Search for pair production of third-generation scalar leptoquarks and top squarks in proton–proton collisions at $\sqrt{s} = 8$ TeV

CMS Collaboration*

CERN, Switzerland

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A search for pair production of third-generation scalar leptoquarks and supersymmetric top quark partners, top squarks, in final states involving tau leptons and bottom quarks is presented. The search uses events from a data sample of proton–proton collisions corresponding to an integrated luminosity of 19.7 fb$^{-1}$, collected with the CMS detector at the LHC with $\sqrt{s} = 8$ TeV. The number of observed events is found to be in agreement with the expected standard model background. Third-generation scalar leptoquarks with masses below 740 GeV are excluded at 95% confidence level, assuming a 100% branching fraction for the leptoquark decay to a tau lepton and a bottom quark. In addition, this mass limit applies directly to top squarks decaying via an R-parity violating coupling $\lambda_{ijk}^β$. The search also considers a similar signature from top squarks undergoing a chargino-mediated decay involving the R-parity violating coupling $\lambda_{ijk}^α$. Each top squark decays to a tau lepton, a bottom quark, and two light quarks. Top squarks in this model with masses below 580 GeV are excluded at 95% confidence level. The constraint on the leptoquark mass is the most stringent to date, and this is the first search for top squarks decaying via $\lambda_{ijk}^β$.

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1. Introduction

Many extensions of the standard model (SM) predict new scalar or vector bosons, called leptoquarks (LQ), which carry non-zero lepton and baryon numbers, as well as color and fractional electric charge. Examples of such SM extensions include SU(5) grand unification [1], Pati–Salam SU(4) [2], composite models [3], superstrings [4], and technicolor models [5]. Leptoquarks decay into a quark and a lepton, with a model-dependent branching fraction for each possible decay. Experimental limits on flavor-changing neutral currents and other rare processes suggest that searches should focus on leptoquarks that couple to quarks and leptons within the same SM generation, for leptoquark masses accessible to current colliders [6].

The dominant pair production mechanisms for leptoquarks at the CERN LHC would be gluon–gluon fusion and quark–antiquark annihilation via quantum chromodynamic (QCD) couplings. The cross sections for these processes depend only on the leptoquark mass for scalar leptoquarks. In this Letter, a search with the CMS detector for third-generation scalar leptoquarks, each decaying to a tau lepton and a bottom quark, is presented.

Similar signatures arising from supersymmetric models are also covered by this search. Supersymmetry (SUSY) [7,8] is an attractive extension of the SM because it can resolve the hierarchy problem without unnatural fine-tuning, if the masses of the supersymmetric partner of the top quark (top squark) and the supersymmetric partners of the Higgs boson (higgsinos) are not too large [9,10]. In many natural SUSY models the top squark and the higgsinos are substantially lighter than the other scalar SUSY particles. This light top squark scenario can be realized in both R-parity conserving (RPC) and R-parity violating (RPV) SUSY models, where R-parity is a new quantum number [11] that distinguishes SM and SUSY particles. In the context of an RPC decay of the top squark, the presence of an undetected particle (the lightest SUSY particle) is expected to generate a signature with large missing transverse momentum. If R-parity is violated, however, SUSY particles can decay into final states containing only SM particles. The RPV terms in the superpotential are:

$$W \supset \frac{1}{2} \lambda_{ijk} L_i L_j E_k^c + \lambda_{ijk}^α L_i Q_j D_k^c + \frac{1}{2} \lambda_{ijk}^β U_i^c D_j^c D_k^c + \mu_4 L_i H_u$$  \hspace{1cm} (1)$$

where $W$ is the superpotential; $L$ is the lepton doublet superfield; $E$ is the lepton singlet superfield; $Q$ is the quark doublet superfield; $U$ and $D$ are the quark singlet superfields; $H_u$ is the Higgs

* E-mail address: cms-publication-committee-chair@cern.ch.

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doublet superfield that couples to up-type quarks; $\lambda$, $\lambda'$, and $\lambda''$ are coupling constants; and $i$, $j$, and $k$ are generation indices.

At the LHC, top squarks ($\tilde{t}$) would be directly pair-produced via strong interactions. In this search, two different decay channels of directly produced top squarks are considered. Both scenarios relate to simplified models in which all of the other SUSY particles have masses too large to participate in the interactions. In the first case we study the two-body lepton number violating decay $\tilde{t} \rightarrow \nu \tilde{b}$ [11] with a coupling constant $\lambda_{33}\tilde{t}$ allowed by the trilinear RPV operators. The final-state signature and kinematics distributions of such a signal are identical to those from the pair production of third-generation scalar leptoquarks. When the masses of the supersymmetric partners of the gluon and quarks, excluding the top squark, are large, the top squark pair production cross section is the same as that of the third generation LQ. Thus, the results of the leptoquark search can be directly interpreted in the context of RPV top squarks.

In some natural SUSY models [12], if the higgsinos ($\tilde{\psi}^0$, $\tilde{\chi}^0$) are lighter than the top squark, or if the RPV couplings that allow direct decays to SM particles are sufficiently small, the top squark decay may preferentially proceed via superpartners. In the second part of the search we focus on a scenario in which the dominant RPC decay of the top squark is $\tilde{t} \rightarrow \nu \tilde{b}$. This requires the mass splitting between the top squark and the chargino to be less than the mass of the top quark, so it is chosen to be 100 GeV. The chargino is assumed to be a pure higgsino and to be nearly degenerate in mass with the neutralino. We consider the case when $\tilde{\chi}^+ \rightarrow \nu \tilde{\tau}$, where the cases $\tilde{\chi}_{1,2}^\pm$ are considered. Such signal models can only be probed by searches that do not require large missing transverse momentum, as the other decay of the chargino, $\tilde{\chi}^- \rightarrow \nu \tilde{\tau}$, does not contribute to scenarios involving the $\lambda_{3jk}\tilde{t}$ coupling because of chiral suppression. From such a signal process, we expect events with two tau leptons, two jets originating from hadronization of the bottom quarks, and at least four additional jets.

