

Cardiac Filaminopathy: Prevalence, Clinical Features, and Genetic Insights in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

Cardiac filaminopathy, resulting from mutations in the *FLNC* gene that encodes filamin C, is increasingly recognized as a significant cause of inherited cardiomyopathies, including dilated cardiomyopathy, hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, restrictive cardiomyopathy, and arrhythmogenic right ventricular cardiomyopathy. This review synthesizes current knowledge about the genetic basis, clinical manifestations, and prevalence of cardiac filaminopathy, with a specific focus on Saudi Arabia. The unique genetic landscape of the Saudi population, characterized by a high prevalence of consanguinity, suggests a potentially elevated burden of cardiac filaminopathy condition, although data remain limited. We highlight the need for more comprehensive genetic screening and research to understand better and manage cardiac filaminopathy in Saudi Arabia. (International Journal of Biomedicine. 2025;15(2):239-246.)

Keywords: cardiac filaminopathy • cardiomyopathy • filamin-C • clinical features • Saudi Arabia

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Abbreviations

ACM, arrhythmogenic cardiomyopathy; **DCM**, dilated cardiomyopathy; **FLNC**, filamin C; **HCM**, hypertrophic cardiomyopathy; **ICD**, implantable cardioverter defibrillator; **LV**, left ventricle; **RCM**, restrictive cardiomyopathy.

Introduction

Inherited cardiomyopathies are a diverse group of heart muscle diseases with significant clinical and genetic heterogeneity. Among these, cardiac filaminopathy, caused by mutations in the filamin C (*FLNC*) gene, has gained attention due to its role in various forms of cardiomyopathy. Filamin C (*FLNC*) is an essential actin-binding protein

involved in cytoskeletal organization and signal transduction in cardiomyocytes. Mutations in the *FLNC* gene disrupt these processes, leading to a range of cardiac phenotypes, including dilated, hypertrophic, restrictive, and arrhythmogenic cardiomyopathies.¹ Unlike filamin A and filamin B, *FLNC* is widely expressed in skeletal and cardiac muscle tissues, where it is localized to the Z-disc, myotendinous junctions, sarcolemma, and intercalated discs.² While the mutations in

the *FLNC* gene are associated with distal and myofibrillar skeletal muscle disorders, the development of cardiomyopathy may occur independently of any skeletal muscle disease.^{1,3,4}

Saudi Arabia presents a unique context for studying cardiac filaminopathy due to its high rate of consanguinity, which increases the risk of inherited genetic disorders. Despite this, the prevalence and impact of *FLNC* mutations in the Saudi population have not been extensively studied. Recently, a couple of cases in Saudi Arabia have been identified with mutations in the *FLNC* gene linked to dilated cardiomyopathy⁵ and distal skeletal myopathy.⁶ This growing body of evidence highlights the critical role that the *FLNC* gene plays in cardiac muscle function, suggesting a potential area of focus for future research and clinical interventions. These findings also emphasize the need for further genetic screening and investigation within the population to understand better the prevalence and impact of *FLNC* mutations on heart health in this region.

Methods

We conducted a comprehensive literature search on PubMed for inherited cardiomyopathies associated with *FLNC* mutations, focusing particularly on their phenotypic characteristics and potential prevalence within the Saudi Arabian population. Different keyword combinations were inserted: “cardiac filaminopathy” AND “filamin-C” OR “*FLNC*” AND “inherited cardiomyopathy” AND “cardiomyopathy” AND “Saudi Arabia” AND “clinical features.” The relevance of the articles was selected for each cardiomyopathy.

