Analysis of pre-symptomatic *Drosophila* models for ALS and SMA reveals convergent impact on functional protein complexes linked to neuro-muscular degeneration

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34
35 **Abstract**

36 Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA) and Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) share phenotypic
37 and molecular commonalities, including the fact that they can be caused by mutations in
38 ubiquitous proteins involved in RNA metabolism, namely SMN, TDP-43 and FUS. Although
39 this suggests the existence of common disease mechanisms, there is currently no model to
40 explain the resulting motor neuron dysfunction. In this work we generated a parallel set of
41 *Drosophila* models for adult-onset RNAi and tagged neuronal expression of the fly
42 orthologues of the three human proteins, named Smn, TBPH and Caz, respectively. We
43 profiled nuclear and cytoplasmic bound mRNAs using a RIP-seq approach and characterized
44 the transcriptome of the RNAi models by RNA-seq. To unravel the mechanisms underlying
45 the common functional impact of these proteins on neuronal cells, we devised a
46 computational approach based on the construction of a tissue-specific library of protein
47 functional modules, selected by an overall impact score measuring the estimated extent of
48 perturbation caused by each gene knockdown. Transcriptome analysis revealed that the three
49 proteins do not bind to the same RNA molecules and that only a limited set of functionally

unrelated transcripts is commonly affected by their knock-down. However, our integrative approach revealed they exert a concerted effect on protein functional modules, acting through distinct targets. Most strikingly, functional annotation revealed that these modules are involved in critical cellular pathways for motor neurons, including neuromuscular junction function. Furthermore, selected modules were found to be significantly enriched in orthologues of human neuronal disease genes. The results presented here show that SMA and ALS disease-associated genes linked to RNA metabolism functionally converge on neuronal protein complexes, providing a new hypothesis to explain the common motor neuron phenotype. The functional modules identified represent promising biomarkers and therapeutic targets, namely given their alteration in asymptomatic settings.

Keywords

ALS, SMA, motor neuron, *Drosophila*, SMN, TDP-43, FUS, transcriptomics, network biology, neurodegeneration

Background

Motor neuron diseases (MNDs) are characterized by a progressive and selective degeneration and loss of motor neurons accompanied by an atrophy of innervated muscles. Although MNDs encompass heterogeneous groups of pathologies with different onset and genetic origins, a number of MND-causing mutations have been identified in RNA-associated proteins, leading to a model in which alteration of RNA metabolism may be a key, and potentially common, driver of MND pathogenesis (Achsel et al. 2013; Ling et al. 2013; Taylor et al. 2016; Gama-Carvalho et al. 2017; Zaepfel and Rothstein 2021). This has become particularly clear in the context of two well-studied pathologies: Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA) and Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), which have both been linked to mutations

75 in conserved RNA binding proteins (RBPs). SMA, the most common early-onset
76 degenerative neuromuscular disease, is caused in 95% of patients by a loss of the SMN1 gene,
77 which encodes a protein with chaperone functions essential for the assembly of both nuclear
78 and cytoplasmic ribonucleoprotein (RNP) complexes (Li et al. 2014; Price et al. 2018). The
79 best-characterized role of SMN is to promote the assembly of spliceosomal small nuclear
80 ribonucleoprotein complexes (snRNPs) (Boulisfane et al. 2011; Workman et al. 2012), but it
81 has also been involved in the assembly of other nuclear sRNPs required for 3'end processing
82 (Tisdale et al. 2013), as well as cytoplasmic RNP complexes essential for long-distance
83 mRNA transport (Donlin-Asp et al. 2016; Donlin-Asp et al. 2017). Consistent with these
84 functions, and with additional reported roles in transcription regulation (Pellizzoni et al. 2001;
85 Zou et al. 2004), inactivation of SMN was shown to result in alternative splicing defects
86 (Zhang et al. 2008), transcriptional changes (Zhao et al. 2016) and defective axonal RNA
87 targeting (Fallini et al. 2011; Fallini et al. 2016). To date, how these changes in gene
88 expression account for the full spectrum of symptoms observed in SMA patients and disease
89 models remains unclear. ALS, on the other hand, is the most-common adult-onset MND and
90 has mostly sporadic origins. Remarkably, however, disease-causing mutations in two genes
91 encoding RNA binding proteins, FUS and TDP-43 (alias gene symbol of TARDBP), have
92 been identified in both genetic and sporadic forms of the disease (Da Cruz and Cleveland
93 2011; Gama-Carvalho et al. 2017). Both proteins shuttle between the nucleus and the
94 cytoplasm and regulate different aspects of RNA metabolism, ranging from transcription and
95 pre-mRNA splicing to mRNA stability and axonal targeting (Ratti and Buratti 2016; Ederle
96 and Dormann 2017; Birsa et al. 2020). ALS-causing mutations were described to have
97 pleiotropic consequences, compromising both the nuclear and cytoplasmic functions of FUS
98 and TDP-43, and resulting in their accumulation into non-functional cytoplasmic inclusions
99 (Ling et al. 2013; Zbinden et al. 2020). Whether ALS pathogenesis primarily originates from

100 a depletion of the nuclear pool of these RBPs, or rather from a toxic effect of cytoplasmic
101 aggregates, has remained unclear (Li et al. 2013; Fernandes et al. 2018).
102 Thus, SMA and ALS are not only connected by pathogenic commonalities
103 (Bowerman et al. 2018), but also appear to both originate from alterations in RBP-mediated
104 regulatory mechanisms. Further strengthening the possibility that these two MNDs may be
105 molecularly connected, recent studies have suggested that SMN, FUS and TDP-43 belong to
106 common molecular complexes and also exhibit functional interactions (Yamazaki et al. 2012;
107 Groen et al. 2013; Tsuiji et al. 2013; Sun et al. 2015; Perera et al. 2016; Chi et al. 2018;
108 Cacciottolo et al. 2019). Together, these results have raised the hypothesis that SMN, FUS
109 and TDP-43 may control common transcriptional and/or post-transcriptional regulatory steps.
110 The alteration of these common processes in response to an impaired function of either
111 protein would underlie MND progression (Achsel et al. 2013). Comparative transcriptomic
112 studies performed so far, however, did not clearly identify classes of transcripts that may be
113 co-regulated by the three MND RBPs (Lagier-Tourenne et al. 2012; Gama-Carvalho et al.
114 2017; Kline et al. 2017). This fact has left the question of the existence of common molecular
115 regulatory mechanisms and targets in the diverse MNDs un-answered.
116 A major difficulty in comparing available transcriptomic studies is that the datasets
117 were obtained from heterogeneous, and often late-stage or post-mortem samples. This
118 prevents robust comparisons and the identification of direct *vs*. indirect targets. Another
119 challenge associated with the identification of relevant regulated mRNAs is that SMN, FUS
120 and TDP-43 are multifunctional and may exhibit distinct sets of target RNAs in the nucleus
121 and the cytoplasm, raising the need for compartment-specific studies. To overcome previous
122 limitations and unambiguously assess the existence of transcripts commonly regulated by
123 SMN, FUS and TDP-43, we decided in this study to systematically identify the direct and
124 indirect neuronal RNA targets of these proteins. For this purpose, we defined a strategy

involving the establishment of parallel schemes for tagged-protein expression to perform RNP complex purification, alongside neuron specific, adult-onset gene silencing of the *Drosophila* orthologs of *SMN*, *FUS* and *TARDBP*, identified by the gene symbols *Smn*, *caz* and *TBPH*, respectively.

Highlighting the conservation of protein functions from fly to human, expression of human FUS and TDP-43 proteins was shown to rescue the lethality induced upon inactivation of the corresponding fly genes (Wang et al. 2011). Furthermore, *Drosophila* models based on expression of mutant human or *Drosophila* proteins that recapitulate the hallmarks of SMA and ALS, in particular motor neuron disabilities and degeneration, have been previously established (McGurk et al. 2015; Aquilina and Cauchi 2018; Olesnicky and Wright 2018; Spring et al. 2019; Liguori et al. 2021). Several of these models have been successfully used for large-scale screening and discovery of genetic modifiers (Chang et al. 2008; Kankel et al. 2020; Liguori et al. 2021).

