

Tauopathy: A common mechanism for neurodegeneration and brain aging

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ABSTRACT

Tau, a microtubule-associated protein promotes assembly and stability of microtubules which is related to axoplasmic flow and critical neuronal activities upon physiological conditions. Under neurodegenerative condition such as in Alzheimer's Disease (AD), tau-microtubule binding dynamics and equilibrium are severely affected due to its aberrant post-translational modifications including acetylation and hyperphosphorylation. This event results in its conformational changes to form neurofibrillary tangles (NFT) after aggregation in the cytosol. The formation of NFT is more strongly correlated with cognitive decline than the distribution of senile plaque, which is formed by polymorphous beta-amyloid (A β) protein deposits, another pathological hallmark of AD. In neurodegenerative conditions, other than AD, the disease manifestation is correlated with mutations of the MAPT gene. In Primary age-related tauopathy (PART), which is commonly observed in the brains of aged individuals, tau deposition is directly correlated with cognitive deficits even in the absence of A β deposition. Thus, tauopathy has been considered as an essential hallmark in neurodegeneration and normal brain aging. In this review, we highlighted the recent progress about the tauopathies in the light of its posttranslational modifications and its implication in AD and the aged brain.

1. Introduction

The Alzheimer's disease (AD) is the most prevalent neurodegenerative disorder that accounts for more than 50–60% of all the dementia cases and 50% of all individuals of 85 years and above, dies due to the AD (Qiu et al., 2009; Bekris et al., 2010; Vinters, 2015; Graham et al., 2017). The two well established diagnostic hallmarks of the AD are extracellular A β senile plaque deposition and intracellular Neurofibrillary tangle (NFT) formation (Jellinger and Attems, 2007; Vinters, 2015; Graham et al., 2017). The overproduction of A β peptide from a transmembrane protein Amyloid precursor protein (APP) by the sequential action of beta and gamma-secretase eventually leads to the formation of A β plaques. On the other hand, hyperphosphorylation of a microtubule-associated protein Tau on its serine or threonine residues enhances its intracellular deposition that ultimately leads to form Neurofibrillary Tangle (NFT) (Lee et al., 1991; Goedert et al., 1992; Vinters, 2015; Graham et al., 2017). The aberrant hyperphosphorylation of tau disrupts its binding ability to microtubule (MT) thereby affecting MT stability and axoplasmic transports (Petrucci et al., 2004; Kosik and Shimura, 2005; Poppek et al., 2006; Dickey et al., 2007; Green et al., 2008) (Bramblett et al., 1993; Iqbal et al., 1994; Stoothoff and Johnson, 2005). Tau-related pathology or tauopathy is not only involved in AD (Mattson, 2004; Goedert and

Spillantini, 2006; Ballatore et al., 2007; Spires-Jones et al., 2009), but also found to be an integrated part of several neurodegenerative conditions such as progressive supranuclear palsy (PSP), corticobasal degeneration (CBD), Pick's disease, dementia pugilistica, frontotemporal dementia with Parkinsonism linked to chromosome 17 (FTDP-17) (Spillantini and Goedert, 2013) as well as of primary age-related tauopathy in normal aging process (Crary et al., 2014).

The cognitive impairment was found to be the most common outcome of AD patients, and severity of cognitive impairment have been found to be more strongly correlated with the NFT deposition compare to that of the A β load in AD brain (Arriagada et al., 1992; Bierer et al., 1995). Consistent with this finding, it was shown that A β directly triggers tau protein phosphorylation and aggregation; if once NFT is formed, A β clearance cannot improve the cognitive decline (Oddo et al., 2004); however, the removal of tau can improve the cognitive function even after A β burden remains to be constant or increased (Chesser et al., 2013; Simic et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2018; Xin et al., 2018). Thus, Tau aggregation is considered as the more critical causal mediator of cognitive dysfunction over A β .

