

# Evaluation of the LncRNA TMPO AS-1 Expression Level in Breast Cancer Tissues in Comparison with Paired Normal Marginal Tissues

Saman Niknam\*, MD, Habib Zarredar\*, PhD, Tooraj Asvadi\*, MD, Milad Asadi\*\*, PhD, Venus Zafari\*\*, PhD, Raheleh Aligholipour Maleki\*, MD, Dariush Shanehbandi\*\*\*, PhD, Shahryar Hashemzadeh\*\*, MD

\*Tuberculosis and Lung Disease Research Center, Tabriz University of Medical Sciences, Tabriz, Iran

\*\*Department of Basic Oncology of Health Institute of Ege University, Izmir, Turkey

\*\*\*Immunology Research Center, Tabriz University of Medical Sciences, Tabriz, Iran

Please cite this article as:  
Niknam S, Zarredar H, Asvadi T, Asadi M, Zafari V, Aligholipour Maleki R, et al. Evaluation of the LncRNA TMPO AS-1 expression level in breast cancer tissues in comparison with paired normal marginal tissues. Middle East J Cancer. 2026; 17(2): 97-105. doi: 10.30476/mejc.2025.105196.2229.

Received: December 22, 2024;  
Accepted: February 27, 2025

## Abstract

**Background:** Breast malignancy is a major public health problem and one of the prevalent cancers, which leads to death in women all around the world. Long non-coding RNAs (lncRNAs) are widely studied in the pathogenesis of malignancies. Previous studies have confirmed the correlation of lncRNAs and the cellular development and growth of breast malignancy. The present study aimed to evaluate the expression level of long non-coding RNATMPO antisense RNA 1 (LncRNA TMPO AS-1) in breast cancer tissues and compare it with paired normal marginal tissues.

**Method:** 50 breast cancer patients were included in this case-control study and tumor tissues and healthy marginal tissues were collected during surgery. Total RNAs were extracted from the normal and cancerous tissues, and after quality control cDNA was synthesized. The TMPO AS-1 expression level was determined by quantitative polymerase chain reaction (qPCR). The gene expression level and their relationships with the patient's clinicopathological characteristics were analyzed using appropriate statistical tests.

**Results:** TMPO Antisense RNA 1(TMPO-AS1) is significantly high expressed in breast cancer tissues compared with normal peripheral tissues ( $P$ -value <0.0001, fold change: 1.16). Among the 40 patients exposed to chemotherapy drugs 5-Fluorouracil (5FU) and doxorubicin, the TMPO-AS1 expression level was significantly decreased as compared with the 10 patients unexposed to chemotherapy ( $P$  < 0.0001, fold change: 0.11). Lymph node metastatic patients (29 positive patients, 21 negative patients) showed high TMPO-AS1 expression level than negative lymph nodes metastasis patients ( $P$  = 0.0012, fold change = 1.161).

**Conclusion:** We demonstrated that TMPO-AS1 is highly expressed and its up-regulation correlates with the pathogenesis and tumorigenesis of breast cancer.

**Keywords:** Breast cancer, TMPO AS-1, Biomarkers, Prognoses

### Corresponding Author:

Shahryar Hashemzadeh, MD  
Tuberculosis and Lung Disease  
Research Center, Tabriz  
University of Medical Sciences,  
Tabriz, Iran  
Email: sh.hashemzadeh@gmail.com



