

MASTER'S THESIS

Neurotoxicological effects of 2,3,7,8-tetrachlorodibenzo-p-dioxin on cultured neurons

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Neurotoxicological Effects of
2,3,7,8-Tetrachlorodibenzo-*r*-dioxin
on Cultured Neurons

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Abstract

One major form of dioxins, namely 2,3,7,8-tetrachlorodibenzo-*p*-dioxin (TCDD), is known to be a group of highly persistent and stable compounds which is one of the major environmental pollutants that imposes serious risks to public health, such as carcinogenesis, reproductive toxicity, and neurotoxicity. N-methyl-D-aspartate (NMDA) receptors (NRs) are known to play an important role in synaptic plasticity including learning and memory. In addition, NR2B subunit is suggested to be a key molecule in the cellular memory formation, especially in the brain regions of cortex and hippocampus. In the first part of my study, the effects of TCDD on the gene and protein expressions of NR1 and NR2B subunits in cultured rat cortical and hippocampal neurons were studied. After low dose TCDD treatments (1 and 4 μ g/ml), both types of neurons were seen to survive without obvious morphological changes. The levels of NR1 and NR2B mRNAs and proteins were found to be reduced in the hippocampal neurons but NR1 and NR2B mRNAs and proteins were found to be increased in cortical neurons after TCDD treatments. The changes of NR expressions have been observed in accordance to the TCDD concentrations. In addition, results from patch-clamp recording also showed that NMDA-induced peak inward currents were also reduced in the hippocampal neurons after 20 μ g/ml TCDD treatments. These results indicate that TCDD down-regulates the expression of NR1 and NR2B subunits and may cause deficits in NMDA receptor functions. These may impose a serious threat in formation of cellular memory in the hippocampal neurons.

Moreover, in the second part of my study, the effects of TCDD on the protein expression of tyrosine hydroxylase (TH; a synthetic enzyme for the neurotransmitter dopamine) in cultured dopaminergic neurons of the rat substantia nigra were investigated. After low doses of TCDD treatments (0.1, 1 and 4 μ g/ml), TH-positive neurons were also seen to survive with no obvious morphological changes. Western blot experiments and immunofluorescence showed that TH immunoreactivity and proteins were found to be reduced in the nigral neurons after TCDD treatments. The reduction is also found to be dose dependent. These results indicate that TCDD may cause deficits in dopamine neurotransmission in the dopaminergic neurons and may contribute in the onset of Parkinson's disease in humans.

In conclusion, results of the present study have provided important pieces of evidence that low doses of TCDD in μ M range (lower than the acceptable level of dioxin) are neurotoxic and may cause deficits in functions of the nervous system.

Table of Contents

Declaration	i
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Table	x
List of Figures	xi
List of Abbreviations	xiii
Chapter 1 Literature Review	1
1.1 Persistent Organic Pollutants	1
1.1.1 Tetrachlorodibenzo- ρ -dioxin	2
1.1.2 Toxicity of TCDD	3
1.1.3 General Toxicological Mechanism of TCDD	4
1.1.4 Neurotoxicity of TCDD	7
1.2 Learning and Memory	8
1.2.1 Short-term Memory	10
1.2.2 Long-term Memory	11
1.2.3 Relationship between Short-term and Long-term Memories	13
1.2.4 Long-term Potentiation	14

1.3	Cerebral Cortex and Hippocampus:	16
	Major Brain Regions for Learning and Memory	
1.3.1	Structure of Cerebral Cortex	17
1.3.2	Structure of Hippocampus	18
1.3.3	Memory in Cerebral Cortex	18
1.3.4	Memory in Hippocampus	20
1.4	Glutamate and Glutamate Receptors	22
1.4.1	Structures and Functions of NMDA Receptors	24
1.4.2	NMDA Receptors and Formation of LTP	26
1.4.3	Glutamate Excitotoxicity and NMDA Receptor	28
1.5	The Basal Ganglia	30
1.5.1	Structure of Basal Ganglia	30
1.5.2	Substantia Nigra	31
1.5.3	Parkinson's Disease	33
1.6	Objectives of the Present Thesis	34
Figure 1.1	Four Different Chemical Structures of POPs	36
Figure 1.2	General Toxicological Mechanism of TCDD	38
Chapter 2	Methodology	40
2.1	Overall Sequence of Procedures	40
2.2	Animals	40
2.3	Neuronal Primary Cell Culture	41
2.4	Treatments of 2,3,7,8-Tetrachlorodibenzo-p-dioxin	42

