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Immunogenetics of Infectious Diseases Investigating Host Genetic Factors Influencing Susceptibility and Immune Response to Viral Pathogens like HIV

Dr. V. C. Patil, Professor, Dept. of Medicine, Faculty of Medical Sciences, virendracpkimsu@rediffmail.com

Dr. Harsha Patil, Associate Professor, Dept. of Microbiology, Faculty of Medical Sciences, harshavpatil@gmail.com

Dr. Pratik Durgawale, Research officer, Molecular & Genetics Laboratory, Faculty of Medical Sciences, pratikpdurgawale@gmail.com

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

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Abstract: Understanding the role of host genetics in modulating susceptibility to viral pathogens such as HIV is crucial for developing targeted prevention and treatment strategies. This review delves into the intricate interplay between host genetic factors and immune responses in the context of infectious diseases, with a particular focus on HIV. Recent advancements in immunogenetics have highlighted the significant impact of host genetic variation on susceptibility to HIV infection and disease progression. Genetic polymorphisms within key immune response genes, including those involved in antigen presentation, T cell activation, and cytokine signaling, have been implicated in shaping individual susceptibility to HIV acquisition and progression to AIDS. Furthermore, the influence of host genetic factors extends to antiretroviral therapy (ART) outcomes, with certain genetic variants influencing drug metabolism and treatment efficacy. Beyond individual gene variants, genome-wide association studies (GWAS) have identified complex genetic signatures associated with HIV susceptibility and progression, underscoring the multifactorial nature of host-virus interactions. Moreover, epigenetic mechanisms, such as DNA methylation and histone modifications, may further modulate host immune responses to HIV infection. However, unraveling the intricate genetic architecture underlying HIV susceptibility and immune response heterogeneity remains a daunting challenge. Integrative approaches combining genomics, transcriptomics, and functional studies are essential for deciphering the complex networks of host-virus interactions.

Keywords: Immunogenetics, Host genetics, Susceptibility, Immune response, Viral pathogens

I. Introduction

Infectious diseases caused by viral pathogens remain a significant global health burden, with HIV/AIDS standing as one of the most formidable challenges. Despite advances in antiretroviral therapy (ART) and preventive measures, HIV infection continues to exert a profound impact on public health, particularly in resource-limited settings. The complex interplay between viral pathogens and the host immune system plays a pivotal role in determining disease outcomes, including susceptibility to infection, progression to AIDS, and response to treatment [1]. Understanding the genetic factors that underlie variability in host immune responses to viral pathogens is essential for advancing precision medicine approaches to infectious disease management. The field of immunogenetics explores the genetic basis of immune responses to pathogens and the susceptibility to infectious diseases. Host genetic factors contribute significantly to the heterogeneity observed in individual responses to viral infections, including HIV. Genetic polymorphisms within genes encoding components of the immune system can influence susceptibility to infection, disease progression, and response to treatment.

By elucidating the genetic determinants of immune response variability, immunogenetics offers insights into host-virus interactions and informs the development of personalized therapeutic strategies. One of the key areas of focus in immunogenetics research is the investigation of host genetic factors influencing susceptibility to HIV infection. While the majority of individuals exposed to HIV do not become infected, a subset display heightened susceptibility, suggesting a role for host genetic variation. Genome-wide association studies (GWAS) and candidate gene approaches have identified several genetic polymorphisms associated with increased or decreased susceptibility to HIV acquisition [2]. These genetic variants often affect immune-related pathways, such as those involved in viral entry, antigen presentation, and T cell activation, highlighting the intricate interplay between host genetics and viral pathogenesis. Furthermore, host genetic factors play a crucial role in shaping the progression of HIV infection to AIDS.