Our study was performed on pre-symptomatic flies starting from head samples. RNA immunoprecipitation sequencing (RIP-seq) experiments were performed to identify the cytoplasmic and nuclear transcripts bound by each protein. These assays were complemented with neuron-specific, adult-onset down-regulation of *Smn*, *caz* or *TBPH* followed by RNA sequencing (RNA-seq) to identify transcripts with altered expression levels and/or splicing patterns. The RIP-seq analysis showed that the three proteins bind to largely distinct sets of RNA targets, in the nucleus and in the cytoplasm. Directly bound mRNAs were not particularly affected by the gene knockdowns, which collectively altered the expression and/or splicing profile of a limited, albeit significant set of common transcripts. These transcripts do not seem to be direct RNA-binding targets and do not present any consistent functional signatures. These observations suggested that the common physiological processes regulated by the three proteins may be altered at a higher order level. To unravel a possible

150 functional relationship between transcripts regulated by Smn, Caz and TBPH, we designed a
151 strategy to map them on neuronal protein complexes. Our results revealed a convergent effect
152 of the three knockdowns on the regulation of common functional modules. Among these
153 modules, we identified seven functional units directly implicated in neuro-muscular junction
154 (NMJ) development. Noteworthy, although these modules were selected by suffering a
155 common impact in all knockdowns, they were also found to be enriched in direct targets
156 identified in RIP-seq experiments. Finally, selected functional modules were enriched in
157 orthologues of human MND-associated genes. In summary, our work provides a new
158 conceptual framework to explain how changes in three ubiquitous proteins involved in RNA
159 metabolism converge into molecular functions critical for MN processes, thereby leading to
160 overlapping disease phenotypes.
161

162 **Methods**

163 **Fly lines**

164 The fly stocks used were obtained from the Bloomington *Drosophila* Stock Center (BDSC)
165 and the Vienna *Drosophila* Resource Center (VDRC), or were generated using the
166 *Drosophila* Embryo Injection Service form BestGene (http://www.thebestgene.com). BDSC
167 stocks #39014 (expressing shRNA targeting *TBPH*), #55158 (expressing shRNA targeting
168 *Smn*) and #32990 (expressing shRNA targeting *caz*) were used for the transcriptome profiling
169 assays along with the VDRC strain #13673 (expressing dsRNA targeting *always early*).
170 Transgenic lines used for neuronal expression of GFP-tagged variants of *Smn* (CG16725, fly
171 *SMN*), *TBPH* (CG10327, fly *TARDBP*), *caz* (CG3606, fly *FUS*) were generated by site
172 directed integration into the same attP landing site (VK00013, BDSC#9732).
173 *Smn*, *caz* and *TBPH* coding sequences were PCR-amplified from ESTs LD23602, UASt-*caz*
174 plasmid (gift from C. Thömmes) and EST GH09868, respectively. Primers used for

175 amplification are listed in Table 1. *Smn* and *caz* PCR products were subcloned into pENTR-
176 D/TOPO vector (Life Technologies), fully sequenced, and recombined into a pUASt-EGFP-
177 attB Gateway destination vector to express N-terminally-tagged proteins. The *TBPH* PCR
178 product was double digested with NotI and XhoI and ligated into a NotI/XhoI digested
179 pUASt-EGFP-attB plasmid (gift from S. Luschnig). Primer sequences are provided in
180 Supplementary Methods.
181
182 **Fly crosses**
183 shRNA expression was induced using the GeneSwitch system. Mifepristone was dissolved in
184 80% ethanol and pipetted on the surface of regular fly food (final concentration of 0,1
185 mg/cm^2). Vehicle-only treated fly vials served as control. Vials were prepared 24 hours prior
186 to use to allow evaporation of ethanol. Crosses performed for 'knockdown' analyses were as
187 follows: virgins carrying the ubiquitous daughterless GeneSwitch driver (daGS) were crossed
188 with males carrying the UAS:shRNA constructs. In the progeny, male *daGS*/UAS:shRNA
189 flies were collected one day post eclosion (1 dpe) and exposed to food containing
190 mifepristone (replaced every 2nd day). After 10 days, flies were collected, snap frozen in
191 liquid nitrogen and stored at -80°C until further use. Knock-down efficiency of the target
192 genes was assessed by RT-qPCR using rp49 and act5C as normalizing genes using the
193 primers described in Supplementary Methods. The iScript^{TM} cDNA Synthesis Kit (BioRad)
194 was used to transcribe 500ng of total head RNA according to manufacturer's instructions.
195 Real Time PCR was performed in a total reaction volume of 25 µL using the SYBR^{TM} Green
196 PCR Master Mix (ThermoFisher).
197 For RIP-seq experiments, males carrying UASt-GFP-fusions (or sole EGFP) were crossed en
198 masse with *elav*-Gal4; tub-Gal80ts virgins. *elav*-Gal4/Y/+; *tub*-Gal80ts/UAS-GFP-*Smn* (or

199 *TBPH* or *caz*) flies were raised at 18°C, switched to 29°C upon eclosion and aged for 5 to 7
200 days before being collected in 50 mL Falcon tubes and snap frozen.
201
202 **Immuno-histochemistry and Western-blotting**
203 For analysis of GFP-fusion distribution, brains were dissected in PBS and immuno-stained
204 using anti-GFP antibodies (1:1,000; Molecular Probes, A-11122), as described previously
205 (Vijayakumar et al. 2019). Samples were imaged on an inverted Zeiss LSM710 confocal
206 microscope. For analysis of GFP-fusion expression, heads were smashed into RIPA buffer (15
207 heads for 100 µL RIPA) and lysates directly supplemented with SDS loading buffer (without
208 any centrifugation). Total protein extracts or RIP extracts were subjected to SDS Page
209 electrophoresis, blotted to PVDF membranes, and probed with the following primary
210 antibodies: rabbit anti-GFP (1:2,500; #TP-401; Torey Pines); mouse anti-Tubulin (1:5,000;
211 DM1A clone; Sigma); and mouse anti-Lamin (1:2,000; ADL 67.10 and ADL 84.12 clones;
212 DHSB).
213
214 **RNA Immunoprecipitation assays**
215 Falcon tubes with frozen flies were chilled in liquid nitrogen and extensively vortexed to
216 separate heads, legs and wings from the main body. Head fractions were collected at 4°C,
217 through sieving on 630 μm and 400μm sieves stacked on top of each other. 1 mL of heads
218 was used per condition, except for GFP-Smn, where 2 mL of heads were used. For the GFP
219 control, 500 μL of heads were mixed with 500 μL of w^{1118} heads to normalize the amount of
220 GFP proteins present in the initial lysate.
221 Adult *Drosophila* heads were ground into powder with liquid nitrogen pre-chilled mortars and
222 pestles. The powder was then transferred to a prechilled 15 mL glass Dounce Tissue Grinder
223 and homogenized in 8.5 mL of Lysis buffer (20mM Hepes pH 8, 125mM KCl, 4mM MgCl2,

224 0.05% NP40, 1mM dithoithreitol (DTT), 1:100 Halt™ Protease & Phosphatase Inhibitor
225 Cocktail, Thermo Scientific, 1:200 RNasOUT™ , Invitrogen). Cuticle debris were eliminated
226 by two consecutive centrifugations at 100 g for 5 minutes at 4°C. Nuclear and cytoplasmic
227 fractions were then separated by centrifugation at 900 g for 10 minutes at 4°C. The
228 supernatant (cytoplasmic fraction) was further cleared by two consecutive centrifugations at
229 16,000 g for 20 minutes. The pellet (nuclear fraction) was washed with 1 mL of Sucrose
230 buffer (20 mM Tris pH 7.65, 60 mM NaCl, 15 mM KCl, 0.34 M Sucrose, 1 mM dithoithreitol
231 (DTT), 1:100 Halt™ Protease & Phosphatase Inhibitor Cocktail, Thermo Scientific, 1:200
232 RNasOUT™ , Invitrogen), centrifuged at 900 g for 10 minutes at 4°C and resuspended in 2
233 mL of Sucrose buffer. 800 μL of High salt buffer (20 mM Tris pH 7.65, 0.2 mM EDTA, 25%
234 Glycerol, 900 mM NaCl, 1.5 mM MgCl2, 1 mM dithoithreitol (DTT), 1:100 Halt™ Protease
235 & Phosphatase Inhibitor Cocktail, Thermo Scientific, 1:200 RNasOUT™ , Invitrogen) were
236 then added to reach a final concentration of 300 mM NaCl. After 30 minutes incubation on
237 ice, the nuclear fraction was supplemented with 4.7 mL of Sucrose buffer to reach a
238 concentration of 150 mM NaCl and with $CaCl_2$ to reach a 1 mM $CaCl_2$ concentration. RNAse
239 free DNase I (Ambion™ , Invitrogen) was added (0.1 mM final concentration) and the sample
240 was incubated for 15 minutes at 37°C with gentle agitation. EDTA was added to a 4 mM final
241 concentration to stop the reaction, and the digested fraction was centrifuged at 16,000 g for 20
242 minutes (4°C) to obtain soluble (supernatant; used for immuno-precipitation) and insoluble
243 (pellet) fractions.
244 Cytoplasmic and nuclear fractions were incubated for 30 minutes at 4°C under agitation with
245 120 μL of control agarose beads (ChromoTek, Germany). Pre-cleared lysates were collected
246 by a centrifuging 2 min at 400g (4°C). Immuno-precipitations (IPs) were performed by
247 addition of 120 μL of GFP-Trap®_A beads (ChromoTek, Germany) to each fraction and
248 incubation on a rotator for 1.5 hours at 4°C. Tubes were then centrifuged for 2 minutes at

