of SNVs with HLA-B and C alleles

The antigen presenting site of the HLA class I molecule is on the $\alpha 1$ and $\alpha 2$ domains and is comprised of ~180 amino acids [17]. Amino acid variation in HLA molecules that affects peptide binding affinity influences the peptide repertoire presented to T cells and the immunogenicity of the HLA-peptide complex [4,18,19]. We postulated that the risk-associated SNVs (rs2254556 and rs6906846) could influence the polymorphic class I HLA amino acid sequences in the peptide binding groove, which, in turn, affects CTL recognition. Therefore, we first studied the association between the two SNVs (rs6906846 and rs2254556) and high-resolution HLA-B and HLA-C types, using only homozygous subjects in U.S. Cohort 1 (rs6906846: AA n = 24, GG n = 29 and rs2254556: AA n = 4, GG n = 54) since we did not have the sequence for each chromatid.

The A-allele (risk) of rs6906846 was associated with certain HLA types, including HLA-C*07:02 ($p = 2.8 \times 10^{-10}$) and HLA-C*04:01 ($p = 8.6 \times 10^{-9}$) in the US multi-ethnic cohort (Table 2 and Supplementary Table 2). This same association was replicated using only homozygous subjects in the Japanese cohort (rs6906846: AA n = 23, GG n = 125). Again, HLA-C*07:02 ($p = 1.9 \times 10^{-17}$, US and Japanese combined $p = 2.8 \times 10^{-30}$) and HLA-C*04:01 ($p = 7.5 \times 10^{-5}$, US and Japanese combined $p = 1.1 \times 10^{-17}$) were associated with the A-allele (risk) of rs6906846 (Table 2 and Supplementary Table 2). HLA-C*12:02, which was not found in the US multi-ethnic Cohort 1, was strongly associated with the A-allele (risk) of rs6906846 in Japanese Cohort 2 ($p = 1.9 \times 10^{-18}$).

The frequency of HLA-C*04:01, C*07:02, and C*12:02 (associated with A-allele at rs6906846) in all subjects in Cohort 2 (Japanese n = 275, 550 chromatids) was compared with published Japanese data [20]. HLA-C*12:02 was over-represented in Japanese KD subjects compared to the Japanese population at large (HLA-C*12:02: 15.3% vs. 11.2%, $p = 3.5 \times 10^{-3}$) (Table 3). This analysis could not be performed for multiethnic Cohort 1 that was intentionally enriched for subjects carrying the A-allele (rs6906846).

We also explored the potential relationships between the risk alleles in the HLA-B region and high resolution HLA types. The T-allele (risk) of rs2254556 (HLA-B) was not associated with HLA-C high-resolution types (data not shown). For association with HLA-B high-resolution types, the A-allele of rs6906846 and the T-allele of rs2254556 showed only weak association with HLA-B*07:02 ($p = 8.1 \times 10^{-5}$ and $p = 3.5 \times 10^{-7}$, respectively).

3.3. Association of SNVs with HLA-B and C amino acid variants

Next, we analyzed the association between the SNVs and the amino acid sequence for 181 positions in the antigen presenting site of HLA-C

Table 2
Association between rs6906846 and the three most significantly associated HLA-C types (See Supplementary Table 2).

HLA-C type	US multi-ethnicity (Cohort 1)			Japanese (Cohort 2)			Combined P _{combined}
	rs6906846			rs6906846			
	A allele n = 48	G allele n = 58	p	A allele n = 46	G allele n = 250	p	
*04:01	20	0	8.6E–09	5	0	7.5E–05	1.1E–17
*07:02	23	0	2.8E–10	20	1	1.9E–17	2.8E–30
*12:02	0	0	NA	21	1	1.9E–18	NA

Bonferroni corrected p value threshold: $0.05/(50 \text{ HLA-B types} + 26 \text{ HLA-C types}) = 6.6E-04$, NA: not applicable, Only homozygous subjects of rs6906846 were included in the analysis.

Table 3
Frequencies of HLA-C*04:01, C*07:02 and C*12:02 in KD patients and the general Japanese population.