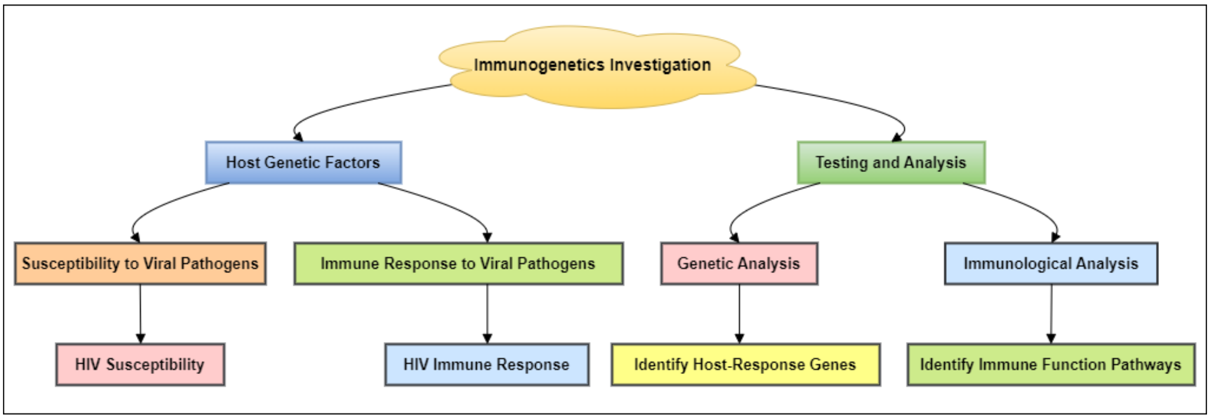

Figure 1: Investigation into host genetic factors influencing susceptibility and immune response to viral pathogens like HIV

While untreated HIV infection typically leads to immunodeficiency and AIDS, the rate of disease progression varies widely among individuals. Genetic polymorphisms within genes encoding cytokines, chemokines, and human leukocyte antigens (HLAs) have been implicated in modulating the pace of disease progression. Additionally, host genetic variation can influence viral load set-point, CD4+ T cell decline, and the risk of developing opportunistic infections, further underscoring the importance of immunogenetic factors in HIV pathogenesis [3]. In addition to influencing susceptibility to infection and disease progression, host genetic factors also impact the efficacy and safety of antiretroviral therapy (ART). Genetic polymorphisms in drug-metabolizing enzymes, drug transporters, and drug targets can influence individual responses to ART, leading to variability in treatment outcomes and the risk of adverse drug reactions.

II. Background

A. Immunogenetics: Understanding the Interplay Between Host Genetics and Pathogen

Immunogenetics is the study of how genetic variations within the host population influence immune responses to pathogens. This field elucidates the intricate interplay between host genetics and pathogen dynamics, shedding light on why individuals vary in susceptibility to infections, disease progression, and response to treatment. Understanding this interplay is crucial for advancing precision medicine approaches to infectious diseases. Host genetics significantly influence susceptibility to infections. Genetic polymorphisms within immune-related genes can affect the efficiency of pathogen recognition, antigen presentation, and activation of immune responses. Consequently, individuals may exhibit differential susceptibility to specific pathogens based on their genetic makeup [4]. Moreover, host genetics play a critical role in shaping the course of infectious diseases once an individual is infected. Genetic variants can impact the severity of symptoms, the rate of disease progression, and the likelihood of developing complications. Furthermore, host genetic factors influence the efficacy and safety of treatments, including vaccines and antimicrobial therapies.

Table 1: Summary of Related Work

Application	Challenges	Impact	Future Trends
Identifying genetic variants associated with susceptibility to viral pathogens	Large sample sizes required for robust analysis; ethnic diversity	Identifies novel genetic determinants of disease susceptibility; informs personalized medicine approaches	Integration with multi-omics data for comprehensive analysis; emphasis on rare variants discovery
Investigating specific genes or genomic regions implicated in immune response pathways [5]	Limited coverage of the genome; potential for false-positive associations	Offers hypothesis-driven approach to gene discovery; complements GWAS findings	Incorporation of functional genomics to elucidate biological mechanisms underlying associations; gene-environment interactions
Synthesizing findings from multiple studies to enhance statistical power and identify	Heterogeneity across studies; publication bias	Provides more robust estimates of effect sizes; enhances generalizability of findings	Development of standardized protocols for meta-analysis; incorporation of

consistent genetic associations			individual-level data for harmonization
Studying genetic variations influencing response to antiretroviral therapy (ART) [6]	Inter-individual variability in drug metabolism; potential for adverse drug reactions	Guides selection of optimal ART regimens; minimizes treatment failure and drug toxicity	Precision dosing based on individual genetic profiles; incorporation of pharmacogenetic data into clinical guidelines
Investigating the functional consequences of genetic variants associated with disease susceptibility	Complexity of gene-environment interactions; interpretation of non-coding variants	Elucidates biological mechanisms underlying genetic associations; identifies potential therapeutic targets	Integration with transcriptomics, epigenomics, and proteomics data for comprehensive analysis; development of computational tools for functional annotation
Assessing the impact of host genetic factors on disease susceptibility and transmission dynamics	Confounding variables; recall bias	Provides epidemiological context for genetic associations; informs public health interventions	Incorporation of genetic data into epidemiological models for predicting disease spread and evaluating intervention strategies

