

Original Article

α^0 -thalassemia in affected fetuses with hemoglobin E- β^0 -thalassemia disease in a high-risk population in Thailand

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Abstract: Objectives: A co-inheritance of α^0 -thalassemia can ameliorate the clinical severity of the hemoglobin (Hb) E- β -thalassemia disease. This information should be provided at prenatal diagnosis. Identification of α^0 -thalassemia in an affected fetus is therefore valuable. We have explored this genetic interaction in a large cohort of affected fetuses with hemoglobin (Hb) E- β -thalassemia in northeast Thailand. Methods: A study was done retrospectively on 1,592 couples at risk of having fetuses with Hb E- β -thalassemia, encountered from January 2011 to December 2019. A total of 415 left-over DNA specimens of the affected fetuses with Hb E- β -thalassemia disease were further investigated. Examination of α^0 -thalassemia was done using gap-PCR or a multiplex PCR assay for simultaneous detection of Hb E and α^0 -thalassemia mutations. Results: Of the 415 affected fetuses, the two most common β^0 -thalassemia genes found were the codons 41/42 (-TTCT) (199/415; 48.0%) and codon 17 (A-T) (115/415; 27.7%). α^0 -thalassemia was found unexpectedly in 21 (5.1%) fetuses. Hematologic phenotypes of the parents indicated that it was impossible to differentiate a pure β^0 -thalassemia carrier from a double β^0 -thalassemia/ α^0 -thalassemia heterozygote unless DNA analysis is performed. In contrast, a reduced level of Hb E in the Hb E carrier (<25%) is a valuable marker for predicting double heterozygosity for Hb E/ α^0 -thalassemia. This could be further confirmed using a multiplex PCR assay. Conclusions: There is a high prevalence of co-inheritance of α^0 -thalassemia in fetuses with Hb E- β -thalassemia disease. In a high-risk population such as Thailand, we recommend screening for α^0 -thalassemia in all affected fetuses with Hb E- β -thalassemia disease and providing complete genetic information to the parents to make appropriate decisions at prenatal diagnosis and genetic counseling.

Keywords: α -thalassemia, β -thalassemia, Hb E- β -thalassemia, prenatal diagnosis, genetic interaction

Introduction

Hemoglobin (Hb) E- β^0 -thalassemia is the most common form of thalassemia found in northeast Thailand [1]. The disease exhibits variable clinical phenotype, ranging from mild non-transfusion dependent thalassemia (NTDT) to severe transfusion-dependent thalassemia (TDT) [2, 3]. This marked phenotypic diversity is associated with a great variety of genotypes, including different β -thalassemia alleles, co-inheritance of α -thalassemia, and the presence of genetic determinants associated with increased production of γ -globin chains and consequent ability to produce functional fetal hemoglobin (Hb F) in adult life [4-7]. Among

these genetic modifiers, co-inheritance of α^0 -thalassemia is a significant factor that can dramatically reduce the clinical severity of the cases in our population [8, 9]. In Thailand, according to the national prevention and control program of thalassemia, Hb E- β^0 -thalassemia is one of the targeted severe thalassemia diseases [10]. Prenatal diagnosis is routinely offered to a couple at risk of having a fetus with the disease [1]. Therefore, identification of α^0 -thalassemia in an affected fetus is useful. Due to the variability of the phenotype associated with the disease, it is essential to examine the possible co-inheritance of genetic modifiers in the fetus, especially α^0 -thalassemia, before a decision is made appropriately. The micromap-

ping survey in our area in northeast Thailand has identified the prevalence of 5.8% for α^0 -thalassemia, 0.9% for β -thalassemia, and 41.7% for Hb E [11]. A genetic co-inheritance of these thalassemia defects in the population is expected. Our previous studies in adult subjects showed that the prevalence of α^0 -thalassemia in β -thalassemia carrier, Hb E carriers, and homozygous Hb E were 4.4%, 10.4%, and 4.6%, respectively [12-14]. In this study, we examine the prevalence of co-inheritance of α^0 -thalassemia in a large retrospective cohort of affected fetuses with Hb E- β^0 -thalassemia encountered at our prenatal diagnosis service nine consecutive years during January 2011 to December 2019.

