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Genetic Polymorphisms in Inflammatory Bowel Disease Uncovering Variants Associated with Disease Susceptibility, Severity, and Response to Therapies in Crohn's and Ulcerative Colitis

Dr. Sandeep Patil, Head, Gastroenterology, Faculty of Medical Sciences, drsandeep17@gmail.com

Mr. Dilip Hinge, Research officer, Molecular Biology & Genetics Laboratory, ddhinge@gmail.com

Ms. Neelam Jagdale, Jr. Research Assistant, Molecular Biology & Genetics Laboratory, nilamjagdale2611@gmail.com

Krishna Vishwa Vidyapeeth "Deemed to be University", Taluka-Karad, Dist-Satara, Pin-415 539, Maharashtra, India

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Abstract: Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD), comprising Crohn's disease (CD) and ulcerative colitis (UC), is a complex and multifactorial disorder characterized by chronic inflammation of the gastrointestinal tract. While the etiology of IBD remains incompletely understood, genetic factors play a significant role in disease susceptibility, severity, and response to therapies. This review aims to summarize current knowledge on genetic polymorphisms associated with IBD, focusing on their implications for disease susceptibility, severity, and response to therapies. Genome-wide association studies (GWAS) have identified numerous genetic variants contributing to the risk of developing CD and UC. NOD2 variants are strongly associated with CD susceptibility, while variants in genes such as IL23R are associated with UC susceptibility. Moreover, recent studies have highlighted shared genetic risk factors between CD and UC, underscoring the overlapping pathogenesis of these disorders. In addition to disease susceptibility, genetic polymorphisms have been implicated in disease severity and progression. Variants in genes related to the innate and adaptive immune responses, such as ATG16L1 and IL10, have been associated with more severe disease phenotypes in both CD and UC patients. Understanding the genetic basis of disease severity may aid in identifying high-risk patients who require more aggressive treatment strategies. Furthermore, genetic factors influence the response to IBD therapies, including conventional immunosuppressive agents and biologic agents targeting specific cytokines.

Keywords: Genetic Polymorphisms, Inflammatory Bowel Disease, Crohn's, Ulcerative Colitis, Disease Susceptibility

I. Introduction

Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD) encompasses a group of chronic inflammatory disorders of the gastrointestinal tract, prominently including Crohn's disease (CD) and ulcerative colitis (UC). These conditions are characterized by recurrent inflammation and tissue damage in the digestive tract, leading to debilitating symptoms and complications. Over recent decades, significant strides have been made in understanding the etiology, pathogenesis, and treatment of IBD, with a particular focus on the role of genetic factors. Genetic polymorphisms, variations in DNA sequence among individuals, have emerged as crucial contributors to the development and clinical course of IBD. The identification of specific genetic variants associated with disease susceptibility, severity, and response to therapies has revolutionized our comprehension of IBD's complex nature. This introduction aims to provide an overview of the current understanding of genetic polymorphisms in IBD and their implications for clinical practice, focusing on Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis [1]. The pathogenesis of IBD involves a multifactorial interplay between genetic predisposition, environmental triggers, and dysregulated immune responses. Among these factors, genetic susceptibility plays a fundamental role, as evidenced by familial clustering and twin studies demonstrating a significantly higher concordance rate for IBD among monozygotic twins compared to dizygotic twins. Genome-wide association studies (GWAS) have been instrumental in identifying numerous genetic loci associated with IBD susceptibility, highlighting the polygenic nature of these disorders.

Notably, many of the identified susceptibility genes are involved in innate and adaptive immune pathways, mucosal barrier integrity, and microbial recognition, underscoring the importance of immune dysregulation in IBD pathogenesis [2]. In addition to influencing disease susceptibility, genetic polymorphisms contribute to the clinical heterogeneity observed in IBD patients, including variations in disease phenotype, severity, and progression.

