

Research Article

## 探索马蹄内翻足的遗传和病理生物学途径：简短叙述性综述

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Received: 2024-01-25 ◆ Reviewed: 2024-09-20

Accepted: 2024-11-30 ◆ Publication: 2024-12-25

### 【摘要】：

背景：马蹄内翻足 (TEV)，通常称为马蹄足，是一种常见的先天性足部畸形，其特征是多种骨软骨组织异常，包括后足内翻（距下关节外翻或内翻）、前足内收（跖骨内收）、足弓过大（高弓足）和踝关节背屈受限（马蹄足）。TEV 的发病率为每 1000 个活产婴儿中 0.5 至 2.0 个，其病因被认为涉及遗传和环境因素的复杂相互作用。尽管人们早已认识到 TEV 的确切病因，但其确切病因在很大程度上仍不清楚。各种遗传学研究，包括候选基因关联研究、拷贝数变异分析、连锁分析、全外显子组测序和全基因组测序，已经确定了与 TEV 发病机制有关的特定基因。然而，现有文献仍然不足以查明家族性病例的确切遗传原因，因为大多数研究都集中在散发病例上，许多遗传因素仍处于推测阶段。方法：本叙述性综述综合了现有关于导致 TEV 的环境、分子和遗传因素的文献，同时阐明了其发展所涉及的病理生物学机制。结果：有证据表明，TEV 表现出与常染色体显性和隐性遗传以及不完全外显率的常染色体显性遗传一致的家族分离模式，强调了遗传因素的重要作用。值得注意的是，同卵双胞胎 (32%) 的 TEV 一致率明显高于异卵双胞胎 (2.9%)，这强化了该疾病的遗传基础。结论：根据我们的综述结果，TEV 同时源于遗传倾向和环境影响，这些因素会破坏下肢细胞骨架的正常有丝分裂。为了加深我们对 TEV 的了解，迫切需要进行大规模、多中心合作研究，采用先进的遗传技术，例如采用单核苷酸多态性扫描的全基因组关联研究 (GWAS) 和广泛家庭队列中的连锁分析。

【关键词】：马蹄内翻足，遗传，病理学

## Exploring the Genetic and Pathobiological Pathways of Talipes Equinovarus: a Short Narrative Review

### 【Abstract】：

**Background:** Talipes equinovarus (TEV), commonly referred to as clubfoot, is a prevalent congenital foot deformity characterized by a combination of osteochondral tissue anomalies including hindfoot varus (supination or inversion of the subtalar joint), forefoot adduction (metatarsus adductus), exaggerated midfoot arch (cavus), and restricted ankle dorsiflexion (equinus). The incidence of TEV ranges from 0.5 to 2.0 per 1000 live births, and its etiology is believed to involve a complex interplay of genetic and environmental factors. Despite its long-standing recognition, the precise cause of TEV remains largely unknown. Various genetic studies, including candidate gene association studies, copy number variation analyses, linkage analyses, whole-exome sequencing, and whole-genome sequencing, have identified the specific genes implicated in TEV pathogenesis.

However, the existing literature remains insufficient to pinpoint the exact genetic causes of familial cases, as most investigations have concentrated on sporadic instances, leaving many speculative genetic factors. **Methods:** This

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narrative review synthesizes the existing literature on the environmental, molecular, and genetic factors contributing to TEV while elucidating the pathobiological mechanisms involved in its development. **Results:** Evidence suggests that TEV exhibit familial segregation patterns consistent with both autosomal dominant and recessive inheritance, as well as autosomal dominant inheritance with incomplete penetrance, underscoring the significant role of genetic components. Notably, the concordance rate for TEV was markedly higher in monozygotic twins (32%) than in dizygotic twins (2.9%), reinforcing the genetic underpinning of the condition. **Conclusions:** According to our review outcomes, TEV simultaneously originates from genetic predispositions and environmental influences that disrupt normal mitotic division of the cytoskeleton in the lower limbs. To advance our understanding of TEV, there is a pressing need for large-scale, multicenter collaborative studies employing advanced genetic techniques, such as genome-wide association studies (GWAS) with single nucleotide polymorphism scans and linkage analysis in extensive family cohorts.