Aging is considered the most critical risk factor for almost all neurodegenerative diseases. An increasing number of studies suggest that the underlying cause and symptoms of healthy aging and age-related disorders are overlapping in various cases. Albeit many investigations

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have identified the underlying molecular mechanisms, but these do not suffice to combat the neurodegenerative diseases due to its multifactorial complex and progressive nature. In this review, we will focus on how tauopathy both in the degenerative and aging process takes a vital role to play in the progression of neurological abnormalities. Also, we will emphasize the importance of two prominent posttranslational modifications of tau such as phosphorylation, and acetylation that significantly contribute to the disease progression.

2. The potential role of A β in hyperphosphorylation of tau, tauopathy and associated cognitive dysfunction

Two groundbreaking studies in 2001 had given convincing evidence that A β burden in AD brain directly instigates tau aggregation by enhancing its phosphorylation (Gotz et al., 2001; Lewis et al., 2001). It was further confirmed in a study where A β infusion to P301 L tau transgenic mice, which carries a transgene encoding human tau with four microtubule-binding repeat domains, triggers NFT formation (Gotz et al., 2001). As a part of the mechanism it was shown that A β oligomers could induce phosphorylation of tau by mostly activating the cJun kinase or AKT- GSK3beta signaling pathway (Ma et al., 2009; Tokutake et al., 2012; Li et al., 2016). The recent investigation further strengthened the fact that neuritic amyloid plaques trigger the pathological conversion of tau in an AD mouse model (Li et al., 2016). Consistent with these studies another group has documented that tau aggregation and subsequent neurofibrillary degeneration was shown to be increased in JNPL3/Tg2576 double transgenic mice without an increase in A β load (Lewis et al., 2001). Supporting the *in vivo* finding; it was shown that tau phosphorylation at ser-202 and ser-396/ser-404 residues in rat hippocampal and human cortical neurons induced by A β fibrils, remains as either soluble or amorphous-aggregated form. (Busciglio et al., 1995). Hyperphosphorylation of tau ultimately leads to its aggregation, mislocalization, and accumulation instead of its proteasomal degradation that leads to neurofibrillary degeneration (Blurton-Jones and Laferla, 2006; Qiu et al., 2009; Bekris et al., 2010; Vinters, 2015; Graham et al., 2017).

For decades, the neurotoxic effects of A β and tau had been established separately until recently it has been found that in many cases A β -induced neurotoxicity and cognitive deficit are primarily mediated by tau protein (Mucke and Selkoe, 2012; Huber et al., 2018), and A β -induced cytotoxicity is absent in tau null background (Rapoport et al., 2002; Nussbaum et al., 2012). Similarly, another independent study has shown that early intervention of A β accumulation can prevent pTau development via the proteasomal degradation machinery (Oddo et al., 2004; Iaccarino et al., 2016). Consistent with this finding, another study shows that gamma frequency entrainment can lower initial load of A β and modified microglial population through the reduction of Tau phosphorylation in mice model of tauopathy where tau P301S mutant form of human microtubule-associated protein tau (MAPT) was overexpressed constitutively (Iaccarino et al., 2016). Therefore, it can be convincingly concluded that tau aggregation could be independent of A β load; however, a question remains unanswered whether tau phosphorylation is enough to induce cognitive dysfunction independent of A β .

A substantial number of efforts have been made to elucidate the underlying mechanism responsible for how tau phosphorylation contributes to cognitive dysfunctions. One of the remarkable studies has shown that tau can mediate the A β -induced learning and memory deficits by inducing an imbalance in the ratio of excitatory/inhibitory neurons in the brain by modulating a nonreceptor tyrosine kinase Fyn kinase (Roberson et al., 2007; Roberson et al., 2011). This notion was further confirmed by the fact that depletion of tau can prevent the synergistic effect of A β and Fyn on synaptic, network and cognitive impairment (Roberson et al. 2007, Roberson et al., 2011). Recently an elegant study provides a direct mechanism how phosphorylated, and mislocalized tau can induce synaptic dysfunction which underlies