249 2,000 rpm (4°C) and the unbound fractions (supernatants) collected. Beads were washed 5
250 times with Lysis buffer, resuspended in 100 μL of Lysis buffer supplemented with 30 μg of
251 proteinase K (Ambion) and incubated at 55°C for 30 minutes. Eluates (bound fractions) were
252 then recovered and further processed. At least three independent IPs were performed for each
253 condition.
254
255 **RNA extraction, Library preparation and RNA sequencing**
256 RNA from IP eluates or frozen fly heads (50 flies aprox/genotype) was extracted using Trizol
257 according to the manufacturer's instructions. RIP-Seq libraries were prepared in parallel and
258 sequenced at the EMBL Genomics core facility. Briefly, libraries were prepared using the
259 non-strand-specific poly(A)+ RNA Smart-Seq2 protocol (Nextera XT part). Following quality
260 control, cDNA libraries were multiplexed and sequenced through single-end 50 bp
261 sequencing (HiSeq 2000, Illumina).
262 For the RNA-preparation used in RNA-Seq experiments, 30-50 fly heads were homogenized
263 in 0.5 ml Trizol (ThermoFischer) using a speed mill (Analytic Jena) and ceramic beads.
264 Debris was removed by short centrifugation and supernatant was transfered to a fresh
265 Eppendorf tube and incubated at 10 minutes on ice. 0.2 ml Chloroform were added and
266 mixture was vortexed for 15 seconds and incubated on ice for 10 minutes followed by
267 centrifugation for 15 minutates, 17.000 xg at 4°C. Upper phase was removed and volume
268 determined. RNA was precipitated by addition of 1x volume Isopropanol and incubated on ice
269 for 1 hour follwed by a centrifugation for ten minutes with 17.000 xg at 4°C. Supernatant was
270 removed and pellet was washed twice with 1 ml ice cold 70% ethanol, air dried and
271 resuspended in 25 μl RNAse free water.
272 RNA-seq libraries for shRNA analysis were prepared and sequenced at the Genomics
273 Facility, Interdisziplinäres Zentrum für Klinische Forschung (IZKF), RWTH Aachen,

274 Germany. Libraries were generated using the Illumina TrueSeqHT library protocol and ran on
275 a NextSeq machine with paired-end sequencing and a read length of 2x76nt. The 47 raw fastq
276 files of the RNA-seq data generated for this study have been submitted to the European
277 Nucleotide Archive under the umbrella project FlySMALS, with accession numbers
278 PRJEB42797 and PRJEB42798.
279
280 **RNA-seq data analysis**
281 Following quality assessment using FastQC version 0.11.5 (https://www.bioinformatics.
282 babraham.ac.uk/projects/fastqc/), all raw sequencing data was processed with in-house perl
283 scripts to filter out reads with unknown nucleotides, homopolymers with length ≥50 nt or an
284 average Phred score < 30, and trim the first 10 nucleotides (Amaral et al. 2014) Remaining
285 reads were aligned to the BDGP *D. melanogaster* Release 6 genome assembly build (dos
286 Santos et al. 2015) using the STAR aligner version 2.5.0 (Dobin et al. 2013) with the
287 following options: –outFilterType BySJout –alignSJoverhangMin 8 –alignSJDBoverhangMin
288 5 –alignIntronMax 100000 –outSAMtype BAM SortedByCoordinate –twopassMode Basic –
289 outFilterScoreMinOverLread 0 –outFilterMatchNminOverLread 0 –outFilterMatchNmin 0 –
290 outFilterMultimapNmax 1 –limitBAMsortRAM 10000000000 –quantMode GeneCounts.
291 Gene counts were determined using the htseq-count function from HTseq (version 0.9.1) in
292 union mode and discarding low quality score alignments (–a 10), using the Flybase R6.19
293 annotation of gene models for genome assembly BDGP6.
294 For RIP-seq data analysis, gene counts were normalized and tested for DE using the DESeq2
295 (Love et al. 2014) package of the Bioconductor project (Huber et al. 2015), following removal
296 of genes with less than 10 counts. mRNAs associated with each protein were identified by
297 performing a differential expression analysis (DEA) for each condition vs the corresponding

298 control pull-down. Transcripts with a positive log2 FC and an adjusted p value for DEA lower
299 that 0.05 were considered to be bound by the target protein.
300 DEA for RNA-Seq gene counts was performed with the limma Bioconductor package
301 (Ritchie et al. 2015) using the voom method (Law et al. 2014) to convert the read-counts to
302 log2-cpm, with associated weights, for linear modelling. The design formula (~ hormone +
303 Cond, where hormone = treated or non-treated and Cond = Caz, Smn or TBPH RNAi) was
304 used to consider hormone treatment as a batch effect. Differential gene expression analysis
305 was performed by comparing RNAi samples for each target protein to control (always early
306 RNAi) samples. Genes showing up or down-regulation with an adjusted p value <0.05 were
307 considered to be differentially expressed.
308 Altered splicing analysis (ASA) was performed on the RNA-seq aligned data using rMATS
309 version 4.0.2 (Shen et al. 2014) with flags -t paired --nthread 10 --readLength 66 --libType fr-
310 firststrand. For the purpose of the downstream analysis, the union of all genes showing any
311 kind of altered splicing using the junction count and exon count (JCEC) analysis with a FDR
312 <0.05 in the comparison between each target gene RNAi versus control RNAi was compiled
313 as a single dataset.
314 Normalized RNA-Seq data of adult fly brain tissue was retrieved from FlyAtlas2 database in
315 November 2020 (www.flyatlas2.org; (Leader et al. 2018)). Neuronal transcripts were filtered
316 applying an expression threshold of >1 FPKM (Fragments Per Kilobase per Million). This
317 gene set was then used to filter the final gene lists from RIP-seq, DEA and ASA. The full
318 universe of 8,921 neuronal genes is annotated in Supplementary Data 5.
319 Clustering analysis was performed using the heatmap function from ggplot2 R package
320 (default parameters) (Whickam 2016) and correlation plots were generated using lattice R
321 package. Intersection analyses of RNA-Seq and RIP-seq datasets were performed using
322 UpSetR and SuperExactTest R packages (Wang et al. 2015).

323

324 **Network analysis and generation of the library of functional modules**

325 *Drosophila* physical Protein-Protein Interaction (PPI) data was retrieved from APID
326 repository (http://apid.dep.usal.es; (Alonso-López et al. 2016, Alonso-López et al. 2019)) in
327 December 2019. The original unspecific network was filtered to include only interactions
328 between proteins expressed in adult fly brain tissue as described in previous section. The
329 neuronal network was then simplified to remove self-loops and isolated proteins using the
330 igraph R package (Mora and Donaldson 2011). Bioconductor GOfuncR R package was used
331 to evaluate the functional enrichment of brain network as compared to the unspecific network
332 - Gene Ontology Biological Process, hyper-geometric test, FDR = 0.1 on 1000
333 randomizations- (Grote 2020). Finally, the functional modules were defined by selecting
334 groups of physically interacting proteins annotated under the same enriched term. It should be
335 noted that not all the proteins collaborating in the same process must physically interact (*e.g.*,
336 as in the case of cell signaling, the membrane receptor does not bind to its downstream
337 transcription factor). Based on this, we enabled modules to be formed by non-connected
338 subnetworks. The isolated clusters were discarded only when the largest subnetwork
339 represented more than 90% of the total module. The same protein might be annotated with
340 several terms and therefore might be involved in several modules simultaneously. Conversely,
341 we are aware that the use of GO data may return functionally redundant modules. Prior any
342 further analysis, module redundancy was evaluated to check that modules do not exceedingly
343 overlap nor represent redundant biological processes. Based on this analysis, a module size
344 from 10 up to 100 proteins was defined as optimal to minimize redundancy.

345

346 **Results**

347 **Caz, Smn and TBPH proteins do not share common mRNA targets**

348 We hypothesized that the existence of shared RNA targets for Caz, Smn and TBPH might
349 underlie the observed phenotypic commonalities between SMA and ALS. To test this
350 hypothesis, we performed RIP-seq to identify neuronal mRNAs present in the RNP
351 complexes formed by each of these proteins in adult *Drosophila* neurons. To facilitate cross-
352 comparisons and ensure reproducible and cell-type specific purification, we generated three
353 independent transgenic lines with GFP-tagged constructs expressed under the control of UAS
354 sequences inserted into the same chromosomal position. To specifically characterize the
355 neuronal RNA interactome, GFP-fusion proteins were expressed in adult neuronal cells using
356 the pan-neuronal *elav*-GAL4 driver. The ectopic expression of Caz, Smn and TBPH has been
357 reported to induce toxicity (Grice and Liu 2011; Xia et al. 2012; Cragnaz et al. 2014). For this
358 reason, we used the TARGET method (McGuire et al. 2003) to express GFP-fusion proteins
359 specifically in adult neurons within a limited time window (5-7 days post-eclosion). The
360 TARGET system relies on the temperature-sensitive GAL80 protein, which inhibits GAL4 at
361 low temperature, enabling temporal regulation of UAS constructs. When expressed in
362 neuronal cells, GFP-Caz and GFP-TBPH robustly accumulated in the soma, showing a
363 predominant, although not exclusive nuclear accumulation (Supplementary Fig. S1A and
364 S1C). As expected, GFP-Smn was found mainly in the cytoplasm, sometimes accumulating in
365 foci (Supplementary Fig. S1B). Despite the same insertion site and promotor sequence, GFP-
366 Smn protein was consistently expressed at lower levels (Supplementary Fig. S1D).
367 Since Caz, Smn and TBPH are multifunctional proteins involved in both nuclear and
368 cytoplasmic regulatory functions, we separately characterized their RNA interactome in each
369 cellular compartment. For this purpose, cellular fractionations were performed prior to
370 independent anti-GFP immunoprecipitations, thus generating paired nuclear and cytoplasmic
371 samples (Fig. 1A). As shown in Fig. 1B, relatively pure nuclear and cytoplasmic fractions

