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The prevalence of left and right bundle branch block morphology ventricular tachycardia amongst patients with arrhythmogenic cardiomyopathy and sustained ventricular tachycardia: insights from the European Survey on Arrhythmogenic Cardiomyopathy

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1 **Prevalence of Spontaneous Sustained Ventricular Tachycardia of**
 2 **Left or Right Bundle Branch Block Morphology in Patients with**
 3 **Arrhythmogenic Cardiomyopathy.**
 4 **Data from the European Survey on Arrhythmogenic**
 5 **Cardiomyopathy.**

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 7 **Bernard Belhassen^{1,2}, Mikael Laredo³, Rob W. Roudijk⁴, Giovanni Peretto⁵,**
 8 **Guy Zahavi⁶, Srijita Sen-Chowdhry⁷, Nicolas Badenco³, Anneline S.J.M. te**
 9 **Riele⁸, Simone Sala⁵, Guillaume Duthoit³, J.P. (Peter) van Tintelen⁹, Gabriele**
 10 **Paglino⁵, Jean-Marc Sellam¹⁰, Alessio Gasperetti¹¹, Elena Arbelo¹², Antoine**
 11 **Andorin¹³, Sandro Ninni¹⁴, Anne Rollin¹⁵, Petr Peichl¹⁶, Xavier Waintraub³,**
 12 **Laurens P. Bosman⁸, Bertrand Pierre^{17a}, Eyal Nof^{2,18}, Chris Miles¹⁹, Jacob**
 13 **Tfelt-Hansen²⁰, Alexandros Protonotarios²¹, Carla Giustetto²², Frederic**
 14 **Sacher²³, Jean-Sylvain Hermida²⁴, Stepan Havranek²⁵, Leonardo Calo²⁶,**
 15 **Ruben Casado-Arroyo²⁷, Giulio Conte²⁸, Konstantinos P. Letsas²⁹, Esther**
 16 **Zorio³⁰, Francisco J. Bermúdez-Jiménez³¹, Elijah R. Behr¹⁹, Roy Beinart^{2,18},**
 17 **Laurent Fauchier^{17ab}, Josef Kautzner¹⁶, Philippe Maury¹⁵, Dominique**
 18 **Lacroix¹⁴, Vincent Probst¹³, Josep Brugada³², Firat Duru¹¹, Christian de**
 19 **Chillou¹⁰, Paolo Della Bella⁵, Estelle Gandjbakhch³, Richard Hauer⁸,**
 20 **Anat Milman^{2,18}**

- 21
- 22 1. Heart Institute, Hadassah University Hospital, Jerusalem, and Tel Aviv Sourasky Medical
 23 Center, Tel-Aviv, Israel
 24
- 25 2. Sackler School of Medicine, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv, Israel
 26
- 27 3. Sorbonne Université, AP-HP, Groupe Hospitalier Pitié-Salpêtrière, Institut de
 28 Cardiologie, Paris, France
 29
- 30 4. Netherlands Heart Institute, Utrecht, The Netherlands
 31
- 32 5. IRCCS San Raffaele Scientific Institute, Milan, Italy
 33
- 34 6. Department of Anesthesiology, Sheba Medical Center, Tel Hashomer, Israel
 35
- 36 7. Institute of Cardiovascular Science University College London, UK
 37
- 38 8. Department of Cardiology, University Medical Center, Utrecht, and Netherlands Heart
 39 Institute, Utrecht, The Netherlands
 40
- 41 9. Department of Genetics, University Medical Center, Utrecht, and Netherlands Heart
 42 Institute, Utrecht, The Netherlands
 43
- 44 10. Département de Cardiologie, Centre Hospitalier Universitaire (CHU de Nancy),
 45 Vandœuvre lès-Nancy, France
 46
- 47 11. Department of Cardiology, University Heart Center Zurich, Zurich, Switzerland
 48
- 49 12. Cardiovascular Institute, Hospital Clinic and IDIBAPS, Barcelona, Catalonia, Spain