In this Letter, the search for scalar leptoquarks and top squarks decaying through the coupling $\lambda_{33}\tilde{t}$ is referred to as the leptoquark search. The search for the chargino-mediated decay of top squarks involving the $\lambda_{3jk}\tilde{t}$ coupling is referred to as the top squark search. The data sample used in this search has been recorded with the CMS detector in proton–proton collisions at a center-of-mass energy of 8 TeV and corresponds to an integrated luminosity of 19.7 fb$^{-1}$. One of the tau leptons in the final state is required to decay leptonically: $\tau \rightarrow \ell\nu\nu\nu$, where $\ell$ can be either an electron or a muon, denoted as a light lepton. The other tau lepton is required to decay to hadrons ($k$: $\tau \rightarrow \text{hadrons} + \nu_\tau$). These decays result in two possible final states labeled below as $\tau_{\ell}$ and $\tau_{k}$, or collectively $\tau_{\ell k}$, when the lepton flavor is unimportant. The leptoquark search is performed in a mass range from 200 to 1000 GeV using a sample of events containing one light lepton, a hadronically decaying tau lepton, and at least two jets, with at least one of the jets identified as originating from bottom quark hadronization (b-tagged). The top squark search is performed in a mass range from 200 to 800 GeV using a sample of events containing one light lepton, a hadronically decaying tau lepton, and at least five jets, with at least one of the jets b-tagged.

No evidence for third-generation leptoquarks or top squarks decaying to tau leptons and bottom quarks has been found in previous searches [13,14]. The most stringent lower limit to date on the mass of a scalar third generation leptoquark decaying to a tau lepton and a bottom quark with a 100% branching fraction is about 530 GeV from both the CMS and ATLAS experiments. This Letter also presents the first search for the chargino-mediated decay of the top squark through the RPV coupling $\lambda_{3jk}\tilde{t}$.

2. The CMS detector

The central feature of the CMS apparatus is a superconducting solenoid, of 6 m internal diameter, providing a field of 3.8 T. Within the field volume are several subdetectors. A silicon pixel and strip tracker allows the reconstruction of the trajectories of charged particles within the pseudorapidity range $|\eta| < 2.5$. The calorimetry system consists of a lead tungstate crystal electromagnetic calorimeter (ECAL) and a brass and scintillator hadron calorimeter, and measures particle energy depositions for $|\eta| < 3$. The CMS detector also has extensive forward calorimetry ($2.8 < |\eta| < 5.2$). Muons are measured in gas-ionization detectors embedded in the steel flux-return yoke of the magnet. Collision events are selected using a two-tiered trigger system [15]. A more detailed description of the CMS detector, together with a definition of the coordinate system used and the relevant kinematic variables, can be found in Ref. [16].

3. Object and event selection

Candidate LQ or top squark events were collected using a set of triggers requiring the presence of either an electron or a muon with transverse momentum ($p_T$) above a threshold of 27 or 24 GeV, respectively.

Both electrons and muons are required to be reconstructed within the range $|\eta| < 2.1$ and to have $p_T > 30$ GeV. Electrons, reconstructed using information from the ECAL and the tracker, are required to have an electromagnetic shower shape consistent with that of an electron, and an energy deposition in ECAL that is compatible with the track reconstructed in the tracker. Muons are required to be reconstructed by both the tracker and the muon spectrometer. A particle-flow (PF) technique [17–19] is used for the reconstruction of hadronically decaying tau lepton candidates. In the PF approach, information from all subdetectors is combined to reconstruct and identify all final-state particles produced in the collision. The particles are classified as either charged hadrons, neutral hadrons, electrons, muons, or photons. These particles are used with the “hadron plus strips” algorithm [20] to identify $\tau_0$ objects. Hadronically decaying tau leptons with one or three charged pions and up to two neutral pions are reconstructed. The reconstructed $\tau_0$ is required to have visible $p_T > 50$ GeV and $|\eta| < 2.3$. Electrons, muons, and tau leptons are required to be isolated from other reconstructed particles. The identified electron (muon) and $\tau_0$ are required to originate from the same vertex and be separated by $\Delta R = \sqrt{(\Delta \eta)^2 + (\Delta \phi)^2} > 0.5$. The light lepton and the $\tau_0$ are also required to have opposite electric charge. Events are vetoed if another light lepton is found, passing the kinematic, identification, and isolation criteria described above, that has an opposite electric charge from the selected light lepton.