impairment of cognitive function. Synaptic strength depends primarily on NMDA receptor activation which is known to regulate by PSD95-Fyn-NMDA receptor complex at the postsynaptic site (Chabrier et al., 2012). PSD95, a membrane-associated guanylate kinase (MAGUK), is the major scaffolding protein in the excitatory postsynaptic density (PSD) and a potent regulator of synaptic strength, while Fyn physically associates with Tau, and can phosphorylate tyrosine residues near the amino terminus (Lee et al. 1998; Lee et al., 2004; Chabrier et al. 2012). Tau can be hyperphosphorylated upon NMDA receptor activation through a signaling cascade that is also activated by A β . Thus, it can be anticipated that hyperphosphorylation of tau will affect the complex formation among PSD95-Fyn-NMDA receptor complex at the postsynaptic site that will, in turn, attenuate synaptic functions. Therefore, Fyn has been linking the two critical pathologies in AD uniquely and merit it to be considered as an attractive target for AD therapeutics. However, Fyn is a challenging target, with broad expression throughout the body and significant homology with other members of the Src family kinases, which may lead to unintended off-target effects. A phase 2a proof-of-concept clinical trial in patients with AD is currently underway, providing critical first data on the potential effectiveness of targeting Fyn in AD (Nygaard et al., 2014; Nygaard, 2018).

Other studies have shown that A β can induce cognitive dysfunction by impairing axonal transport (Vossel et al., 2010), dendritic function (Ittner et al., 2010) and long-term potentiation (Roberson et al., 2011; Shipton et al., 2011), which are independent of the activity of Fyn kinase but dependent on Tau. Targeting tau either by chemical treatment or immunotherapy have been shown to improve cognitive function even though the A β levels continue to increase suggests that Tau can directly regulate cognitive dysfunction (Castillo-Carranza et al., 2015) with the severity of AD. It was shown that tau immunotherapy could reduce A β burden to facilitate cognitive function (Castillo-Carranza et al., 2015); further reemphasizes the fact that tau phosphorylation is much more relevant for cognitive dysfunction compared to an increase in A β levels.

3. Molecular mechanisms underlying post-translational modifications of tau and their correlations to tauopathy

Tau undergoes a myriad of various posttranslational modifications, such as acetylation (Cohen et al., 2011), nitration (Horiguchi et al., 2003), glycation (Ledesma et al., 1995), O-glycosylation (Arnold et al., 1996), ubiquitination (Cripps et al., 2006), SUMOylation (Dorval and Fraser, 2006), cross-linking by transglutaminase (Wilhelmus et al., 2009), isomerization (Miyasaka et al., 2005), conformational alteration and proteolytic cleavage (Gamblin et al., 2003) in addition to phosphorylation. Although, the exact function for all these post-translational modifications of tau during neurodegeneration has not been fully understood; it was found that modulating these post-translational modifications of tau affect the phosphorylation level of tau and tauopathy. In fact, most of the post-translational modifications of tau functions as the precursors of tau phosphorylation and modulation of their levels can impact the tauopathy. Therefore, these posttranslational modifications of tau offered an attractive target to reduce tauopathy other than either eliminating the phosphorylation or inducing the dephosphorylation of tau. Among these modifications, acetylation of Tau has been found to be most clinically relevant and shown to have significant influence on phosphorylation level of tau (Alonso et al., 1994; Alonso et al., 1996; Wang et al., 1996; Alonso et al., 1997; Alonso et al., 2001; Wang et al., 2007). Therefore, in this review, we will mostly highlight the current literature regarding the phosphorylation and acetylation of tau in tauopathy with the progression of AD.

3.1. Phosphorylation of Tau in AD

Under physiological condition, tau can be phosphorylated in both in WT and hAPP transgenic mice on 63 sites in both the cases (Morris

et al., 2015). However, the AD brain contains 2–3 fold higher hyperphosphorylated tau (6–8 mol P/mole of tau protein) compared to that of a healthy brain (2–3 mol P/mole of tau protein) (Kopke et al., 1993). The mass spectrometry analysis revealed that there are at least 40 serine/threonine and two tyrosine sites for phosphorylation in PHF form of tau (Hasegawa et al., 1992; Morishima-Kawashima et al., 1995; Hanger et al., 1998).