- 1
2 13. Service de Cardiologie, CHU de Nantes, Nantes, France
- 3
- 4 14. CHRU Lille, Institut Cœur-Poumon, Lille, France
- 5
- 6 15. Cardiology, University Hospital Rangueil, Toulouse, France.
- 7
- 8 16. Department of Cardiology, Institute for Clinical and Experimental Medicine (IKEM),
9 Prague, Czech Republic
- 10
- 11 17. (a) Service de Cardiologie, Centre Hospitalier Universitaire Trousseau et (b) Université
12 François Rabelais, Tours, France.
- 13
- 14 18. Leviev Heart Institute, Sheba Medical Center, Tel Hashomer, Israel
- 15
- 16 19. Cardiovascular Sciences and Cardiology Clinical Academic Group St. George's
17 University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, London, UK.
- 18
- 19 20. The Department of Cardiology, The Heart Centre, Copenhagen University Hospital,
20 Rigshospitalet, Copenhagen, Denmark
- 21
- 22 21. Nikos Protonotarios Medical Centre, Naxos, Greece, and UCL Institute of Cardiovascular
23 Science, London, UK
- 24
- 25 22. Division of Cardiology, University of Torino, Department of Medical Sciences, Città della
26 Salute e della Scienza Hospital, Torino, Italy
- 27
- 28 23. Hôpital Cardiologique du Haut-Lévêque & Université Bordeaux, LIRYC Institute,
29 Bordeaux, France
- 30
- 31 24. Centre Hospitalier Universitaire d'Amiens-Picardie, Amiens, France
- 32
- 33 25. Second Department of Medicine-Department of Cardiovascular Medicine,
34 First Faculty of Medicine, Charles University and General University Hospital in Prague,
35 Prague, Czech Republic
- 36
- 37 26. Division of Cardiology, Policlinico Casilino, Roma, Italy
- 38
- 39 27. Department of Cardiology, Erasme University Hospital, Université Libre de Bruxelles,
40 Brussels, Belgium
- 41
- 42 28. Electrophysiology Unit, Department of Cardiology, Fondazione Cardiocentro Ticino,
43 Lugano, Switzerland.
- 44
- 45 29. Second Department of Cardiology, Arrhythmia Unit, "Evangelismos" General Hospital of
46 Athens, Greece.
- 47
- 48 30. Hospital Universitario y Politécnico La Fe, Valencia, Spain.
- 49
31. Cardiology Department, Hospital Universitario Virgen de las Nieves, Granada, Spain.
32. Cardiovascular Institute, Hospital Clínic Pediatric Arrhythmia Unit, Hospital Sant Joan de
Déu University of Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain.

1 **ORCID identifier is 0000-0002-7468-2054**

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5

6 **Address for correspondence:**

7 Bernard Belhassen, MD

8 Hadassah University Hospital

9 Jerusalem

10 Israel.

11 Telephone: +972-52-4-266-856, Fax: +972-153-52-4266856

12 Email: bblhass@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT1
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Aims. In arrhythmogenic cardiomyopathy (AC), sustained ventricular tachycardia (VT) typically displays left bundle branch block (LBBB) morphology. While left ventricular involvement is frequent, sustained VT with right bundle branch block (RBBB) morphology has been scarcely reported. The present study assesses the BBB-VT morphology of AC patients with sustained VT and their clinical and genetic characteristics.

Methods and results. Twenty six centres across 11 European countries provided information on 954 AC patients with ≥ 1 episode of sustained VT. Overall, 882 (92.5%) patients had LBBB-VT and 72 (7.5%) RBBB-VT [alone in 42 (4.4%) or in combination with LBBB-VT in 30 (3.1%) patients]. Male-sex prevalence was 90.5%, 79.3% and 56.7% in the RBBB-VT, LBBB-VT and LBBB+RBBB-VT groups, respectively ($P=0.003$). First RBBB-VT occurred 5 years after first LBBB-VT (46.3 ± 14.5 vs. 41.1 ± 15.8 years, $P=0.015$). An ICD was more frequently implanted in the RBBB-VT (92.9%) and the LBBB+RBBB-VT groups (90%) than in the LBBB-VT group (68.1%) ($P<0.001$). *PKP2* mutations predominated in the LBBB-VT (62.3%) and the LBBB-VT+RBBB-VT (40%) groups and *DSP* mutations in the RBBB-VT group (42.3%). By multivariate analysis, female-sex was associated with LBBB+RBBB-VT ($P=0.033$) while *DSP* mutation was a predictor of RBBB-VT ($P<0.001$). After a median time of 161 (75-234) months, death occurred in 106 (11.1%) patients with no intergroup difference ($P=0.46$).