Jets are reconstructed using the anti-$k_T$ algorithm [21,22] with a size parameter 0.5 using particle candidates reconstructed with the PF technique. Jet energies are corrected by subtracting the average contribution from particles coming from other proton–proton collisions in the same beam crossing (pileup) and by applying a jet energy calibration, determined empirically [23]. Jets are required to be within $|\eta| < 2.4$, have $p_T > 30$ GeV, and be separated from both the light lepton and the $\tau_0$ by $\Delta R > 0.5$. The minimum jet $p_T$ requirement eliminates most jets from pileup interactions. Jets are b-tagged using the combined secondary vertex algorithm with the loose operating point [24]. In the leptoquark search, the b-tagged jet with the highest $p_T$ is selected, and then the remaining jet with the highest $p_T$ is selected whether or not it is b-tagged. In the top squark search, the b-tagged jet with the highest $p_T$ is selected, and then the remaining four jets with the highest $p_T$ are selected whether or not they are b-tagged.
To discriminate between signal and background in the leptoquark search, the mass of the $\tau_{b}$ and a jet, denoted $M(\tau_{b}, \text{jet})$, is required to be greater than 250 GeV. There are two possible pairings of the $\tau_{b}$ with the two required jets. The pairing is chosen to minimize the difference between the mass of the $\tau_{b}$ and one jet and the mass of the light lepton and another jet. According to a simulation, the correct pairing is selected in approximately 70% of events.

The $S_{\tau}$ distribution after the final selection is used to extract the limits on both the leptoquark and top squark signal scenarios, where $S_{\tau}$ is defined as the scalar sum of the $p_{T}$ of the light lepton, the $\tau_{b}$, and the two jets (five jets) for the leptoquark search (top squark search).

4. Background and signal models

Several SM processes can mimic the final-state signatures expected from leptoquark or top squark pair production and decay. For this analysis, the backgrounds are divided into three groups, which are denoted as $t\bar{t}$ irreducible, major reducible, and other. The $t\bar{t}$ irreducible background comes from the pair production of top quarks ($t\bar{t}$) when both the light lepton and $\tau_{b}$ are genuine, each produced from the decay of a $W$ boson. In this case, the light lepton can originate either directly from the $W$ boson decay or from a decay chain $W \rightarrow \tau_{b} \nu_{\tau} \rightarrow \ell_{\nu} \nu_{\ell} \nu_{\tau}$. The major reducible background consists of events in which a quark or gluon jet is misidentified as a $\tau_{b}$. The processes contributing to the major reducible background are associated production of a $W$ or $Z$ boson with jets, and $t\bar{t}$. Additionally, a small contribution from the QCD multijet process is included, in which both the light lepton and the $\tau_{b}$ are misidentified jets. The third group, other backgrounds, consists of processes that make small contributions and may contain either genuine or misidentified tau leptons. This includes the diboson and single-top-quark processes, the $t\bar{t}$ and $Z+\text{jets}$ processes when a light lepton is misidentified as a $\tau_{b}$, and the $Z+\text{jets}$ process when the $Z$ boson decays to a pair of tau leptons. The other backgrounds are estimated from the simulation described below, while the $t\bar{t}$ irreducible and major reducible backgrounds are estimated using observed data. The major reducible and other backgrounds include events with both genuine and misidentified light leptons.

The PYTHIA v6.4.24 generator [25] is used to model the signal and diboson processes. The leptoquark signal samples are generated with masses ranging from 200 to 1000 GeV, and the top squark signal samples are generated with masses ranging from 200 to 800 GeV and the sneutrino mass set to 2000 GeV. The MADGRAPH v5.1.3.30 generator [26] is used to model the $t\bar{t}$, $W+\text{jets}$, and $Z+\text{jets}$ processes. This generation includes contributions from heavy-flavor and extra jets. The single top-quark production is modeled with the POWHEG 1.0 r138 [27–29] generator. Both the MADGRAPH and POWHEG generators are interfaced with PYTHIA for hadronization and showering. The TAUOLA program [30] is used for tau lepton decays in the leptoquark, $t\bar{t}$, $W+\text{jets}$, $Z+\text{jets}$, diboson, and single top-quark samples. Each sample is passed through a full simulation of the CMS detector based on GEANT4 [31] and the complete set of reconstruction algorithms is used to analyze collision data. Cross sections for the leptoquark signal and diboson processes are calculated to next-to-leading order (NLO) [32,33]. The cross sections for the top squark signal are calculated at NLO in the strong coupling constant, including the resummation of soft gluon emission at next-to-leading-logarithmic accuracy (NLO + NLL) [34–38]. The next-to-next-to-leading-order or approximate next-to-next-to-leading-order [39,40] cross sections are used for the rest of the background processes.

The efficiencies of the trigger and final selection criteria for signal processes are estimated from the simulation. The efficiencies for light leptons and $b$ jets are calculated from data and used where necessary to correct the event selection efficiency estimations from the simulation. No correction is required for hadronically decaying tau leptons.

The $t\bar{t}$ irreducible background is estimated from an $e\mu$ sample that is 87% pure in $t\bar{t}$ events according to the simulation. The contributions from other processes are simulated and subtracted from the observed data. This sample comprises events with one electron and one muon that satisfy the remaining final selection criteria, except that a $\tau_{b}$ is not required. The potential signal contamination of this sample has been found to be negligible for any signal mass hypothesis. The final yield of the $e\mu$ sample is scaled by the relative difference in the selection efficiencies between the $\ell\tau_{b}$ and $e\mu$ samples. The selection efficiencies are measured in the simulation and are corrected to match those from collision data. The estimation of the final yield based on the observed data agrees with both the direct prediction from the simulation and the yield obtained after applying the same method to the Monte Carlo (MC) samples. The $S_{\tau}$ distribution for the $t\bar{t}$ irreducible background is obtained from a simulated $t\bar{t}$ sample that consists exclusively of fully leptonic decays of top quarks.

