Role of the \textit{Atg9a} gene in intrauterine growth and survival of fetal mice

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\textbf{Short title:} \textit{Atg9a} gene in murine fetal growth and survival

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Abstract

Autophagy is activated by environment unfavorable for survival and requires Atg9a protein. Mice heterozygous for p57$^{Kip2}$, devoid of the imprinted paternal allele (p57$^{Kip2+/−}$), are known to develop hypertension during pregnancy. To determine whether fetal Atg9a is involved in the intrauterine survival and growth of fetal mice, this study was performed on Atg9a heterozygous (Atg9a$^{+/−}$) pregnant mice with and without p57$^{Kip2+/−}$. The pregnant mice heterozygous for both knockout alleles of Atg9a and p57$^{Kip2}$ (Atg9a$^{+/−}$/p57$^{Kip2+/−}$), but not those heterozygous for Atg9a alone, developed hypertension during pregnancy. Placental expression of Atg9a mRNA was significantly decreased in the Atg9a$^{−/−}$ mice compared to Atg9a$^{+/+}$ or Atg9a$^{+/−}$ mice. The Atg9a$^{−/−}$ fetal mice exhibited significantly retarded growth and were more likely to die in utero compared to Atg9a$^{+/+}$ and Atg9a$^{+/−}$ fetal mice. Growth retardation was observed in the presence of maternal hypertension in Atg9a$^{−/−}$ fetal mice. These results suggest that Atg9a$^{−/−}$ fetal mice from pregnant dams heterozygous for both knockout alleles of Atg9a and p57$^{Kip2}$ are more susceptible to hypertensive stress than fetuses with intact autophagic machinery.

Key words: Autophagy, Fetal growth restriction, Hypoxia, Intrauterine fetal death, Hypertension
1. Introduction

Autophagy is a bulk degradation system, which controls the clearance and reuse of intracellular constituents, and is important for the maintenance of an amino acid pool essential for survival [1-3]. Autophagy can be activated by nutritional deprivation and intracellular stress, such as hypoxia. Genetic studies in yeast have identified many autophagy-related (Atg) genes that are required for autophagosome formation essential for autophagy, such as Atg3, Atg5, Atg7, Atg9a, and Atg16L1 [4]. Most of the Atg genes are conserved in higher eukaryotes. In yeast, autophagy-defective mutants were unable to survive under conditions of nitrogen starvation [5]. Similarly, the Atg3-/-, Atg5-/-, Atg7-/-, Atg9a-/-, and Atg16L1-knockout mice (genotypes of each Atg -/-) did not survive, and usually died within one day after birth [6-9]. Thus, autophagy was found to be crucial for survival in the neonatal period [6-10], while mice heterozygous for the knockout allele of the Atg9a gene (Atg9a +/-) grew normally [9]. Even in the embryonic stages, a shortage of nutrient and oxygen supply from the placenta occurs in human fetuses in certain clinical conditions, such as hypertensive pregnancies and maternal malnutrition, leading to fetal growth restriction (FGR) and intrauterine fetal death (IUFD) [11-13]. Therefore, similar adverse events may occur in response to unfavorable intrauterine environments in fetal mice devoid of autophagic machinery. Indeed, FGR and IUFD have been reported in fetal mice deficient in beclin 1, which is another gene essential for autophagy [14].

The Atg9b gene - expressed in the placenta - functionally complements Atg9a [19]. Therefore, Atg9b protein expression may be higher in the placenta of Atg9a +/- fetal mice.
When the expression of Atg9b protein is increased, autophagic activity may be monitored by quantifying the expression of LC3-II (truncated protein of LC3-I) in the placenta of Atg9a–/– fetal mice.

The p57Kip2, a potent inhibitor of the cyclin-cyclin dependent kinase (CDK) complex, is a paternally imprinted gene located within a cluster of imprinted genes in humans (chromosome 11p15.5) and mice (distal chromosome 7) [15,16]. As p57Kip2+/- (heterozygous, lacking the paternal allele) pregnant mice develop abnormalities similar to preeclampsia, including hypertension and proteinuria when carrying a fetus without p57Kip2 expression [17], these mice can be used as an animal model for hypertensive disorders in pregnancy. The present study was performed to determine whether fetal Atg9a is involved in survival and in utero growth in pregnant mice heterozygous for Atg9a (Atg9a+/-) with and without p57Kip2+/-.