372 were obtained from head lysates and GFP-tagged proteins could be efficiently immuno-
373 precipitated from each fraction.
374 For each paired nuclear and cytoplasmic pull-down, co-precipitated RNAs were extracted and
375 used to prepare mRNA-seq libraries. Pull-downs from flies expressing GFP were used as
376 control. Three independent replicate datasets were generated for each protein, except for GFP-
377 Caz, for which one nuclear pull-down sample did not pass quality control for library
378 generation. The raw sequencing dataset, composed of 23 libraries containing between 17.7
379 and 64.6 million total reads (Supplementary Data 1), was submitted to the European
380 Nucleotide Archive (ENA) with the study accession code PRJB42798.
381 RIP-seq datasets were analyzed to identify mRNA molecules enriched in GFP-fusion versus
382 GFP control pull-downs with an average of 13,500 genes detected across all samples, ranging
383 (Supplementary Data 1). Sequencing datasets clustered primarily depending on the nuclear
384 *versus* cytoplasmic natures of the extract, and secondly depending on the protein used for
385 pull-down (Supplementary Fig. S2A). Differential expression analysis (DEA) was performed
386 between each of the six pull-down conditions and the corresponding GFP control, with
387 transcripts displaying positive enrichment (adjusted p value < 0.05) considered as associating
388 with the target protein (Supplementary Data 2).
389 Although Caz, Smn and TBPH fusion proteins were expressed specifically in neurons *via* the
390 *elav* promotor, a certain degree of RNP complex re-association may occur in head lysates
391 during the different experimental steps, as previously described (Mili and Steitz 2004). To
392 discard any non-neuronal transcripts that may have co-precipitated with target proteins, the
393 dataset resulting from the DEA was filtered to include only genes with reported expression in
394 the adult fly brain (see Methods), corresponding on average to 70% of the enriched transcripts
395 (see Supplementary Fig. S3).

396 These analyses revealed that Smn and TBPH associate with a large fraction of the neuronal
397 transcriptome (1,708 and 1,754 mRNAs in total, respectively), and that most of their
398 identified mRNA targets associate in the cytoplasm rather than in the nucleus (Fig. 1C). A
399 much smaller number (208) of mRNAs were found to associate with Caz in the cytoplasm,
400 with 236 mRNAs detected as enriched in the pull-downs from nuclear fractions. Although this
401 may partly reflect the higher heterogeneity of the Caz pull-down samples (Supplementary Fig.
402 2A), it is in good agreement with the low abundance of GFP-Caz protein found in the
403 cytoplasm compared to GFP-Smn and GFP-TBPH (Fig. 1B). Of note, the percentage of
404 transcripts simultaneously bound by the same protein on both compartments averaged only
405 22%, with TBPH displaying a much larger overlap than Smn for a similarly sized set of target
406 mRNAs (Fig. 1C). This observation is in agreement with the current model of mRNP
407 complex remodeling between the nucleus and the cytoplasm, with the compartment-specific
408 set of mRNA bound proteins being influenced both by their relative affinities and abundance
409 (Mili and Steitz 2004).
410 We next addressed the existence of common RNA targets, which could provide insights
411 regarding a potential common MN degenerative mechanism associated with the altered
412 expression of the human orthologue proteins in a disease context. Overlap analysis of the
413 mRNA interactomes of Caz, Smn, and TBPH revealed a striking absence of transcripts bound
414 by all three RBPs in the cytoplasmic or nuclear fractions (Fig. 1D). This finding might not
415 exclusively result from the small number of RNAs bound by Caz, as a poor overlap was also
416 observed between the large sets of cytoplasmic mRNAs bound by TBPH and Smn.
417 Considering that the universe of protein-associated transcripts was defined exclusively based
418 on the adjusted p value, without imposing a minimal enrichment threshold, this observation is
419 particularly surprising. Together, our RIP-seq experiments thus uncovered that Caz, Smn and
420 TBPH do not share common RNA targets.

421

422 **Gene expression changes in response to reduced levels of Caz, Smn and TBPH have**
423 **significant commonalities but lack a clear functional signature**

424 In addition to regulatory roles associated with mRNA binding activity, Caz, Smn, and TBPH
425 have been shown to have both direct and indirect roles as transcriptional, translational, and
426 splicing regulators (reviewed in Gama-Carvalho 2017). It is thus possible that, despite
427 associating to non-overlapping sets of mRNAs, these proteins may coordinate common gene
428 expression programs through other molecular mechanisms. To address this hypothesis, we
429 used shRNA-expressing fly lines to knock-down the expression of *caz*, *Smn*, and *TBPH* in
430 adult flies by RNA interference (RNAi) and characterized the resulting changes in neuronal
431 gene expression using RNA-seq (Fig. 2A). After identification of fly lines displaying a robust
432 silencing of each target gene, we used the GeneSwitch (GS) system to induce ubiquitous,
433 adult-onset RNAi (Osterwalder et al. 2001). This system relies on the feeding of flies with the
434 hormone mifepristone (RU486), which activates GAL4-progesterone-receptor fusions, thus
435 driving expression of the shRNA transgenes (Fig. 2A). Given that the system has been
436 reported to display some leakage in the absence of the hormone (Scialo et al. 2016), a fly line
437 expressing shRNA against the non-related embryonic transcript *always early* (ae) was used as
438 control. Three to five days post-eclosion, resulting male progeny was transferred to food with
439 or without the shRNA-inducing hormone for ten days and knock-down efficiency of target
440 genes was evaluated by qRT-PCR (Supplementary Fig. 1E). Of note, despite an effective
441 knock-down of the target gene levels of ~50%, these flies did not exhibit any motor
442 phenotype or increased mortality. Therefore, our model represents a pre-symptomatic stage of
443 the molecular pathways regulated by the *caz*, *Smn* and *TBPH* genes. Total RNA extracted
444 from fly heads from three independent experimental assays was used for library preparation
445 and paired-end Illumina mRNA sequencing (RNA-seq). The raw sequencing dataset,

446 composed of 24 libraries with an average number of 50 million reads (Supplementary Data 1),
447 was submitted to ENA with the study accession code PRJB42797.
448 Following quality control and filtering, reads were aligned to the *Drosophila* reference
449 genome, mapping to ~13,600 expressed genes. The RNA-seq dataset was analyzed to
450 determine the overall changes in transcript abundance and splicing patterns induced by the
451 knock-down of each protein. Exploratory analysis of the normalized RNA-seq dataset
452 revealed that the samples clustered primarily according to genotype, followed by treatment
453 (Supplementary Fig. S2B), an observation consistent with the expected leakage from the
454 siRNA locus. However, hormone-treated samples exhibited a better separation between
455 genotypes than the corresponding untreated controls, as expected from shRNA-expressing
456 samples (Supplementary Fig. S2C,). As hormone treatment induced a significant number of
457 common changes across all sample types, explaining up to 7% of the variance in the dataset
458 (Supplementary Fig. S2C), differential gene expression (DE) analysis was performed between
459 hormone treated *Caz*, *Smn* and *TBPH* shRNA-expressing target and control fly lines (see
460 Supplementary Data 3). Confirming the robustness of our dataset and DE analysis, the
461 specific shRNA target genes were found to be significantly down-regulated exclusively in the
462 corresponding fly line (Fig. 2B). Given that our three target proteins are known to regulate
463 mRNA processing, we also analyzed the data to identify alternative splicing (AS) changes
464 that occurred as a consequence of the gene knockdowns (Supplementary Data 4). Although
465 the analysis we performed distinguishes between five distinct types of AS, for the aim of the
466 present study all AS changes identified in each siRNA line were combined and transcripts
467 defined as either alternatively spliced, or not affected. Taking into consideration that RNA-
468 seq was performed using samples isolated from fly heads, the list of transcripts showing
469 significant DE or AS changes in response to *caz*, *Smn* or *TBPH* knock-down was filtered as
470 previously described to exclude non-neuronal genes (Supplementary Fig. S3). Supplementary

471 Data 5 provides the final annotated list of all neuronal genes detected in the different fly
472 models and experiments.
473 Fig. 2C summarizes the overall results of the RNA-seq analysis. Although the proportion of
474 up- and down-regulated genes within the DE gene set (~50%) was similar in all conditions,
475 there were considerable differences in the number of DE or AS transcripts identified in
476 response to each knockdown (Fig. 2C). Given the correlation between these numbers and the
477 observed knock-down efficiency and sample heterogeneity (Fig. 2B and Supplementary Fig.
478 S2B), we believe these differences more likely reflect our experimental set-up than a specific
479 characteristic of the gene expression programs regulated by each target protein. Importantly,
480 only a relatively small fraction of the DE transcripts was identified as a direct protein target in
481 the RIP-seq assays (Supplementary Data 5). Caz-regulated transcripts showed minimal direct
482 association with Caz protein (4.6%), whereas ~22% of the genes showing altered expression
483 in response to Smn or TBPH RNAi were found to be enriched in the corresponding RIP-seq
484 assays. Interestingly, this fraction goes up to ~40% when considering only the transcripts
485 displaying AS changes in response to Smn or TBPH knock-down, suggesting the splicing of
486 these transcripts may be directly regulated by each protein (Supplementary Data 5).
487 We next looked for the commonalities between the sets of transcripts with altered expression
488 induced by the knockdown of each target protein. A summary of the number of genes
489 displaying common changes in expression as a consequence of the shRNA knockdowns is
490 depicted in Fig. 2D. The overlap analysis of these gene sets revealed that approximately 500
491 genes exhibit similar gene expression changes in response to all knockdowns (Fig. 2D). This
492 is well above the overlap expected by random chance, with an estimated p value < 1e-16.
493 Performing the overlap analysis for common DE genes without requiring that the type of
494 change is identical in the three fly lines only retrieved an additional 20 genes, underscoring
495 the significance of the common changes that were detected. Thus, despite the total lack of