The major reducible background from $t\bar{t}$, $W+\text{jets}$, and $Z+\text{jets}$ events in which a jet is misidentified as a hadronically decaying tau lepton is estimated from observed data. The probability of misidentification is measured using events recorded with a $Z$ boson produced in association with jets and decaying to a pair of muons ($Z \rightarrow \mu\mu$). The invariant mass of the muon pair is required to be greater than 50 GeV and events are required to contain at least one jet that is incorrectly identified as a $\tau_{b}$ and may or may not pass the isolation requirement. The misidentification probability $f(p_{T}(\tau))$ is calculated as the fraction of these $\tau_{b}$ candidates that pass the isolation requirement and depends on the $p_{T}$ of the candidates. The background yield is estimated from a sample of events satisfying the final selection criteria, except that all $\tau_{b}$ candidates in the events must fail the isolation requirement. Eq. (2) relates the yield of these "anti-isolated" events to the yield of events passing the final selection, using the misidentification probability:

$$N_{\text{misid}}(\tau) = \sum_{\text{events}} \frac{(\text{anti-iso})}{\sum_{\text{events}} \left(1 - f(p_{T}(\tau))\right)}.$$  

The estimation of the final yield based on the observed data agrees with both the direct prediction from the simulation and the estimation performed using the same approach on simulated samples. The $S_{\tau}$ distribution for the major reducible background is obtained using simulated samples for the $W+\text{jets}$ and $Z+\text{jets}$ processes and the $t\bar{t}$ process with exclusively semi-leptonic decays.

The QCD multijet process contributes only in the $\tau_{b}$ channel in the leptoquark search and corresponds to 16% of the reducible background. The contribution from multijet events is estimated from a sample of observed events satisfying the final selection criteria for the $\tau_{b}$ channel except that the electron and $\tau_{b}$ must have the same electric charge. The QCD component is included in the distribution of the rest of the major reducible background, described above.

5. Systematic uncertainties

There are a number of systematic uncertainties associated with both the background estimation and the signal efficiency. The uncertainty in the total integrated luminosity is 2.6% [41]. The uncertainty in the trigger and lepton efficiencies is 2%, while the
uncertainty assigned to the $\tau_b$ identification efficiency is 6%. The uncertainties in the b-tagging efficiency and mistagging probability depend on the $\eta$ and $p_T$ of the jet and are on average 4% and 10%, respectively [42].

Systematic uncertainties, totaling 19–22% depending on the channel and the search, are assigned to the normalization of the $t\bar{t}$ irreducible background based on statistical uncertainty in the control samples and the propagation of the uncertainties in the acceptances, efficiencies, and subtraction of the contributions from other processes in the $e\mu$ sample. Systematic uncertainties in the major reducible background are driven by statistical uncertainty in the measured misidentification probability and variation in the misidentification probability based on the event topology. These uncertainties amount to 16–24%, depending on the channel and the search.

Because of the limited number of events in the simulation, uncertainties in the small backgrounds range between 20–50%. Uncertainty due to the effect of pileup modeling in the MC is estimated to be 3%. A 4% uncertainty, due to modeling of initial- and final-state radiation in the simulation, is assigned to the signal acceptance. The uncertainty in the initial- and final-state radiation was found to have a negligible effect on the simulated backgrounds. A 7–32% uncertainty from knowledge of parton distribution functions and a 14–80% uncertainty from QCD renormalization and factorization scales are assigned to the theoretical signal cross-section. Finally, jet energy scale uncertainties (2–4% depending on $\eta$ and $p_T$) and energy resolution uncertainties (5–10% depending on $\eta$), as well as energy scale (3%) and resolution (10%) uncertainties for $\tau_b$, affect both the $S_T$ distributions and the expected yields from the signal and background processes.

6. Results

The numbers of observed events and expected signal and background events after the final selection for the leptoquark and top squark searches are listed in Tables 1 and 2, respectively, and the selection efficiencies for the two signals are listed in Tables 3 and 4. The $S_T$ distributions of the selected events from the observed data and from the background predictions, combining $e\tau_b$ and $\mu\tau_b$ channels, are shown in Fig. 1 for the leptoquark search and Fig. 2 for the top squark search. The distribution from the 500 GeV (300 GeV) signal hypothesis is added to the background in Fig. 1 (Fig. 2) to illustrate how a hypothetical signal would appear above the background prediction. The data agree well with the SM background prediction.

An upper bound at 95% confidence level (CL) is set on $\sigma B^2$, where $\sigma$ is the cross section for pair production of third-generation LQs (top squarks) and $B$ is the branching fraction for the LQ decay to a tau lepton and a bottom quark (the top squark decay to a $\tilde{\chi}^\pm$ and a bottom quark, with a subsequent decay of the chargino via $\tilde{\chi}^{\pm} \rightarrow \tilde{\nu} \tau^{\pm} \rightarrow q \nu \tau^{\pm}$). The symbol $M_{LQ}$ is used for the leptoquark mass and the symbol $M_{T'}$ is used for the top squark mass. The modified-frequentist construction $C_L$ [43–45] is used for the limit calculation. A maximum likelihood fit is performed to the $S_T$ spectrum simultaneously for the $e\tau_b$ and $\mu\tau_b$ channels, taking into account correlations between the systematic uncertainties. Expected and observed upper limits on $\sigma B^2$ as a function of the signal mass are shown in Fig. 3 for the leptoquark search and Fig. 4 for the top squark search.