Material and methods

Subjects

Ethical approval of the study protocol was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Khon Kaen University, Khon Kaen, Thailand (HE622173). A retrospective review was made on 1,592 couples at risk of having fetuses with Hb E- β^0 -thalassemia referred to our Thalassemia Service Unit, Centre for Research and Development of Medical Diagnostic Laboratories (CMDL), Khon Kaen University, Khon Kaen, Thailand, for prenatal diagnosis during January 2011 to December 2019. Left-over DNA specimens were selectively recruited from 415 affected fetuses with Hb E- β^0 -thalassemia disease. These DNA specimens were prepared routinely from chorionic villi, amniotic fluid, or fetal blood specimens obtained at prenatal diagnosis [1].

DNA analysis

At our routine setting, identification of β -thalassemia and Hb E mutations are carried out using allele-specific PCR and related techniques [1]. Screening for α^0 -thalassemia mutation (SEA & THAI deletions) was done in the 415 affected fetuses using gap-PCR as previously described [15, 16]. Alternatively, α^0 -thalassemia was detected simultaneously with the Hb E gene in a modified multiplex PCR manner, as shown in **Figure 1** [17]. The multiplex PCR was carried out in a reaction volume of 50 μ L containing 1 μ g of fetal DNA in a PCR buffer (10 mM Tris-HCl pH 8.3, 50 mM KCl, 3 mM MgCl₂, 0.001% gelatin), 200 mM dNTPs, 1.005

M Betaine, 2% Dimethyl sulfoxide, 1.5 pmol each of primer; γ 4 (5'-GGCCTAAAACACAGAGT-3'), γ 5 (5'-CCAGAAGCGAGTGTGTGGAA-3'), S3 (5'-TCCCATAGACTCACCTGAA-3') and G24 (5'-CGTGGATGAAGTTGGTGGTA-3'), 2.4 pmol each of primer; α G64 (5'-CGATCTGGGCTCTGTGTTCT-3') and α G65 (5'-TGGAGTGCAGTGTGTAGTC-3'), and 2 units *Taq* DNA polymerase (Biotoools, B&M Labs, Madrid, Spain). After initial heating at 95°C for 5 min, a PCR process (95°C for 1 min, 63°C for 1 min, and 72°C for 90 sec) was carried out on a SimpliAmp Thermal Cycler (Applied Biosystems, Waltham, MA, USA) for 30 cycles. The PCR amplicon was analyzed on 2% agarose gel electrophoresis and visualized under UV light after staining with ethidium bromide.

Statistical analysis

Frequency of α^0 -thalassemia was presented as number and percentage. Hematological values and Hb profiles among at-risk couples were described by mean and standard deviation. All descriptive statistics were performed using Minitab version 16 (Minitab, Inc., USA).

Results

Thalassemic diseases at-risk for the fetuses

From January 2011 to December 2019, a total of 3,699 at-risk couples were referred to our center for prenatal diagnosis of thalassemia. Of these, 1,592 couples were at risk of having fetuses with Hb E- β^0 -thalassemia disease based on initial Hb and DNA analyses. Some of them also carried additional risks for homozygous α^0 -thalassemia and homozygous β -thalassemia, as shown in **Table 1**. As shown in the Table, Hb analysis revealed, in most couples (1,544/1,592; 97.0%) with Hb A₂A (Hb A₂>3.5% for β -thalassemia trait) in one of the couples and EA (Hb E>25% for Hb E trait) in another, indicating a 25% risk of Hb E- β -thalassemia in the fetuses (Group 1). Based on the national screening protocol, prenatal testing of these at-risk couples in group 1 focuses mainly on β -thalassemia and Hb E, and analysis of α^0 -thalassemia is not performed. In the remaining couples, 45 (45/1592; 2.8%) had additional risks for homozygous α^0 -thalassemia since one of the couples carried β -thalassemia heterozygote, Hb E homozygote, or Hb E heterozygote (with Hb E<25%, possibly