Results

Filamin C (FLNC), encoded by the *FLNC* gene, is a critical component of the cardiac Z-disc, where it contributes to the mechanical stability and signal transduction pathways that regulate muscle contraction. The protein's role in maintaining the structural integrity of the sarcomere and its interactions with various signaling molecules underline its importance in cardiac function. Mutations in *FLNC* can lead to the development of cardiomyopathies through mechanisms such as impaired mechanotransduction, altered signaling pathways, and disrupted cytoskeletal architecture.¹ Also, FLNC is believed to be involved in crosslinking filamentous actin (F-actin), although the precise mechanisms underlying this interaction remain unclear. Recently, Ohiri et al. revealed FLNC functions as an actin crosslinking protein. They justified the potential key role of FLNC in regulating cellular responses, such as stress and injury. For example, FLNC is observed to accumulate at injury sites within skeletal myofibers and cardiomyocytes during exercise, where it contributes to repair mechanisms, including sarcomere rebuilding.² FLNC is known to be predominantly localized to key structural regions within cardiomyocytes, including the Z-discs, sarcolemma, and intercalated discs (Figure 1).

Many proteins can interact with FLNC, including Z-disc-associated proteins such as Titin, Calsarcin, Myotilin, Nebulette, and other proteins.¹⁰ Also, other protein complexes

known to interact with FLNC, such as the β 1A integrin subunit and the sarcoglycan complex at the costamere, are anchored to the sarcolemma of cardiomyocytes.¹¹ Moreover, FLNC associates with the structures of intercalated discs, which are composed of gap junctions, adherens junctions, and desmosomes. Thus, FLNC localization at intercalated discs supports mechanical and electrical coupling between adjacent cardiomyocytes. Given that FLNC can interact with various proteins linked to inherited cardiomyopathy, it may contribute to the manifestation of diverse cardiomyopathy phenotypes.¹²

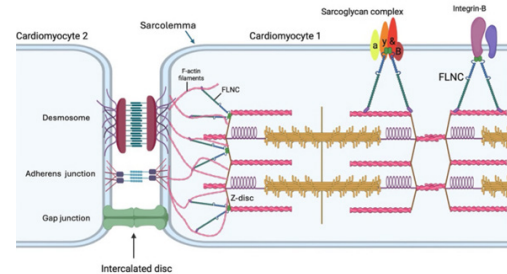


Fig. 1. FLNC interacts with Z-disc proteins and costamere proteins (sarcoglycans) through its C-terminal region. This interaction facilitates the linkage between Z-disc proteins and sarcolemma. FLNC actin-binding protein can also interact with F-actin filaments.⁸ FLNC is also localized at the intercalated disc, and thereby any disruption in FLNC function could impair the cell-cell mechanical force transduction. Figure is adapted from Ortiz-Genga et al.⁹ and Zhou et al.^[8] and created by BioRender. FLNC, filamin C.

Genetic Mutations and Pathogenesis

The *FLNC* gene mutations associated with cardiac filaminopathy can be classified into truncating and missense mutations, each leading to distinct cardiomyopathy phenotypes. Truncating mutations often result in a loss of protein function, contributing to the development of dilated cardiomyopathy (DCM) and arrhythmogenic cardiomyopathy (ACM), characterized by ventricular arrhythmias, left ventricular fibrosis, and a high risk of sudden cardiac death.¹³⁻¹⁵ On the other hand, missense mutations that disrupt the dimerization and proper folding of the protein are known to result in the formation of protein aggregates within the sarcomere that are more commonly associated with hypertrophic (HCM) and restrictive cardiomyopathies (RCM), which can lead to abnormal thickening of the ventricular walls and impaired diastolic function.¹

In addition, the *FLNC* truncating variants were defined as nonsense, frameshift, or canonical splice site variants.^{14, 16} These truncating variants compromise the structural integrity of FLNC, which may exacerbate the susceptibility to cardiac dysfunction and contribute to various cardiomyopathic phenotypes.¹⁷ Understanding the specific impact of these mutations is essential for elucidating the molecular mechanisms underlying FLNC-related cardiomyopathies.