## Introduction

Breast malignancy is a prevalent cancer that leads to death in women all around the world.<sup>1</sup> In 2018, the International Agency of Cancer Research reported that about 2,088,849 (11.6% of all malignancy) new cases of breast cancer were detected and 626,679 (6.6% of all cancers) patients died through this year.<sup>2</sup> Breast tumor, as the most diagnosed malignancy in women, is classified into heterogeneous groups of tumors and consists of specific subgroups related to different clinical manifestations.<sup>3,4</sup> About 70%–80% of breast tumors will finally be a member of two main histopathological classes, not otherwise specified and invasive ductal carcinomas.<sup>5</sup> Breast cancer subtypes were classified based on immunohistochemical analysis of estrogen receptor, progesterone receptor, and human epidermal growth factor receptor 2 (HER2) status. Recently, long non-coding RNAs (lncRNAs) containing 200 or more nucleotides with no or limited protein-coding potential, have been identified as a main factor in controlling cellular activities and biological functions. Previous studies also recommend that lncRNAs are involved in various malignancies like breast malignancy.<sup>6,7</sup> Thymopoietin antisense transcript 1, an antisense lncRNA, is encoded differently from the TMPO gene and located on the 12<sup>th</sup> chromosome. TMPO AS-1 protein is placed in the cell's nucleus and involved in the formation of the nuclear lamina and maintenance of the structure of the nuclear membrane.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the TMPO gene plays an essential role in the cellular processes and inhibits the depolymerization of nuclear laminas over the induction of the mitosis axis. TMPO-AS1 gene is the antisense of the TMPO gene, and may be important in cellular processes, which leads to depolymerization of the nuclear laminas and mitosis pathway induction.<sup>9</sup> The construction between TMPO-AS1 and nuclear lamina maintenance has been extended to highlight its potential role in nuclear structural integrity, chromatin organization, and gene regulation in breast malignancy. New research recommends that dysregulation of TMPO-AS1 may lead to abnormal nuclear

architecture and chromatin remodeling, thereby inducing carcinogenesis. Definitely, the abnormal expression of TMPO-AS1 has been linked to changed nuclear envelope integrity, increased nuclear deformability, and promoted cancer cell metastases and invasion.<sup>10,11</sup> Previous research have revealed that lncRNA TMPO-AS1 has an oncogenic role in non-small cell lung cancer, osteosarcoma, cervical, and colorectal malignancies.<sup>12</sup> Also, TMPO-AS1 has an oncogenic function and is involved in the growth and proliferation of the breast tumor.<sup>13</sup> Previous studies indicated that the TMPO-AS1 gene induced migration, cell cycle progression, development, proliferation, and decreased apoptosis in prostate cancer.<sup>14</sup> Also, previous research has shown that TMPO-AS1 significantly correlated with cell growth and development factors, including proliferating cell nuclear antigen (PCNA) and MKi-67.<sup>15</sup> In the present study, we evaluated the TMPO-AS1 mRNA expression level in breast cancer, and its potential as a prognostic and diagnostic biomarker.

## Methods

### *Bioinformatics analysis*

We used the Cancer Genome Atlas (TCGA) datasets for bioinformatics evaluation of the TMPO-AS1 expression level in breast tumors. After that, we used the Xena Functional Genomics Explorer (<https://xena.ucsc.edu/>) expression data to retrieve TMPO-AS1 from TCGA breast cancer datasets, and then analyzed the data.

### *Research population and method for clinical sampling*

We have registered all clinical trials reported in manuscripts in Academic Committee on Research Ethics (Human Studies Subjects) in Tabriz University of Medical Sciences (Trial Registration Number: IR.TBZMED.REC.1399.932). This case-control study was conducted between 2019 and 2021 by collecting tumor and margin healthy tissues from 50 breast cancer patients during surgery. The patients were recognized by surgical oncologists and confirmed by a pathologist at Imam Reza Hospital. Female patients diagnosed with breast malignancy,

**Table 1.** Clinicopathological characteristics of study population with breast cancer

Number of Samples	50	
Mean age 56.7	21 sample <55	29 sample >55
Stage	7 stage 4	
	19 stage 2	
	24 stage 3	
Lymphnod metastasis	21 neg	
	29 positive	
Chemotherapy history	10 sample negative	
	40 sample pos	

