TOP2A substitution enhances topoisomerase activity and causes transcriptional dysfunction in glioblastoma patients

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44   Running title: Novel mutations in *TOP2A* in gliomas

Abstract

High grade gliomas (HGGs) are aggressive, primary brain tumors with poor clinical outcomes. To better understand glioma pathobiology and find potential therapeutic susceptibilities, we designed a custom- panel 664 cancer- and epigenetics-related genes and employed targeted next generation sequencing to study the genomic landscape of somatic and germline variants in 182 glioma samples of different malignancy grades. Besides known alterations in *TP53*, *IDH1*, *ATRX*, *EGFR* genes, we found several novel variants that can be potential drivers in gliomas. In four patients from the Polish glioma cohort, we identified a novel recurrent mutation in the *TOP2A* gene coding for Topoisomerase 2A in glioblastomas (GBM, WHO grade IV gliomas). The mutation results in a substitution of glutamic acid (E) 948 to glutamine (Q) of TOP2 A and we predicted this E948Q substitution may affect DNA binding and a TOP2A enzymatic activity. Topoisomerases are enzymes that control the higher order DNA structure by introducing transient breaks and rejoining DNA strands. Using recombinant proteins we demonstrated stronger DNA binding and DNA supercoil relaxation activities of the variant proteins. Glioblastoma (GBM) patients with the mutated *TOP2A* had shorter overall survival than wild type *TOP2A* GBM patients. Computational analyses of transcriptomic data showed that the GBM samples with the mutated *TOP2A* have different transcriptomic patterns suggesting higher transcriptomic activity. The results suggest that TOP2A E948Q variant strongly binds to DNA and is more active in comparison to the wild-type protein. Altogether, our findings suggest that the E948Q substitution leads to gain of function by TOP2A.

Introduction

High-grade gliomas (HGGs) are most frequent, primary brain tumors in adults.[34, 35, 54, 55] The World Health Organization (WHO) classifies HGGs as WHO grade III and IV gliomas. Among HGGs, the most aggressive is glioblastoma (GBM, a WHO grade IV tumor) which has a high recurrence and mortality rate due to highly infiltrative growth, genetic alterations and therapy resistance. Post-surgery radiotherapy combined with temozolomide in glioblastomas or with procarbazine, CCNU (lomustine) and vincristine in diffuse low-grade (WHO grade II) and anaplastic (WHO grade III) gliomas showed some survival benefits. Overall survival of HGG patients from a time of diagnosis ranges from 12-18 months despite an extensive all available therapies.[20, 43, 53] Recent advancements in high-throughput genomic and transcriptomic studies performed by The Cancer Genome Atlas (TCGA) consortium[6] brought emerging insights into etiology, molecular subtypes and putative therapeutic cues in HGGs. Recurrent somatic alterations in genes such as *TP53*, *PTEN*, *NF1*, *ATRX*, *EGFR*, *PDGFRA* and *IDH1/2* have been reported.[5, 17, 33, 49] Discovery of the recurrent mutation in the *IDH1* gene[36] in gliomas and resulting distinct transcriptomic and DNA methylation profiles in *IDH*-mutant and *IDH*-wild type gliomas[7] improved the WHO classification.[28, 37, 57] Phosphoinositide 3-kinase (PI3K) signaling which is affected by several oncogenic alterations such as *PTEN* deletion, mutations in *PDGFR* (encoding platelet derived growth factor receptor*)* or *EGFR* (encoding epidermal growth factor receptor) emerged as a vital target in HGGs. Several PI3K inhibitors including pan-PI3K, isoform-selective or dual PI3K/mammalian target of rapamycin (mTOR) inhibitors have displayed promising preclinical results and entered clinical trials.[21, 63] Regrettably, inhibitors against aberrant EGFR failed in the phase III clinical trials[52, 58] and none of the receptor tyrosine kinase inhibitors have been approved for GBM patients. Due to the lack of an effective treatment in HGGs, even rare, but targetable genetic changes are of interest as they may offer a personalized treatment for selected patients. *BRAF V600E* mutations found in approximately

1% of glioma patients are considered as a therapeutic target in basket trials including gliomas.[19,]
[60] Inhibitors of Aurora kinases, which play important roles in the cell division through regulation
of chromosome segregation, had a synergistic or sensitizing effect with chemotherapy drugs,
radiotherapy, or with other targeted molecules in GBM and several of them are currently in
clinical trials.[3, 13]

In this study, we applied targeted next generation sequencing of a custom panel of 664-
cancer- and epigenetics related genes to study the genomic landscape of both somatic and
germ-line variants in 182 high grade gliomas. Besides previously described alterations in *TP53*,
IDH1, *ATRX*, *EGFR* genes, we found several new variants that were predicted to be potential
drivers. In four GBM patients from the Polish HGG cohort, we identified a novel, recurrent
mutation in the *TOP2A* gene, resulting in a substitution of glutamic acid (E) 948 to glutamine
(Q). The *TOP2A* gene encodes Topoisomerase 2A which belongs to a family of
Topoisomerases engaged in the maintenance of a higher order DNA structure. These enzymes
are also implicated in other cellular processes such as chromatin folding and gene expression,
in which the topological transformations of higher-order DNA structures are catalyzed.[39] GBMs
with *TOP2A* mutations had shorter survival and displayed the increased transcriptomic activity.
Using computational methods we predicted the consequences of the E948Q substitution on
TOP2A and verified them with biochemical assays using a recombinant wild type and variant
TOP2A. Our results show that the E948Q substitution in TOP2A affects its DNA binding and
enzymatic activity, which could lead to a "gain of function".

Materials and Methods

Tumor Samples

Glioma samples and matching blood samples were obtained from the: St. Raphael Hospital, Scanmed, Cracow, Poland; Medical University of Silesia, Sosnowiec, Poland; Medical University of Warsaw, Poland; Military Institute of Medicine, Warsaw, Poland; Copernicus Hospital PL, Gdansk, Poland; Medical University of Gdańsk, Poland; Institute of Psychiatry and Neurology, Warsaw, Poland; Mazovian Brodnowski Hospital, Warsaw, Poland; Maria Sklodowska-Curie National Research Institute of Oncology, Warsaw, Poland; Canadian Human Tissue Bank. Each patient provided a written consent for the use of tumor tissues. All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committees, with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments. Detailed description of our patient cohort is presented in Supplementary Table 1. In the analysis we used 182 II, III and IV grade glioma samples. For 67 of them we were able to sequence DNA isolated from blood as a reference for analysis of somatic mutations. Most of the patients from our cohort suffered from glioblastoma (132/182). For the samples provided by Canadian Human Tissue Bank (GL162-GL182) we do not have access to clinical data, excluding diagnosis.

