



In silico analysis of *SLC3A1* and *SLC7A9* mutations in Iranian patients with Cystinuria

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Received: 12 May 2018 / Accepted: 16 July 2018 / Published online: 1 August 2018
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Abstract

Cystinuria is an autosomal recessive defect in reabsorptive transport of cystine and the dibasic amino acids ornithine, arginine, and lysine from renal tubule and small intestine. Mutations in two genes: *SLC3A1*, encoding the heavy chain rBAT of the renal cystine transport system and *SLC7A9*, the gene of its light chain b^{0,+}AT have a crucial role in the diseases. In our previous studies from Iranian populations with Cystinuria totally six and eleven novel mutations respectively identified in *SLC3A1* and *SLC7A9* genes. In this study, we conducted an in silico functional analysis to explore the possible association between these genetic mutations and Cystinuria. MutationTaster, PolyPhen-2, PANTHER, FATHMM, PhDSNP and MutPred was applied to predict the degree of pathogenicity for the missense mutations. Furthermore, Residue Interaction Network (RIN) and Intron variant analyses was performed using Cytoscape and Human Slicing Finder softwares. These genetic variants can provide a better understanding of genotype–phenotype relationships in patients with Cystinuria. In the future, the findings may also facilitate the development of new molecular diagnostic markers for the diseases.

Keywords Cystinuria · *SLC7A9* · *SLC3A1* · Solute carrier transporters · Mutation

Introduction

Transporters are embedded proteins within membranes that control the uptake of different solutes [1]. They are divided into solute carrier (SLC) and ATP-binding cassette (ABC) transporters [2]. The SLC transporters control the uptake of endogenous compounds essential for cell survival, including sugars, amino acids, digested peptides, nucleotides, and inorganic ions [3–5].

The solute carrier (SLC) transporter superfamily with 55 families are encoded by a total of at least 362 putatively functional protein coding genes [6]. Because of key physiological roles of SLC transporters, defects in functionally specific SLC transporters can cause many Mendelian diseases or monogenic disorders [7]. More than 80 SLC genes have been involved in monogenic disorders. For example, mutations in *SLC25A19* and *SLC5A2* respectively was lead to Amish lethal microcephaly and familial renal glucosuria [8–10]. Cystinuria is another disease due to pathogenic variants in the *SLC3A1* or *SLC7A9* genes [11, 12].

Here, we focus on the Cystinuria, which is an inherited autosomal recessive disorder of renal reabsorption of cystine, arginine, lysine, and ornithine [13]. The protein products of *SLC3A1* (rBAT) and *SLC7A9* (b^{0,+}AT) form the

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heterodimeric amino-acid transporter system b⁰⁺, which is responsible for the uptake of cystine and dibasic amino acids in the renal tubular and intestinal epithelial cells [14, 15]. In Cystinuria, mutation in the two genes resulted to increased urinary excretion of cystine and finally formation of kidney stones [16]. Patients with two *SLC3A1* mutations are classified as type I Cystinuria, whereas patients with two *SLC7A9* mutations are classified as non-type I Cystinuria [17, 18]. Over 100 *SLC3A1* mutations have been recognized, and all, except one (dupE5–E9), were limited to patients with type I Cystinuria [17, 19, 20]. At least 66 *SLC7A9* mutations were identified and these mutations were found in both type I and type non-I patients [21]. From our previous studies in Iranian patients with Cystinuria, we identified four missense mutations, one intron variant and one polymorphism in *SLC3A1* as well as three missense mutations, one frame shift, four intron variant and three polymorphisms in *SLC7A9* [22–26].

Bioinformatics prediction tools can be applied in a cost efficient manner to calculate effects of specific mutations on the protein structure and function for selecting SNPs likely contribute to an individual's disease susceptibility. Recently, several computational methods have been developed to screen functional SNPs out of large pools of disease-sensitive SNPs related to the *BRCA1*, *ATM*, *PONI*, *ADIPOR1* and *SLC* genes [27–29].