ALL: Acute lymphoblastic leukemia; WBC: White blood cell count; Hb: Hemoglobin; PLT: Platelets; CD: Cluster of differentiation; B-ALL: B- Acute lymphoblastic leukemia; T-ALL: T- Acute lymphoblastic leukemia; dim: diminished

validated by pathology specialist and preparing of paired tumor and healthy marginal tissue from the same patient and comprehensive clinical and treatment history records were included in this study. Patients with previous cancer or concurrent malignancy, patients who exposed chemotherapy drug (pre-surgical chemotherapy) before sample collection, cases with low-quality RNA that could not be extracted from tissue samples were excluded from the study. The patients who received chemotherapy drug had completed chemotherapy before surgery and sample collection. The clinicopathological characteristics of the patients are shown in table 1. Tumor and paired healthy marginal tissues were collected from patients during surgical resection before any systemic treatment was initiated, except for patients in the chemotherapy-exposed group, who had completed chemotherapy prior to surgery. For patients who received chemotherapy drugs, tissue samples were gained after the completion of chemotherapy. In contrast, for patients unexposed to chemotherapy, samples were collected prior to any systemic therapy, ensuring that the TMPO-AS1 expression was measured in tumors without being exposed to chemotherapy drugs. This distinction enables the comparison of TMPO-AS1 expression in both treated and untreated conditions, providing insight into its potential role in chemotherapy response. The chemotherapy regimens mainly included 5-FU, and doxorubicin. The number of chemotherapy cycles varied among patients, with an average of 4 to 6 cycles administered before surgery. After surgery, we put the tissue samples in the RNase inhibitor solution (Qiagen, Hilden, Germany) and transferred them to the laboratory. The sample

size of 50 patients was evaluated based on initial data and statistical calculations. Using G Power software, we assessed that a minimum of 45–50 paired samples would be required to detect statistically significant differences.

#### *Total RNA isolation, reverse transcription and quantitative poly chain reaction (qPCR)*

Total RNA extraction from tissues was performed in accordance with the manufacturer's protocol using RiboEx reagent (Gene All biotechnology, Seoul, Korea). Next, the Nanodrop tool was used for checking the quantity of RNA (Thermo Fisher Scientific, USA). The samples were then kept at -80 ° C until the next step. For cDNA synthesis, the stem-loop method and 2x real-time polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) (Taq) pre-mixture kit (BioFACT, Seoul) were used. Gene expression level was evaluated by SYBR Green Master Mix (Takara, Korea) Step-one and qPCR device (Applied Biosystems, USA). In addition, the housekeeping gene of this study was GAPDH. Formula 2<sup>-ΔCT</sup> was used to calculate the relative LncRNA expression (Table 2).

#### *Statistical analyses*

Statistical analyses were evaluated using GraphPad Prism 6. A paired t-test was used for comparisons among malignant tissues and healthy marginal tissues from the same patient. For comparisons of independent group, like chemotherapy-exposed with unexposed patients and metastatic with non-metastatic cases, an unpaired t-test was applied. The normality of the data was evaluated via Kolmogorov-Smirnov test before performing t-tests to ensure appropriate application ( $P$ -value < 0.05, mean ± SD). Also, Benjamini-Hochberg FDR correction was used to adjust  $P$ -values when performing multiple comparisons.

**Table 2.** Primer sequencing for target genes

		Annealing temperature (°C)
TMPO-AS1-	Forward: 5'-AGACGCCGATAAGGGACAG-3' Reverse: 5'-AGCCAAGGGTCTCTACA-3'	58.8
GAPDH	Forward: 5'-CAAGATCATCAGCAATGCCTCC-3' Reverse: 5'-GCCATCACGCCACAGTTTCC-3'	59

## Results

### *TMPO-AS1 overexpression in TCGA breast tumor samples*

For the pre-estimation of TMPO-AS1 dysregulation in breast tumor, we firstly analyzed TCGA datasets for breast cancer. As shown in figure 1, the TMPO-AS1 expression level was significantly increased in breast cancer samples compared with healthy breast samples ( $P < 0.0001$ , fold change: 1.128). These results showed that the TMPO-AS1 could be associated with the pathogenesis of breast malignancy.

