

DOCTORAL THESIS

Developmental expression of N-methyl-D-aspartate and gamma-aminobutyric acid receptors in the rat basal ganglia

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**Developmental Expression of N-methyl-D-aspartate and
Gamma-aminobutyric Acid Receptors in the Rat Basal Ganglia**

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

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Abstract

Glutamate is the major excitatory neurotransmitter in the basal ganglia and it is considered as the driving force of the neurons in the basal ganglia. *N*-methyl-*D*-aspartate (NMDA) receptors are a group of important ionotropic glutamate receptors in the basal ganglia that mediate the functions of glutamate. NMDA receptors are therefore known to be involved in the control of movements in the basal ganglia. In contrast, Gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA) is a major inhibitory neurotransmitter in the neostriatum. Functions of GABA are mediated by GABA_A and GABA_B receptors in the neostriatum. In order to investigate the developmental expression of NMDA receptor subunits (NR1 and NR2A-D) and GABA receptors subunits (GABA_Aα1, α3 and α6; GABA_BR1 and R2) in the rat neostriatum (Str) and substantia nigra pars compacta and pars reticulata (SNc and SNr), reverse transcriptase-polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) and immunofluorescence were performed. Tissues were obtained from rats at postnatal-day-1 (PND1), day-7 (PND7), and day-14 (PND14) and from adult rats were used.

In the Str, RT-PCR indicated that levels of NR1, NR2A and NR2D mRNAs reached peak levels between PND 7 and PND 14. The levels of NR2B and NR2C mRNAs were increased at PND 7 and remained high in adults. Immunofluorescence combined with image analysis revealed that the levels of NR1 and NR2B immunoreactivity rose progressively in perikarya of striatal neurons. However, levels of NR2A immunoreactivity were higher in striatal neurons at PND 1 and PND 7. In addition, double immunofluorescence revealed that the levels of NR1 immunoreactivity decreased but the levels of NR2A immunoreactivity were the same in parvalbumin (PV)-positive striatal interneurons of PND 14 and adult rats. NR2B immunoreactivity was not detected in PV-positive neurons of PND 14 rats, but intense NR2B labeling was seen in PV-positive neurons of adult rats. In choline acetyltransferase (ChAT)-positive striatal interneurons of PND 14 and adult rats, levels of NR1 and NR2A immunoreactivity were seen to increase and the level of NR2B immunoreactivity remained the same.

In the SN, NR1, NR2A, NR2B and NR2C mRNA levels were highest in PND 14 rats, NR2D mRNA level was highest in PND 7 rats. Highest levels of NR1, NR2A and NR2B immunoreactivity were seen in adult rats. Double immunofluorescence revealed that tyrosine hydroxylase (TH)-positive dopaminergic neurons display peak level of NR1 immunoreactivity in PND1 and PND7 rats. Opposite trend in expression of NR2A and NR2B immunoreactivity was observed in TH-positive dopaminergic neurons. In the SNr, the levels of NR1 immunoreactivity increased in PV-positive GABAergic neurons. However, the levels of NR2A and NR2B immunoreactivity in PV-positive neurons were similar to Str.

In the Str, low levels of the GABA_Aα1 and GABA_Aα6 mRNA but high levels of GABA_Aβ2 and GABA_Aβ3 mRNAs was found during early postnatal period. Immunofluorescence revealed that GABA_Aα1 immunoreactivity was found in perikarya

of most striatal neurons in young animals. However, GABA_Aα1 immunoreactivity was only observed in striatal interneurons in PND14 and adult rats. Immunoreactivity for GABA_Aα3 and GABA_Aα6 were only observed in PND14 and adult animals. GABA_BR1 immunoreactivity was found to be expressed by perikarya of striatal neurons from all ages. In contrast, GABA_BR2 immunoreactivity was mainly observed in ChAT-positive striatal interneurons in PND 14 and adult rats. These findings indicated that in adult rats, ChAT-positive striatal interneurons are the major group of neurons that display functional GABA_B receptors.

In the SN, levels of GABA_A mRNAs reached peak levels in the early postnatal period. GABA_Aα1 immunoreactivity was not found in TH-positive dopaminergic neurons but the levels of GABA_Bα1 immunoreactivity increased in PV-positive GABAergic neurons. Immunoreactivity for GABA_Aα3 was only observed in perikarya of TH- and PV-positive neurons in adult animals. In contrast, the levels of GABA_Aα6 and GABA_BR1 immunoreactivity of both TH- and PV-positive neurons reached peak levels between PND7 and PND14. However, GABA_BR2-positive neurons were only observed in the adult rats of SNc but the levels were the same in SNr of PND 14 and adult rats.

The present results indicate that there are differential patterns of developmental expression of NMDA and GABA receptor subunits in the striatum and the substantia nigra. The present results have provided important implications in development of the glutamate and GABA systems in the rat basal ganglia.