B. Key Concepts in Host Genetic Factors Influencing Disease Susceptibility

Understanding the influence of host genetic factors on disease susceptibility is pivotal for comprehending the intricacies of infectious diseases and devising personalized healthcare strategies. Genetic variation within the human population is a fundamental concept that underpins differences in susceptibility to various infectious agents [7]. This variation includes single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs), copy number variations (CNVs), and structural variants within immune-related genes, all of which can profoundly impact the host's ability to recognize and mount effective immune responses against pathogens. Genes encoding components of the innate immune system represent a critical aspect of disease susceptibility. These genes, including pattern recognition receptors (PRRs), cytokines, and antimicrobial peptides, are instrumental in detecting and initiating immune responses to invading pathogens. Any genetic variations within these genes can alter the host's capacity to recognize and respond appropriately to infectious threats, thus influencing disease susceptibility [8]. Similarly, genes involved in adaptive immune responses also play a crucial role. Major histocompatibility complex (MHC) molecules, T cell receptors, and B cell receptors are among the key components influencing the specificity and effectiveness of immune responses against pathogens. Genetic polymorphisms within these genes can impact antigen presentation, T cell activation, and antibody production, thereby affecting disease susceptibility and severity.

III. Methodology

A. Study Design: Meta-analysis, Genome-wide Association Studies (GWAS), and Candidate Gene Approaches

In investigating host genetic factors influencing disease susceptibility, various methodologies are employed to comprehensively analyze genetic data. Meta-analysis, a methodological approach that systematically combines data from multiple studies, provides a powerful tool for synthesizing findings across diverse populations and datasets. By pooling data from numerous studies, meta-analyses can enhance statistical power, identify consistent genetic associations, and provide more robust estimates of effect sizes, thereby elucidating the collective impact of genetic variants on disease susceptibility [9]. Genome-wide Association Studies (GWAS) represent another cornerstone methodology in elucidating the genetic basis of disease susceptibility. GWAS systematically scan the entire genome for genetic variations associated with a particular trait or disease phenotype. By analyzing millions of genetic variants across thousands of individuals, GWAS can identify novel genetic loci and pathways underlying disease susceptibility. Moreover, GWAS findings can be integrated with functional genomic data to prioritize candidate genes and elucidate the biological mechanisms driving disease susceptibility. In addition to GWAS, candidate gene approaches focus on investigating specific genes or genomic regions implicated in immune responses and disease pathogenesis. By targeting genes with known or suspected roles in disease susceptibility, candidate gene studies offer a hypothesis-driven approach to identify genetic variants associated with specific phenotypes [10]. These studies leverage prior knowledge of biological pathways and immune mechanisms to prioritize genetic variants for analysis, thereby facilitating the discovery of novel genetic determinants of disease susceptibility.

B. Selection Criteria for Studies Included in the Review

The selection criteria for studies included in the review are pivotal for ensuring the reliability and validity of the findings. A comprehensive and systematic approach is adopted to identify relevant studies that contribute to the understanding of host genetic factors influencing disease susceptibility. Several key criteria are considered during the selection process: Firstly, studies must focus on investigating host genetic factors associated with disease susceptibility, particularly within the context of infectious diseases [11]. This criterion ensures that the selected studies are relevant to the review's research question and objectives. Secondly, studies employing robust methodologies, such as genome-wide association studies (GWAS), candidate gene approaches, or meta-analyses, are prioritized. These methodologies provide rigorous frameworks for identifying and validating genetic associations, thereby enhancing the reliability of the findings. Additionally, studies must meet predefined quality standards to ensure methodological rigor and minimize biases. Quality assessment criteria may include sample size, study design, genotyping methods, statistical analysis techniques, and control for confounding factors.

