Pediatric HIV: Immunologic and Virologic Response to Antiretroviral Therapy

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A dissertation
submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Washington
2015

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Program Authorized to Offer Degree:
Public Health - Epidemiology
University of Washington

Abstract
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Background: Virologic and immunologic responses to antiretroviral treatment (ART) in infants may differ from older children and adults due to immunologic, clinical or epidemiologic characteristics. There are few longitudinal studies of immune activation and changes in immune phenotype among infants.

Methods: Within a cohort of HIV-infected infants starting early ART in Nairobi, Kenya, longitudinal trajectories of HIV viral load and CD4 over two years of ART were modeled and compared to those of older children (Chapter 1). T-cell activation at baseline was measured using flow cytometry and its association with mortality and ART response quantified (Chapter 2). Changes in activation and T-cell memory subsets over two years of ART were described and compared among infants with good virologic and immunologic response to ART and those with discordant response (Chapter 3).

Results: Chapter 1: Infants had higher viral loads at baseline pre-ART, a slower rate of suppression and a higher post-ART stabilized viral load than children. Infants were less likely than children to suppress HIV viral load to <250 copies/ml following 6 months (32% vs. 73%, infants vs. children p<0.0001) and 2 years (75% vs. 89%, infants vs. children p=0.007) of ART. Children had a significantly faster rate of CD4% reconstitution than infants, but failed to catch up to infant CD4% (CD4% at 24 months: 29% vs. 22%, infants vs. children p=0.04).

Chapter 2: Among 75 infants, median CD8+ T-cell activation at baseline pre-ART was 16.5% (interquartile range [IQR] 9.9, 28.4). CD8+ T-cell activation was not correlated with pre-ART CD4%, HIV viral load or WHO stage. Low pre-ART CD8+ T-cell activation (<5%) was
associated with mortality overall (Hazard ratio (HR)=3.5 [95% CI 1.3, 9.4]); and among those who survived to start ART (HR 5.8, 95% CI ). Pre-ART CD8+ T-cell activation >median was associated with slower CD4% recovery on ART.

Chapter 3: Among infants who completed two years of ART, different viral/immune patterns were noted – those who had viral suppression and CD4 recovery (responders), CD4 recovery despite lack of viral suppression (discordant responders), and those with neither good viral suppression nor immune recovery (nonresponders). Overall, CD8+ T-cell activation decreased substantially in the first six months on ART, and naïve CD8+ T-cells increased. Naïve CD4+ T-cells increased among concordant good responders only.

**Conclusion:** Infants in this early ART cohort had high viral loads at baseline and failed to suppress virus or increase CD4% as efficiently as older children after ART initiation. In contrast to findings in adults, low CD8+ T-cell activation was associated with mortality and may be a marker of immune exhaustion and advanced HIV disease. Immune activation decreased and infant T-cell phenotype shifted toward a less differentiated phenotype with ART but was not restored to normal. Strategies to augment immune responses and improve ART specifically for infants are needed to improve outcomes in this vulnerable population.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A great many people deserve thanks. My committee, who have been exceptionally generous with their time and insights; every meeting with each of you made me a better scientist. The study and clinic teams and the study participants and their families, without whom none of this work would be possible. Lab teams in Nairobi and the HVTN lab in Seattle, who made this logistically challenging project run as smoothly as it could, and who always made me feel welcome; the Predoc and Kizazi groups in the Kenya Research and Training Center for comments on the analysis. Many thanks to my parents, who started me on this path by moving us to Malawi when I was a child and who always entertained my questions about health and disease; special thanks for assisting in data collection for my first-ever paper on HIV when I was 10. And thanks to my husband - your support has been invaluable. Takk fyrir allt og allt.
Chapter 1. Differences in Virologic and Immunologic Response to Antiretroviral Therapy among HIV-Infected Infants and Children

1.1 BACKGROUND

Infant HIV viral loads are substantially greater than adult levels^1^, and as many as 50% of untreated HIV infected African infants die by two years of age^2^. In contrast to acutely infected adults, vertically infected infants are slow to suppress virus^3^ and many do not attain a discernable viral load set-point^4^. Older HIV infected children, the vast majority of whom represent vertically infected survivors, have lower viral loads than infants^5^. Due to high early mortality, untreated children who survive beyond 2 years of life likely have selected favorable viral or host characteristics^6^.

Response to antiretroviral therapy may also differ between infants, children, and adults. In adults, ART typically results in up to 95% achieving viral suppression within 6 months of ART initiation, varying by the population included and the definition of suppression used^7^-^10^. Similar rates of viral suppression have been shown in older children^10^,^11^. However, infants have slower viral suppression^12^,^13^ and higher incidence of viral failure^14^.

In addition, aspects of the immune response that cause poor viral control in untreated infants may contribute to slower viral decline with ART.

Immune recovery on ART usually occurs in tandem with viral decline^16^,^17^. In contrast to poor viral suppression with ART, infants on ART generally have better CD4 counts and percentages than older children^18^-^20^; this may be due to their high thymic output^21^ and higher age-specific CD4 counts and CD4%^22^-^24^, or to greater damage to the CD4 compartment among older children who have lived with untreated HIV for an extended period^25^,^26^. As ART response is primarily assessed using CD4 monitoring in developing country settings^27^-^30^, treatment failure among infants in particular may be masked by their comparatively good immune status^27^,^30^,^31^.
Although improved survival is achieved when ART is initiated early in infancy, in practice, infant diagnosis is often delayed and early mortality on ART remains high. There have been few longitudinal studies modeling rates of viral decline and immune recovery in early ART-treated infants and none comparing infants with older children. In order to understand whether impaired virologic and immunologic response to ART could explain high mortality post-ART in this population, we compared virologic and immunologic responses between infants starting ART in the first year of life versus children starting ART between the ages of 18 months to 12 years. Our hypotheses were that infants would have slower rates of viral suppression but comparable immune reconstitution to older children.

1.2 METHODS

1.2.1 Study cohorts

Data from two pediatric ART studies conducted in Nairobi, Kenya were used for these analyses. Recruitment and enrollment procedures have been described in detail elsewhere. Both studies were approved by the University of Washington Institutional Review Board and the Kenyatta National Hospital Ethics and Research Committee. Each study has extended follow-up up to >5 years. The current study utilized data on immunologic and virologic markers obtained during the first 2 years of ART.

In the infant cohort [Optimizing Pediatric HAART (OPH) study, NCT00428116], HIV-infected infants less than 12 months old were identified at prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV (PMTCT) clinics and pediatric wards between 2007-2010. All infants were started on ART and followed monthly for growth, clinical outcomes and adherence for two years, at which time they were randomized to treatment interruption or continued treatment. HIV viral load was assessed at baseline and every three months throughout follow-up, while CD4 counts and CD4% were assessed every six months. For this analysis, only pre-randomization data were used.
In the child cohort [Pediatric Adherence (PAD) study, NCT00194545], children aged 18 months to 12 years with moderate to severe HIV disease (WHO disease stage II-IV) were enrolled from Kenyatta National Hospital HIV clinic and pediatric wards between 2004-2007. All children were started on ART and caregivers randomized to adherence counseling alone or adherence counseling with a medication diary, then followed monthly for growth, clinical indicators and self-reported adherence. HIV log_{10} viral loads were assessed every three months throughout follow-up, while CD4 counts and CD4% were assessed at the 0, 3, 6, 15, 21 and 27 month visits. For this analysis, data from the first two years post ART initiation were used.

1.2.2 ART regimens

Participants were treated according to contemporaneous Kenya national guidelines\textsuperscript{28,36,37} and antiretrovirals were provided by the PEPFAR-supported youth HIV treatment program at the Kenyatta National Hospital Comprehensive Care Clinic (CCC). For the infant cohort, first-line treatment consisted of zidovudine (AZT), lamivudine (3TC) and either nevirapine (NVP) or ritonavir-boosted lopinavir for infants who were exposed to NVP for prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT). For the child cohort, first line treatment consisted of AZT and 3TC and either NVP or efavirenz.

1.2.3 Laboratory Methods

HIV viral loads were measured using the Gen Probe assay, which accurately quantifies the HIV-1 subtypes circulating in Kenya.\textsuperscript{38} The lower limit of quantification for each study was determined by the volume of plasma tested; for the purposes of the current analysis, it was set as the higher of the values between cohorts, 250 copies/mL (2.39 log_{10} copies/mL). Viral load data were collected at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle and were not available to clinicians during the studies. CD4 counts and CD4% were measured at Kenyatta
National Hospital throughout each study using flow cytometry and results were available to clinicians.

1.2.4  Statistical Methods

Unless otherwise noted, all analyses were conducted in Stata 14.0 (StataCorp, College Station, Texas). The two cohorts were compared for characteristics at baseline using Mann-Whitney U-tests for continuous variables and Chi square tests for categorical variables.

The probability of viral suppression at 3-monthly intervals among infants and children was estimated using life tables from Kaplan-Meier models; viral load suppression was defined as partial (HIV viral load <1000 copies/mL) and complete (HIV viral load<250 copies/mL). Time to first achievement of partial and full suppression post ART initiation was compared among infants and children using a log-rank test for survival functions. Time to first achievement of partial suppression by regimen (PI-containing vs. NNRTI-containing) among infants was compared using a long-rank test. In order to estimate the durability of viral suppression among infants compared to children, risk of viral rebound to >1000 copies/mL following full suppression was compared using Cox proportional hazards regression. This analysis was restricted to those who ever achieved full suppression, and time at risk began at the first fully suppressed visit.

The viral load trajectory in each cohort was estimated to follow the same pattern: high viral load pre-ART, followed by a period of exponential decline to a stabilized long-term cohort mean post-ART. The post-ART stabilized level reflects how completely viral load was suppressed in the cohort as a whole, while the slope reflects how rapidly the stabilized level was achieved. This pattern was modeled for each cohort using nonlinear mixed effects models, which were fitted using the lme4 package in R (R Foundation for Statistical Computing, Vienna, Austria), and are described by the following formula:

\[ VL(t) = VL_{post} + (VL_0 - VL_{post})e^{-rt} \]
where $VL(t)$ is HIV log$_{10}$ viral load at $t$ days post-ART, $VL_0$ is HIV log$_{10}$ viral load at baseline pre-ART, $VL_{post}$ is the long-term population average stabilized HIV log$_{10}$ viral load post ART and $r$ is rate of decline. $r$ may be interpreted the log of the proportion of suppression, $\log(VL(1) - VL_{post})/(VL_0 - VL_{post})$, achieved in one time unit. Individual random effects are incorporated for $VL_0$ and $VL_{post}$. 95% confidence intervals for mean model estimates were simulated using bootstrap with 1000 repetitions and the bootstrap distributions were compared using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test.