Further studies revealed that hyperphosphorylation of tau is the net effect of the interplay between several kinases and phosphatases. Tau is phosphorylated mainly by several prolines directed protein kinases (PDPKs) mostly on serine/threonine residues followed by a proline residue. Important tau PDPKs are glycogen synthase kinase-3beta (GSK-3beta), Cyclin-dependent like kinase-5 (CDK5) and dual specificity tyrosine phosphorylation regulated kinase 1A (DYRK1A) (Arioka et al., 1993; Morishima-Kawashima et al., 1995; Woods et al., 2001; Liu et al., 2008). Apart from the PDPKs, several non-PDPKs like calcium/calmodulin-activated protein kinase II (CaMK II), microtubule affinity regulated kinase 110 (MARK p110), protein kinase A (PKA) and casein kinase 1 (CK1) can also phosphorylate tau (Baudier and Cole, 1988; Ledesma et al., 1992; Singh et al., 1996a,b; Drewes et al., 1997; Sironi et al., 1998). The dephosphorylation of tau is mainly regulated by PP2A that accounts for ~70% of total tau phosphatase activity in the central nervous system (Benneccib et al., 2000; Gong et al., 2000; Liu et al., 2005).

3.2. Tau acetylation in AD

Acetylation of tau recently has got special attention as a potent regulatory post-translational modification which is implicated in several tauopathies including AD pathology (Min et al., 2010; Cohen et al., 2011; Cook et al., 2014; Min et al., 2015; Hettinger and Cirrito, 2016). An NMR analysis using recombinant hTau has shown that each molecule of tau can be acetylated on an average six lysine residues (Kamah et al., 2014). Particular interest in tau acetylation is lying in the fact that, acetylation of tau can trigger tau aggregation through its hyperphosphorylation as it has been found in AD, corticobasal degeneration, progressive supranuclear palsy and in tau transgenic mice models of tauopathies (Cohen et al., 2011; Irwin et al., 2012). This study indicates the pivotal upstream regulation of tau acetylation over tau hyperphosphorylation. Thus, in that case, targeting acetylation despite phosphorylation of tau might be a more effective strategy to combat the disease root-cause and outcome.

First identification of tau acetylation and its implication with neurodegeneration came in 2010 by Li Gan and his group (Min et al., 2010). They have found multiple tau acetylation sites including three putative lysines 163, 174 and 180 residues which prevent tau ubiquitination and therefore tau turn over. In this study, authors have drawn clear evidence of lysine acetyltransferase, p300 mediated tau

acetylation promotes phospho-tau aggregation, and this can be blocked by deacetylation of tau by SIRT1 deacetylase (Min et al., 2010). In the subsequent year, Cohen et al. further confirmed that Lysine 280 acetylation in the MT-binding domain of tau causes impairment in tau-MT affinity and aggregation of the gain of function tau toxic species (Cohen, Guo, et al. 2011). The particular importance of acetylation of Lysine 280 residue in critical events in tauopathy was further strengthened (Irwin, Cohen, et al. 2012). Li Gan and his group further identified another novel acetylation site, Lysine 174 which is also acetylated by p300 and acetylation on Lysine 174 is a potent tau modification that leads to its aggregation and cognitive deficits (Min et al., 2015). Through a recent study by Tracy et al., they have demonstrated for the first time that acetylated tau is linked with synaptic dysfunction and cognitive decline through postsynaptic KIBRA signaling pathway, actin signaling, and AMPA receptor trafficking. They have created acetylated mimic tau by mutating K274 and K281 sites with glutamine which showed a higher level of misfolded tau aggregation along with long-term hippocampal potentiation (Tracy et al., 2016).

