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Distal chromosome 16p11.2 duplications containing *SH2B1* in patients with scoliosis

Brooke Sadler¹, Gabe Haller², Lilian Antunes¹, Xavier Bledsoe¹, Jose A. Morcuende³, Philip Giampietro⁴, Cathleen Raggio⁵, Nancy Hadley-Miller⁶, Yared Kidane⁷, Carol A. Wise^{7,8,9}, Ina Amarillo¹¹, Nephi Walton¹², Mark Seeley¹², Darren Johnson¹², Conner Jenkins¹², Troy Jenkins¹², Matthew Oetjens¹², R. Spencer Tong³, Todd E. Druley¹¹, Matthew B. Dobbs², and Christina A. Gurnett^{1,11}

¹Department of Neurology, Washington University in St. Louis, St Louis, MO, USA.

²Department of Orthopaedic Surgery, Washington University in St. Louis, St. Louis, MO, USA.

³Department of Orthopaedics and Rehabilitation, University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA, USA.

⁴Department of Pediatrics, Drexel University, Philadelphia, PA, USA.

⁵Hospital for Special Surgery, New York, NY, USA.

⁶Department of Orthopedics, University of Colorado, Denver, CO, USA.

⁷Sarah M. and Charles E. Seay Center for Musculoskeletal Research, Texas Scottish Rite Hospital for Children, Dallas, TX, USA

⁸Department of Orthopaedic Surgery, University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas, Dallas, TX, USA.

⁹McDermott Center for Human Growth and Development, University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas, Dallas, TX, USA.

¹¹Department of Pathology and Immunology, Washington University in St. Louis, St. Louis, MO, USA.

¹²Geisinger Health System, Danville, PA, USA.

Abstract

Corresponding author: Christina A Gurnett, MD PhD, Department of Neurology, 660 S Euclid Ave, Campus Box 8111, Washington University in St Louis, St Louis, MO 63110, Phone (314) 454-6120, gurnettc@wustl.edu.

CONTRIBUTORSHIP STATEMENT: BS, GH, MBD, CAG conceived of the study; BS and GH carried out statistical analyses, LA compiled exome data; XB compiled supplemental table data; CAW, YK, JAM, PG, CR, NHM compiled and provided additional exome data from University of Iowa, University of Colorado and University of Texas; IA provided additional advice on CNV location methods; NW, MS, DJ, CJ, TJ, MO provided and analyzed Geisinger dataset for CNVs and phenotypic data, RST and TED validated CNVs. All authors edited the manuscript.

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The authors declare no competing interests.

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Introduction: Adolescent idiopathic scoliosis (AIS) is a common musculoskeletal disorder with strong evidence for a genetic contribution. Copy number variants (CNVs) play an important role in congenital scoliosis, but their role in idiopathic scoliosis has been largely unexplored.

Methods: Exome sequence data from 1197 AIS cases and 1664 in-house controls was analyzed using coverage data to identify rare CNVs. CNV calls were filtered to include only highly confident CNVs with > 10 average reads per region and mean log-ratio of coverage consistent with single-copy duplication or deletion. The frequency of 55 common recurrent CNVs was determined and correlated with clinical characteristics.

Results: Distal chromosome 16p11.2 microduplications containing the gene *SH2B1* were found in 0.7% of AIS cases (8/1197). We replicated this finding in two additional AIS cohorts (8/1097 and 2/433), resulting in 0.7% (18/2727) of all AIS cases harboring a chromosome 16p11.2 microduplication, compared to 0.06% of local controls (1/1664) and 0.04% of published controls (8/19584) ($P=2.28 \times 10^{-11}$, OR=16.15). Furthermore, examination of electronic health records of 92,455 patients from the Geisinger health system showed scoliosis in 30% (20/66) patients with chromosome 16p11.2 microduplications containing *SH2B1* compared to 7.6% (10/132) of controls ($P=5.6 \times 10^{-4}$, OR=3.9).

Conclusions: Recurrent distal chromosome 16p11.2 duplications explain nearly 1% of AIS. Distal chromosome 16p11.2 duplications may contribute to scoliosis pathogenesis by directly impairing growth or by altering expression of nearby genes, such as *TBX6*. Individuals with distal chromosome 16p11.2 microduplications should be screened for scoliosis to facilitate early treatment.

