

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Impacts of CR1 genetic variants on cerebrospinal fluid and neuroimaging biomarkers in alzheimer's disease

Xi-chen Zhu , Wen-zhuo Dai and Tao Ma*

Abstract

Background: The complement component (3b/4b) receptor 1 gene (*CR1*) gene has been proved to affect the susceptibility of Alzheimer's disease (AD) in different ethnic and districts groups. However, the effect of *CR1* genetic variants on amyloid β ($A\beta$) metabolism of AD human is still unclear. Hence, the aim of this study was to investigate genetic influences of *CR1* gene on $A\beta$ metabolism.

Methods: All data of AD patients and normal controls (NC) were obtained from alzheimer's disease neuroimaging initiative database (ADNI) database. In order to assess the effect of each single nucleotide polymorphism (SNP) of *CR1* on $A\beta$ metabolism, the PLINK software was used to conduct the quality control procedures to enroll appropriate SNPs. Moreover, the correlation between *CR1* genotypes and $A\beta$ metabolism in all participants were estimated with multiple linear regression models.

Results: After quality control procedures, a total of 329 samples and 83 SNPs were enrolled in our study. Moreover, our results identified five SNPs (rs10494884, rs11118322, rs1323721, rs17259045 and rs41308433), which were linked to $A\beta$ accumulation in brain. In further analyses, rs17259045 was found to decrease $A\beta$ accumulation among AD patients. Additionally, our study revealed the genetic variants in rs12567945 could increase CSF $A\beta_{42}$ in NC population.

Conclusions: Our study had revealed several novel SNPs in *CR1* genes which might be involved in the progression of AD via regulating $A\beta$ accumulation. These findings will provide a new basis for the diagnosis and treatment AD.

Keywords: *CR1*, Alzheimer's disease, Amyloid- β ($A\beta$) plaques, CSF $A\beta_{42}$, ADNI

Highlights

1. We found that five SNPs were linked to $A\beta$ accumulation in brain.
2. The rs17259045 decreased $A\beta$ accumulation among AD patients.
3. The rs12567945 could increase CSF $A\beta_{42}$ in NC population.

Background

Alzheimer's disease (AD) has been regarded as a neurodegenerative disease of the elderly, which has accounted for 47 million people worldwide with numbers predicted to rise double by 2030 and triple by 2050 [1]. As one of the most common dementia, AD has the characteristics of poor language, memory, perception, behavior and activities of daily living. Moreover, the extracellular neurotoxic amyloid- β ($A\beta$) plaques and intracellular neurofibrillary tangles have been regarded as the neuropathological hallmarks of AD [2]. It has been widely confirmed that AD is a

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multifactorial disease, and genetic factors is proved to play a vital role in AD [3, 4]. However, in spite of the progress in understanding risk factors related to AD development, the underlying mechanisms involved in this disease have not been completely understood till now, and to date there is no curative treatment for AD [5, 6].

Now many genes are proved to significantly influence AD risk, among which the complement component (3b/4b) receptor 1 gene (*CR1*) has been proved to affect AD susceptibility across different ethnic and districts groups [7–12]. Currently, *CR1* has been postulated to be a key factor for AD pathogenesis because of its role in regulating complement activity by acting as a receptor of complement C3b protein [13]. More importantly, in AD patients, *CR1* is found to be associated with neuronal death [14] and hence has received increasing attention. Although a significant association between AD and single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs) in several novel AD loci of large case-control datasets is identified, *CR1* is considered as one of the most important genetic susceptibility loci in AD according to the Alzgene database [15–17]. As well known, accumulation of A β in brain is one important pathological hallmark of AD, moreover, it is considered to induce a deleterious neurodegenerative cascade and finally cause cognitive impairments [18]. Furthermore, it has been shown that *CR1* takes part in AD pathology by regulating the amyloid protein (A β) metabolism [19], and Johansson et al. [20] reveals that the single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs) in *CR1* gene were associated with increased erythrocyte *CR1* which will finally decreased AD risk. Hence, it would be meaningful to discover the genetic variants of *CR1* in AD development.