In addition, expressions of Atg9b mRNA, Atg9b protein and LC3-II protein were compared between placentas with Atg9a–/– and Atg9a+/+.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Mice

Mice housed in a temperature- and humidity-controlled room were maintained under a 12:12-hour light-dark schedule with free access to food and water. All procedures were performed in accordance with the Local Ethical Commission for Animal Experiments at Hokkaido University (Japan). Female and male mice (129Sv × C57BL/6) heterozygous for Atg9a (Atg9a+/-) [9] were provided by a co-author (TS). Male mice heterozygous for p57Kip2.
lacking the imprinted paternal allele (p57\textsuperscript{Kip2\textasciitilde}) [18], were provided by co-authors (KN and KN). In the current study, female mice of \textit{Atg9a}\textasciitilde\textasciitilde\textasciitilde alone were mated with male mice of p57\textit{Kip2\textasciitilde\textasciitilde\textasciitilde} to generate female mice heterozygous for knockout alleles of \textit{Atg9a} and p57\textit{Kip2}\textasciitilde\textasciitilde\textasciitilde. The genotype of generated \textit{Atg9a}\textasciitilde\textasciitilde\textasciitilde/p57\textit{Kip2\textasciitilde\textasciitilde\textasciitilde} female was determined by PCR of tail DNA. Female mice of \textit{Atg9a}\textasciitilde\textasciitilde\textasciitilde and \textit{Atg9a}\textasciitilde\textasciitilde\textasciitilde/p57\textit{Kip2\textasciitilde\textasciitilde\textasciitilde} were mated with male mice of \textit{Atg9a}\textasciitilde\textasciitilde\textasciitilde to generate four embryo groups (groups A1, A2, B1 and B2, Tab. 1) divided according to differences in mother and fetal \textit{Atg9a} genotypes. Pregnancy stage was expressed as the number of days \textit{post coitum} (dpc). Thirteen pregnant mice with \textit{Atg9a}\textasciitilde\textasciitilde\textasciitilde and 13 pregnant mice with \textit{Atg9a}\textasciitilde\textasciitilde\textasciitilde/p57\textit{Kip2\textasciitilde\textasciitilde\textasciitilde} were used in the study. Pregnant mice of both groups were sacrificed on 13.5, 15.5, and 17.5 dpc for determination of the number of fetuses, measurement of live fetal body weight and determination of fetal \textit{Atg9a} genotypes by PCR of tail DNA (Fig. 1).

2.2. Measurement of blood pressure in pregnant mice

Blood pressure was measured with a tail-cuff using a CODA\textsuperscript{TM} monitor (Kent Scientific, Torrington, CT, USA), 5 – 10 times at 30 s intervals, 15 min after the behavior and heart rate of the pregnant mice were stabilized in the morning of 5.5, 9.5, 13.5, 15.5, and 17.5 dpc. Blood pressure values are reported as the means of at least three measurements varying by 5% obtained in one session.
2.3. Measurement of fetal body weight

The body weights of pregnant mice and alive fetal mice were measured using Electronic balance FA-200 (A&D, Tokyo, Japan). Pregnant mice were anesthetized deeply with ether and dissected in the lower abdomen. The multilocular uterus containing a fetus in each loculus was incised and fetuses with their placentas were separated from the uterus. Some fetuses, based on their color and size, appeared to be dead at sacrifice. Fetuses that were less pinkish and smaller than others were judged as dead (Fig. 1; upper panel). These fetuses were subjected to Atg9a genotype determination, but their body weights were not measured.

2.4. DNA extraction, PCR amplification and electrophoresis

The Atg9a genotypes of the fetuses (Fig. 1; lower panel) and placentas were analyzed using PCR of fetal tail DNA and placental DNA. The DNA was extracted using a DNA extraction kit (DNeasy® Blood & Tissue Kit; Quiagen, Valencia, CA, USA). PCR was performed in a final volume of 15 μL consisting of 1 μL of genomic DNA, 1.5 μL of 10× Taq buffer, 1.5 μL of dNTPs (2.5 mM each), 0.6 μL each of forward and reverse primers, 9.7 μL of nuclease-free water, and 0.1 μL of Taq DNA polymerase, under the following conditions: 3 min at 95°C, 35 cycles at 95°C for 20 s and 68°C for 1 min. The primers for the wild-type allele were:

5′-CCAGAGCCTGTCATGGGTACTGGGAACC-3′ (primer I) and
5′-CCTCAAGGAGCGTGAGCGAGATGG-3′ (primer II).