α^0 -thalassemia and Hb E- β^0 -thalassemia in the fetus

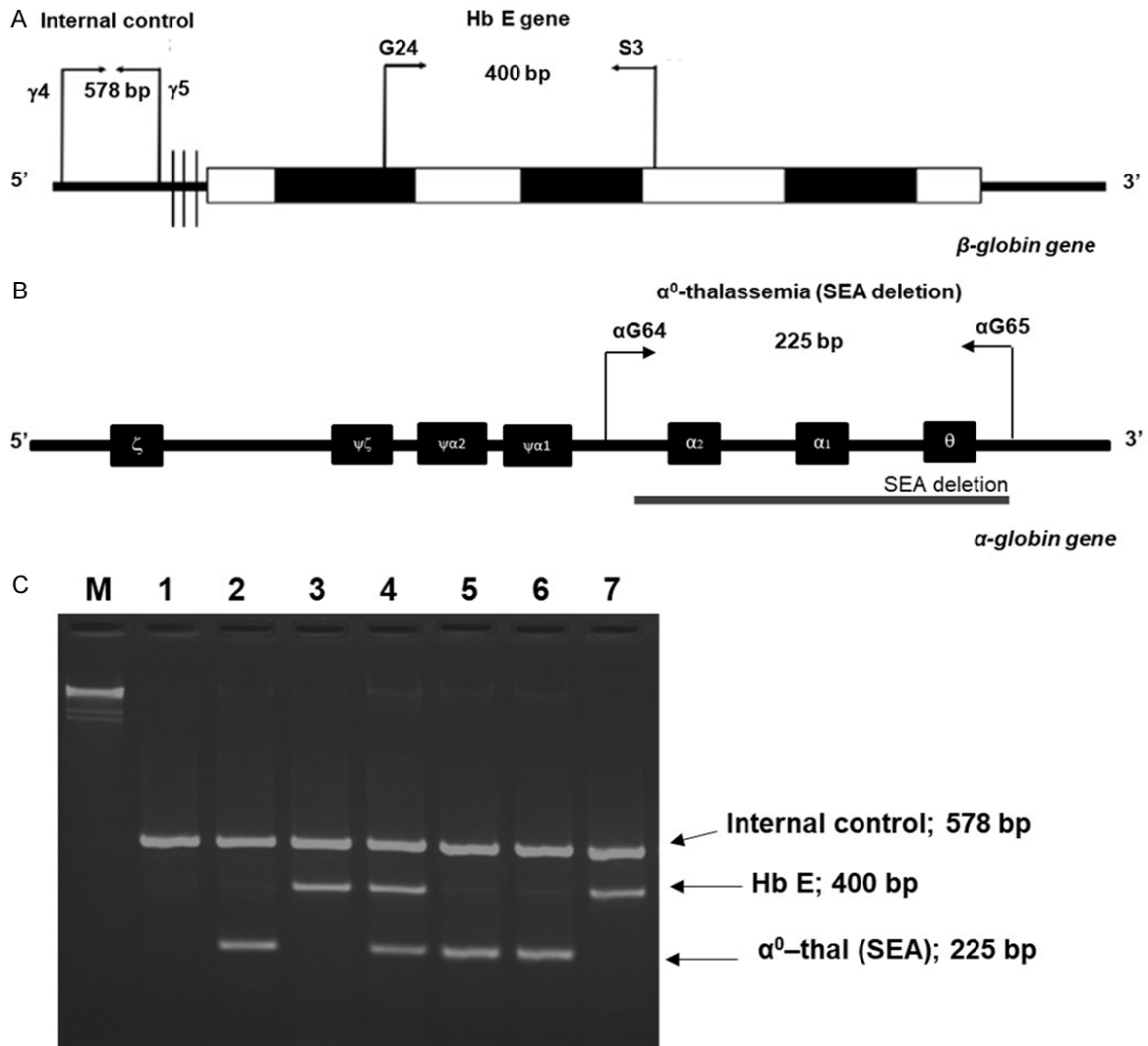


Figure 1. Multiplex PCR for simultaneous identification of Hb E and α^0 -thalassemia (SEA deletion) genes. The locations and orientations of the primers used in the PCR assay are depicted. A: The Hb E allele-specific primer (G24) is used with a common primer (S3) to produce a 400 bp Hb E-specific fragment. Two common primers, $\gamma 4$ and $\gamma 5$ for γ -globin gene promoter, are used to generate a 578 bp internal control fragment. B: The primers $\alpha G64$ and $\alpha G65$ are used to produce a 225-bp specific fragment of α^0 -thalassemia (SEA deletion). C: A representative 2% agarose gel electrophoresis. M is λ /Hind III DNA markers. Lane 1 is normal, lanes 2, 5, and 6 are positive for the α^0 -thalassemia (SEA deletion), lanes 3 and 7 are positive for Hb E, and lane 4 is positive for both Hb E and α^0 -thalassemia (SEA deletion).

