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Original article

Intracellular Signaling Mechanisms Governing Odontoblast Differentiation During Physiological Dentin Repair: An Experimental Study in Dental Clinics of Alexandria, Egypt

Aml Aljayer

Department of Oral Biology, Faculty of Oral and Dental Medicine, Gharyan University, Gharyan, Libya
Aml.aljayer@gu.edu.ly

Abstract
Natural dentin repair is a biologically mediated process that preserves tooth vitality through odontoblast activity and intracellular signaling pathways. This study employed a mixed methods design, combining laboratory experiments with descriptive analytical surveys of dentists in Egypt, to investigate the mechanisms of odontoblast differentiation and assess clinical knowledge and practices related to regenerative dentistry. Laboratory analyses included microscopic and molecular techniques to evaluate cellular signaling during dentin repair, while questionnaires were distributed to 100 dentists across public and private sectors. Data were analyzed using quantitative statistics, qualitative assessments, and integrative interpretation of laboratory and clinical findings. Results revealed significant positive correlations between dentists' knowledge of intracellular signaling and their clinical practices, with Spearman correlation coefficients ranging from 0.52 to 0.65 (p = 0.01). A majority of respondents (80%) reported experience with mesenchymal stem cell therapy for craniofacial bone remodeling or dental tissue regeneration, and 70% observed improvements in bone density, while 65% reported enhanced dental tissue regeneration. Imaging studies were widely used, with 85% of participants undergoing radiographic or CT evaluations to monitor progress. Despite these encouraging outcomes, only 35% of dentists were familiar with molecular techniques targeting signaling pathways, and just 40% reported applying clinical strategies to enhance odontoblast differentiation. Notably, 75% expressed interest in specialized training to improve their knowledge and practices in regenerative dentistry. The study concludes that while theoretical awareness of dentin repair mechanisms is relatively strong, clinical application remains limited. Bridging this gap through structured training and evidence-based protocols will be essential for integrating molecular insights into routine dental practice, thereby improving dentin repair outcomes and long-term tooth vitality.
Keywords. *Dentin Repair, Odontoblast Differentiation, Intracellular Signaling, Regenerative Dentistry, Stem Cell Therapy.*

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Introduction

Natural dentin repair represents a fundamental biological process that ensures the preservation of tooth vitality following injury or disease. Unlike restorative interventions that rely on artificial materials, dentin repair is mediated by odontoblasts and progenitor cells within the dental pulp, which secrete reparative dentin in response to stimuli [1]. This process is tightly regulated by intracellular signaling pathways, growth factors, and the inflammatory microenvironment, all of which orchestrate odontoblast differentiation and matrix deposition [2]. Understanding these mechanisms is critical for advancing regenerative dentistry, as it provides the biological foundation for therapies that aim to restore both structure and function of dental tissues.

Recent advances in molecular biology and tissue engineering have highlighted the role of signaling cascades such as Wnt/β-catenin, TGF-β, and MAPK in odontoblast differentiation and dentinogenesis [3]. These pathways not only regulate cell fate but also integrate external signals from biomaterials and stem cell therapies, thereby influencing clinical outcomes [4]. Moreover, mesenchymal stem cell (MSC)-based approaches have shown promising results in craniofacial bone remodeling and dental tissue regeneration, underscoring the translational potential of regenerative strategies [5]. However, despite growing theoretical knowledge, clinical application of intracellular signaling in routine dental practice remains limited, with many practitioners relying on conventional techniques such as pulp capping or mineral trioxide aggregate (MTA) [6]. Bridging this gap between laboratory findings and clinical practice requires both professional training and evidence-based protocols.

The importance of this research lies in its dual focus: elucidating the cellular and molecular mechanisms underlying dentin repair, and assessing the level of awareness and application among clinicians. By integrating laboratory data with field surveys, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how intracellular signaling can be harnessed to improve dentin repair outcomes. Furthermore, it

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highlights the need for specialized training to translate molecular insights into clinical strategies, thereby advancing the field of regenerative dentistry [7].
The current study contributes to the growing body of literature that emphasizes the biological basis of dental repair and the necessity of aligning clinical practices with emerging regenerative technologies. Such integration is essential for improving patient outcomes, reducing reliance on synthetic restorative materials, and promoting long-term tooth vitality [8].

Methodology

Methodological Approach

This study adopts a mixed-methods design, integrating experimental laboratory research with descriptive-analytical field investigation. The experimental component focuses on elucidating intracellular signaling mechanisms that regulate odontoblast differentiation during normal dentin repair. The descriptive-analytical component evaluates current clinical practices and the level of knowledge among dentists in Egypt regarding dentin repair and pulp vitality. The overarching aim is to bridge the gap between laboratory findings and clinical application.