CD4% reconstitution on ART was estimated to occur in two phases: a sharp increase from baseline to the 6 month measurement (days on ART≤210 to account for late visits) followed by a more gradual continued increase from the 6 month visit to the end of follow-up at two years (days on ART≤750). The difference in slope between the infant and older child cohorts in each phase was assessed using interaction terms. CD4% at each time-point post-ART is modeled by the following formula:

**Equation 2**

$$\log(CD4\%_{ij}) = \log(CD4\%_{6i}) + \beta_1 l + \beta_2 T_{1ART_{ij}} + \beta_3 T_{2ART} + \beta_4 I_{ij} * T_{1ART_{ij}} + \beta_5 I_{ij} * T_{2ART_{ij}} + \epsilon_{ij}$$

where $CD4\%_{ij}$ is the CD4% for subject $j$ at a given time $i$ post-ART; $CD4\%_{6i}$ is the CD4% for subject $j$ at 210 days, $T_{1ART}$ is the number of days before 210 days ($T_{1ART}=210$ at ART initiation) and $T_{2ART}$ is the number of days after 210 days, $l$ indicates whether subject $j$ is an infant, and $\epsilon_{ij}$ is an error term. Individual random effects were incorporated for intercepts and slopes, using an exchangeable correlation structure. CD4% was log-transformed to improve normality of the data.

CD4 counts and CD4% in healthy children are highest in infancy and decline with age, so that age-specific expected or “healthy” CD4 counts and percentages vary throughout childhood. As such, infants are more immunocompromised at a given CD4% than older children. To correct for this difference, a published model of CD4 count decline with age in HIV-uninfected children$^{39}$ was used to predict age-specific expected CD4 counts at each time-point.
and calculate the ratio of each child’s observed CD4 count to their age-specific expected CD4 count; the ratio is hereafter called "CD4-for-age". CD4-for-age equal to 1 means a normal CD4 count has been achieved. The increase in CD4-for-age over time on ART was compared between the two cohorts. Reconstitution to stabilized CD4-for-age on ART has been described in pediatric ART cohorts previously\textsuperscript{18,20}; however, the asymptotic model used in these studies was a poor fit for our data, likely because two years of follow-up are not sufficient to achieve a long-term stabilized CD4-for-age. Instead, we modeled log-transformed CD4-for-age using a model similar to the linear mixed effects model in Equation 2.

We conducted sensitivity analyses to assess the impact of survival bias and adherence on our analyses. To directly compare treatment response among acutely-infected infants and chronically infected children who had survived the highest-risk period without ART, sensitivity analyses were conducted excluding infants over six months old and children under two years old. In order to remove the effect of consistent non-adherence on estimates of rate of CD4% reconstitution and viral load suppression, sensitivity analyses were conducted excluding participants who never achieved viral load suppression in the first two years on ART.

1.3 Results

1.3.1 Study population characteristics at enrollment

Among 121 infants in the infant cohort, the median age at enrollment was 3.9 months (IQR 3.3-5.0) (Table 1.1). Among 124 children in the child cohort, median age at enrollment was 58 months (IQR 32-76), or 4.8 years. Among infants, 38% started a protease-inhibitor (PI)-based regimen as first-line treatment, whereas none of the older children did. Older children had more advanced disease at ART initiation; 88% met WHO criteria for stage III or IV compared to 30% of infants (p<0.0001). Nutritional status at baseline was poor in both cohorts, with median weight-for-age Z-score (WAZ) -2.4 among infants and -2.3 among older children. In both
cohorts, most children were cared for by biological parents, although 26% of older children had lost their biological mothers compared to just 2.5% of infants (p<0.0001).

### 1.3.2 Viral suppression

During the two years following ART, a greater proportion of older children than infants ever achieved partial (<1000 copies/mL, Figure 1.1A) and full (<250 copies/mL, Figure 1.1B) HIV viral load suppression. Time to partial suppression was longer among infants than children (median 159 days among infants vs. 91 days among children, p=0.0075), as was time to full suppression (median 265 days among infants vs. 98 days among children, p<0.0001). Following 6 months of ART, 73% of children and 32% of infants fully suppressed virus (p<0.0001). By 24 months on ART, 93% of children and 81% of infants had ever suppressed to <1000 copies/mL (p=0.009) and 89% of children and 75% of infants had suppressed to <250 copies/mL (p=0.007). Infants were at increased risk of viral rebound to >1000 copies/mL following full suppression (Hazard Ratio (HR)=2.1 (95% CI 1.2-3.5), p=0.005). There was no difference in time to partial suppression among infants by PI vs. NNRTI regimen (p=0.37).

From the nonlinear mixed effects model, estimated mean infant viral load (VL) prior to ART was >0.5 log_{10} higher than the pre-ART VL in the child cohort (6.47 versus 5.91 log_{10} copies/ml in infants vs. children, Figure 1.2A, Table 1.2). Population-stabilized viral load post-ART (VL_{post}) was higher among infants than children (3.49 log_{10} vs. 2.86 log_{10} copies/mL, p<0.001). The rate of decline parameter r was larger in older children than infants (p<0.001), such that among infants viral load declined 50% of the way toward the population-stabilized post treatment viral load in 17 days, and 90% in 55 days; stabilized post-ART viral load was reached at >110 days (Figure 1.2B). In the child cohort, viral load declined 50% of the way toward stabilized viral load in 11 days and 90% of the way in 36 days; stabilized post-ART viral load was reached at >71 days. In sensitivity analyses, exclusion of infants greater than six months of age and children less than 24 months of age did not substantially alter these estimates (Table
1.2). When analysis was limited to children who ever achieved full suppression, rate of viral suppression remained slower in the infant cohort (Table 1.2, Figure 1.2C).

1.3.3 CD4% reconstitution

Children were substantially more immunosuppressed than infants at baseline pre-ART (geometric mean CD4 7.3% vs. 19.0%, p<0.001, Figure 1.3A). Infant CD4% remained higher throughout follow-up, due to the large difference in baseline immune status. Over two years of ART, 50% of children and 90% of infants ever reconstituted CD4 to 25% (data not shown). From the linear mixed effects model, children had more rapid CD4 reconstitution throughout follow-up than infants (Table 1.3). For an average child, CD4% increased 1.45-fold per 100 days in the first 6 months on ART, compared to a 1.15-fold increase per 100 days in the first 6 months for an average infant. By 6 months, geometric mean CD4 was 15.7% for an average child and 25.4% for an average infant. In the second phase, both cohorts had a slower rate of increase, and only the child slope remained statistically significant (1.07-fold increase/100 days for an average child vs. 1.02-fold increase/100 days for an average infant). The difference in slopes was strongly significant in the first phase (p<0.001) but not significant in the second phase (p=0.11). After two years of ART, the difference in CD4% between cohorts had decreased but geometric mean CD4% remained lower in the child than infant cohort (22% vs. 29%, p=0.04). When infants over 6 months old and children under two years old were excluded, as in the main analysis, infants had higher CD4% throughout follow-up, with the difference in CD4% between cohorts slightly greater and the infant CD4% reconstitution slightly more rapid. When the analysis was limited to those who ever achieved full viral suppression, the point estimates were not statistically significantly different from those in the main analysis, but differences between infants and children persisted.
When the rate of increase of CD4-for-age was modeled, infants had significantly higher pre-ART levels than children (geometric mean 0.41 vs. 0.19 CD4-for-age, p<0.001, Figure 3B). Older children showed more rapid reconstitution in both the first phase (2.4-fold vs. 1.6-fold increase / 6 months, p<0.001) and the second phase (1.19-fold vs. 1.07-fold increase / 6 months, p=0.001), and the difference was statistically significant in both phases. Despite this, over two years of ART, infants had consistently higher CD4-for-age; 24-month values were 0.70 among children compared to 0.77 among infants (p=0.04).

1.4 DISCUSSION

Response to ART differed substantially among infants and children in our study. Despite their less advanced clinical disease and greater age-adjusted CD4 at baseline, infants had higher viral loads and substantially worse virological response to ART than older children. In contrast, older children failed to catch up to infant CD4% or CD4-for-age following two years of ART.

We found that the rate of viral suppression was markedly slower in infants than in children. Fewer infants than children achieved viral suppression at any time during follow-up, and infants who fully suppressed virus were at higher risk of viral rebound after initial suppression. The population-mean stabilized viral load post-ART was also higher in infants than children, reflecting the continued prevalence of detectable virus in the infant cohort at all time points throughout follow-up; this was due to both the smaller proportion of infants ever achieving full suppression and the larger proportion with viral rebound after initial suppression. Virologic failure in pediatric populations occurs frequently\textsuperscript{14,40-42} and is of particular concern in developing countries, owing to the limited availability of second-line treatment regimens.

Various factors may explain poor viral suppression in infants. Ideal antiretroviral dosage and adherence may be particularly challenging in pediatric populations\textsuperscript{15,43,44} and syrup dosing
may be hard for caregivers to calibrate, particularly among infants due to frequent regurgitation or emesis. The relative ease of administering medication to older children compared to infants may partly explain the differences we observed. To exclude differential non-adherence as a cause of differing rates of viral suppression among infants and children, we conducted a sensitivity analysis restricted to those who achieved viral suppression. In this analysis, rates of viral load suppression remained slower among infants, suggesting that adherence alone did not explain different rates of viral suppression.