DNA/RNA Isolation

Total DNA and RNA were extracted from fresh frozen tissue samples using Trizol Reagent (Thermo Fischer Scientific, Waltham, MA, USA), following manufacturer's protocol. DNA from blood samples was isolated using QIAamp DNA Blood Mini Kit (Qiagen, Hilden, Germany), following manufacturer's protocol. Quality and quantity of nucleic acids were determined by

Nanodrop (Thermo Fisher Scientific, Waltham, MA, USA) and Agilent Bioanalyzer (Agilent

Technologies, Santa Clara, CA, USA).

Design of Targeted Cancer-Related Gene Enrichment Panel

More than 90% of known pathogenic mutations registered in the NCBI ClinVar database are

located in protein-coding DNA sequence (CDS) regions. We used SeqCap EZ Custom

Enrichment Kit, which is an exome enrichment design that targets the latest genomic annotation

GRCh38/hg38. Our SeqCap EZ Choice Library covers exomic regions of 664 genes frequently

mutated in cancer. A majority of genes (578) were selected from the Roche Nimblegene Cancer

Comprehensive Panel (based on Cancer Gene Consensus from Sanger Institute and NCBI

Gene Tests). Additionally, we included 86 epigenetics-related genes (genes coding for histone

acetylases/deacetylases, histone methylases/demethylases, DNA methylases/demethylases

and chromatin remodeling proteins) based on a literature review.[12, 30, 47]

DNA and RNA Sequencing

DNA isolated from tumor samples was processed for library preparation according to a

NimbleGen SeqCap EZ Library SR (v 4.2) user guide. Libraries were prepared from 1 µg of total

DNA. Initial step in the procedure was fragmentation of the material to obtain 180-220 bp DNA

fragments. Next ends of these fragments were repaired and A base was added to 3' end. Then

indexed adapters were ligated and libraries were amplified. Obtained libraries were mixed

eximolar and special oligonucleotide probes were added to enrich the libraries with earlier

fragments of interest. After 72 h incubation of the mixture pooled libraries were purified using

special beads and amplified. Quality control of obtained libraries was done using Agilent

Bioanalyzer with High Sensitivity DNA Kit (Agilent Technologies, Palo Alto, CA, USA).

Quantification of the libraries was done using Quantus Fluorometer and QuantiFluor Double

Stranded DNA System (Promega, Madison, Wisconsin, USA). Libraries were run in the rapid

run flow cell and were paired-end sequenced (2x76bp) on HiSeq 1500 (Illumina, San Diego, CA

92122 USA).

mRNA sequencing libraries were prepared using KAPA Stranded mRNAseq Kit according to

manufacturer's protocol. Briefly, mRNA molecules were enriched from 500 ng of total RNA

using poly-T oligo-attached magnetic beads (Kapa Biosystems, MA, USA). Obtained mRNA

was fragmented and first and second strand of cDNA were synthesized. Then adapter was

ligated and loop structure of adapter was cut by USER enzyme (NEB, Ipswich, MA, USA).

Amplification of obtained dsDNA fragments containing the adapters was performed using NEB

starters (Ipswich, MA, USA). Quality control of obtained libraries was done using Agilent

Bioanalyzer with High Sensitivity DNA Kit (Agilent Technologies, Palo Alto, CA, USA).

Quantification of the libraries was done using Quantus Fluorometer and QuantiFluor Double

Stranded DNA System (Promega, Madison, Wisconsin, USA). Libraries were run in the rapid

run flow cell and were paired-end sequenced (2x76bp) on HiSeq 1500 (Illumina, San Diego, CA

92122 USA).

Total RNA sequencing libraries were prepared using NEBNext Ultra II Directional RNA Library

Prep Kit (NEB, Ipswich, MA, USA). rRNA molecules were depleted using NEBNext rRNA

Depletion Kit (NEB, Ipswich, MA, USA). Libraries were prepared from 100 ng of total RNA. After

rRNA depletion first and second strand of cDNA were synthesized, adapter was ligated and

finally libraries were amplified using NEB starters (NEB, Ipswich, MA, USA). Quallity evaluation

of the libraries was done using Agilent Bioanalyzer with High Sensitivity DNA Kit (Agilent

Technologies, Santa Clara, CA, USA) and concentrations were checked with Quantus

Fluorometer and QuantiFluor Double Stranded DNA System (Promega, Madison, Wisconsin,

USA). Libraries were run in the rapid run flow cell and were paired-end sequenced (2x76bp) on

HiSeq 1500 (Illumina, San Diego, CA 92122 USA).

Data Analysis

Somatic plus rare germline variants pipeline

Fastq files from both tumor and blood samples were prepared as follows. Sequencing reads were filtered by trimmomatic program.[2] Filtered and trimmed reads were mapped to human genome version hg38 by BWA aligner[24] (http://bio-bwa.sourceforge.net/). The mapped reads as the BAM files were sorted and indexed. Next, sample read pileup was prepared by samtools mpileup and then variants were called by bcftools and filtered by varfilter from vcfutils to include just variants with coverage higher than 12 reads per position and with mapping quality higher than Q35. Next variants were filtered to include just the ones with variant allele frequency (VAF) higher than 20%, meaning that more than 20% of reads had to support the variant. Separate analysis on the same sample was prepared with Scalpel software[16] to enrich short deletions and insertions discovery. Variants obtained with scalpel were filtered as well to include just variants with VAF>20%. Variants obtained from bcftools and scalpel analysis were merged and processed to maf format by vcf2maf program. Vcf2maf tool annotates genetic variants to existing databases by Variant Effect Predictor (VEP) program.[32] Subsequently maf object was filtered by the Minor Allele Frequency (MAF) value, it had to be lower than 0.001 in all populations annotated by VEP to be included in the final analysis, meaning that in any of well defined populations, including gnomAD, 100 genomes, EXAC it was not found in more than 1 in 1000 individuals. Filtered maf object was subsequantly analyzed in maftools R library.[31] At the end our glioma cohort included putative somatic and rare germline variants.