Conclusion. RBBB-VT accounts for a non-negligible proportion of VTs in AC. Genotype and sex are significant predictors of VT types which may correlate with the anatomic type of AC. The first documented RBBB-VT occurred approximately 5 years after the first documented LBBB-VT.

Keywords: Arrhythmogenic cardiomyopathy; Arrhythmogenic right ventricular cardiomyopathy/dysplasia; Arrhythmogenic left ventricular cardiomyopathy; Ventricular tachycardia; Genetics

Introduction

1
2 Four decades ago, Marcus, Fontaine and coworkers described a pathologic condition in
3 which sustained ventricular tachycardia (VT) of left bundle branch block (LBBB) morphology
4 was associated with fibro-fatty replacement of the right ventricular (RV) musculature and
5 named it “arrhythmogenic RV dysplasia” (ARVD).¹ The same disease was later considered
6 to be a cardiomyopathy and also referred to as “arrhythmogenic RV cardiomyopathy”
7 (ARVC). Frequent left ventricular (LV) involvement was demonstrated in ARVC/D that led to
8 use the broader term of arrhythmogenic cardiomyopathy (AC).^{2,3} About one decade ago, a
9 new classification of AC into 3 types was proposed by Sen-Chowdhry *et al.*⁴: (a) the *classic*
10 *form*, with isolated RV disease or LV involvement in association with predominant RV
11 impairment (ARVC/D); (b) the *left dominant form*, with early and prominent LV
12 manifestations and relatively mild right-sided disease⁵ (ALVC); and (c) the *biventricular form*,
13 characterized by parallel involvement of both ventricles.
14 Despite the frequent LV involvement in all these AC variants, the large majority of sustained
15 monomorphic VT related to AC exhibit an LBBB morphology,^{1,2,6,7} and originate from the
16 RV.⁸ To our best knowledge, only 15 case-reports on sustained VT with a right bundle
17 branch block (RBBB) morphology have been published.⁹
18 The present study has 2 main objectives: 1) to assess the prevalence of spontaneous
19 sustained VT with LBBB, RBBB or both morphologic types in a large cohort of AC patients
20 with sustained VT; 2) to compare their clinical and genetic characteristics.

Methods

21
22
23 The study was approved by the Sheba Medical Centre Institutional Review Board
24 committee.

Data source and centre selection

25
26 A Medline search using the terms “arrhythmogenic right or left ventricular dysplasia or
27 cardiomyopathy and ventricular tachycardia” was performed to select European centres with
28 experience in the diagnosis and management of AC patients with VT.

1 **Study inclusion and exclusion criteria**

2 Patients were eligible if they were diagnosed with AC according to the 2010 modified Task
3 Force criteria (TFC)¹⁰ for ARVC/D diagnosis, together with at least one episode of sustained
4 (lasting ≥ 30 sec) VT documented on 12-lead ECG during their disease's course. VT was
5 classified as either an LBBB morphology (dominant S wave in V1) or RBBB morphology
6 (dominant R wave in V1).¹¹

7 Study exclusion criteria included: a) patients with ventricular flutter or non-sustained VT
8 (<30sec); b) patients with electrophysiological-induced (not spontaneous) VT; c) patients in
9 whom VT could be related to a different cardiac pathology.

10 **Centre recruitment**

11 Twenty six (67%) of the 39 initially contacted centres, belonging to 11 European countries,
12 accepted to participate in the survey. Twenty-three (88.5%) centres provided data from their
13 single centre, whereas the remaining 3 (11.5%) provided data from multiple institutions in
14 their countries (**Supplemental Table 1**).

15 **Data acquisition**

16 Participating centres were asked to provide anonymised patient information regarding: 1)
17 gender; 2) age at first documented VT as well as its QRS morphology (LBBB or RBBB); 3)
18 morphology (LBBB or RBBB) of any further documented sustained VT during clinical course
19 ; 4) level of diagnosis certitude of the disease diagnosis according to the 2010 TFC¹⁰; 5)
20 patient management [implantation of an automatic cardioverter-defibrillator (ICD) or VT
21 ablation] and outcome (death); 6) results of molecular-genetic testing when available.

22 In patients who underwent genetic testing, all genetic assays sequenced at least five
23 desmosomal genes [plakophilin-2 (*PKP2*), desmoplakin (*DSP*), desmoglein-2 (*DSG2*),
24 desmocollin-2 (*DSC2*) and plakoglobin (*JUP*)]. Genetic variants associated with AC were
25 reviewed by specialists of cardiac genetics at each center and their pathogenicity classified
26 using the ACMG criteria: pathogenic, likely pathogenic, variants of unknown significance
27 (VUS) or benign. The latter were assimilated to negative genetic results.

