Presence of exoU and exoS Genes in Pseudomonas aeruginosa Isolated from Urinary Tract Infections

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1. Background

Pseudomonas aeruginosa is a gram-negative, aerobic, oxidase-positive, non-fermentative, motile, rod-shaped bacterium that inhabits a wide range of environments, such as water, soil, the rhizosphere, and animals. It is also known as a frequent opportunistic pathogen in both animals and human (1-3). The P. aeruginosa is considered an opportunistic pathogen; several reports indicate that the organism can also cause infections in healthy hosts. Four effector proteins have been described in P. aeruginosa: exoU, exoS, exoT, and exoY. These genes that are translated into protein products related to type III secretion systems.

Materials and Methods: A total of 134 samples were isolated, and P. aeruginosa was identified using biochemical tests. Bacterial genomic DNA was extracted, and the presence of the exoS and exoU genes were detected by PCR. Biofilms were formed by culturing P. aeruginosa on glass slides in rich medium.

Results: The exoU (73%), exoS (62%) genes were detected from infections caused by P. aeruginosa in urinary tract infection patients. Among the 119 strains isolated from patients with urinary tract infections.

Conclusion: An improved understanding of virulence genes and biofilm formation in P. aeruginosa may facilitate the future development of novel vaccines and drug treatments.

Keywords: Pseudomonas aeruginosa, exoU, exoS, Urinary tract infection, Biofilm

2. Objectives

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between genes (exoS and exoU genes), biofilm formation, and create disease. The present study was to characterize the environmental bacterial genus with the human body as one of its habitats. Because of its high intrinsic antibiotic resistance and its ability to develop new resistances during antibiotic treatment, infections with P. aeruginosa are difficult to eradicate (19). Their multidrug resistant strains are normally intractable in any infectious episode, including urinary tract infection, suppurring wounds, or bloodstream infections, thereby causing a fear of the onset of various ailments in people of all age groups (20). To promote severe illness, P. aeruginosa uses a type III secretion system to inject toxic effector proteins into the cytoplasm of eukaryotic cells. To date, four effector proteins have been described in P. aeruginosa: exoU, exoS, exoT and exoY (21, 22). These genes that are translated into protein products are related to type III secretion systems (TSS). These products have been demonstrated to show a cytotoxic effect in vitro (23). Furthermore, in clinical studies, the presence of these toxins is associated with a dissatisfaction clinical outcome among patients with P. aeruginosa infection (24). The ExoU is a 74 kDa, hydrophilic, and slightly acidic protein with a PI of 5.9. The ExoU is an important virulence factor of P. aeruginosa, and causes rapid cell death during in vitro infections (25, 26). A recent study with a mutant with a specific deletion in the exoS structural gene failed to detect a contribution of exoS to virulence in a model (21). Genes encoding the cytotoxic exoS are present as variable traits and are mutually exclusive in most strains (27).
presence of the exoS and exoU genes in clinically isolated P. aeruginosa strains. An improved understanding of these virulence factors is important for the future development of vaccines, because P. aeruginosa is an opportunistic bacterium that is resistant to common antibiotics.

### 3. Materials and Methods

A total of 134 strains of P. aeruginosa bacteria were collected from UTIs of 325 hospitalized patients in Tehran. Bacteria were isolated from 85 female and 49 male patients; the patients were aged between 36 and 71 years.

#### 3.1. Bacterial strains and growth condition

Samples were cultured on cetrimide agar for 24 hours. Gram-negative bacillus was recognized by gram staining, then catalase and oxidase tests were done. If these tests were positive, bacteria were recognized by SIM for detection of motility, indol and H2S production. Other biochemical tests including triple sugar iron (TSI), methyl red-Voges-Proskauer (MR-VP), oxidase fermentation (OF), urease broth, citrate tests, lysine and ornithine decarboxylase and growth in 42°C were done for detection of P. aeruginosa. All strains were stored in Luria Bertani (LB) containing 20% glycerol at -20°C. Single colonies were grown in 50 ml LB medium at 37°C for 24 hours with shaking. After incubation, 1.5 ml of medium was transferred to a new test tube and centrifugation was carried out at 12000rpm for 1min at 4°C. Supernatants were discarded and when precipitate of bacteria was low, this process was repeated 2 or 3 times. The chromosomal bacterial genome was extracted through DNA purification kit (MBST Inc., Iran) and stored at -20°C for further experiments.

#### 3.2. PCR-based genotyping assays

The oligonucleotide primers used in this study are presented in Table 1. To design these primers first nucleotide sequence of genes were blasted in NCBI site. PCR amplification was performed in a total volume of 25 μL in 0.5 ml tubes containing 1μg of the extracted DNA sample, 1μM of each four primers, 2mM MgCl2, 200μM deoxynucleoside triphosphates, 2.5μL of 10X PCR buffer (10mM Tris-HCl, 1.5mM MgCl2, 50mM KCl [pH 8.3]) and 1 unit of Taq DNA polymerase (Roche Applied Science, Germany). All oligonucleotide primers were synthesized by CinaGene (CinaGene Co, Tehran, Iran). Amplification was carried out by using the Mastercycler Gradient Thermal Cycler (Eppendorf, Germany) with the programs which have been shown in Table 2. PCR (for exoU) was performed by use of pfu proofreading polymerase (Stratagene, United States), according to the following protocol: 94°C for 10 min, then 25 cycles at 94°C for 30s, 56°C for 45s and 72°C for 45s, then a final extension at 72°C for 10 min. Also, PCR (for exoS) was performed by use of pfu proofreading polymerase (Stratagene, United States), according to the following protocol: 94°C for 10 min, then 25 cycles at 94°C for 30s, 58°C for 45s and 72°C for 45s, followed by a final extension at 72°C for 10 min. To investigate the reaction product, 5μl of each product was transferred on 1% agarose gel to Electrophores. They were stained with Ethidium Bromide and photographed.