We extend the current limits and exclude scalar leptoquarks and top squarks decaying through the coupling $\lambda_{323}$ with masses below 740 GeV, in agreement with a limit at 750 GeV, expected in the absence of a signal. We exclude top squarks undergoing a
The expected and observed combined upper limits on the third-generation LQ pair production cross section \( \sigma \) times the square of the branching fraction, \( B^2 \), at 95% CL, as a function of the LQ mass. These limits also apply to top squarks decaying directly via the coupling \( \lambda'_{3jk} \). The green (darker) and yellow (lighter) uncertainties represent 68% and 95% CL intervals on the expected limit. The dark blue curve and the hatched light blue band represent the theoretical LQ pair production cross section, assuming \( B^2 = 100\% \), and the uncertainties due to the choice of PDF and renormalization/factorization scales. (For interpretation of the references to color in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.)

The expected and observed combined upper limits on the top squark pair production cross section \( \sigma \) times the square of the branching fraction, \( B^2 \), at 95% CL, as a function of the top squark mass. These limits apply to top squarks with a chargino-mediated decay through the coupling \( \lambda'_{3jk} \). The green (darker) and yellow (lighter) uncertainties represent 68% and 95% CL intervals on the expected limit. The dark blue curve and the hatched light blue band represent the theoretical top squark pair production cross section, assuming \( B^2 = 100\% \), and the uncertainties due to the choice of PDF and renormalization/factorization scales. (For interpretation of the references to color in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.)

The upper bounds for the leptoquark search as a function of the leptoquark branching fraction and mass are shown in Fig. 5. Small \( B \) values are not constrained by this search. Results from the CMS experiment on a search for top squarks decaying to a top quark and a neutralino [46] are used to further constrain \( B \). If the neutralino is massless, the final state kinematic distributions for such a signal are the same as those for the pair production of leptoquarks decaying to a tau neutrino and a top quark. Limits can therefore be placed on this signal, which must have a branching fraction of \( 1 - B \) if the leptoquark only decays to third-generation fermions. This reinterpretation is included in Fig. 5. The unexcluded region at \( M_{LQ} = 200–230 \text{ GeV} \) corresponds to a portion of phase space where it is topologically very difficult to distinguish between the top squark signal and the t\!t process, owing to small missing transverse momentum. A top squark excess in this region would imply an excess in the measured t\!t cross section of \( \sim 10\% \).

7. Summary

A search for pair production of third-generation scalar leptoquarks and top squarks has been presented. The search for
leptoquarks and top squarks decaying through the R-parity violating coupling $\lambda_{33}^{\prime}$ is performed in final states that include an electron or a muon, a hadronically decaying tau lepton, and at least two jets, at least one of which is b-tagged. The search for top squarks undergoing a chargino-mediated decay involving the R-parity violating coupling $\lambda_{3jk}^{\prime}$ is performed in events containing an electron or a muon, a hadronically decaying tau lepton, and at least five jets, at least one of which is b-tagged. No excesses above the standard model background prediction are observed in the $S_t$ distributions. Assuming a 100% branching fraction for the decay to a tau lepton and a bottom quark, scalar leptoquarks and top squarks decaying through $\lambda_{33}^{\prime}$ with masses below 740 GeV are excluded at 95% confidence level. Top squarks decaying through $\lambda_{3jk}^{\prime}$ with masses below 580 GeV are excluded at 95% confidence level, assuming a 100% branching fraction for the decay to a tau lepton, a bottom quark, and two light quarks. The constraint on the third-generation leptoquark mass is the most stringent to date, and this is the first search for top squarks decaying through $\lambda_{3jk}^{\prime}$.

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References


Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Brussel, Belgium


Université Libre de Bruxelles, Bruxelles, Belgium


Ghent University, Ghent, Belgium


Université Catholique de Louvain, Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium

N. Beliy, T. Caebers, E. Daubie, G.H. Hammad

Université de Mons, Mons, Belgium


Centro Brasileiro de Pesquisas Físicas, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil


Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

C.A. Bernardes b, S. Dogra a, T.R. Fernandez Perez Tomei a, E.M. Gregores b, P.G. Mercadante b, S.F. Novaes a, Sandra S. Padula a

a Universidade Estadual Paulista, São Paulo, Brazil
b Universidade Federal do ABC, São Paulo, Brazil

A. Aleksandrov, V. Genchev 2, P. Iaydjiev, A. Marinov, S. Piperov, M. Rodozov, S. Stoykova, G. Sultanov, V. Tcholakov, M. Vutova

Institute for Nuclear Research and Nuclear Energy, Sofia, Bulgaria

A. Dimitrov, I. Glushkov, R. Hadjiiska, V. Kozhuharov, L. Litov, B. Pavlov, P. Petkov

University of Sofia, Sofia, Bulgaria


Institute of High Energy Physics, Beijing, China

C. Asawatangtrakuldee, Y. Ban, Y. Guo, Q. Li, W. Li, S. Liu, Y. Mao, S.J. Qian, H. Teng, D. Wang, W. Zou

State Key Laboratory of Nuclear Physics and Technology, Peking University, Beijing, China

C. Avila, L.F. Chaparro Sierra, C. Florez, J.P. Gomez, B. Gomez Moreno, J.C. Sanabria

Universidad de Los Andes, Bogota, Colombia
N. Godinovic, D. Lelas, D. Polic, I. Puljak

University of Split, Faculty of Electrical Engineering, Mechanical Engineering and Naval Architecture, Split, Croatia