Moreover, it has been well demonstrated that overexpression of mutant tau at lysine 280 that mimics acetylated tau in a *Drosophila* transgenic species augments the phosphorylation at S262 and T212/S214 of tau (Gorsky et al., 2016). Interestingly tau has been found to have intrinsic acetyltransferase activity as well. It can be autoacetylated through cysteine residues at C291 and C322 position (Cohen et al., 2013). However, what exactly causes tau autoacetylation remains to be elusive. Most of the putative lysine residues for acetylation in the microtubule-binding domain can also be ubiquitinated implying that acetylation prevents the ubiquitination and thus proteasomal degradation and clearance of tau in pathological conditions (Min et al., 2010; Morris et al., 2015).

The extent of acetylation of tau has been found to be modified by several acetyltransferases and deacetylases in AD condition. Previously it mentioned that p300 or CBP acetyltransferases could acetylate tau and deacetylated by SIRT1 (Min et al., 2010). In contrast, a negative correlation between SIRT1 and Tau has also been identified. In this study, it was shown that pseudo acetylation on tau prevents the phosphorylation level of tau and can mitigate A β -mediated toxicity (Gorsky et al., 2017).

However, a missing mechanistic link between A β to acetylated tau in AD condition demands further investigation. In this context, very recently we reported a novel upstream mechanism that regulates tau acetylation status upon exposure to A β which straightforwardly connects A β with tau acetylation (Sen et al., 2018). Nitrosative stress has previously been implicated in the synaptic loss, neuron death in neurodegenerative conditions including AD (Nakamura and Lipton, 2009; Gu et al., 2010; Nakamura and Lipton, 2013) where nitrosylation of proteins takes place (Sen and Snyder, 2010). In this literature, we reported that A β -induced NO production nitrosylate GAPDH which in

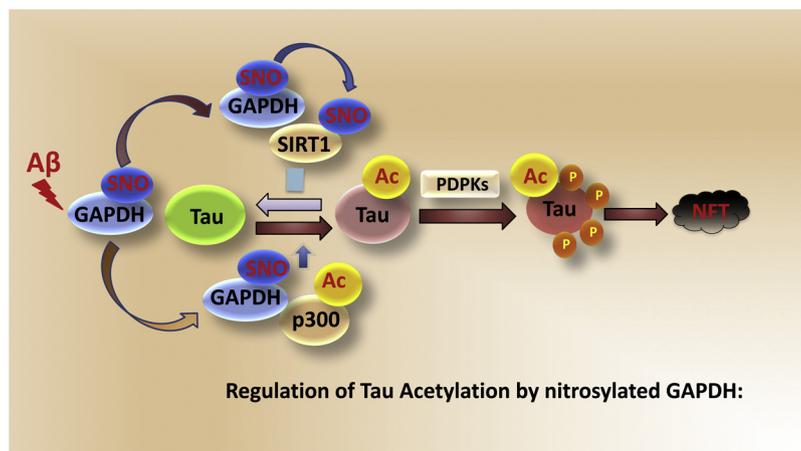


Fig. 1. Upon induction of amyloid beta, Nitrosylated GAPDH activates an acetyltransferase p300 via direct interaction. On the other hand, it inactivates a deacetylase, SIRT1 by nitrosylates SIRT1 through transnitrosylation reaction. As a result, the level of Tau acetylation remains elevated and accumulation of acetylated tau leads to tau phosphorylation and NFT in AD.

turn promote the acetylation and activation of p300 acetyltransferase which further acetylates tau protein (Sen et al. 2018) (Fig. 1). Also, nitrosylated GAPDH inactivated the deacetylase, SIRT1 by nitrosylation enhancing the possibility of more tau acetylation. So, our study presents the nitrosylated GAPDH as a double-edged sword and a very potent regulator of tau acetylation upon A β induction.