**【Keywords】** : Talipes equinovarus, genetics, pathology

## 1. Introduction

Skeletal disorders include a series of conditions in which the development and architecture of the chondro-osseous tissue are adversely affected, leading to deformities of the musculoskeletal system. TEV is one of the most common congenital abnormalities affecting the limbs, characterized by deformity of the foot with four components of osteochondral tissues, namely, the hind foot varus, forefoot (metatarsus) adducts, exaggerated midfoot arch (cavus), and equinus [1], [2]. The resulting deformities are shown in Figure 1.



图 1

**Fig.1 An infant with bilateral club foot (Courtesy of orthopedic unit, District headquarter hospital Rawalpindi Pakistan)**

The prevalence of TEVs varies from 0.5 to 2.0 per 1000 live births [3]. In low- to middle-income countries,

TEV incidence varies between 0.15 and 2.03/1000 live births [4]. The incidence of TEV is high in the Māori population in New Zealand, which can be explained by the genetic load carried by closed societies [5]. Approximately 80 % of all reported cases of TEV are classified as isolated clubfoot, also called non-syndromic, while the other 20% are associated with other clinical abnormalities, and are thus called syndromic.

Syndromic TEV is more commonly associated with myelomeningocele and distal arthrogryposis, multiple epiphyseal dysplasia, Larsen syndrome (LS), Lambert syndrome, and Ehlers-Danlos syndrome (EDS) [6], [8], as shown in Figure 2. Studies performed on isolated TEV have been carried out during childhood; however, no data are available for these cases in adulthood to elaborate on the presence of delayed presentations of other features. The male-to-female ratio is 2:1, which is not variable in different societies [3]. As explained in [7], the polygenic and multifactorial pattern of inheritance in which females are also more likely to transmit clubfoot to their children, leads to the Carter effect. The clubfoot can be unilateral (30-40%) or bilateral (60-70%). TEVs manifest a large variety of biomolecular genetic defects that are influenced by environmental factors [8].

Historically, TEV were also described by Hippocrates during his era [9]. Egyptian Pharaoh Tutankhamen in 1332 was also shown to suffer from clubfoot [10]. A 17<sup>th</sup>-century painting of a dubbed *clubfoot child* by Jusepe de Ribera remains at the Musee du Louvre [11]. Since ancient times, considerable work and advancements have been made in the management of TEVs.

However, the primary cause of this deformity remains unclear. In this review, we focus on the molecular genetic factors and pathobiological mechanisms underlying TEV.

