

**Association between Non-Secretion of ABH Antigens and
Sickle Cell Anaemia**

ABSTRACT

Aim: To determine whether non-secretion of ABH blood group antigens was associated with Sickle Cell Anaemia.

Materials and Methods: Haemagglutination inhibition test was carried out on saliva samples from 300 individuals; 100 of whom had haemoglobin (Hb) genotype AA, 100 HbAS, 50 HbAC and 50 HbSS. ABO blood grouping was carried out by standard methods and Haemoglobin genotype test was performed by cellulose acetate electrophoresis technique.

Results: Eighteen percent (18%) of HbAA, 23% of HbAS, 18% of HbAC and 42% of HbSS individuals were non-secretors of ABH antigens ($p = 0.007$). Non-secretion of ABH substances was more associated with HbSS persons than HbAA ($p = 0.002$), HbAS ($p = 0.016$) and HbAC ($p = 0.009$) individuals.

Conclusion: Non-secretion of ABH blood group substances is associated with Sickle Cell Anaemia.

Keywords: Haemoglobin genotype, ABO blood group, Sickle cell anaemia, ABH antigens, Secretor status

1. INTRODUCTION

In Southwestern Nigeria, in addition to normal haemoglobin A, haemoglobins S and C exist bringing about variants HbAA, HbAS, HbAC, HbSS, HbCC and HbSC among the people in the region [1]. Haemoglobinopathies especially sickle cell anaemia poses a lot of health challenges in Nigeria [2]. Sickle cell anaemia (SCA) is an inherited disorder caused by mutation resulting in replacement of amino-acid glutamic acid with valine at the 6th base position of the beta globin chain. It is a genetic blood disorder characterized by the presence of 2 alleles of the abnormal haemoglobin S (HbSS) in the red cell instead of HbAA with high morbidity and mortality rates. It is recognized by the United Nations as a global public health concern and the World Health Organisation has recommended that by 2020, half of its members should have set up Sickle Cell Anaemia (SCA) control programmes [3].

21 Worldwide, SCA is estimated to affect 20-25 million people and annually about 300,000
22 children are born with the disorder [4]; approximately 250,000 of whom are in sub-Saharan
23 Africa [5] with 50-80% of affected children dying before the age of 5 years [6].

24 The ABO blood group and secretor status of a person are inherited independently. While the
25 ABH (FUT 1) gene codes for the ABO blood group, the secretor (FUT 2) gene interacts with
26 the ABH (FUT 1) gene to determine the secretor status of an individual [7]. Individuals can
27 be homozygous (SeSe) or heterozygous (Sese) secretors or non-secretors (sese). Non-
28 secretion of ABH antigens has been associated with a number of non-communicable
29 diseases and disorders such as autoimmune diseases [8, 9], blood clotting and thrombotic
30 diseases [10, 11], immunological disorders [12], myocardial infarction [13, 14], rheumatic
31 heart disease [15, 16], duodenal ulcers [17]. Apart from one study [18] which investigated
32 frequency distribution of secretors and non-secretors in HbAA and HbSS individuals in Zaria,
33 Northwestern Nigeria, we are not aware of any other investigation that has related secretor
34 status with haemoglobin variants. In this study, we hypothesized that secretor status varied
35 significantly with haemoglobin variants and that non-secretion of ABH antigens was
36 associated with sickle cell anaemia.

37 38 **2. METHODOLOGY**

39 40 **2.1 Study Area and Population**

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42 This study was carried out in Osogbo, Southwestern Nigeria. It is the capital of Osun State.
43 Osogbo city seats the Headquarters of both Osogbo Local Government Area (situated at
44 Oke Baale Area of the city) and Olorunda Local Government Area (situated at Igbonna Area
45 of the city). It is some 88 kilometers by road northeast of Ibadan with coordinates Latitude
46 7.767-7.770°N and Longitude 4.557-4.567°E. A total of 300 participants were screened for
47 this study: 100 HbAA individuals, 100 HbAS, 50 HbAC and 50 HbSS. They were drawn from
48 apparently healthy staff, students and patients of LAUTECH Teaching Hospital visiting the
49 General Out Patient Department for routine examination.

50 **2.2 Collection of Blood Samples**

51 Blood samples were collected for Haemoglobin genotype test and ABO blood grouping. A
52 sample of 3 ml of venous blood was collected from each participant into
53 ethylenediaminetetraacetic acid (EDTA) bottle. Haemoglobin genotype test was performed
54 using cellulose acetate electrophoresis method as described elsewhere [1]. In an alkaline pH
55 (8.2-8.6), Hb is a negatively charged molecule and will migrate towards the anode. Different
56 Hbs move at different rates depending on their net charge which is controlled by the amino
57 acid composition of their globin chain. The ABO grouping system is based on agglutination
58 reaction. When a red blood cell carrying an antigen is exposed to its corresponding antibody,
59 they react with each other to form agglutination or clumping. ABO blood group tests were
60 performed by standard techniques ~~as described elsewhere~~ [19].