For the knockout allele, primer I and 5′-CTAAAGCGCATGCTCCAGACTGCTTTG-3′ (primer III) were used. The amplified products were checked by 2.0% agarose gel electrophoresis with ethidium bromide.
The DNA bands were visualized with a UV transilluminator to determine the genotypes (Fig. 1; lower panel).

2.5. Detection of Atg9b mRNA expression

The RNA samples were extracted from 20 mg of frozen placental sample using an RNeasy® Plus Mini Kit (Qiagen) after smashing with MicroSmash™ (Tomy Seiko, Tokyo, Japan), and the sample RNA concentrations were measured by NanoDrop® (ND-1000; Thermo Scientific Japan, Kanagawa, Japan). After dilution of each sample with RNase-free water and adjusted to a uniform density (3 μg/μL), reverse-transcription polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) was performed with Super Script™ III (Life Technologies, Carlsbad, CA, USA). Quantitative Real-time PCR was used to measure the expression of Atg9b mRNA using SYBR® Premix Ex Taq™ (Takara, Shiga, Japan) and an ABI 7300 Real-Time PCR System (PE Applied Biosystems, Foster City, CA, USA). GAPDH was used as an internal standard (housekeeping gene). Real-time PCR was performed in a final volume of 15 μL consisting of 0.6 μL of sample cDNA, 7.5 μL of 2x Ex Taq buffer, 0.3 μL of 50x ROX Reference Dye, 0.6 μL each of forward and reverse primers, 5.4 μL of nuclease-free water under the following conditions: for Atg9a, 2 min at 50°C, 10 s at 95°C, 40 cycles at 95°C for 15 s and 59°C for 1 min; and for Atg9b and GAPDH, 2 min at 50°C, 10 s at 95°C, 40 cycles at 95°C for 15 s and 62°C for 1 min. The sequences of primers were 5’-GAGCAGGTGCAGCGAGATG-3’ (forward) and 5’-GCAGGTCTCTGGACAGTGAGG-3’ (reverse) for Atg9a,
7

5’-GCATCACATCCAGAACCTGGA-3’ (forward) and 5’-CCGCTGATGATAGCTGTAGATCTTTG-3’ (reverse) for *Atg9b*, and

5’-GGCATGGCTCTCAATGACAA-3’ (forward) and 5’-TGTGAGGGAGATGCTCAGTG-3’ (reverse) for *GAPDH*.

2.6. Immunodetection of *Atg9b* and LC3-II

Western blotting was performed to analyze the expression levels of *Atg9b* protein and microtubule-associated protein light chain 3 (LC3)-II (truncated protein of LC3-I). The sample proteins were extracted from 20 mg of frozen placental tissues after mixing with 100 μL of 2% Triton X-100 lysis buffer (20 mM Tris-HCl, 150 mM NaCl, 2% Triton X-100, 2 mM PMSF, and complete protease inhibitor cocktail), and then sonicated (Handy Sonic®; Tomy Seiko, Tokyo, Japan), extracted, and the protein concentration was measured by BCA Protein Assay (Thermo Fisher Scientific, Rockford, IL, USA).

Aliquots of 12 μg of protein samples were diluted with 1:2 volumes of Laemmli sample buffer (10% SDS, 1 M DTT, 0.5 M Tris-HCl, pH 6.8, 0.001% bromophenol blue, and 5% glycerol), boiled at 95°C for 5 min, separated by SDS-polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis (SDS-PAGE) using 8% gels for *Atg9b* and 13% for LC3-II, electrotransferred onto PDVF membranes (Amersham Biosciences, Little Chalfont, UK), and blocked with 1.5% skim milk in TBS-T (1× TBS with 0.08% Tween) at room temperature for 60 min. The membranes were incubated with the following primary antibodies at 4°C overnight: *Atg9b* (anti-ATG9B
antibody, 1:1000; NB110-74833; NOVUS, Littleton, CO, USA), LC3-II (anti-LC3, 1:800; MBL, Nagoya, Japan). GAPDH was also detected as a loading control in this study using an anti-GAPDH mouse IgG antibody at a dilution of 1:4×10^6.

