The Vasopressin $V_{1b}$ Receptor as a Therapeutic Target in Stress-Related Disorders

Guy Griebel
Schematic representation of the endocrine, behavioral and autonomic responses to stress mediated by vasopressin (AVP), and the consequences of repeated stress.

The blockade of V₁b receptors in the hypothalamus may prevent the deleterious effects of an hyperactive HPA (stress) axis.
The vasopressin pathways in the brain

- PVN: Paraventricular Nucleus of the Hypothalamus
- PHN: Posterior Hypothalamic Nucleus
- SON: Supraoptic Nucleus
- SCN: Suprachiasmatic Nucleus

- Hypothalamic pathways: blue
- Central Pathways: red
Immunohistochemical localization of the V₁b receptor in the rat brain
Immunohistochemical localization of $V_{1b}$ receptors in brain areas known to modulate anxiety behaviors in rats

- Lateral Septum
- Bed Nucleus of the Stria Terminalis
- Amygdala
- Dendate Gyrus

V1bR

Control
The $V_{1b}$ receptor and stress

Eight or 14 days immobilization stress or hypertonic saline injection (ip HS) increases $V_{1b}$ receptor mRNA

Rabadan-Diehl et al., J. Neuroendocrinol. 7 : 903-10, 1995
Chemical name: (2S, 4R)-1-[5-chloro-1-[(2,4-dimethoxyphenyl)sulfonyl]-3-(2-methoxyphenyl)-2-oxo-2,3-dihydro-1H-indol-3-yl]-4-hydroxy-\(N,N\)-dimethyl-2-pyrrolidinocarboxamide, isomer(-)
Selectivity profile of SSR149415 for vasopressin and oxytocin receptors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ki (nM)</th>
<th>V(_{1b})</th>
<th>V(_{1a})</th>
<th>V(_{2})</th>
<th>OT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human</td>
<td>Hypophysis</td>
<td>CHO</td>
<td>CHO</td>
<td>CHO Itk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>1.5 ± 0.8</td>
<td>91 ± 23</td>
<td>1412 ± 214</td>
<td>174 ± 35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rat</td>
<td>Hypophysis</td>
<td>CHO</td>
<td>Liver</td>
<td>Kidney Mammary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>1.3 ± 0.9</td>
<td>1050 ± 112</td>
<td>2897 ± 509</td>
<td>270 ± 39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SSR149415 is selective for the rat and human V\(_{1b}\) receptor
Efficacy of SSR149415 at the human V$_{1b}$ receptor

Inhibition by SSR149415 of AVP-induced Ca$^{2+}$ increase in CHO cells transfected with the human V$_{1b}$ receptor.

SSR149415 (M)

$IC_{50} = 3.8$ nM

SSR149415 is a competitive antagonist
**Effects of SSR149415 on vasopressin-induced ACTH secretion in conscious rats**

SSR149415 decreased in a dose-dependent manner vasopressin-induced secretion of ACTH

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AVP + SSR149415 (mg/kg p.o. 2 h)</th>
<th>ACTH (pg/ml)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AVP</td>
<td>250 ± 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>200 ± 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>150 ± 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>100 ± 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>50 ± 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basal</td>
<td>0 ± 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Animal models used and psychiatric conditions* modeled to investigate the effects of SSR149415 on emotional processes

*According to the DSM-IV classification (1994)

Generalized Anxiety Disorder

Panic Disorder

Acute Stress Disorder

Major Depressive Disorder

4-Plate
- Light/dark
- Social Interaction
- Punished Drinking
- Elevated Plus-Maze

Mouse Defense Test Battery
- Risk Assessment
- Flight
- Defensive Aggression

Restraint stress-induced ACTH secretion and physiological changes
- Tail-pinch-induced NE release
  - Social Defeat
  - Conditioned fear
  - Distress vocalizations in rats or guinea pigs

Forced Swimming
- Chronic Mild Stress
- Chronic social stress

Restraint stress-induced ACTH secretion and physiological changes
- Tail-pinch-induced NE release
  - Social Defeat
  - Conditioned fear
  - Distress vocalizations in rats or guinea pigs

According to the DSM-IV classification (1994)
Effects of SSR149415 in two classical models of anxiety: The elevated plus-maze and Vogel conflict tests in rats

Elevated Plus-maze

Vogel Conflict

SSR149415 produced weak anxiolytic-like activity in the elevated plus-maze and Vogel conflict tests in rats.
Effects of SSR149415 in the elevated plus-maze test in mice following social defeat

SSR149415 antagonized the heightened emotionality in the elevated plus-maze produced by prior (stressful) exposure to an aggressive isolated resident.
The mouse defense test battery

- **FLIGHT**
- **RISK ASSESSMENT**
- **DEFENSIVE AGGRESSION**
Effects of SSR149415 in the mouse defense test battery

SSR149415 reduced defensive aggression, but no other aspects of defensive behaviors
Effects of SSR149415 on offensive aggression in hamsters

SSR149415 reduced both conspecific offensive attack and olfactory investigation in hamsters.
Effects of SSR149415 on maternal separation-induced distress vocalizations in rat or guinea pig pups