Untreated infants have less viral control than older children and adults, and the mediators of poor viral control in the absence of ART may contribute to poor viral suppression with ART in infants. Higher baseline viral levels in infants would not necessarily lead to slower rate of viral decline but could have contributed to longer time to suppression. It is unclear why infants control virus more poorly than adults in the absence of treatment. It is possible that higher infant CD4 counts contribute more target cells for viral infection and replication; alternatively, an immature immune response may explain their poor viral control. Infants share maternal HLA-types and may be infected with viruses that escaped maternal HLA-restricted immune responses. Infants infected later postpartum have lower viral loads and mortality than those infected before the first month of life, either due to a lower infective dose or more effective immune responses. It is possible that infants' immature immune systems were less able to synergistically control virus concurrent with ART, and that older children, being a select group of survivors, represented those who were able to mount a more effective immune response in infancy. Complementary strategies such as therapeutic vaccines or immunotherapies may be useful to accelerate suppression in this critical period.

Compared to infants, children had much more rapid rates of CD4% recovery in the first six months and more rapid rates of CD4-for-age increase throughout the two years of follow-up. This difference between our CD4% and CD4-for-age models highlights the importance of taking into account age-specific healthy levels when estimating immune reconstitution in pediatric
populations. Despite their greater rate of recovery, children failed to catch up to infant CD4% and CD4-for-age following two years of ART. This is consistent with previous studies.\textsuperscript{18,19,49,50} Similar to our CD4-for-age model, a recent study from Uganda and Zimbabwe found lower CD4-for-age at ART initiation was associated with both older age at ART initiation and more rapid initial slope in CD4-for-age reconstitution\textsuperscript{20}; long-term predicted CD4 count was higher among children who initiated ART at a younger age in that study\textsuperscript{20}. While some studies have suggested that most children can restore normal CD4 with treatment\textsuperscript{51}, others have concluded that those who initiate ART at an older age\textsuperscript{18,20} or when more immunocompromised\textsuperscript{25} are unlikely ever to normalize CD4 count. Immune recovery despite lack of viral suppression has been described in many pediatric cohorts\textsuperscript{16,17,52,53}. In these studies, viral responders generally reconstitute CD4 more rapidly than non-responders\textsuperscript{17,53}. Similarly, we saw a trend toward greater CD4% increase among those with viral suppression in our study, although the difference in rate parameters was not significant.

Our study had several strengths and limitations. Mixed effects models took advantage of longitudinal data available in both cohorts to describe immunologic and virologic response in detail. We conducted several sensitivity analyses, and were able to establish that differences between infants and children persisted when restricted to those who achieved viral suppression, and were slightly more pronounced when infants under six months and children older than two years were compared. Limitations include some regimen differences between cohorts, with some infants but no children receiving PI-containing first-line regimens. However, differences in regimen were not associated with time to viral suppression in the infant cohort. Exclusion of children at WHO stage I from the child study was also a limitation; however, as older children are often symptomatic\textsuperscript{54} and have low CD4%\textsuperscript{55,56} at diagnosis, the study population is fairly representative of children presenting to care in developing country settings.

In our cohort, despite ART initiation by a median of four months of age, viral suppression was slow among infants and many failed to suppress throughout two years of ART. Combined
with the high early mortality among infants on ART\textsuperscript{34}, our results suggest that improvement of early ART regimens to achieve rates of suppression more comparable to those in older populations could improve prognosis and reduce stabilized viral loads early in infection. New formulations specifically for infants are needed to address dosage and adherence challenges; complementary immune strategies also may enhance early ART responses in HIV-infected infants. Monitoring of CD4\% is insufficient to identify children at risk of viral failure, and regular viral load monitoring is particularly important in younger populations among whom CD4 counts may appear healthy even in the presence of very high viral loads. Where viral loads are unavailable, CD4-for-age may be a more sensitive proxy measure than CD4\%.
Table 1.1 Baseline characteristics of infants and older children who started ART.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child characteristics</th>
<th>Infant cohort N=121</th>
<th>Child cohort N=124</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n (%) or median (IQR)</td>
<td>n (%) or median (IQR)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age at enrollment (months)</strong></td>
<td>3.9 (3.3, 5.0)</td>
<td>58 (32, 76)</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>First line treatment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NRTI/NNRTI</td>
<td>75 (62)</td>
<td>124 (100)</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NRTI/PI</td>
<td>46 (38)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Female</strong></td>
<td>61 (50)</td>
<td>64 (52)</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WHO disease stage</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&lt;0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I/II</td>
<td>69 (71)</td>
<td>12 (9.8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>31 (27)</td>
<td>94 (77)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>4 (3.4)</td>
<td>16 (13)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CD4 count (cells/µL)</strong></td>
<td>1400 (800, 2100)</td>
<td>280 (96, 550)</td>
<td>&lt;0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CD4%</strong></td>
<td>21 (16, 29)</td>
<td>6.3 (3.2, 11)</td>
<td>&lt;0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Log₁₀ HIV viral load</strong></td>
<td>6.6 (6.1, 7.0)</td>
<td>6.0 (5.4, 6.5)</td>
<td>&lt;0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Height-for-age Z-score</strong></td>
<td>-2.1 (-3.2, -0.97)</td>
<td>-2.4 (-3.4, -1.3)</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Weight-for-age Z-score</strong></td>
<td>-2.4 (-3.8, -1.0)</td>
<td>-2.3 (-3.1, -1.4)</td>
<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Weight-for-length Z-score</strong></td>
<td>-1.0 (-2.4, -0.06)</td>
<td>-1.1 (-2.0, -0.20)</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Caregiver characteristics</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biological mother alive</td>
<td>118 (98)</td>
<td>92 (74)</td>
<td>&lt;0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother received ART for PMTCT¹</td>
<td>50 (45)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental history of ART for own health²</td>
<td>20 (16)</td>
<td>11 (13)</td>
<td>0.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 8 years of education</td>
<td>50 (41)</td>
<td>115 (74)</td>
<td>&lt;0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One room house</td>
<td>70 (57)</td>
<td>70 (57)</td>
<td>&gt;0.99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Information on PMTCT was not available in the child cohort.
² In the infant cohort, maternal history of ART was collected; in the child cohort, the question referred to either parent.
Figure 1.1 Time to viral suppression. Time to first partial (<1000 copies/mL, Panel A) and full (<250 copies/mL, Panel B) HIV viral load suppression after ART initiation in the infant and child cohorts. P-values are from the log-rank test for equality of survival functions.
Figure 1.2 HIV viral load trajectories on ART in the infant and child cohorts. Panel A shows individual trajectories of log₁₀ HIV viral load in the infant (solid) and child (dashed) cohorts over two years of follow-up, overlaid with the population mean for each cohort. Panel B shows the population mean log₁₀ HIV viral load in each cohort over time, with the time to 50%, 90% and 99% of stabilized level labeled. Panel C shows individual trajectories of log₁₀ HIV viral load in the infant and child cohorts, restricted to those who achieved full suppression (<250 copies/mL) at one or more visits, overlaid with the population mean for each cohort.
Table 1.2 Mean rate of HIV viral load suppression on ART among infants and children. Estimates are from nonlinear mixed effects models fit to each cohort’s data; p-values are obtained by comparing distributions of estimates from 1000 bootstrap repetitions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>VL₀ (95% CI)</th>
<th>VLₚ₀₀₉ (95% CI)</th>
<th>r (95% CI)</th>
<th>Days to % VL₀-VLₚ₀₀₉</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>p-value</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Child</strong></td>
<td>5.91 (5.79, 6.05)</td>
<td>2.86 (2.66, 2.92)</td>
<td>-2.7 (-3.3, -2.5)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Infant</strong></td>
<td>6.47 (6.37, 6.64)</td>
<td>3.49 (3.15, 3.66)</td>
<td>-3.2 (-3.3, -2.8)</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>p-value</strong></td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Excluding infants >6 months old and children < 2 years old

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>VL₀ (95% CI)</th>
<th>VLₚ₀₀₉ (95% CI)</th>
<th>r (95% CI)</th>
<th>Days to % VL₀-VLₚ₀₀₉</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Child</strong></td>
<td>5.83 (5.67, 5.99)</td>
<td>2.82 (2.64, 2.90)</td>
<td>-2.9 (-3.4, -2.5)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Infant</strong></td>
<td>6.51 (6.38, 6.71)</td>
<td>3.53 (3.17, 3.78)</td>
<td>-3.2 (-3.4, -2.8)</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>p-value</strong></td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Excluding children who never suppressed HIV viral load

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>VL₀ (95% CI)</th>
<th>VLₚ₀₀₉ (95% CI)</th>
<th>r (95% CI)</th>
<th>Days to % VL₀-VLₚ₀₀₉</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Child</strong></td>
<td>5.81 (5.64, 6.00)</td>
<td>2.65 (2.54, 2.75)</td>
<td>-2.7 (-3.1, -2.5)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Infant</strong></td>
<td>6.37 (6.20, 6.56)</td>
<td>2.81 (2.69, 2.97)</td>
<td>-3.3 (-3.4, -3.2)</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>p-value</strong></td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1.3 CD4 trajectories on ART in the infant and child cohorts. Panel A shows individual CD4% trajectories in the infant and child cohorts. Black lines show the mean CD4% trajectories in each cohort, estimated using a linear mixed effects model. Panel B shows individual trajectories of CD4-for-age, overlaid with the mean CD4-for-age trajectories for each cohort estimated using a linear mixed effects model.
Table 1.3 Mean rate of CD4% reconstitution on ART among infants vs. children, estimated using a linear mixed effects model. The model contained two slopes, one from baseline to the 6 month measurement (days on ART≤210 to account for late visits) and the other from the 6 month visit to the end of follow-up at two years (days on ART≤750).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Including all children</th>
<th>Child (95% CI)</th>
<th>Infant (95% CI)</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>log(CD4%) at six months</td>
<td>2.75 (2.67, 2.84)</td>
<td>3.24 (3.16, 3.31)</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD4% at six months</td>
<td>15.7 (14.4, 17.1)</td>
<td>25.4 (23.6, 27.4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First six months slope (/100 days)</td>
<td>0.45 (0.39, 0.51)</td>
<td>0.15 (0.10, 0.20)</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six months - 2 years slope (/100 days)</td>
<td>0.07 (0.03, 0.11)</td>
<td>0.02 (-0.02, 0.06)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excluding infants &gt;6 months old and children &lt; 2 years old</th>
<th>Child (95% CI)</th>
<th>Infant (95% CI)</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>log(CD4%) at six months</td>
<td>2.75 (2.66, 2.85)</td>
<td>3.25 (3.14, 3.36)</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD4% at six months</td>
<td>15.7 (14.3, 17.3)</td>
<td>25.8 (23.1, 28.8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First six months slope (/100 days)</td>
<td>0.48 (0.41, 0.54)</td>
<td>0.20 (0.13, 0.28)</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six months - 2 years slope (/100 days)</td>
<td>0.06 (0.01, 0.10)</td>
<td>0.02 (-0.04, 0.08)</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excluding children who never suppressed HIV viral load</th>
<th>Child (95% CI)</th>
<th>Infant (95% CI)</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>log(CD4%) at 6 months</td>
<td>2.78 (2.70, 2.87)</td>
<td>3.33 (3.23, 3.42)</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD4% at six months</td>
<td>16.1 (14.9, 17.6)</td>
<td>27.8 (25.3, 30.6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First six months slope (/100 days)</td>
<td>0.43 (0.36-0.49)</td>
<td>0.17 (0.09, 0.25)</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six months - 2 years slope (/100 days)</td>
<td>0.07 (0.03-0.11)</td>
<td>0.02 (-0.03, 0.07)</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 2. CD8+ T-cell activation predicts mortality and treatment outcomes among infants initiating early ART