In the current study, we used different softwares and publicly available bioinformatics tools to comprehensively analyze various mutation identified in the *SLC3A1* and *SLC7A9* genes of Iranian populations with Cystinuria from our previous studies [22–26]. Since missense mutations of the genes are associated with more abnormalities, we aimed to study the effect of mutations on protein stability. Moreover, the pathogenic effects of the intron variants using bioinformatics tools were predicted. Subsequently, the 3D modeled protein structures of the mutants were compared with the native protein to evaluate structural deviations and topological similarities.

Methods

Bioinformatic pathogenicity predictions

The degree of pathogenicity for the missense mutations identified in *SLC3A1* and *SLC7A9* genes was predicted using the MutationTaster (<http://www.mutationtaster.org/>) [30], Polymorphism Phenotyping v2 (PolyPhen-2) (<http://genetics.bwh.harvard.edu/pph2>) [31], Protein Analysis Through Evolutionary Relationships (PANTHER) (<http://www.pantherdb.org>) [32], and Functional Analysis Through Hidden Markov Models (FATHMM) (<http://fathmm.biocompute.org.uk/index.html>) [33]. The Mutation Prediction Predictor of Human Deleterious Single Nucleotide Polymorphisms

(PhDSNP) (<http://snps.biofold.org/phd-snp/phd-snp.html>) [34] and (MutPred) (<http://mutpred.mutdb.org>) [35] were applied to estimate its functional effects.

3D structure preparation

The 3D modelled structure of the *SLC3A1* and *SLC7A9* proteins for wild and mutant type prepared using Homology modeling in SWISS-MODEL webserver (<https://swissmodel.expasy.org/>) [36–39] were applied for structural analysis.

Exploration of residue interaction networks

Cytoscape with two plugins StructureViz [40] and RINalyzer [41] was used for analysis of residue network interaction of wild type and mutated structures [42].

Sequence alignment

Sequence alignment and visualization of conserved amino acids were prepared using the cobalt constraint-based multiple protein alignment tool (https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/tools/cobalt/re_cobalt.cgi) [43] and the universal protein resource (UniProt) (<http://www.uniprot.org/align/>) [44] with default parameters.

Intron variant analysis

To in silico evaluate the possible effects of the identified intron variants on gene splicing, Human Splicing Finder (<http://www.umd.be/HSF/>, Marseille, France) softwares were used [45]. In this tool, analysis of intron sequences for putative branch points and calculation of the breakage of exonic splicing enhancers (ESE) or creation of exonic splicing silencers (ESS) was performed.

Results and discussion

In previous studies from these authors [22–26], some variants were identified in *SLC3A1* and *SLC7A9* genes including missense, polymorphism, and intron variants summarized in Table 1. Totally, six and eleven novel mutations respectively identified in *SLC3A1* and *SLC7A9* genes. Wass et al found 57 different mutations in UK population [46]. Similarly, they used computational methods to discover the functional and structural consequences of the nsSNPs [29]. In the current research work, the novel variants that have not been reported so far including c.1136+2/3delT in *SLC3A1* and c.177G/A, c.478+14insA, c.272–273insA, c.478+10T/C, c.604+66A/G, c.993G/A in *SLC7A9* were identified. As shown in Table 1, c.177G>A, c.411T>C and c.993G>A mutations in *SLC7A9* as well as c.114A/C

Table 1 Description of mutations identified in the *SLC3A1* and the *SLC7A9* genes

Gene	Ex/Int	Nucleotide change	Amino acid change	Type of mutation
SLC3A1	Ex 1	c.114A/C	G38G	Polymorphism
	Ex 3	c.647C/T	T216M	Missense
	In 6	c.1136+2/3delT	No coding	Intron variant
	Ex 6	c.1084C/T	R362C	Missense
	Ex 8	c.1400T/C	M467T	Missense
	Ex 8	c.1400T/A	M467K	Missense
SLC7A9	Ex 3	c.177G/A	T59T	Synonymous
	In 3	c.235+22T/G	No coding	Intron variant
	In 4	c.478+14insA	No coding	Intron variant
	Ex 4	c.272–273insA	K92Qfs*30	Frame shift
	Ex 4	c.425T/C	V142A	Missense
	Ex 4	c.313G/A	G105R	Missense
	In 4	c.478+10T/C	No coding	Intron variant
	Ex 4	c.411T/C	C137C	Synonymous
	In 5	c.604+66C>G	No coding	Intron variant
	Ex 10	c.993G>A	A331A	Synonymous
Ex 10	c.997C/T	R333W	Missense	

mutation in *SLC3A1* lead to polymorphism/synonymous for Thr 59, Cys 137, Ala 331 and Gly 38 residues, respectively. The c.235+22T/G, c.478+14insA, c.478+10T>C, c.604+66C>G mutations in *SLC7A9* and c.1136+2/3delT mutation in *SLC3A1* were in the intronic region or Untranslated/No coding region.