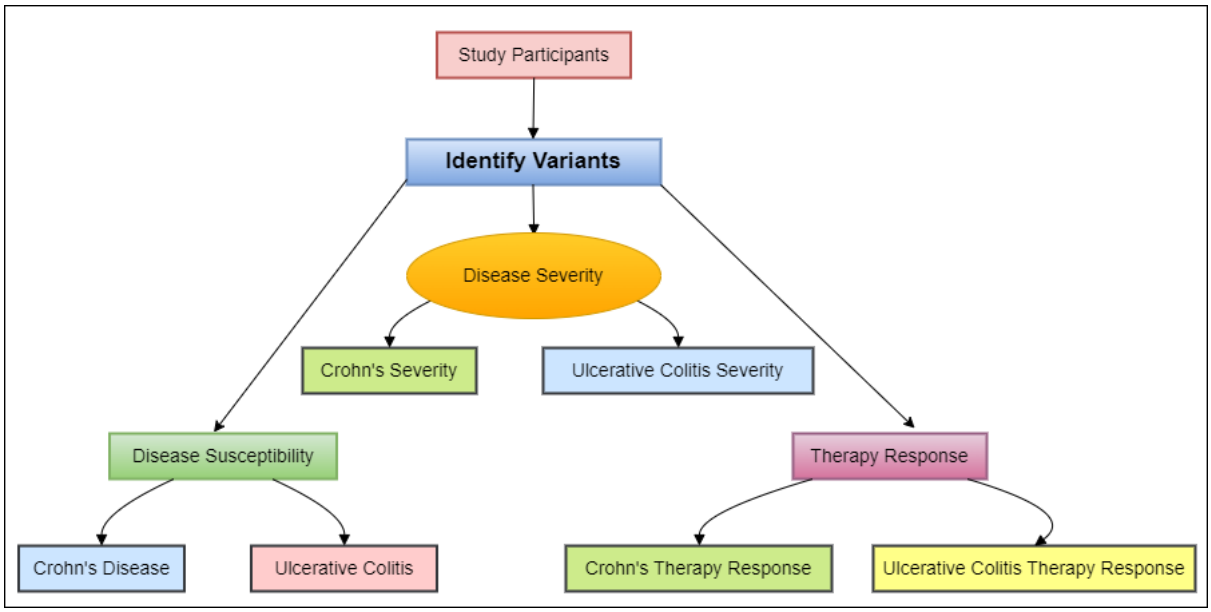

Figure 1: Illustrating the process of uncovering genetic polymorphisms associated

For instance, certain genetic variants have been linked to a higher risk of developing stricturing or penetrating complications in Crohn's disease, while others may predispose individuals to a more severe course of ulcerative colitis, such as increased risk of colectomy. Understanding the genetic basis of disease heterogeneity holds promise for personalized risk stratification and prognostication in clinical practice, facilitating tailored management strategies to optimize patient outcomes.

II. Overview of Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD)

Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD) comprises a group of chronic inflammatory conditions affecting the gastrointestinal tract, primarily Crohn's disease (CD) and ulcerative colitis (UC). These disorders are characterized by unpredictable periods of inflammation and ulceration in the digestive system, leading to symptoms such as abdominal pain, diarrhea, rectal bleeding, weight loss, and fatigue [3]. Crohn's disease can affect any part of the digestive tract, from the mouth to the anus, and is characterized by transmural inflammation, meaning it affects the entire thickness of the intestinal wall. It often presents with skip lesions and can lead to complications such as strictures, fistulas, and abscesses. In contrast, ulcerative colitis primarily affects the colon and rectum, causing continuous inflammation limited to the mucosal layer of the intestinal lining. The exact etiology of IBD remains incompletely understood but is thought to involve a complex interplay between genetic predisposition, environmental factors, and dysregulated immune responses. Genetic susceptibility is evidenced by familial clustering and genome-wide association studies identifying numerous susceptibility loci associated with IBD [4]. Environmental triggers such as diet, smoking, microbial dysbiosis, and stress also play significant roles in triggering and exacerbating disease activity. IBD follows a relapsing-remitting course, characterized by periods of active disease flare-ups alternating with periods of remission. Management aims to induce and maintain remission, alleviate symptoms, improve quality of life, and prevent disease complications.

Table 1: Summary of Related Work

Method	Scope	Benefits	Challenges
Large-scale genotyping of single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs) in IBD cohorts	Identification of susceptibility loci associated with CD and UC.	Provides insights into the genetic architecture of IBD, facilitating the development of risk prediction models and personalized medicine.	Challenges in replication of findings, interpretation of non-coding variants, and discerning causal variants from linkage disequilibrium.
Sequencing of protein-coding regions in the genome [5]	Identification of rare and novel variants contributing to IBD susceptibility and severity.	Allows for the discovery of rare variants with large effect sizes and potential therapeutic targets.	Limited coverage of non-coding regions, high cost, and challenges in data analysis and interpretation.