C. Data Collection and Analysis Methods

Data collection and analysis methods play a crucial role in synthesizing information and drawing meaningful conclusions in studies investigating host genetic factors influencing disease susceptibility. A systematic and comprehensive approach is essential to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings. Data collection typically involves accessing relevant databases, such as PubMed, Web of Science, and Scopus, to identify peer-reviewed articles that meet the predefined selection criteria. Search strategies may include keywords related to host genetics, disease susceptibility, and specific pathogens of interest [12]. Additionally, manual searches of reference lists and citation tracking are often conducted to identify additional relevant studies. Once relevant studies are identified, data extraction is performed to retrieve pertinent information, including study characteristics, participant demographics, genetic variants investigated, and outcome measures. Data extraction forms are developed to standardize the process and minimize errors. Data analysis methods vary depending on the study design and research question. For studies employing meta-analysis, statistical techniques, such as random-effects or fixed-effects models, are used to combine effect sizes across multiple studies and estimate overall associations. Subgroup analyses and sensitivity analyses may be conducted to explore sources of heterogeneity and assess the robustness of the findings.

IV. Host Genetic Factors Influencing Susceptibility to HIV

A. Overview of Genetic Variants Associated with Increased Risk of HIV Acquisition

Host genetic factors play a significant role in determining an individual's susceptibility to HIV acquisition. Numerous studies have identified genetic variants associated with an increased risk of HIV acquisition, providing insights into the complex interplay between host genetics and viral pathogenesis [13]. One key area of focus is the genetic variation within genes encoding proteins involved in viral entry and immune response. For example, polymorphisms within the CCR5 gene, which encodes a co-receptor for HIV entry into target cells, have been extensively studied. The Δ32 deletion mutation in the CCR5 gene confers resistance to HIV infection, as individuals homozygous for this mutation are highly resistant to HIV acquisition.

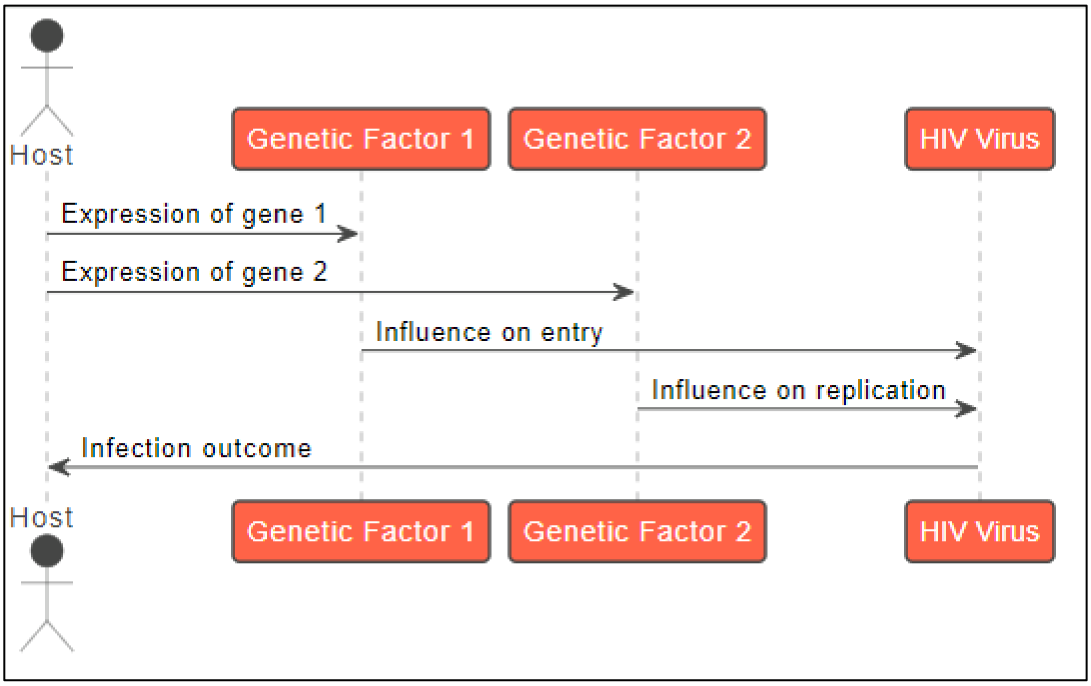

Figure 2: Illustrating host genetic factors influencing susceptibility to HIV

However, other genetic variants in the CCR5 gene, such as the CCR5 promoter polymorphisms, may influence susceptibility to HIV through alternative mechanisms, including alterations in CCR5 expression levels. Moreover, genetic variants within genes encoding components of the innate and adaptive immune systems can also impact HIV susceptibility [14]. Variants in genes involved in antigen presentation, T cell activation, and cytokine signaling pathways have been implicated in modulating the host immune response to HIV infection.