In this study, we enrolled the participants from the alzheimer's disease neuroimaging initiative (ADNI) database (<http://www.loni.ucla.edu/ADNI>), which is a multicenter project to assess the role of genetic factors in neuroimage biomarkers and cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) proteins. Next, we used PLINK software to conduct the quality control procedures to enroll appropriate SNPs in *CR1*, and then investigated genetic influences of *CR1* gene on A β metabolism, in order to explore the role of *CR1* genetic variants in the progression of AD.

Methods

Participants

The data in our study were obtained from the ADNI database, which contains genetic information, neuroimaging information, and CSF proteins of AD, and normal controls (NC) (<http://www.adni-info.org>). All

participants of this study were included with the specific criteria according the protocol of ADNI, and then divided into two groups, including the AD group and NC group. Briefly, when participants met the National Institute of Neurological and Communicative Disorders (NINCDS) and Stroke/Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders Association (ADRDA) criteria for probable AD [21], they were diagnosed as AD.

Genotyping data

All genetic information of SNPs of *CR1* were detected using the Illumina Infinium Human610-Quad Bead Chip (Illumina, Inc., San Diego, CA) or Illumina Human Omni Express Bead Chip. And the quality control procedures were performed by using PLINK software. The SNPs would be excluded when minimum minor allele frequency (MAF) was less than 0.01 or Hardy-Weinberg (H-W) equilibrium test's value was less than 0.05.

AV45-pet

The imaging data of PET with amyloid tracer, florbetapir (AV-45), was obtained from UC Berkeley-AV45 analysis database [22]. In order to define cortical grey matter regions of interest, these images were segmented and parcellated with Freesurfer (Version 5.3.0). After that, four regions, including the frontal, cingulate, parietal, temporal and florbetapir were involved in this study [23]. In addition, through averaging across the four cortical regions and dividing it by whole cerebellum florbetapir, the cortical standardized uptake values ratios (SUVR) were calculated [24].

CSF A β_{42} proteins

Similarly, the data about the level of CSF A β_{42} was also got from ADNI database. Briefly, all samples of CSF

Table 1 The details of enrolled samples from ADNI database

Characteristics	NC		AD	
	N	Mean \pm SD		Mean \pm SD
Age (years)	281	74.51 \pm 5.56	48	75.51 \pm 9.23
Gender (male/female)	281	136/145	48	30/18
Education (years)	281	16.41 \pm 2.66	48	15.73 \pm 2.62
ApoE ϵ 4 (0/1/2)	281	204/70/7	48	14/25/9
CDRSB (scores)	207	6.54 \pm 0.55	47	5.3 \pm 0.72
ADAS (scores)	281	29.07 \pm 1.15	48	22.96 \pm 2.03
MMSE (scores)	281	9.06 \pm 4.23	48	29.8 \pm 8.44
RAVLT total (scores)	280	44.83 \pm 9.6	47	22.32 \pm 7.84
FAQ (scores)	281	0.17 \pm 0.66	48	12.6 \pm 7.14

ADNI alzheimer's disease neuroimaging initiative, AD alzheimer's disease, ApoE ϵ 4 apolipoprotein E ϵ 4, SD standard deviations, ADAS alzheimer's disease assessment scale, CDRSB clinical dementia rating scale sum of boxes, FAQ functional activities questionnaire, MMSE mini-mental state exam, NC normal controls, RAVLT rey auditory verbal learning test

were collected and transported to ADNI Biomarker Core laboratory at the University of Pennsylvania Medical Center. Following thawed at room temperature and gentle mixed, these samples were used for preparation of aliquots (0.5 ml). Finally, the level of CSF A β_{42} was determined with multiplex xMAP luminex platform (Luminex Corp, Austin, TX) with immunoassay kit according to reagents [25].

Statistical analyses

All statistical analyses were determined by using the SPSS 18.0 software (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA) and PLINK (<http://pangu.mgh.harvard.edu/wpurcell/plink/>). The demographic characteristics were performed with means \pm standard deviations (SD). The t-test or chi-square test were used for the analysis of demographics and genotypic frequencies. The correlation between *CR1* genotypes and A β metabolism in all cohorts were estimated with multiple linear regression models. The false discovery rate (FDR) test was applied to control for multiple hypothesis testing [26], and a $P \leq 0.05$ was considered to be statistically significant.