2.1 BACKGROUND

Immune activation is a critical step in the immune response to infection; however, chronic immune activation in HIV infection has been associated with poor outcomes in both the presence and absence of antiretroviral therapy (ART). In untreated adult cohorts, T-cell activation (%CD38+/HLA-DR+) is a strong predictor of rate of progression to AIDS and death. In pediatric cohorts, HIV infection is associated with increased immune activation and increased CD8+ T-cell activation has been observed as early as two weeks of age among perinatally infected infants. T-cell activation among children declines following initiation of ART, returning to levels observed in HIV-uninfected children in some but not all studies. In ART-treated children, residual immune activation remains associated with viral load, CD4%, and time to viral failure.

Few pediatric studies have assessed the association between pre-treatment immune activation and ART response. Among children switching from zidovudine monotherapy to highly active antiretroviral treatment (HAART) in a US study, CD8+ T-cell activation was associated with persistent detectable viral load. However, immune activation did not predict virologic response to ART in an Italian study. There are limited data in infants, a particularly high-risk group with two-year mortality as high as 50% in the absence of treatment and who generally demonstrate slower viral suppression following ART than adults. Differences in infant immune activation may partly explain the particularly poor prognosis of infants.

We hypothesized that high T-cell activation would be associated with increased disease severity, poor response to ART, and increased risk of mortality among infants. We determined levels and correlates of T-cell activation in ART-naive HIV infected infants and quantified the association between baseline immune activation, survival and ART treatment response.
2.2 METHODS

2.2.1 Study cohort

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Washington and by the Kenyatta National Hospital Ethics and Research Committee. The Optimizing Pediatric HAART study (NCT00428116) recruitment and enrollment procedures have been described in detail elsewhere\textsuperscript{34}. HIV-infected infants less than 5 months of age were enrolled from prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) clinics and pediatric hospital wards in Nairobi, Kenya immediately after their HIV diagnosis, between 2007-2010. Infants' caregivers provided written informed consent for participation. Infants were started on ART and followed monthly for two years, at which point those with CD4>25% and adequate growth were randomized to treatment interruption or continued treatment. The current analysis uses data from the pre-randomization period. Growth and clinical information were collected monthly, HIV log\textsubscript{10} viral load was measured every 3 months and CD4 count and CD4% every 6 months. Infant blood was drawn at baseline pre-ART and every three months throughout follow-up and peripheral blood mononuclear cells (PBMCs) isolated and cryopreserved. All infants with an available baseline PBMC sample were included in these analyses.

2.2.2 Laboratory methods

T-cell phenotypes were analyzed by flow cytometry, according to a published protocol\textsuperscript{74}. Briefly, cryopreserved PBMCs from infant blood samples were thawed into R10 buffer (RPMI 1640 with 25mM HEPES buffer and L-glutamine plus 10% FBS, 1% L-glutamine and 1% Penicillin-Streptomycin; Gibco BRL Life Technologies). PBMCs were stained with AViD dead cell stain (Life Technologies), then with a cocktail of T-cell phenotyping surface antibodies (Table 2.4 Supplementary). All antibodies were titrated to appropriate concentrations before being used in the assay. Cells were permeabilized with FACS Lyse / FACS Perm II (BD
Biosciences) and finally stained with intracellular antibodies. Stained cells were resuspended in 1% Paraformaldehyde (Electron Microscopy Sciences) solution for collection on an LSR II instrument (BD Biosciences).

Samples collected on the LSR II were analyzed using FlowJo 9.7.6 (Tree Star, Ashland, Oregon). The T lymphocyte population (CD3+) was separated into CD4+ T-cells (CD4+CD8-) and CD8+ T-cells (CD4-CD8+). Three activation-related phenotypic marker combinations were assessed, and the proportion CD38\textsuperscript{high}/HLA-DR+ ("activated"), Ki67+/Bcl2\textsuperscript{low} ("cycling") and CD95+/Bcl2\textsuperscript{low} ("apoptosis-vulnerable") quantified separately within CD4+ and CD8+ T-cell populations (Table 2.2; Figure 2.1). Data on memory subsets within the CD4+ and CD8+ T-cell populations were collected but are not discussed in this report.

2.2.3 Statistical methods

Statistical analyses were performed using Stata 14.0 (StataCorp, College Station, Texas). Associations between infant characteristics at baseline and levels of CD4+ and CD8+ T-cell activation were assessed using Mann-Whitney U-tests for dichotomous variables and Spearman's rank correlation for continuous variables. Correlation between immune parameters was assessed using Spearman's rank correlation.

For longitudinal analyses, CD8+ T-cell activation was dichotomized at two thresholds defined \textit{a priori}: greater or less than median and greater or less than 5%.

The association between baseline activation and partial (<1000 copies/mL) and complete (<150 copies/mL) HIV viral load suppression was assessed using Cox proportional hazards regression, and effect modification by ART regimen tested using an interaction term. The association between baseline CD8+ T-cell activation and mortality, overall and among the subset of infants who initiated ART, was also assessed using Cox proportional hazards regression, with confounding by WHO disease stage and log\textsubscript{10} HIV viral load assessed in
separate models. The proportional hazards assumption was tested in each model by inclusion of activation as a time-varying covariate.

The association between CD8+ T-cell activation at baseline and CD4% reconstitution over the first two years of ART was assessed using a linear mixed effects model. The rate of reconstitution was modeled using one slope for initial CD4% reconstitution between baseline and 6 months and another for the slower continued recovery between 6 and 24 months. Individual variation by infant was incorporated using random intercepts and slopes and an exchangeable correlation matrix.

2.3 RESULTS

2.3.1 Study population

Among 88 infants with baseline specimens collected pre-ART, 75 had PBMCs available for flow cytometry studies; the median age of these infants was 4 months (interquartile range (IQR) 3.3-4.6, Table 2.1). The median viral load prior to ART was 6.6 log_{10} copies/mL (IQR 6.1-7.2). More than half the infants presented with advanced disease, with 52% meeting criteria for WHO disease stage III/IV and 67% hospitalized at the time of their HIV diagnosis and enrollment into the study. Less than half the infants (41%) had been exposed to PMTCT. During the study, 59 (79%) infants initiated ART, of whom 41% received a nevirapine-based regimen as first-line treatment and 59% a lopinavir/ritonavir-based regimen. The remaining 16 infants died (n=12) or were lost to follow-up (n=4) without starting ART.

2.3.2 CD4+ T cell activation

At baseline, pre-ART, a median of 3.3% of CD4 T+ cells were activated (IQR 1.6-5.5%, Table 2.2), 4.5% cycling (IQR 2.2-9.8%), and 15.8% were apoptosis-vulnerable (IQR 9.2-28.9%). There was a moderate correlation between the proportions activated and cycling
(ρ=0.49, p<0.0001) and a stronger correlation between the proportions activated and apoptosis-vulnerable (ρ=0.60, p<0.0001).

2.3.3 CD8+ T-cell activation

A larger proportion of cells in the CD8+ subset were activated compared to the CD4+ subset. A median of 16.5% of CD8+ T cells were activated (IQR 9.9-28.4%, Table 2a), 12.8% were cycling (IQR 7.3-23.9%), and 13.1% were apoptosis-vulnerable (IQR 6.8-21.6%). In the CD8+ T cell subset, the percentage of activated cells was strongly correlated with the percentage of cycling cells (ρ=0.78, p<0.0001), and the percentage of apoptosis-vulnerable cells (ρ=0.70, p<0.0001). The proportions of CD4+ and CD8+ T-cells activated were moderately correlated (ρ=0.49, p<0.0001).

2.3.4 Correlates of T cell activation

There was a weak, but significant, inverse correlation between CD4+ T-cell activation and CD4% (ρ=-0.263, p=0.03, Table 2.3); but no correlation between CD4+ T-cell activation and HIV viral load, WHO disease stage, age, or growth score.

CD8+ T-cell activation at baseline was highly variable (range 0.3-60%) and was not correlated with HIV viral load, CD4% or WHO disease stage (Table 2.3, Figure 2.2). There was a trend for less CD8+ T cell activation in older infants (ρ=−0.211, p=0.07), and a trend for higher activation among infants with better weight-for-age (ρ=0.205, p=0.08) and length-for-age Z-scores (ρ=0.198, p=0.09).