Keywords

scoliosis; copy number variants; 16p11.2

INTRODUCTION:

Scoliosis is defined as a spinal deformity consisting of a 10° or greater lateral curvature of the spine using the Cobb measurement method on a standing radiograph[1]. Known causes of scoliosis include congenital abnormalities, neuromuscular and connective tissue disorders. However, the majority of scoliosis cases are idiopathic (~80%). Adolescent idiopathic scoliosis (AIS) develops during late childhood and affects up to 3% of the population, with females disproportionately experiencing more severe scoliosis than males[2]. Twin studies show high rates of concordance for AIS and increased risk in first-degree relatives[3]. Genetic studies of common variants have shed important insight into the etiology of AIS, and include associations with variants near *basonuclin-2*[4], *adherens junctions associated protein 1*, *BCL2* apoptosis regulator, *ladybird homeobox 1 antisense RNA* [5], *ladybird homeobox 1* [6], *neural cell adhesion molecules* [7], *paired homeobox 1* [8] and *G-protein-coupled receptor 126* [9], but these variants explain only a small fraction of the heritability of AIS. With the advances of sequencing technology, rare genetic variants are also being shown to contribute to AIS risk. Rare variants in *FBN1* and *FBN2*, which underlie Marfan syndrome and congenital contractural arachnodactyly, along with

musculoskeletal collagen genes, were recently shown to be enriched in AIS cases and contribute to scoliosis severity[10 11].

In addition to single nucleotide variants, copy number variants (CNVs) resulting in large-scale duplications or deletions can also influence disease risk through alteration of gene dosage[12]. CNVs contribute to a wide range of disorders, including autism, schizophrenia, and neuropsychiatric disorders[13 14], and influence bone mineral density[15] and numerous Mendelian and complex traits[16]. Scoliosis and other skeletal abnormalities were observed among patients with proximal chromosome 16p11.2 CNVs ascertained during evaluation for developmental disabilities[17]-[18]. Furthermore, proximal chromosome 16p11.2 deletions containing *TBX6* are strongly associated with congenital scoliosis[19–21].

In the single prior study of CNVs in AIS, recurrent CNVs were identified in several of the 143 cases studied, suggesting a possible role in AIS pathogenesis[22]. However, this study was too small to determine a role for CNVs in AIS. In the current study, we performed a comprehensive, large-scale study to determine the contribution of recurrent CNVs to AIS risk by analyzing exome sequence data from 1197 AIS cases and 1664 controls.

MATERIALS AND METHODS:

Cohort Description

Patients with juvenile or adolescent idiopathic scoliosis were recruited from St. Louis Children's Hospital, St. Louis Shriners Hospital for Children, University of Iowa, University of Colorado, Hospital for Special Surgery, and University of Wisconsin-Madison. The institutional review board at each institution approved this study and all patients and/or parents provided informed consent. Inclusion criteria was spinal curve of $>10^\circ$ although most patients had severe scoliosis with a mean curve of 50 degrees. Patients with developmental delay, multiple congenital anomalies, or known or suspected underlying disorders, including Marfan syndrome or Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, were excluded from the study.

Exome Sequencing

Sequencing data for 1197 AIS samples was generated at the McDonnell Genome Institute (MGI) using IDT xGen Exome Panel V1 capture on Illumina HiSeq 4000 paired-end reads. The St Louis replication cohort of 443 AIS samples were captured using Agilent reagents and sequenced on HiSeq 1500/2000. For controls, we used MGI in-house control data from 1664 samples that included 860 male infertility cases, which were captured and sequenced using the identical IDT platform from AIS cases, and 637 amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) cases and 167 multiple congenital anomaly cases captured using Agilent reagents and sequenced on HiSeq 1500/2000 (dbGAP accession number: phs001677).

Exome alignment and BAM file processing

The sequencing reads (i.e. fastq files) from all AIS cases and controls samples were aligned to the human genome reference (GRCh37) using BWA-MEM (v0.7.15). The resulting BAM

files were sorted and duplicates were marked using Picard MarkDuplicates (v2.9.0). Re-alignment intervals for each BAM file was determined using GATK (v3.5) RealignerTargetCreator using a list of known indel sites (Mills and 1kg indels data from the GATK resource bundle <ftp://ftp.broadinstitute.org/bundle/b37/>), local realignment and base quality recalibration were then performed by GATK (v3.5) IndelRealigner, and BaseRecalibrator respectively.