Results

Characteristics of included participants

As shown in Table 1, a total of 329 individuals (48 AD and 281 NC) were enrolled in our study according to the quality control for genotype. Moreover, the AD group with 70.8% has higher frequency of the $\epsilon 4$ allele within apolipoprotein E (ApoE) gene than the NC group with 26.3%. According to the scores of different neuropsychological scales, the patients with AD have worse cognitive function in comparison to those NC group, respectively.

Characteristics of included SNPs of *CR1*

After quality control with PLINK software, a total of 83 SNPs of *CR1* were enrolled in our study. Next, we used Haploview version 4.2 to explore the linkage disequilibrium (LD) patterns of these included SNPs of *CR1* (**Supplementary Fig. 1**). The results showed these SNPs distributed from block 1 to 5 which indicated the SNPs capture most common variants in *CR1*. Furthermore, the characteristics (major allele, minor allele, MAF, functional consequence, position and H-W value) of included *CR1* SNPs were illustrated in **supplementary Table 1**. The MAF values of all included SNPs were more than 0.01, and the H-W values of included SNPs were more than 0.05.

The effects of *CR1* genetic variants on AV-45 PET

It is well known that the data of the AV-45 retention on the PET imaging of amyloid may represent A β accumulation biomarkers. In the present study, our data revealed five SNPs, including rs10494884, rs11118322, rs1323721, rs17259045 and rs41308433 were significantly related to the level of tracer retention on amyloid PET imaging. Moreover, Rs10494884, RS11118322, and rs1323721 were in block 3, rs17259045 was in block 2 and RS41308433 was in block 4. As illustrated in Table 2, the variant in rs10494884 would increase A β accumulation in temporal, frontal, and SUVR ($P = 0.03392$, $P = 0.03845$ and $P = 0.04447$). Similarly, rs11118322 and rs1323721 were proved to significantly increase A β accumulation in temporal and frontal (all, $P < 0.05$). In addition, our data revealed that the variant in rs17259045 may widely decrease the level of A β accumulation in frontal ($P = 0.007581$), temporal ($P = 0.009251$), SUVR ($P = 0.01725$), cingulate ($P = 0.02512$) and parietal ($P = 0.03033$). And rs41308433 was proved

Table 2 The association of genetic variants in *CR1* gene with A β deposition on AV-45 PET among all people