Somatic variants pipeline

FASTQ files from both tumor and blood samples were processed with trimmomatic program[2] to remove low quality reads and sequencing adapters. Filtered and trimmed reads were mapped to human genome (hg38) by NextGenMap aligner (http://cibiv.github.io/NextGenMap/). Read

duplicates were marked and removed by Picard (https://broadinstitute.github.io/picard/) and

only properly oriented and uniquely mapping reads were considered for further analysis. For

somatic calls, a minimum coverage of 10 reads was established for both normal and tumor

samples. Additionally, variants with strand supporting reads bias were discarded. Only coding

variants with damaging predicted SIFT values (>0.05) were selected.

ProcessSomatic method from VarScan2[23] was applied to extract high confidence somatic calls

based on variant allele frequency and Fisher's exact test p-value. The final subset of variants

was annotated with Annovar (http://annovar.openbioinformatics.org/en/latest/) employing the

latest databases versions (refGene, clinvar, cosmic, avsnp150 and dbnsfp30a). Finally, maftools

R library[31] was used to analyze the resulting somatic variants.

To test overlap between a somatic analysis pipeline (including blood DNA as a reference) and

somatic andrare germ-line variants pipelines, we compared 50 samples that were common in

two analyses. A number of Missense Mutations, Frame Shift Del, Frame Shift Ins and

Nonsense mutation obtained was compared between these two pipelines.

RNA sequencing analysis

RNA sequencing reads were aligned to the human genome by gap-aware algorithm - STAR

(https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3530905/) and gene counts were obtained by

featurecounts.[26] Aligned reads (bam format) were processed by RseQC[51] program to evaluate

the quality of obtained results, but also to estimate the proportion of reads mapping to protein

coding exons, 5'-UTRs, 3'-UTRs and introns. From the gene counts subsequent statistical

analysis was performed in R using NOIseq[46] and clusterProfiler[61] libraries.

Prediction of the TOP2A mutant effect

To predict the consequences of E948Q substitution on the TOP2A, we used the crystal

structure of the human TOP2A in a complex with DNA (PDB code: 4FM9). Protein structures

were visualized and an electrostatic potential was calculated using PyMOL.

Cloning and mutagenesis

The *TOP2A* gene (NCBI nucleotide accession number (AC) – NM_001067, protein –

NP_001058.2) cloned into pcDNA3.1+/C-(K)-DYK vector (Clone ID OHu21029D) was

purchased from Genscript. The cDNAs were cloned into a bacterial expression vector. *TOP2A*

fragment corresponding to amino acid residues 890-996 was amplified and cloned into pET28a

vector as a BamHI - EcoRI fragment, resulting in a construct expressing His6 tag fused to N-

terminus of TOP2A 890-996 aa. *TOP2A* fragment corresponding to amino acid residues 431-

1193 was amplified and cloned into a pET28a vector as a SalI - NotI fragment, resulting in a

construct expressing His6 tag fused to N-terminus of TOP2A 431-1193 aa. Site-directed

mutagenesis of *TOP2A* gene was performed by a PCR-based technique. All mutant genes were

sequenced and found to contain only the desired mutations.

Protein expression and purification

Proteins were expressed from bacterial plasmid DNA carrying *TOP2A* in *E. coli* Rosetta (DE3)

strain. Cells were grown in LB medium with appropriate antibiotics at 37°C. When the bacteria

reached OD_{600} 0.8, protein expression was induced by addition of 1 mM IPTG. The induction of

TOP2A 890-996 aa was carried out at 37°C for 4 h. One hour before the induction of TOP2A

431-1193 aa the temperature was changed to 37°C and the induction was carried out overnight.

Cells were harvested by centrifugation (4000 g for 5 min, 4°C) and pelleted. Proteins were

purified using the HisPur Ni-NTA Magnetic beads (Thermo Scientific). The pellet was

resuspended in binding buffer (10 mM Na_2HPO_4, 1,8 mM KH_2PO_4, 2,7 mM KCl, 300 mM NaCl,

10 mM imidazole, pH 8.0, 10 % (v/v) glycerol, 10 mM 2-Mercaptoethanol (BME), 1 mM PMSF)

and lysed using Bioruptor Plus sonicator (Diagenode). The purification was carried out at 4°C.

Proteins from the clarified lysates were bound to the Ni-NTA resin, the beads were washed with

binding buffer, wash buffer 1 (binding buffer with 2 M NaCl) and wash buffer 2 (binding buffer

with 20 mM imidazole). The proteins were eluted with elution buffer (binding buffer with 250 mM

imidazole, pH 8.0). Next, the buffer was exchanged to (phosphate-buffered saline, 10 % (v/v)

glycerol, 10 mM BME) using G25 Sephadex resin (Thermo Scientific) and Spin-X Centrifuge

Tube (Costar). Final protein samples of TOP2A 890-996 aa were analyzed in 15% SDS-PAGE

and TOP2A 431-1193 aa samples in 6% SDS-PAGE. The homogeneity of the proteins was

approximately 90%. Protein concentrations were estimated by measuring the absorbance at

280 nm.

Electrophoretic mobility shift assay (EMSA)

EMSA was performed using the LightShift Chemiluminescent EMSA Kit (Thermo Scientific Cat

20148) according to manufacturer's instructions. Binding reactions contained 20 pM biotin-

labeled oligonucleotide 60 bp end-labeled duplex from LightShift Chemiluminescent EMSA Kit

and 4.25 µM TOP2A 431-1193 aa WT or E948Q variant proteins, in the 10 mM Tris pH 7.5

buffer with 50 mM KCl, 1 mM DTT, 5 mM $MgCl_2$. DNA binding reactions were performed in 30

µl. The reaction mixtures were incubated for 30 min at room temperature and subjected to

electrophoresis (100 V, 8°C) on 6% polyacrylamide gels with 10% glycerol and Tris–borate–

EDTA buffer. Then, complexes were transferred onto a 0.45 µm Biodyne nylon membrane

(Thermo Scientific Cat # 77016) in a Tris–borate–EDTA buffer and detected by

chemiluminescence using a Chemidoc camera (Bio-Rad).