Exome Copy Number Variant Analysis

Copy number analysis was performed on AIS cases and control samples using the software package FishingCNV[23] that is designed to identify rare copy number variants from exome-sequencing data without the need for a paired control. This program uses an algorithm to prioritize rare variants, and compares coverage depth in a test sample against the background distribution, as well as PCA to remove batch effects. The program extracts coverage information from GATK processed BAM files[24], then normalizes read depth information at each exon[25] into Reads Per Kilobase per Million mapped reads (RPKM) files. To identify only the most confident CNV calls, we included only CNVs with an average RPKM of at least 10, the mean log-ratio coverage between background and sample of -1.2 to -0.8 (consistent with a deletion) or 0.4 to 0.8 (consistent with a duplication) and Holm-Bonferroni adjusted p-value less than 10^{-3} .

To systematically assess our samples for known recurrent CNVs, we used a size overlap threshold of 40% to call known recurrent CNVs. This lower threshold was used not only because the exome sequence often does not cover the entire CNV, but also because FishingCNV occasionally breaks a CNV into smaller segments, particularly for larger CNVs. Data was also manually reviewed to identify CNVs that were broken into smaller segments and therefore removed by the above filter.

Copy Number Variant Analysis in Replication Cohort

Raw intensity data was obtained from 1,390 subjects using the Illumina HumanCoreExome-24 v1.0 BeadChip. CNVs were called using PennCNV[26]. B Allele Frequency (BAF) and Log R Ratio (LRR) values were computed in Genome Studio. Data was exported out and processed using the “split_illumina_report.pl” script in PennCNV to obtain BAF and LRR values per SNP per subject. Population Frequency of B Allele (PFB) and Gmodel data sets were derived using the “compile_pfb” and “cal_gc_snp” Perl modules in PennCNV, respectively.

After CNV calling, we merged CNVs if the gap between adjacent calls was $\leq 50\%$ of the combined length. Then, we performed initial quality control checks as recommended by PennCNV. Subjects were excluded from downstream analysis if they had a LRR standard deviation (SD) of > 0.28 , a B Allele Frequency drift (BAF drift) of > 0.01 or an absolute waviness factor of > 0.05 . Then, we excluded spurious CNV calls pertaining to telomeric and centromeric regions. CNVs that overlapped with immunoglobulin encoding regions were also removed. We retained 1,339 subjects for further analysis after quality control. Of these, 1097 were unique from the original dataset.

CNV validation

For validation of CNVs using quantitative PCR (qPCR), we designed 3 primer pairs to exonic sequence within the CNV. Primers were tested for quality and efficiency using PCR and RT-qPCR standard curves, respectively. QC was performed on the tested DNA using the Qubit Fluorimeter (Invitrogen). qPCR is performed on a 96 well high-sided low profile PCR plates (Thermo Scientific) on the Applied Biosystems StepOne™ Real-Time PCR System. Positive and negative controls with known gains or losses in the gene of interest were included in each run. The *RPL27* housekeeping gene was used as a reference.

Geisinger dataset

We assessed the exome sequencing data of 92,445 participants in the MyCode program, data that was generated as part of the Geisinger-Regeneron DiscovEHR project[27]. We used copy number estimation using Lattice-Aligned Mixture Models (CLAMMS) software for calling copy number variants from the exome data[28]. We identified all individuals in the DiscovEHR cohort with duplications of the chromosome 16p11.2 region that contained the *SH2B1* gene. Manual chart review was performed on all the patients with *SH2B1* duplications to assess for scoliosis. All images were reviewed by an orthopedic surgeon who assessed them for scoliosis and calculated Cobb angles. Patients were identified as having scoliosis if they met any of the following criteria 1.) Mention of significant scoliosis in notes or in an imaging report, 2.) Scoliosis was identified on the problem list or 3.) Imaging of the spine that showed a cobb angle $>10^\circ$.

RESULTS:

To systematically identify the frequency of 55 clinically relevant recurrent CNVs described in Coe et al.[29] in AIS, the discovery cohort data consisting of 1197 AIS cases and 1664 in-house controls was assessed for CNVs with $>40\%$ overlap in size with known recurrent CNVs (Table 1).

A total of 8 AIS cases with distal chromosome 16p11.2 duplications were detected (Table S1). The smallest duplication was detected by manual review because it did not pass the initial filter criteria due to minimal overlap with the known CNV (only 11%). Other than the distal chromosome 16p11.2 duplication, there were no other recurrent CNVs that were statistically enriched in the AIS cohort. Identical analysis of our in-house control samples revealed only one distal chromosome 16p11.2 duplication out of 1664 controls (Table 2).