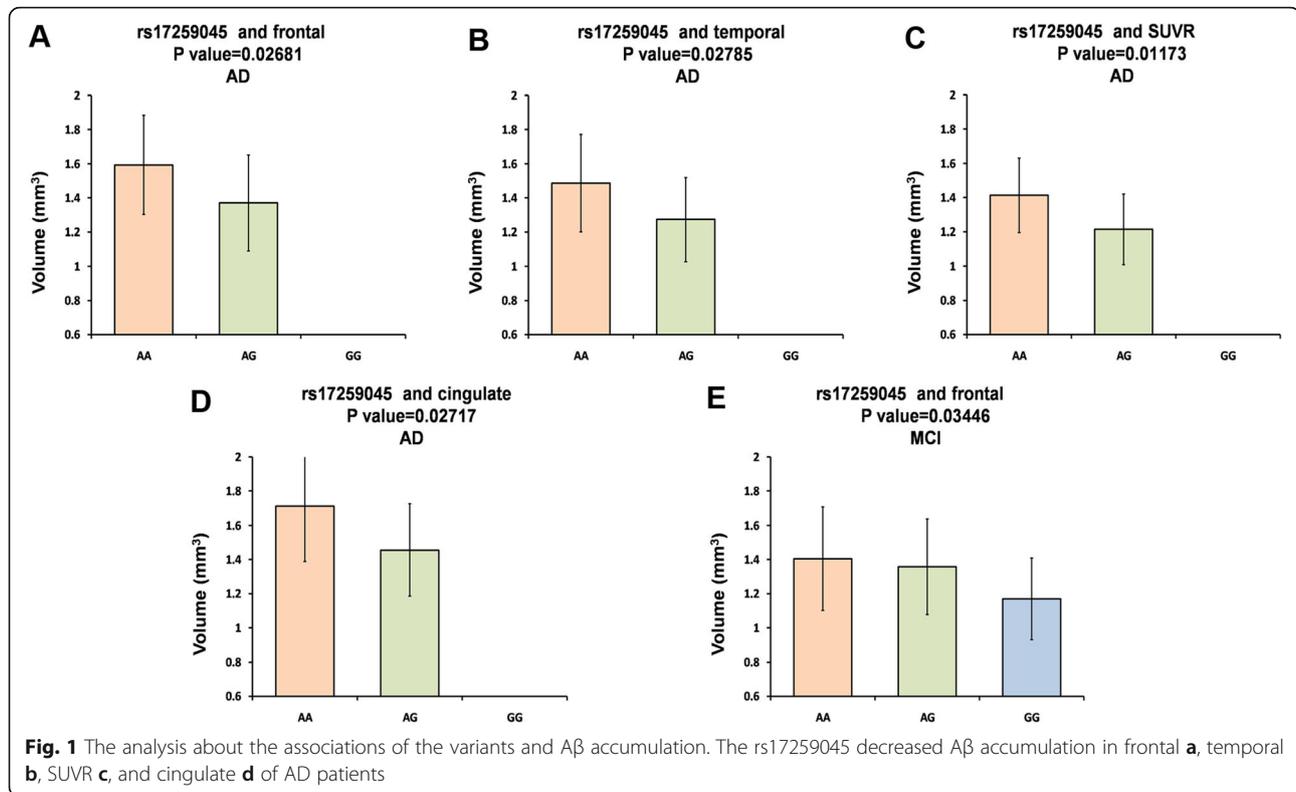
SNPs	Gene regions	Position (Chromosome)	Major allele	Minor allele	Regions	β	P value
rs10494884	intron variant	1:207674531	G	A	temporal	0.03364	0.03392
					frontal	0.03543	0.03845
					SUVR	0.02647	0.04447
rs11118322	intron variant	1:207674706	T	C	temporal	0.03342	0.03448
					frontal	0.03477	0.04155
rs1323721	intron variant	1:207649895	A	G	temporal	0.03245	0.04141
					frontal	0.03381	0.04894
rs17259045	missense	1:207609362	A	G	frontal	-0.0773	0.007581
					temporal	-0.06968	0.009251
					SUVR	-0.05298	0.01725
					cingulate	-0.07068	0.02512
					parietal	-0.06473	0.03033
rs41308433	intron variant	1:207699490	A	C	temporal	-0.0427	0.04292

CR1 complement component (3b/4b) receptor 1 gene, SNPs single nucleotide polymorphisms, A β amyloid protein, SUVR standardized uptake values ratios