2.5	TCDD Toxicity Experiment	43
2.6	Patch-clamp Experiments	44
2.7	Cell Counting after Immunofluorescence and Semi-quantitative Analysis of Intensity of Immunofluorescence after TCDD Treatments	45
2.8	Reverse Transcriptase-Polymerase Chain Reaction (RT-PCR)	47
2.8.1	Preparation of Total RNA	47
2.8.2	Synthesis of First Strand cDNA	48
2.8.3	Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) Assay	49
2.8.4	Semi-quantitative Analysis of RT-PCR Results	50
2.9	Western Blot Experiments	51
2.9.1	Total Protein Preparation	51
2.9.2	Protein Quantification and Electrophoresis	52
2.9.3	Immunoblotting	53
Chapter 3	Modulations of N-methyl-D-aspartate Receptors in Cortical and Hippocampal Neurons in Primary Cell Culture after 2,3,7,8-Tetrachlorodibenzo-r-dioxin Exposure	55
3.1	Introduction	55
3.2	Objectives	59
3.3	Results	60
3.3.1	TCDD Toxicity on the Cortical and Hippocampal Neurons	60

3.3.2	Effects of TCDD Treatments on the Expressions of NMDA Receptors mRNAs in the Cortical and Hippocampal Neurons	61
3.3.3	Effects of TCDD Treatments on the Expressions of NMDA Receptors Proteins in the Cortical and Hippocampal Neurons	64
3.3.4	Effects of TCDD Treatments on the Electrophysiology of NMDA Receptors in Cultured Hippocampal Neurons	65
3.4	Discussion	66
3.4.1	Toxicity Effect of TCDD on Cultured Cortical and Hippocampal Neurons	67
3.4.2	Effects of TCDD on the Expressions of NR1 and NR2B in Cultured Cortical Neurons	69
3.4.3	Effects of TCDD on the Expressions of NR1 and NR2B in Cultured Hippocampal Neurons	70
3.4.4	Effects of TCDD on the Electrophysiology of NMDA Receptor in Cultured Hippocampal Neurons	71
3.4.5	Toxic Effects of TCDD on the Formation of Cellular Memory	72
3.5	Conclusion	75
Figure 3.1	The images of the cultured cortical neurons before and after TCDD treatments at 7 DIV	76
Figure 3.2	The images of the cultured hippocampal neurons before and after TCDD treatment at 7 DIV	78
Figure 3.3	The survival percentages of cultured cortical neurons after TCDD treatments at 7 DIV	80
Figure 3.4	The survival percentages of cultured cortical neurons after TCDD treatments at 7 DIV	82
Figure 3.5	mRNA expressions of NMDA subunits of cultured cortical neurons after TCDD treatments at 7 DIV	84
Figure 3.6	mRNA expressions of NMDA subunits of cultured hippocampal neurons after TCDD treatments at 7 DIV	86

Table 3.1	Semi-quantitative analysis of the relative intensity of NMDA receptor subunits mRNA expression in the cultured cortical and hippocampal neurons	88
Figure 3.7	Protein expressions of NMDA subunits of cultured cortical neurons after TCDD treatments at 7 DIV	89
Figure 3.8	Protein expressions of NMDA subunits of cultured hippocampal neurons after TCDD treatments at 7 DIV	91
Figure 3.9	Whole-cell peak inward currents of different concentrations of TCDD treated hippocampal neurons in exposing to 50 μ M NMDA	93
Chapter 4	Neurotoxicological Effects	95
	2,3,7,8-Tetrachlorodibenzo-r-dioxin in Dopaminergic Neurons in Primary Cell Culture	
4.1	Introduction	95
4.2	Objectives	98
4.3	Results	99
4.3.1	Percentage of Dopaminergic Neurons in Nigral Cell Culture	99
4.3.2	TCDD Toxicity on Nigral Neurons	99
4.3.3	Effects of TCDD Treatments on the Expressions of TH Immunoreactivity in the Cultured Nigral Neurons	100
4.3.4	Effects of TCDD Treatments on the Protein Expression of TH Receptor in the Cultured Nigral Neurons	101
4.4	Discussion	102
4.4.1	Sub-acceptable levels of TCDD are not cytotoxic	102
4.4.2	Effects of TCDD on the Expression of TH Proteins in the Cultured Nigral Neurons	103
4.5	Conclusion	106

Figure 4.1	The fluorescent and bright-field images of the nigral cultures at low magnification (20x) after TCDD treatments at 7 DIV	107
Figure 4.2	The images of the cultured nigral neurons before and after TCDD treatment at 7 DIV	110
Figure 4.3	The survival percentages of cultured nigral neurons after TCDD treatments at 7 DIV	112
Figure 4.4	The fluorescent images of the nigral cultures at high magnification (63x) after TCDD treatments at 7 DIV	114
Figure 4.5	Protein expressions of TH of cultured nigral neurons after TCDD treatments at 7 DIV	116
Chapter 5	General Conclusion: How clean is clean?	117
	Risk assessment of Dioxins in Causing Deficits in the Nervous System	
Figure 5.1	The graphs show the different hypothetical curves to indicate a reduced risk of cancer at low doses of carcinogens	123
	List of References	125
	Appendix I	151
	Appendix II	152
	Appendix III	153
	Appendix IV	154
	Curriculum Vitae	159
	List of Publications	160