Intron variant mutations

Intron variant analysis indicated that only c.478+10T/C mutation was not created/changed a significant splicing motif in *SLC7A9* and probably no impact on splicing (Table 2). Furthermore, c.235+22T/G and c.478+14insA intron variants in *SLC7A9* had not any effect on splicing but they can created and also changed ESS and ESE motif sites in the intronic regions (Int3 for c.235+22T/G and Int4 for c.478+14insA). However, both of variants c.1136+2/3delT and c.604+66C>G mutations in *SLC3A1* and *SLC7A9*

genes most probably affected splicing respectively through alteration in WT donor sites and exonic ESE sites (Table 2). These molecular events probably make an alternative splicing process.

Missense mutations

Only the missense mutations change the amino acid sequence of the SLC transporter proteins. The protein prediction analysis for the pathogenic effects of these missense mutations on SLC3A1 and SLC7A9 proteins were calculated using six bioinformatics programs that use different prediction algorithms: PolyPhen-2, PANTHER, FATHMM, PhD-SNP, MutPred and MutationTaster (Tables 3, 4). All of these programs predicted the variants p.R362C, p.M67K/T, p.T216M in *SLC3A1* and p.G105R, p.R333W in *SLC7A9* to be damaging/deleterious/disease causing.

Table 2 Intron variant analysis for mutations identified in *SLC3A1* and *SLC7A9* genes

Intron variant mutation	Splice-site analysis tools (Human Splicing Finder software)
In 6 SLC3A1 c.1136+2/3delT	Alteration of the WT donor site Most probably affecting splicing
Int 3 SLC7A9 c.235+22T/G	Creation of an intronic ESE site Probably no impact on splicing
Int 4 SLC7A9 c.478+14insA	(1) Alteration of an intronic ESS site. Probably no impact on splicing (2) Creation of an intronic ESE site. Probably no impact on splicing
Int 4 SLC7A9 c.478+10T/C	No significant splicing motif alteration detected This mutation has probably no impact on splicing
Int 5 SLC7A9 c.604+66C>G	Alteration of an exonic ESE site Potential alteration of splicing

ESE site exonic splicing enhancer, *ESS site* exonic splicing silencer

Table 3 The protein prediction analysis for missense mutations identified in the *SLC3A1* gene

Protein prediction algorithm	c.1084C/T p. R362C	c.1400T/C p. M467T	c.647C/T p. T216M	c.1400T/A p. M467K
MutationTaster	Disease causing/probably deleterious	Disease causing/probably deleterious	Disease causing/probably deleterious	Disease causing/probably deleterious
PolyPhen-2	Probably damaging	Benign	Probably damaging	Possibly damaging
PANTHER	Deleterious	Deleterious	Deleterious	Not-scored
FATHMM	Damaging	Damaging	Damaging	Damaging
	Lysosomal and lipid storage disease	Lysosomal and lipid storage disease	Lysosomal and lipid storage disease	Lysosomal and lipid storage disease
PhD-SNP	Disease	Disease	Disease	Disease
MutPred	Loss of MoRF binding Loss of solvent accessibility Loss of disorder Loss of helix Gain of loop	Loss of stability Gain of catalytic residue at M467 Loss of MoRF binding Gain of phosphorylation at T471 Loss of helix	Loss of catalytic residue at T216 Loss of sheet Loss of ubiquitination at K219 Gain of methylation at K219 Loss of phosphorylation at T216	Loss of stability Gain of MoRF binding Gain of ubiquitination at M467 Gain of phosphorylation at T471 Gain of catalytic residue at M465

Table 4 The protein prediction analysis for missense and frameshift mutations identified in the *SLC7A9* gene