Table 3 Stratified of positive results in AD group and NC group

Kinds	SNPs	Regions	Group	Value (mean ± SD)		Mm		mm		β	P value
				MM		(mean ± SD)		(mean ± SD)			
				(mean ± SD)	N	(mean ± SD)	N	(mean ± SD)	N		
AV45-PET	rs10494884	temporal	AD	1.387 ± 0.2783	17	1.415 ± 0.3144	17	1.566 ± 0.2483	12	0.06873	0.119
		temporal	NC	1.201 ± 0.2014	44	1.219 ± 0.2556	85	1.333 ± 0.2917	24	0.05121	0.08755
	frontal	AD	1.489 ± 0.2873	17	1.501 ± 0.3219	17	1.701 ± 0.2474	12	0.08014	0.08302	
		frontal	NC	1.259 ± 0.2147	44	1.295 ± 0.2868	85	1.392 ± 0.2961	24	0.04313	0.1718
	SUVR	AD	1.33 ± 0.2193	17	1.332 ± 0.2515	17	1.494 ± 0.17	12	0.06683	0.06938	
		SUVR	NC	1.103 ± 0.1775	44	1.125 ± 0.2015	85	1.201 ± 0.2176	24	0.03969	0.09432
	rs11118322	temporal	AD	1.387 ± 0.2783	17	1.415 ± 0.3144	17	1.566 ± 0.2483	12	0.06873	0.119
			temporal	NC	1.201 ± 0.2014	44	1.219 ± 0.2556	85	1.333 ± 0.2917	24	0.05121
		frontal	AD	1.489 ± 0.2873	17	1.501 ± 0.3219	17	1.701 ± 0.2474	12	0.08014	0.08302
			frontal	NC	1.259 ± 0.2147	44	1.295 ± 0.2868	85	1.392 ± 0.2961	24	0.04313
temporal		AD	1.387 ± 0.2783	17	1.415 ± 0.3144	17	1.566 ± 0.2483	12	0.06873	0.119	
		temporal	NC	1.2 ± 0.2035	43	1.219 ± 0.2541	86	1.333 ± 0.2917	24	0.05124	0.08938
frontal		AD	1.489 ± 0.2873	17	1.501 ± 0.3219	17	1.701 ± 0.2474	12	0.08014	0.08302	
		frontal	NC	1.259 ± 0.2147	44	1.295 ± 0.2868	85	1.392 ± 0.2961	24	0.04313	0.1718
rs1323721		temporal	AD	1.387 ± 0.2783	17	1.415 ± 0.3144	17	1.566 ± 0.2483	12	0.06873	0.119
			temporal	NC	1.2 ± 0.2035	43	1.219 ± 0.2541	86	1.333 ± 0.2917	24	0.05124
	frontal	AD	1.489 ± 0.2873	17	1.501 ± 0.3219	17	1.701 ± 0.2474	12	0.08014	0.08302	
		frontal	NC	1.257 ± 0.2169	43	1.295 ± 0.2851	86	1.392 ± 0.2961	24	0.04191	0.1878
	frontal	AD	1.593 ± 0.2906	37	1.37 ± 0.2805	9	0	0	-0.1974	0.02681	
		frontal	NC	1.312 ± 0.2783	120	1.24 ± 0.2391	30	1.358 ± 0.3367	2	-0.04546	0.3264
	temporal	AD	1.486 ± 0.2857	37	1.273 ± 0.2458	9	0	0	-0.1864	0.02785	
		temporal	NC	1.242 ± 0.2563	120	1.186 ± 0.2276	30	1.168 ± 0.2109	2	-0.05859	0.1847
	SUVR	AD	1.413 ± 0.2178	37	1.214 ± 0.2062	9	0	0	-0.1775	0.01173	
		SUVR	NC	1.14 ± 0.2074	120	1.085 ± 0.1543	30	1.169 ± 0.2835	2	-0.04196	0.2297
rs17259045	cingulate	AD	1.711 ± 0.3232	37	1.455 ± 0.2704	9	0	0	-0.2262	0.02717	
		cingulate	NC	1.431 ± 0.3073	120	1.351 ± 0.2576	30	1.482 ± 0.2336	2	-0.06105	0.2494
	parietal	AD	1.604 ± 0.2992	37	1.369 ± 0.2273	9	0	0	-0.2085	0.01895	
		parietal	NC	1.33 ± 0.29	120	1.251 ± 0.2344	30	1.341 ± 0.353	2	-0.06408	0.1983
	temporal	AD	1.5 ± 0.3029	30	1.33 ± 0.2385	15	1.498 ± 0	1	-0.08598	0.1943	
		NC	1.252 ± 0.2708	105	1.188 ± 0.1949	45	1.151 ± 0.1519	3	-0.05517	0.1494	
	CSF Aβ ₄₂	AD	139.6 ± 41.82	34	140.3 ± 34.01	5	233.9 ± 0	1	14.13	0.3726	
		NC	191.6 ± 53.29	116	219.7 ± 45.29	16	0	0	28.66	0.02589	

AD alzheimer's disease, NC normal controls, SVPs single nucleotide polymorphisms, SD standard deviations, SUVR standardized uptake values ratios



to reduce the A β accumulation only in temporal ($P = 0.04292$).

Then, we conducted further analyses about the associations of the variants and A β accumulation in AD and NC population. As shown in Table 3 and Fig. 1, rs17259045 may decrease A β accumulation of AD patients in frontal (AA: mean \pm SD, 1.593 ± 0.2906 , $N = 37$; AG: mean \pm SD, 1.37 ± 0.2805 , $N = 9$; $P = 0.02681$), temporal (AA: mean \pm SD, 1.486 ± 0.2857 , $N = 37$; AG: mean \pm SD, 1.273 ± 0.2458 , $N = 9$; $P = 0.02785$), SUVR (AA: mean \pm SD, 1.413 ± 0.2178 , $N = 37$; AG: mean \pm SD, 1.214 ± 0.2062 , $N = 9$; $P = 0.01173$), and cingulated (AA: mean \pm SD, 1.711 ± 0.3232 , $N = 37$; AG: mean \pm SD, 1.455 ± 0.2704 , $N = 9$; $P = 0.02717$).

