

Research Letter

Novel CLOCK and NR1D2 variants in 64 sighted Japanese individuals with non-24-hour sleep–wake rhythm disorder

Akiko Hida^{1,*}, Aritoshi Iida², Motoki Ukai¹, Hiroshi Kadotani³, Makoto Uchiyama⁴, Takashi Ebisawa⁵, Yuichi Inoue⁶, Shingo Kitamura¹ and Kazuo Mishima^{1,7,*}¹Department of Sleep-Wake Disorders, National Institute of Mental Health, National Center of Neurology and Psychiatry, Tokyo, Japan,²Department of Clinical Genome Analysis, Medical Genome Center, National Center of Neurology and Psychiatry, Tokyo, Japan,³Department of Psychiatry, Shiga University of Medical Science, Shiga, Japan,⁴Department of Psychiatry, Nihon University School of Medicine, Tokyo, Japan,⁵Department of Psychiatry, Tokyo Metropolitan Police Hospital, Tokyo, Japan,⁶Department of Somnology, Tokyo Medical University, Tokyo, Japan and⁷Department of Neuropsychiatry, Akita University Graduate School of Medicine, Akita, Japan

*Corresponding author. Akiko Hida, Department of Sleep-Wake Disorders, National Institute of Mental Health, National Center of Neurology and Psychiatry, 4-1-1 Ogawa-Higashi, Kodaira, Tokyo 187-8553, Japan. Email: hida@ncnp.go.jp, Kazuo Mishima, Department of Neuropsychiatry, Akita University Graduate School of Medicine, 1-1-1 Hondo, Akita, Akita 010-8543, Japan. Email: mishima@med.akita-u.ac.jp.

Circadian rhythm sleep–wake disorders (CRSWDs) are characterized by an inability to fall asleep and awaken at desired times. A subtype of CRSWDs, non-24-hour sleep–wake rhythm disorder (N24SWD), exhibits a free-running pattern of sleep–wake cycles that are not synchronized with the external 24-hour day. N24SWD occurs commonly in visually impaired individuals and rarely in sighted individuals. We have shown that the intrinsic circadian period (τ) determined under a forced desynchrony protocol is longer in sighted individuals with N24SWD than intermediate-type controls [1]. Therefore, it appears that prolonged τ and/or impaired entrainment mechanisms contribute to the pathogenesis of N24SWD. Some clock gene variants are associated with CRSWDs and transgenic animals carrying human clock variants exhibit altered τ [2]. These findings suggest that clock gene variants might disrupt the circadian clock system and lead to the onset of CRSWDs.

The study population consisted of 64 participants with N24SWD (45 males and 19 females; mean \pm SD age: 27.7 \pm 9.61 years). Most of the participants were examined in our previous studies [1, 3]. They were all unrelated and sighted Japanese. They were diagnosed by trained psychiatrists according to the International Classification of Sleep Disorders' second edition. This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of National Center of Neurology and Psychiatry and was conducted in accordance with the declaration of Helsinki. Written informed consent was obtained from each participant. DNA samples were extracted from the participants' blood samples using the QIAamp DNA Mini Kit (QIAGEN). Targeted sequencing of 76 genes was performed in 17 individuals with N24SWD (11 males and six females; mean \pm SD age: 32.82 \pm 10.05 years) using next-generation

sequencing by RIKEN GENESIS (RIKEN GENESIS CO., LTD.). Briefly, DNA samples were captured using the SureSelect DNA Capture Custom Kit (Agilent Technologies) and sequenced on the MiSeq system (Illumina) with 151 bp paired-end reads. The reads were aligned to a human reference sequence (University of California Santa Cruz assembly GRCh37/hg19). The 76 genes examined in this study are listed in [Supplementary Table 1](#). Sanger sequencing was performed using BigDye™ Terminator v1.1 Ready Reaction Mix (ThermoFisher Scientific) and an ABI Prism 3130 DNA Analyzer (Applied Biosystems). All primers were designed by Primer3Plus. The possible impact of amino acid substitutions on protein function was tested by Polyphen-2 and PROVEAN (Protein Variation Effect Analyzer).