Supercoil relaxation assay

The supercoil relaxation reaction was conducted at 37°C for 30 min in a buffer containing 20

mM Tris pH 8.0, 100 mM KCl, 0.1 mM EDTA, 10 mM $MgCl_2$, 1 mM adenosinetriphosphate

(ATP), 30 µg∕ml bovine serum albumin (BSA) and 200 ng supercoiled (SC) pET28a plasmid

with *TOP2A* fragment corresponding to amino acid residues 890-996 DNA. 0.1 and 0.2 µM

TOP2A 431-1193 aa WT or E948Q variant were added to start the reaction. The resultant

reaction mixtures were resolved by electrophoresis on 0.7% agarose gel followed by staining

with SimplySafe dye (EURX Cat # E4600-01) and visualization using Chemidoc camera (Bio-

Rad).

Results

Landscape of somatic and rare germ-line variants in the studied cohort

A total of 182 glioma specimens were collected in this study, 21 were from Canadian

Brain Tumor Bank, 161 were from the Polish glioma cohort. Majority of tumors were

glioblastomas (74%). The clinical characteristics of patients are summarized in the

Supplementary Table 1 and Supplementary Fig.1. We searched for somatic and rare germline

variants, as genetic variants databases have significantly improved in the last few years

allowing to identify variants occurring with very low frequency in existing databases (based on

EXAC, TOPMED, gnomAD and 1000 genomes projects) even in the absence of a reference

blood DNA. As the identified germline variants were exceptionally rare in the general population

(threshold of MAF<0.001 in all external databases), it is likely that these variants are

pathogenic.

Our approach to find potential new oncogenic drivers was based on OncodriveCLUST

spatial clustering method.[45] OncodriveCLUST estimates a background model from coding-silent

mutations and tests protein domains containing clusters of missense mutations that are likely to

alter protein structure. The results show *IDH1* gene as a top scoring hotspot, but among

identified genes we found also genes such as *FOXO3*, *PDE4DIP*, *HOXA11, ABL1* and *RECQL4*

that were not previously reported as mutated in HGGs (Fig.1A, B). When the identified genes

were compared to the results obtained in the TCGA project, most of the genes (shown in bold in

the Fig.1B) were found to be potentially new oncogenic genes.

One of the most interesting genes was *TOP2A,* which expression is highly up-regulated

in gliomas in a grade-specific manner (Fig. 1C). The *TOP2A* gene harbored 7 different

mutations and interestingly, one mutation occurred in 4 GBM patients exactly in the same

chromosomal position. This recurrent mutation in the *TOP2A* was located inside a gene

fragment encoding TOWER domain of TOP2A (Fig. 1D). The presented lolliplot (Fig. 1D) shows

all variants found in the *TOP2A* gene, including the ones that did not pass QC analysis

(Supplementary Table 2).

The results of the targeted sequencing indicate a high frequency of altered genes

(Supplementary Fig. 2A) and are in agreement with previous findings on the landscape of

pathogenic genetic changes in gliomas.[41] Annotations of variants to genes revealed that top 10

of the most frequently altered genes have genetic changes in more than 80% of samples

(Supplementary Fig. 2A). The most altered gene was *TP53*, followed by *IDH1*, *PTEN*, *ATRX*

and *EGFR* (Supplementary Fig. 2A). Other genes that were found to be frequently altered

included *KDM6B*, *ABL1*, *ARID1A*, *AR* and *NCOA6* (Supplementary Fig. 2A). One of the

reasons, why these changes have not been noticed previously, is the fact that these changes

are most likely rare germline alterations and represent mostly in-frame insertions (*KDM6B*) or in-

frame deletions (*ABL1*, *ARID1A*, *AR, NCOA6).* These genetic alterations were found at a very

low frequency in the general population (MAF<0.001) and would result in insertion or deletion

one or more amino acids to the protein, therefore we consider them potentially pathogenic. The

highest number of genetic alterations occur in genes coding for receptor tyrosine kinases (RTK)

of RAS pathway (RTK-RAS), less frequently in genes coding for proteins from NOTCH, WNT

and PI3K pathways (Supplementary Fig. 2B). More than 30 genes from the RTK-RAS pathway

were found to be altered (Supplementary Fig. 2C). The identification of RTK-RAS, MAPK

(mitogen activated protein kinases), PI(3)K (phosphatidylinositol-3-OH kinase) and Wnt/β-

catenin signaling pathways as deregulated in HGGs is consistent with the results of previous

cancer studies. Notably, new categories (for example, transcription regulators, epigenetic

enzymes and modifiers) emerge as exciting, potential targets for the development of new

therapeutics. In this cohort, the *ABL1* gene was found to be altered more frequently than the

EGFR gene (Supplementary Fig. 2C). Most frequently mutated genes encoding specific protein

domains from the PFAM database are: the TP53 domain, the PTZ00435 domain related to

IDH1/2 mutations, conserved domains of protein kinases (PKc_like, S_TKc) and kinase

phosphatases (PTPc) (Supplementary Fig. 2D).

Identification of somatic variants in high grade gliomas

Fifty glioma samples of WHO grades II, III and IV and reference blood DNAs were subjected to

targeted sequencing and detection of SNVs were performed on both a tumor and blood DNA,

which allowed to confirm if the identified variants were somatic. Considering a set of the somatic

mutations with deleterious consequences (Fig. 2A), the most frequently altered gene is *TP53*,

which is mutated in 48% of the patients, followed by *IDH1*, *ATRX*, *EGFR* and *PTEN*, among

others.