496 common RIP-seq targets, the downregulation of Caz, Smn and TBPH protein expression
497 seems to elicit a coherent transcriptome response.
498 In an attempt to understand the functional consequences of this common transcriptome
499 signature, we performed a functional enrichment analysis to identify altered biological
500 processes. Surprisingly, almost no Gene Ontology (GO) terms were enriched in the subset of
501 ~500 common genes (Supplementary Data 6). This result is in stark contrast with the strong
502 functional signature that was observed for GO enrichment analysis of the subsets of mRNAs
503 captured in the RIP-Seq assays. Furthermore, the identification of functional signatures was
504 not improved by imposing more stringent fold change cut-offs on the DE gene sets. Indeed,
505 the majority of DE genes showing common changes across all knockdowns presents very
506 small variations in expression (Supplementary Fig. 2D). The use of more stringent fold
507 change cut-offs on our dataset leads to a big reduction in the size of the gene sets
508 (Supplementary Fig. 2E), with an even larger impact on the number of common DE genes
509 that are retained (Fig. 2F). These observations support our choice to consider all genes
510 showing statistically significant changes in expression in our analysis, independently of their
511 fold change level. However, we were unable to link this group of genes to a coherent set of
512 molecular processes that are directly influenced by the three proteins, which might provide
513 novel insights into the human disease context. Nevertheless, given the clear presence of a
514 shared transcriptome signature, we hypothesized that putative underlying functional
515 connections might be obscured by independent, albeit converging phenomena, taking place at
516 the protein network level. To obtain insights into these potential connections, we proceeded to
517 a more in-depth network-based analysis of our datasets.
518
519 **Network-based approaches identify commonly affected neuronal functional modules**

520 Biological processes are dynamic and complex phenomena that emerge from the interaction
521 of numerous proteins collaborating to carry out specialized tasks. Thus, a biological process
522 can be similarly impacted by changes in distinct proteins that contribute to the same
523 regulatory function.

524 To understand whether the phenotypic commonalities observed in ALS and SMA might result
525 from the deregulation of distinct, but functionally connected target proteins, we used a
526 computational network-based approach. First, following our recently published approach
527 (Garcia-Vaquero et al. 2022), we generated a library of tissue-specific "functional modules"
528 comprised of physically interacting and functionally collaborating neuronal proteins (Fig.
529 3A). To do so, we began by reconstructing the entire *Drosophila* neuronal interaction network
530 using protein-protein interaction (PPI) and adult fly brain RNA-seq datasets available in the
531 APID and FlyAtlas2 repositories, respectively (Leader et al. 2018; Alonso-López et al. 2019).
532 Notably, 45.5% of the 5 353 proteins found in this neuronal network are encoded by
533 transcripts whose levels and/or splicing were altered in response to *caz*, *Smn* and/or *TBPH*
534 knockdowns. Next, we defined functional modules in the neuronal network by selecting
535 groups of physically interacting proteins annotated under the same enriched functional term.
536 Of the 232 modules with associated GO terms, we focused on the subset of 122 modules
537 composed of 10 to 100 proteins (Supplementary data 7). These modules retained 1541
538 proteins in total, maintaining the high percentage of Caz, Smn and/or TBPH-dependent genes
539 found in the original network (43.7%).

540 To evaluate the impact of each of the three proteins on individual functional modules, we
541 calculated the percentage of nodes belonging to the DE or AS categories. To focus on
542 modules simultaneously affected by the downregulation of *caz*, *Smn* and *TBPH*, we assigned
543 to each module an “overall impact” score, defined as the minimal percentage of transcripts
544 showing altered expression in any given knockdown (Fig. 3A). 52 modules with an overall

545 impact score of ≥ 20% were identified. These modules were selected for further analysis, as
546 they seem to be under the common control of all three proteins, although not necessarily
547 through regulation of the same target genes.

548 Consistent with the potential functional relevance of the selected modules, associated
549 functional terms were found to comprise a range of biological processes relevant in a MND
550 context. These include general cellular processes such as kinase signal transduction pathways,
551 regulation of the actin cytoskeleton, regulation of endocytosis, as well as neuron-specific
552 processes such as learning and memory, and regulation of synapse assembly (Supplementary
553 Data 7). Interestingly, differences in the impact of individual gene knockdowns were
554 observed when comparing modules, which we propose to reflect some degree of functional
555 specialization of the two ALS-related genes and the single SMA-associated gene (Fig. 3B).
556 For example, the module related to "learning and memory" functions was strongly impacted
557 by *caz* down-regulation, but to a lower extent by *Smn* or *TBPH* silencing. In contrast, the
558 module "neuromuscular synaptic transmission" was strongly impacted by *TBPH*, followed by
559 *caz*, and less so by *Smn* knockdown. Finally, some modules, like the one linked to "regulation
560 of endocytosis" tended to be similarly impacted by all three knockdowns. Overall, the impact
561 of *TBPH* and *Caz* knockdowns on functional modules is much more similar to each other than
562 to *Smn*, which generally displays lower impact scores, with a few exceptions including
563 "regulation of endocytosis" (Fig. 3B). This observation is quite striking considering that *Caz*
564 and *TBPH* are associated to the same disease.

565 To determine the relevance of the selected modules to the pathophysiology of MNDs,
566 we calculated for each module the percentage of proteins with human orthologs already
567 linked to MNDs (according to the DisGeNET repository). Remarkably, selected modules
568 were significantly enriched in proteins with MND-linked human orthologs when compared to
569 modules that did not pass the "overall impact" threshold (p value = 1.5e-3, Wilcoxon test)

570 (Fig. 3C). This result suggests that we were able to identify novel disease-relevant
571 interactions based on the convergent analysis of *Caz*, *Smn* and *TBPH*-dependent functional
572 modules in *Drosophila*.

573 As the selected modules represent core biological functions regulated by the three
574 proteins, we looked at the prevalence of direct targets (i.e mRNAs identified by RIP-seq)
575 among module components classified as DE and/or AS in the knockdown analysis. We found
576 that 31% of the 411 DE/AS transcripts associated to selected modules are also bound by at
577 least one of the three MND proteins. In non-selected modules, this number decreases
578 significantly to 24% (p value = 1.4e-2, Fig. 3D), being even lower for transcripts that do not
579 integrate any functional module (18% of 2280 transcripts, p value = 3.1e-8; Supplementary
580 Data 7). Together, these results suggest that our integrated data analysis approach was able to
581 identify key functional processes that are commonly and directly regulated by the three
582 proteins. Our findings point to the ability of Caz, Smn and TBPH protein dysregulation to
583 elicit a convergent functional impact through distinct individual targets. The connection to
584 key biological processes is mediated by functional protein networks enriched in molecules
585 with known links to MNDs. Further exploration of the selected networks may thus provide
586 novel information to understand MND pathophysiology.

587

588 **Convergent disruption of neuromuscular junction processes by altered Caz, TBPH or**
589 **Smn protein levels**

590 Pairwise comparison of the 52 selected modules revealed a high number of shared genes
591 between many of them (see Supplementary Fig. S4). To generate a non-redundant map of the
592 common functional networks established by Caz, Smn and TBPH, we coalesced groups of
593 highly interconnected modules into larger but more condensed "super-modules" (Fig. 4). This
594 resulted in seven super-modules named after their core functional association: signaling,

595 traffic, cytoskeleton, stress, behavior, synaptic transmission, and neuro-muscular junction
596 (NMJ) (Supplementary Data 7). These super-modules range in size from 77 to 259 nodes,
597 with a maximum overlap between any two super-modules of ~12% of the nodes
598 (Supplementary Fig. S4). We next determined the presence of MND-associated gene
599 orthologues in the different super-modules (MND-linked, Fig. 5, left panel). We further
600 mapped the distribution of DE transcripts that are direct targets of Caz, Smn and TBPH
601 (RNA-binding, Fig. 5, middle panel); and of transcripts showing altered splicing (Altered
602 Splicing, Fig. 5, right panel). This analysis revealed a distinctive distribution of these
603 characteristics in the groups of modules that were coalesced into super-modules, which is
604 particularly evident regarding the percentage of transcripts displaying altered splicing or with
605 potential roles in MND. The super-modules related to behavior, neuro-muscular junction
606 (NMJ) and cytoskeleton incorporated the largest fraction of MND-linked and AS transcripts.
607 Given the critical link between MNDs and the physiology of NMJs, we focused on the NMJ
608 super-module for a more in-depth analysis.
609 The NMJ super-module comprises 104 proteins, of which 49% (51 nodes) are encoded by
610 genes differentially expressed and/or displaying altered splicing in at least one knockdown
611 condition (Supplementary Data 8). 38 of these genes establish direct interactions, forming the
612 subnetwork represented in Fig. 6A. To assess the degree to which the NMJ "super module"
613 functionally interacts with Caz, Smn and TBPH *in vivo*, we cross-referenced it to genetic
614 modifiers of *Drosophila* Smn, Caz or TBPH mutants identified in genome-wide screens for
615 modulators of degenerative phenotypes using the Exelixis transposon collection (Kankel et al.
616 2020, Sen et al 2013, Chang et al 2008). Interestingly, 21 nodes (~20%) of the NMJ "super
617 module" were identified as either suppressors or enhancers of these models of
618 neurodegeneration (Supplementary Data 8). Given that the reported percentage of recovered