After washing with TBS-T, the membranes were incubated with secondary antibody at room temperature for 60 min. ECL™ anti-rabbit IgG, horseradish peroxidase-conjugated whole antibody (1:10000; GE Healthcare, Little Chalfont, UK) was used for Atg9b and LC3-II, and ECL™ anti-mouse IgG, horseradish peroxidase-conjugated whole antibody (1:10000; GE Healthcare) for GAPDH. The protein bands were visualized with ECL solution (Immobilon™ Western, Chemiluminescent HRP Substrate; Millipore, Little Chalfont, UK) and quantified with ImageQuant LAS4000 (GE Healthcare Japan, Tokyo, Japan).

2.7. Statistical analysis

Data are presented as mean±standard deviation. Statistical analysis was performed using the JMP® Pro 11 statistical software package (SAS, Cary, NC, USA). Differences between two groups were tested using the Mann-Whitney U test (Figs. 2, 5, and 6). Differences between more groups were tested using the Steel-Dwass test after confirmation of significant difference with Kruskal-Wallis test (Figs. 3, 4, and 7). Differences between frequencies were tested using Fisher’s exact test with Bonferroni correction (Table 2). In all analyses, P < 0.05 was taken to indicate statistical significance.

3. Results
mice (used to obtain A1 and A2 groups, Tab. 1) did not exhibit significant changes in systolic blood pressure (SBP) during pregnancy (Fig. 2), while $Atg9a^{+/−}$/p57$^{−/−}$ mice (used to obtain B1 and B2 groups, Tab. 1) exhibited a significant increase in SBP at 9.5 dpc (113 ± 11.6 mm Hg) and thereafter (116 ± 12.6, 125 ± 16.2, and 121 ± 12.8 mm Hg for 13.5, 15.5, and 17.5 dpc, respectively) compared to SBP baseline (102 ± 12.0 mm Hg) determined before pregnancy. The SBP differed significantly between the two groups (A vs. B) at 9.5 dpc (113 ± 11.6 vs. 99 ± 9.5 mm Hg), 15.5 dpc (125 ± 16.2 vs. 95 ± 10.5 mm Hg), and 17.5 dpc (121 ± 12.8 vs. 102 ± 12.1 mm Hg). Pre-pregnancy body weight did not differ significantly between female mice of $Atg9a^{+/−}$ (normotensive pregnancy [A] group; n=13; Tab. 1) and $Atg9a^{+/-}$/p57$^{−/−}$ (hypertensive pregnancy group [B]; n=13) groups (22.8 ± 2.7 vs. 21.7 ± 2.5 g, respectively).

The expression of $Atg9a$ mRNA was significantly reduced in $Atg9a^{−/−}$ placentas compared to $Atg9a^{+/−}$ and $Atg9a^{+/-}$ placentas (Fig. 3). Then, placental expression of $Atg9b$ mRNA, $Atg9b$ protein and LC-3-II protein (Fig. 4) were analyzed in relation to placental $Atg9a$ genotype ($Atg9a^{+/−}$ vs. $Atg9a^{−/−}$) and the presence or absence of gene p57$^{−/−}$ (indicative of hypertension). The $Atg9b$ mRNA expression in $Atg9a^{−/−}$ placentas was comparable to that of $Atg9a^{+/-}$ placentas. However, in the presence of hypertension, the $Atg9b$ mRNA level was significantly higher in $Atg9a^{+/−}$ placentas than that in $Atg9a^{−/−}$ placentas. The expression of $Atg9b$ and LC3-II proteins was significantly higher in $Atg9a^{−/−}$ placentas than in $Atg9a^{+/-}$ placentas in the presence of hypertension (Fig. 4).

The $Atg9a^{+/−}$, $Atg9a^{−/−}$, and $Atg9a^{−/−}$ fetal mice accounted for 30% (69/231), 53%
(123/231), and 17% (39/231) of the total number of fetuses, respectively, with the number of $Atg9a^{-/-}$ fetal mice lower than the expected Mendelian frequency (Tab. 2). The fraction of dead fetal mice appeared to be greater with decreasing number of fetal $Atg9a$ alleles: 1.4% (1/69), 14% (17/123), and 26% (10/39) for $Atg9a^{+/+}$, $Atg9a^{+-}$, and $Atg9a^{-/-}$ fetuses, respectively. The prevalence rate of IUFD was significantly higher in $Atg9a^{-/-}$ fetal mice than in $Atg9a^{+/+}$ fetal mice (26% [10/39] vs. 1.4% [1/69]) and in fetal mice with at least one $Atg9a$ allele ($Atg9a^{+/+} + Atg9a^{+-}$) (26% [10/39] vs. 9.4% [18/192]).