All distal chromosome 16p11.2 duplications were validated by qPCR. A large published study of CNVs identified this distal chromosome 16p11.2 duplication in only 8 of 19,584 controls[29]. Therefore, the distal chromosome 16p11.2 duplication was significantly enriched in our cases compared to both in-house controls ($p=0.005$, $OR = 8.55$) and published controls ($p=1.05 \times 10^{-6}$, $OR=16.34$) even after Bonferonni correction for multiple tests.

Replication of chromosome 16p11.2 duplications in AIS

Two replication cohorts were assayed for chromosome 16p11.2 duplications containing the *SH2B1* gene to replicate the discovery cohort results. Replication cohort 1 consisted of 1097 AIS cases who were genotyped using the Illumina HumanCoreExome-24 v1.0 BeadChip and had CNVs called using PennCNV[26]. Replication cohort 2 consisted of 433 AIS cases with exome data that was generated using Agilent reagents and were analyzed for the presence of CNVs separately from the discovery cohort, which was captured using IDT probes. Eight AIS cases with the distal chromosome 16p11.2 duplication were identified in replication cohort 1 (N=1097). Two additional cases were identified in replication cohort 2 (N=433). When the discovery and replication cohorts were combined, the distal chromosome 16p11.2 duplication was present in 0.7% cases (18/2727) compared to 0.04% (8/19584) controls ($p=2.28 \times 10^{-11}$, OR=16.15) (Table 2).

The locations of the distal chromosome 16p11.2 duplications that included *SH2B1* were mapped onto the genome (Figure 1). The chromosome 16p11.2 region is highly enriched for segmental microduplications and microdeletions with known breakpoints defining these regions (Figure 1). The proximal 600 kb region (29.5–31.1 Mb) is defined by BP4-BP5 and has previously been associated with congenital scoliosis[19] while the distal BP2-BP3 region (28.7–28.9 Mb) has not previously been associated with a skeletal phenotype. The duplications ranged from 80 to 340 exons in length and were consistent in size with known CNVs mediated by segmental duplications in this region. One duplication was slightly smaller than the typical BP2-BP3 CNV, and involved only 80 exons in 4 genes, including *SH2B1*. These duplications were near, but did not include, the proximal chromosome 16p11.2 deletion (BP4-BP5). The proximal deletion was seen only once in the AIS cohort, shown in red on Figure 1; however, further review revealed a subtle vertebral segmentation anomaly consistent with congenital scoliosis. Therefore, if we exclude this case, there were no AIS cases with proximal chromosome 16p11.2 deletions, suggesting no or minimal overlap with this genetic cause of congenital scoliosis. While the eight duplications identified in the replication cohort 1 appear slightly larger, their size was determined based on genotype data, rather than exome data.

Clinical phenotypes associated with chromosome 16p11.2 duplications

Clinical evaluations of the AIS cases with the distal chromosome 16p11.2 duplication revealed that all but two are female, which is consistent with the strong gender bias in severe AIS cases. The mean BMI of cases with the chromosome 16p11.2 duplication was lower than those without the duplication but the difference was not significant (21.1 vs. 22.2) ($p=0.17$)(Table S2). The mean maximum curve severity in individuals with and without the chromosome 16p11.2 duplication was not different. As developmental disability was an exclusion for the study, all of the cases had normal neurodevelopment. One case had ADHD. Beighton scores of joint hypermobility[30] and Ghent systemic feature scores[31] were unremarkable in four cases, but were not measured in others.

Analysis of scoliosis in chromosome 16p11.2 duplication carriers in Geisinger dataset

Finally, we examined a dataset of 92,445 patients from Geisinger Health System with exome data, and discovered 66 patients with microduplications that include *SH2B1*. Of these 66

patients, 20 had evidence for scoliosis by imaging and/or report, suggesting a 30% lifetime risk of scoliosis. Their mean age was 58 and 16 (80%) were female. Nineteen of the 20 patients had healthcare visits specifically for back pain and three out of 20 had back surgery for scoliosis. Of the 46 patients who were not classified as having scoliosis, 31 had imaging that included at least a section of the spine and showed no scoliosis or minor scoliosis (cobb angle $< 10^\circ$) and 15 patients did not have any imaging that included the spine. One patient reported having scoliosis when younger but showed no scoliosis on current imaging, and two other patients had mild scoliosis on an imaging report from an outside hospital but images were not available for assessment, therefore all three were classified as not having scoliosis using the diagnostic criteria. In comparison, evaluation of 132 age- and sex-matched controls from the Geisinger dataset using the same criteria revealed that 7.6% controls (10/132) had scoliosis, suggesting an approximately 4-fold increase in lifetime scoliosis risk in patients with the distal chromosome 16p11.2 duplication ($P=5.6 \times 10^{-4}$, OR=3.9).