### 3.3. Biofilms

In the present study, biofilms were formed on glass slides. First, the slides were sterilized at 121°C. From a fresh culture of bacteria (18-24 hours) that has represented equivalent to 0.5 Macfarland, about 200μl was removed and added to 20ml BHI broth in a tube. Then it was poured into a sterile plate with one glass slide and stored at 37°C for 6, 24, 48, 72 and 120 hours. After a period of time set, slides were removed slowly with sterile forceps and were gently shaken in distilled water until BHI broth was washed on surface slides. Slides were then dried at room temperature for at least 30min. Then, the slides were stained with safranin or without staining were observed under light and phase contrast microscope.

### 4. Results

A total of 134 strains of P. aeruginosa were isolated from 325 hospitalized patients with UTI. From all of the strains in this study 119 P. aeruginosa (88%) produced green-blue pigments after cultivation on cetrimide agar medium. Bacterial colonies were dispersed. For detection of exoS and the exoU genes PCR reaction was done and the following results were obtained. PCR results of exoS gene (204 bp) are shown in Figure 1. Also, PCR results of exoU gene (230bp) are shown in Figure 2.
Moreover, all strains isolated from UTI patients formed biofilms. After five days biofilm structure showed vertical growth and the formation of water channels. The image of the *P. aeruginosa* biofilm after 5 days was photographed (Figure3). Prevalence of *exoU* and *exoS* genes in patients with urinary tract infections caused by *P. aeruginosa* is shown in Figure4. Four different modes including: *exoU*+/*exoS*+, *exoU*+/*exoS*−, *exoU*−/exoS+ and *exoU*/*exoS* were observed. In contrast, 11% of UTIs caused by *exoU*/exoS bacteria. In contrast, *exoS* genes were seen in UTIs in 16% of the infections. Statistical analysis of these two genes is shown in Figure 4.

**Figure 3.** biofilm formation by *P. aeruginosa* with (A) optical microscope and (B) opposite phase microscopy (After 5 days).

5. Discussion

Several factors are involved in causing diseases including the induced genes encoded regulators, transporters, biosynthetic enzymes and other proteins of unknown function. The majority of genes differentially expressed in biofilms grown under different conditions are related to pathogenesis in human (28). The overall observed gene regulation principle has indicated strong treatment limitation under pathogenic conditions (29). Urinary tract infections occur in both hospital and in community (30). *P. aeruginosa* is an ubiquitous environmental bacterium responsible for a variety of infection in human as well as urinary tract infections (31). *P. aeruginosa* utilizes the TTSS to deliver effector toxins (exoS, *exoU*, *exoY*, and *exoT*) directly into host cells, which can cause rapid cell necrosis or can modulate the actin cytoskeleton, allowing the pathogen to invade the host cells and evade phagocytosis depending on the disease site or patient background. The genes encoding the cytotoxins *exoU* and *exoS* are present as variable traits and are mutually exclusive in most strains (32, 33).

The relative virulence associated with each of these effector proteins are important since clinical isolates of *P. aeruginosa* commonly fall into one of the following four phenotypic categories: Patients with both gene expressions is an infection caused by *P. aeruginosa* (*exoU*+ and *exoS*+). Statistical analysis of both genes is shown in Figure 4.

Those strains that were incapable of type III secretion and therefore do not secrete *exoU*, *exoS*, *exoT* may be the least virulent. Both *exoS* and *exoT* have been implicated in the induction of apoptosis in vitro (34, 35). The role of *exoS* and *exoT* in *P. aeruginosa* keratitis is almost entirely due to the ADA ribosyltransferase activities that appear to have non-redundant roles in bacterial survival in neutrophils, and in the induction of neutrophil apoptosis. To date, only fully enzymatic and catalytically inactive *exoU* proteins have been examined for phospholipase activity (21, 25). These results indicate that *exoU* is a predominant cytotoxin of *P. aeruginosa* (36, 37). Expression of virulence factors in *P. aeruginosa* is under comprehensive regulation, and in vitro expression does not necessarily reflect expression during infection processes. One notable exception was the isolates from urinary tract infections, all of which had the *exoS* gene but lacked *exoU* (38, 39). Increased *exoS* activity in urinary tract isolates was recently demonstrated which, combined with our findings, indicates that this exo enzyme may be important in the pathogenesis of urinary tract infections caused by *P. aeruginosa*. The *exoU* production was recently shown to be associated with increased virulence in a murine model of acute pneumonia and systemic spread in accordance with the hypothesis that cytotoxicity plays a role in dissemination of *P. aeruginosa* (40-42).

6. Conclusion

Based on the results of this study, it is suggested to find ways to prevent *exoU* gene activity in order to prevent biofilm formation, especially in burn patients with high mortality. It is likely for *exoS* gene to play an important role in the infections caused by *P. aeruginosa*. Due to the advantages of molecular methods in the diagnosis of opportunistic pathogenic bacteria, it could be convenient and swift technique to prevent the progress of infections and mortality among these patients.

**Conflict of Interests**

The authors declare they have no conflict of interests.