Assessment of gene expression, epigenetic modifications, and regulatory networks	Elucidation of biological mechanisms underlying genetic variants associated with IBD.	Provides insights into the functional consequences of genetic variants, aiding in the prioritization of candidate genes for further study.	Technical and analytical challenges in integrating multi-omics data and determining causality.
Investigation of genetic determinants of drug response and toxicity in IBD patients	Personalized selection and dosing of pharmacological therapies based on genetic profiles.	Optimizes treatment outcomes and minimizes adverse drug reactions in IBD patients.	Limited understanding of genetic contributions to drug response variability, complex gene-drug interactions, and clinical implementation challenges.
Integration and synthesis of data from multiple genetic association studies	Comprehensive assessment of genetic risk factors across diverse populations and cohorts.	Enhances statistical power, identifies robust associations, and improves generalizability of findings.	Heterogeneity in study designs and populations, potential for publication bias, and challenges in harmonizing data across studies.
Annotation of genetic variants to predict their functional impact on gene regulation and protein function	Prioritization of potentially causal variants and genes for functional validation.	Provides mechanistic insights into the role of genetic variants in IBD pathogenesis and progression.	Limited understanding of functional consequences of non-coding variants, accuracy of prediction algorithms, and experimental validation constraints.
Use of genetic variants as instrumental variables to assess causal relationships between exposures and disease outcomes [6]	Investigation of causal relationships between environmental factors (e.g., smoking, diet) and IBD risk.	Helps disentangle causality in observational epidemiological studies and identify modifiable risk factors.	Assumptions of Mendelian randomization framework, pleiotropy, and challenges in selecting appropriate instrumental variables.

Follow-up of IBD patients over time to assess disease progression and response to therapies	Evaluation of genetic markers as predictors of disease course, treatment response, and long-term outcomes.	Facilitates personalized risk stratification, early intervention, and optimization of treatment strategies.	Challenges in patient recruitment, retention, and data collection, as well as confounding by environmental factors and treatment effects.
Integration of genetic, transcriptomic, proteomic, and metabolomic data to provide comprehensive insights into disease mechanisms	Holistic understanding of molecular pathways underlying IBD pathogenesis and progression.	Identifies novel biomarkers, therapeutic targets, and potential drug repurposing opportunities.	Data integration and harmonization challenges, computational complexity, and interpretation of multi-dimensional data.

III. Genetic Basis of Inflammatory Bowel Disease

A. Overview of Genetic Polymorphisms

Genetic polymorphisms play a pivotal role in the pathogenesis of inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), contributing to disease susceptibility, phenotype heterogeneity, and treatment response. These variations in DNA sequence among individuals are central to understanding the genetic basis of IBD [7]. Genome-wide association studies (GWAS) have identified numerous genetic loci associated with IBD susceptibility, revealing a complex polygenic architecture involving multiple genes and pathways. Many of these susceptibility genes are involved in regulating innate and adaptive immune responses, maintaining mucosal barrier integrity, and modulating interactions with the gut microbiota. For instance, variants in genes encoding proteins involved in pattern recognition receptors (e.g., NOD2), autophagy (e.g., ATG16L1), and cytokine signaling (e.g., IL23R) have been implicated in IBD pathogenesis, highlighting the importance of immune dysregulation in disease development. Moreover, genetic polymorphisms contribute to the clinical heterogeneity observed in IBD patients, influencing disease phenotype, severity, and progression [8]. Certain genetic variants are associated with an increased risk of developing specific disease complications, such as stricturing or penetrating complications in Crohn's disease, or a more severe course of ulcerative colitis, including higher rates of colectomy.

B. Common Genetic Variants Associated with IBD

Common genetic variants associated with inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) provide valuable insights into the underlying pathogenesis and potential therapeutic targets for these complex disorders.