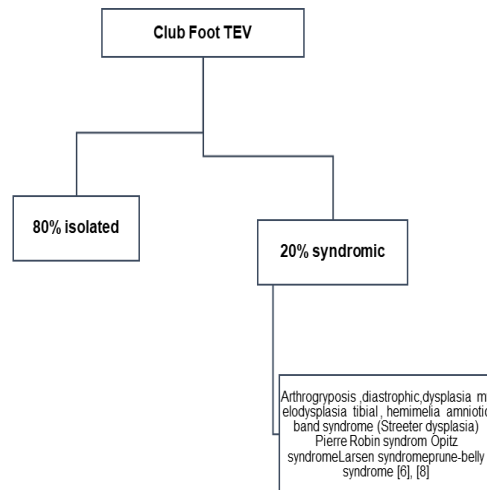


图 2

Fig.2 Presentation of TEV

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Etiology

Despite multiple theories, the exact cause of this deformity remains unclear. It is multifactorial, in that environmental and genetic factors are thought to play significant roles [12]. Some environmental factors, such as maternal psychological distress during pregnancy, alcohol use, parental age, parental education, and birth season were excluded because of the lack of significant statistical association [13]. Hippocrates postulated that increased intrauterine pressure compressing the lower limbs during the intrauterine life of a fetus plays a role in the development of this deformity. However, later studies showed that congested fetuses with oligohydramnios, twin pregnancy, large babies, and primigravida fetuses are not affected by clubfoot [14]. Moreover, it has also been proved that TEV can be diagnosed even in the second trimester of pregnancy before the intrauterine pressure rises [15]. The most common and congruous environmental factor involved in the etiology of this anomaly is the exposure of women to tobacco smoke during pregnancy [16]. Previous studies have shown that tobacco smoke is biotransformed via modulation of the N-acetylation genes, *NAT1* and *NAT2*. This is supported by studies showing that variations in the *NAT1* and *NAT2* genes are associated with TEV [18]. Moreover, decreased acetylation activity of the *NATE 2* gene polymorphism was also found to be associated with TEV [17]-[18]. Additionally, genetic variations in smoking metabolism genes were studied in relation to clubfoot, where it was found that perturbation of the *CYP1A1* gene results in adverse effects on the development of the lower limb [16].

Because TEVs segregate in families with both autosomal dominant and recessive modes of

inheritance, the concordance rate is higher in monozygotic twins (32%) than in dizygotic twins (2.9%) [19]-[21]. Various genetic technologies have been used to identify genetic defects involved in the development of TEVs. Candidate association studies, copy number variation analysis, linkage analysis, whole-genome sequencing, and whole-exome sequencing have indicated the involvement of certain genes in the development of TEVs [12]. However, the genetic molecular regulatory network underlying TEVs has yet to be identified. Other studies have shown that TEV is a multifactorial deformity of the lower limb, in which genetic factors are predominant but modifiable by environmental factors [22]-[23].

### 2.2. Gross TEV Phenotypic Abnormalities

In TEVs, the tibia and fibula bones are slightly shortened because of the incomplete developmental process [24]-[25]. Hence, distal tibial metaphyseal fractures due to diastasis in the tibiofibular joint have been reported in several cases during forced dorsiflexion and eversion of the ankle joint [26]-[28]. Relations between the talus bone and other abnormal bones are divided into different subgroups, such as medial subluxation of the navicular bone on the talar head and medial subluxation of the cuboid bone over the calcaneal head, which ultimately leads to restriction of movements in the ankle joint [26]-[27]. However, some bone anomalies in TEV, such as small dome-shaped deformations, are associated with a better range of movements of the ankle joint [29].

Congenital hypoplasia of the calf muscles after TEV treatment has also been reported [30]. The total number of muscle fibers was normal, but they showed type 1 fiber atrophy, type 2b deficiency, and an increased number of type 2c muscle fibers, suggesting abnormal development of these muscle fibers in TEV cases [31].

### 2.3. TEV Genetics

Usually, mutations in genes encoding contractile proteins of skeletal myofibrils, such as *MYBPH*, *TPM2*, *TNNT3*, *TPM1*, *MYH13*, and *MYH3* are involved in TEVs [32]-[33]. However, Gurnett et al. in their study of 31 patients, of whom 20 had familial clubfoot TEV, could not detect mutations in the *TNNT3*, *MYH3*, and *TPM2* genes [33]. However, he found several previously undescribed single-nucleotide polymorphisms of unknown importance.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Genes implicated in TEVs

#### 3.1.1. *PITX*-Gene

*PITX1* participates in the development of hind limbs, primarily in the legs and feet. The first brachial arch, an embryonic structure at the base of the brain, has also been found to preferentially express *PITX1* [34]-[35]. A study of six probands of Ghanaian parents reported the co-occurrence of orofacial clefts (congenital malformations of the face and palate) and clubfoot with variable genetic causes [36]. Defects in the bronchial arches explain this co-occurrence. Most studies have shown that genetic defects in *PITX1* can cause lower limb developmental deformities such as developmental hip dysplasia, patellar hypoplasia, tibial hemimelia, preaxial polydactyly, and bilateral TEV [37]-[41]. Moreover, copy number variations and haploinsufficiency of *PITX1* play crucial roles in the development of isolated clubfoot [42]-[43].