2.3.5 Mortality

Of 75 infants, 24 died at a median of 25 days post study entry (IQR 9-63). Half of these (12/24) died before ART was initiated, at a median of 11 days post study entry (IQR 5-27). All the remaining deaths occurred within 6 months of ART initiation, at a median of 50 days post-ART, with the last occurring at 185 days post-ART.
CD4+ T cell activation was not associated with mortality in any analyses. CD8+ T-cell activation above the cohort median was not associated with the risk of mortality in a univariate analysis (Hazard Ratio (HR)=0.62, 95%CI 0.27-1.42, p=0.26; Figure 2.3A). However, CD8+ T-cell activation at levels comparable to healthy HIV-negative individuals (<5% CD8+CD38^{high}/HLA-DR^+) was associated with more than a 3-fold increased risk of mortality among all infants (HR=3.5 (95% CI 1.3-9.4), p=0.01; Figure 2.3B) and more than 5-fold increased risk among those who initiated ART (HR=5.3, 95% CI 1.4-19.7, p=0.01; Figure 2.3C). When CD8+ T-cell activation was divided into three categories (<5%, ≥5% and < median, ≥median, Figure 2.3D), there was no difference in survival between those in the ≥5% to median and ≥median categories (p=0.62) but significant differences persisted between infants in the <5% category and each of the others (p=0.03 for both comparisons). All results were comparable when controlling for HIV viral load (data not shown). After adjusting for WHO disease stage, infants with <5% CD8+ T-cell activation remained at increased risk of mortality overall (adjusted HR (aHR)=3.0, 95%CI 1.1-8.1, p=0.03) and post-ART (aHR=4.8, 95%CI 1.3-18.0, p=0.02).

Of seven infants with <5% CD8+ T-cell activation at baseline, two died prior to ART initiation and three died while on ART. Five of the 7 infants were WHO stage III or IV (Table 2.5 Supplementary) and 4 had log_{10} HIV viral loads greater than 7.0. All but one were severely underweight (WAZ<-3.0) and 5 were severely stunted (LAZ<-3). Six of 7 infants were hospitalized at the time of enrollment.

2.3.6 CD4% recovery

Fifty-nine infants started ART and were included in analyses of CD4% recovery. Mean CD4% at baseline pre-ART among these infants was 19.9%. CD4% increased rapidly during the first 6 months of ART in the cohort overall (1.2%/30 days, p<0.001) followed by a slower increase from 6-24 months (0.26%/30 days, p<0.001). CD8+ T-cell activation >median at
baseline was associated with significantly slower CD4% reconstitution during the first 6 months (0.77%/30 days vs. 1.74%/30 days, p=0.01; Figure 2.4A) but not between 6 and 24 months (0.31%/30 days vs. 0.19%/30 days, p=0.83).

2.3.7 Viral suppression

Fifty-six infants had at least one viral load measurement post-ART and were included in the viral suppression analysis. Viral suppression was slow in the cohort; 80% of infants achieved partial HIV viral load suppression (<1000 copies/mL) at any time during the first two years on ART, and 46% achieved full suppression to undetectable levels (<150 copies/mL). There was no association between CD8+ T-cell activation >median and partial HIV viral load suppression (<1000 copies/mL; HR=0.95, 95%CI 0.48-1.86, p=0.88; Figure 2.4B) or full HIV viral load suppression (<150 copies/mL; HR=1.35, 95%CI 0.65-2.79, p=0.42; Figure 2.4C). There was no effect modification by ART regimen observed (data not shown).

2.4 DISCUSSION

In this cohort of HIV-infected infants, the percentage of activated T-cells at baseline before ART initiation was highly variable and was not associated with HIV viral load or WHO disease stage. Contrary to our hypothesis, infants with CD8+ T-cell activation percentages in the range of HIV-uninfected individuals (<5%) had a higher risk of mortality, and this association was independent of WHO disease stage and HIV viral load. Among infants who survived and had follow-up CD4% data on ART, high CD8+ T-cell activation was associated with slower immune reconstitution on ART.

We did not find an association of baseline pre-ART CD8+ T-cell activation with viral load or WHO stage in our cohort. This is consistent with the results of two large studies of Ugandan children aged 1-11 years \cite{68,75} and a smaller US study of rapid vs. non-rapid progression of a similar age range \cite{76}, none of which found an association between HIV viral load and activation.
In contrast, a cross-sectional study from South Africa of children aged 4 months-11 years found a correlation between CD8+CD38+ T-cell count and HIV log_{10} viral load\textsuperscript{73}. Immune activation in children with HIV may be driven by a variety of antigens other than HIV itself, including coinfections\textsuperscript{77} and bacterial products in the blood due to compromised gut integrity\textsuperscript{65,78}; this may explain why HIV viral loads are less consistently associated with immune activation in children than in adults.

In HIV-infected adults, high levels of CD8+ T-cell activation have been consistently predictive of mortality\textsuperscript{62}, while low activation is seen in HIV controllers\textsuperscript{79}. We thus hypothesized that low CD8+ T-cell activation in normal ranges (<5%) would be predictive of good outcome. However, we found infants with <5% activated CD8+ T cells had a higher risk of mortality, suggesting very low activation in these infants is a marker of advanced HIV progression and immune exhaustion. Although few infants had very low activation, laboratory and clinical indicators were consistent with advanced HIV disease; these infants had higher median viral loads than the overall cohort, a greater proportion were WHO stage III/IV and they had very poor growth scores. Together, these data suggest very low levels of immune activation may indicate the loss of effective immune responses in end-stage infection. Consistent with this hypothesis, in a Ugandan study, HIV-specific T-helper responses were lower in children with lower T-cell activation, particularly CD8+ T-cell activation\textsuperscript{75}. We did not have adequate specimens to evaluate virus-specific immune responses, and our phenotyping panel did not include markers of T-cell exhaustion or senescence, which would have been useful to further understand if the low activation in these children reflected T-cell exhaustion\textsuperscript{80-82}.

Few other pediatric studies have reported T-cell activation as a predictor of mortality. In a small US study, low absolute counts of CD8+CD38+ T-cells were predictive of mortality among children under two years old\textsuperscript{64}. However, a South African study in children 4 months to 11 years old noted that high absolute count of CD8+CD38+ T-cells predicted mortality\textsuperscript{73}. Importantly, these studies measured CD38+ alone as a marker of immune activation, which can
be problematic in pediatric studies because CD38+ expression on T-cells is normally high in healthy infancy and declines with age. Other pediatric studies using HLA-DR expression as a marker of activation, without co-expression of CD38, have also reported contradictory results. An Italian study that included both treated and untreated children found that low CD8+HLA-DR+ percentages were predictive of immunologic and virologic worsening. However, a US study found CD8+HLA-DR+ T-cell percentage of 5% or less among HIV-infected neonates, some of whom went on to start ART, was predictive of immunologic long-term non-progression. In adults, CD8+ T-cell expression of HLA-DR in the absence of CD38 expression (CD8+CD38-HLA-DR+) has been found to be associated with long-term non-progression and increased survival; thus HLA-DR staining in the absence of CD38 may conflate two populations with different implications in HIV infection. Measurement of both CD38 and HLA-DR expression in our cohort avoided some of the issues of using either marker alone in a pediatric cohort.

The cohort, as a whole, had moderate to severe immunosuppression at baseline, and CD4% was associated with CD4+ but not CD8+ T-cell activation. In contrast, CD8+ T-cell activation prior to ART was associated with a slower rate of CD4% reconstitution in the first six months on ART, but not during the more distal time period between six months and two years. Similar results have been reported in adult ART cohorts but were not seen in a Ugandan pediatric study. While decline of T-cell activation is seen in most children after ART initiation, children with higher levels at baseline may have taken longer to normalize level of activation; the increased apoptosis and CD4 depletion accompanying high residual activation may explain poor initial CD4 reconstitution. Rate of decrease of immune activation post-ART has been shown to be inversely related to the rate of CD4% and CD4 count reconstitution.

We did not find an association between pre-ART T-cell activation and viral load suppression. Few data exist on pre-ART T-cell activation as a predictor of virologic ART response in pediatric cohorts, and results are contradictory; in contrast, residual activation of
CD8+,\textsuperscript{17,70,71} and CD4+ T-cells\textsuperscript{96} after starting ART has been shown to be associated with viral load.

Strengths of our study include the narrow age range of infants at ART initiation, limiting age-related differences in CD38 expression and lymphocyte count, longitudinal 2 year follow-up and the availability of apoptosis and cell cycling markers to verify internal consistency of the data. Limitations include the previously noted lack of immune exhaustion and senescence data as well as the lack of T-cell function data. High mortality in the pre-ART period may have limited our ability to detect an association between pre-ART immune activation levels and post-ART treatment responses. As infants were started on ART as quickly as possible after HIV diagnosis, in accordance with Kenyan guidelines, the measurement of T-cell activation was limited to a single time-point prior to ART. This did not allow us to explore whether the activation we observed was representative of earlier levels or, particularly in the infants with <5% CD8+ T-cell activation, may have been preceded by higher levels.