The fetal body weight was significantly lower in fetuses carried by hypertensive dams than those of normotensive dams (B1 and B2 < A1 and A2) at all stages of pregnancy (Fig. 5). The fetal body weight was also significantly lower in $Atg9a^{-/-}$ fetal mice (groups A2+B2) than in $Atg9a^{+/+}$ and $Atg9a^{+-}$ fetal mice (groups A1+B1) on 13.5 and 17.5 dpc (Fig. 6). Finally, the body weight of fetuses carried by hypertensive dams was usually lower than that of fetuses of normotensive dams (Fig. 7). At any stage of pregnancy, fetal body weight did not differ between the groups carried by normotensive dams (A1 vs. A2). In contrast, body weight of fetuses carried by hypertensive dams was significantly lower in group B2 than in group B1 on 15.5 and 17.5 dpc (Fig. 7).

4. Discussion

The current study demonstrated that the growth of $Atg9a^{-/-}$ fetal mice was retarded compared with $Atg9a^{+/+}$ and $Atg9a^{+-}$ fetal mice. This confirmed the results of previous studies in which autophagy-defective fetal mice devoid of $Atg$ genes other than $Atg9a$ were born with lower
birth weight than those with normal (in relation to autophagy) phenotype [6,7,10]. In addition, it was suggested that \textit{Atg9a}-knockout fetal mice are characterized by an increased likelihood of dying \textit{in utero}, as it was reported for \textit{beclin 1}-knockout fetal mice [14].

Since in mice autophagy remains at a low level throughout the embryonic period and massive autophagy occurs transiently soon after birth in normal neonatal mice, autophagy was suggested to play minor role in fetal mouse development [6]. Therefore, fetal growth restriction of \textit{Atg9a}-knockout fetal mice has not been emphasized in previous reports [6,7,10]. The body weights of \textit{Atg3}^{−/−}, \textit{Atg5}^{−/−}, and \textit{Atg7}^{−/−} neonatal mice were significantly lower than those of wild-type and heterozygous mice [6,7,10]. As all \textit{Atg3}^{−/−}, \textit{Atg5}^{−/−}, \textit{Atg7}^{−/−}, and \textit{Atg9a}^{−/−} mice are indeed defective in autophagy [6,7,9,10], these results suggest that the lack of functional autophagic machinery in fetuses resulted in a lower birth weight. Thus, the fetal autophagic machinery has a protective function against FGR. This notion was further supported by our findings that FGR was observed in \textit{Atg9a}^{−/−} fetal mice carried by hypertensive dams.

Although in the current study, the fetus size in normotensive dams did not differ significantly among different fetal \textit{Atg9a} genotype, the \textit{Atg9b} and LC3-II proteins were present in the placentas of \textit{Atg9a}^{−/−} fetal mice. The placental autophagy may have prevented FGR in \textit{Atg9a}^{−/−} fetal mice carried by normotensive dams. The deleterious effect of hypertension in addition to the lack of fetal autophagy, in turn, may have outweighed the protective effect of placental autophagy on FGR in fetuses carried by hypertensive dams.

Maternal hypertension is a well-known detrimental factor for pregnancy outcome,
causing FGR and IUFD in humans [12]. Placental insufficiency due to poor blood supply via the uterine arteries is the most common cause of fetal starvation, and the increased impedance to flow within uterine arteries occurs frequently in hypertensive disorders in pregnancy [11,13]. In such an unfavorable intrauterine environment, fetal autophagy may be activated, and placental autophagy was indeed increased in women with hypertensive disorders and/or FGR [20-24]. In addition, the expression of LC3-II protein in the human placenta tended to linearly increase with a decreasing normalized infant birth weight [24]. The findings in humans and mice suggest that dysfunction of the fetal autophagic machinery is causally associated with FGR, and an unfavorable intrauterine environment such as maternal hypertension outweighs the protective role of fetal autophagy in FGR, leading to FGR even after the activation of autophagy.