Protein prediction algorithm	c.272–273insA	c.997C/T p.R333W	c.425T/C p.V142A	c.313G/A p.G105R
MutationTaster	Disease NMD (from 487 to 120 aa) Frameshift (K92Qfs*30)	Disease causing/probably deleterious	Polymorphism	Disease causing/probably deleterious
PolyPhen-2	–	Probably damaging	Benign	Probably damaging
PANTHER	–	Deleterious	Probably benign	Deleterious
FATHMM	–	Damaging	Damaging	Damaging
PhD-SNP	–	Disease	Neutral	Disease
MutPred	–	Loss of methylation at R333 Gain of catalytic residue at R333 Gain of loop Gain of helix Loss of MoRF binding	Loss of ubiquitination at K145 Loss of stability Gain of catalytic residue at V142 Gain of helix Gain of loop	Gain of solvent accessibility Gain of methylation at G105 Gain of relative solvent accessibility Loss of catalytic residue at I107 Loss of helix

While the p.V142A variant in *SLC7A9* were benign/Neutral Polymorphism/Polymorphism.

The residue interaction analysis for these mutations were presented in Figs. 1 and 2. In *SLC7A9* protein, Gly 105 in the wild type had contacts with Met 101, Ileu 107, Pro 108, and Ala 109 but Arg 105 is in the connection with these residues as well as Tyr 104. Trp 333 in the mutant type of the protein, lost its contact to Ser 342 and Ala 331, while Arg in wild type connected to them as well as Tyr 329, Gly 325 and Val 330. Moreover, Val 142 which was in the connection with Cys 144, Lys 145 and Ala 142, in the mutant type, had contacts with the same residues plus Cys 137. In *SLC3A1* protein, Arg 362 from the mutant type

had residue interaction network similar to wild type as well as additional connection to Glu 404 and Gln 403. In M467T mutation from the mentioned protein, the mutant type had lost its connection to residues Gly645, Asp 628 and obtained connection to Leu 597. In the same way, M467K missense mutation, the mutated protein had lost its contacts to residues Leu 468, Leu 555, Gly 645, Asp 628 and expanded its network connection to other residues such as Asn 466, Leu 469 and Phe 470. In the last mutation T216M, the mutant type of the *SLC3A1* protein had contacts with residues as the same as wild type and also Leu 285, His 215 and Phe 280.

Fig. 1 The residue interaction analysis for **a** p.G105R, **b** p.R333W and **c** p.V142A missense mutations in SLC7A9 protein