Z. Antunovic, M. Kovac

University of Split, Faculty of Science, Split, Croatia

V. Brigljekic, K. Kadija, J. Luetic, D. Mekterovic, L. Sudic

Institute Rudjer Boskovic, Zagreb, Croatia

A. Attikis, G. Mavromanolakis, J. Mousa, C. Nicolaou, F. Ptochos, P.A. Razis

University of Cyprus, Nicosia, Cyprus

M. Bodlak, M. Finger, M. Finger Jr. 8

Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic

Y. Assran 9, S. Elgammal 10, M.A. Mahmoud 11, A. Radi 10.12

Academy of Scientific Research and Technology of the Arab Republic of Egypt, Egyptian Network of High Energy Physics, Cairo, Egypt

M. Kadastik, M. Murumaa, M. Raidal, A. Tiko

National Institute of Chemical Physics and Biophysics, Tallinn, Estonia

P. Eerola, G. Fedi, M. Voutilainen

Department of Physics, University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland


Helsinki Institute of Physics, Helsinki, Finland

J. Talvitie, T. Tuuva

Lappeenranta University of Technology, Lappeenranta, Finland


DSM/IRFU, CEA/Saclay, Gif-sur-Yvette, France


Laboratoire Leprince-Ringuet, Ecole Polytechnique, IN2P3-CNRS, Palaiseau, France


Institut Pluridisciplinaire Hubert Curien, Université de Strasbourg, Université de Haute Alsace Mulhouse, CNRS/IN2P3, Strasbourg, France

S. Gadrat

Centre de Calcul de l’Institut National de Physique Nucleaire et de Physique des Particules, CNRS/IN2P3, Villeurbanne, France


Université de Lyon, Université Claude Bernard Lyon 1, CNRS-IN2P3, Institut de Physique Nucléaire de Lyon, Villeurbanne, France

Z. Tsamalaidze

Institute of High Energy Physics and Informatization, Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi, Georgia


RWTH Aachen University, I. Physikalisches Institut, Aachen, Germany


RWTH Aachen University, III. Physikalisches Institut A, Aachen, Germany


RWTH Aachen University, III. Physikalisches Institut B, Aachen, Germany


Deutsches Elektronen-Synchrotron, Hamburg, Germany


University of Hamburg, Hamburg, Germany


Institut für Experimentelle Kernphysik, Karlsruhe, Germany


Institute of Nuclear and Particle Physics (INPP), NCSR Demokritos, Aghia Paraskevi, Greece

S. Kesisoglou, A. Panagiotou, N. Saoulidou, E. Stiliaris

University of Athens, Athens, Greece
T. Lomtadze\textsuperscript{a}, L. Martini\textsuperscript{a,b}, A. Messineo\textsuperscript{a,b}, C.S. Moon\textsuperscript{a,25}, F. Palla\textsuperscript{a,2}, A. Rizzi\textsuperscript{a,b}, A. Savoy-Navarro\textsuperscript{a,26}, A.T. Serban\textsuperscript{a}, P. Spagnolo\textsuperscript{a}, P. Squillacioti\textsuperscript{a,24}, R. Tenchini\textsuperscript{a}, G. Tonelli\textsuperscript{a,b}, A. Venturi\textsuperscript{a}, P.G. Verdini\textsuperscript{a}, C. Vernieri\textsuperscript{a,c,2}

\textsuperscript{a} INFN Sezione di Pisa, Pisa, Italy
\textsuperscript{b} Università di Pisa, Pisa, Italy
\textsuperscript{c} Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, Pisa, Italy

L. Barone\textsuperscript{a,b}, F. Cavallari\textsuperscript{a}, G. D'imperio\textsuperscript{a,b}, D. Del Re\textsuperscript{a,b}, M. Diemoz\textsuperscript{a}, M. Grassi\textsuperscript{a,b}, C. Jorda\textsuperscript{a}, E. Longo\textsuperscript{a,b}, F. Margaroli\textsuperscript{a,b}, P. Meridiani\textsuperscript{a}, F. Micheli\textsuperscript{a,b,2}, S. Nourbakhsh\textsuperscript{a,b}, G. Organti\textsuperscript{a,b}, R. Paramatti\textsuperscript{a}, S. Rahatlou\textsuperscript{a,b}, C. Rovelli\textsuperscript{a}, F. Santanastasio\textsuperscript{a,b}, L. Soffi\textsuperscript{a,b,2}, P. Traczyk\textsuperscript{a,b}

\textsuperscript{a} INFN Sezione di Roma, Roma, Italy
\textsuperscript{b} Università di Roma, Roma, Italy
\textsuperscript{c} Università del Piemonte Orientale (Novara), Torino, Italy

N. Amapane\textsuperscript{a,b}, R. Arcidiacono\textsuperscript{a,c}, S. Argiro\textsuperscript{a,b,2}, M. Arneodo\textsuperscript{a,c}, R. Bellan\textsuperscript{a,b}, C. Biino\textsuperscript{a}, N. Cartiglia\textsuperscript{a}, S. Casasso\textsuperscript{a,b,2}, M. Costa\textsuperscript{a,b}, A. Degano\textsuperscript{a,b}, N. Demaria\textsuperscript{a}, L. Finco\textsuperscript{a,b}, C. Mariotti\textsuperscript{a}, S. Maselli\textsuperscript{a}, E. Migliore\textsuperscript{a,b}, V. Monaco\textsuperscript{a,b}, M. Musich\textsuperscript{a}, M.M. Obertino\textsuperscript{a,c,2}, G. Ortona\textsuperscript{a,b}, L. Pacher\textsuperscript{a,b}, N. Pastrone\textsuperscript{a}, M. Pelliccioni\textsuperscript{a}, G.L. Pinna Angioni\textsuperscript{a}, A. Potenza\textsuperscript{a,b}, A. Romero\textsuperscript{a,b}, M. Ruspa\textsuperscript{a,c}, R. Sacchi\textsuperscript{a,b}, A. Solano\textsuperscript{a,b}, A. Staiano\textsuperscript{a}, U. Tamponi\textsuperscript{a}