4. Oxidative stress and Tauopathy

An increase in oxidative stress is a characteristic feature of AD. Recent studies have substantiated that tauopathies have been associated with oxidative stress markers and neuronal damage both *in vitro* and *in vivo*. Intracellular ROS is mainly produced in mitochondrial electron transport chain (ETC), peroxisomes and endoplasmic reticulum (Abou-Sleiman et al., 2006). ROS attacks the cellular macromolecules like DNA, RNA, membrane lipids and proteins. Oxidative stress markers are closely associated with A β deposition in AD brain, Pick's disease as well as corticobasal degeneration (CBD) patients (Castellani et al., 1995). In other tauopathies, such as Frontotemporal lobar degeneration (FTLD) spectrum disorder and progressive supranuclear palsy (PSP), several lipid peroxidation markers, namely, malondialdehyde (MDA), 4-hydroxynonenal (4-HNE), and Thiobarbituric acid reactive substances (TBARS) were generated due to ROS (Odetti et al., 2000; Cantuti-Castelvetri et al., 2002; Martinez et al., 2008). Other studies have shown that fatty acid oxidation product also can induce the NFT formation in AD condition (Patil and Chan, 2005).

The direct evidence of oxidative stress and impairment of tau function was shown in a study where overexpression of wild-type tau in N2a neuroblastoma cells confers greater susceptibility to oxidative stress and manifests the toxicity through impairment of microtubule-associated peroxisome transportation (Stamer et al., 2002). These studies raised the possibility that oxidative stress may have a direct influence on Tauopathies. Indeed, it was demonstrated that the oxidative damage induced tau phosphorylation which leads to its aggregation (Ledesma et al., 1994; Yan et al., 1994; Perez et al., 2000; Reynolds et al., 2006). In a chronic oxidative stress model where M17 neuroblastoma cells were treated with buthionine sulfoximine (BSO), resulted in an increase in the level of phosphorylated tau in concomitant with an inhibition of glutathione synthesis (Su et al., 2010). Further studies revealed that ROS induced by 1,2-diacetyl benzene (DAB; a neurotoxic metabolite of 1,2-diethyl benzene) cause hyperphosphorylation of tau by activating GSK-3 α in the hippocampus that leads to impaired memory in mice (Lovell et al., 2004). In another study, where Tau was overexpressed in human embryonic kidney 293 (HEK293) cells, tau was shown to be phosphorylated at ser396, ser404, and Thr231 residues after induction of oxidative stress by treatment with H₂O₂ (Chiara et al., 2012). Consistent with this finding, a recent study demonstrates that sodium orthovanadate, which is commonly used to induce oxidative stress, causes an augmentation in hyperphosphorylation of tau at Ser396 significantly; however, it was decreased upon resveratrol treatment in rat hippocampal slices (Jhang et al., 2017). Resveratrol is known to function as an activator of a protein deacetylase SIRT1 (Borra et al., 2005; Mohar and Malik, 2012), which can reduce the oxidative stress by promoting the level of antioxidants through activation of several transcription factors such as Foxo3a (Giannakou and Partridge, 2004; Daitoku et al., 2011). Considering that GSK-3 α or JNK/p38kinase are major kinases to phosphorylate Tau, it was shown that inhibiting GSK-3 α or JNK/p38kinase can improve streptozotocin-induced oxidative stress and cognitive impairment by reducing tau phosphorylation and tauopathy (Guo et al., 2017).

Furthermore, oxidative stress has been found to be a critical regulator in tau-induced neurodegeneration in *Drosophila* where ROS is the vital element that causes tau phosphorylation through p38-MAPK pathway activation (Dias-Santagata et al., 2007). Apart from the activation of kinases responsible for tau phosphorylation induced by oxidative stress, there are several pieces of evidence where the level of a

dephosphorylating enzyme of tau, such as PP2A activity was decreased upon the oxidatively stressed condition (Zhang et al., 2014). This data suggests that oxidative stress triggers tau hyperphosphorylation both by activating kinases and deactivating phosphatases with the severity of AD.