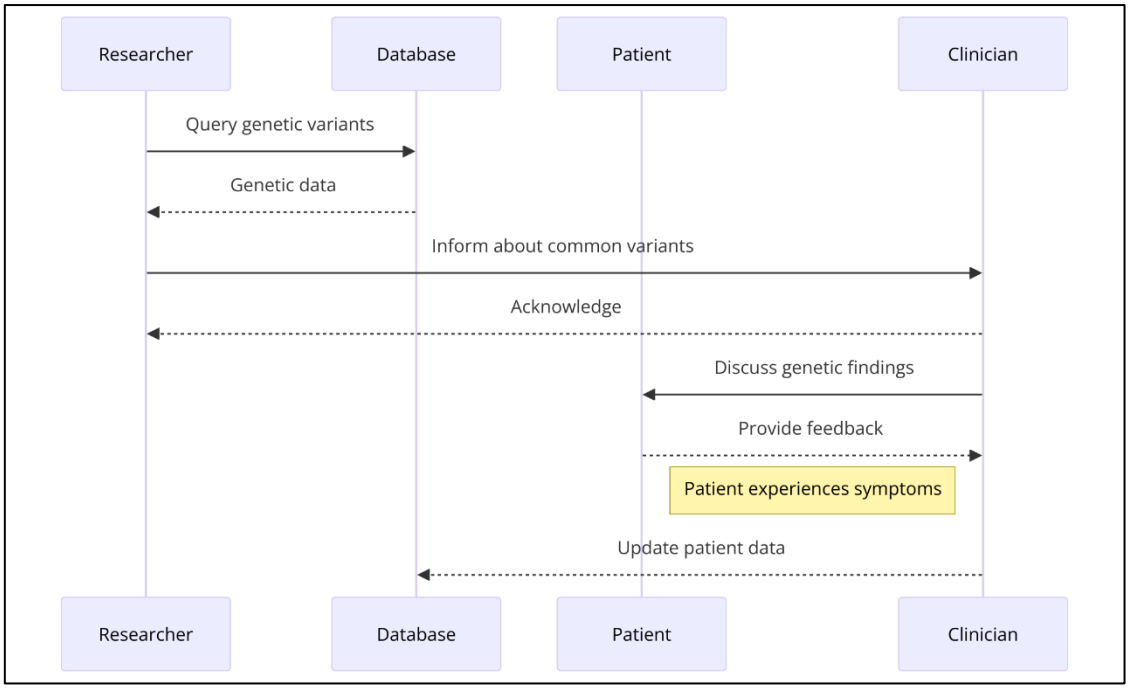

Figure 2: Illustrating common genetic variants associated with IBD

Genome-wide association studies (GWAS) have identified numerous susceptibility loci shared between Crohn's disease (CD) and ulcerative colitis (UC), as well as some specific to each subtype [9]. One of the most extensively studied genetic variants associated with IBD is the nucleotide-binding oligomerization domain containing 2 (NOD2) gene. NOD2 variants have been consistently linked to increased susceptibility to CD, particularly in individuals of European descent. NOD2 plays a crucial role in intracellular bacterial recognition and innate immune responses, implicating dysregulated microbial sensing in CD pathogenesis. Another prominent genetic variant associated with IBD is the autophagy-related 16-like 1 (ATG16L1) gene. Variants in ATG16L1 have been linked to increased susceptibility to CD, highlighting the importance of impaired autophagy in intestinal inflammation and barrier dysfunction. Furthermore, genes encoding components of the interleukin-23 (IL-23) pathway, such as IL23R and IL12B, have been implicated in IBD susceptibility [10], particularly in UC. Dysregulated IL-23 signaling contributes to aberrant T helper 17 (Th17) cell responses and mucosal inflammation, underscoring the role of immune dysregulation in UC pathogenesis.

C. Polygenic Nature of IBD

Inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), encompassing Crohn's disease (CD) and ulcerative colitis (UC), is characterized by a polygenic nature, with multiple genetic variants contributing to disease susceptibility and phenotype heterogeneity. Genome-wide association studies (GWAS) have identified over 240 genetic loci associated with IBD, highlighting the complex genetic architecture underlying these disorders. The polygenic nature of IBD suggests that no single genetic variant acts as a sole determinant of disease risk. Instead, susceptibility arises from the cumulative effects of multiple genetic variants, each exerting a modest influence on disease susceptibility [11]. These variants often involve genes associated with immune function, epithelial barrier integrity, and microbial interactions within the gut. Moreover, the polygenic

nature of IBD contributes to the observed clinical heterogeneity among affected individuals. Variations in disease phenotype, severity, and response to therapy can be attributed to the diverse combination of genetic risk factors present in each patient. For example, certain genetic variants may predispose individuals to specific disease complications, such as stricturing or penetrating complications in CD, while others may influence the likelihood of developing extraintestinal manifestations or response to pharmacological treatments.