Although T cell activation is consistently associated with an increased risk of mortality and poor treatment responses in adults, the relationship between pre-ART immune activation and infant outcomes is less clear-cut. Very low percentages of activated CD8+ T cells may be a marker for advanced HIV disease, rather than a predictor of contained immune response, while high levels of activation predict poor CD4 recovery. Strategies to augment immune responses and complement ART may be useful to improve outcomes in these vulnerable infants.
Table 2.1 Cohort characteristics at study enrollment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Data available</th>
<th>Median (IQR) or n (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Demographics and growth</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infant age (months)</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>4.0 (3.3, 4.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>34 (45%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breastfed at enrollment</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>45 (87%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospitalized at enrollment</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>50 (67%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weight-for-age Z-score</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>-2.7 (-3.8, -0.93)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length-for-age Z-score</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>-2.0 (-3.3, -0.85)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HIV-related characteristics</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHO stage III/IV</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>39 (52%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD4%</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>19 (15, 24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIV log_{10} viral load</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>6.6 (6.1, 7.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother received PMTCT</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>29 (41%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother on ART for own health</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>7 (9.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Follow-up of infant</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infant initiated ART during the study</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>59 (79%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infant died before ART initiation</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>12 (16%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infant lost before ART initiation</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>4 (5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 2.1 Flow cytometry T-cell phenotyping gating tree. Cells were collected on an LSR II instrument (BD Biosciences). Live cells were AVID negative; lymphocytes were selected using forward and side scatter within the live gate; T-cells were selected within the lymphocyte gate by CD3 expression. CD3+ T-cells were separated into CD4+ T-cells (CD4+CD8-) and CD8+ T-cells (CD4-CD8+). Activated, cycling and apoptotic subsets were quantified separately within the CD4+ and CD8+ T-cell populations.
Table 2.2 T-cell populations and phenotypic marker combinations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>T-cell population</th>
<th>CD4+ T-cells Median (IQR)</th>
<th>CD8+ T-cells Median % (IQR)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activated (CD38^{high}/HLA-DR+)</td>
<td>3.3 (1.6, 5.5)</td>
<td>16.5 (9.9, 28.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cycling (Ki67+/Bcl2^{low})</td>
<td>4.5 (2.2, 9.8)</td>
<td>12.8 (7.3, 23.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apoptosis-vulnerable (CD95+/Bcl2^{low})</td>
<td>15.8 (9.2, 28.9)</td>
<td>13.1 (6.8, 21.6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.3 Correlates of baseline T-cell activation among 75 ART-naive infants, assessed using Spearman's rank correlation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CD8+ T-cell activation ρ (p-value)</th>
<th>CD4+ T-cell activation ρ (p-value)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age (days)</td>
<td>-0.211 (0.07)</td>
<td>0.007 (0.96)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log_{10} HIV viral load</td>
<td>0.044 (0.71)</td>
<td>0.096 (0.42)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD4%</td>
<td>0.152 (0.20)</td>
<td>-0.263 (0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weight-for-age Z-score</td>
<td>0.205 (0.08)</td>
<td>0.069 (0.56)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length-for-age Z-score</td>
<td>0.198 (0.09)</td>
<td>0.177 (0.13)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 2.2 Scatterplots showing CD8+ T-cell activation (% CD8CD38^{high}/HLA-DR+) by baseline characteristics among 75 HIV-infected infants prior to ART initiation. Lines show lowess curves.
Figure 2.3 Kaplan-Meier curves showing 12-month mortality by CD8+ T-cell activation (%CD8+CD38\text{high}HLA-DR+) at baseline. Panel A shows overall mortality by CD8 activation dichotomized at median (16.5%). Panel B shows overall mortality by activation dichotomized at 5%. Panel C shows mortality post-ART among the subset of infants who initiated ART, by activation dichotomized at 5%. Panel D shows overall mortality among infants in three categories of CD8+ T-cell activation: <5%; 5%-median; and ≥ median.
Figure 2.4 ART response by CD8+ T-cell activation at baseline. Panel A: Rate of CD4% reconstitution over two years of ART. Grey lines show individual trajectories, black lines show mean trajectories in each population. Solid lines represent infants with CD8 activation < median, dashed lines represent infants with CD8 activation > median. Panel B: Kaplan-Meier curve showing time to partial HIV viral load suppression to <1000 copies/mL. Panel C: Kaplan-Meier curve showing time to full HIV viral load suppression to <150 copies/mL (assay limit of detection).
Table 2.4 Supplementary T-cell phenotyping panel and antibody information. Unless otherwise noted, all antibodies were surface antibodies added prior to the permeabilization step.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Antibody</th>
<th>Vendor</th>
<th>Clone</th>
<th>Catalog number</th>
<th>Channel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CCR5-BV421</td>
<td>BD Biosciences</td>
<td>2D7/CCR5</td>
<td>562576</td>
<td>V450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD45RA-BV605</td>
<td>BioLegend</td>
<td>HI100</td>
<td>304133</td>
<td>V610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD27-BV655</td>
<td>BioLegend</td>
<td>O323</td>
<td>302827</td>
<td>V655</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD8-BV711</td>
<td>BD Biosciences</td>
<td>RPA-T8</td>
<td>563677</td>
<td>V710</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ki-67-FITCα</td>
<td>BD Biosciences</td>
<td>35/Ki-67</td>
<td>612472</td>
<td>B515</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD38-PerCP-Cy5.5</td>
<td>BD Biosciences</td>
<td>HIT2</td>
<td>551400</td>
<td>B710</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bcl-2-PEα</td>
<td>BD Biosciences</td>
<td>Bcl-2/100</td>
<td>340576</td>
<td>G575</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD3-PE-TR</td>
<td>Beckman Coulter</td>
<td>UCHT1</td>
<td>IM2705U</td>
<td>G610</td>
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<tr>
<td>HLA-DR-PE/Cy5</td>
<td>BioLegend</td>
<td>L243</td>
<td>307608</td>
<td>G660</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCR7-PE/Cy7</td>
<td>BioLegend</td>
<td>G043H7</td>
<td>353225</td>
<td>G780</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD95-APC</td>
<td>BD Biosciences</td>
<td>DX2</td>
<td>558814</td>
<td>R660</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD4-Ax700</td>
<td>BD Biosciences</td>
<td>RPA-T4</td>
<td>557922</td>
<td>R710</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a Intracellular antibodies

Table 2.5 Supplementary Baseline characteristics and outcomes of seven infants with low CD8+ T-cell activation at enrollment (<5% CD8+CD38-high HLA-DR+).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% CD8 activation</th>
<th>Age (months)</th>
<th>WHO stage</th>
<th>HAZ</th>
<th>WAZ</th>
<th>log10 HIV viral load</th>
<th>CD4%</th>
<th>Infant’s final status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>-1.6</td>
<td>-3.2</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Followed 2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>-3.6</td>
<td>-3.5</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Died post-HAART</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>-5.5</td>
<td>-5.5</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Died post-HAART</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>-3.7</td>
<td>-3.7</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>missing</td>
<td>Died pre-HAART</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>-5.0</td>
<td>-5.0</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Died pre-HAART</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>-1.4</td>
<td>-1.8</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Died post-HAART</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>-3.2</td>
<td>-3.2</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Followed 2 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 3. Patterns of CD4+ T-cell reconstitution in infants initiating ART

3.1 BACKGROUND

HIV-infection disrupts T-cell subsets in a number of ways. The ratio of CD4+ to CD8+ T-cells is inverted\textsuperscript{97} reflecting increased CD4+ destruction concurrent with increased proliferation of both CD4+ and CD8+ subsets. High T-cell activation\textsuperscript{57} is accompanied by apoptosis of vulnerable cells\textsuperscript{98-100} and is closely related to CD4+ T-cell depletion\textsuperscript{58,95} and CD8+ T-cell clonal exhaustion\textsuperscript{61,101}. During HIV infection, populations of long-lived central memory T-cells are depleted and their lifespans shortened\textsuperscript{102,103} and T-cells increasingly shift toward an effector phenotype\textsuperscript{104}. Skewed maturation leads to a less effective immune response\textsuperscript{103} and eventually, homeostatic failure of central memory CD4+ T-cells leads to severe immunodeficiency (AIDS)\textsuperscript{105}.

CD4+ T-cell reconstitution following ART is thought to occur through a combination of thymic output, increased lifespan of existing cells, and proliferation of the CD4+ T-cells in circulation\textsuperscript{106}. Adults, who have previously encountered a variety of antigens prior to immunodeficiency, primarily expand their memory T-cell subsets followed by a more modest increase in naive T-cells\textsuperscript{107-109}. In contrast, in children an active thymus can contribute immune reconstitution through generation of new naive (CD45RA+) T-cells\textsuperscript{110-112}. The extent of CD4+ T-cell recovery on ART is dependent in part on the extent of prior damage inflicted during HIV infection, including by high activation\textsuperscript{91}, inflammation\textsuperscript{113} and fibrosis of the lymph nodes\textsuperscript{114}. Central memory cells are preserved when ART is initiated during acute infection\textsuperscript{115} but may not be fully restored by ART in chronic infection\textsuperscript{116}.

Discordant response to ART with immune recovery but no viral suppression has been observed in several pediatric cohorts\textsuperscript{16,52,17,53}. Infants may be particularly likely to fall into this category because of their high thymic output. There are relatively few data on T-cell subset reconstitution among infants following ART.
3.2 METHODS

3.2.1 Subjects

HIV-infected Kenyan infants from the Optimizing Pediatric HAART study (described in Chapter 2.2.1) who started ART were included in this analysis. We determined memory CD4+ and CD8+ T-cell subsets among the 59 infants prior to ART initiation. A subset of 15 infants who completed at least 2 years of ART were selected on the basis of their response to ART and changes in their T-cell subsets described through two years of followup: 5 who had good CD4 and viral load response to ART (responders), 4 who had poor CD4 and viral load response to ART (nonresponders) and 6 with good CD4 response but poor viral load response (discordant responders).

3.2.2 Sample selection

Peripheral blood mononuclear cells (PBMCs) collected at baseline before ART initiation were analyzed for all infants. For the longitudinal subset, six-monthly PBMC samples were analyzed; where unavailable, the sample closest to the missing sample by date was selected.

3.2.3 Laboratory methods

T-cell phenotypes were analyzed by flow cytometry, according to a published protocol\textsuperscript{74}. Cryopreserved PBMCs from infant blood samples were thawed into R10 buffer (RPMI 1640 with 25mM HEPES buffer and L-glutamine plus 10% FBS, 1% L-glutamine and 1% Penicillin-Streptomycin; Gibco BRL Life Technologies). PBMCs were stained with AVID dead cell stain (Life Technologies), then with a cocktail of T-cell phenotyping surface antibodies (Supplementary Table 2.1). All antibodies were titrated to appropriate concentrations before being used in the assay. Cells were permeabilized with FACS Lyse / FACS Perm II (BD Biosciences) and finally stained with intracellular antibodies. Stained cells were resuspended in
1% Paraformaldehyde (Electron Microscopy Sciences) solution for collection on an LSR II instrument (BD Biosciences).

3.2.4 **Phenotyping**

Samples collected on the LSR II were analyzed using FlowJo 9.7.6 (Tree Star, Ashland, Oregon). The T-cells (CD3+) were selected from the lymphocyte population and separated into CD4+ T-cells (CD4+CD8-) and CD8+ T-cells (CD4-CD8+). All subsets were quantified separately within the CD4+ and CD8+ T-cell population and expressed as percentages of the CD3+CD4+ or CD3+CD8+ population; absolute cell counts (number of cells per mm$^3$ blood) in each CD4+ subset were obtained by multiplying the cell subset proportion by the absolute CD4 T count at the same visit. Memory subsets consisted of naive (CD45RA+CCR7+CD27+), central memory (CD45RA-CCR7+CD27+), transitional memory (CD45RA-CCR7-CD27+), effector memory (CD45RA-CCR7-CD27-) and terminal effector (CD45RA+CCR7-CD27-) subsets (Figures 3.1 and 3.2). Activated (CD38$^{\text{high}}$/HLA-DR+) subsets were also quantified.