Clinical Features of Cardiac Filaminopathy

The clinical spectrum of cardiac filaminopathy is broad, ranging from asymptomatic carriers to individuals with severe, life-threatening cardiac conditions. Recent studies have shown that variants in *FLNC* can be associated with various cardiomyopathies, including dilated cardiomyopathy (DCM),

hypertrophic cardiomyopathy (HCM), arrhythmogenic cardiomyopathy (ACM), and restrictive cardiomyopathy (RCM),¹⁸ and can also lead to distinct phenotypes.^{1,19}

Dilated Cardiomyopathy (DCM)

Truncating mutations of *FLNC* have been found in 1%-5% of patients with the DCM phenotype.²⁰ Dilated cardiomyopathy is a severe cardiac condition characterized by left ventricular dilation and impaired systolic function, often leading to heart failure, arrhythmia, and sudden cardiac death. Emerging research has established a strong association between DCM and pathogenic mutation in *FLNC*. There are different genes closely associated with DCM, including titin, desmin, lamin A/C (*LMNA*), desmoplakin, desmin, β -myosin heavy chain (*MYH7*), Bcl2-associated athanogene 3 (*BAG3*), and *FLNC*. The clinical manifestations of DCM during its early stages may include fatigue, dyspnea, dizziness, syncope, and edema. However, abnormal skin pigmentation, skeletal myopathy, and neurosensory disorders may appear in severe cases.²¹ A recent study genetically characterized DCM patients who underwent cardiac transplantation in a Chinese population using whole-exome sequencing and showed that *FLNC* truncation could lead to severe clinical symptoms in DCM patients, suggesting an urgent need for appropriate treatment of this complex cardiomyopathy.²²

Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy (HCM):

This phenotype is characterized by asymmetric septal hypertrophy, leading to left ventricular outflow tract obstruction, diastolic dysfunction, mitral regurgitation, myocardial ischemia, autonomic dysfunction, and an increased risk of arrhythmias. Patients may present with symptoms such as chest pain, dyspnea, palpitations, and syncope. Variants in sarcomere-related structures have been linked to causing left ventricular (LV) hypertrophy,²³ but the two most common pathogenic gene mutations are *MYH7* and *MYBPC3*.²⁴ The identification of the *MYH7* gene, which encodes the beta-myosin heavy chain—a key component of the sarcomere thick filament—was indeed a major step in understanding the genetic basis of HCM, especially the non-syndromic form of the disease. Subsequent familial studies have revealed pathogenic variants in additional sarcomeric genes, including *MYBPC3* (myosin-binding protein C), *TNNT2* (troponin T), and *TNNI3* (troponin I). Recent research methodologies have also uncovered variants in non-sarcomeric genes that display moderate to strong associations with HCM. Noteworthy among these are *JPH2* (junctophilin), *CSR3* (cysteine and glycine-rich protein 3), *FHOD3* (formin homology 2 domain-containing 3), *ALPK3* (alpha-protein kinase 3), *TRIM63* (tripartite motif containing 63, exhibiting autosomal recessive inheritance), *PLN* (phospholamban), and *FLNC*.²⁵

The severity of HCM in patients with *FLNC* mutations can vary widely, from mild to severe forms²⁶ requiring medical intervention or implantable cardioverter-defibrillators (ICDs). Missense variants of *FLNC* are predominantly linked to HCM, with prevalence rates ranging from 1.3% to 8.7% in HCM cohorts. However, some studies found no significant excess of rare missense variants in HCM patients compared to controls, raising questions about the role of *FLNC* missense variants in this condition. Of the 54 identified missense variants, only

13 are considered (likely) pathogenic based on additional evidence, such as functional studies or familial segregation. The remaining variants are classified as variants of uncertain significance (VUS) according to current diagnostic criteria. Notably, there is significant clustering of missense variants within the ROD2 domain of *FLNC*, a region crucial for cell signaling, suggesting that variants located in this domain have a higher likelihood of being pathogenic for HCM.¹⁷

Restrictive Cardiomyopathy (RCM)

Restrictive cardiomyopathy (RCM) is marked by a stiffening of the ventricular walls, resulting in impaired diastolic filling, atrial enlargement, and the development of heart failure with preserved ejection fraction (HFpEF). Patients with RCM often present with symptoms of heart failure, such as fatigue, dyspnea, edema, and ascites.²⁷ This phenotype is particularly severe and is associated with a poor prognosis.^{28,29} RCM typically follows an autosomal dominant inheritance pattern. Genes related to RCM include *TNNI3*, *TNNT2*, *MYH7*, *MYBPC3*, *LMNA*, desmin, and *FLNC* (Table 1). Most identified mutations occur within genes that encode sarcomeric proteins, while others are found in proteins that can associate with the sarcomere, such as small heat-shock proteins like crystallin α B, or their interacting partners, like *BAG3* proteins. The dysfunction of these proteins may contribute to the accumulation of aggregated proteins.²⁹ Recently, several reports have shown that missense mutations in *FLNC* may lead to exclusively RCM phenotype or overlapping with other cardiomyopathies such as hypertrophic cardiomyopathy or left-ventricular non-compaction.^{26,30,31}