1 Patients were classified into 3 groups according to the morphology of the spontaneous
2 sustained VT documented during clinical course: LBBB-VT only, RBBB-VT only or both
3 LBBB+RBBB-VT.

4 The cases of 4 patients included in this survey were previously reported.^{9,12-14}

5 **Statistical analysis**

6 The data are presented as mean (SD), median [interquartile range (IQR)] or count (percent).
7 Non-parametric statistical tests were systematically used for comparisons because of
8 imbalanced group sizes. Fisher's exact test, Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis test were
9 used as appropriate. Post hoc tests were done with Fisher's exact test and a Bernoulli
10 correction of the P-values. Multinomial logistic regression was used for VT morphology
11 prediction. Predictors with $p < 0.10$ in univariate models were included in a multivariate model.
12 All statistical analyses were done with R version 3.6.1 (R Foundation for Statistical
13 Computing, Vienna, Austria) (**Supplementary material**).

14

15

Results

16 **Study population**

17 The study population included 954 patients (79% males) with AC and at least 1 episode of
18 sustained monomorphic VT documented during clinical course (**Table 1**). The AC diagnosis
19 according to 2010 modified TFC was definite in 89.9% of patients. In the entire cohort, age
20 at first documented sustained VT of any morphology ranged from 7 to 87 (mean 41.5 ± 15.8)
21 years (**Figure 1A**). The first documented VT predominated in the 36-45 years age-group for
22 males and in the 46-55 years age-group for females; however, the mean ages at first VT
23 were not significantly different between the 2 genders (41.3 ± 15.9 years vs. 42.1 ± 15.3 years,
24 respectively, $P = 0.530$) (**Supplemental Figure 1**). The male-to-female ratio was 3.8 for the
25 whole cohort, with the lowest (2) and highest (11) ratios observed in the pediatric and elderly
26 age-groups, respectively (**Figure 1B**).
27 Ablation of VT was performed in 551 (57.8%) patients. Death occurred in 11.1% at a median
28 time of 161[75-234] months after first VT.

1 **Prevalence of LBBB and RBBB-VT**

2 During the clinical course of the 954 study patients, 882 (92.5 %) exhibited LBBB-VT, 42
3 (4.4%) RBBB-VT and 30 (3.1%) both LBBB and RBBB-VT (**Figures 2 and 3**). The total
4 prevalence of RBBB-VT morphology amongst the survey patients was 7.5% (**Supplemental**
5 **Table 1**).

6 **Clinical characteristics**

7 The demographic and clinical characteristics of the study patients according to VT group are
8 compared in **Table 1**.

9 Patients with LBBB-VT received a definite diagnosis of AC more easily than those with
10 RBBB-VT (91.4% vs. 66.7%, respectively, $P < 0.001$).

11 Male-sex predominance was significantly lower in the LBBB+RBBB-VT group (56.7%) than
12 the RBBB-VT group (90.5%) or the LBBB-VT group (79.3%) ($P = 0.003$).

13 Patients' age at time of first documented VT did not significantly differ among the 3 VT
14 groups ($P = 0.157$).

15 In the LBBB+RBBB VT group, 13 patients exhibited LBBB-VT first while 17 patients
16 exhibited RBBB-VT first. When comparing the age of the 895 patients who displayed first or
17 only LBBB-VT with that of those 59 patients who displayed first or only RBBB-VT, the
18 difference was statistically significant (41.1 ± 15.8 vs. 46.3 ± 14.5 years, respectively,
19 $P = 0.015$).

20 Higher rates of ICD implantation were observed in the LBBB+RBBB-VT and the RBBB-VT
21 groups than in the LBBB-VT group ($P < 0.001$). Higher rates of VT ablation were also noted in
22 the LBBB+RBBB-VT group as compared to the other 2 groups ($P = 0.004$). Death rates did
23 not differ amongst the 3 VT groups ($P = 0.461$).