### *TMPO-AS1 expression status in clinical sample*

To compare the obtained results from the TCGA database with the clinical sample, the lncRNA expression level of the TMPO-AS1 genes was evaluated in 50 breast tumor tissues samples compared with healthy margin tissues and then was statistically analyzed. Furthermore, qRT-PCR results and clinicopathological features of breast cancer cases, like age, tumor stage, and lymph node metastasis were analyzed. The data showed that TMPO-AS1 was significantly overexpressed in the tumor samples compared with the healthy margin tissues ( $P < 0.0001$ , fold change: 1.16). Moreover, in breast cancer patients (10 patients negative and 40 patients positive), who were exposed to chemotherapy drugs (5-FU), significant lower expression level of TMPO-AS1 was observed as compared with patients unexposed to chemotherapy ( $P < 0.0001$ , fold change: 0.11). Also, in patients with lymph nodes metastasis (29 patient positive, 21 patients negative) the TMPO-AS1 expression level was up-regulated as compared with negative lymph nodes metastasis patients ( $P = 0.0012$ , fold change = 1.161) (Figure 1).

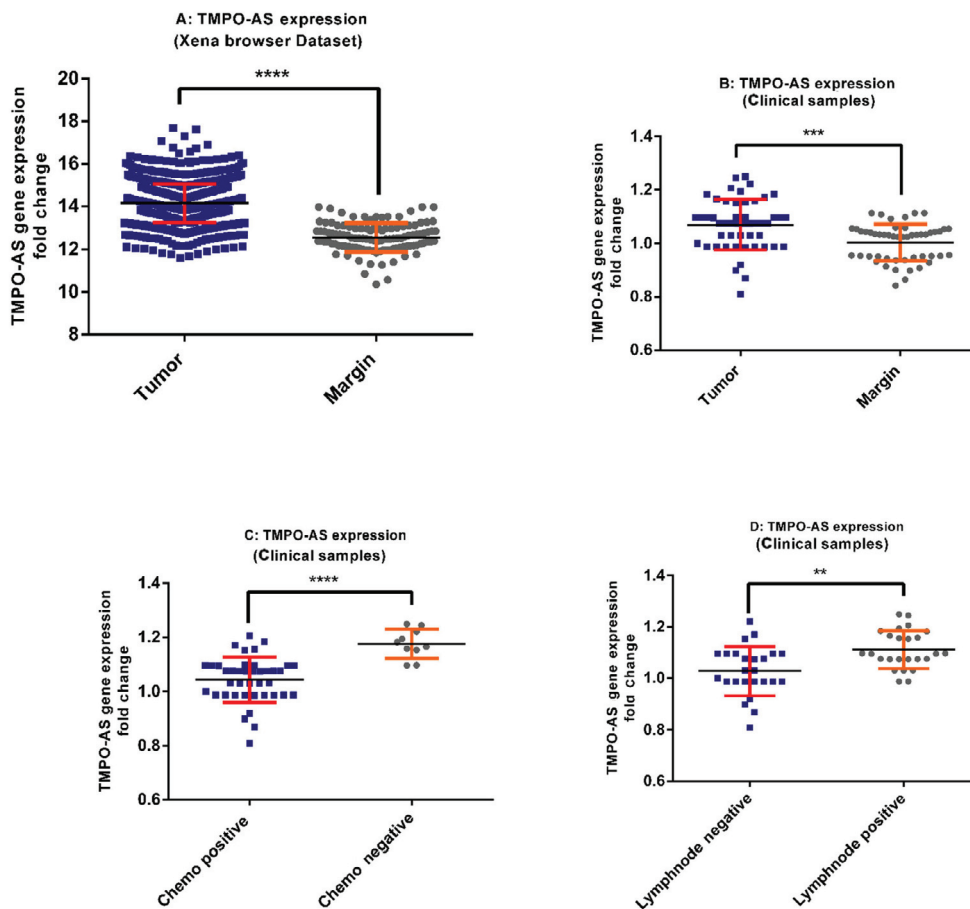
## Discussion

Our study shows that the TMPO-AS1 expression level is significantly high expressed