The \( \text{Atg9a}\,^{+/−}\) fetal mice had a high likelihood of \textit{in utero} death in the present study. In addition, the frequency of \( \text{Atg9a}\,^{+/−}\) fetal mice was somewhat lower than the expected Mendelian frequency, even after including dead fetuses. Similar findings, but with a more severe phenotype, were reported in \textit{beclin 1}-knockout fetal mice. No homozygous mutant offspring (\( \text{beclin 1}\,^{−/−}\)) were born to dams heterozygous for \textit{beclin 1} because all \( \text{beclin 1}\,^{−/−}\) fetal mice had severely retarded growth and died in the early embryonic stages [14]. Such early-dead fetuses become conceptus traces and are not recognized as fetuses [14]. These early embryonic deaths may help to explain why less \( \text{Atg9a}\,^{+/−}\) fetal mice than expected were observed in the current study. In addition, strict classification of fetal mice as dead or alive was not easy and was based on color and size. Therefore, some fetal mice classified as dead
might have been alive.

In conclusion, in the current study we have focused on the examination of the effects of \textit{Atg9a} deficiency in fetal mice on fetal growth and survival. We demonstrated that \textit{Atg9a}-knockout (\textit{Atg9a} \textsuperscript{−/−}) fetal mice were likely to show growth restriction, especially in the presence of maternal hypertension. This suggests that dysfunction of fetal autophagic machinery causes lower fetal body weight. In addition, the results of the study indicated that fetal mice devoid of \textit{Atg9a} had an increased likelihood of dying \textit{in utero}, similar to the observations reported previously for autophagy-defective \textit{beclin 1} \textsuperscript{−/−} mice [14].

\textbf{Conflict of Interest}

None declared.
References


16

Figure captions

Fig. 1. Exemplary images of fetuses at 17.5 day post coitum. A/ Atg9a<sup>−/−</sup> fetuses judged as dead, B/ Atg9a<sup>−/−</sup> fetuses with growth retardation, C/ Atg9a<sup>+/+</sup> fetuses with normal growth. The Atg9a genotypes of the fetuses were determined by PCR of mouse tail DNA according to the presence or absence of wild type (WT) and knockout (KO) alleles.

Fig. 2. Systolic blood pressure (mean ± SD) in Atg9a<sup>+/−</sup>/p57<sup>Kip</sup><sup>+/−</sup> and Atg9a<sup>−/−</sup> pregnant mice. The numbers of pregnant mice are indicated in parentheses. *P < 0.05 between the two examined groups of mice; †P < 0.05 between a particular day post coitum (dpc) and a pre-pregnancy day (SBP baseline).

Fig. 3. Expression of Atg9a mRNA in the placentas of Atg9a<sup>+/+</sup>, Atg9a<sup>+/−</sup> and Atg9a<sup>−/−</sup> mice. The mice were sacrificed at 15.5 day post coitum; the numbers of pregnant mice are indicated in parentheses. Different superscripts mean significant differences (P<0.05).

Fig. 4. Expression of Atg9b mRNA, Atg9b protein and LC3-II protein in placentas with Atg9a<sup>+/+</sup> and Atg9a<sup>−/−</sup> genotypes. The pregnant mice were sacrificed at 17.5 day post coitum. Please refer to Table 1 for group (A1, A2, B1, and B2) definition. Different superscripts mean significant differences (P<0.05).
Fig. 5. Fetal body weight in the A1+A2 (normotensive) and B1+B2 (hypertensive) mice on 13.5, 15.5, and 17.5 days post coitum (dpc). Numbers of fetuses are presented in parentheses. Upper and lower ends of the box and horizontal line inside the box indicate 75th percentile, 25th percentile, and median values, respectively. *P < 0.05 between the two compared groups. Please refer to Table 1 for group (A1, A2, B1, and B2) definition.

Fig. 6. Fetal body weight in the A1+B1 and A2+B2 mice on 13.5, 15.5, and 17.5 days post coitum (dpc). Numbers of fetuses are presented in parentheses. Upper and lower ends of the box and horizontal line inside the box indicate 75th percentile, 25th percentile, and median values, respectively. *P < 0.05 between the two compared groups. Please refer to Table 1 for group (A1, A2, B1, and B2) definition.

Fig. 7. Fetal body weight in the A1, A2, B1 and B2 mice on 13.5, 15.5, and 17.5 days post coitum (dpc). Numbers of fetuses are presented in parentheses. Upper and lower ends of the box and horizontal line inside the box indicate 75th percentile, 25th percentile, and median values, respectively. *P < 0.05 between the two compared groups. Please refer to Table 1 for group (A1, A2, B1, and B2) definition.
Fig. 1.