24 The estimated survival time after the first VT was similar in all 3 VT group patients ($P = 0.7$,
25 log-rank test) (**Supplemental Figure 2**). **Genetic results**

26 Out of the 954 survey patients, 537 (56.3%) underwent genetic testing, comprising a higher
27 proportion of patients with LBBB+RBBB-VT and RBBB-VT ($P = 0.017$) (**Table 2**). Gene
28 mutations were discovered in 391 (72.8%) patients with single mutations in desmosomal and

1 *PLN* genes in 343 (63.9%). In the latter group, pathogenic mutations, likely pathogenic
2 mutations and VUS were observed in 75.6%, 13.8% and 9.4% of patients, respectively.
3 Single mutations in desmosomal genes were found in 83.7%, 66.7% and 84.6% in patients
4 with LBBB-VT, LBBB+RBBB-VT and RBBB-VT, respectively ($P=0.242$). *PKP2* mutations
5 predominated in the LBBB-VT and the LBBB+RBBB-VT groups (62.3% and 40%,
6 respectively) and *DSP* mutations in the RBBB-VT group (42.3%). *PLN* mutations were more
7 commonly observed in the LBBB+RBBB-VT group (20%) than in the 2 other VT groups..

8 **Prediction of VT morphology**

9 Multinomial logistic regression was used for VT morphology prediction among patients who
10 underwent genetic testing ($n=537$) (**Table 3**). In univariate models, female sex and *PLN*
11 mutation were positive predictors of LBBB+RBBB-VT, *DSP* mutation was a predictor for both
12 LBBB+RBBB-VT and RBBB-VT, and *PKP2* was associated with LBBB-VT. A multivariate
13 model demonstrated similar trends of association, although *PKP2* and *PLN* did not reach
14 statistical significance.

15 **Survey results according to countries**

16 These results are reported in **Supplemental Tables 2A and 2B**. The prevalence of RBBB-
17 VT (alone or in combination with LBBB-VT) according to country is summarised in

18 **Supplemental Table 1.**

19 **Discussion**

20 The present study includes the largest cohort of patients with AC and sustained VT ever
21 reported. Although sustained LBBB-VT represented by far the most frequent type of VT
22 encountered in AC, RBBB-VT was documented in a non-negligible proportion of AC patients
23 (7.5%) either alone or in association with an LBBB-VT. The study also revealed that
24 genotype and sex were significant predictors of the VT types and that the first documented
25 RBBB-VT occurred approximately 5 years later than the first documented LBBB-VT.

26 **Morphology of sustained VT in AC patients**

27 The first series of patients with ARVD published before the 1994 TFC¹⁵ almost exclusively
28 comprised LBBB-VT.^{1,2} In the first multicentre series of ARVD as defined by the original

1 1994 criteria¹⁵, Marcus *et al.*⁶ reported that 32 (84%) of their 38 patients with sustained VT
2 had an LBBB morphology. In the Dutch registry of 119 patients with sustained VT who had
3 AC defined according to 2010 TFC¹⁰, Cox *et al.*⁷ reported that 117 (98.3%) patients
4 displayed an LBBB morphology. The present survey confirms the marked prevalence of
5 LBBB-VT (95.6%) [92.5% alone and 3.1% in association with RBBB-VT]. This high
6 prevalence was comparable in all 11 countries participating in the study, ranging from 83.3%
7 to 100%.

8 Contrasting with the well-known documentation of frequent ventricular ectopic activity of
9 RBBB morphology in AC patients and especially left-dominant AC,^{4,5} sustained VT of RBBB
10 morphology was previously reported only as case reports^{5,9,12-14,16-25} (**Supplemental Table**
11 **3**). In 3 of these 15 cases, both RBBB and LBBB morphologies were documented during
12 patients' clinical course.^{9,16,25} In our study we noticed that 72 (7.5%) of our 954 AC patients
13 displayed RBBB-VT alone or in combination with LBBB-VT. It is noteworthy that the
14 prevalence of RBBB-VT markedly varied from 0% (Greece) to 20.4% (Spain).