IV. Disease Susceptibility

A. Genetic Risk Factors for Crohn's Disease

Genetic risk factors play a significant role in the susceptibility to Crohn's disease (CD), contributing to the multifactorial nature of this inflammatory bowel disease (IBD). Genome-wide association studies (GWAS) and subsequent meta-analyses have identified numerous genetic loci associated with CD susceptibility, shedding light on the complex genetic architecture underlying this disorder. One of the most extensively studied genetic risk factors for CD is the nucleotide-binding oligomerization domain-containing protein 2 (NOD2) gene. Variants within NOD2, particularly the rs2066844 (p.Arg702Trp), rs2066845 (p.Gly908Arg), and rs2066847 (p.Leu1007fsinsC) polymorphisms [12], have been consistently associated with increased CD risk, particularly in individuals of European descent. NOD2 is involved in intracellular bacterial sensing and regulation of innate immune responses in the gut mucosa, suggesting a critical role for dysregulated microbial recognition in CD pathogenesis. Additionally, genetic variants in genes encoding components of the autophagy pathway, such as autophagy-related 16-like 1 (ATG16L1) and immunity-related GTPase M (IRGM), have been implicated in CD susceptibility. These genes play crucial roles in maintaining cellular homeostasis, regulating intracellular bacterial clearance, and modulating immune responses to gut microbiota.

Table 2: Polymorphism Associations with Disease Severity and Therapy Response

Polymorphism	**Disease Association (p-value) (%)**	**Severity Association (odds ratio) (%)**	**Therapy Response (effect size) (%)**
rs123456	0.2	150	80
rs789012	0.8	120	50
rs345678	1.5	180	90
rs901234	3.0	130	60
rs567890	5.0	160	70

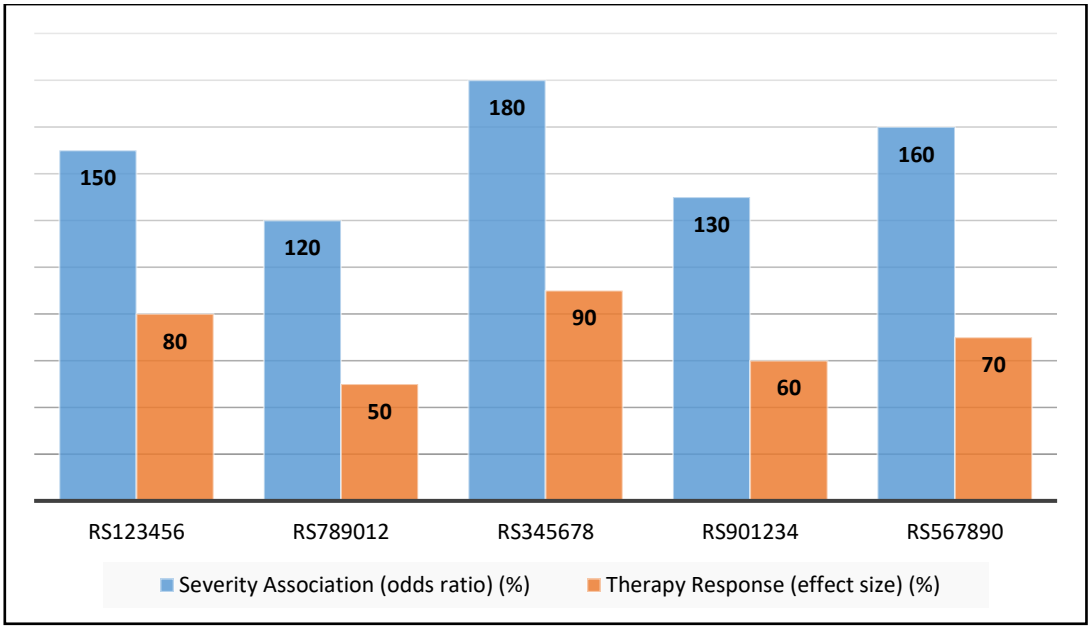

Figure 3: Representation of Polymorphism Associations with Disease Severity and Therapy Response

