

Chapter 3

The Neuronal Porosome Complex in Mammalian Brain: A Study Using Electron Microscopic Study

Mzia G. Zhvania,^{a,b} Nadezhda J. Japaridze,^b Mariam G. Qsovreli,^a
Vera G. Okuneva,^{a,b} Arkadi G. Surmava,^b and Tamar G.
Lordkipanidze^{a,b}

^a*Institute of Chemical Biology, Iliia State University,
3/5 K. Cholokhashvili Avenue, 0162 Tbilisi, Georgia*

^b*Department of Neuroanatomy, I. Beritashvili Center of Experimental BioMedicine,
14, Gotua Street, 0160 Tbilisi, Georgia*

mzia_zhvania@iliauni.edu.ge

Porosomes are the universal secretory machinery in cells where membrane-bound secretory vesicles dock and transiently fuse (kiss-and-run) to release intravesicular contents to the outside of the cell during secretion. Earlier it was shown that in rat neurons 12–17 nm cup-shaped lipoprotein porosomes, possessing a central plug are present at the presynaptic membrane sometimes with 35–50 nm in diameter docked synaptic vesicles. In the current study, neuronal porosome structures following hypokinetic stress were evaluated using electron microscopy. Experiments were carried out to identify and evaluate the porosome structure at the presynaptic membrane in the rat and cat brain in control and experimental

NanoCellBiology: Multimodal Imaging in Biology and Medicine

Edited by Bhanu P. Jena and Douglas J. Taatjes

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ISBN 978-981-4411-79-0 (Hardcover), 978-981-4411-80-6 (eBook)

www.panstanford.com

animals and to demonstrate the presence of porosomes in the dog brain. The results reveal for the first time the presence of neuronal porosomes in dog brain and further confirm their existence at the presynaptic membrane in rat and cat brain. Furthermore, the results demonstrate neuronal porosomes to possess a cup-shaped morphology in all the three mammalian species examined, i.e., the rat, cat, and dog. The next series of experiments were designed to evaluate morphological changes in the porosome structure as a consequence of pathological condition—chronic hypokinetic stress. This condition is known to produce structural alterations in the synapses, including the presynaptic regions of limbic region. The depth and diameter of porosome in the central nucleus of amygdale of normal rat and rat subjected to 90 day hypokinetic stress were measured. Morphometric analysis point out the heterogeneity of porosome dimensions that remain unchanged in pathological states. These studies demonstrate for the first time that despite alterations in the presynaptic terminal structure and synaptic transmission provoked by chronic hypokinetic stress in the limbic region, the gross morphology of porosome is unaffected. These results do not, however, rule out possible changes in the composition of the porosome complex following stress. Furthermore, longer period of stress may elicit changes in the neuronal porosome complex, which remains to be established.

3.1 Introduction

In all cells, cellular cargo destined for secretion is packaged and stored within membranous vesicles that transiently dock and establish continuity at the base of cup or flask-shaped plasma membrane structures called “porosomes”¹⁻⁵ and neurons are no exception.⁶⁻¹⁶ Therefore, “porosomes” are the universal secretory machinery in cells where vesicles transiently dock and fuse to release intravesicular contents to the outside of the cell during secretion.

It is suggested that in each type of secretory cell special content of secretory vesicles, different speed of release and different volume of content release dictates specific size of porosomes. In neurons and astrocytes, representing fast secretory cells, porosomes range in size from 10 to 17 nm. In an earlier study, using the atomic force microscope (AFM) and the electron microscope (EM), it was