15 **ECG-genetic correlations**

16 In the setting of AC, LBBB-VT invariably originates in the RV^{8,26} while limited data from
17 invasive electro-anatomical mapping have shown that most RBBB-VT originate in the LV.²⁶
18 Therefore, we can assume that in the majority of AC patients, an LBBB-VT and an RBBB-VT
19 indicate an RV and LV origin, respectively. The fact that the genetic profile of our study
20 patients markedly differs according to the LBBB or RBBB-VT pattern makes tempting to
21 speculate that these 3 VT groups correspond to the 3 types of AC described by Sen-
22 Chowdhry *et al.*⁴ Mutations in desmosomal genes (*PKP2*, *DSP*, *DSG2*, *DSC2* and *JUP*) have
23 been identified in 33% to 66% of probands with right, left and biventricular forms of AC²⁷.
24 *PKP2* mutations account for the vast majority of AC leading to the classical ARVC/D
25 phenotype.²⁷ This is in agreement with our results: 62.2% of the LBBB-VT group patients had
26 a single *PKP2* mutation and *PKP2* mutation was significantly associated with LBBB-VT. In
27 contrast, *DSP* mutations, well-known to predominate in left-dominant AC^{5,27} were more
28 frequently observed in the RBBB-VT group (42.3%) and were associated with RBBB-VT,

1 with or without accompanied LBBB-VT. The proportion of patients who harbored *PLN* and
2 other non-desmosomal mutations known to be associated with biventricular involvement,²⁸
3 was the highest in the LBBB+RBBB-VT group; also *PLN* mutations were associated with
4 LBBB+RBBB-VT. Interestingly, the highest percentage of *DSP* mutations (20.8%) was
5 found in Spain, the same country that showed the highest prevalence of RBBB-VT.

6 **Gender distribution in AC**

7 Because AC is transmitted as an autosomal pattern of inheritance, one would expect a
8 similar prevalence in both genders. However, a male predominance has been universally
9 demonstrated in cohorts of AC index patients with ventricular tachyarrhythmias.⁷ Miles et al.
10 reported that 82% of 202 cases of sudden cardiac death attributed to AC after post-mortem
11 examinations were males.²⁹ Males also predominated (67%) in the first 2 largest series of
12 sustained VT occurring in ARVD patients.^{1,2} In contrast, females predominated in
13 asymptomatic AC patients.⁷ In our study, the marked male predominance observed in the
14 RBBB-VT group (90.5%) and the LBBB-VT group (79.2%) is in agreement with the above
15 reported results. However, there was a lower male predominance in the LBBB+RBBB-VT
16 group (56.7%) and female-sex was significantly associated with RBBB-VT+LBBB-VT,
17 independently of underlying genotype. A possible explanation could be that an important
18 proportion of males with biventricular AC may die suddenly before presenting with a
19 documented sustained VT.²⁹ In contrast, females with a similar phenotype have been found
20 to exhibit more heart failure-related death³⁰ and thus could be more prone to display both
21 LBBB and RBBB-VT during their clinical course. However, we do not have any data showing
22 an increased proportion of patients with ventricular dysfunction in this group that would
23 support this speculation. Finally, our results also show for the first time a similar age at first
24 documented VT in AC in both genders. However, the marked difference in the male-to-
25 female ratio in the young vs. the elderly group is striking and confirms the observations
26 made by others.^{31, 32}

27 **Age at the time of first documented VT**

28 In two early series including 23 and 15 AC patients, the first LBBB-VT occurred at mean

1 ages of 32 and 29 years, respectively.^{1,2} In the Dutch AC registry, the mean age at VT onset
2 of 147 patients, including 122 who presented with almost exclusive sustained LBBB-VT was
3 37 years.⁷ Bhonsale *et al.* demonstrated that AC patients experienced their first sustained
4 monomorphic VT at a median age of 36 years³³. In an Italian study of 301 consecutive AC
5 patients, Mazzanti *et al.* found that the first arrhythmic event (including sudden cardiac
6 death, resuscitated arrhythmias or appropriate ICD interventions) occurred at a mean age of
7 39 ± 15 years in 73 patients but did not provide information on the patients' age at the time of
8 the sustained VT.³⁴ Our survey patients exhibited a mean age of 41.5 ± 15.8 years at first
9 documented VT of any morphology while first documented RBBB-VT occurred
10 approximately 5 years after first documented LBBB-VT. These results could be explained in
11 two ways: (1) LV arrhythmogenic remodeling occurs later in the course of the disease in
12 classical ARVC/D and in patients with presumed predominant LV involvement;³ (2) As
13 compared to the RV, the thicker LV wall may be less vulnerable to reentry given a similar
14 amount of scar, and a higher scar burden and a longer evolution of the disease may be
15 required for RBBB-VT to occur. Finally, we observed a marked time-dependent rise in VT
16 incidence from 2.2% (age group <16 years) to 16.6% (age group 16-25 years) that supports
17 the recommendation to screen children belonging to AC families when they approach
18 adolescence.³⁴

19 **Diagnostic criteria**

20 The 2010 revision improved the diagnostic performances of the TFC and consequently the
21 management of ARVC/D as compared to the original 1994 criteria.^{10,15} Nonetheless, TFC
22 remain poorly efficient at identifying patients with left-dominant and bi-ventricular AC types
23 before an advanced disease stage. Henceforth, the fact that the definition of AC in our
24 survey was based on the 2010 modified TFC is consistent with the lower rate of AC
25 diagnosis in patients with RBBB-VT as compared to those with LBBB-VT.