The effects of CR1 genetic variants on CSF A β_{42} biomarkers

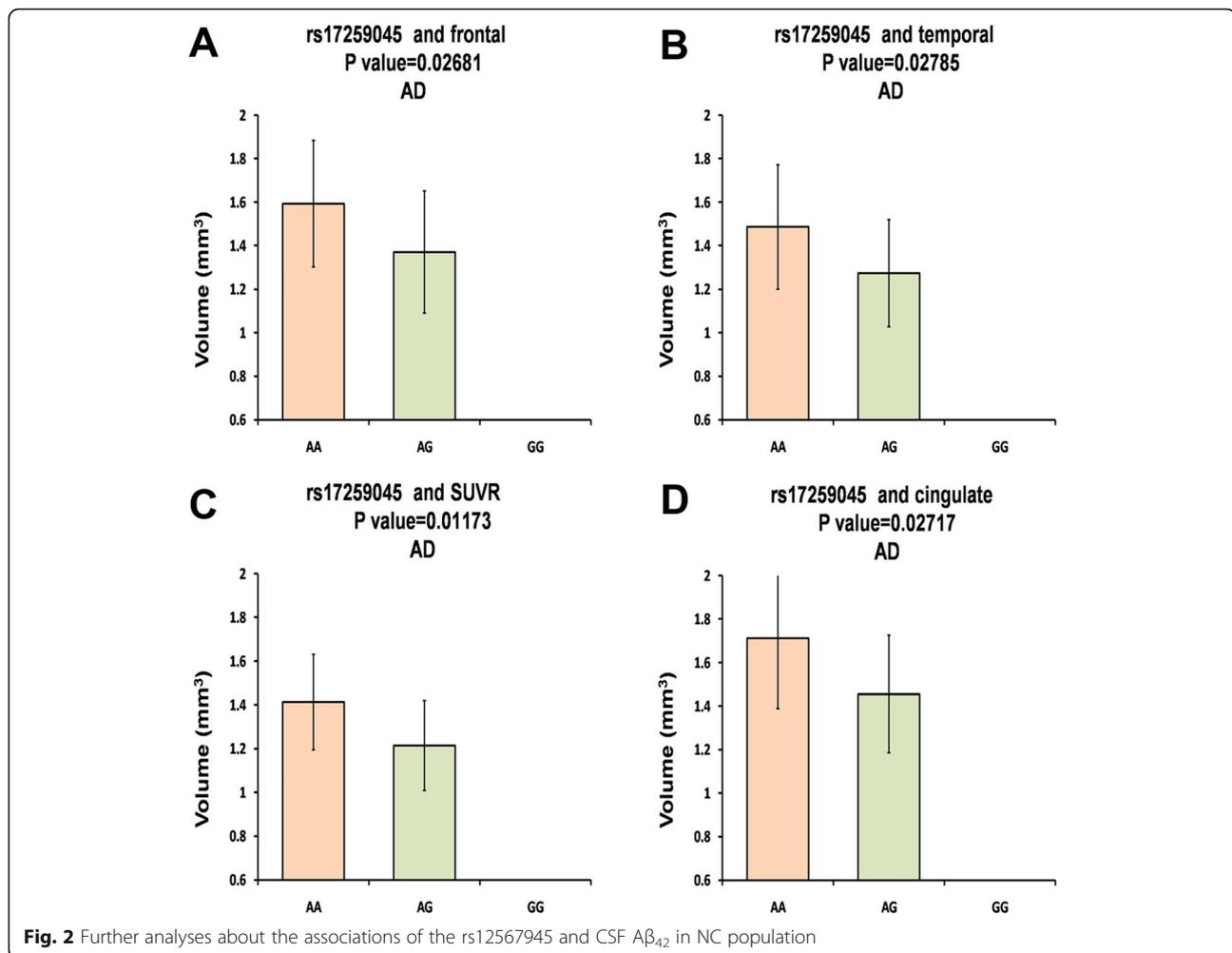
Next, the correlations between *CR1* genetic variants and CSF A β_{42} biomarkers were determined. The results indicated that rs12567945 could observably increase CSF A β_{42} in NC population (TT: mean \pm SD, 191.6 ± 53.29 , $N = 116$; TC: mean \pm SD, 219.7 ± 45.29 , $N = 16$; $P = 0.02589$; Table 3 and Fig. 2), which was found in block 3.