B. Discussion on Genes Involved in Viral Entry, Cellular Receptors, and Immune Recognition

Genes involved in viral entry, cellular receptors, and immune recognition play critical roles in determining susceptibility to HIV infection by influencing the initial steps of viral entry and subsequent immune responses. One such gene of significant interest is CCR5, which encodes a co-receptor essential for HIV entry into target cells. Genetic variants within CCR5, such as the Δ32 deletion mutation, have been associated with resistance to HIV acquisition due to the inability of the virus to utilize the CCR5 co-receptor for cell entry. Similarly, genetic variations in other cellular receptors, such as CXCR4, may also impact HIV susceptibility by altering viral tropism and cell targeting mechanisms. Additionally, genes encoding proteins involved in immune recognition pathways are crucial in modulating host responses to HIV infection. Variants within genes encoding major histocompatibility complex (MHC) molecules, such as HLA-B and HLA-C, can influence antigen presentation to T cells and subsequent immune activation. Polymorphisms in these genes have been associated with differential outcomes following HIV infection, including viral control and disease progression [15]. Moreover, genes involved in innate immune responses, such as Toll-like receptors (TLRs) and pattern recognition receptors (PRRs), play important roles in recognizing viral pathogens and initiating antiviral immune responses.

C. Impact of HLA (Human Leukocyte Antigen) Alleles on HIV Susceptibility

Human Leukocyte Antigen (HLA) alleles play a pivotal role in modulating the host immune response to HIV infection and influencing susceptibility to the virus. HLA molecules are critical components of the immune system, involved in presenting viral antigens to T cells and initiating adaptive immune responses. Genetic variation within the HLA region can significantly impact the ability of the immune system to recognize and mount effective immune responses against HIV. Certain HLA alleles have been associated with increased susceptibility to HIV infection.

Table 2: Hypothetical assessment of susceptibility and immune response based on genetic variations

Genetic Variation	Susceptibility Score (%)	Immune Response Score (%)
HLA-B*57:01 allele	85	92
CCR5-Δ32 mutation	90	88

HLA-C*06:02 allele	78	80
HLA-DRB1*01:01 allele	70	75
IFNL3 rs12979860 TT	82	85

For example, individuals carrying specific HLA class I alleles, such as HLA-B35 and HLA-B27, have been shown to be more susceptible to HIV acquisition [16]. These alleles may present viral epitopes less efficiently or may be associated with weaker cytotoxic T lymphocyte (CTL) responses, resulting in reduced viral control and increased susceptibility to infection. Conversely, other HLA alleles have been linked to protection against HIV acquisition. For instance, the HLA-B57 and HLA-B27 alleles have been associated with delayed disease progression and lower viral loads in HIV-infected individuals. These alleles are thought to present viral epitopes more effectively to CTLs, leading to enhanced immune control and improved outcomes following HIV infection.