In this study, we performed targeted sequencing of 76 genes by next-generation sequencing in 17 N24SWD individuals and found a total of 94 variants ([Supplementary Table 2](#)). A novel missense variant was initially found in each of the APOE (*apolipoprotein E*), CLOCK (*CLOCK*), NR1D2 (*nuclear receptor subfamily 1 group D member 2*), and PER1 genes. The NR1D2 (*PERIOD1*) and PER1 missense variants were found in an individual with N24SWD. These four variants were further evaluated by public databases, the Genome Aggregation Database, 1000 Genomes and Human Genetic Variation Database, and the Japanese Whole Genome Reference Panel 8.3KJPN. The APOE and CLOCK variants (designated as rs1969838696 and rs1723064872, respectively) were recently observed as rare variants in 8.3KJPN (alternative allele frequency = 0.00012), while the NR1D2 and PER1 variants were not found in any database. Previous studies using animal models have suggested that Clock and REV-ERB β (NR1D2) are involved in some mechanisms that regulate circadian rhythms and

sleep-wakefulness [2, 4, 5]. In contrast, APOE-deficient and *Per1*-null mice show a robust behavioral rhythm comparable to that of WT mice [6, 7]. Therefore, our initial focus was on the *CLOCK* and *NR1D2* genes, which have been implicated as core components of negative transcriptional feedback loops regulating multiple clock genes in the circadian clock system [2, 4, 5]. We subsequently performed Sanger sequencing on the coding regions of *CLOCK* and *NR1D2* in a total of 64 N24SWD individuals, including 17 N24SWD individuals.

One novel and four known *CLOCK* variants were identified in our study population of 64 N24SWD individuals (Supplementary Table 3). A novel variant in exon 18 was identified in one of the additional 47 N24SWD individuals (NM_004898.3: c.1488C>G: p.Q[Gln]496H[His]) (Figure 1A). The amino acids Q and H differ in isoelectric point and the Q496H substitution is predicted to be possibly damaging (0.887) by Polyphen-2 and deleterious (-2.854) by PROVEAN. The Q496H substitution occurs in the domain that potentially associates with SIRT1, a NAD⁺-dependent histone deacetylase. SIRT1 is recruited to the *CLOCK*:BMAL1 chromatin complex and regulates target gene transcription by modulating the histone acetyltransferase function of *CLOCK* [8]. The Q496H substitution could alter the binding interaction between *CLOCK* and SIRT1 thereby disrupting chromatin remodeling. The known variant in exon 22 (rs1723064872) causes the amino acid substitution of glutamine to glutamate (NM_004898.3: c.2278C>G: p.Q[Gln]760E[Glu]). The amino acids Q and E differ in isoelectric point, although the Q760E substitution is predicted to be benign (0.033) by Polyphen-2 and neutral (-1.289) by PROVEAN. The Q760E substitution is located in the poly-Q region of the C-terminal domain. The Q-rich motif is known to characterize the activation domain of transcription factors. Furthermore, *Clock* mutant mice show a longer period of behavioral rhythms than wild-type mice. The genetic variant carried by *Clock* mutants results in exon skipping and a deletion of 51 amino acids within the *CLOCK* transactivation domain [4]. Notably, the missense variants in the potentially functional domains of *CLOCK* were identified in two N24SWD individuals. These *CLOCK* missense variants might contribute to the N24SWD phenotype.

One novel and eight known *NR1D* variants were identified in our study population of 64 N24SWD individuals (Supplementary Table 3). The novel variant in exon 2 causes an amino acid substitution of glycine to serine (NM_005126.4: c.274G>A: p.G[Gly]92S[Ser]) (Figure 1B). The amino acids G and S differ in polarity, although the G92S substitution is predicted to be benign (0.011) by Polyphen-2