Rat Pups

Guinea Pig Pups

SSR149415 produced a dose-dependent decrease in both sonic and ultrasonic distress vocalizations.
Effects of SSR149415 on acute stress-induced ACTH or NE secretion in rats

Restraint Stress-induced increase in plasma ACTH levels

Tail Pinch Stress-induced release in NE in the prefrontal cortex

SSR149415 prevented both restraint and tail pinch stress-induced ACTH and NE releases, respectively
Effects of SSR149415 in an animal model of depression: The forced-swimming test in rats

SSR149415 produced dose-dependent antidepressant-like activity
The Chronic Mild Stress Procedure in Mice: A model of depression

Chronic sequential application of mild stressors*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 weeks

Tests

Treatments

• Restraint
• Water and food deprivation
• Paired housing in damp sawdust
• Light/dark cycle modification
• Forced swimming

Non-stressed mouse

Stressed mouse

*
Effects of repeated treatment (39 days/once a day, ip) of SSR149415 in the chronic mild stress model in mice

Repeated administration of SSR149415 reversed the degradation of the physical state produced by stress.
Effects of 39-day treatment (once a day, ip) of SSR149415 in the chronic mild stress model in mice

**Anxiety in the Elevated plus-maze**

Repeated administration of SSR149415 reversed anxiety produced by stress.

**Risk Assessment in the Mouse Defense Test Battery**

Repeated administration of SSR149415 reversed anxiety produced by stress.
Cell proliferation in the hippocampal dentate gyrus of stressed and non-stressed mice

No stress

Stress

24h post BrdU

Chronic mild stress decreases the number of BrdU-positive cells
Repeated treatment with SSR149415 prevented stress-induced decrease of cell proliferation in the subgranular zone and neurogenesis in the granular cell layer of the dentate gyrus.
Phenotype of BrdU-labeled cells 30 days after the end of stress exposure

The population of surviving BrdU-positive cells essentially mature into neurons

No difference in phenotypic expression patterns between groups
The Visible Burrow System: A Realistic Model of Depression in Rats
Effects of repeated treatment with SSR149415 on agonistic behavior in socially stressed rats in a visible burrow system

Fluoxetine and SSR149415-treated animals showed higher wound counts than did controls rats

Fighting intensity with the dominant rat

ACTH secretion following restraint stress

Fluoxetine and SSR149415-treated rats showed much higher plasma ACTH levels relative to vehicle subordinates, suggesting normalization of this HPA axis parameter.
Expected clinical spectrum of therapeutic activity of SSR149415 in anxiety/depressive disorders

- Benzodiazepines
- Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- Panic Disorder
- Acute Stress Disorder
- Major Depressive Disorder
- Tricyclics, SSRIs and mixed 5HT/NARIs
- SSR149415
SSR149415 : Safety studies

- Central depressant effects in mice: rotarod, traction test and spontaneous activity
  - No effect up to 100 mg/kg, p.o.

- Sleep pattern in rats: EEG
  - No modification up to 30 mg/kg, p.o.

- Food intake and weight gain: Obese (ob/ob) and Lean female mice, normoglycemic mice and rats
  - No effect up to 30 mg/kg, p.o.
Effects of SSR149415 on spatial memory in mice: The Morris water maze

SSR149415 had no effect on either the acquisition of the test or on recalling the platform position after removal.
Effects of SSR149415 in the forced-swimming test in hypophysectomized rats

SSR149415 is still effective in hypophysectomized rats, indicating that the antidepressant-like effects do not depend on blocking only the hypothalamic V_{1b} receptors.
Effects of local infusions of SSR149415 in the forced-swimming test in rats

Lateral Septum

Central Amygdala

The antidepressant-like effects of SSR149415 are mediated by the V_{1b} receptors located in the lateral septum and the amygdala.
Conclusion

- The $V_{1b}$ receptor antagonist SSR149415 is able to attenuate some but not all stress-related behaviors in rodents.
- The $V_{1b}$ receptor antagonist showed clear effects only in particularly stressful situations, and in tests sensitive to social or aggression cues.
- SSR149415 is devoid of central depressant effects, even at high doses, and does not affect cognitive processes or food intake, suggesting a large therapeutic window.
- The lateral septum and the central nucleus of the amygdala participate in the antidepressant-like action of SSR149415
- $V_{1b}$ receptor antagonists might be useful as a treatment for major depression and stress disorders that result from traumatic events.
Acknowledgments

CHEMISTRY

P. AVENET
M. DECOBERT
D. FRANCON

J. WAGNON

ELECTROPHYSIOLOGICAL STUDIES

NEUROCHEMICAL STUDIES

P. AVENET
M. DECOBERT
D. FRANCON

BEHAVIORAL STUDIES

M. ARNONE
O. BERGIS
D.C. BLANCHARD
R.J. BLANCHARD
E. DUCONSEILLE
J. SIMIAND
P. SOUBRIE
J. STEMMELIN

R. ALONSO
L. LUKOVIC
C. SERRADEIL-LE GAL
R. STEINBERG