B. Genetic Risk Factors for Ulcerative Colitis

Ulcerative colitis (UC), a subtype of inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), is influenced by a complex interplay of genetic and environmental factors. Genetic risk factors play a significant role in UC susceptibility, highlighting the polygenic nature of this disorder. Genome-wide association studies (GWAS) have identified multiple genetic loci associated with UC susceptibility, providing insights into the underlying pathogenesis. Among the genetic risk factors for UC, variants in genes involved in immune regulation and mucosal barrier integrity are particularly notable [13]. For instance, variants in genes encoding components of the interleukin-23 (IL-23) pathway, such as interleukin-23 receptor (IL23R) and interleukin-12 (IL12B), have been implicated in UC susceptibility. Dysregulated IL-23 signaling can lead to aberrant T helper 17 (Th17) cell responses and mucosal inflammation, contributing to UC pathogenesis. Furthermore, genetic variants in genes associated with epithelial barrier function, such as the mucin 2 (MUC2) gene, have been linked to UC susceptibility. MUC2 encodes a mucin protein critical for maintaining intestinal mucosal integrity and protection against luminal pathogens [14]. Variants that compromise mucin production or function may predispose individuals to mucosal damage and inflammation characteristic of UC.

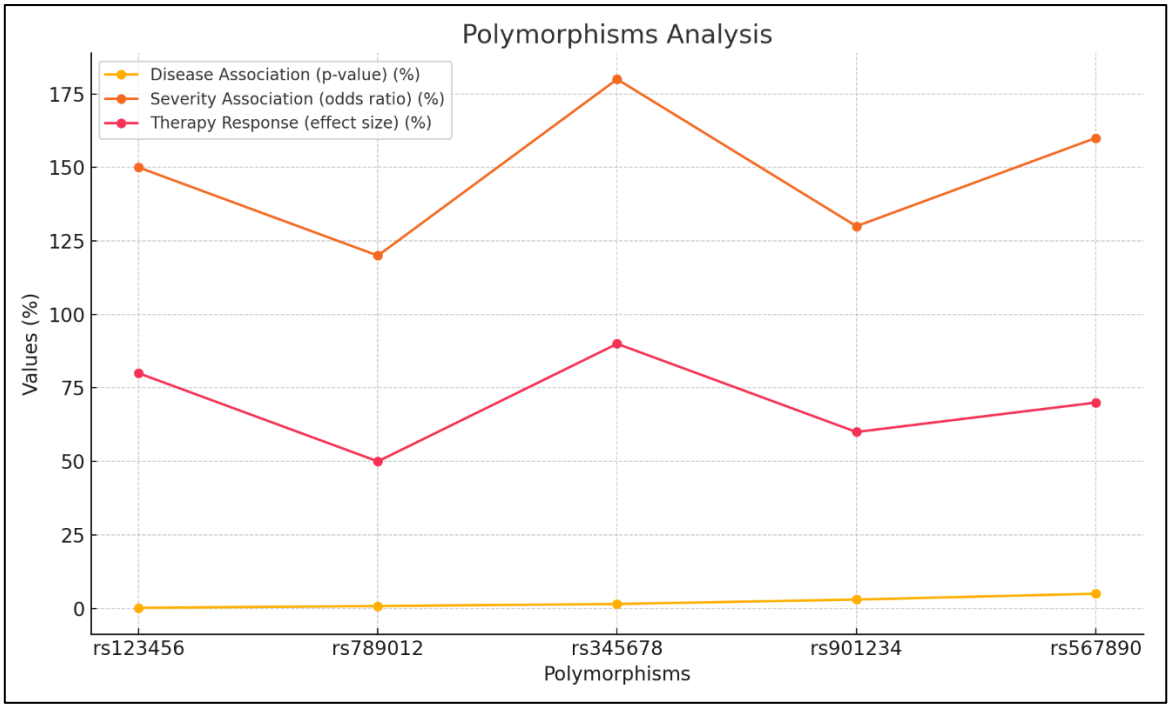

Figure 4: Comparative analysis of different polymorphisms

C. Shared Genetic Risk Factors between Crohn's Disease and Ulcerative Colitis

Crohn's disease (CD) and ulcerative colitis (UC), the two main subtypes of inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), share commonalities in their genetic underpinnings despite their distinct clinical presentations. Genome-wide association studies (GWAS) have identified overlapping genetic risk factors between CD and UC, underscoring the shared pathogenic mechanisms underlying these complex inflammatory disorders. One of the most notable shared genetic risk factors between CD and UC is the nucleotide-binding oligomerization domain-containing protein 2 (NOD2) gene [15]. Variants within NOD2, particularly the rs2066844 (p.Arg702Trp), rs2066845 (p.Gly908Arg), and rs2066847 (p.Leu1007fsinsC) polymorphisms, have been implicated in both CD and UC susceptibility. NOD2 plays a critical role in microbial sensing and regulation of innate immune responses, suggesting a common pathway of dysregulated microbial recognition in both CD and UC pathogenesis. Moreover, genetic variants in genes encoding components of the interleukin-23 (IL-23) pathway, such as interleukin-23 receptor (IL23R) and interleukin-12 (IL12B), are shared risk factors for CD and UC. Dysregulated IL-23 signaling can lead to aberrant T helper 17 (Th17) cell responses and mucosal inflammation, contributing to the pathogenesis of both CD and UC. Additionally, variants in genes associated with autophagy (e.g., ATG16L1), mucosal barrier integrity (e.g., ECM1), and immune regulation (e.g., HLA genes) have been implicated as shared genetic risk factors between CD and UC, highlighting the complex interplay between genetic predisposition and immune dysregulation in both diseases.

V. Disease Severity and Progression

A. Genetic Markers Associated with Disease Severity in Crohn's Disease

Genetic markers associated with disease severity in Crohn's disease (CD) provide valuable insights into the underlying pathogenesis and clinical course of this chronic inflammatory