and neutral (-1.094) by PROVEAN. A known variant in exon 5 (rs139583758) causes the amino acid substitution of glutamine to histidine (NM_005126.4: c.696A>C: p.Q[Gln]232H[His]). The amino acids Q and H differ in isoelectric point and the Q232H substitution is predicted to be possibly damaging (0.925) by Polyphen-2 and be deleterious (-2.518) by PROVEAN. Another known variant in exon 7 (rs78292562) causes the amino acid substitution of alanine to threonine (NM_005126.4: c.1351G>A: p.A[Ala]451T[Thr]). Amino acids A and T differ in polarity. Furthermore, the A451T substitution is predicted to be probably damaging (0.995) by Polyphen-2 and deleterious (-3.157) by PROVEAN. The A451T substitution occurs in the potential ligand-binding domain of *NR1D2*. Heme binds to the ligand-binding domain and modulates the ability of *NR1D2* to recruit the corepressor and repress target gene transcription [9]. *NR1D1* (REV-ERBa) and *NR1D2* (REV-ERBβ) regulate sleep architecture and emotional behavior in mice [5]. REV-ERB agonists induce wakefulness and reduce rapid eye movement and slow-wave sleep. Intriguingly, a pharmacological study in REV-ERBβ-deficient mice suggests that REV-ERBβ modulates the maintenance of wakefulness during the activity period [10]. These *NR1D2* missense variants could alter the function of *NR1D2*, resulting in impaired sleep regulation. Also, the novel *PER1* variant was found in the N24SWD individual carrying the novel *NR1D2* variant in exon 2. The *PER1* variant in exon 10 (NM_002616.2: c.1198G>A: p.E[Glu]400K[Lys]) was confirmed by Sanger sequencing in the N24SWD individual (Figure 1C).

Further analysis is required to demonstrate that these variants contribute to the N24SWD phenotype. However, our findings will provide potential genetic factors associated with the N24SWD phenotype and expand the current understanding of circadian and sleep regulation in humans.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material is available at SLEEP online.

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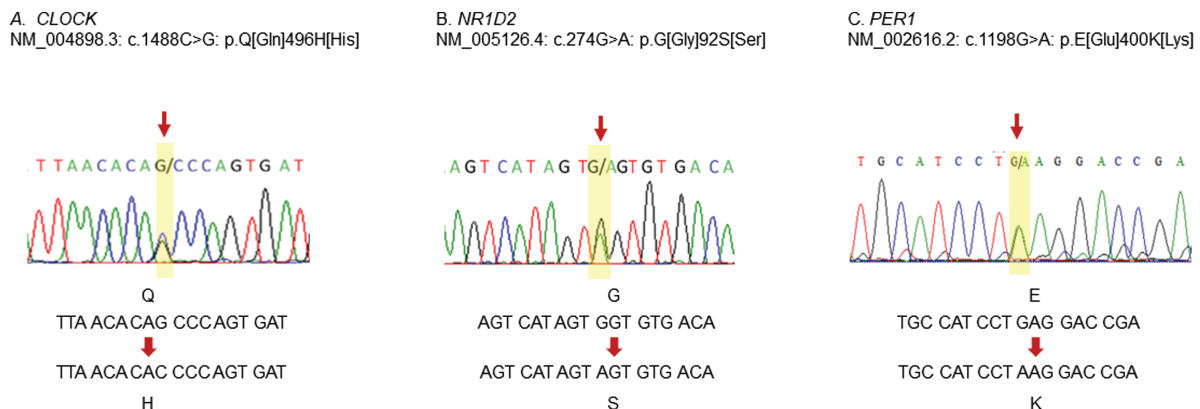


Figure 1. Novel missense variants of the *CLOCK*, *NR1D2*, and *PER1* genes in N24SWD individuals. Sanger sequencing confirms a novel missense variant in each of *CLOCK* (A), *NR1D2* (B) and *PER1* (C) as indicated by an arrow.

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Data Availability

The data underlying this article are available in the article and in its online supplementary material.

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Supplementary Table 1: 76 circadian- and sleep-related genes examined in 17 subjects with N24SWD