Table 1. Results of Hb analysis of 1,592 at-risk couples, classified into 6 different groups and the diseases at-risk for the fetuses

Group	Results of Hb analysis		Diseases at-risk	No.	%
	Husband/Wife	Husband/Wife			
1	A_2A ; Hb $A_2 > 3.5\%$	EA; Hb E $> 25\%$	a	1,544	96.9
2	A_2A ; Hb $A_2 > 3.5\%$	EA; Hb E $\leq 25\%$	a, b	29	1.8
3	A_2A ; Hb $A_2 > 3.5\%$	EE	a, b	9	0.6
4	EF	EA; Hb E $\leq 25\%$	a, b	4	0.3
5	EF	EE	a, b	3	0.2
6	A_2A ; Hb $A_2 > 3.5\%$	EF, EE/EF	a, b, c	3	0.2
	Total			1,592	100

A: Hb E- β^0 -thalassemia disease; b: Homozygous α^0 -thalassemia, and c: Homozygous β^0 -thalassemia.

α^0 -thalassemia and Hb E- β^0 -thalassemia in the fetus

Table 2. Number of affected fetuses with Hb E- β^0 -thalassemia according to β -thalassemia mutations *in trans* of Hb E mutation and number of fetuses with co-inheritance of α^0 -thalassemia

β -thalassemia mutations	No	(%)	Number of fetuses with α^0 -thalassemia (SEA) (%)
CD 41/42 (-TTCT)	199	(48.0)	11 (2.7)
CD 17 (A-T)	115	(27.7)	7 (1.7)
IVSI-1 (G-T)	26	(6.3)	2 (0.5)
IVSI-5 (G-C)	19	(4.6)	
CD 71/72 (+A)	18	(4.3)	
3.4-kb deletion	10	(2.4)	
IVSII-654 (C-T)	8	(1.9)	
CD 35 (C-A)	5	(1.2)	
CD 41 (-C)	3	(0.7)	
CD 26 (C-T)	2	(0.5)	
CD 27 (+C)	2	(0.5)	1 (0.2)
105 bp del	2	(0.5)	
FIL del	1	(0.2)	
CD 43 (G-T)	1	(0.2)	
CD 30 (G-C)	1	(0.2)	
CD 15 (-T)	1	(0.2)	
CD 33/34 (+C)	1	(0.2)	
CD 95 (+A)	1	(0.2)	
Total	415	(100)	21 (5.1)

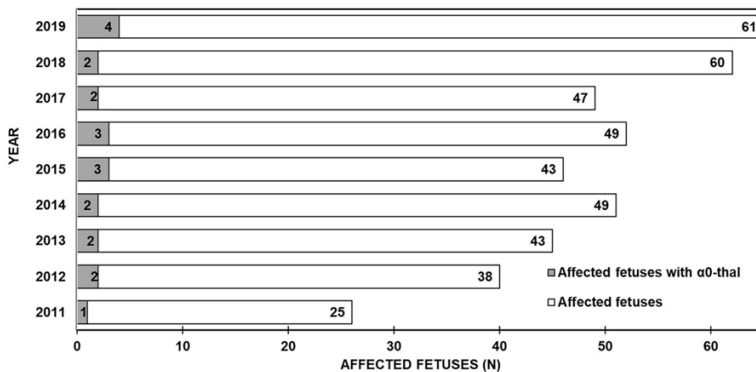


Figure 2. Numbers of affected fetuses with Hb E- β^0 -thalassemia disease encountered within nine years from 2011 to 2019. The white bars indicate the total number of Hb E- β^0 -thalassemia affected fetuses and the gray boxes indicate the number of affected fetuses that co-inherited α^0 -thalassemia.

co-inheritance of α^0 -thalassemia requiring further PCR analysis of α^0 -thalassemia). Therefore, these 45 couples were at risk of having fetuses with both Hb E- β^0 -thalassemia and homozygous α^0 -thalassemia. Thus, the fetuses of these 45 couples were tested at prenatal diagnosis for β^0 -thalassemia, Hb E, and α^0 -thalassemia mutations. In contrast, the last three

couples (3/1,592; 0.2%) were at risk for Hb E- β -thalassemia, homozygous α^0 -thalassemia and homozygous β -thalassemia. In this last group, one partner of the couples was a carrier of β -thalassemia, and their partner carried Hb E- β -thalassemia or homozygous Hb E disorders (**Table 1**).