\textsuperscript{a} INFN Sezione di Torino, Torino, Italy
\textsuperscript{b} Università di Torino, Torino, Italy
\textsuperscript{c} Università del Piemonte Orientale (Novara), Torino, Italy

S. Belforte\textsuperscript{a}, V. Candelise\textsuperscript{a,b}, M. Casarsa\textsuperscript{a}, F. Cossutti\textsuperscript{a}, G. Della Ricca\textsuperscript{a,b}, B. Gobbo\textsuperscript{a}, C. La Licata\textsuperscript{a,b}, M. Marone\textsuperscript{a,b}, D. Montanino\textsuperscript{a,b}, A. Schizzi\textsuperscript{a,b,2}, T. Umer\textsuperscript{a,b}, A. Zanetti\textsuperscript{a}

\textsuperscript{a} INFN Sezione di Trieste, Trieste, Italy
\textsuperscript{b} Università di Trieste, Trieste, Italy

S. Chang, A. Kropivnitskaya, S.K. Nam

Kangwon National University, Chuncheon, Republic of Korea

D.H. Kim, G.N. Kim, M.S. Kim, D.J. Kong, S. Lee, Y.D. Oh, H. Park, A. Sakharov, D.C. Son

Kyungpook National University, Daegu, Republic of Korea

T.J. Kim

Chonbuk National University, Jeonju, Republic of Korea

J.Y. Kim, S. Song

Chonnam National University, Institute for Universe and Elementary Particles, Kwangju, Republic of Korea

S. Choi, D. Gyun, B. Hong, M. Jo, H. Kim, Y. Kim, B. Lee, K.S. Lee, S.K. Park, Y. Roh

Korea University, Seoul, Republic of Korea

M. Choi, J.H. Kim, I.C. Park, S. Park, G. Ryu, M.S. Ryu

University of Seoul, Seoul, Republic of Korea


Sungkyunkwan University, Suwon, Republic of Korea

A. Juodagalvis

Vilnius University, Vilnius, Lithuania

J.R. Komaragiri, M.A.B. Md Ali

National Centre for Particle Physics, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

P.N. Lebedev Physical Institute, Moscow, Russia

A. Belyaev, E. Boos, V. Bunichev, M. Dubinin, L. Dudko, A. Ershov, V. Klyukhin, O. Kodolova, I. Lokhtin, S. Obraztsov, S. Petrushanko, V. Savrin, A. Snigirev

Skobeltsyn Institute of Nuclear Physics, Lomonosov Moscow State University, Moscow, Russia


State Research Center of Russian Federation, Institute for High Energy Physics, Protvino, Russia

P. Adzic, M. Ekmedzic, J. Milosevic, V. Rekovic

University of Belgrade, Faculty of Physics and Vinca Institute of Nuclear Sciences, Belgrade, Serbia


Centro de Investigaciones Energéticas Medioambientales y Tecnológicas (CIEMAT), Madrid, Spain

C. Albajar, J.F. de Trocóniz, M. Missiroli, D. Moran

Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Madrid, Spain

H. Brun, J. Cuevas, J. Fernandez Menendez, S. Folgueras, I. Gonzalez Caballero, L. Lloret Iglesias

Universidad de Oviedo, Oviedo, Spain


Instituto de Física de Cantabria (IFCA), CSIC–Universidad de Cantabria, Santander, Spain


CERN, European Organization for Nuclear Research, Geneva, Switzerland


Paul Scherrer Institut, Villigen, Switzerland

Imperial College, London, United Kingdom


Brunel University, Uxbridge, United Kingdom

J. Dittmann, K. Hatakeyama, A. Kasmi, H. Liu, T. Scarborough

Baylor University, Waco, USA

O. Charaf, S.I. Cooper, C. Henderson, P. Rumberio

The University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, USA

A. Avetisyan, T. Bose, C. Fantasia, P. Lawson, C. Richardson, J. Rohlf, D. Sperka, J. St. John, L. Sulak

Boston University, Boston, USA


Brown University, Providence, USA


University of California, Davis, Davis, USA


University of California, Los Angeles, USA


University of California, Riverside, Riverside, USA


University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, USA


University of California, Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara, USA


California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, USA

V. Azzolini, A. Calamba, B. Carlson, T. Ferguson, Y. Iiyama, M. Paulini, J. Russ, H. Vogel, I. Vorobiev

Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, USA

The University of Kansas, Lawrence, USA


Kansas State University, Manhattan, USA

J. Gronberg, D. Lange, F. Rebassoo, D. Wright

Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, Livermore, USA


University of Maryland, College Park, USA


Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, USA


University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, USA

J.G. Acosta, S. Oliveros

University of Mississippi, Oxford, USA


University of Nebraska–Lincoln, Lincoln, USA

J. Dolen, A. Godshalk, I. Iashvili, A. Kharchilava, A. Kumar, S. Rappoccio

State University of New York at Buffalo, Buffalo, USA


Northeastern University, Boston, USA


Northwestern University, Evanston, USA


University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, USA


The Ohio State University, Columbus, USA

Princeton University, Princeton, USA

E. Brownson, H. Mendez, J.E. Ramirez Vargas

University of Puerto Rico, Mayaguez, USA


Purdue University, West Lafayette, USA

N. Parashar, J. Stupak

Purdue University Calumet, Hammond, USA

A. Adair, B. Akgun, K.M. Ecklund, F.J.M. Geurts, W. Li, B. Michlin, B.P. Padley, R. Redjimi, J. Roberts, J. Zabel

Rice University, Houston, USA

B. Betchart, A. Bodek, R. Covarelli, P. de Barbaro, R. Demina, Y. Eshaq, T. Ferbel, A. Garcia-Bellido, P. Goldenzweig, J. Han, A. Harel, A. Khukhunaishvili, G. Petrillo, D. Vishnevskiy