61 **2.3 Collection of Saliva Samples**

62 Saliva samples were collected from participants for the determination of their secretor status;
63 2 ml of saliva was collected from each participant for determination of secretor status using
64 haemagglutination inhibition test as described elsewhere [20]. In haemagglutination
65 inhibition technique, processed saliva is mixed with antiserum (anti A, anti B or anti H) and
66 allowed to incubate briefly. If the saliva is from a secretor, the soluble blood antigens in it
67 react and neutralize the antibodies in the antiserum. So when red blood cells of appropriate
68 blood group are added to the test mixture of the saliva and antiserum, there will be no free
69 antibody to agglutinate them because the antibodies have already been neutralized by the
70 antigens in the saliva. Therefore the reaction will be negative for agglutination. However, if
71 the saliva is from a non-secretor, there will be no blood group antigens in it and so the
72 antibodies in the antiserum will not be neutralized but free to react with appropriate test cells
73 when added to produced agglutination. Laboratory investigations were carried out on
74 samples collected in the Research Laboratory of the Department of Medical Laboratory
75 Science, College of Health Sciences, Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Osogbo,
76 Nigeria.

2.4 Data Analysis

Data were analysed using proportions and percentages. Differences in proportions or percentages were tested by Chi-square test. A p-value of < 0.05 was considered significant.

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3. RESULTS

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88 A total of 300 persons comprising 100 HbAA, 100 HbAS, 50 HbAC and 50 HbSS individuals
89 participated in this study. Table 1 shows the age and sex distributions of the study
90 population. There were no significant differences in the age ($p = 0.998$) and sex ($p = 0.718$)
91 distributions among the four groups of haemoglobin variants.

92 The distributions of the haemoglobin variants of the study participants in relation to secretor
93 status are given in Table 2. Of the 100 individuals with HbAA, 18% were non-secretors;
94 23%, 18% and 42% of the HbAS, HbAC and HbSS individuals respectively were non-
95 secretors. Non-secretion of ABH antigens varied significantly with haemoglobin variants (χ^2
96 = 11.99, $df = 3$, $p = 0.007$). Further Chi-square tests showed that non-secretion of ABH
97 antigens was more associated with HbSS individuals than HbAA individuals ($\chi^2 = 9.978$, $df =$
98 1, $p = 0.002$), HbAS individuals ($\chi^2 = 5.805$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.016$) and HbAC individuals ($\chi^2 =$
99 6.857, $df = 1$, $p = 0.009$). There was no significant variation in secretion of ABH antigens
100 among HbAA, HbAS and HbAC individuals ($\chi^2 = 0.938$, $df = 2$, $p = 0.626$). Altogether, non-
101 secretors in the HbSS group (42.0%) were significantly higher than those in the non-SS
102 (HbAA, AS and AC) group (20.0%) ($\chi^2 = 11.163$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.001$).

103 The distributions of the haemoglobin variants of the study participants in relation to ABO
104 blood group are given in Table 3. Group AB was excluded from the analysis due to its small
105 number across the haemoglobin variants. There was no significant association in the

distributions of haemoglobin variants in relation to ABO blood group ($\chi^2 = 5.69$, $df = 6$, $p = 0.458$).

The distributions of the non-secretors of the study participants with respect to haemoglobin variants and ABO blood group is given in Table 4. Of the 100 AA individuals, 18 were non-secretors (10 non-group O and 8 group O); of the 100 AS individuals, 23 were non-secretors (14 non-group O and 9 group O); of the 50 AC individuals, 9 were non-secretors (6 non-group O and 3 group O) while 21 of the 50 SS individuals were non-secretors (14 non-group O and 7 group O). Altogether, of the 150 non-O blood group participants, 44 (29.3%) were non-secretors while 27 of the 150 (18.0%) group O participants were non-secretors ($\chi^2 = 5.332$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.021$).

Table 1: Age and Sex distributions among the Study Participants

	Haemoglobin Variants				Total 300	p
	HbAA n=100(%)	HbAS n=100(%)	HbAC n=50(%)	HbSS n=50(%)		
Age group(years)						0.998
16 - 25	32(32.0)	35(35.0)	17(34.0)	15(30.0)	99(33.0)	
26 - 35	28(28.0)	27(27.0)	14(28.0)	15(30.0)	84(28.0)	
>36	40(40.0)	38(38.0)	19(38.0)	20(40.0)	117(39.0)	
Sex						0.718
Male	45(45.0)	48(48.0)	26(52.0)	27(54.0)	146(48.7)	
Female	55 (55.0)	52(52.0)	24(48.0)	23(46.0)	154(51.3)	