HLA-C type	Japanese				Odds ratio (CI)	p
	KD (550 haplotypes)		General (19183 haplotypes)			
	n	%	n	%		
C*04:01	20	3.6	846	4.4	0.9 (0.6–1.4)	NS
C*07:02	69	12.5	2439	12.7	1.0 (0.8–1.3)	NS
C*12:02	84	15.3	2145	11.2	1.4 (1.1–1.8)	3.5E-03

p: nominal p-value. CI: Confidence interval. Bonferroni corrected p value threshold: $0.05/3 = 0.0166$.

and HLA-B using individuals homozygous for rs6906846 both in the U.S. (AA n = 24, GG n = 29; Cohort 1) and Japanese cohorts (AA n = 23, GG n = 125; Cohort 2). In both cohorts, we found highly significant associations (nominal $p < 1.0E-06$) of certain amino acids with the risk allele of rs6906846 in eight positions in the peptide binding groove ($\alpha 1$ and $\alpha 2$ domain). The amino acids and their position in parentheses were as follows: Asp or Ser (9), Arg (14), Ala (49), Ala (73), Ala (90), Arg (97), Phe or Ser (99), and Phe or Ser (116) (Table 4). The association between these eight amino acid positions and rs6906846 was replicated in Japanese Cohort 2 with the strongest p value at amino acid position 73 (U.S. and Japanese combined $p = 7.7E-68$) (Table 4).

Based on crystallography [21], amino acid residues in five (position 9, 73, 97, 99 and 116) of the eight positions in the $\alpha 1$ and 2 domains are predicted to point toward the peptide binding groove (Fig. 2), and thus would be expected to interact with the peptide. None of the positions were at the sites that directly interact with the T-cell receptor.

Association between rs2254556 and certain amino acids was evaluated using only homozygotes in U.S. Cohort 1 (TT n = 4, CC n = 54). The T-allele (risk) was not associated with amino acids in the antigen presenting site of HLA-B or HLA-C, although the number of subjects was limited. No association was detected between amino acids at position 77–80 (critical position for binding to NK cells) and the risk alleles at rs6906846 and rs2254556.

4. Discussion

Using a genetic approach, we identified two intergenic variants, rs6906846 (HLA-C) and rs2254556 (HLA-B) associated with KD susceptibility in both European descent and Japanese subjects. High-resolution HLA typing and amino acid sequence analysis in U.S. multi-ethnic and Japanese cohorts demonstrated that genetic variation at rs6906846 was associated with amino acids at position 9, 14, 49, 73, 90, 97, 99 and 116 in the peptide-binding groove of the subjects' HLA-C

molecule that defines the allele-specific peptide repertoire presented to CTL [22].

Other studies of the HLA-B and -C locus and KD pathogenesis have focused on allele associations in a Korean population, HLA/KIR relationships in an Italian KD population, and an analysis of the imputed HLA locus with HLA types in a European descent cohort. Our risk alleles were not in linkage disequilibrium with any of the risk alleles or associated with any HLA types reported in these studies [7,11,12,23].

We propose a mechanism by which the risk alleles described here are linked to HLA-C types and amino acid substitutions that lead to preferential binding of KD antigen-derived peptides, which may lead to increased activation and expansion of CTL (Fig. 3). As an alternative hypothesis, we need to consider that the amino acid substitutions associated with the rs6906846 (HLA-C) risk allele could have lower affinity for KD-associated peptides and therefore reduced presentation of relevant peptides to CTL, leading to reduced responses and delayed clearing of the inciting agent. Both hypotheses underscore the importance of antigen presentation to CTL in KD pathogenesis [1,2].

4.1. Amino acid variation in HLA-C

Single amino acid substitutions at critical positions in the peptide-binding groove are known to influence disease susceptibility and response to pathogens [3–5]. As an example, of the five positions that were oriented toward the peptide binding site (position 9, 73, 97, 99 and 116, Fig. 2), certain amino acids at positions 97, 99 and 116 have been linked to ankylosing spondylitis and graft versus host disease (GVHD) [24–26].

The strongest combined p-value was observed at position 73, which is located on the alpha 1-domain alpha helix at the edge of the antigen-binding groove. Amino acid changes that alter charge or hydrophobicity (Table 4) change the peptide-binding repertoire [4]. At position 73, the A allele (risk) of rs6906846 (HLA-C) is associated with the hydrophobic amino acid alanine (A) but the G allele (protective) is associated with the hydrophilic amino acid threonine (T) in both US and Japanese cohorts. At position 9, the A allele (risk) of rs6906846 (HLA-C) is associated with the negatively charged, hydrophilic amino acid, aspartic acid (D), but the G allele (protective) is associated with the neutral, hydrophobic amino acids phenylalanine (F) and tyrosine (Y) in both US and Japanese cohorts. These important amino acid changes would be expected to have a significant effect on peptide binding.