β -thalassemia mutations and α^0 -thalassemia identified in affected fetuses

Retrospective reviews at prenatal diagnosis of these 1,592 at-risk couples showed that 415 (26.1%) fetuses were affected by Hb E- β^0 -thalassemia disease. A total of 18 different β -thalassemia mutations were identified. As expected, the two most common mutations were codons 41/42 (-TTCT) and codon17 (A-T), accounting for 48.0% and 27.7%, respectively. Other β -thalassemia mutations were encountered at much lower frequencies, as shown in **Table 2**. DNA samples of these 415 affected fetuses were further investigated for co-inheritance of α^0 -thalassemia (SEA & THAI deletions). With this analysis, we found 21 of 415 (5.1%) fetuses with Hb E- β^0 -thalassemia disease to carry α^0 -thalassemia (SEA deletion). **Figure 2** summarizes a total number of affected fetuses with Hb E- β^0 -thalassemia disease and those with α^0 -thalassemia (SEA deletion) found each year during

2011-2019. Hematologic features and the result of DNA analysis of the parents of these 21 affected fetuses are presented in **Table 3**. As shown in the table, α^0 -thalassemia was identified in the parents with heterozygous β -thalassemia (n=13), heterozygous Hb E (n=7), homozygous Hb E (n=2), and Hb E- β -thalassemia (n=1). Except for a reduced level of Hb E in Hb E

α^0 -thalassemia and Hb E- β^0 -thalassemia in the fetus

Table 3. Hematologic values and Hb profiles of 21 at-risk couples who had affected fetuses with Hb E- β^0 -thalassemia and heterozygous α^0 -thalassemia (SEA), including results of α^0 -thalassemia analysis of the couples

Group	Number of couples (%)	Hb analysis	α^0 -thal gene (SEA)	Rbc ($\times 10^{12}/L$)	Hb (g/dL)	HCT (%)	MCV (fL)	MCH (pg)	RDW (%)	Hb A ₂ /E (%)	Hb F (%)	
1	10 (47.6)	Husband/Wife	A ₂ A; Hb A ₂ >3.5%	Pos	5.4±1.0	11.6±1.8	35.7±5.1	66.1±4.9	21.1±1.6	15.4±2.1	5.8±0.8	1.3±0.5
		Husband/Wife	EA; Hb E>25%	Neg	5.3±0.6	12.8±2.3	38.8±6.5	73.1±8.0	24.4±3.3	14.1±2.8	28.4±1.1	1.2±0.7
2	3 (14.3)	Husband/Wife	A ₂ A; Hb A ₂ >3.5%	Pos	5.8±0.7	11.2±2.7	35.1±7.2	59.6±5.5	19.0±2.4	18.2±2.0	5.7±0.6	0.5±0.4
		Husband/Wife	EA; Hb E≤25%	Pos	4.9±0.1	10.5±0.4	31.5±1.1	64.8±3.7	21.5±0.7	14.6±0.7	21.7±0.7	0.5±0.3
3	3 (14.3)	Husband/Wife	A ₂ A; Hb A ₂ >3.5%	Neg	6.3±0.7	12.2±1.4	40.0±3.5	63.9±3.1	19.5±1.0	13.9±0.1	5.8±0.5	1.7±0.9
		Husband/Wife	EA; Hb E≤25%	Pos	5.8±0.7	12.1±1.5	38.3±5.0	71.3±5.8	21.0±0.1	16.0±2.5	19.7±0.8	1.2±0.8
4	1 (4.8)	Husband	EE	Neg	6.8	13.4	42.5	62.8	19.8	15.3	98.8	1.2
		Wife	A ₂ A; Hb A ₂ >3.5%	Pos	5.3	11.0	34.9	65.9	20.8	16.9	5.7	0
5	1 (4.8)	Husband	A ₂ A; Hb A ₂ >3.5%	Neg	4.6	10.9	30.4	66.5	23.9	13.8	5.2	0.5
		Wife	EE	Pos	5.8	13.6	40.1	69.0	23.3	20.1	98.5	1.5
6	1 (4.8)	Husband	EE	na	5.6	11.8	34.8	62.0	21.0	15.8	96.5	3.5
		Wife	A ₂ A; Hb A ₂ >3.5%	na	5.3	11.4	36	67.0	21.3	14.8	5.2	1.1
7	1 (4.8)	Husband	EE	Pos	6.3	13.2	37.9	60.1	20.9	18.6	90.2	1.9
		Wife	EF	Pos	4.9	8.2	23.8	48.8	16.7	21.9	66.6	33.4
8	1 (4.8)	Husband	EF	Neg	5.4	10.2	33.4	61.3	18.7	27.1	63.2	36.8
		Wife	EA; Hb E≤25%	Pos	5.2	10.7	34	65.7	20.7	16.4	19.2	0.7