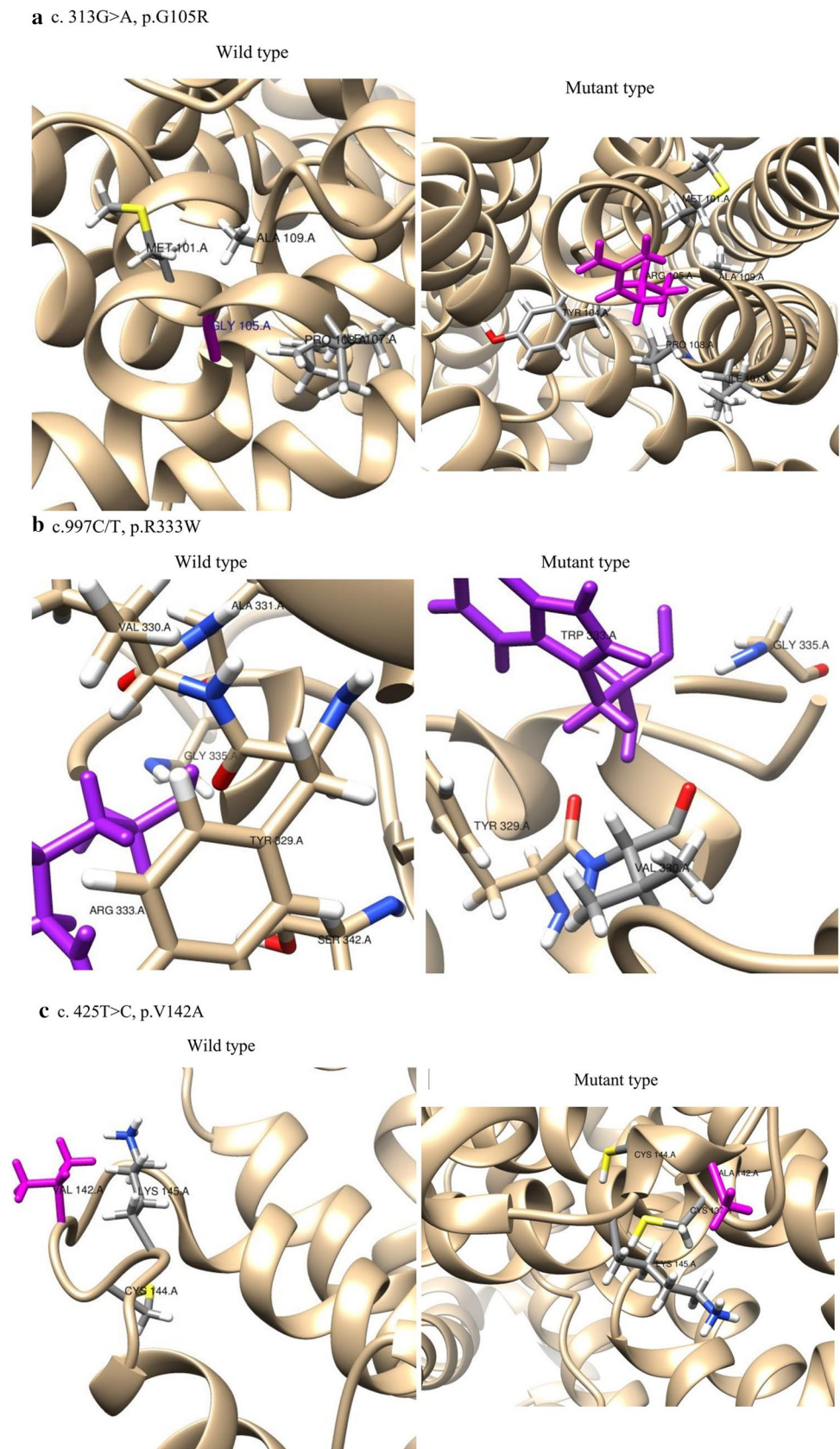
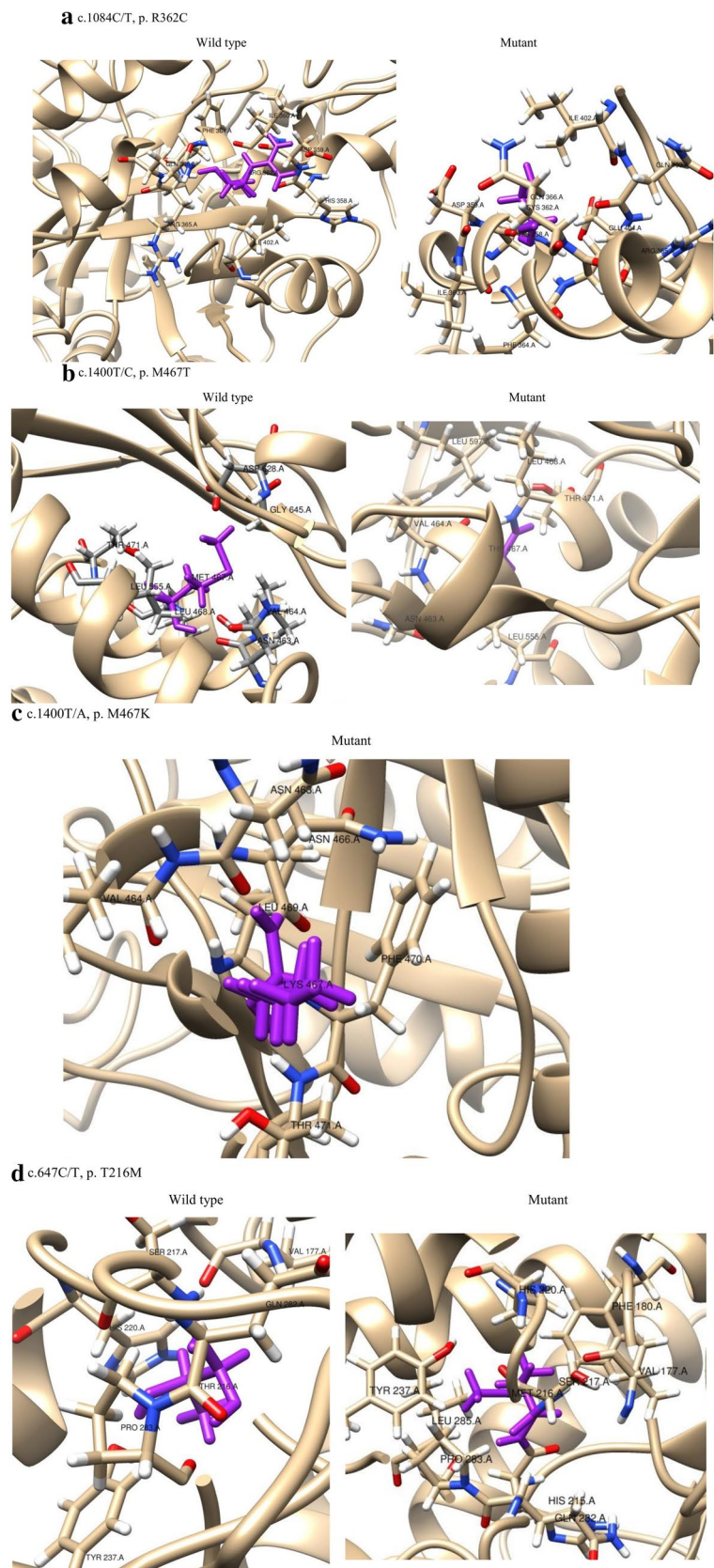