Atg9a genotype of the fetus

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<th>Atg9a *+/−</th>
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Knockout
Wild type allele
Fig. 2.

[Graph showing systolic blood pressure (mm Hg) over days post coitum (dpc) for Atg9a +/-/p57Kip2 +/- pregnant mice and Atg9a +/- pregnant mice.]

- Atg9a +/-/p57Kip2 +/- pregnant mice
- Atg9a +/- pregnant mice
Fig. 3.

Atg9a mRNA level (arbitrary unit)

a a b

Atg9a \(^{+/+}\) (n=4) Atg9a \(^{+-}\) (n=4) Atg9a \(^{-/-}\) (n=5)

Placental Atg9a genotype
Fig. 4.

**Atg9b mRNA level (arbitrary unit)**

**Atg9b protein level (arbitrary unit)**

**LC3-II protein level (arbitrary unit)**

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Placental Atg9a genotype

- LC3-I (18kDa)
- LC3-II (16kDa)
- Atg9b (86kDa)
- GAPDH (39kDa)
Fig. 5.

Fetal body weight (g)

13.5 dpc  15.5 dpc  17.5 dpc


(27)  (16)  (47)  (36)  (47)  (30)

Groups

*
Fig. 6.

Fetal body weight (g)

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* Significant difference.
Fig. 7.

### Fetal body weight (g)

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<th>15.5 dpc</th>
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<td>15.5 dpc</td>
<td>17.5 dpc</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* indicates significant differences.

**Groups**

- A1
- B1
- A2
- B2

Counts: (23) (11) (4) (5) (37) (33) (10) (3) (45) (25) (2) (5)
Table 1. Mating patterns and fetal *Atg9a* genotype

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mating (male × female)</th>
<th>Fetal genotype</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group A1 <em>Atg9a</em> +/- × <em>Atg9a</em> +/-</td>
<td><em>Atg9a</em> +/-, <em>Atg9a</em> +/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group A2 <em>Atg9a</em> +/- × <em>Atg9a</em> +/-</td>
<td><em>Atg9a</em> +/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group B1 <em>Atg9a</em> +/- × <em>Atg9a</em> +/-/p57Kip2 +/-*</td>
<td><em>Atg9a</em> +/-, <em>Atg9a</em> +/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group B2 <em>Atg9a</em> +/- × <em>Atg9a</em> +/-/p57Kip2 +/-*</td>
<td><em>Atg9a</em> +/-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p57Kip2 +/-*: heterozygous, devoid of the imprinted paternal allele
Table 2. Effects of fetal \textit{Atg9a} genotype on the number of live or dead fetal mice and the intrauterine fetal death (IUFD) rate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fetal genotype</th>
<th>\textit{Atg9a}^{+/+} (A1)</th>
<th>\textit{Atg9a}^{+/-} (A1)</th>
<th>\textit{Atg9a}^{--} (A2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13.5 dpc</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12/0</td>
<td>11/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.5 dpc</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21/0</td>
<td>16/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.5 dpc</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14/1</td>
<td>31/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IUFD rate</td>
<td>2.1% (1/48)</td>
<td>12% (8/66)</td>
<td>30% (7/23)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fetal genotype</th>
<th>\textit{Atg9a}^{+/+} (B1)</th>
<th>\textit{Atg9a}^{+/-} (B1)</th>
<th>\textit{Atg9a}^{--} (B2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13.5 dpc</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3/0</td>
<td>8/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.5 dpc</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9/0</td>
<td>24/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.5 dpc</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9/0</td>
<td>16/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IUFD rate</td>
<td>0.0% (0/21)</td>
<td>16% (9/57)</td>
<td>19% (3/16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall number of fetuses</td>
<td>69 (68/1)</td>
<td>123 (106/17)</td>
<td>39 (29/10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall IUFD rate</td>
<td>1.4% (1/69)\textsuperscript{a}</td>
<td>14% (17/123)\textsuperscript{b}</td>
<td>26% (10/39)\textsuperscript{c}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

dpc - day post coitum; n - number of dams sacrificed.

\( P < 0.05 \) for a vs. b, a vs. c; and a + b (18/192) vs. c; Fisher’s exact test with Bonferroni correction.