Effects of Chronic Stimulation of Nucleus Accumbens on Binge Drinking and Transcriptome

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Pozhidayeva, Dar'ya; Firsick, Evan; Townsley, Kayla G.; Iancu, Dan; and Ozbum, Angela, "Effects of Chronic Stimulation of Nucleus Accumbens on Binge Drinking and Transcriptome" (2018). Student Research Symposium. 15.

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Effects of Chronic Stimulation of Nucleus Accumbens on Binge Drinking and Transcriptome


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Abstract

The nucleus accumbens (NAC) is an important brain region in alcohol use disorders. Previously, we found increasing NAC activity decreases binge drinking of alcohol, without altering fluid or tantant intake. Here, we used clozapine-N-oxide (CNO) to selectively activate mutated excitatory muscarinic G-protein-coupled receptors (mM3Dq) in the NAC. We found that the effects of chronically increasing NAC activity produced lasting reductions in binge-like drinking, based on these behavioral results we proposed that transcriptional changes potentially underlie these changes.

Methods: High Drinking In the Dark (HDID) mice were stereotaxically injected with AAV2-DIO-M3Dq-mCherry and Cre-GFP into the NAC. We used a 6 week Drinking the Dark (DID) schedule where mice had 2hr access to 20% ethanol (EtOH). For 7 days, mice were treated with 1% DMSO in saline (vehicle, IP, 30 minutes prior to DID) to determine baseline intake. Mice were then treated with CNO (1 mg/kg) prior to daily drinking for 28 days. Then, mice were administered vehicle for another 7 days to determine whether the effects of chronic CNO treatment were lasting. There were 3 control groups (ethanol drinking mice not receiving CNO, and water drinking mice receiving either CNO or vehicle).

Conclusion: Based on these behavioral studies and analyses, we propose that chronically increasing NAC activity via CNO/DREADDs can induce molecular and cellular plasticity. By using these analyses, we are working to identify changes in gene expression related to harmful binge-like drinking and CNO/DREADD-induced reductions in binge-drinking. We plan to identify key hubs for pharmacological manipulation of binge-like drinking.

Research Question

What are the effects of changing NAC activity on binge-drinking and gene expression networks? Can we reverse alcohol-induced changes in gene expression using DREADDs?

Using DREADDs to Manipulate Activity in the Nucleus Accumbens

The Nucleus Accumbens (NAC) is a site of convergent inputs and an important regulator of mood.

Chronic NAC stimulation produces lasting reduction in binge-like drinking.

Experimental Design and Schedule: HDID-1 female mice were stereotaxically injected with AAV2-DIO-M3Dq-mCherry into the NAC and allowed to recover to 3 weeks before behavioral testing began.

Methods

Pareidol: Adult female HDID-1 mice were stereotaxically injected with 0.5µL AAV2/DIO-M3Dq and 0.5 µL AAV2/DIO-M3Dq-mCherry into the NAC (coordinates: +/-1.5 M/L, +/-.2 A/V, +/.4 D/S). Animals were allowed to recover for three weeks prior to testing. Binge-like ethanol intake was tested using a variation of the Drinking in the Dark (DID) 6-week schedule where mice received access to one bottle of 20% ethanol daily for 2 hours. There were 4 experimental groups: Ethanol Doid with or without CNO and Water drinking groups with or without CNO (n = 12-13/group). Mice were from same selection generation. Mice received daily injections (IP) of either 1 mg/kg clozapine-N-oxide (CNO) or vehicle (1% DMSO in saline) approximately 30 minutes before a 2 hour DID session. For the CNO groups, weeks 1 and 5 were vehicle injections and weeks 2, 3, 4, and 6 were CNO injections (1 mg/kg). Vehicle groups were injected with 1% DMSO in saline (IP) for 6 weeks. Mice were euthanized via cervical dislocation one day after the last session.

Sample Preparation and Processing: Tissue was mechanically homogenized in Purge ALT and RNA was isolated using Aurum Total RNA Fatty and Fibrous Tissue kit (BioRad). RNA quality was assessed via Bioanalyzer and sequenced using library preparation and HiSeq 2500-Illumina by the Massively Parallel Sequencing Shared Resource at OHSU.

Analysis: Sequenced RNA was analyzed by aligning sample reads to Mus musculus genome using STAR, ultralinear RNA-seq aligner. Alignment, read counts were filtered and normalised to produce a count matrix. To perform Differential Expression analysis (DE), DESeq2 (2012) was used to process the data and determine significantly up or down regulated genes based on p-value threshold. Next Weighted Gene Co-expression Analysis (WGCNA) was used to identify modules (co-regulated genes) and hubs (genes correlating strongly with a significant number of related expressed modules). The WGCNA package (in R) was used to build a network on the basis of gene-gene correlations. Gene-gene correlations were calculated in an adjacency matrix from the count matrix. The adjacency matrix was further processed (using soft threshold) and then clustered to detect gene modules (groups of genes that are expressed).

Conclusion:

1. Quantifying Gene Expression Differences Between Groups

Differential expression analysis (DE) is used to analyze gene expression levels between treatment groups.

- Sequenced RNA from NAC tissue of mice from both CNO and VEH (Water and EtOH) treatment groups is aligned to the Mus musculus genome, and normalized.
- Regions of the sequenced genome in one sample cover regions of Mus musculus. Different samples between groups may have variability in alignment coverage.
- Based on this coverage between samples, we can see how genes are being expressed (Up-regulated/Down-regulated).
- How does CNO change gene expression? (What are the significant genes? What are their functions?)

2. How Do Differentially Expressed Genes Correlate?

Weighted Gene Co-expression Analysis (WGCNA) is used to describe correlation patterns between genes. It can identify sets of tightly co-regulated genes (modules) based on network analysis. Understanding connectivity between genes can be used to single out important hubs.

- In gene co-expression networks, RNA-Seq data is transformed into a count matrix. This matrix is used to compare gene expression between samples. Each gene (and its counts) correspond to a node; two nodes are connected if their expression values are highly correlated.
- The network is built on the basis of gene-gene correlations, which are collected in an adjacency matrix.
- The adjacency matrix is further processed and then clustered to detect gene modules (groups of genes that are coexpressed and often participate in the same biological processes).
- Genes that have many strong correlations are denoted as hubs.
- Our assumption is that they are important and potential targets for manipulation and/or therapy.
- Network properties in combination with differential expression can offer insights into molecular mechanisms.

Conclusions

- We found that chronically increasing NAC activity (via CNO/DREADDs) can induce lasting reductions in binge-drinking and propose that molecular plasticity underlies this effect.
- By using these analyses, we are identifying changes in gene expression related to harmful binge-like drinking and CNO/DREADD-induced reductions in binge-drinking.
- We plan to identify key hubs (WGCNA) for pharmacological manipulation of binge-like drinking.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks Dr. R. Jude Samulski at UNC Viral Vector Core for AAV prep. Supported by NIH grants [U01 AA10760 (JCC, ARO), US Department of Veterans Affairs Awards [R21 BX002488 (ARO), Andrews Genomics Fund (ARO). Work reported in this poster was supported by the National Institutes of Health Common Fund and Office of Scientific Workforce Diversity under three awards UL1GM118964, R25GM118963, and T32GM118965, administered by the National Institute of General Medical Sciences. The work is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official view of the National Institutes of Health. This work was supported by the Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program supported by grants from the U.S. Department of Education. The authors gratefully acknowledge Sukhwant Jhaj, Dr. Teoetu Falea and staff.