Values are presented as mean ± standard deviation or as raw data where appropriated. Pos: Positive; Neg: Negative; na: not available.

α^0 -thalassemia and Hb E- β^0 -thalassemia in the fetus

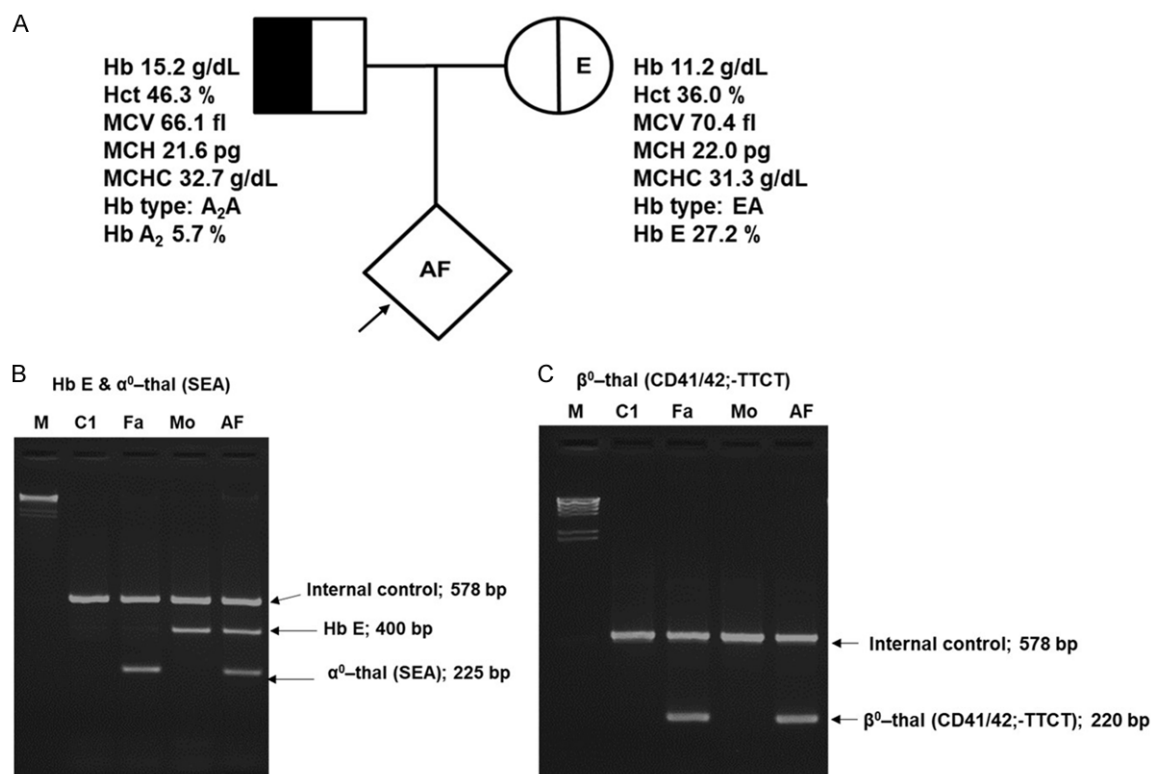


Figure 3. Prenatal diagnosis of Hb E- β^0 -thalassemia in a representative family. A: Pedigree analysis with hematological and Hb analysis results of the couples at risk. The arrow indicates the fetus whose amniotic fluid specimen (AF) was obtained at 16 weeks of gestation. A representative 2% agarose gel electrophoresis of the PCR products are shown. M is λ /*Hind* III DNA markers. B: The multiplex PCR assay for Hb E and α^0 -thalassemia (SEA deletion) showed that the father (Fa), the mother (Mo), and the fetus (AF) were respectively positive for α^0 -thalassemia, Hb E, and both Hb E and α^0 -thalassemia. C1 is a negative control. C: Allele-specific PCR assay for β^0 -thalassemia (CD 41/42; -TTCT). The result indicated that the father (Fa) and the fetus (AF) but not the mother (Mo) were positive for β^0 -thalassemia (CD 41/42; -TTCT). Therefore, the fetus was affected by Hb E- β^0 -thalassemia disease with a co-inherited α^0 -thalassemia (SEA deletion).

heterozygote with α^0 -thalassemia (Hb E <25%), we did not observe a difference in the hematologic features of these double heterozygotic subjects and those of heterozygotic subjects without α^0 -thalassemia in our archives. Therefore, screening of such thalassemia interactions in the parents based on hematological grounds may be difficult.

Simultaneous detection of α^0 -thalassemia and Hb E

Simultaneous identification of α^0 -thalassemia in the fetus with Hb E- β -thalassemia at prenatal diagnosis is the best alternative. This is shown representatively in **Figure 3**. Hematologic findings indicated that the father was a β^0 -thalassemia carrier (CD 41/42; -TTCT) associated with reduced MCV (66.1 fL) & MCH (21.6 pg), and elevated Hb A₂ (5.7%). The mother was diagnosed as a Hb E carrier with 27.2% Hb E.

The couple had a 25% risk of having a fetus with Hb E- β^0 -thalassemia disease. As shown in the figure, a multiplex PCR assay identified unexpectedly that the fetus was affected by Hb E- β^0 -thalassemia and α^0 -thalassemia, and the father was, in fact, a double β^0 -thalassemia/ α^0 -thalassemia heterozygote.

Discussion

Hb E- β^0 -thalassemia is a significant public health problem in Thailand and many Southeast Asian countries [1, 14]. Generally, the patient requires regular blood transfusion for effective treatment, although variable phenotypic expression varying from mild to severe phenotype has been noted [3, 19]. Several genetic factors have been identified as genetic modifiers of this disease. A study of Hb E- β^0 -thalassemia patients with non-transfusion-dependent thalassemia (NTDT) phenotype in north-