Fig. 2 The residue interaction analysis for **a** p.R362C, **b**, **c** p.M467T/K and **d** p.T216M missense mutations in the SLC3A1 gene



Point mutations

In point mutation, c.272–273insA, the *SLC7A9* protein changed through Nonsense mediated mRNA Decay (NMD). The length of *SLC7A9* protein sequence was decreased from 478 amino acid to 120. In this mutation, insertion “A” between nucleotide C272 and C273, lead to frame shift mutation and changing Lys 92 to Gln in the protein structure. The residue interaction analysis indicated the residues that were interacted to the mutant and wild type protein is also changed (Fig. 3). Lys 92 of *SLC7A9* protein interacts with seven amino acids in the same chain including Ileu 90, Ser 93, Gly 94, Gly 95, Pro 98, Glu 102 and Thr 242. While Gln 92 had contact with only four residues of the protein: Ileu 90, Arg 94, Gly 95 and Ser 98. Therefore the major changes in the length of protein and contact network will be definitely pathogenic. The MutationTaster determined that c.272–273insA mutation was “disease causing”.

Sequence alignment

The multiple sequence alignment obtained by cobalt constraint based multiple protein alignment tool indicated that Arg 362, Met 467, Thr 216 in *SLC3A1* protein and Gly 105 and Arg 333 in *SLC7A9* protein, are in a highly conserved region, whereas Val 142 in *SLC7A9* protein is not conserved (Fig. 4). The other alignments were not shown. The substitution of the conserved residues which mainly contribute to the protein structure and function, confirm the deleterious effect of the mentioned mutations in *SLC3A1* and *SLC7A9* genes and also the benign effect of p.V142A in *SLC7A9* predicted previously using different bioinformatics programs.

Conclusion

The present study offers that various computational tools were able to distinguish disease-causing mutations from benign polymorphisms. Four deleterious mutation (R362C, T216M, M467K/T) in the coding region of *SLC3A1* were identified. Only missense mutation V142A had a benign

Fig. 3 The residue 92 interaction network in wild type and mutated *SLC7A9* protein structures. **a** Lys 92 has contacts with Ileu 90, Ser 93, Gly 94, Gly 95, Pro 98, Glu 102 and Thr 242. **b** Gln 92 is in connection with Ileu 90, Arg 94, Gly 95 and Ser 98. The residues 93–120 was colored blue for showing the frameshift mutation. (Color figure online)