in breast cancer tissues, and may play critical roles in breast tumorigenesis. Also, we found that the TMPO-AS1 high expression is correlated with cancer development and poor clinical result. We also analyzed the TCGA breast cancer dataset and showed that TMPO-AS1 expression level considerably high expressed in breast malignancy samples compared with breast healthy tissue samples which are similar to our results. We also found that in patients treated with chemotherapy drugs (5-FU and doxorubicin), the TMPO-AS1 expression level significantly reduced as compared with patients untreated with chemotherapy. Also, we showed that the expression level of TMPO-AS1 was highly expressed in lymph node metastatic patients than negative lymph nodes metastasis patients. According to the receiver operating characteristic curve analysis, we found that the expression level of TMPO-AS1 in breast cancer samples could be served as a prognostic and diagnostic marker in breast malignancy (Figure 2). Also, we carefully considered several clinicopathological variables that may affect TMPO-AS1 expression. These factors can affect gene expression profiles and potentially confuse the observed results. To control the influence of these factor, we performed subgroup analyses to evaluate the TMPO-AS1 expression across different tumor grades (low vs. high), and lymph node metastasis status (positive vs. negative) and patients exposed to chemotherapy drugs vs. patients unexposed to chemotherapy drugs. This method let us consider the potential relationship between TMPO-AS1 and these clinicopathological features. Change in lncRNAs expression levels has been widely proved to be associated with malignancies development and could be used as an effective marker for early detection in several human malignancies.<sup>16</sup> Previous studies indicated that the suppression of the TMPO-AS1 expression prevents the metastasis and growth of triple-

negative breast malignancy. Mitobe et al. recommended that TMPO-AS1 have a central role in the pathophysiology of triple-negative breast malignancy and might be used as a therapeutic target.<sup>13</sup> TMPO-AS1 that placed on the opposite strand of gene TMPO, is highly expressed in lung adenocarcinoma (LUAD) and related to the LUAD patients prognosis.<sup>17</sup> Peng et al., by analyzing microarray datasets of LUAD, indicated that TMPO-AS1 was upregulated in LUAD cases and could be served as a prognostic factor.<sup>18</sup> In the prostate tumor, Huang et al. demonstrated that TMPO-AS1 could be used as a prognostic and diagnostic factor and its upregulation induced cell progression, growth,