Table of Contents

Declaration	i
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iv
Table of Contents	v
List of Tables	xiii
List of Figures	xiv
List of Abbreviations	xvii
Chapter 1 Literature Review	1
1.1 The Basal Ganglia	1
1.1.1 General Characteristic	1
1.1.2 Nuclei of the Basal Ganglia	2
1.1.3 Neurotransmitters in the Basal Ganglia	3
1.2 Microcircuitry of the Basal Ganglia	5
1.2.1 Synaptic Input of the Basal Ganglia	5
1.2.2 Indirect and Direct Pathways of the Basal Ganglia	5
1.2.3 Synaptic Output from the Basal Ganglia	6
1.2.4 Dopaminergic Pathway in the Basal Ganglia	6
1.3 Neurons in the Neostriatum	9
1.3.1 Medium-size Densely Spiny Neurons	9
1.3.2 Striatal Interneurons	11
1.3.2.1 Cholinergic Interneurons	11
1.3.2.2 GABA Interneurons	12

1.3.2.3 Somatostatin/ Neuropeptide Y/ Nitric Oxidase Syntase-positive Neurons	12
1.4 Neuron in the Substantia Nigra	13
1.4.1 Substantia Nigra par Reticulata	13
1.4.2 Substantia Nigra par Compacta	13
1.5 Glutamate and Glutamate Receptors in the Basal Ganglia	14
1.5.1 Glutamate in the Basal Ganglia	14
1.5.2 Classification of Glutamate Receptor	14
1.5.3 NMDA Receptors	15
1.5.3.1 NR1 Receptor	15
1.5.3.2 NR2 Receptor	16
1.6 GABA and GABA Receptors in the Basal Ganglia	19
1.6.1 GABA in the Basal Ganglia	19
1.6.2 Classification of GABA Receptor	20
1.6.2.1 GABA _A Receptor	21
1.6.2.2 GABA _B Receptor	22
1.6.2.3 GABA _C Receptor	23
1.7 Postnatal Development of the Basal Ganglia	24
1.7.1 Postnatal Development of NMDA Receptors	24
1.7.2 Postnatal Development of GABA Receptors	25
1.8 Objectives of the Thesis	26

Chapter 2 Materials and Methods	27
2.1 Animals	27
2.2 Reverse Transcriptase–polymerase Chain Reaction (RT-PCR)	28
2.2.1 Total RNA Preparation	28
2.2.2 First Strand cDNA Synthesis	28
2.2.3 PCR Assay	29
2.2.4 Semi-quantitative Analysis of RT-PCR Results	30
2.3 Immunocytochemistry	31
2.3.1 Tissue Preparation	31
2.3.2 Single Immunofluorescence	31
2.3.3 Double Immunofluorescence	32
2.3.4 Control for Immunofluorescence	33
2.3.5 Preparation for Fluorescent Microscopy	33
2.3.6 Digital Image Analyses of Immunofluorescence and Statistics	33
Chapter 3 Developmental Expression of NMDA Receptor Subunit in the Neostriatum	35
3.1 Introduction	35
3.2 Objectives	38
3.3 Materials and Methods	39
3.3.1 Animals	39
3.3.2 Tissue Preparation for RT-PCR	39
3.3.3. Semi-quantitative Analyses of RT-PCR Results and Statistics	40
3.3.4 Tissue Preparation for Immunofluorescence	40

3.3.5 Antibodies	41
3.3.6 Single and Double Immunofluorescence	41
3.3.7 Control for Immunofluorescence	41
3.3.8 Digital Image Analyses of Immunofluorescence and Statistics	42
3.4 Results	43
3.4.1 Developmental Expression of NMDA Receptor Subunit mRNAs in the Neostriatum	43
3.4.2 Control for Immunofluorescence	44
3.4.3 Developmental Expression of NR1 Immunoreactivity in the Neostriatum	44
3.4.4 Developmental Expression of NR2A Immunoreactivity in the Neostriatum	45
3.4.5 Developmental Expression of NR2B Immunoreactivity in the Neostriatum	46
3.4.6 Developmental Expression of NMDA Receptor Immunoreactivity in ChAT- immunoreactive Neurons	46
3.4.7 Developmental Expression of NMDA Receptor Immunoreactivity in PV- immunoreactive Neurons	47
3.4.8 Double Labeling of NR1 and GAD or SV2	48
3.5 Discussion	50
3.5.1 Dynamic Changes of NR mRNAs in Postnatal Development	50
3.5.2 Diversified Trends in NR Immunoreactivity Expression	51
3.5.3 Change in Subunit Compositions of NMDA Receptors in Presumed Medium Spiny Neurons during Development	53
3.5.4 Striatal Interneurons Express Different NMDA Receptor Subunits during Development	54
3.5.5 Physiological Considerations: Functional and Anatomical Compartmentalization of Receptors?	56