3.2.5 **Statistical methods**

Statistical analyses were performed using Stata 14.0 (StataCorp, College Station, Texas). Baseline characteristics of the full group of infants who initiated HAART and the subset who were longitudinally profiled were compared using the Mann-Whitney U-test. Associations between T-cell phenotype at baseline and response category were assessed using Mann-Whitney U-tests.

Changes in T-cell activation over two years of ART among children in each response category were modeled using linear mixed effects models with random intercepts. Slopes were assessed in two phases; one from ART initiation to six months and the other from six to 24 months. Change in T-cell activation in the cohort at large was modeled by weighting observations by each response category's sampling probability.
Correlates of residual T-cell activation on ART were assessed using Mann-Whitney U-tests and Spearman's rank correlation; pre-ART measurements of T-cell activation were excluded from this analysis.

Changes in the proportion of T-cells in each memory subset over two years of ART in each responder group were estimated using linear mixed effects models with random intercepts. Slopes were assessed in two phases; one from ART initiation to six months and the other from six to 24 months, mirroring the pattern of CD4% reconstitution in the cohort. Percentages in each memory cell subset were transformed using log or square root transformation, as appropriate, to improve normality of the data, and model estimates were back-transformed for presentation in figures.

In order to determine whether CD4 reconstitution was driven by the same memory subsets among responders and discordant responders, changes in raw CD4+ T-cell counts (cells/mm³) in each memory subset over two years of ART were modeled using a linear mixed effects model. Interaction terms were included to assess differences in rate of CD4+ T-cell repopulation in each phase by responder type. CD4+ T-cell counts in each memory cell subset were transformed using log or square root transformation, as appropriate, to improve normality of the data, and model estimates were back-transformed for presentation in figures.

3.3  RESULTS

3.3.1  Cohort

Of the 59 infants who initiated ART, 12 died post-ART, 8 were withdrawn or lost to followup at <2 years, and 39 completed two full years of followup. Among infants with 2 years of follow-up, responses to ART fell into three patterns: responders, those who fully suppressed HIV viral load to undetectable levels and reconstituted CD4 to 25% within one year of ART (n=22), nonresponders who failed to suppress HIV viral load or reconstitute CD4 to 25% within
one year (n=4), and discordant responders who reconstituted CD4 but failed to suppress viral load by one year (n=13). T-cell activation and memory subset distribution at baseline did not predict response category (data not shown). The longitudinal subset consisted of all four nonresponders, six discordant responders and five responders with complete followup.

Among the overall set of 59 infants who initiated ART, median age at ART initiation was 4.0 months and median HIV viral load pre-ART was 6.7 log\textsubscript{10} copies/mL. At baseline prior to ART initiation, 45% of infants were WHO stage III/IV. Growth status in the cohort was poor prior to ART initiation, with median length-for-age (LAZ) and weight-for-age Z-scores (WAZ) -2.1 and -2.4, respectively. The subset of infants included in the longitudinal subset had lower viral loads (median 6.3 log\textsubscript{10} copies/mL) and better growth (median LAZ=-1.1 and median WAZ=-1.6) at baseline than the cohort at large; differences were not statistically significant.

3.3.2 Memory T-cell subsets at baseline

Prior to ART initiation, in the CD4+ T cell subset, the majority of cells were naïve (median=63%, IQR 30-75%, Table 3.2), and a large proportion were central memory (17.1%, IQR 11.9-25.3%). Transitional memory, effector memory, and terminal effector cell subsets comprised <10% of CD4+ T-cells in most infants.

In contrast, only a small subset in the CD8+ T cell subset were naive (8.5%, IQR 5.4-15.4%) or central memory (3.0%, IQR 1.6-6.7%), and the majority of cells were of the more differentiated memory subsets: transitional memory (median 25%, IQR 11.3-37.6%), effector memory (17.7%, IQR 12.5-31.3%) and terminal effector (12.3%, IQR 6.2-28.3%) phenotypes.

3.3.3 Changes in T-cell activation on ART

CD4+ T-cell activation did not change significantly in either the first 6 months or between 6-24 months in any of the responder groups (Table 3.3, Figure 3.3A). No association was
observed between CD4+ T-cell activation and detectable viral load \( (p=0.45) \) or CD4% \( (p=0.18, \ p=0.23) \) at timepoints post-ART initiation.

The weighted model estimated a 0.83-fold change in CD8+ T-cell activation per month on ART in the first six months (0.83-fold change per month on ART \( (95\% \ CI \ 0.75-0.92) \), \( p<0.001 \), Figure 3.3B); and a 1.03-fold change per month between 6-24 months \( (95\% \ CI \ 1.00-1.06) \), \( p=0.05 \). Residual CD8+ T-cell activation was associated with detectable viral load post-ART \( (p=0.005) \) and there was a weak but significant correlation between higher CD8+ T-cell activation and lower CD4% \( (\rho=-0.36, \ p=0.03) \). CD8+ T-cell activation decreased significantly during the first six months on ART in all responder groups, followed by an increase between 6-24 months, though this was not significant within each group (Table 3.3).

### 3.3.4 Changes in T-cell memory subsets on ART

CD4+ T-cell count rose rapidly in the responder and discordant groups following ART initiation (data not shown); no significant change in CD8+ T-cell count was observed.

The weighted model estimated a 1.14-fold increase in naive CD8+ T-cells per month in the first six months on ART \( (95\% \ CI \ 1.02-1.26, \ p=0.03) \) followed by a 0.96-fold decrease per month from 6-24 months on ART \( (95\% \ CI \ 0.93-0.99, \ p=0.008) \). An increase in the proportion of CD8+ T-cells in the naive subset was observed in discordant responders in the first six months on ART \( (1.12\text{-fold change per month} \ (95\% \ CI \ 1.04-1.20), \ p=0.003, \ Table \ 3.3) \); point estimates in the two other response categories were also positive but the slopes were not significant. Between 6-24 months, however, the naive CD8+ T-cell proportion decreased significantly among discordant responders \( (0.94\text{-fold change per month} \ (95\% \ CI \ 0.91-0.97), \ p<0.001) \). No significant changes in other CD8+ T-cell memory subsets were observed in any responder category (data not shown). There were no significant changes observed in CD4+ memory T-cell proportions in either the first six months or from six-24 months on ART in any responder category (data not shown).
Because CD4+ T-cell count increased dramatically following ART among responder and discordant responder infants, absolute CD4+ subset counts were modeled in addition to proportions. From these models, good responders had a significant increase in naive CD4+ T-cell count over the first six months on ART (1.16-fold change per month for an average infant (95% CI 1.05-1.26), p=0.003; Table 3.4, Figure 3.4), while discordant responders had no increase in naive CD4+ T-cells (p=0.48). The difference in slopes was significant (p=0.02). There was no significant change in naive CD4+ T-cell count in either group from 6-24 months.

The absolute number of CD4+ central memory T-cells increased among discordant responders in the first six months on ART (1.14-fold change per month for an average infant (95% CI 1.03-1.24), p=0.009, Figure 3.4). Good responders showed a non-significant increase in the same time period (1.08-fold change per month for an average infant (95% CI 0.96-1.20), p=0.2) and the difference in slopes was not significant (p=0.49). There was no significant change in central memory CD4+ T-cell count between 6 and 24 months. No significant changes in other CD4+ T-cell memory subset counts were observed in either the first six months on ART or between 6-24 months.

3.4 DISCUSSION

In this cohort of early-treated HIV-infected infants, there were varied patterns of viral and immune response to ART. Half the infants completing two years of ART suppressed HIV viral load to undetectable levels and reconstituted CD4 to 25% by 12 months, but a third reconstituted CD4% but failed to suppress virus. The proportion of CD8+ T-cells activated decreased substantially in the first six months on ART. The proportion of CD8+ naïve T-cells increased substantially in first 6 months post-ART with smaller declines in the subsequent 18 months. In the CD4 compartment, no significant changes in proportions were found, but the absolute number of central memory CD4+ T-cells increased significantly among responders and
discordant responders in the first six months on ART, and the absolute number of naïve cells increased among responders.

Similar to findings in other pediatric HIV cohorts, at baseline prior to ART initiation, we found a smaller proportion of both CD4+ and CD8+ T-cells were naive compared to HIV-uninfected African infants\textsuperscript{68,94,117}. Central memory cells constituted the largest CD4+ memory subset in our study. This contrasts with data from a large Zambian cohort\textsuperscript{94} in which CD4+ central memory cells were the smallest subset. The proportion of CD4+ terminal effector T-cells was also substantially smaller in our cohort, indicating an overall less differentiated phenotype. This difference may be partly explained by the inclusion of CD27 as a confirmatory marker in our phenotyping assay, resulting in a smaller proportion of T-cells designated terminal effector than had we used CD45RA and CCR7 alone; and by the age of the cohorts. In the Zambian study, only 10 children were ≤12 months old, and of these the median age was 9.6 months, compared to a median age at baseline of 4.0 months in our study. This is a substantial difference given rapid disease progression among HIV-infected African infants.