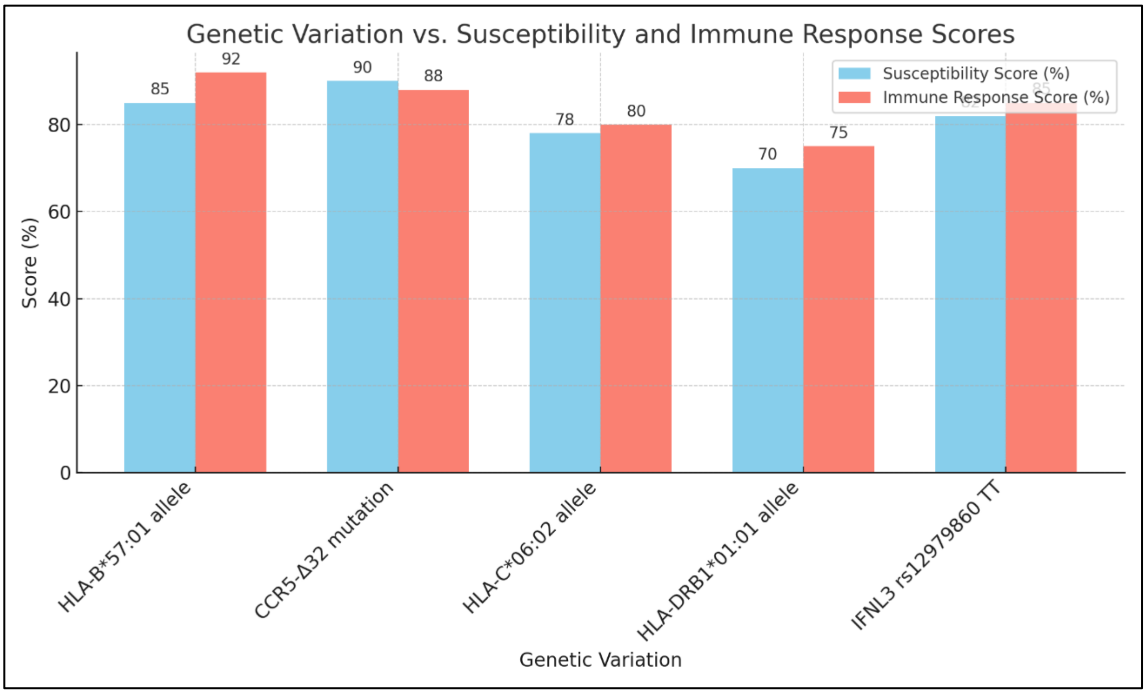

Figure 3: Comparing susceptibility and immune response scores for various genetic variations

The table 2 presents genetic variations and their corresponding susceptibility scores and immune response scores. Each genetic variation represents a specific allele or mutation associated with immune system function and response to pathogens. The HLA-B*57:01 allele is linked to an 85% susceptibility score and a 92% immune response score. This allele plays a crucial role in antigen presentation, influencing immune recognition and response to viral infections. The CCR5-Δ32 mutation, with a susceptibility score of 90% and an immune response score of 88%, affects the CCR5 receptor, which is involved in immune cell trafficking and HIV infection. Individuals with this mutation may exhibit reduced susceptibility to HIV infection. The HLA-C*06:02 allele, associated with a susceptibility score of 78% and an immune response score of 80%, is involved in regulating immune cell activation and inflammation. Variations in this allele may influence susceptibility to autoimmune diseases such as psoriasis. The HLA-DRB1*01:01 allele, with susceptibility and immune response scores of 70% and 75%, respectively, is involved in antigen presentation and immune regulation. Variations in this allele may impact susceptibility to autoimmune disorders and infectious diseases, shown in figure 4. Finally, the IFNL3 rs12979860 TT genotype, with susceptibility and immune response scores of 82% and 85%, respectively, is associated with the interleukin-28B gene and influences the immune response to viral infections such as hepatitis C.