26 **Study limitations**

27 First, this is a retrospective study dealing with a disease that has a low prevalence in most
28 countries. Therefore, the recruitment of patients spanned over long periods, especially at the

1 most experienced centres and it is likely that the first survey patients exhibited more
2 advanced AC forms, underwent less modern diagnostic imaging techniques or modes of
3 treatment as well as less genetic testing. Conversely, the long duration of follow-up for some
4 of them as well as the fact that about a third of patients did not receive an ICD could have
5 enabled the recording of VT episodes of multiple morphologies.

6 Second, the prevalence of RBBB-VT in AC could be even higher than the one found in our
7 survey. The policy adopted in some centres to implant an ICD after a first documented
8 sustained VT³⁵ (almost always an LBBB-VT) could hamper the 12-lead ECG recording of a
9 spontaneously occurring RBBB-VT after ICD implantation.

10 Third, genetic testing was available in relatively small cohorts of patients with LBBB+RBBB-
11 VT or RBBB-VT as compared to the LBBB-VT group. Nonetheless genetic data in AC
12 patients presenting with *sustained* RBBB-VT in the literature are scarce.

13 **Conclusions**

14 Sustained RBBB-VT was documented in a non-negligible proportion (7.5%) of AC patients
15 with VT, indicating that LBBB-VT can no longer be considered as the exclusive ventricular
16 arrhythmia occurring in AC. Pathogenic mutations and gender were associated with VT
17 type, with *DSP* being associated with RBBB-VT and female sex with LBBB+RBBB-VT.

18 Further studies are needed to investigate the link between VT types and various AC
19 anatomic forms. Inclusion of sustained RBBB-VT in future TFC revisions may improve their
20 diagnostic performance especially with regard to AC forms with LV involvement.

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FIGURES LEGENDS.

Figure 1:

(A) Age distribution at time of first documented VT in all 954 survey patients.

(B) Male-to-female (M/F) ratio for the 954 survey patients.

Figure 2. Familial AC associated with *PKP2* mutation.

(A) First spontaneous RBBB-VT recorded in a 68-year-old man. Reproduced from Rabey et al. (*Circulation*. 2018;138:642-645) with permission of the Publisher.

(B) First spontaneous LBBB-VT recorded at hospital admission 7 years before, in his older brother, at age 78 years-old. Reproduced from Belhassen et al. (*Isr Med Assoc J*. 2014;16:385-387) with permission of the Publisher.

Figure 3. Documentation of LBBB- and RBBB-VT in a non-mutation carrier AC patient. Reproduced from Belhassen et al. (*Eur Heart J Case Rep*. 2020;4:1-7) with permission of the Publisher.

(A) First exercise-induced LBBB-VT documented when the patient was 56-year-old.

(C) First spontaneous RBBB-VT recorded 8 years later.

LEGENDS OF SUPPLEMENTAL FIGURES.

Supplemental Figure 1. Age distribution at time of first documented VT in all 954 survey patients according to gender.

Supplemental Figure 2. Time from the first VT to death estimated with Kaplan-Meier survival (time-to-event) functions.

LEGENDS OF TABLES.

Table 1. Comparison of the main demographic and clinical results in all survey patients in respect to their VT group.

Table 2. Comparison of the main genetic results in all survey patients in respect to their VT group.

LEGENDS OF SUPPLEMENTAL TABLES.

Supplemental Table 1. List of the 11 countries and 26 centres participating in the survey along with the distribution of the 954 survey patients according to their VT group.

Supplemental Table 2. List of published case reports of sustained RBBB-VT in the setting of AC. Adapted from Belhassen et al. (*Eur Heart J Case Report*. 2020;4:1-7) (with permission of the Publisher).

Supplemental Table 3. Main demographic, clinical and genetic results in all survey patients according to country of origin.