Table 2: Distribution of the Haemoglobin Variants of the Study Participants in Relation to Secretor Status

	Haemoglobin Variants				Total 300	p
	HbAA n=100(%)	HbAS n=100(%)	HbAC n=50(%)	HbSS n=50(%)		
Secretor status						0.007
Secretor	82(82.0)	77(77.0)	41(82.0)	29(58.0)	229(76.3)	
Non-secretor	18(18.0)	23(23.0)	09(18.0)	21(42.0)	71(23.7)	

Table 3: Distribution of the Haemoglobin Variants of the Study Participants in Relation to ABO Blood Group

	Haemoglobin Variants				Total 300(%)	p
	HbAA n=100(%)	HbAS n=100(%)	HbAC n=50(%)	HbSS n=50(%)		
ABO Blood Group						0.458
A	22(22.0)	23(23.0)	11(22.0)	16(32.0)	72(24.0)	
B	19(19.0)	26(26.0)	13(26.0)	14(28.0)	72(24.0)	
*AB	02(2.0)	02(2.0)	01(2.0)	01(2.0)	06(2.0)	
O	57(57.0)	49(49.0)	25(50.0)	19(38.0)	150(50.0)	

*AB group was not included in the statistical analysis

Table 4: Distribution of the Non-Secretors of the Study Participants with Respect to Haemoglobin Variants and ABO Blood Group

	Haemoglobin Variants				Total(NS)
	HbAA(NS)	HbAS(NS)	HbAC(NS)	HbSS(NS)	
ABO Blood Group					
Non-O	43(10)	51(14)	25(06)	31(14)	150(44)
O	57(08)	49(09)	25(03)	19(07)	150(27)
Total	100(18)	100(23)	50(09)	50(21)	300(71)

NS: Non-Secretor

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151 4. DISCUSSION

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153 Previous studies in this study area had shown that secretor status was independent of sex
154 [20]. A similar finding was reported in Calabar, South south Nigeria[21]. Similarly, in this
155 study locality, the distribution of ABO blood group and haemoglobin variants had been
156 reported to be sex independent [1, 22] which were in line with ABO studies carried out in the
157 same region by other researchers [23, 24].

158 In this study, we tested the hypothesis that non-secretors were more associated with HbSS
159 compared to the other haemoglobin variants. The frequency of non-secretors in SCA (HbSS)
160 individuals was significantly higher than the frequency of non-secretors in the other
161 haemoglobin variants (HbAA, HbAS and HbAC) showing that secretor status varied
162 significantly with haemoglobin variants. A study in Northwestern Nigeria reported a higher
163 frequency of non-secretor in HbSS individuals compared to HbAA individuals [18].

164 Also in this study, non-secretion of ABH substances was more associated with persons of
165 non-O group compared to those of O group. Previous studies in the study area and
166 elsewhere had reported lower proportion of group O non-secretors compared to non-O
167 group non-secretors [7, 20]. Another study in the area showed that malaria was less
168 associated with group O secretors than non-group O secretors [22]. These studies showed
169 that with respect to ABO blood group system, more group O persons were secretors
170 compared to the other groups. The protective effect offered by group O individuals had been
171 linked to higher incidence of secretor compared to non-O group [7].

172 Non-secretion of ABH antigens has been associated with many non-communicable diseases
173 and disorders ~~as stated earlier on~~. Similarly, sickle cell anaemia individuals are known to
174 have several complications including chronic pain, intermittent painful episodes,
175 musculoskeletal problems, stroke, pulmonary hypertension and septicaemia [3, 25]. It is not
176 unlikely that the complications exhibited by majority of the persons with sickle cell disorder
177 might largely be due to their inability to secrete ABH substances. Also, the observed

178 association might be linked with the Le^a antigens which are present in greater amounts on
179 the epithelial surface of non-secretors [26]. The positive interaction observed between HbSS
180 and inability to secrete ABH antigens could be suggestive of the fact that the sickle cell gene
181 and the secretor gene might directly or indirectly interact to confer susceptibility on persons
182 with sickle cell anaemia. We opine that the severity of symptoms and complications
183 observed in HbSS patients could be due to their inability to secrete ABH antigens. Further
184 studies can be carried out to confirm or disprove this view.

185 186 **4. CONCLUSION**

187 ~~We conclude that~~ secretor status varies significantly with haemoglobin variants and ~~that~~
188 inability to secrete ABH antigens is associated sickle cell anaemia. ~~The increased risk of~~
190 ~~symptoms and complications of sickle cell anaemia.~~

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194 **CONSENT**

195 Informed consent was obtained from all the participants. Ethical approval for this study was
196 obtained from the Ethical Committee of the College of Health Sciences, Ladoke Akintola
197 University of Technology, Osogbo, Osun State, Nigeria.

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200 **COMPETING INTERESTS**

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202 Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.
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