University of Rochester, Rochester, USA

R. Ciesielski, L. Demortier, K. Goulianos, G. Lungu, C. Mesropian

The Rockefeller University, New York, USA


Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, Piscataway, USA

K. Rose, S. Spanier, A. York

University of Tennessee, Knoxville, USA


Texas A&M University, College Station, USA

N. Akchurin, C. Cowden, J. Damgov, C. Dragoi, P.R. Dudero, J. Faulkner, K. Kovitanggoon, S. Kunori, S.W. Lee, T. Libeiro, I. Volobouev

Texas Tech University, Lubbock, USA


Vanderbilt University, Nashville, USA


University of Virginia, Charlottesville, USA
C. Clarke, R. Harr, P.E. Karchin, C. Kottachchi Kankanamge Don, P. Lamichhane, J. Sturdy

Wayne State University, Detroit, USA


University of Wisconsin, Madison, USA

1 Deceased.

2 Also at Vienna University of Technology, Vienna, Austria.

3 Also at CERN, European Organization for Nuclear Research, Geneva, Switzerland.

4 Also at Institut Pluridisciplinaire Hubert Curien, Université de Strasbourg, Université de Haute Alsace Mulhouse, CNRS/IN2P3, Strasbourg, France.

5 Also at National Institute of Chemical Physics and Biophysics, Tallinn, Estonia.

6 Also at Skolkı́ıı́ıın Institute of Nuclear Physics, Lomonosov Moscow State University, Moscow, Russia.

7 Also at Universidade Estadual de Campinas, Campinas, Brazil.

8 Also at Laboratoire Leprince-Ringuet, Ecole Polytechnique, IN2P3-CNRS, Palaiseau, France.

9 Also at Joint Institute for Nuclear Research, Dubna, Russia.

10 Also at Suez University, Suez, Egypt.

11 Also at British University in Egypt, Cairo, Egypt.

12 Also at Fayoum University, El-Fayoum, Egypt.

13 Now at Ain Shams University, Cairo, Egypt.

14 Also at Université de Haute Alsace, Mulhouse, France.

15 Also at Brandenburg University of Technology, Cottbus, Germany.

16 Also at Institute of Nuclear Research ATOMKI, Debrecen, Hungary.

17 Also at Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary.

18 Also at University of Debrecen, Debrecen, Hungary.

19 Also at University of Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan, India.

20 Now at King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

21 Also at University of Ruhuna, Matara, Sri Lanka.

22 Also at Isfahan University of Technology, Isfahan, Iran.

23 Also at Sharif University of Technology, Tehran, Iran.

24 Also at Plasma Physics Research Center, Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran.

25 Also at Università degli Studi di Siena, Siena, Italy.

26 Also at Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) – IN2P3, Paris, France.

27 Also at Purdue University, West Lafayette, USA.

28 Also at Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo, Morelia, Mexico.

29 Also at Institute for Nuclear Research, Moscow, Russia.

30 Also at St. Petersburg State Polytechnical University, St. Petersburg, Russia.

31 Also at California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, USA.

32 Also at University of Belgrade, Belgrade, Serbia.

33 Also at Facoltà Ingegneria, Università di Roma, Roma, Italy.

34 Also at Scuola Normale e Sezione dell’INFN, Pisa, Italy.

35 Also at University of Athens, Athens, Greece.

36 Also at Paul Scherrer Institut, Villigen, Switzerland.

37 Also at Institute for Theoretical and Experimental Physics, Moscow, Russia.

38 Also at Albert Einstein Center for Fundamental Physics, Bern, Switzerland.

39 Also at Gaziosmanpasa University, Tokat, Turkey.

40 Also at Adiyaman University, Adıyaman, Turkey.

41 Also at Cag University, Mersin, Turkey.

42 Also at Izmir Institute of Technology, Izmir, Turkey.

43 Also at Ozyegin University, Istanbul, Turkey.

44 Also at Marmara University, Istanbul, Turkey.

45 Also at Kafkas University, Kars, Turkey.

46 Also at Rutherford Appleton Laboratory, Didcot, United Kingdom.

47 Also at School of Physics and Astronomy, University of Southampton, Southampton, United Kingdom.

48 Also at University of Belgrade, Faculty of Physics and Vinca Institute of Nuclear Sciences, Belgrade, Serbia.

49 Also at Mimar Sinan University, Istanbul, Istanbul, Turkey.

50 Also at Argonne National Laboratory, Argonne, USA.

51 Also at Erzincan University, Erzincan, Turkey.

52 Also at Yıldız Technical University, Istanbul, Turkey.

53 Also at Texas A&M University at Qatar, Doha, Qatar.

54 Also at Kyungpook National University, Daegu, Republic of Korea.