619 modifiers in these screens ranged between 2% and 5%, this result highlights the biological
620 relevance of the functional modules identified through our approach.
621 Detailed analysis of the FlyBase annotations for the genes within the NMJ subnetwork
622 represented in Fig. 6A provides interesting insights into the potential mechanisms causing
623 neuronal dysfunction in the context of MNDs.
624 First, essential genes are highly overrepresented in the module. While about 30% of
625 *Drosophila* genes are expected to be essential for adult viability (Spradling et al. 1999), more
626 than 75% of genes present in the NMJ super-module have a lethal phenotype (Fig. 6B).
627 Exceptions are *CASK*, *liprin-γ*, *Nlg2*, *metro*, *dbo* and *nwk*. For *RhoGAP92B* and *Nrx-1*, it is so
628 far not entirely clear whether mutant alleles would cause lethality.
629 We next asked whether the human orthologs of these genes are linked to neurological
630 disorders. *TBPH* (TDP-43), *unc-104* (KIF1A, B, C), *Ank2* (Ank2), *futsch* (MAP1A/B), *sgg*
631 (GSK3A/B), *Src64B* (FYN/SRC) and *Nrx-1* (Nrx-1-3) have been implicated in MNDs
632 (hexagonal nodes in network). Moreover, a high number of genes have human orthologs
633 linked to other neuronal dysfunctions or diseases. For example, human orthologs to fly genes
634 *CASK* (CASK), *Mnb* (DYRK1A), *Rac1* (RAC1), *Dlg-1* (DLG1), *Cdc42* (CDC42), *Fmr1*
635 (FMR1, FXR1/2), *trio* (TRIO), *Nedd4* (NEDD4L/NEDD4) and *CamKII* (CAMK2A/B/D)
636 have been linked to intellectual disability. Epilepsy has been associated with mutations in the
637 human gene orthologs of *cac* (CACNA1A/B/E), *alpha-Spec* (SPTAN1) and *slo* (KCNMA1).
638 In addition, human psychiatric diseases like schizophrenia or bipolar disorder can be caused
639 by alterations in genes with high similarity to *Pak* (PAK1/2/3) and *dbo* (KLHL20 indirect, via
640 regulation of Pak, (Wang et al. 2016)). Alterations in the human gene coding Teneurin
641 Transmembrane Protein 4 (TENM4, shares high homology with fly *Ten-a* and *Ten-m*) are
642 known to cause hereditary essential tremor-5, while human neuroligins NLGN1, NLGN3 and
643 NLGN4X were linked to autism/Asperger syndrome and encode orthologs to fly *Nlg2*.

644 Finally, alterations in human orthologs to fly *Pum* (PUM1/2), *beta-Spec* (SPTBN1/2) and
645 Ank2 (ANK1/2/3) have been associated with Ataxia-like phenotypes and mental retardation.
646 In total, we were able to find direct associations to human MN or neurological disorders for
647 32 out of the 38 represented genes. Thus, although most of the genes captured in our analysis
648 are not exclusively expressed in neurons, their mutations are somehow associated to abnormal
649 neuroanatomy and function. Interestingly, this holds true for the non-essential genes as well.
650 It is also noteworthy that, in spite of the relatively limited overlap between the different super-
651 modules, all the proteins that constitute this core NMJ network are common to at least another
652 super-module, and on average to more than half of them (Fig 6B).
653 Altogether, these observations imply that the proteins encoded by the NMJ super-module
654 genes fulfill relevant functions in NMJ maintenance and that their alteration could eventually
655 contribute to MND. Our results reveal that *Caz*, *Smn* and *TBPH* act in concert to regulate
656 biological processes linked to NMJ maturation and function by altering the expression of
657 transcripts encoding distinct, yet physically and functionally interacting proteins. We propose
658 that the functional complexes established by these proteins may represent important players in
659 disease progression, emerging as potential common therapeutic targets rather than the
660 individual proteins that compose them.
661
662 **Discussion**
663 SMA and ALS are the most common MNDs and are characterized by a progressive
664 degeneration of motor neurons and loss of skeletal muscle innervation. Although both
665 diseases share many pathological features, including selective motor neuron vulnerability,
666 altered neuronal excitability, as well as pre- and post-synaptic NMJ defects (Bowerman et al.
667 2018), their very different genetic origins and onset led them to be classified as independent,
668 non-related diseases. This view has been challenged by recent studies demonstrating that

669 disease-causing proteins (Smn for SMA, Fus and TDP-43 for ALS) are connected through
670 both molecular and genetic interactions (reviewed by Gama-Carvalho et al, 2017).
671 Furthermore, the increasing number of functions attributed to these proteins converges onto
672 common regulatory processes, among which control of transcription and splicing in the
673 nucleus, as well as mRNA stability and subcellular localization in the cytoplasm. Despite the
674 observed convergence in the molecular function of Smn, Fus and TDP-43, transcripts co-
675 regulated by these three proteins, and thus central to SMA and ALS pathophysiology, have
676 not been identified by previous transcriptomic analyses. In this study, we used the power of
677 *Drosophila* to systematically identify, on one hand the mRNA repertoires bound by each
678 protein in the nucleus and cytoplasm of adult neurons and, on the other hand, the mRNA
679 populations undergoing significant alterations in steady-state levels or splicing as a
680 consequence of the knockdown of each protein. This approach revealed a striking absence of
681 mRNAs commonly bound by the three proteins and a small, albeit significant, number of
682 commonly altered transcripts. Notwithstanding, and contrary to the simplest model that
683 explains shared disease phenotypes, this subset of shared transcripts did not present any
684 functional signature linking it to biological pathways related to disease progression.
685 Considering that functional protein complexes are at the core of all critical cellular
686 mechanisms, an alternative model posits that shared phenotypes may arise through convergent
687 effects on independent elements of such complexes. To investigate this possibility, we
688 mapped the de-regulated transcripts identified in our transcriptomic analysis onto a
689 comprehensive and non-biased library of neuronal physically interacting and functionally
690 collaborating protein consortia. Following our recently published approach (Garcia-Vaquero
691 2022), definition of these functional units was achieved through the integration publicly
692 available information from *Drosophila* PPI networks, neuronal gene expression and gene
693 ontology annotations. This approach led to the identification of a set of 52 functional modules

694 significantly impacted by all three proteins through the regulation of distinct components
695 (Fig. 3). Of note, although we used as selection criterium the presence of a minimum of 20%
696 of module elements displaying altered gene expression in each knock-down model, we found
697 that modules passing this cut-off were significantly enriched in direct RNA binding targets of
698 Smn, Caz and TBPH compared to non-selected modules (Fig. 3D). Considering that only a
699 very small proportion of these targets are common to the three proteins, this observation
700 underscores our hypothesis of convergent regulation of functional complexes through distinct
701 individual elements. Furthermore, the enrichment of RIP targets in the selected modules
702 establishes a direct mechanistic link between changes in the levels of Smn, Caz and TBPH
703 and changes in the steady state expression of module components. It is possible that the
704 steady-state levels of transcripts encoding other proteins that belong to the same complex will
705 vary as part of homeostatic feed-back processes. This could justify the presence of a relatively
706 large number of DE/AS genes that are common to the three knockdown models, but whose
707 transcripts are not found as direct protein targets in our RIP-seq data.
708 The functional classification of the 52 selected modules revealed a striking connection with
709 critical pathways for MND. Particularly relevant, mapping of the human orthologues of the
710 different module components revealed a high number of genes with reported association to
711 MNDs. This observation provides support to the relevance of our approach, which uses
712 *Drosophila* as a model for uncovering molecular interactions underlying human disease. It is
713 noteworthy that the enrichment in disease-associated orthologues was not homogeneous
714 across the super-modules generated by coalescing highly related modules into a smaller
715 number of larger functional protein consortia (Fig. 5). Interestingly, we found that a super-
716 module related to NMJ function was among the highest scoring regarding both enrichment in
717 MND associated genes and presence of alternatively spliced/direct RNA binding targets. The
718 subset of DE/AS genes present in this module forms a highly interconnected network and the

719 analysis of FlyBase annotations for this focused subset provided interesting insights into
720 potential mechanisms that may underlie neuronal disfunction. An unusually large number of
721 DE/AS genes within the NMJ super-module was found to correspond to essential genes,
722 indispensable for the development of adult flies. Alterations in the abundance and/or function
723 of these genes have been linked in several cases to a disturbance of nervous system function.
724 This is reflected by an alteration in stress response and/or abnormal behavior in either
725 embryos, larvae or adult flies. Strikingly, even the non-lethal genes captured in this super-
726 module have been shown to impact nervous system development and cause abnormal
727 neuroanatomy when mutated/silenced.
728 The essential function of most of the selected genes obviously prohibits the analysis of loss-
729 of-function phenotypes in the adult organism. In neurons, classical forward and reverse
730 genetics of essential genes and clonal analysis is complex. This is the reason why there is
731 little genetic data on gene products involved in neuronal maintenance. Conditional knockouts
732 and spatiotemporal control of RNAi-mediated gene silencing (like the approach used here) is
733 a way to overcome these limitations. We can only speculate whether a neuron specific, adult-
734 onset knockdown of the individual genes within the super-module will impair adult neuron
735 integrity. However, it is reasonable to assume that the collective deregulation of this set of
736 genes within the super-module is incompatible with proper neuronal function. This
737 assumption is particularly sound if the encoded proteins and their associated functional
738 complexes are found to contribute to cellular processes critical for neurons, as indeed we find
739 in this case. In fact, for almost all proteins encoded by the NMJ sub-network, synaptic
740 functions have been reported. Interestingly, the other identified super-modules are also
741 functionally annotated to cellular mechanisms that are especially important in neurons, like
742 signaling, cytoskeletal dynamics, traffic and transport. Thus, an attractive model emerges for
743 SMA and ALS MN dysfunction: convergent functional impacts can emerge from the