We investigated the mutational signatures of hotspot mutations and illustrated the

common and distinct sequence contexts under which the hotspot mutations were enriched. Two

novel mutational hotspots with deleterious consequences were detected in the *AKAP9* gene

(Fig. 2A,B). A-kinase anchor protein 9 (AKAP9), a cAMP-responsive scaffold protein AKAP9,

regulates microtubule dynamics and nucleation at the Golgi apparatus[48], promotes development

and growth of colorectal cancer[18] and is associated with enhanced cancer risk and metastatic

relapses in breast cancer[22] The analysis of *AKAP9* expression in gliomas from the TCGA

dataset shows its lower expression in HGGs, in particular in glioblastomas (Fig. 2C). Low

expression of *AKAP9* associates with poor survival of HGG patients (Fig. 2D). This finding

suggests that *AKAP9* could be an important mutated gene in a subset of HGGs. Using the

Sorting Intolerant from Tolerant (SIFT) algorithm which predicts whether the detected frameshift

insertion could affect the protein structure, we established that the somatic variation in the

AKAP9 gene could have a damaging effect on protein structure.

To verify concordance of the somatic and somatic/rare germline pipeline of the variant

analysis, we have computed overlap of these results and found out that most of somatic

variants are also found by a somatic/rare germline pipeline (Supplementary Table 3).

Novel mutations identified in the *TOP2A* gene

We found 7 SNPs in the *TOP2A* gene in 10 glioblastoma samples (Supplementary Table

2). All identified SNPs give rise to missense variants. Transversion of guanine to cytosine at the

chromosomal position 17:40400367 which results in the substitution of E948 to Q, was found in

four GBM patients, and several other mutations in the *TOP2A* gene were found in GBM patients

from the Polish HGG cohort. These SNVs have been verified by Sanger sequencing, apart from

one sample which had a low variant allele frequency. The *TOP2A* gene encodes

Topoisomerase 2A which belongs to a family of topoisomerases that relax, loosen, and

disentangle DNA by transiently cleaving and re-ligating both strands of DNA, which modulate

DNA topology.[10, 39] The novel, recurrent mutation in the *TOP2A* gene results in a substitution of

E948 to Q in the Tower domain of the TOP2A.

We studied exclusivity and co-occurrence of *TOP2A* mutations among detected top

mutations. *TOP2A* mutations co-occurred with *ARID1A* mutations*,* encoding a SWI/SNF family

helicase, and *KMT2C* (formerly *MLL3*), coding for histone methyltransferase, as well as with

EGFR and *NOTCH3* mutations (Fig. 3A). One of the *TOP2A* mutated samples (first from the left

in Fig. 3A) is a hypermutated sample, some of the other samples have also a high number of

genetic alterations when compared to other well-defined clusters, such as *IDH1_TP53-, IDH1-,*

TP53- and PTEN-mutated clusters (Fig. 3B). All *TOP2A* mutated samples show a higher

number of genetic alterations when compared to other defined clusters of glioma samples (Fig.

3B). Moreover, most of the changes in *TOP2A* mutated samples are C>T transitions, linked

most likely to deamination of 5-methylcysteine[42] (Fig. 3C). There is a high variability within GBM

samples with the *TOP2A* mutated, showing roughly a half of *TOP2A* samples having a very high

fraction (>80%) of C>T changes, while the other half have an expected fraction (<40%) of C>T

changes (Fig. 3C).

Using RNA sequencing (RNA-seq) data from HGGs in the TCGA dataset, we

demonstrate that patients with the mutated *TOP2A* had shorter survival than other HGG

patients within that cohort (p=0.00027) (Fig. 3D). The mutation in the *TOP2A* gene at the

position 17:40400367 was identified in four GBM samples in the studied cohort. Three GBM

patients with the mutated *TOP2A* (one patient died after surgery) survived 5, 3 and 8 months

from the time of diagnosis, respectively, which indicates that the GBM patients harboring this

TOP2A variant had a shorter overall survival compared to other GBM patients (Fig. 3E). This

suggests a negative effect of mutations in the *TOP2A* gene on the overall survival of GBM

patients.

E948Q substitution in the TOP2A changes its functions

To predict the consequences of E948Q substitution on the TOP2A, we used the crystal

structure of the human TOP2A in a complex with DNA (PDB code: 4FM9[) 56] (Fig.4A, B). Amino

acid residue E948 is located in the Tower domain of the TOP2A protein (Fig. 4C), which with

other domains (TOPRIM and WHD) form the DNA-Gate involved in DNA binding.[1] In the crystal

structure of the human TOP2A in a complex with DNA E948 is in a close proximity to DNA (Fig.

4B). The replacement of a negatively charged E residue to a polar Q residue changes an

electrostatic potential of the protein (Fig. 4C). Therefore, we predict that this change would

affect protein-DNA interactions and the TOP2A E948Q variant may have an increased affinity

towards DNA. Some of the other discovered *TOP2A* mutations may also have the effect on

TOP2A binding to DNA, as described in Supplementary Table 4.

To analyze the effect of the TOP2A E948Q substitution on an enzymatic activity, we

produced and purified recombinant wild-type (WT) and variant TOP2A proteins as His6 tag-

fusion proteins (Fig. 5A). We compared DNA binding activity of WT and E948Q TOP2A using

electrophoretic mobility shift assay (EMSA) and purified proteins: TOP2A 890-996 aa

comprising only the Tower domain and TOP2A 431-1193 aa, which includes the entire DNA-

Gate domain (see Materials and Methods). The representative EMSA gel shows that the

TOP2A variant E948Q binds to DNA more strongly (Fig. 5B). The lower panel shows the results

of densitometric assessment of shifted bands from two experiments.

Subsequently, we analyzed the effects of the TOP2A E948Q substitution on a catalytic

activity of the protein. Topoisomerases are enzymes that regulate DNA topology by making

temporary single- or double-strand DNA breaks. The DNA double helix needs to be unwound

during DNA replication or transcription. Topoisomerases relax supercoiled DNA and decatenate

DNA to allow DNA transcription and replication.[38, 50] *In vitro* measurements of a protein activity

towards supercoiled DNA substrates may reflect the *in vivo* situation, at least with respect to the

impact on DNA topology. We studied a supercoil relaxation activity of WT and TOP2A E948Q

proteins. Disappearance of the lower band representing a supercoiled plasmid (SC bands) and

appearance of higher band representing an untwisted plasmid DNA (OC) shows differences in

the enzymatic activity of TOP2A proteins. The E948Q variant is functional and might have a

higher activity than the WT protein (Fig. 6). The lower panel shows the results of densitometric

assessment of shifted bands from these experiments.