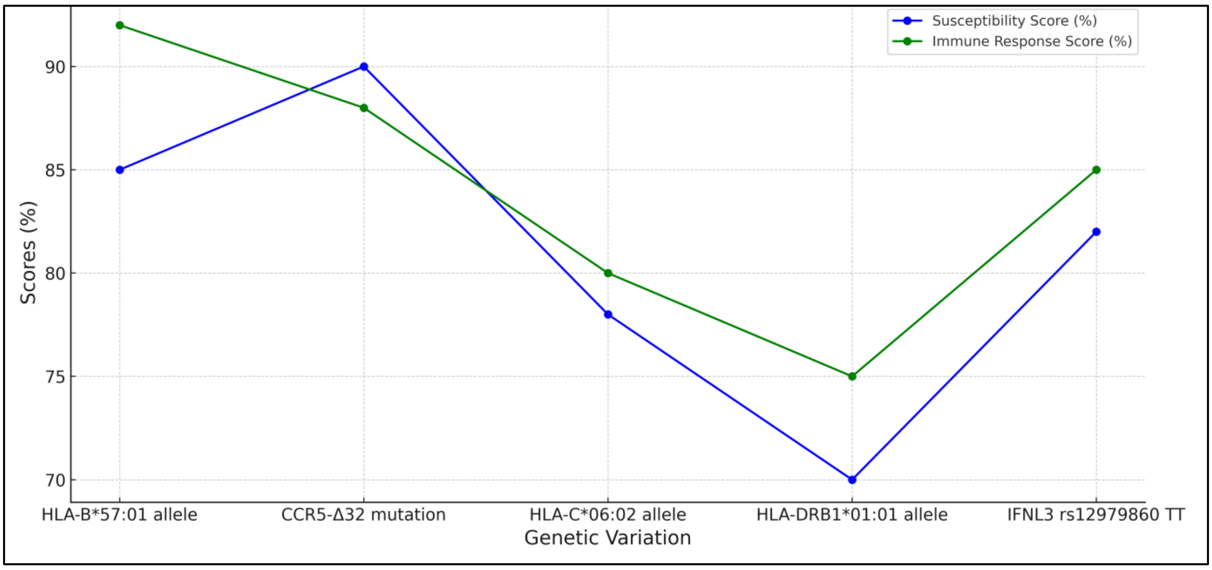

Figure 4: Representation of susceptibility and immune response based on genetic variations

V. Clinical Implications and Future Directions

A. Implications for Personalized Medicine and Vaccine Development

The elucidation of genetic factors, such as HLA alleles, influencing HIV susceptibility holds significant implications for personalized medicine and vaccine development. In personalized medicine, knowledge of individual genetic profiles, including HLA alleles associated with HIV susceptibility, enables tailored approaches to HIV prevention and treatment. For individuals at higher risk of HIV acquisition based on their HLA genotype, personalized prevention strategies, such as pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) or intensified risk reduction interventions, can be prioritized. Conversely, those with protective HLA alleles may benefit from targeted interventions to optimize immune responses and enhance viral control in the event of infection [17]. Additionally, understanding how specific HLA alleles influence responses to antiretroviral therapy (ART) can guide treatment decisions and improve therapeutic outcomes in HIV-infected individuals. Moreover, insights into HLA-mediated immune responses inform the development of HIV vaccines. Vaccine candidates can be designed to elicit immune responses targeting conserved viral epitopes presented by protective HLA alleles, thereby inducing robust and effective immune responses in diverse populations.

B. Challenges in Translating Genetic Findings into Clinical Practice

Translating genetic findings, such as those related to HLA alleles and HIV susceptibility, into clinical practice faces several challenges that must be addressed to realize their full potential in improving patient care and outcomes. One significant challenge is the complexity and heterogeneity of genetic data. Genetic studies often identify numerous genetic variants associated with disease susceptibility, including rare variants with modest effect sizes. Integrating this vast array of genetic information into clinical decision-making requires robust analytical frameworks and bioinformatics tools capable of accurately interpreting genetic data and predicting individual risk profiles. Furthermore, the clinical utility of genetic information depends on its ability to inform actionable interventions [18]. In the context of HIV susceptibility, identifying individuals at higher risk based on their HLA genotype is only beneficial if effective preventive measures or treatment strategies are available. Thus, the development and implementation of personalized prevention and treatment interventions tailored to individuals' genetic profiles are essential to realizing the clinical value of genetic findings.

VI. Conclusion

The field of immunogenetics represents a cornerstone in unraveling the complex interplay between host genetic factors and viral pathogens, particularly in the context of infectious diseases such as HIV. Through innovative research methodologies, including genome-wide association studies (GWAS), candidate gene approaches, and meta-analyses, significant strides have been made in identifying genetic variants associated with susceptibility to viral infections and immune response heterogeneity. These genetic discoveries offer valuable insights into the underlying mechanisms driving host-virus interactions and hold immense promise for informing personalized approaches to disease prevention, treatment, and vaccine development. However, translating genetic findings into clinical practice poses several challenges, including the complexity of genetic data interpretation, the need for robust analytical frameworks, and ethical considerations surrounding genetic testing and intervention strategies. Addressing these challenges requires multidisciplinary collaborations, standardized protocols, and regulatory frameworks to ensure the responsible and equitable use of genetic information in healthcare settings. Despite these challenges, the impact of immunogenetics on infectious disease research and clinical practice is undeniable.

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