Study Tools

A comprehensive set of instruments is employed, including microscopic techniques to examine cellular changes during odontoblast differentiation, molecular analyses such as polymerase chain reaction (PCR), gene expression profiling, and protein expression analysis of signaling pathways. A structured questionnaire is designed for dentists to assess knowledge, attitudes, and clinical practices related to natural dentin repair, the role of dentinal cells, and the importance of cell signaling in guiding treatment. Standardized forms are also used for recording and analyzing both laboratory and field data.

Data Sources

The study draws upon two categories of data. Primary sources include laboratory experiments on dental pulp tissue samples and responses to questionnaires distributed among dentists in Egyptian healthcare institutions. Secondary sources consist of books, peer-reviewed journals, and prior studies retrieved from specialized scientific databases in regenerative dentistry and cell signaling.

Study Sample

The sample is divided into two groups. The laboratory sample consists of dental pulp cellular specimens obtained from selected cases in teaching centers and hospitals in Egypt, in accordance with approved ethical standards. The field sample comprises a purposive selection of dentists from both public and private sectors in Egypt, chosen based on criteria such as years of experience and specialization, to ensure data accurately reflects clinical practice.

Analytical Methods

The study employs multiple analytical techniques. Quantitative statistical analysis is applied to questionnaire data, including calculation of means, differences, and statistical significance. Qualitative analysis is used to interpret dentists' opinions and attitudes toward natural dentin repair. Laboratory data are analyzed to correlate experimental findings with signaling pathways involved in odontoblast differentiation. Finally, integrative interpretation combines laboratory and field results to provide a comprehensive understanding that links cellular mechanisms with clinical applications.

Study Limitations

The study acknowledges several limitations. Spatially, it is restricted to selected laboratories and healthcare or educational centers within Egypt. Temporally, it is bound by the timeframe allocated for laboratory experiments, questionnaire distribution, and data analysis. Thematically, it focuses specifically on intracellular signaling mechanisms associated with odontoblast differentiation during normal dentin repair, and their relation to dentists' knowledge and practices, without extending to long-term therapeutic outcomes.

Results

Table 1 presents the results of calculating the correlation ratio using Spearman's correlation. The findings demonstrate significant positive correlations between dentists' knowledge, attitudes, and practices related to natural dentin repair and intracellular signaling mechanisms. All correlation coefficients (ρ) range between 0.52 and 0.65, with p-values of 0.01, indicating statistically significant associations. These results suggest that greater familiarity with biological processes such as odontoblast differentiation and

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signaling pathways is strongly linked to improved clinical practices and interest in professional development.

Table 1. Calculating the correlation ratio using Spearman correlation

Question	Sample Size	Correlation Coefficient (ρ)	Significance (p-value)
Are you familiar with the concept of natural dentin repair?	100	0.62	0.01
Do you routinely consider pulp vitality when treating dentin injuries or pulp diseases?	100	0.58	0.01
Do you apply techniques that promote natural dentin repair (e.g., pulp capping, calcium hydroxide, MTA)?	100	0.61	0.01
Are you aware of the role of odontoblasts in secreting dentin during repair?	100	0.63	0.01
Do you consider the inflammatory status of the pulp before planning dentin repair treatment?	100	0.59	0.01
Do you use strategies to enhance odontoblast differentiation and dentin regeneration?	100	0.60	0.01
Are you familiar with intracellular signaling pathways involved in odontoblast differentiation?	100	0.57	0.01
Have you observed improvements in dentin repair outcomes when applying regenerative techniques?	100	0.64	0.01
Do you encounter challenges that limit natural dentin repair in your clinical practice?	100	0.52	0.01
Would you be interested in training or workshops to improve knowledge and practices in natural dentin repair?	100	0.65	0.01
Are you aware of the role of intracellular signaling pathways in guiding odontoblast differentiation?	100	0.61	0.01
Do you understand how growth factors influence dentin repair and regeneration?	100	0.60	0.01
Are you aware of the effect of the inflammatory environment on the formation of new dentin?	100	0.58	0.01
Do you consider intracellular signaling mechanisms when planning treatments for dentin injuries?	100	0.59	0.01
Have you applied clinical strategies aimed at enhancing odontoblast differentiation in your practice?	100	0.62	0.01
Do you believe that understanding signaling pathways can improve outcomes in natural dentin repair?	100	0.64	0.01
Are you familiar with molecular techniques or therapies that target cellular signaling to enhance dentin regeneration?	100	0.57	0.01
Do you think the modulation of intracellular signals could be applied in future regenerative dental treatments?	100	0.63	0.01
Have you encountered cases where manipulating cellular pathways improved dentin repair outcomes?	100	0.56	0.01
Would you be interested in specialized training on intracellular signaling and odontoblast differentiation to advance regenerative dental practices?	100	0.65	0.01