Chromosome	Gene
chr17	AANAT
chr19	APOE
chr11	ARNTL
chr12	ARNTL2
chrX	ASMT
chr20	AVP
chr12	AVPR1A
chr1	AVPR1B
chrX	AVPR2
chr11	BDNF
chr3	BHLHE40
chr12	BHLHE41
chr4	CLOCK
chr12	CRY1
chr11	CRY2
chr17	CSNK1D
chr22	CSNK1E
chr3	GSK3B
chr17	HCRT
chr6	HCRTR2
chr6	HLA-A
chr6	HLA-B
chr6	HLA-C
chr6	HLA-DMA
chr6	HLA-DMB
chr6	HLA-DOA
chr6	HLA-DOB
chr6	HLA-DPA1
chr6	HLA-DPB1
chr6	HLA-DPB2
chr6	HLA-DQA1
chr6	HLA-DQA2
chr6	HLA-DQB1
chr6	HLA-DQB2
chr6	HLA-DRA
chr6	HLA-DRB1
chr6	HLA-DRB5
chr6	HLA-DRB6
chr6	HLA-E
chr6	HLA-F
chr6	HLA-F-AS1
chr6	HLA-G
chr6	HLA-H
chr6	HLA-L
chr5	HTR1A
chr13	HTR2A
chrX	HTR2C
chr11	HTR3A
chr11	HTR3B
chr3	HTR3C
chr3	HTR3D
chr3	HTR3E
chr5	HTR4
chr7	HTR5A
chr2	HTR5B
chr1	HTR6
chr10	HTR7
chr7	IL6
chr4	MTNR1A
chr11	MTNR1B
chr2	NPAS2
chr17	NR1D1
chr3	NR1D2
chr10	OPN4
chr17	PER1
chr2	PER2
chr1	PER3
chr22	PPARA
chr15	RORA
chr9	RORB
chr12	TIMELESS
chr6	TNF
chr6	VIP
chr3	VIPR1
chr7	VIPR2

Supplementary Table 3: Allele frequency of the *CLOCK* and *NR1D2* variants in 64 individuals with N24SWD

Gene	Reference Sequence	Chromosome Position	Exon	Reference Allele	Alternative Allele	Known /Novel	dbSNP	Function	Alternative Allele Frequency (AAF)	AAF in public databases (population)			
										gnomAD-Exomes (Global)	1000Genomes (Global)	HGVD (Japanese)	8.3KJPN (Japanese)
<i>CLOCK</i>	NM_004898.3	56314997	18	C	G	Novel		missense	0.0078125				
<i>CLOCK</i>	NM_004898.3	56309992	21	A	G	Known	rs3736544	synonymous	0.8359375	0.695777	0.723	0.7728	0.79075
<i>CLOCK</i>	NM_004898.3	56304532	22	G	C	Known	rs1723064872	missense	0.0078125				0.00012
<i>CLOCK</i>	NM_004898.3	56301663	23	T	C	Known	rs192938463	synonymous	0.0078125	0.00002	0.0002	0.0045	0.004
<i>CLOCK</i>	NM_004898.3	56301369	23	A	G	Known	rs1801260	3' UTR	0.1640625	0.242754*	0.2296	0.16	0.17208
<i>NR1D2</i>	NM_005126.4	23986895	1	C	T	Known	rs536068754	5' UTR	0.0078125	0.000424*	0.0002		0.02011
<i>NR1D2</i>	NM_005126.4	23986930	1	A	C	Known	rs4858565	5' UTR	0.953125	0.794666*	0.7704		0.58014
<i>NR1D2</i>	NM_005126.4	23986947	1	C	T	Known	rs575779558	5' UTR	0.015625	0.011979*	0.0254		0.03103
<i>NR1D2</i>	NM_005126.4	23986983	1	C	G	Known	rs7644275	5' UTR	0.0078125		0.244		0.05372
<i>NR1D2</i>	NM_005126.4	23996056	2	C	T	Known	rs72627100	synonymous	0.046875	0.009695	0.0184	0.0276	0.03126
<i>NR1D2</i>	NM_005126.4	23996285	2	G	A	Novel		missense	0.0078125				
<i>NR1D2</i>	NM_005126.4	24003646	5	A	C	Known	rs139583758	missense	0.015625		0.0026	0.0033	
<i>NR1D2</i>	NM_005126.4	24006497	6	G	A	Known	rs72628104	synonymous	0.046875	0.009537	0.018	0.0306	0.03138
<i>NR1D2</i>	NM_005126.4	24009322	7	G	A	Known	rs78292562	missense	0.0078125	0.000853	0.0024	0.0142	0.01426

Human genome sequence was referred to UCSC assembly GRCh37/hg19.; gnomAD: Genome Aggregation Database; HGVD: Human Genetic Variation Database; *AAF in gnomAD-Genomes