east Thailand also showed many genetic factors, such as co-inheritance of α -thalassemia, $^6\gamma$ -*XmnI* polymorphism, and other genetic determinants associated with increased production of γ -globin chains play important role in the severity of the disease [3, 9, 20, 21]. Among these genetic modifiers, co-inheritance of α^0 -thalassemia was found to be a major genetic modifier for Hb E- β^0 -thalassemia disease. Our recent study in northeast Thailand demonstrated that Hb E- β^0 -thalassemia patients with co-inherited α^0 -thalassemia showed NTDT phenotype with a mean Hb level of 10.5 ± 2.9 g/dL [21]. This is also the case in northern Thai patients where it was found that Hb E- β^0 -thalassemia patients with co-inherited α^0 -thalassemia showed a mild clinical phenotype with the mean Hb level of 7.9 ± 1.5 g/dL, and growth was close to normal [22]. Therefore, identifying the co-inheritance of α^0 -thalassemia in the fetus with Hb E- β^0 -thalassemia disease is important additional information for phenotypic prediction of the expecting fetus and genetic counseling the parents. It is understandable that the affected fetus with this genetic thalassemia interaction would have a mild clinical phenotype. In this study, the prevalence of 5.1% (**Table 2**) co-inheritance of α^0 -thalassemia in fetuses with Hb E- β^0 -thalassemia disease indicates that this should not be overlooked at prenatal diagnosis in Thai population. A prevalence of 5.8% α^0 -thalassemia has been documented in the northeast Thai population [11]. Our previous study revealed that the prevalence of co-inherited α^0 -thalassemia in β -thalassemia heterozygote in our population is around 4.4% [12]. As shown in **Table 3**, among 21 couples who had fetuses with Hb E- β^0 -thalassemia disease with α^0 -thalassemia, only one of the couples carried α^0 -thalassemia. Accordingly, these couples do not carry the risk for fetal homozygous α^0 -thalassemia disease (Hb Bart's hydrops fetalis) in their fetuses, information related to α^0 -thalassemia gets ignored, and no α^0 -thalassemia screening is carried out at prenatal diagnosis and counseling. Thus, two approaches may be carried out prospectively, i.e., massive screening of α^0 -thalassemia in all couples at risk for fetal Hb E- β^0 -thalassemia or selective identification of α^0 -thalassemia in all fetuses with Hb E- β^0 -thalassemia disease.