Transcriptomic alterations in glioblastomas with the mutated *TOP2A* point to dysfunction

of splicing

Bulk RNA sequencing was performed on 105 samples of low (WHO grade II) and high-

grade gliomas (WHO grades III and IV), and we searched for peculiarities of transcriptional

patterns in the wild type and mutated *TOP2A* gliomas. Among the analyzed samples were 7

GBM samples with mutations in the *TOP2A* gene, including 4 samples with a recurrent mutation

at position 17: 40400367. Transcriptional patterns of GBMs with mutations in the *TOP2A* gene

were compared with samples with mutations in the *IDH1, ATRX, TP53 and PTEN* genes.

We found that a larger percentage of the detected sequencing reads are mapped in

non-coding (intron) regions in GBMs with the mutated the *TOP2A* gene when compared to the

other gliomas with the *IDH1, ATRX, TP53,* and *PTEN* mutations (Fig. 7A). This observation

suggests a higher level of transcription in samples with the mutated *TOP2A*. The higher content

of intron regions in the RNA sequencing data may indicate a higher level of *de novo*

transcription or deficiency in mRNA splicing (Fig. 7A). An analysis of the content of G-C pairs in

the coding sequences of the expressed genes in gliomas with the mutated *TOP2A* versus other

samples was performed (Fig. 7B). The analysis showed significant differences in the content of

G-C pairs in the coding sequences of the genes expressed in the compared groups. In GBMs

with the *TOP2A* mutation, the genes with the coding sequences rich in A-T pairs were more

often expressed, while the genes with coding sequences rich in G-C pairs were less frequently

present in these samples (Fig. 7B).

Additionally, we tested the expression of some genes that are not expressed in a

normal brain and *TOP2A*-wild type (WT) and *TOP2A* mutated GBMs. RNA-seq data were

filtered to remove all brain-specific genes, by filtering out genes expressed in the brain uploaded

from the Stanford Brain RNA-Seq database and our data on human normal brain samples.

Expression of non-brain specific genes was higher in the *TOP2A* mutated samples than in

TOP2A WT glioma samples (Fig. 7C). We performed a Gene Ontology (GO) analysis of

differentially expressed, non-brain specific genes and the results showed over-representation of

pathways involved in endopeptidase activity and spermatid development, suggesting acquisition

of some new functionalities related to aberrant differentiation and migratory processes (Fig. 7D).

Further, we performed a GO terms analysis of non-brain specific genes that are

upregulated in TOP2A mutants. Analysis has showed increased expression of genes associated

with endopeptidase activity and germ cells development in samples with *TOP2A* mutations

(Fig.7D). These acquired functions of TOP2A mutants may contribute to a shorter survival time

of *TOP2A* mutated GBM patients.

Discussion

In this study we present the results of next generation sequencing with a custom-designed

panel 664 cancer- and epigenetics-related genes of 182 II, III and IV grade glioma samples.

This focused NGS approach has brought a novel information regarding a spectrum of genomic

alterations in high grade gliomas and revealed a set of known and novel mutations, The results

considerably broaden our understanding of glioma pathobiology and disclose therapeutically

targetable genes. Previous efforts of TCGA and other consortia to molecularly characterize a

genomic landscape of gliomas revealed highly recurrent somatic alterations and provided a

rationale for a molecular classification of gliomas.[4, 7, 15, 44]

We identified a number of well-known and described GBM frequent alterations in *TP53*, *IDH1*,

ATRX, *EGFR*, *CDK8, RB1, PTEN* genes, which validates our approach. However, using

OncodriveCLUST[45] we identified several novel variants that represent potentially deleterious

germ-line, somatic mosaicism or loss-of-heterozygosity variants.. Mutations in genes such

FOXO3, *PDE4DIP*, *HOXA11, ABL1, TOP2A* and *RECQL4* were not previously reported as

mutated in HGGs (Fig.1A,B). In three HGGs we found a recurrent mutation in the *AKAP9* gene

coding for A-kinase anchor protein 9/AKAP9), a scaffold protein which regulates microtubule

dynamics and nucleation at the Golgi apparatus.[48] AKAP9 promotes development and growth of

colorectal cancer[18] and is associated with enhanced risk and metastatic relapses in breast

cancer.[22] *AKAP9 e*xpression was lower in HGGs, in particular in GBMs and low expression of

AKAP9 associated with poor survival of HGG patients (Fig. 2D). The somatic variation in the

AKAP9 gene could have a damaging effect on four different transcripts and result in a non-

functional or truncated protein.

When a set of mutated genes from this study was compared with the results obtained in

the TCGA project, most of them were found to be potentially oncogenic genes. There are

several potential reasons for detecting novel mutations in this study: updated databases with

novel definitions of SNVs, targeted sequencing focusing on specific genes and a unique

national cohort. Among top 50 genes most frequently mutated in this cohort, of particular

interest are are genetic alterations in the genes coding for epigenetic enzymes and modifiers:

KDM6B, NCOA2, *NCOA3* and *NCOA6. KDM6B* encodes histone 3 lysine 27 demethylase

KDM6B/JMJD3 which controls the induction of a mature neuronal gene expression program in

cerebellar granule neurons.[59] KDM6B is critical for maintenance of glioma stem cells that

upregulate primitive developmental programs.[27] KDM6B has been targeted with a specific

inhibitor GSK-J4 in acute myeloid leukemia[25] and GSK J4 is active against native and TMZ-

resistant glioblastoma cells.[40] The presence of mutations in genes encoding three different

members of the NCOA (nuclear receptor co-activator) family of co-activators conveys potential

significance. NCOA2 is a co-activator of diverse nuclear receptors such as estrogen receptor,

retinoic acid receptor/retinoid X receptor, thyroid receptor and vitamin D receptor, and regulates

a wide variety of physiological responses.[8, 29] NCOA6 has been shown to associate with three

co-activator complexes containing CBP/p300 and Set methyltransferases, and may play a

crucial role in transcriptional activation by modulating chromatin structure through histone

methylation.[29] NCOA2 inhibited Wnt/β-catenin signaling through upregulation of inhibitors and

downregulation of stimulators of Wnt/β-catenin pathway.[62] The biological relevance in HGGs

requires further investigations.