#### 3.1.2. *TBX4*-Gene

In the T-box family, T-box factor 4 (*TBX4*) is a known transcription factor and its expression has been expressed in multiple organs and tissues [44]. Knockout studies have revealed that *the TBX4 gene plays* a significant role in the development of the lower limbs and respiratory pathways [45]. Hence, mutations in *TBX4* lead to skeletal dysplasia and pulmonary hypertension due to developmental lung diseases [37]. Specifically, mutations in *TBX4* have been reported in patients with pulmonary developmental disorders and lower-limb deformities [46]. Moreover, microduplication of the 17q23.1q23.2 region involving *TBX4* has been identified in familial cases of TEV [47].

#### 3.1.3. *HOX* (*homeobox A, C, D*) gene

The *HOX* family participates in patterning [48]. Genes in the *HOX* cluster (*HOXA-D*) control the development of the lower-limb axis. Members of the *HOXD* cluster, *HOXD12* and *HOXD13*, are involved in the development of TEV [49]. Transmission defects in *HOXA* and *HOXD* apoptosis gene clusters have also been found in TEVs [50]. Moreover, microdeletion of the 5' region of *HOXC* contributes to the development of both the vertical talus and TEV [51].

#### 3.1.4. *Filamin B* (*FLNB*)

*FLNB* is a cytoplasmic protein that regulates intracellular communication and signaling by cross-

linking the protein actin, thus allowing direct communication between the cell membrane and cytoskeletal network, thereby controlling and guiding proper skeletal development. *FLNB* mutations may lead to boomerang dysplasia atelosteogenesis I and III and Larsen syndrome [52]-[55]. Although a mutation in filamin B can cause a complex syndrome, three novel missense mutations in this gene have been identified in the development of TEV [56]. The deletion of *FLNB E1792del* has also been documented in isolated clubfoot patients [57].

#### 3.1.5. *COL9A1*

Type IX collagen proteins are produced by the *COL9A1* gene, which helps in strengthening connective tissues, ligaments, tendons, cartilage, bone, and skin [58]. A study of a Chinese population showed that the *COL9A1* rs35470562 variant may contribute to the development of TEVs [59]. As demonstrated in [60], the high expression of a protein from the *COL9A1* gene in the rs1135056-encoding region may increase susceptibility to TEVs.

Table 2 lists the most common genes involved in TEV development.

表 2  
Table 2 Genes involved in TEV development

Genes	Associated with other phenotypes	References
<i>PITX-gene</i>	Orofacial clefts Developmental hip dysplasia Patella hypoplasia Tibial hemimelia Preaxial polydactyly	37,38,39,40,41,42, 43
<i>TBX4-gene</i>	Skeletal dysplasia Pulmonary hypertension Coxodopatellar syndrome Amelia	37, 44,45,
<i>HOX A</i>	Severe limb and genital abnormalities	49, 50,51
<i>FLNB</i>	Dysplasia atelosteogenesis I-III and Larsen syndrome	52, 53,54,55,57
<i>COL9A1</i>	Osteoarthritis Epiphyseal dysplasia Stickler syndrome	58, 59,60

## 4. Discussion

Recently, mutations in several candidate genes or SNPs have been hypothesized to be involved in the molecular genetic basis of TEV, but the main mechanism remains elusive [9], [61]-[62]. TEV inheritance in heterogenic families is associated with multiple genetic factors. These genetic factors and their regulatory sequences are further influenced by a few environmental factors, complicating their discovery. A neurovascular hypothesis is proposed to identify the common denominator. Spinal anomalies and spina bifida, which are frequently observed in TEV deformities, are associated with neurodegenerative disorders [63]-[64]. A study on sciatic nerve defects in a chicken and mouse model of the TEV phenotype found that upregulation of *LIMK1* causes peroneal muscular atrophy [65]. Vascular insufficiency and occlusion of the vascular tree at the sinus tarsi canal of

the ankle and foot are found in the limbs of patients affected by TEV [66]-[67]. The finding of joint laxity in patients with TEV supports the theory of connective tissue defect [65]. Calcaneus and talar bone anomalies with reduced fetal movement also support the concept of physiological deformity of the foot [1], [68]. All these mechanisms for developing TEVs are related to genes that are key players in cytoskeleton formation. A healthy and genetically maintained cytoskeleton in the feet during intrauterine life is important for foot maturity. Any disruption to the physical properties or shape of the cytoskeleton of bones, muscles, ligaments, and soft tissues may lead to a deformed foot.