4.2. KD risk alleles and HLA-C peptide-binding specificities

The A (risk) allele at rs6906846 (HLA-C) was strongly linked to HLA-C*07:02, C*04:01, and C*12:02. The HLA type C*12:02 is not represented in US multi-ethnic populations and the frequency of this HLA type among the Japanese KD subjects was 15.3% compared to 11.2% among the Japanese population at large ($p = 3.5E-03$). This is intriguing given the 12-fold higher rate of KD in children of Japanese

Table 4
Location and character of amino acids associated with the A and G alleles at rs6906846.

Location	Amino acid characteristics										U.S. Cohort 1				Japanese Cohort 2				Combined
	Charge					Hydrophobia					rs6906846 allele				rs6906846 allele				
	Position	Amino acids	Negative	Positive	Neutral	Hydrophobic	Hydrophilic	A	G	P	A	G	P	A	G	P	A	G	
α 1 domain	<u>9</u>	D	X			X	X	24	14	4.0E-14	20	5	1.2E-16	20	5	1.2E-16	20	5	6.6E-28
		S		X	X	X	X	21	1		5	37		5	79		5	37	
		F		X	X	X	X	0	13		0	0		0	79		0	79	
		Y		X	X	X	X	3	30		3	21		21	129		21	129	
14	R	X			X	X	27	58	2.8E-09	41	250	7.5E-05	41	250	7.5E-05	41	250	2.0E-18	
	W		X	X	X	X	21	0		5	0		5	0		5	0		
49	A		X	X	X	X	27	58	2.8E-09	41	250	7.5E-05	41	250	7.5E-05	41	250	2.0E-18	
	E	X			X	X	21	0		5	0		5	0		5	0		
<u>73</u>	A		X	X	X	X	47	17	1.9E-14	46	6	9.4E-48	46	6	9.4E-48	46	6	7.7E-68	
	T		X	X	X	X	1	41		0	244		0	244		0	244		
90	A		X	X	X	X	1	44	2.8E-16	21	245	4.9E-19	21	245	4.9E-19	21	245	1.3E-41	
	D	X			X	X	47	14		25	5		25	5		25	5		
α 2 domain	<u>97</u>	R	X			X	48	31	4.7E-09	46	132	5.7E-12	46	132	5.7E-12	46	132	6.0E-22	
	W		X	X	X	X	0	26		0	118		0	118		0	118		
	S		X	X	X	X	0	1		0	0		0	0		0	0		
<u>99</u>	F		X	X	X	X	22	1	5.9E-25	5	37	6.1E-20	5	37	6.1E-20	5	37	6.1E-20	
	S		X	X	X	X	23	0		1	20		1	20		1	20		
	C		X	X	X	X	0	13		0	79		0	79		0	79		
	Y		X	X	X	X	3	44		3	21		3	21		3	21		
<u>116</u>	F		X	X	X	X	23	9	1.7E-09	5	38	5.4E-23	5	38	5.4E-23	5	38	9.3E-34	
	S		X	X	X	X	25	20		41	43		41	43		41	43		
	Y		X	X	X	X	0	27		0	157		0	157		0	157		
	L		X	X	X	X	0	2		0	12		0	12		0	12		

Bonferromi corrected p value threshold: 0.05/181 = 2.8E-04, Underlined bold: Residues pointing toward the peptide binding site and can interact with the peptide (van Deutekom & Keşmir 2015), Characteristics of amino acids (Harper's Illustrated Biochemistry (30th edition)).