Discussion

In our study, we explored the relation between whole *CR1* genetic variants and A β metabolism biomarkers,

and the results showed that five SNPs, including rs10494884, rs11118322, rs1323721, rs17259045 and rs41308433 could significantly alter A β accumulation in brain. In further analyses, the results suggested rs17259045 might decrease A β accumulation among AD patients. In addition, the genetic variants in rs12567945 would increase CSF A β_{42} in NC population.

As we all known, A β is one important pathological characteristic of AD [27], which may induce the activation of the classical complement pathway in AD brains [28, 29]. Moreover, *CRI* is a necessary component of complement system, and it has been reported to have a close connection with amyloid plaque burden during aging [30, 31]. More importantly, *CRI* genetic variants are found to link to intelligence decline, and may influence the eliminations of A β plaques [30]. Hence, it is urgent to investigate whether *CRI* polymorphisms take part in the pathogenesis and development of LOAD. Actually, previous studies have revealed the association between *CRI* SNPs and amyloid plaque [30, 32–34], including the CSF A β levels [35–37]. However, the current studies only discuss the role of specific SNPs (rs6656401, rs3818361, rs670173, and rs1408077) in A β metabolism. Briefly, rs6656401 and rs3818361, within the *CR1* gene, have association with LOAD susceptibility in Caucasians [17], which are found to be in moderate LD ($D' =$



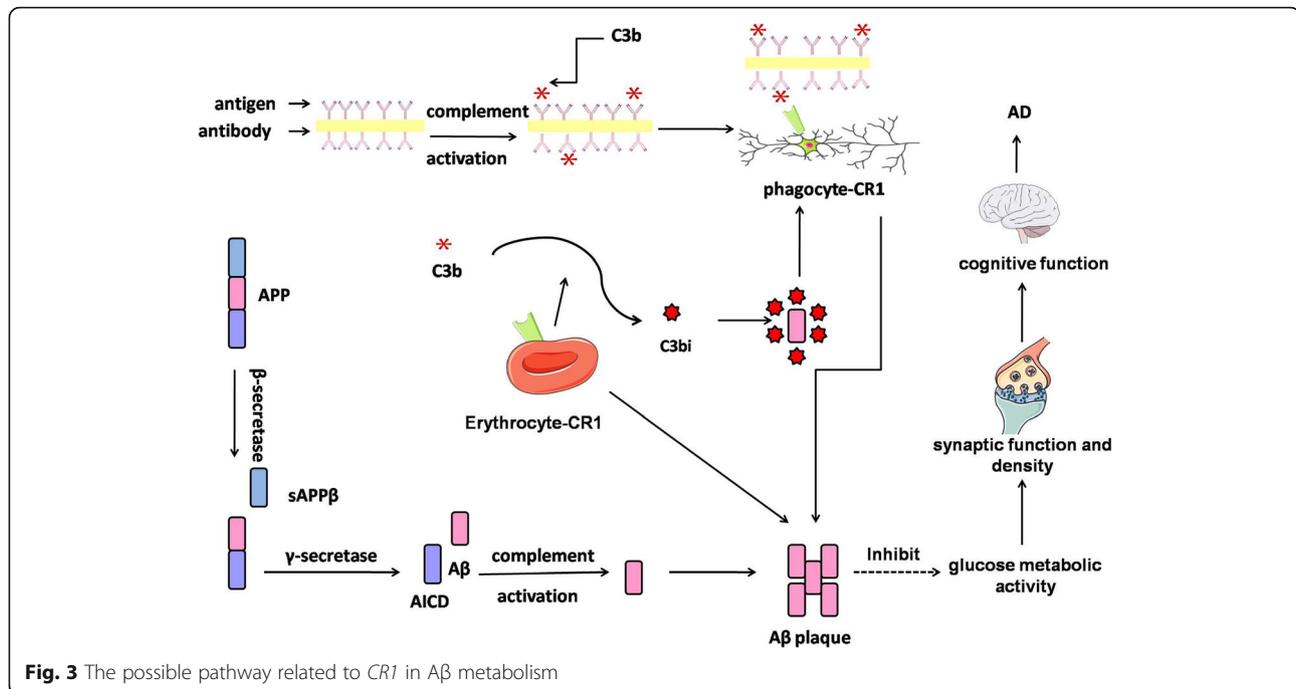
0.824, $r^2 = 0.328$) [38]. Specially, rs3818361 is found to be in block 1 [37]. In our study, the results firstly revealed that rs17259045 could reduce the level of A β accumulation among AD patients, respectively; moreover, rs12567945 could increase CSF A β_{42} in NC population. In fact, rs17259045 was in the missense of *CRI* gene, and rs12567945 located in the intron variant of *CRI* gene. We speculated the genetic variants in the two SNPs might modulate the level of *CRI*, influence the activation of complement system, and finally alter the A β metabolism in the clearance of A β in the brain. Taken together, these results indicated that the detection of variants in *CRI* gene may be useful to diagnose AD timely, and it may be a useful method to treat AD via altering *CRI* level.