Since its description by Hippocrates in 400 BC, a search for possible causes was initiated. Data on segregation analysis suggested the “major genes” involved in the development of TEVs. However, because of the heterogeneity of genetic causes, the candidate gene approach failed to reveal the exact number of causative variants in both isolated and syndromic TEV phenotypes. Moreover, according to [69], the genetics of isolated and syndromic clubfeet were classified, and it was concluded that *FLNB* is involved in both types. As shown in Table 2, genes involved in clubfoot are also involved in other disease processes. Studies published on clubfoot management reported that additional features appear even after surgical intervention in clubfoot patients during adulthood [70]. A case report [71] in a 56 year of age suggested additional features, such as degenerative changes in the hindfoot and thoracolumbar scoliosis with degenerative spondyloarthrosis in the thoracolumbar spine segments. Sequencing analysis in one study failed to detect genetic variants of *TBX4*, *PITX1*, *HOXD12*, and *HOXD9* in two Pakistani families [72]. They suggested that mutations might be present in the regulatory regions of these genes. A literature review of a large number of studies proved that relapse of the disease process occurs even after corrective surgery because of tissue deposition, indicating that pathobiological factors persist and cause the issues [73]-[74].

Recently, more advanced techniques have become available to obtain promising results regarding the underlying causes of TEV. Among all the reported genetic studies using different techniques, next-generation sequencing (NGS), including whole-genome sequencing and whole-exome sequencing (WES), has become popular in common clinical diagnosis, as well as in research on gene identification in inherited diseases. To obtain the most effective results, it is useful to combine these techniques with a linkage analysis [75].

## 5. Conclusions

TEV is a multifactorial condition characterized by genetic disruption of multiple molecules in the cytoskeleton, which is affected by exposure to adverse environmental and genetic factors. The available literature shows a deficit in high-profile studies, as many studies focusing on the genetic causes of this deformity lack speculative harmony in proving the exact genetic cause in both isolated and syndromic types of

talipes equinovarus. Therefore, refinement of existing genes of isolated clubfoot and clubfoot-associated phenotypes in early and late adulthood will lead to more effective genotype determination and improved diagnostic capabilities and management options. Hence, large-scale, multicenter collaborative studies using genetic techniques such as GWAS with SNP scans for linkage analysis are required for families affected by TEV. Furthermore, inheritance patterns and penetrance will help to identify novel genes involved in this disorder. The discovery of genetic factors will revolutionize the management of TEV and eliminate the disability of patients who often persist.

Nonetheless, we would like to put forward the hypothesis that genes implicated in clubfoot not only cause clubfoot but also lead to multiple symptoms, and the affected patients are suffering from syndromic clubfoot. Therefore, we need to thoroughly investigate affected individuals to determine the possibility of other syndromes. In other words, the classification of club feet into isolated and syndromic types must be revised.

## Declarations

### Author Contributions

Yasir Naseem Khan wrote the initial draft of the article under the supervision of **Mohammad Imad. Mohammad Imad** reviewed and suggested the changes required for publication. All the authors contributed equally to the study and approved the final manuscript.

### Ethical Approval and Consent to participate

The Research Ethics Committee of the Islamic International University, Malaysia, granted all necessary clearance and ethical approval.

### Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

### Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank Dr. Uzma Khan from the Department of Clinical Sciences, Al Rayan College of Medicine, Al Rayan National College, Madina Munawarra for her useful suggestions and guidance during the final stage of the study.

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