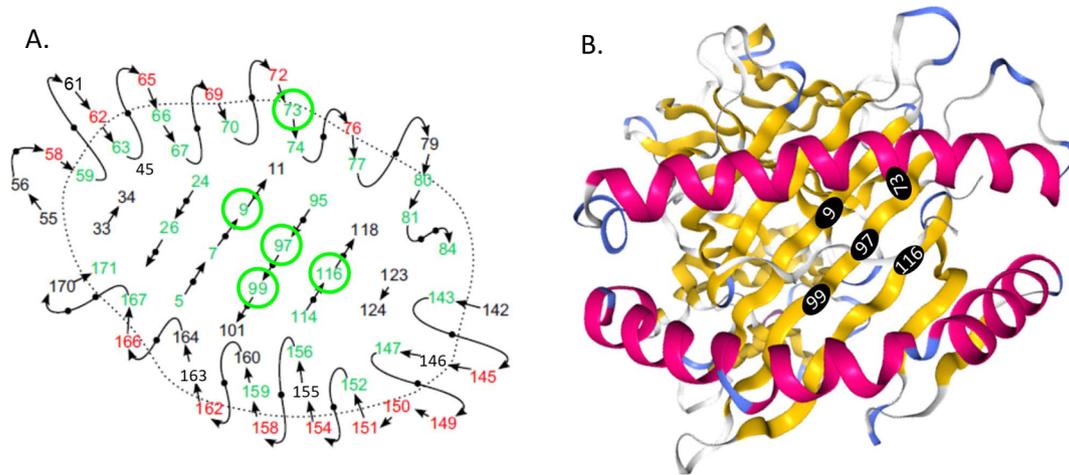


Fig 2. HLA-C amino acid position in the peptide binding groove associated with rs6906846 A/G (risk/protective). A schematic view of the peptide binding groove and amino acid positions (Adapted from van Deutekom & Keşmir 2015) (A). Residues pointing toward the peptide binding site can interact with the peptide and are colored in green. Residues pointing up from the peptide binding site can interact with the T cell receptor and are colored in red. The remaining residues are shown in black. The 3D structure of the HLA-C molecule (PDB id: 5VGE) and amino acid positions from the Protein Data Bank (PDB: <http://www.rcsb.org/3d-view/5VGE>) (B). Amino acid positions that are associated with rs6906846 A/G (risk/protective) and pointing towards the peptide binding groove are circled in green (A) and in black filled circles (B).

descent compared to the rate in a mixed ethnic KD cohort from the U.S. [27]. Because the peptide repertoire is restricted by HLA type-specific amino acid variation in the peptide-binding groove, amino acid differences between the A (risk)-associated and G (protection)-associated HLA-C types may be helpful in identifying KD-specific antigens. Peptide binding affinity between candidate peptides (8–14-mers) and HLA-C types of interest can be calculated. (<http://www.cbs.dtu.dk/services/NetMHC>) [28] (Fig. 4). In addition, a published analysis using the transmission disequilibrium test on 12 informative KD families showed over-transmission of HLA-C*15, which tagged with leucine in position 116 that is located in the middle of the peptide binding groove of the HLA-C molecule [11]. The environmental or infectious trigger for KD may contain peptides with configurations that are preferentially presented by these KD-associated HLA-C types.

4.3. Strengths and limitations

A genetic pathway approach allowed us to discover HLA class I intergenic SNVs associated with KD susceptibility in both European descent and Japanese subjects. Because there were no available European GWAS datasets on which to perform replication, we used a Japanese GWAS to test for the association between SNVs and KD. Differences in LD structure between the two populations may have prevented us from replicating additional HLA variants identified through the pathway and gene stability analyses. Since association of these intergenic SNVs was discovered in ethnically diverse populations, we did not adjust for the population structure in subsequent analysis of tagged amino acids. Also, the minor allele frequency of rs2254556 was low, so it was difficult to assess whether the associations were lacking

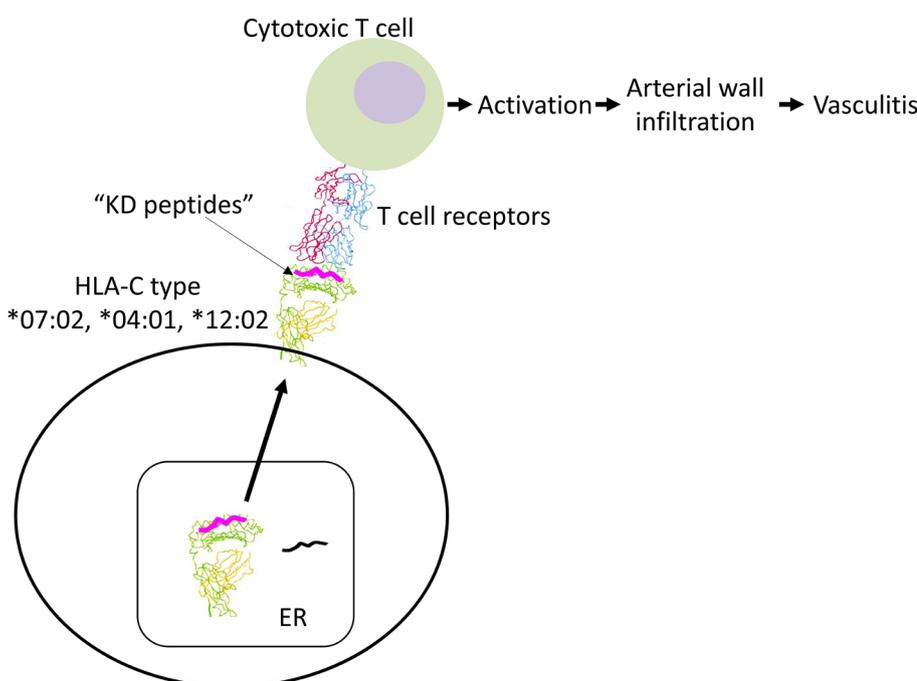


Fig 3. Hypothesis for effect of risk alleles in HLA-C on KD pathogenesis. We propose distinct mechanisms by which the risk alleles described here may affect KD susceptibility due to preferential binding of KD pathogen-derived peptides in the HLA-C antigen binding groove. The amino acids associated with the HLA-C risk allele may preferentially bind to KD antigen-derived peptides leading to T cell activation and arterial wall infiltration of CD8+ cytotoxic T cells. ER: endoplasmic reticulum.