DISCUSSION:

Here we describe the occurrence of distal chromosome 16p11.2 duplications in nearly 1% of patients with AIS, a common pediatric musculoskeletal disorder whose etiology is largely unexplained. The chromosome 16p11.2 region was previously proposed as a candidate locus for AIS based on linkage data[32 33]. This complex chromosomal region has undergone a recent, rapid integration of segmental duplications followed by adaptive evolution that has occurred since the split between the human/great ape lineage and orangutans, approximately 12 million years ago[34]. This region's richness in segmental duplications predisposes it to recurrent rearrangements[35]. The proximal 600 kb region (29.5–30.1 Mb) defined by breakpoints 4–5 (BP4-BP5; OMIM#611913) harbors the *TBX6* gene, and has been previously associated with congenital scoliosis[19] while the distal 220 kb BP2-BP3 region (28.7–28.9 Mb) reported here in AIS has not been previously associated with any skeletal phenotype. Deletion of the proximal region is associated with autism spectrum disorder, obesity and macrocephaly[36], and deletion of the distal region has similarly associated phenotypes[37]. Developmental delay is associated with the distal chromosome 16p11.2 deletion, and to a lesser degree, with the duplication[38 39]. Distal chromosome 16p11.2 duplication (OMIM#614671) carriers also have lower body mass index (BMI) and reduced head circumference[37]. This distal region includes the *SH2B1* gene, which is involved in leptin and insulin signaling. Variants in *SH2B1* are associated with behavioral abnormalities and obesity[40] and deletion of which is associated with severe obesity, hyperphagia and insulin resistance[41], suggesting that *SH2B1* is the major gene driving these growth phenotypes.

The complex relationship between the proximal and distal chromosome 16p11.2 regions is exemplified by data demonstrating that perturbation of the distal region may impact expression of genes in the proximal region, including *TBX6*[37]. The two regions are reciprocally engaged in complex chromatin looping, bringing together regulatory elements and genes, which is disturbed in carriers of the proximal CNV. The observed duplication could also be affecting nearby topologically associated domains (TADs), and as such, have an effect on expression and co-regulation of more distant genes in the region. Thus, duplications of distal chromosome 16p11.2 may influence scoliosis risk by indirectly

altering *TBX6* expression. However, a role for *TBX6* is considered less likely because none of the AIS cases with the distal chromosome 16p11.2 duplication had evidence for structural vertebral anomalies which are hallmarks of congenital scoliosis associated with *TBX6* dysregulation[19]. Likewise, we detected only one proximal chromosome 16p11.2 deletion that includes *TBX6* in our large cohort, and this patient should have been excluded from our study as he had subtle congenital scoliosis on closer review. Additional support against a role for *TBX6* in AIS pathogenesis is also provided by prior work showing the lack of segregating *TBX6* coding variants in idiopathic scoliosis families[42].

While the distal chromosome 16p11.2 duplication may influence scoliosis risk by indirectly altering nearby genes such as *TBX6*, direct involvement of single genes within the interval may also be causative. The smallest duplication interval in our AIS cases included only *ATXN2L*, *TUFM*, *SH2B1* and *ATP2A1*. *SH2B1* is a strong candidate due to its previous associations with growth, obesity and BMI. The distal duplication is also associated with low BMI[37]. When combined with the observation that AIS patients are significantly more likely be underweight than healthy controls,[43] the enrichment of this duplication in our sample is intriguing and suggests the possibility that genetic abnormalities that alter growth, such as the distal chromosome 16p11.2 duplication, directly influence either susceptibility to scoliosis or its progression. Notably, *SH2B1* is one of only two genes in this particular CNV with a probability of loss intolerance (pLI) score of greater than 0.9,[44] indicating a strong dependence upon gene dosage. The other gene with a high pLI score is *ATXN2L* (ataxin 2 like), which encodes a protein of unknown function. Other genes in the region include *TUFM* (Tu translation elongation factor, mitochondrial), which is associated with human combined oxidative phosphorylation deficiency, and *ATP2A1* (ATPase sarcoplasmic/endoplasmic reticulum Ca²⁺ transporting 1), an enzyme involved in muscular excitation and contraction. Delineation of the exact mechanism by which the chromosome 16p11.2 microduplication influences scoliosis risk will require additional study.