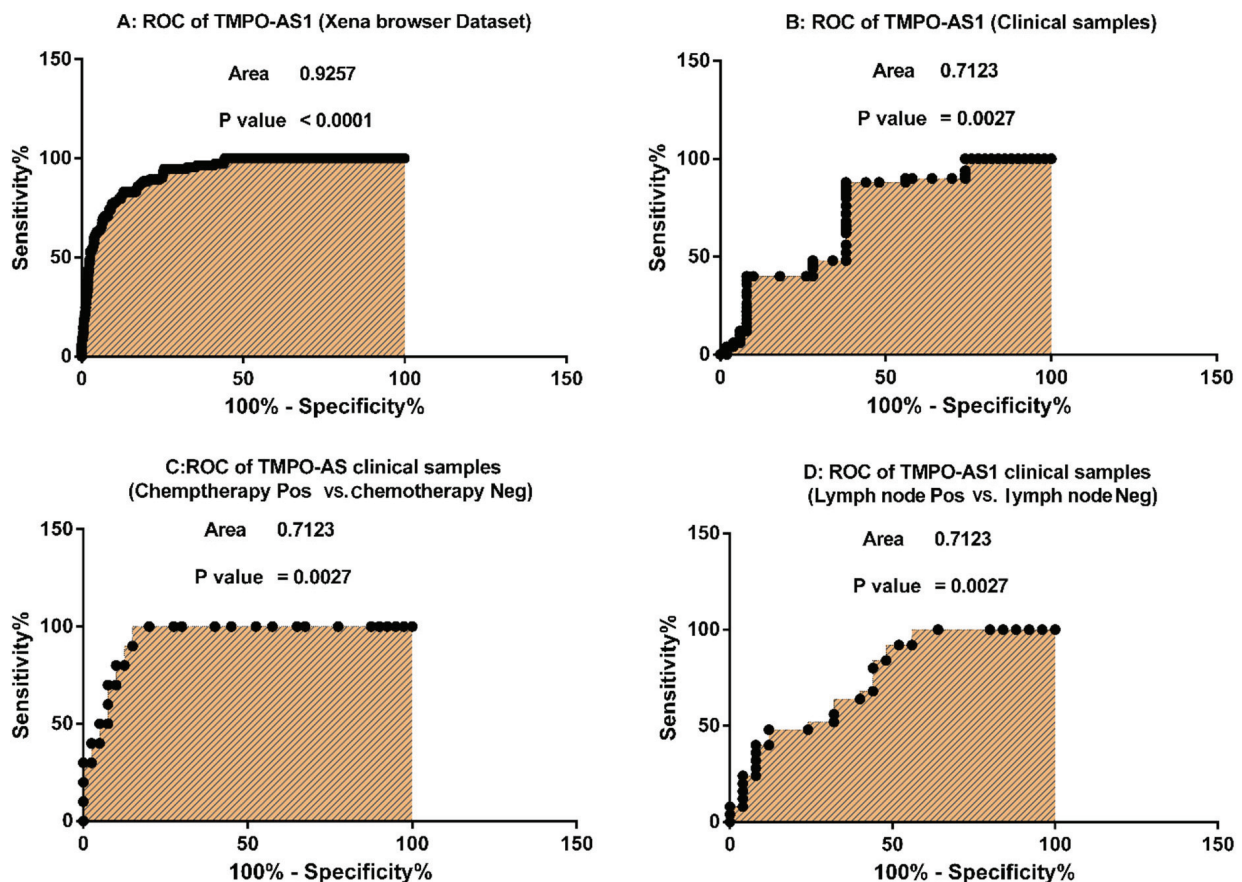
and metastasis.<sup>14</sup> New reports showed that TMPO-AS1 has an oncogene function in various malignancies. For example, TMPO-AS1 induces growth, invasion, and metastasis in cervical malignancy cells via promoting ras-related protein Rab-14 (RAB14) by miR-143 sponging.<sup>19</sup> In hepatocellular carcinoma, Guo et al. confirmed that TMPO-AS1 activate tumor cells' growth, invasion, and metastasis via miR-329-3p sponging by the promotion of the AKT-mammalian target of rapamycin (AKT-mTOR) axis.<sup>20</sup> Cui et al. indicated that TMPO-AS1 has a ceRNA function to induce osteosarcoma carcinogenesis via sponging the miR-199a-5p-Wnt Family Member axis. They reported that TMPO-AS1 is



**Figure 1.** Expression levels of TMPO-AS1 across different breast cancer groups. This figure illustrates the differential expression of TMPO-AS1 in various breast cancer-related groups. (A) TMPO-AS1 expression levels derived from TCGA dataset using the Xena Functional Genomics Browser, comparing breast cancer samples to normal tissue samples. (B) Quantitative expression analysis of TMPO-AS1 in clinical samples, comparing breast cancer tissues with their paired normal marginal tissues. (C) Comparison of TMPO-AS1 expression levels between patients who received chemotherapy (5-FU) and those who did not undergo chemotherapy. (D) TMPO-AS1 expression levels in patients with lymph node metastasis compared with those without metastasis. Statistical significance is indicated by \* $P < 0.1$ , \*\* $P < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $P < 0.001$ , and \*\*\*\* $P < 0.00001$ . (5-fluorouracil; 5-fu, The Cancer Genome Atlas: TCGA).

significantly upregulated in osteosarcoma. Additionally, suppression of the TMPO-AS1 expression prevents the promotion of the Wnt/ $\beta$ -catenin axis and cell progression, and induces apoptosis.<sup>21</sup> Peng et al. indicated that TMPO-AS1 has an oncogenic role and could be used as a therapeutic target prognostic, and diagnostic marker in prostate cancer.<sup>18</sup> Ning et al. showed that silencing of TMPO-AS1 increases the docetaxel sensitivity via direct inhibition of miR-1179 in breast cancer (acts as a tumor suppressor).<sup>22</sup> Zhu et al. indicated that the expression of TMPO-AS1 is significantly upregulated in breast tumors compared with adjacent healthy tissues. In vivo and in vitro studies have established that suppression of the

