Letters to the editor

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Sex ratios in HLA related autoimmune disease

Sirs: With respect to the interesting article by James' we would like to describe data which support the hypothesis that sex ratios are disturbed in families of probands with HLA related autoimmune disease.

Primary Sjögren's syndrome is a heterogeneous disease with a strong female preponderance.1 A large family study of the disease has been completed in north east England and confirmed the association between HLA-DR3 and primary Sjögren's syndrome.3 The families were ascertained from 40 white probands who all satisfied Fox's criteria for definite primary Sjögren's syndrome.4 Two hundred and seven relatives from a potential pool of 224 were included. The table shows the female:male sex ratio among the family members.

There was a trend for a female excess in siblings, though this did not reach statistical significance. A significant female preponderance, however, was seen in index cases and for relatives as a whole. The availability of all the family pedigrees suggests this to be a true phenomenon and not merely attributable to those consenting to the study.

We have reported definite/probable primary Sjögren's syndrome occurring exclusively in the female relatives with a strong association with HLA-DR3 (5/8 (63%)). In addition, a cohort of young relatives (under 45 years) who expressed some features consistent with primary Sjögren's syndrome were also identified. Twenty eight of these 45 subjects were female (male:female ratio 1:65:1, x2 = 1:365, NS). For these women there was a strong association with HLA-DR3 (18/28 (64%) compared with the association for the men (5/17 (29%), x2 = 3-85, p < 0-05). We suggested that these women may be at risk of developing definite primary Sjögren's syndrome in the future, and a prospective study will help to support or refute this hypothesis.

This suggests that the inheritance of HLA-DR3 may influence the sex ratio of the offspring as well as the susceptibility to primary Sjögren's syndrome.

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Female:male sex ratio among family members with primary Sjögren's syndrome

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
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<tr>
<td>150</td>
<td>74</td>
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<td>142</td>
<td>65</td>
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<td>49</td>
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Index cases (n) 150
Total relatives (n) 142
Siblings in study (n) 49
Offspring of probands (n) 19

*Refers to the potential pool of relatives.
†Refers to the relatives actually seen.

index cases 150

Relative risk 20:3

p = <0:001

49

577–85

Figure 1 Technetium-99m labelled nanocolloid scintigram. Accumulation in the joints and along the tenosynovial sheath of the fourth left finger.
Sex ratios in HLA related autoimmune disease.

H Foster, C Kelly and I Griffiths

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