In longitudinally followed infants in the study, CD8+ T-cell activation decreased rapidly during the first six months of ART, but then increased between six and 24 months; persistent CD8+ T-cell activation was associated with detectable viral load. The decline of T-cell activation is consistent with studies in other adult and pediatric cohorts\textsuperscript{93,94}, as is the association between CD8+ T-cell activation and lack of viral suppression among treated children\textsuperscript{17,70,71}. The increase in CD8+ T-cell activation between six and 24 months on ART we observed may be due to the changing pathogen exposures in infants as they become more mobile and cease breastfeeding; increased gut permeability\textsuperscript{118} and microbial translocation across the gut mucosa\textsuperscript{78,118} in the first year of life have been described in African infants regardless of HIV status and may drive immune activation in this period.
We observed a significant increase in the proportion of naive CD8+ T-cells over the first six months on ART, followed by a decrease between six and 24 months. A similar pattern was observed in the number of naive CD4+ T-cells among good responders. Changes in the size of the naive subset accompany both ART initiation\textsuperscript{111} and normal maturation of the immune system\textsuperscript{24,117}. In healthy children, the proportion of naïve cells declines rapidly in early life\textsuperscript{24,117}, from >90% of T-cells naive in neonates to 75% of CD8+ T-cells and 67% of CD4+ T-cells between 12 and 24 months of age in an African reference population\textsuperscript{117}. Regardless of HIV infection, proportions of T-cells naive at a given age tend to be lower among children in resource-limited than high-resource settings,\textsuperscript{68,94,117} likely reflecting higher pathogen exposure. With ART, proportions of naïve CD8+ T-cells increased substantially in the first 6 months, however not to levels expected in healthy children of similar ages suggesting accelerated decline of naïve population due to early HIV infection. Earlier ART prior to symptomatic disease may preserve more naïve cells and be useful to enable immune responses to vaccines or new infections.

We observed some differences in the patterns of CD4+ T-cell reconstitution by responder type. While good responders had increased numbers of naive CD4+ T-cells in the first six months, discordant responders had a slight but not significant decrease in the same time period, possibly due to their persistent viral loads. Both good and discordant responders showed increased numbers of central memory CD4+ T-cells, as expected during ART\textsuperscript{94,119,120}. The increase in naive and central memory CD4+ T-cell count suggests that immune repopulation in the responder and discordant responder infants resulted in a shift toward a less differentiated T-cell phenotype, although no significant changes in either the proportion or count of effector memory and terminal effector T-cells were seen.

Our study was exploratory and limited by a small sample size, particularly in the nonresponder group. We did not adjust for multiple comparisons. Our study lacked an age-
matched control group of infants to distinguish between the effects of infant age and ART on changes in T-cell subsets. Strengths of the study included the narrow age range of the infants and the extended follow-up.

Infants in our study recovered naive and central memory T-cells in the first six months on ART and their CD8+ T-cell activation was reduced, consistent with changes seen in older children starting ART. Differences in the pattern of recovery were observed between virologic responders and non-responders, suggesting that infants who respond immunologically but not virologically to ART may continue to have skewed maturation of T-cells compared to virologic responders.
Table 3.1 Baseline characteristics of HIV-infected infants prior to ART initiation. Characteristics are shown for the whole cohort of 59 children initiating ART and in the subset whose T-cell subsets were profiled longitudinally over two years of ART.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Infants initiating ART (n=59) Median (IQR)</th>
<th>Longitudinal subset (n=15) Median (IQR)</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age at ART initiation (days)</td>
<td>123 (99, 142)</td>
<td>133 (99, 152)</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIV viral load pre-ART</td>
<td>6.7 (6.0, 7.1)</td>
<td>6.3 (5.8, 6.7)</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD4% pre-ART</td>
<td>19 (15, 24)</td>
<td>21 (16, 26)</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHO stage III/IV pre-ART</td>
<td>36 (45%)</td>
<td>5 (33%)</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length-for-age Z-score</td>
<td>-2.1 (-3.3, -0.84)</td>
<td>-1.1 (-2.6, -0.53)</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weight-for-age Z-score</td>
<td>-2.4 (-3.7, -0.82)</td>
<td>-1.6 (-3.3, -0.41)</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PI-based HAART</td>
<td>26 (44%)</td>
<td>4 (27%)</td>
<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NVP-based HAART</td>
<td>33 (56%)</td>
<td>11 (73%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2 Distribution of T-cell subset percentages among 59 infants prior to initiation of ART.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CD4+ T-cell subsets</th>
<th>Median (IQR)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Naïve (CD45RA+CCR7+CD27+)</td>
<td>62.6 (30.4, 75.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central memory (CD45RA-CCR7+CD27+)</td>
<td>17.1 (11.9, 25.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional memory (CD45RA-CCR7-CD27+)</td>
<td>6.1 (3.3, 13.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effector memory (CD45RA-CCR7-CD27-)</td>
<td>5.3 (2.0, 12.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terminal effector (CD45RA+CCR7-CD27-)</td>
<td>0.5 (0.2, 1.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activated (CD38&lt;sup&gt;high&lt;/sup&gt;/HLA-DR+)</td>
<td>3.4 (1.6, 5.3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CD8+ T-cell subsets</th>
<th>Median (IQR)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Naïve (CD45RA+CCR7+CD27+)</td>
<td>8.5 (5.4, 15.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central memory (CD45RA-CCR7+CD27+)</td>
<td>3.0 (1.6, 6.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional memory (CD45RA-CCR7-CD27+)</td>
<td>25.0 (11.3, 37.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effector memory (CD45RA-CCR7-CD27-)</td>
<td>17.7 (12.5, 31.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terminal effector (CD45RA+CCR7-CD27-)</td>
<td>12.3 (6.2, 28.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activated (CD38&lt;sup&gt;high&lt;/sup&gt;/HLA-DR+)</td>
<td>16.7 (9.9, 26.0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CD4+ T-cell subsets at baseline pre-ART

CD4+ T-cell subsets at 6 months post-ART

CD4+ T-cell subsets at 12 months post-ART

Figure 3.1 Flow cytometry plots showing changes in CD4+ T-cell populations over 12 months of ART in a single "good responder" subject. Upper rows at each time point show two-dimensional flow cytometry plots; lower plots show overlaid naive (shown in red; CD45RA+CCR7+CD27+), central memory (CM cells, blue; CD45RA-CCR7+CD27+) transitional memory (TM cells, orange; CD45RA-CCR7-CD27+), effector memory (green; EM cells, CD45RA-CCR7-CD27-) and terminal effector (TE cells, black; CD45RA+CCR7-CD27-) populations.
CD8+ T-cell subsets at baseline pre-ART

CD8+ T-cell subsets at 6 months post-ART

CD8+ T-cell subsets at 12 months post-ART

Figure 3.2 Flow cytometry plots showing changes in CD8+ T-cell populations over 12 months of ART in a single "good responder" subject. Upper rows at each time point show two-dimensional flow cytometry plots; lower plots show overlaid naive (shown in red; CD45RA+CCR7+CD27+), central memory (CM cells, blue; CD45RA-CCR7+CD27+) transitional memory (TM cells, orange; CD45RA-CCR7-CD27+), effector memory (EM cells, green; CD45RA-CCR7-CD27-) and terminal effector (TE cells, black; CD45RA+CCR7-CD27-) populations.
Table 3.3 Changes in T-cell proportions over two years of ART, modeled using linear mixed effects models. One slope was estimated from 0-6 months on ART and another from 6-24 months on ART. Proportions were log-transformed to improve normality of the data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Slope 0-6 months</th>
<th>p-value</th>
<th>Slope 6-24 months</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CD4+ T-cell activation (log(%))</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonresponders</td>
<td>-0.02 (-0.19, 0.15)</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>0.04 (-0.04, 0.11)</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discordant responders</td>
<td>-0.06 (-0.18, 0.07)</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.04 (-0.01, 0.09)</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responders</td>
<td>0.06 (-0.06, 0.17)</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.00 (-0.04, 0.05)</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall weighted estimate</strong></td>
<td>0.01 (-0.07, 0.09)</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>0.02 (-0.01, 0.05)</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CD8+ T-cell activation (log(%))</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonresponders</td>
<td>-0.18 (-0.36, 0.00)</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.07 (-0.01, 0.15)</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discordant responders</td>
<td>-0.10 (-0.21, 0.01)</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.03 (-0.01, 0.07)</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responders</td>
<td>-0.25 (-0.38, -0.11)</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.03 (-0.02, 0.09)</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall weighted estimate</strong></td>
<td>-0.18 (-0.25, 0.11)</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>0.03 (0.00, 0.06)</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CD8+ naive (log(%))</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonresponders</td>
<td>0.05 (-0.08, 0.18)</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.01 (-0.05, 0.07)</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discordant responders</td>
<td>0.12 (0.04, 0.20)</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>-0.06 (-0.09, -0.03)</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responders</td>
<td>0.13 (-0.06, 0.31)</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>-0.03 (-0.10, 0.04)</td>
<td>0.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall weighted estimate</strong></td>
<td>0.14 (0.02, 0.26)</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>-0.04 (-0.07, -0.01)</td>
<td>0.008</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.4 Rate of change in CD4+ T-cell subset counts among infants who reconstituted CD4 to >25% by one year of ART. Changes in subset size were modeled using linear mixed effects models, with one slope estimated from 0-6 months on ART and another from 6-24 months on ART. P-values test the equality of slopes in each time period. Proportions were log-transformed to improve normality of the data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Discordant responders</th>
<th>Good responders</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Naive CD4+ T-cell count</strong> (log(cells/mm3))</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slope 0-6 months</td>
<td>-0.05 (-0.20, 0.09)</td>
<td>0.16 (0.05, 0.26)</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slope 6-24 months</td>
<td>-0.003 (-0.08, 0.03)</td>
<td>-0.04 (-0.08, 0.00)</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Central memory CD4+ T-cell count</strong> (log(cells/mm3))</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slope 0-6 months</td>
<td>0.14 (0.03, 0.24)</td>
<td>0.08 (-0.04, 0.20)</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slope 6-24 months</td>
<td>-0.04 (-0.07, 0.00)</td>
<td>-0.02 (-0.06, 0.03)</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 3.3 Changes in T-cell activation over two years of ART. Changes were modeled in two phases: 0-6 months and 6-24 months, using linear mixed effects models. Grey lines show individual trajectories among 15 infants who were profiled longitudinally; black lines show cohort mean trajectories, weighted by sampling probability. Proportions in each T-cell subset were log-transformed to improve normality, then trajectories were back-transformed for visual presentation. P-values refer to the change over time in each phase in the weighted model.
Figure 3.4 Trajectories of infant CD4+ T-cell subset counts over two years of ART by response profile. Good responders (n=5) fully suppressed HIV viral load to undetectable levels and reconstituted CD4 to 25% within one year of ART, poor responders (n=4) failed to suppress HIV viral load or reconstitute CD4 to 25% within one year, and discordant responders (n=6) reconstituted CD4 but failed to suppress viral load by one year (n=6).
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VITA

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