744 independent, subtle deregulation of a group of proteins that are part of a set connected,
745 neuronal functional modules. A persisting impairment in critical neuronal processes could
746 initiate a self-reinforcing cycle of detrimental events, eventually resulting in neuronal decline.
747 Especially in the case of sporadic, late-onset ALS, this model would comply with the events
748 observed in disease progression.
749 In conclusion, our work revealed common functional modules that are under the control of the
750 SMA and ALS disease-associated gene orthologues *Smn*, *TBPH* and *caz*. This control is
751 exerted through distinct target genes that encode proteins which collaborate in neuronal
752 functional consortia. The fact that these modules are deregulated in pre-symptomatic disease
753 models and are primarily composed of ubiquitously expressed genes opens an interesting
754 avenue of research regarding the discovery of novel disease biomarkers. Importantly, the
755 identification of convergent molecular dysfunctions linked to distinct MND-associated genes
756 suggests that common therapeutic strategies able to help slowdown disease progression or
757 improve symptoms may exist, in spite of the diversity of genetic backgrounds.
758
759 **List of Abbreviations**
760 ALS – Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis
761 AS – Alternative Splicing
762 DE – Differentially Expressed
763 FC – Fold Change
764 GFP – Green Fluorescent Protein
765 GO – Gene Ontology
766 MN - Motor Neuron
767 MND – Motor Neuron Disease
768 NMJ – Neuromuscular Junction

769 RBP – RNA Binding Protein

770 RIP – RNA Immuno-Precipitation

771 RNAi – RNA interference

772 RNA-seq – RNA sequencing

773 RNP - Ribonucleoprotein

774 PPI – Protein-Protein-Interaction

775 shRNA – short hairpin RNA

776 SMA – Spinal Muscular Atrophy

777

778 **Declarations**

779 **Ethical Approval and Consent to participate**

780 Not applicable

781 **Consent for publication**

782 Not applicable

783 **Availability of supporting data**

784 The datasets generated and/or analyzed during the current study are available in the European

785 Nucleotide Archive repository under the umbrella study FlySMALS, with accession numbers

786 PRJEB42797 (https://www.ebi.ac.uk/ena/browser/view/PRJEB42797) and PRJEB42798

787 (https://www.ebi.ac.uk/ena/browser/view/PRJEB42798).

788 **Competing interests**

789 The authors declare that they have no competing interests

790 **Funding**

791 This work is part of an EU Joint Programme – Neurodegenerative Disease Research (JPND)

792 project with the acronym 'Fly-SMALS'. The project is supported through the following

793 funding organisations under the aegis of JPND – www.jpnd.eu: France, Agence Nationale de

la Recherche; Germany, Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung (BMBF); Portugal, Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia and Spain, Instituto de Salud Carlos III (ISCIII). Associated to the JPND, the group of JDLR was funded for this work by the ISCIII and FEDER through projects AC14/00024 and PI15/00328. Work in MGC's group was supported by the grant JPND-CD/0002/2013 and by UIDB/04046/2020 and UIDP/04046/2020 Centre grants from FCT, Portugal (to BioISI). Work in F.B.'s group is supported by the ANR (through the MEMORNP research grant and the 'Investments for the Future' LABEX SIGNALIFE program # ANR-11-LABX-0028-01). MG-V and TMM are recipients of a fellowship from the BioSys PhD programme PD65-2012 (Refs PD/BD/128109/2016 and PD/BD/142854/2018, respectively) from FCT (Portugal).

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to acknowledge Jörg B. Schulz and Joachim Weiss for support and helpful discussions during the course of the project. We thank the Genomics Core Facility (EMBL, Germany) for assistance with library preparation from RIP samples and sequencing.

Authors' contributions

MG-C, AV, FB, and JDLR conceptualized the research approach and supervised the research work; BF validated and generated the RNAi samples; MH generated and characterized the GFP-tagged lines and did the RNA-IP assays; LP assessed the functionality of GFP-tagged lines; MP and TMM did the RNA-seq data analysis; MG-V developed the methods and performed the network-based analysis; FRP contributed to the conceptualization and development of the network analysis. MG-C, AV, FB and MG-V wrote the manuscript draft. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Authors' Information

Not applicable

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1027

1028 **Figures**

1029 **Figure 1. RIP-Seq identification of mRNAs bound by Caz, Smn or TBPH in adult**
1030 ***Drosophila* neurons.** (A) Schematic representation of the RIP-Seq procedure. GFP-fusion
1031 proteins were conditionally expressed in the nervous system of adult flies *via* the
1032 Gal4/Gal80/~UAS system. Head lysates were prepared and fractionated into cytoplasmic and
1033 nuclear fractions (see Methods). Nuclear proteins were further solubilized with high salt
1034 buffer and recovered in the soluble fraction. The cytoplasmic and nuclear soluble fractions
1035 were used for immuno-precipitation with GFP-trap beads. Co-immunoprecipitated mRNAs
1036 were extracted and sequenced. (B) Western blot analysis of the different fractions obtained in
1037 the RIP procedure. Lamin and Tubulin were used as markers of the nuclear and cytoplasmic

1038 fractions, respectively. Depletion of Tubulin from the nuclear fraction and of Laminin from
1039 the cytoplasmic fraction demonstrates the quality of the fractionation procedure. Also note the
1040 differential distribution of GFP-Caz, Smn and TBPH in the different fractions. As expected,
1041 Smn was predominantly localized in the cytoplasmic fraction, and Caz in the nuclear. In
1042 contrast, TBPH was abundant in both fractions. (C) Bar graph showing the number of
1043 neuronal mRNAs co-immunoprecipitated with Caz, Smn or TBPH from cytoplasmic (blue) or
1044 nuclear (yellow) lysates. Transcripts found in both compartments are shown in green. (D)
1045 Venn diagrams and corresponding bar graphs illustrate the overlap between the total (top
1046 panel), cytoplasmic (middle panel) or nuclear (lower panel) mRNA interactomes of Caz, Smn
1047 and TBPH. The seven transcripts found in the overlap of the top diagram ("All") correspond
1048 to mRNA molecules present in distinct compartments, in agreement with no common
1049 transcripts being found in the cytoplasmic and nuclear fraction overlap analysis.
1050
1051 **Figure 2. Identification of differentially expressed neuronal transcripts in response to**
1052 **RNAi-mediated silencing of Caz, Smn or TBPH in adult flies** (A) Schematic
1053 representation of the experimental set-up for RNA-seq analysis. Hormone-dependent, adult-
1054 onset expression of short hairpin (sh) RNA was used to induce RNAi-mediated gene silencing
1055 of *caz*, *Smn* or *TBPH*. RNA was prepared from fly heads five to seven days post induction of
1056 shRNA expression, quality checked and subjected to mRNA-seq. Fly lines with shRNA
1057 against the *always early* (ae) embryonic gene served as control. (B) Bar graph showing the
1058 RNA-seq log2 fold change of the siRNA target genes plus the Gapdh housekeeping gene in
1059 each RNAi fly line. Statistically significant differences to the *ae* siRNA fly line are indicated
1060 as ** (adjusted p value < 0.05) and * (adjusted p value = 0.06 and p value < 0.02). (C) Bar
1061 graph showing the number of upregulated (red), downregulated (green) and differentially
1062 spliced mRNAs (yellow) in each RNA-seq dataset. Note that the kind of splicing change was

1063 not considered for this analysis. (D) Venn diagrams and corresponding bar graphs showing
1064 the overlap in upregulated (top), downregulated (middle) or differentially spliced (bottom)
1065 mRNAs in flies with RNAi-mediated silencing of *caz*, *Smn* or *TBPH*. The bar color compares
1066 the expected (black) and observed (red) overlap given the total transcripts altered in response
1067 to the silencing of *caz*, *Smn* or *TBPH,* respectively. The expected ratios were calculated using
1068 *SuperExactTest* R package.
1069
1070 **Figure 3. Characterization of functional modules impacted by reduced abundance of**
1071 **Caz, Smn and TBPH proteins.** (A) Left panel: workflow used to generate and select
1072 functional modules. The adult brain interactome was obtained from the APID protein-
1073 interaction network after filtering for proteins expressed in the adult *Drosophila* brain (i, see
1074 Methods). Functional enrichment analysis of the resulting interactome was performed to
1075 retrieve overrepresented GO Biological Processes (ii). Note that the functional enrichment
1076 returns all the proteins annotated in each overrepresented term. The modules were generated
1077 from the functional enrichment by retaining the proteins annotated and simultaneously
1078 interacting in the brain network (iii). Finally, the impact of *caz, Smn* and *TBPH* knockdown
1079 was evaluated for each module (iv) to select modules with > 20% of transcripts altered in each
1080 individual knockdown (v). Right panel: summary the workflow outputs. "Overall impact"
1081 calculation is exemplified for two modules (X/Y) with the impact score indicated on the right.
1082 Only the Y module would be selected, as the overall impact of module X is below the defined
1083 threshold. (B) Line plot comparing the impact of individual knockdowns on selected modules,
1084 sorted by increasing overall impact. Modules with the highest impact for each protein are
1085 indicated by their short name. (C) Box plots showing the percentage of proteins with MND-
1086 linked orthologs in each module class. Selected modules (blue) are significantly enriched in
1087 proteins with MND-linked orthologs compared to non-selected modules (grey) (p value =