In this study, we focused on a newly identified, recurrent mutation in the *TOP2A*

discovered in four GBM patients from the Polish HGG cohort. *TOP2A* mutations were described

in many cancers, including breast and lung cancer[9], but not in gliomas. As this recurrent

mutation in the *TOP2A* was discovered only in GBMs from the Polish HGG cohort (not in 21

GBMs from the Canadian Brain Tumor Bank), we consider this mutation as a putative founder

mutation. Topoisomerases regulate DNA topology by introducing transient single- or double-

strand DNA breaks, and may relax and unwind DNA, which is a critical step for proper DNA

replication or transcription.[38, 50] Our computational predictions showed substitution of E948 is

located in the Tower domain of the TOP2A protein in a close proximity to DNA and the

replacement of a negatively charged residue E to a polar residue Q changes an electrostatic

potential of the protein. This prediction has been confirmed by comparing DNA binding and

enzymatic activities of recombinant WT and variant TOP2A. As TOP2A is a large protein, we

prepared constructs expressing the 890-996 aa N-terminus of TOP2A (comprising only the

Tower domain) and the 431-1193 aa N-terminus of TOP2A (encompassing the entire DNA-Gate

domain). Biochemical assays showed that the TOP2A variant E948Q binds to DNA more

strongly and has a higher supercoil relaxation activity than WT TOP2A proteins.

The presented evidence suggests that TOP2A mutant acquires new functions and

exhibits a gain-of-function phenotype. Mutant TOP2A binds more strongly to DNA, exhibits a

higher unwinding activity resulting in expression of genes with a high AT content and

abundance of mRNAs with more intronic regions. These transcriptomic changes suggest either

an increased transcriptomic rate or splicing aberrations. TOP2A mutant GBMs show activation

of genes that encode proteins with an endopeptidase activity implicated in cancer invasion.

Acquisition of these properties may lead to an increased migratory and invasive phenotype that

leads to poor outcome for the patients.

In summary, this study revealed new insights into a landscape of genomic alterations in

the high grade gliomas. In particular, a novel, pathogenic mutation in the *TOP2A* gene has been

found in glioblastomas from The Polish HGG cohort.

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Declarations of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest

Data and Code Availability

The datasets supporting the current study have not been deposited in a public repository

because they are in part a subject for other ongoing project but are available from the

corresponding   author   on   request.

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Figure legend

Fig. 1. **Identification of most frequent mutations in high grade gliomas revealed novel**

mutations in the *TOP2A* gene. A – Plot showing potential oncogenic drivers

(OncodriveCLUST function) in the cohort of high grade gliomas (HGGs), red dots represent

potential drivers, with FDR-corrected OncodriveCLUST P value<0.025; size of the dot

corresponds to a number of the alterations that were present in the cluster. **A, B** - Genes

marked in bold are new potential oncodrivers in HGGs, as these genes were not found to be

mutated in TCGA LGG/GBM datasets. **B** – Oncostrip plot showing genes discovered in the

OncodriveCLUST analysis, each column corresponds to a glioma patient, while each row

corresponds to one altered gene. C –*TOP2A* expression in normal brain (NB) and WHO glioma

grades (GII, GIII and GIV) in the TCGA dataset. P-values based on Wilcoxon signed-rank test

were obtained (* P < 0.05, ** P < 0.01 and *** P < 0.001). D – TOP2A lolliplot showing the

identified substitutions mapped on the protein structure of TOP2A. A number of dots represents

the number of patients in which the particular alteration was found.

Fig. 2. Identification of a novel, recurrent mutation in the *AKAP9* gene in HGGs. **A** –

Oncostrip showing most frequently altered genes in high-grade gliomas, color coded by the

specific mutation type. **B** – AKAP9 lolliplot showing the identified frameshift mapped on the

protein structure. Only potential protein damaging somatic mutations (scores < 0.05) and low

(ExAC < 0.001) or non-existent minor allele frequencies in population are represented here. **C** –

mRNA *AKAP9* expression in normal brain (NB) and WHO glioma grades (GII, GIII and GIV) in

the TCGA dataset. P-values based on Wilcoxon signed-rank test were obtained (* P < 0.05, ** P

< 0.01 and *** P < 0.001). **D** – Kaplan-Meier overall survival curve from TCGA. Patients alive at

the time of the analysis were censored at the time they were last followed up. The medial overall

survival was ~480 days in the low *AKAP9* mRNA expression and ~1950 days in the high *AKAP9*

mRNA expression. P-values based on Log Rank Test were obtained (* P < 0.05, ** P < 0.01

and *** P < 0.001).

Fig. 3. **Genomic alterations of *TOP2A* mutated samples. A** – Oncoplot showing most

frequently altered genes in *TOP2A* mutated HGGs, each column corresponds to a

gliomasample, while each row corresponds to one altered gene. Log2 number of genetic

alterations in *TOP2A* (**B**) and a fraction of C to T nucleotide changes (**C**) in the *TOP2A* mutated

samples versus the samples with other mutations: *IDH1*, *IDH1* and *TP53*, *TP53* and *PTEN*.

Sample assignment to each of described groups is explained in the Supp. Fig. 3. **D** - Kaplan-

Meier overall survival curve for patients with high or low expression in the TCGA dataset.

Patients alive at the time of the analysis were censored at the time they were last followed up.

The median overall survival was ~500 days in the HIGH *TOP2A* mRNA expression group and

~2000 days in the LOW *TOP2A* mRNA expression group. P-values based on Log Rank Test

were obtained. E – Kaplan-Meier overall survival curve in this cohort. The median overall

survival was ~150 days in the HGG patients with the *TOP2A* mutated (TOP2A MUT (E948Q)

and ~400 days in the patients with wild-type *TOP2A* (TOP2A WT). P-values based on Log Rank

Test were obtained.