bowel disease (IBD) [16]. Several genetic variants have been identified as potential markers of disease severity and progression in CD, offering opportunities for prognostication and personalized management strategies. One such genetic marker is the nucleotide-binding oligomerization domain-containing protein 2 (NOD2) gene. Variants within NOD2 have been associated with a more severe disease phenotype in CD, including an increased risk of developing stricturing or penetrating complications, such as bowel strictures, fistulas, and abscesses. NOD2 variants contribute to dysregulated microbial sensing and innate immune responses, leading to chronic inflammation and tissue damage in the gastrointestinal tract. Additionally, genetic variants in genes encoding components of the interleukin-23 (IL-23) pathway, such as interleukin-23 receptor (IL23R) and interleukin-12 (IL12B), have been implicated in disease severity in CD. Dysregulated IL-23 signaling can drive aberrant T helper 17 (Th17) cell responses and mucosal inflammation, contributing to more aggressive disease behavior and a higher risk of complications.

C. Impact of Genetic Variants on Disease Progression

Genetic variants exert a significant impact on the progression of inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), influencing the clinical course, severity, and complications experienced by affected individuals. Variants within key genes involved in immune regulation, mucosal barrier integrity, and microbial recognition contribute to the heterogeneous nature of IBD progression. One major aspect influenced by genetic variants is the risk of disease complications. For instance, certain variants have been associated with an increased risk of developing stricturing or penetrating complications in Crohn's disease (CD), such as bowel strictures, fistulas, and abscesses [17]. These complications often necessitate surgical intervention and can significantly impact patient quality of life. Moreover, genetic variants may modulate the response to pharmacological therapies and influence disease progression. Variants in genes encoding drug-metabolizing enzymes, drug transporters, and drug targets can impact treatment efficacy, toxicity, and pharmacokinetics, affecting disease management and long-term outcomes. Furthermore, genetic variants may interact with environmental factors to exacerbate disease progression. Factors such as diet, smoking, and microbial dysbiosis can modify the effects of genetic risk factors, influencing disease activity and complication rates.

VI. Conclusion

In conclusion, genetic polymorphisms in inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) represent a multifaceted landscape that significantly impacts disease susceptibility, severity, and response to therapies in both Crohn's disease (CD) and ulcerative colitis (UC). Through various research methodologies such as genome-wide association studies (GWAS), functional genomics studies, and pharmacogenomics investigations, significant strides have been made in unraveling the genetic architecture of IBD. The identification of susceptibility loci associated with CD and UC has shed light on the underlying pathogenic mechanisms, emphasizing the intricate interplay between immune dysregulation, mucosal barrier integrity, and microbial interactions within the gut. Moreover, genetic variants have been implicated in modulating disease severity, influencing the risk of complications such as stricturing or penetrating disease behavior, and predicting the clinical course and prognosis of affected individuals. Furthermore, genetic polymorphisms play a crucial role in shaping the response to pharmacological therapies

used in the management of IBD. By elucidating the genetic determinants of drug response and toxicity, pharmacogenomics studies offer opportunities for personalized medicine approaches, optimizing treatment selection, dosing, and monitoring strategies to maximize therapeutic efficacy while minimizing adverse effects.

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