Arrhythmogenic Cardiomyopathy (ACM)

Arrhythmogenic cardiomyopathy (ACM) is a genetic heart disease resulting from mutations in proteins that constitute the intercalated disc, including both desmosomal (plakophilin-2, desmoplakin, desmoglein-2, and desmocollin) and non-desmosomal proteins (titin, PLN, DES, LMNA, and *FLNC*).³² Recent studies have revealed that mutations in *FLNC* may cause the ACM phenotype.^{19,33,34} Arrhythmogenic cardiomyopathy (ACM) is associated with an increased risk of ventricular arrhythmias and sudden cardiac death. Truncating *FLNC* mutations are often implicated in this phenotype, which is characterized by fibrofatty infiltration of the myocardium, left ventricular dilation, and a high incidence of arrhythmias. Sudden cardiac death may be the first manifestation of the disease in some patients, particularly in young adults.³⁵ More recently, Marinas et al.³⁶ have identified rare variants of *FLNC* across 22 index cases (15 males, median age of 45), of which 16 harbored 'radical' variants (comprising 8 deletions/insertions, 6 nonsense variants, and 2 splice site variants) classified as pathogenic or likely pathogenic. Additionally, 6 cases carried missense variants classified as variants of unknown significance (VUS). The left-dominant form of ACM was present in 63.6% of index cases. Interestingly, the 2020 Padua Criteria for ACM were able to distinguish 8 ACM patients with traditional right ventricular involvement from 14 ACM patients with the left ventricular form among *FLNC* carriers, estimating the disease penetrance at around 71%.

Table 1 presents the list of disease-causing genes and their most commonly associated phenotype.

Table 1.
List of disease-causing genes and their most commonly associated phenotype.

Location within the cell/function	Protein	Gene	Common Phenotype	References
Sarcomere proteins	Myosin-binding protein C	<i>MYBPC3</i>	HCM	[37-39]
	Troponin C	<i>TNNC1</i>	HCM	[40]
	Beta-myosin heavy chain	<i>MYH7</i>	HCM	[41]
	Essential myosin light chain	<i>MYL3</i>	HCM	[42,43]
	Troponin T	<i>TNNT2</i>	HCM, DCM	[44,45]
	Troponin I	<i>TNNI3</i>	HCM, RCM, DCM	[46-48]
	Actin	<i>ACTC1</i>	RCM, HCM	[48]
	Regulatory myosin light chain	<i>MYL2</i>	HCM	[43]
	Tropomyosin	<i>TPM1</i>	DCM, HCM	[43,49]
Z-disc proteins	Titin	<i>TTN</i>	DCM	[45,49]
	Desmin	<i>DES</i>	DCM	[50]
	Filamin-C	<i>FLNC</i>	DCM, ACM	[50-52]
	α -actinin 2	<i>ACTN2</i>	HCM	[50,53]
	Cysteine and glycine-rich protein-3	<i>CSRP3</i>	HCM	[50,54]
	Telethonin (T-cap)	<i>TCAP</i>	HCM, DCM	[50,55]
	Myopalladin	<i>MYPN</i>	DCM	[50]
	Nebulette	<i>NEBL</i>	HCM, DCM	[50]
	Nexilin	<i>NEXN</i>	DCM	[50,56]
	Obscurin	<i>OBSCN</i>	HCM, DCM	[50,57]
Calcium handling Proteins	Ryanodine receptor 2	<i>RYR2</i>	HCM, ACM	[58-60]
	Calmodulin	<i>CALM</i>	HCM	[61]
	Phospholamban	<i>PLN</i>	DCM, HCM	[62,63]
Desmosome	Desmoplakin	<i>DSP</i>	DCM, ACM	[64-66]
	Plakophilin-2	<i>PKP2</i>	ACM	[65,67,68]
	Plakoglobin	<i>JUP</i>	ACM	[36,65,69]
	Desmocollin-2	<i>DSC2</i>	ACM	[65,69,70]
	Desmoglein-2	<i>DSG2</i>	ACM	[65,69,71]
Ion channel	Sodium channel protein type 5 subunit alpha	<i>SCN5A</i>	DCM, ACM	[72,73]
	Delayed rectifier inward potassium channel alpha-subunit	<i>KCNQ1</i>	DCM	[74,75]