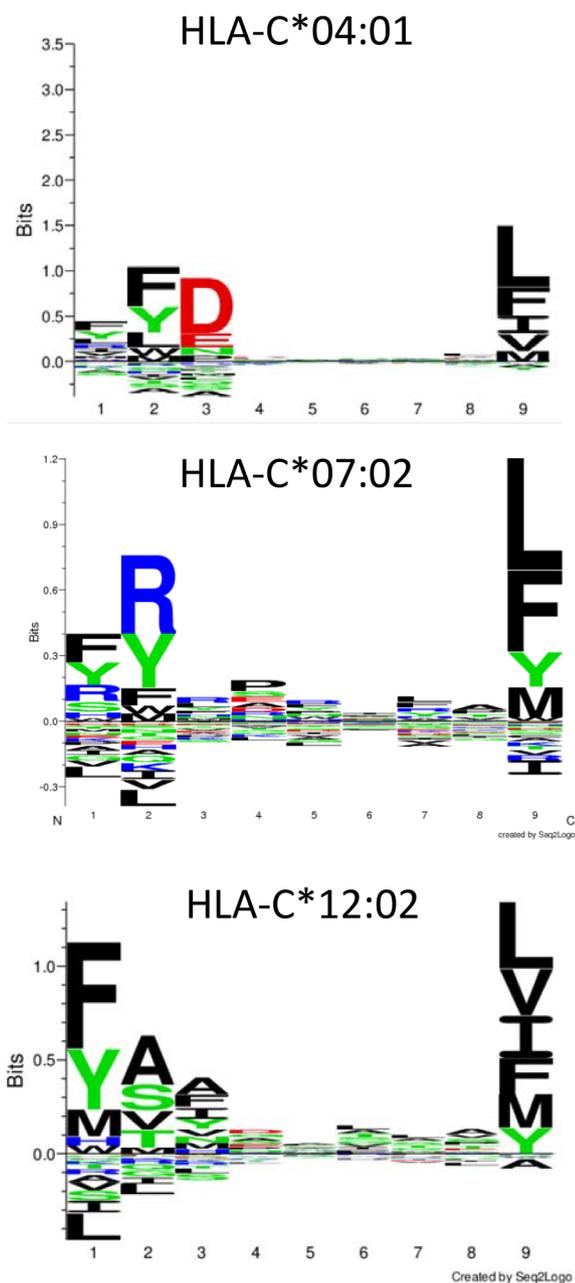


Fig 4. Amino acid sequence of peptide nonamers that preferentially bind to HLA-C*04:01, C*07:02 and C*12:02. <http://www.cbs.dtu.dk/services/NetMHC> (4.0 server).

due to the small sample size, the low number of polymorphic alleles, or a true lack of association. Two SNVs (rs2596551 and 2523535) in HLA-B did not make the statistical cut-off of $p < 0.05$ in Japanese cohort. However, there was a similar trend of association in both European descent cohort 1 and Japanese cohort 2. Future analysis of association between these SNVs and HLA-type is needed. An additional limitation of our study was the small sample size, which precluded a meaningful analysis of genotype vs. disease outcome (coronary artery status and response to treatment). High-resolution HLA typing was available for only a small number of our KD subjects. Enrichment of our mixed ethnicity Cohort 1 for individuals homozygous for the risk allele precluded a comparison to population frequencies of the associated HLA types in each individual ethnic group. Although interactions between HLA A, B and C and KIR genes have been reported in association with KD susceptibility, the KIR loci and HLA/KIR epistasis were not explored in the current study [23,29].

5. Conclusion

Association of KD susceptibility with two SNVs in the HLA class I in European and Japanese GWAS datasets highlights the importance of HLA-C-mediated antigen presentation in KD pathogenesis. These SNVs were associated with specific high-resolution HLA-C types suggesting an influence on peptide binding. These risk SNVs may mediate the preferential binding of “KD-associated peptides” derived from the environmental trigger, which are presented to CTL and/or are involved in NK cell regulation. Future studies should focus on HLA class I pathway genes in existing KD GWAS databases and high-resolution class I HLA typing in KD populations.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

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