Fig. 4. Substitution of E948 to Q changes the electrostatic potential of TOP2A. A –

Schematic representation of a TOP2A domain structure. Functional regions are colored and

labeled: an ATPase domain, a TOPRIM - Mg^{2+} ion-binding topoisomerase/primase fold, a WHD

– winged helix domain, a TOWER, CTD – C-terminal domain. The three dimerization regions

are marked: N-gate, DNA-gate and C-gate. **B** – Secondary structure representation of TOP2A

431-1193 bound to DNA (crystal structure PDB code: 4FM9). For simplification only a TOP2A

protomer is shown. An amino acid residue E948 which is substituted to Q in a TOP2A variant is

represented as spheres on side chains. **C** – Electrostatic surface potential of TOP2A 431-1193

WT and E948Q variant. Electrostatic potential was calculated using a PyMOL program.

Fig. 5. TOP2A E948Q variant exhibits a higher DNA binding capacity than WT. A –Purified

TOP2A proteins. Schematic representation of purified proteins is placed in the top of the figure:

TOP2A 890-996 aa (only the TOWER domain) and TOP2A 431-1193 aa (the DNA-gate). Amino

acid residue E948 which is substituted to Q in the TOP2A variant is labeled in the schemes.

SDS-PAGE of TOP2A purified proteins. Purified proteins were resolved in a 6% and 15% SDS–

PAGE and stained with Coomassie brilliant blue. **B** – DNA-binding activity of TOP2A WT and

E948Q. EMSA was performed using the LightShift Chemiluminescent EMSA Kit. The binding

reactions were resolved in 6% polyacrylamide gels, transferred onto a membrane and detected

by chemiluminescence. Binding activities are expressed in relation to that of TOP2A WT (which

was set to 1) and are presented as mean ± standard deviations (error bars) that were calculated

from two independent measurements. Nonspecific binding level was measured in a reaction

without a protein and was subtracted from the results.

Fig. 6. Activity of TOP2A WT and E948Q variant. Supercoil relaxation assay of a plasmid

DNA induced by TOP2A 431-1193 WT or E948Q proteins. The reaction mixtures were resolved

by electrophoresis on 0.7% agarose gel followed by staining with SimplySafe dye and

visualization using a Chemidoc camera. The protein activities were measured by its ability to

unwind a supercoiled plasmid DNA (SC) to an open circular DNA (OC). The intensities of SC

and OC plasmid DNA were measured in relation to a control DNA without an added protein

(which was set to 100%) and are presented as means ± standard deviations (error bars) that

were calculated from three independent measurements.

Fig.7. Transcriptomic alterations in *TOP2A* mutated HGGs. A – Fractions of RNA-seq reads mapped to intron regions. B - GC content profile of gene expression in *TOP2* mutant (MUT) and wild type (WT) HGGs. C – Differences in expression of genes that are not expressed in the normal brain in *TOP2A* MUT and WT gliomas. Genes were preselected by filtering out all the genes that were expressed in any of the cells from Stanford Human Brain RNAseq containing data from sorted healthy brain cells. Additionally, all genes expressed in normal brain samples were filtered out. D – Gene Ontology terms show functional annotations of genes not expressed in the normal brain that became activated in *TOP2A* mutant HGGs. P-values for plots A based on Wilcoxon signed-rank test, for the panel C on Kolmogonorov-Smirnov test (* $P < 0.05$, ** $P < 0.01$ and *** $P < 0.001$).

Supp. Fig. 1. **Clinical characteristics of patients**. A – patient age distribution. B – patient sex distribution. C – percentages of HGG patients of a specific WHO grade). D – percentages of patients with a specific localization of the tumor in the brain.

Supp. Fig. 2. The detailed landscape of somatic and rare germ-line variants in high-grade gliomas. A – Oncostrip showing most frequently altered genes in high-grade gliomas, each column corresponds to a glioma sample, while each row corresponds to one altered gene. B – Plot of oncogenic pathways more frequently altered in the studied cohort of high-grade gliomas. Size and color intensity of dots mark how many genes from a given pathway were mutated in the studied cohort. C – Oncostrip plot of RTK-RAS pathway which emerges as the most frequently altered in this cohort. D – Most commonly mutated pfam domains, size of a dot corresponds to a number of genes with that particular domain being altered in the studied cohort.

Supp. Fig. 3. Oncostrip showing most frequently altered genes in high-grade gliomas, each

column corresponds to a glioma sample, while each row corresponds to one altered gene.

Vertical lines demark the groups with mutated *IDH1* and*TP53*, *TP53*, *IDH1* and *PTEN* that were

used to achieve data presented in the Figs. 3B and C.

Supplementary Table 1. Clinical characteristics of the tumor samples used in the study.

The following coding was used: "M" - male, "F" - female, "ND" - no data

Supplementary Table 2. List of genetic changes identified in the TOP2A gene using

targeted next generation sequencing of 182 glioma samples. The table contains the most

important information regarding the identified variants

Supplementary Table 3. Comparison of the number of identified somatic variants using

two different data analysis pipelines. Data analysis pipeline for identifying only somatic

variants vs data analysis pipeline for identifying somatic and rare germline variants were

compared.

Supplementary Table 4. The most important features of the amino acid substitutions

caused by mutations identified in *TOP2A* gene. Some of the identified changes may

increase or decrease DNA binding.

A

	Altered Samples [%]
TP53	48
IDH1	27
ATRX	25
EGFR	11
PTEN	9
AKAP9	
CHD5	
CYP1B1	
IDH2	
NCOA4	7
PDE4DIP	
PIK3CA	
SETD2	
ARID2	
BCOR	
HOXD11	5
KMT2C	
NSD1	

Frame shift deletion   Multi hit   Frame shift insertion
Nonsense mutation   Splice site   Missense mutation

B

p.T1334 frame shift

AKAP9

1   2000   3000   3907
Amino Acid

Pericentrin/AKAP−450 centrosomal targeting domain
Elk domain

C

log2 expression

NB   GII   GIII   GIV

**   ***   ***

D

Overall survival

HIGH AKAP9
LOW AKAP9

***

0   2000   4000   6000
Days

A

TOP2A

E948Q

ATPase TOPRIM WHD TOWER CTD

1   431   890   996   1193   1531
                                          Amino acids

N-gate   DNA-gate   C-gate

B

E948Q

C

TOP2A WT   TOP2A E948Q

E948   E948Q

−77.155   77.155