Prevalence and Genetic Landscape in Saudi Arabia

The prevalence of *FLNC*-related cardiomyopathies in Saudi Arabia has not been comprehensively studied. However, the high rate of consanguinity in the population suggests that inherited cardiomyopathies, including those caused by *FLNC* mutations, may be more common than in populations with lower consanguinity rates.⁷⁶ A limited number of case reports and genetic studies have begun to shed light on the burden of *FLNC* mutations in Saudi Arabia.^{3,5,6} In addition, a previous study conducted in a Saudi Arabian cohort identified several families with severe cardiac phenotypes linked to genetic mutations. In these families, 23 marriages (62%) were consanguineous, and DCM was the most common subtype of inherited cardiomyopathy (26 cases) compared to non-consanguineous marriages (only two cases).⁷⁷ Despite the relatively rare occurrence of *FLNC* mutations reported in Saudi Arabia, the significance of genetic testing cannot be overstated. It plays a pivotal role not only in confirming the diagnosis but also in guiding the clinical management and personalized treatment strategies for affected individuals.⁷⁸

Indeed, early detection through genetic screening is crucial for improving patient outcomes, particularly in complex cardiomyopathies associated with *FLNC* variants.

Diagnostic and Therapeutic Challenges

The diagnosis of cardiac filaminopathy in Saudi Arabia faces several challenges, including limited access to genetic testing, a lack of awareness among healthcare providers, and cultural factors that may influence the uptake of genetic counseling and testing. Despite these challenges, advances in genetic testing and the establishment of specialized cardiac genetic clinics have the potential to improve the diagnosis and management of *FLNC*-related cardiomyopathies. Management strategies for patients with cardiac filaminopathy include primary prevention by using ICD implantation as well as the use of beta-blockers and antiarrhythmic drugs to prevent sudden cardiac death.^{79,80} In severe cases, heart transplantation may be considered.²² Given the high risk of sudden cardiac death associated with *FLNC*-related cardiomyopathies, early disease identification and management are crucial to improving outcomes.³⁵

Discussion

This paper provides a comprehensive overview of the current understanding of cardiac filaminopathy, particularly in the context of the Saudi Arabian population. It emphasizes the need for further research and improved diagnostic and management strategies to address the unique challenges posed by this condition in Saudi Arabia. Though a pathogenic mutation in the *FLNC* gene is contributing significantly to the cause of inherited cardiomyopathies, it remains insufficiently acknowledged in Saudi Arabia. The high prevalence of consanguinity in the Saudi population may contribute to a higher burden of *FLNC*-related cardiomyopathies, although more research is needed to confirm this. Genetic testing and early diagnosis are critical to preventing severe outcomes, including sudden cardiac death. There is an urgent need for large-scale epidemiological studies to determine the true prevalence of *FLNC*-related cardiomyopathies in Saudi Arabia. Additionally, establishing a national registry for inherited cardiomyopathies could help track these conditions more effectively and improve patient management.

Research into the genetic basis of inherited cardiomyopathies and the specific *FLNC* mutation spectrum in Saudi Arabia, as well as the development of targeted therapies, is crucial for advancing the care of patients with cardiac filaminopathy. These studies provide important insights into risk stratification and prognosis.⁸¹

Conclusion

More efforts are needed to increase awareness, improve access to genetic services, and develop further research into the genetic landscape of cardiomyopathies in Saudi Arabia. Perhaps these are essential steps toward advanced and better patient care in this nation.

Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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