TMPO-AS1 expression significantly reduces breast tumor cell survival, migration, and invasion compared with the control group. Their outcomes recommended that TMPO-AS1 could be used as therapeutic target in breast malignancy.<sup>23</sup> Yu et al. indicated that TMPO-AS1 induces the progression, migration, and growth of non-small cell lung cancer through sponging miR-204-3p, which leads to ERBB2 upregulating.<sup>24, 25</sup> Also, Luo et al. established that TMPO-AS1 induces the progression and metastasis of bladder tumor cells by sponging miR-98-5p.<sup>26</sup> Xing et al. indicated that suppression of the TMPO-AS1 expression prevents the proliferation, progression, and colony formation capabilities of nasopharyngeal carcinoma cells in vivo and in



**Figure 2.** ROC curve analysis of TMPO-AS1 for diagnostic potential in breast cancer. This figure illustrates the ROC curve used to evaluate the diagnostic performance of TMPO-AS1 expression in distinguishing breast cancer tissues from normal marginal tissues. AUC value represents the diagnostic accuracy, with higher values indicating better discriminatory ability. The curve demonstrates the sensitivity and specificity of TMPO-AS1 expression as a potential biomarker for breast cancer detection.

ROC: Receiver operating characteristic, AUC: Area under the curve; Pos: Positive; Neg: Negative

vitro.<sup>27</sup> Mitobe et al. indicated that TMPO-AS1 overexpression induces estrogen receptor-positive breast tumor cell progression and growth.<sup>13</sup> Peng et al. demonstrated that TMPO-AS1 expression level is abnormally increased in retinoblastoma cells, which leads to promoting the progression, growth, and metastasis of retinoblastoma cells through sponging miR-199a-5p and HIF-1 $\alpha$  high expression.<sup>28</sup> TMPO-AS1 as a potential biomarker has been extended to provide a more detailed comparison with other well-known breast cancer biomarkers as well as Ki-67 (a proliferation marker),<sup>29</sup> proliferating cell nuclear antigen (PCNA) (DNA replication and cell cycle regulation marker),<sup>30</sup> and HER2 (a key predictive marker for targeted therapy response).<sup>31</sup> Although Ki-67 and PCNA are broadly used to evaluate tumor proliferation, TMPO-AS1 may provide additional molecular insights into breast cancer development, mostly in its association with nuclear structural integrity and chromatin organization. Unlike HER2, which serves as a therapeutic target, the potential role of TMPO-AS1 seems to be more associated with cancer development and migration potential.

The main limitations of the present study include the relatively small sample size, which may affect the generalizability of the results, absence of longitudinal follow-up data, which restricts the ability to assess the prognostic value of TMPO-AS1 over time and restrictions to evaluate other potential genes. Our study demonstrates that TMPO-AS1 is highly expressed in breast cancer and its upregulation correlates to the pathogenesis and tumorigenesis of breast cancer.

## Conclusion

The present study indicates that TMPO-AS1 is highly expressed in breast cancer, and its upregulation is related to the pathogenesis and tumorigenesis of breast cancer.

## Acknowledgements

Not applicable.

## Authors' Contribution

Sh.H: Study design, data analysis and interpretation, reviewing the manuscript; H.Z: Study design, writing the draft, reviewing the manuscript; S.N: Study design, data collection, processing and reviewing the manuscript; M.A: Data collection, writing the draft, data analysis and interpretation; T.A: Data collection and processing; D.Sh: Writing the draft, data collection; V.Z: Data collection and writing the draft; R.A.M: Data collection, writing the draft. All authors have read and approved the final manuscript and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

## Funding

This work was funded as a research grant, by the Deputy of Research and Technology, Ministry of Health and Medical Education, Iran (grant number: 700/98,2015.03.14). Also, this study was supported by the Hematology and Oncology Research Center, Tabriz University of Medical Sciences (ID: 60156).

## Conflict of Interest

None declared.

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