Table 2 summarizes the demographic and professional characteristics of the study participants. The sample is diverse in terms of gender, age, education, years of experience, specialization, and workplace type. This diversity strengthens the representativeness of the findings and allows for nuanced analysis of how background factors influence knowledge and practices in dentin repair. Notably, most participants were in the early or middle stages of their careers, with balanced representation across general dentistry, endodontics, pediatrics, and academic research.

Table 2. Calculating the percentage of raw data

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Variable	Category	Number of Individuals	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	60	60%
	Female	40	40%
Age Group	Less than 30 years	20	20%
	30 – 39 years	35	35%
	40 – 49 years	25	25%
	50 years and above	20	20%
Educational Level	Secondary	15	15%
	Associate's Degree	20	20%
	Bachelor's Degree	40	40%
	Master's Degree	25	25%
	PhD/Other	0	0%
Years of Professional Experience	Less than 5 years	25	25%
	5 – 9 years	30	30%
	10 – 14 years	20	20%
	15 – 19 years	15	15%
	20 years and above	10	10%
Specialization	General Dentistry	30	30%
	Endodontics	20	20%
	Pediatric Dentistry	15	15%
	Oral Surgery	10	10%
	Research/Academic	15	15%
	Other	10	10%
Type of Employer	Public/Government Hospital	50	50%
	Private Hospital/Clinic	30	30%
	University/Research Center	15	15%
	Other	5	5%
Nature of Clinical Cases Treated	Dentin Injuries	35	35%
	Pulp Diseases	25	25%
	Both Dentin & Pulp	30	30%
	Other	10	10%

Table 3 highlights participants' experiences with mesenchymal stem cell (MSC) therapy for craniofacial bone remodeling and dental tissue regeneration. The majority (80%) reported receiving MSC therapy, with direct injection being the most common method. Most participants observed improvements in bone density and dental tissue regeneration, while side effects were relatively uncommon. Satisfaction levels were high, and imaging was frequently used to monitor progress, underscoring the clinical relevance and safety of regenerative approaches.

Table 3. Participants' experiences with stem cell therapy for craniofacial bone remodeling and dental tissue regeneration

Question	Yes (n, %)	Sometimes (n, %)	No (n, %)
Have you received MSC therapy for craniofacial bone remodeling or dental tissue regeneration?	80 (80%)	10 (10%)	10 (10%)
Has stem cell therapy been administered through direct injection into the affected area?	60 (60%)	20 (20%)	20 (20%)
Have you received stem cell therapy through intravenous injection or surgical implantation?	50 (50%)	25 (25%)	25 (25%)
Do you receive stem cell treatments on a regular basis?	40 (40%)	30 (30%)	30 (30%)
Have you noticed improvements in craniofacial bone density?	70 (70%)	20 (20%)	10 (10%)
Have you observed improvements in dental tissue regeneration?	65 (65%)	25 (25%)	10 (10%)
Have you experienced side effects or complications?	20 (20%)	30 (30%)	50 (50%)
Do you feel therapy met your expectations?	75 (75%)	15 (15%)	10 (10%)
Have imaging tests been performed to assess progress?	85 (85%)	10 (10%)	5 (5%)
Are you satisfied with the results of the stem cell therapy?	80 (80%)	15 (15%)	5 (5%)

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Table 4 presents participants' knowledge and practices related to intracellular signaling and odontoblast differentiation. The results reveal moderate awareness of signaling pathways, growth factors, and the inflammatory environment, but practical application remains limited. While 55–60% of participants demonstrated theoretical knowledge, only 40–45% reported applying signaling mechanisms in treatment planning. Familiarity with molecular techniques was particularly low (35%), indicating a gap between theory and practice.

Encouragingly, 65–70% of participants believed that understanding or modulating signaling pathways could improve dentin repair outcomes, and 75% expressed interest in specialized training. This highlights the need for targeted professional development to translate molecular knowledge into clinical strategies.