Since tau acetylation is upstream of tau phosphorylation; it opens an excellent scope of investigation on whether oxidative stress can directly modulate tau acetylation or not. In this respect we would like to hypothesize that oxidative stress might have some direct effect on p300/CBP acetyltransferase mediated tau acetylation because elsewhere it has been reported that p300/CBP interacts and acetylates its various substrates in the presence of ROS (Dansen et al., 2009; Sun et al., 2009; Jain et al., 2012). Oxidative stress has been shown to affect the deacetylating activity of SIRT1 (Salminen et al., 2013), which is critical for the regulation of tau acetylation and subsequent tau phosphorylation. Thus, it might also be worth investigating whether oxidative stress induced SIRT1 inactivation has any direct role on tau acetylation and therefore abnormal aggregation.

4.1. Tauopathies in neurodegenerative disorders other than AD: a perspective from genetic manipulation

Implications of tau pathology in neurodegenerative diseases other than AD has started to explore in late 1980, and the first evidence was observed in the study reported by Dr. Pollock and his associates. In this study, it was shown that filamentous aggregates in Tau are common in Pick's disease which is under the group of disorders known as frontotemporal lobar degeneration (FTLD), and progressive supranuclear palsy (PSP) (Pollock et al., 1986). Further characterization of these diseases it was revealed that tau was hyperphosphorylated without any significant pathology of either A β and α -synuclein. The subsequent molecular, biochemical studies provide insight into the tau hyperphosphorylation, and it was shown that all six tau isoforms were present in sarkosyl extracts in equal ratios of R3 and R4 isoforms which were composed of typical tau triplets of 60, 64 and 69 kDa, and additional minor bands of 72/74 kDa. Eventually, this characteristic pattern of tau phosphorylation was evidenced in frontotemporal dementia and parkinsonism linked to chromosome 17 (FTDP-17), Niemann-Pick disease type C, Down syndrome and dementia pugilistica (Sergeant, Delacourte et al. 2005). In other neurodegenerative disorders, such as PSP (Flament et al., 1991), corticobasal degeneration (CBD; Ksiezak-Reding et al., 1994), argyrophilic grain disease (AgD; (Simic, 2002)), and some cases of FTDP-17, sarkosyl extracts revealed that tau protein was separated as doublets of 64 and 69 kDa, which is a typical feature of class II tauopathies where isoforms with 4R predominates. On the other hand, the Pick's disease is characterized by the presence of pathological tau doublets of 60 and 64 kDa and contain mainly 3R tau isoforms (class III tauopathy) whereas in myotonic dystrophy type I (DM1) or Steinert's disease a major insoluble tau band of 60 kDa, and minor 64 and 69 kDa bands have been identified (Delacourte et al., 1996; Buee et al., 2000; Jovanov-Milosevic et al., 2012; Jadhav et al., 2015). Despite having all the characterization of Tau, the direct relevance of tau dysfunction and filament formation in these diseases has not been shown yet.

Further genetic studies shed some light into this relevancy, and it was reported that autosomal dominantly inherited form of FTD with parkinsonism and amyotrophy (disinhibition-dementia-parkinsonism-amyotrophy complex, DDPAC) is in the same chromosome 17q21.2 region where *MAPT* gene is present (Wilhelmsen et al., 1994). Consistent with this finding, another group has shown that the genetic defect in MSTD (multiple system tauopathy with presenile dementia) mapped to chromosome 17q21-22 (Murrell et al., 1997), where *MAPT* gene is present. MSTD is characterized by the presence of 4R tau and solubility of tau was dependent on its isoforms. More specifically, it was shown that increased splicing of exon 10 of the *MAPT* gene might be the cause of familial MSTD (Foster et al., 1997). Sequencing results found

that conversion of a guanine (G) to adenine (A) transition at position +3 of the intron following exon 10 is critical to segregate the disease (Spillantini et al., 1998). However, tauopathy is not dependent only on mutations; other independent studies have shown that two exonic mutations (P301L and V337M) (Poorkaj et al., 1998), or missense mutations (G272V, P301L, and R406W) in exon 10 significantly contribute to the tauopathy (Hutton et al., 1998). Reversing these mutations was able to reduce the ability of tau to promote microtubule assembly (Hasegawa et al., 1998; Hong et al., 1998); suggesting that these mutations directly contribute to the tauopathy. Considering that these mutations in the *MAPT* gene can significantly contribute to the tauopathy independent of A β changes; these mutations can be implicated in neurodegenerative diseases other than AD.