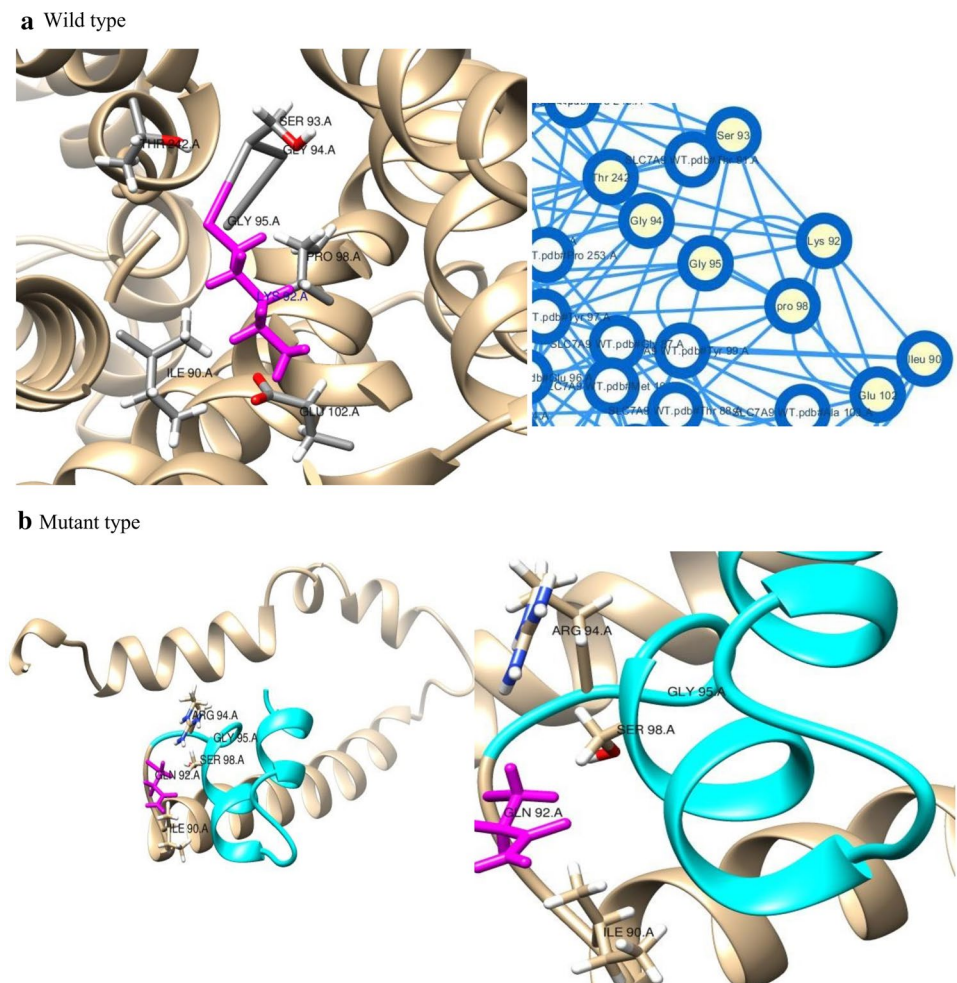


Fig. 4 The multiple sequence alignment for SLC7A9 protein (residues from 105 to 164). The mutation position related to V142 and G105 have been marked with pink boxes. (Color figure online)

	G105	V142
[Cervus	G	P
[Homo	G	V
[Mus	G	F
[Epinephelus	G	F
[Capra	G	F
EDM07621	G	F
EDM07620	G	F
[Xenopus	G	F
[Bos	G	F
AAH98909 [Rat	G	L
ABY85786.1	G	F
[Canis	G	F
ABV74242.1	G	F

effect on the protein structure and function of SLC7A9. The intron variants c.604+66C>G and c.1136+2/3delT respectively in *SLC7A9* and *SLC3A1* genes probably affected the splicing process. Overall, the present computational study will provide an insight into the genetic association of some novel deleterious mutations in *SLC3A1* and *SLC7A9* genes with Cystinuria.

Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Ethical approval This article does not contain any studies with human participants or animals performed by any of the authors.

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