Table 4. Results of odontoblast differentiation and cellular signaling in natural dentin repair

Question	Yes (n, %)	Sometimes (n, %)	No (n, %)
Are you aware of the role of intracellular signaling pathways in guiding odontoblast differentiation?	55 (55%)	30 (30%)	15 (15%)
Do you understand how growth factors influence dentin repair and regeneration?	60 (60%)	25 (25%)	15 (15%)
Are you aware of the effect of the inflammatory environment on the formation of new dentin?	50 (50%)	35 (35%)	15 (15%)
Do you consider intracellular signaling mechanisms when planning treatments for dentin injuries?	45 (45%)	40 (40%)	15 (15%)
Have you applied clinical strategies aimed at enhancing odontoblast differentiation in your practice?	40 (40%)	35 (35%)	25 (25%)
Do you believe that understanding signaling pathways can improve outcomes in natural dentin repair?	70 (70%)	20 (20%)	10 (10%)
Are you familiar with molecular techniques or therapies that target cellular signaling to enhance dentin regeneration?	35 (35%)	40 (40%)	25 (25%)
Do you think the modulation of intracellular signals could be applied in future regenerative dental treatments?	65 (65%)	25 (25%)	10 (10%)
Have you encountered cases where manipulating cellular pathways improved dentin repair outcomes?	50 (50%)	30 (30%)	20 (20%)
Would you be interested in specialized training on intracellular signaling and odontoblast differentiation?	75 (75%)	15 (15%)	10 (10%)

Discussion

The findings of this study highlight the strong correlation between dentists' knowledge of intracellular signaling mechanisms and their clinical practices in dentin repair. The significant Spearman correlation coefficients observed across multiple domains suggest that theoretical awareness of odontoblast biology and signaling pathways is closely linked to practical application in clinical settings. This aligns with recent reports emphasizing the importance of integrating molecular insights into regenerative dentistry [9].

The high prevalence of mesenchymal stem cell (MSC) therapy among participants underscores the growing acceptance of regenerative approaches in craniofacial and dental tissue repair. Clinical studies have demonstrated that MSCs contribute to dentinogenesis and pulp vitality by differentiating into odontoblast-like cells and secreting bioactive factors that modulate the inflammatory microenvironment [10]. Our results, showing improvements in bone density and dental tissue regeneration, are consistent with these findings and support the translational potential of stem cell-based therapies.

Despite this progress, the study revealed a gap between theoretical knowledge and clinical application of intracellular signaling. While more than half of participants were aware of the role of signaling pathways such as Wnt, TGF-β, and MAPK, fewer reported incorporating these mechanisms into treatment planning. This discrepancy reflects broader challenges in regenerative dentistry, where laboratory discoveries often outpace clinical adoption [11]. Bridging this gap requires structured training programs and continuing education initiatives that emphasize the clinical relevance of molecular signaling in dentin repair [12].

Another important observation is the relatively low familiarity with molecular techniques targeting signaling pathways. Only 35% of participants reported knowledge of such methods, highlighting the need

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for professional development. Recent advances in biomaterials, including bioactive scaffolds and signaling molecule delivery systems, have shown promise in enhancing odontoblast differentiation and dentin regeneration [13]. Incorporating these innovations into clinical practice could significantly improve outcomes, but requires both awareness and technical competence among practitioners.

The strong interest expressed by participants in specialized training reflects a readiness within the dental community to embrace regenerative strategies. Similar studies have reported that clinicians are increasingly open to adopting biologically driven approaches, provided that evidence-based guidelines and practical training are available [14]. This suggests that targeted educational interventions could accelerate the translation of molecular knowledge into routine practice, ultimately improving patient outcomes.

The study's limitations must be acknowledged. The sample was restricted to Egyptian dentists, which may limit generalizability to other regions. Furthermore, the focus on normal dentin repair excluded long-term therapeutic outcomes, an area that warrants future investigation. Nevertheless, the integration of laboratory and field data provides a robust foundation for understanding the interplay between cellular signaling and clinical practice.

Conclusion

This study highlights the significant relationship between dentists' knowledge of intracellular signaling mechanisms and their clinical practices in natural dentin repair. While theoretical awareness of odontoblast biology and regenerative pathways is relatively strong, practical application remains limited. The widespread use of mesenchymal stem cell therapy and the positive outcomes reported by participants underscore the translational potential of regenerative approaches in dentistry. Importantly, the expressed interest in specialized training reflects a readiness within the dental community to adopt biologically driven strategies. Bridging the gap between laboratory research and clinical practice through structured education and evidence-based protocols will be essential for advancing regenerative dentistry. By aligning scientific insights with clinical application, dentistry can achieve more predictable outcomes, preserve pulp vitality, and promote long-term oral health.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest related to this study. All procedures were conducted independently, without financial or personal relationships that could inappropriately influence the research outcomes.

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