Our previous study had reported that several volume (entorhinal, middle temporal, posterior cingulate, precuneus, parahippocampal), volume of subcortical (amygdale and hippocampus) and CA1 (the most associated area with the AD-specific amnesic syndrome in hippocampus) were significantly related to

AD [39]. However, our study failed to find the association between the genetic variants of *CRI* (rs17259045 and rs12567945) and the above regions of interest via using ADNI data. As well know, one characteristic feature of synaptic function and density is cerebral glucose metabolic activity. Moreover, the change of glucose metabolic activity in specific brain regions could be valued via FDG PET [40]. Our study indicated that AD patents with genetic variants in rs17259045 might have more level of glucose metabolic activity in right angular ($P = 0.03278$). Hence, we hypothesized that genetic variants in *CRI* might influence cognitive function (Fig. 3), through regulating CSF A β level, changing A β accumulations in brains, influencing the glucose metabolic activity, as well as altering the synaptic function and density.

Conclusion

In summary, our study found five SNPs (rs10494884, rs11118322, rs1323721, rs17259045 and rs41308433) were significantly linked to A β accumulation in brain. In



further analyses of positive results, rs17259045 was found to decrease Aβ accumulation among AD patients. In addition, our study indicated genetic variants in rs12567945 would increase CSF Aβ₄₂ in NC population. Taken together, our study revealed some novel SNPs in *CR1* which might be involved in AD development through regulating the Aβ pathology. However, several limitations still exist in this study. Firstly, the numbers of included samples were relative small. Secondly, our study was explored only in Caucasians. Hence, further study with larger samples and different ethnicities is still necessary.

Supplementary information

Supplementary information accompanies this paper at <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12881-020-01114-x>.

Additional file 1.

Additional file 2.

Abbreviations

AD: Alzheimer's disease; ADNI: Alzheimer's Disease Neuroimaging Initiative; ADRDA: Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders Association; Aβ: amyloid-β; CSF: Cerebrospinal fluid; FDR: False discovery rate; MAF: Minor allele frequency; MCI: Mild cognitive impairment; MMSE: Mini-mental state examination; NC: Normal controls; NINCDS: Neurological and Communicative Disorders; SNP: Single nucleotide polymorphism; SUVR: Standardized uptake values ratios

Acknowledgements

Data used in preparation of this article were obtained from the Alzheimer's Disease Neuroimaging Initiative (ADNI) database (adni.loni.usc.edu). As such, the investigators within the ADNI contributed to the design and implementation of ADNI and/or provided data but did not participate in

analysis or writing of this report. Our study was allowed to use data information by ADNI.

Authors' contributions

Conception and design of the research: Xi-chen Zhu. Acquisition of data: Xi-chen Zhu, Wen-zhuo Dai, Tao Ma. Analysis and interpretation of data: Wen-zhuo Dai. Statistical analysis: Tao Ma. Obtaining funding: Xi-chen Zhu. Drafting the manuscript: Xi-chen Zhu. Revision of manuscript for important intellectual content: Xi-chen Zhu. All authors have read and approved the manuscript, and ensure that this is the case.

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Availability of data and materials

Not applicable. This study was only the primary research, and further study has been in progress.

Ethics approval and consent to participate

This study was approved by Ethics Committee of the Affiliated Wuxi No. 2 People's Hospital of Nanjing Medical University.

Consent for publication

Not applicable.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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