5. Tauopathy in healthy brain aging

Tau deposition is also typical in the aged brain, specifically, in primary age-related tauopathy (PART) (Bouras et al., 1993; Ikeda et al., 1993; Bancher and Jellinger, 1994; Itoh et al., 1996; Jellinger and Attems, 2007; Cray et al., 2014). Clinically, PART can be either correlated or associated with other neurodegenerative conditions such as tangle predominant senile dementia (TPSD), tangle only dementia, preferential development of NFT without senile plaques, or senile dementia of the neurofibrillary tangle type (SD-NFT) (Cray et al., 2014). Even though PART is commonly observed in the brains of aged individuals and universally detectable at autopsy among elderly individuals, the diagnosis of PART in the aged patient remains challenging. However, identifying the association between tauopathy with PART opens the possibility of using tau imaging as a diagnostic tool to detect PART in the clinical settings.

Several efforts have been made to elucidate the underlying molecular mechanism to establish a correlation between common aging mechanisms with tau deposition. Among them, an alteration in the kinase activity of Mammalian target of rapamycin (mTOR) has been shown to have a significant effect on aging. Because, the reduced signaling of mTOR kinase and inhibition by rapamycin have been demonstrated to extend the lifespan of yeast, worms, and flies (Schieke and Finkel, 2006; Harrison et al., 2009; Bishop, Lu et al. 2010). As a part of the mechanism, it was shown that inhibition of mTOR leads to an increase in autophagy which can reduce protein aggregation and tauopathies in neurodegenerative condition (Ravikumar et al., 2004; Bishop, Lu et al. 2010). Secondly, in the healthy aging brain, impairment of proteasomal degradation machinery leads to unwanted protein aggregates, and this phenomenon also gives a link between aging process with tau accumulation (Fischer et al., 2009). Thirdly, aging leads to either downregulate or inactivates a protein deacetylase, SIRT1, which is essential to reduce oxidative stress and maintain the level of neurotrophic factors such as BDNF to keep the brain healthy (Rogina and Helfand, 2004; Boily et al., 2008; Mair and Dillin, 2008). In AD, an inactivation of SIRT1 results in an induction of acetylation of Tau which serves as a precursor for tau phosphorylation and tauopathy. Thus, we cannot rule the possibility that inactivation of SIRT1 in the aged brain, specifically in PART, will result in an increase in acetylation of Tau and pathology associated with Tau.

6. Conclusion

Although substantial progress has been made to understand the pathological aspects of tau phosphorylation in several preclinical models of neurodegenerative disorders, targeting tau phosphorylation to improve cognitive deficiencies remains abortive. Thus, identification of novel post-translational modification of Tau such as tau acetylation which occurs well ahead of tau phosphorylation provides a unique opportunity to address the tau phosphorylation. Specifically, tau acetylation at K280 has the most promising target to treat the tauopathy because of its direct correlation with tau phosphorylation. However, it

is not clear whether tau acetylation can directly affect oxidative stress or neuroinflammation independent of tau phosphorylation. Also, reducing tau acetylation is clinically challenging because Tau acetylation depends on activation and inactivation of an acetyltransferase p300 and a protein deacetylase SIRT1. Both proteins have several substrates other than Tau, and these substrates are functionally relevant to numerous physiological aspects in a cell. Thus, attenuating their activities may result in adverse effects instead of providing neuroprotection. Therefore, it would be much more meaningful to attenuate the aberrant activation of p300 and SIRT1. Our recent study offers an insight where nitrosylation of GAPDH has been shown to be responsible for both aberrant activation of p300 and inactivation of SIRT1. Also, blocking GAPDH-nitrosylation using Omigapil, which is being tested for patients of muscular dystrophy have shown promising results to prevent tau acetylation. In the future, much more studies are needed to specifically target the Tau acetylation which contributes to the pathology upon activation of neurological disorders including AD or the aged brain.

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