It is conceivable, as shown by **Table 3** that based on hematological grounds, selective

screening of α^0 -thalassemia in the couples with heterozygous β -thalassemia may be difficult. The hematologic features of the β -thalassemia heterozygote with or without α^0 -thalassemia are similar, especially since they both have hypochromic microcytosis and elevated Hb A₂ i.e., still within a diagnostic range for a β -thalassemia heterozygote [12, 23]. In contrast, for Hb E heterozygote, the reduced level of Hb E (plus Hb A₂) (<25%) is a useful marker for recognition of a double heterozygosity for Hb E/ α^0 -thalassemia [13]. In addition, as shown in **Table 3**, as compared to a plain Hb E trait (Hb E>25%), a double heterozygous Hb E/ α^0 -thalassemia (Hb E<25%) had relatively lower MCV & MCH values [24]. According to the screening protocol, an individual with Hb E heterozygote and Hb E>25% is considered a plain Hb E carrier and no α^0 -thalassemia screening is essential [1, 10]. For homozygous Hb E, it is helpful to do Hb analysis using capillary electrophoresis rather than Hb-HPLC to determine the level of Hb A₂ since capillary electrophoresis, but not HPLC, can report the level of Hb A₂ in the presence of Hb E. Selection of suspected cases with homozygous Hb E and α^0 -thalassemia is possible. We have demonstrated that co-inheritance of α^0 -thalassemia elevates the Hb A₂ level in homozygous Hb E (>4.5%) [25]. These characteristics are helpful in selective screening of α^0 -thalassemia in couples with β -thalassemia heterozygote or Hb E-related disorders. However, this selective screening in couples can add to workload, and be labor-intensive, and expensive due to a high number of pregnancies each year.

Alternatively, screening of α^0 -thalassemia can be effectively performed in all fetuses with Hb E- β -thalassemia using a multiplex PCR assay to detect Hb E and α^0 -thalassemia as shown in **Figure 3**. In this approach, the fetus is screened for α^0 -thalassemia simultaneously with Hb E. Co-inheritance of α^0 -thalassemia with the Hb E- β -thalassemia disease in the fetus is readily identified, no matter on the status of α^0 -thalassemia of the parents. Complete thalassemia genetic interaction in the fetus can then be provided to the parents at genetic counseling before making an appropriate decision. It is also noteworthy that another approach is to perform a prenatal diagnosis using a fetal blood specimen and Hb fractionation using

capillary electrophoresis. This Hb analysis system can demonstrate and quantitate Hb Bart's (γ_4) because of a co-inheritance of α^0 -thalassemia. Hb Bart's is a homotetramer of excess γ -globin chain, presented in a fetus and newborn with α -thalassemia. It is a useful marker in cord blood for screening of α -thalassemia in newborns [26-28]. We have demonstrated previously that heterozygous α^0 -thalassemia fetuses produced Hb Bart's around 5.0% when examined using capillary electrophoresis [29]. The fetus with Hb E- β^0 -thalassemia and α^0 -thalassemia would demonstrate this amount of Hb Bart's in addition to Hb F and Hb E without Hb A.

In conclusion, this study in Thailand confirmed that as many as 5.1% of affected fetuses with Hb E- β^0 -thalassemia disease carried α^0 -thalassemia (SEA deletion). These affected fetuses should have a mild clinical phenotype, and their parents should receive this complete genetic information at genetic counseling before making an appropriate decision. Therefore, we recommend screening of α^0 -thalassemia in all fetuses with Hb E- β^0 -thalassemia disease at routine prenatal diagnosis in the region to obtain the correct genotype of the affected fetuses, which is necessary for genetic counseling.

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Disclosure of conflict of interest

None.

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