Chapter 4 Developmental Expression of NMDA Receptor Subunit in the Substantia Nigra	81
4.1 Introduction	81
4.2 Objectives	83
4.3 Materials and Methods	84
4.3.1 Animal	84
4.3.2 RT-PCR and Semi-quantitative Analyses of RT-PCR Results	84
4.3.3 Tissue Preparation for Immunofluorescence	85
4.3.4 Antibodies	85
4.3.5 Single and Double Immunofluorescence	86
4.3.6 Digital Images Analyses of Immunofluorescence	86
4.4 Results	87
4.4.1 Developmental Expression of NMDA Receptor Subunit mRNAs in the Substantia Nigra	87
4.4.2 Control for Immunofluorescence	88
4.4.3 Developmental Expression of NR1 Immunoreactivity in the Region of Substantia Nigra	88
4.4.4 Developmental Expression of NR2A Immunoreactivity in the Region of Substantia Nigra	89
4.4.5 Developmental Expression of NR2B Immunoreactivity in the Region of Substantia Nigra	89
4.4.6 Developmental Expression of NMDA Receptor Immunoreactivity in TH-immunoreactive Neurons	89
4.4.7 Developmental Expression of NMDA Receptor Immunoreactivity in PV-immunoreactive Neurons	90
4.5 Discussion	92
4.5.1 Changes of NR mRNAs in Postnatal Development	92
4.5.2 Diversified Trends in NR Immunoreactivity Expression	93

4.5.3 Two Types of Nigral Neurons Express Different NMDA Receptor Subunits during Development	94
4.5.4 NR mRNA and Immunoreactivity are Differentially Expressed in the Rat Substantia Nigra	95
Chapter 5 Developmental Expression of GABA Receptor Subunits in the Neostriatum	112
5.1 Introduction	112
5.2 Objectives	113
5.3 Materials and Methods	114
5.3.1 Animals	114
5.3.2 RT-PCR and Semi-quantitative Analyses of RT-PCR Results	114
5.3.3 Single and Double Immunofluorescence	115
5.3.4 Digital Images Analyses of Immunofluorescence	116
5.4 Results	117
5.4.1 Developmental Expression of GABA Receptor Subunits mRNAs in the Neostriatum	117
5.4.2 Control for Immunocytochemistry	118
5.4.3 Developmental Expression of GABA _A 1 Immunoreactivity in the Region of Neostriatum	118
5.4.4 Developmental Expression of GABA _A 3 Immunoreactivity in the Region of Neostriatum	119
5.4.5 Developmental Expression of GABA _A 6 Immunoreactivity in the Region of Neostriatum	119
5.4.6 Developmental Expression of GABA _B R1 Immunoreactivity in the region of neostriatum	120
5.4.7 Developmental Expression of GABA _B R2 Immunoreactivity in the Region of Neostriatum	121

5.4.8 Developmental Expression of GABA Receptor Immunoreactivity in ChAT-immunoreactive Neurons	121
5.4.9 Developmental Expression of GABA Receptor Immunoreactivity in PV-immunoreactive Neurons	123
5.5 Dissusion	124
5.5.1 Expression of GABA mRNAs in Postnatal Development	124
5.5.2 Developmental Trends in GABA Immunoreactivity Expression	125
5.5.3 Change in Subunit Compositions of GABA Receptors in Medium Spiny Neurons during Deveolpment	126
5.5.4 Striatal Interneuron Express Different GABA Receptor Subunits during Development	127
5.5.5 Functional Implications of GABA Receptor Expression in the Neostriatum	129
Chapter 6 Developmental Expression of GABA Receptor Subunit in the Substantia Nigra	154
6.1 Introduction	154
6.2 Objectives	155
6.3 Materials and Methods	156
6.3.1 Animal	156
6.3.2 RT-PCR and Semi-Quantitative Analyses of RT-PCR Results	156
6.3.3 Single and Double Immunofluorescence and Digital Image Analyses of Immunofluorescence and Statistics	157
6.4 Results	158
6.4.1 Developmental Expression of GABA _A Receptor Subunit mRNAs in the Substantia Nigra	158
6.4.2 Control for Immunofluorescence	158
6.4.3 Developmental Expression of GABA _A 1 Immunoreactivity in the Region of Substantia Nigra	159

6.4.4 Developmental Expression of GABA _A 3 Immunoreactivity in the Region of Substantia Nigra	159
6.4.5 Developmental Expression of GABA _A 6 Immunoreactivity in the Region of Substantia Nigra	160
6.4.6 Developmental Expression of GABA _B R1 Immunoreactivity in the Region of Substantia Nigra	160
6.4.7 Developmental Expression of GABA _B R2 Immunoreactivity in the Region of Substantia Nigra	160
6.4.8 Developmental Expression of GABA Receptor Immunoreactivity in TH-immunoreactive Neurons	161
6.4.9 Developmental Expression of GABA Receptor Immunoreactivity in PV-immunoreactive Neurons	162
6.5 Discussion	164
6.5.1 Changes of GABA _A mRNAs in Postnatal Development	164
6.5.2 Diversified Trends in GABA Immunoreactivity Expression	165
6.5.3 Two Types of Nigral Neurons Express Different GABA Receptor Subunits during Development	166
Chapter 7 NMDA and GABA Receptors are Differentially Expressed in Different Neuronal Elements in the Rat Basal Ganglia During pPostnatal Development	192
List of References	195
Appendix I	219
Appendix II	221
Appendix III	222
Appendix IV	223
Curriculum Vitae	225
List of Publications	226