To grossly estimate the penetrance of scoliosis associated with this distal chromosome 16p11.2 microduplication, we used a genotype-first approach to analyze a very large cohort of patients in the Geisinger Health System database with paired exome data, and found a 30% overall lifetime risk of scoliosis which represents a >4-fold lifetime risk of scoliosis compared to controls from the same health care system. In comparison, prior studies determined that this microduplication is mildly associated with cognitive impairment, with penetrance estimates of only ~11%[45]. Incomplete penetrance of CNVs associated with neuropsychiatric disorders and cognitive impairment is well established, and we have confirmed this is also true for scoliosis. However, chromosome 16p11.2 microduplications appear to be more strongly associated with scoliosis than any other phenotype.

Limitations of the present study include the propensity of the program to fragment large CNVs into many smaller CNVs, as well as potential coverage biases, both of which relate to the use of exome sequence data to call CNVs rather than whole genome or chromosomal microarray data. The size of our cohort is relatively small compared to association studies of autism and other neuropsychiatric disorders, which often used ~20,000 samples to identify associations due to the low frequency of these CNVs. Of note, the distal chromosome 16p11.2 duplication is a significant risk factor that has an odds ratio that is much higher than

any other previously described for AIS, which explains why we were able to detect it with this relatively modest sample size. In addition to the distal chromosome 16p11.2 duplication, we also identified a small number of other recurrent CNVs in AIS cases (Table S3), although due to their rarity, the numbers are too small to statistically confirm enrichment in AIS. Our numbers are also likely too small to determine whether the distal chromosome 16p11.2 duplication influences clinical factors such as curve severity. While we did not detect a difference in scoliosis curve severity in cases with and without the distal chromosome 16p11.2 duplication, our cohort consists predominantly of severe AIS cases and therefore future studies with a broader representation of curve severity in cases are needed to determine if this CNV has any prognostic role in predicting curve progression.

While it is not yet standard of care to perform genetic testing in otherwise healthy AIS patients, discovery of this distal chromosome 16p11.2 duplication as an AIS risk factor in nearly 1% of patients will add to the benefits of genetic testing for this patient population, which may also include identifying associated aortic aneurysm disease gene variants[11], anesthesia and surgical bleeding risk factors, and determination of recurrence risk in family members. For now, the results of this study support scoliosis screening for individuals identified with distal chromosome 16p11.2 microduplications in order to increase the utilization and effectiveness of early treatment interventions such as bracing.

Supplementary Material

Refer to Web version on PubMed Central for supplementary material.

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Table 1.

Recurrent microdeletions and microduplications seen in our AIS cases

		Deletion				Duplication			
		CASES	CONTROLS			CASES	CONTROLS		
		AIS	Current study	Coe et al. 2014	P-Value	AIS	Current study	Coe et al. 2014	P-Value
CNV	Chr:Position (hg19)	N = 1197	N=1664	N = 19584		N = 1197	N=1664	N = 19584	
1q21.1	1:146573376–147393376	0	0	6	1.00	1	0	5	0.42
2q13	2:111383531–113093529	3	0	3	0.07	0	0	0	1.00
15q11.2	15:22798636–23088559	2	2	27	0.56	0	2	60	1.00
15q13.3	15:31132708–32482708	0	0	0	1.00	1	0	11	0.42
16p13.11	16:15502499–16292499	1	2	7	0.80	1	1	27	0.66
Distal 16p11.2	16:28772499–29112499	0	1	1	1.00	8	1	8	0.005
Proximal16p11.2	16:29652499–30202499	1	0	6	0.42	0	0	9	1.00
HNPP/CMT1A	17:14069275–15499275	1	1	8	0.66	0	0	5	1.00
17q12	17:34815887–36205887	1	0	2	0.42	1	1	3	0.66
DiGeorge/VCFS	22:19020000–20290000	2	0	0	0.18	0	0	12	1.00

Table 2.

Enrichment of distal chromosome 16p11.2 duplication in AIS cases

AIS Cases		In-House Controls	P-value	Published Controls[29]	P-value
Discovery (IDT)	8/1197 (0.7%)	1/1664 (0.06%)	0.005	8/19584 (0.04%)	1.05×10^{-6}
Replication 1 (Texas)	8/1097 (0.9%)	0/746 (0.0%)	0.01	8/19584 (0.04%)	5.64×10^{-7}
Replication 2 (St. Louis)	2/433 (0.4%)	-	-	8/19584 (0.04%)	0.02
Combined	18/2727 (0.7%)	1/2410 (0.04%)	0.0001	8/19584 (0.04%)	2.28×10^{-11}