1088 1.5e-3, Wilcoxon test). (D) Pie charts representing the fraction of transcripts with altered
1089 expression (DE) or splicing (AS) in response to a given protein knockdown that are
1090 simultaneously found in RNP complexes bound by the same protein. The high percentage of
1091 DE/AS transcripts (selected modules, blue pie chart) is significantly related to a higher
1092 frequency of DE/AS transcripts involved in RBPs bound by the same proteins (p-value =
1093 5.4e-3, Chi^2 test of independence).
1094
1095 **Figure 4: Identification of functional super-modules through protein overlap analysis**
1096 (A) Network representation of the selected functional modules. Nodes represent the selected
1097 modules designated by the original name of the gene ontology term. Node size indicates the
1098 number of proteins incorporated in the module and gradient color the overall impact, i.e.,
1099 minimum % of transcripts altered by each knockdown. The bar plots within the nodes indicate
1100 the impact of each knockdown on the module. Edge width indicates the number of commonly
1101 altered transcripts between two modules. Modules were manually grouped into 7 "super-
1102 modules" (circles) based on edge density (common altered transcripts) and functional
1103 similarity of module names.
1104
1105 **Figure 5: Analysis of super-module features.** Box plots showing the distribution of the
1106 percentage of annotated proteins in the different super-modules (colored boxes) and across all
1107 other (non-selected) library modules (white boxes). Grey dots represent the same percentage
1108 in the individual modules that are part of the super-module group. (Left) Percentage of
1109 proteins encoded by MND-linked gene orthologs according to the DisGeNET repository.
1110 (Middle) Percentage of proteins encoded by DE or AS transcripts that are direct RNA-binding
1111 targets of Caz, Smn or TBPH. (Right) Percentage of proteins encoded by transcripts with
1112 altered splicing patterns.

1113

1114 **Figure 6: The neuro-muscular junction (NMJ) super-module** (A) Protein-interaction
1115 subnetwork of NMJ super-module nodes that are encoded by transcripts altered by
1116 knockdown of Caz, Smn and/or TBPH. Only proteins with direct interaction with other
1117 proteins encoded by DE/AS transcripts are represented. Node size indicates the number of
1118 knockdown models in which the transcript revealed altered expression (DE) and/or splicing
1119 (AS). Several transcripts are both DE and AS; yellow nodes indicate transcripts only showing
1120 AS. Bold outline highlights proteins encoded by transcripts identified in the RIP-Seq analysis.
1121 Hexagons highlight proteins with MND-linked human orthologs. (B) Categorical heat map
1122 summarizing data concerning the proteins/genes within the network represented in A.
1123 Essential proteins were defined according to the FlyBase repository. Proteins labeled as
1124 "Dubious" display a lethal phenotype after induction of RNAi. Thus, it is likely that flies
1125 homozygous for amorphic mutations would result in lethality during development. However,
1126 since this might result from off-target effects, they were not considered essential. MND-
1127 associations were retrieved from the DisGeNET repository. Caz, Smn and TBPH columns
1128 indicate in which knockdown models the corresponding transcripts were found altered. Last 7
1129 columns indicate whether the protein is also found in other super-modules.

1130

1131 **Additional files**

1132

1133 **Additional file 1**

1134 **Supplementary Figure S1. Characterization of the UAS-GFP-Caz, UAS-GFP-Smn and UAS-**
1135 **GFP-TBPH fly lines.** (A-C) Adult brains dissected from *elav*>GFP-caz (A), *elav*>GFP-Smn (B) and
1136 *elav*>GFP-TBPH (C) flies 5-7 days after expression. The GFP signal is shown in green. Insets in a1-
1137 a3, b1-b3 and c1-c3 show the sub-cellular distribution of the GFP-tagged proteins. GFP signals are
1138 shown in white (left) or green (overlay, right). DAPI signals are shown in white (middle) or blue

1139 (overlay, right). Scale bar: 50 μm. Complete genotypes: *elav*-Gal4/Y; tub-Gal80ts/UAS-GFP-*caz* (A),
1140 *elav*-Gal4/Y; tub-Gal80ts/UAS-GFP-*Smn* (B) and *elav*-Gal4/Y; tub-Gal80ts/UAS-GFP-*TBPH* (C). (D)
1141 Western blot performed on lysates from adult flies with pan neural (*elav*-Gal4) expression of GFP-Caz
1142 (left), GFP-Smn (middle) and GFP-TBPH (right) brains. Anti-GFP antibodies were used to detect GFP
1143 fusions. Tubulin was used as a loading control. (E) qRT-PCR quantification of caz, Smn, and TBPH in
1144 VDRC strain #13673 expressing dsRNA targeting *always early* (contr.) and flies containing the
1145 shRNA transgene for each target gene and grown in the presence of hormone for 10 days. ddCt values
1146 to the endogenous control gene Rp49 were normalized to the corresponding ddCts from samples of
1147 flies grown in the absence of hormone. The black bar for the control samples represents the average
1148 normalized expression of the three target genes in the VDRC strain.
1149 **FigS1.pdf**
1150
1151 **Additional file 2**
1152 **Supplementary Data 1.** Sequencing library statistics
1153 **Supdata1.xlxs**
1154
1155 **Additional file 3**
1156 **Supplementary Figure S2. Overview of sequencing datasets.** Sample-to-sample distance heatmap
1157 for (A) the RIP-seq and (B) the RNA-Seq datasets, revealing overall similarities and dissimilarities
1158 between dataset samples based on Euclidean distance. (C) Principal component analysis for RNA-Seq
1159 datasets. Left: full dataset, samples colored by treatment, symbols indicate fly line (condition). Right:
1160 analysis of hormone treated samples, colored by fly line. (D) Volcano plots of DE genes identified for
1161 each knockdown (with adj. p value < 0.05). Genes displaying common changes across the three fly
1162 lines are highlighted in color. (E) Total number of DE genes identified in each sample type at
1163 increasing levels of | log2 FC |. (F) Number of common genes between the three knockdowns
1164 identified at increasing | log2 FC | cut-offs. The expected versus observed number of common genes in
1165 the overlaps is displayed in red and black, respectively. The percentage represented by the common

1166 genes in the smallest dataset of the overlap (Smn DE) is shown over the plot bars. Increasing fold
1167 change cut-offs leads to a progressively bigger reduction of "captured" genes without benefits to the
1168 functional enrichment analysis.

1169 **FigS2.pdf**

1170

1171 **Additional file 4**

1172 **Supplementary Data 2.** List of RIP-Seq enriched transcripts

1173 **Supdata2.xlxs**

1174

1175 **Additional file 5**

1176 **Supplementary Figure S3: Coverage of RIP-Seq and RNA-Seq experiments in FlyAtlas tissue-**
1177 **specific expression profiles.** (A) Normalized RNA-Seq data of adult fly brain tissue was retrieved
1178 from the FlyAtlas2 database (see methods). The total 9020 transcripts were filtered using an
1179 expression threshold of > 1 FPKM. From the total 7369 transcripts identified in the RIP-Seq and
1180 knockdown experiments, 5511 were also detected in this dataset, and will be referred to as "neuronal"
1181 transcripts hereafter. Bar graph shows the number of transcripts identified in each experiment. (B)
1182 Figure summarizes the top 7 functions enriched in the sets of neuronal and non-neuronal transcripts
1183 identified in RIP-Seq and knockdown experiments. clusterProfiler R package was used to compare the
1184 functional enrichment of the 5511 "neuronal" and 1858 "non-neuronal" transcripts using Gene
1185 Ontology Biological Process, hyper-geometric test, adjusted p-value 0.05. From 824 enriched terms in
1186 neuronal transcripts, 92 include at the description the following key words: "synap", "axon", "neuro",
1187 "dendrite", "nervous", "button", "glial" or "cortex". Non-neuronal transcripts were enriched in 19
1188 terms, none of them related to neuronal processes. (C) Figure shows density plots of log_2-transformed
1189 FPKM values for transcripts identified in the RIP-Seq and RNA-Seq experiments and classified as
1190 "non-neuronal". 67.4% of the 1858 transcripts were detected in 10 additional tissues available in the
1191 FlyAtlas2 and displayed highest expression densities on *head*, *thoracicoabdominal ganglion* and *eye*
1192 tissues, explaining their possible origin in the datasets. (D) Density plot of log_2-transformed FPKM

1193 values of “neuronal” transcripts from the FlyAtlas2, RIP-Seq, DE/AS, and selected functional modules
1194 subsets, revealing an enrichment of our datasets in transcripts with medium to high expression levels
1195 in neurons, particularly for the transcripts with altered expression retained in the selected modules**.**
1196 **FigS3.pdf**
1197
1198 **Additional file 6**
1199 **Supplementary Data 3.** RNA-Seq DE transcripts
1200 **Supdata3.xlxs**
1201
1202 **Additional file 7**
1203 **Supplementary Data 4.** Alternative splicing analysis results
1204 **Supdata4.xlxs**
1205
1206 **Additional file 8**
1207 **Supplementary Data 5.** Annotation of all FlyAtlas “neuronal” genes regarding the presence in the
1208 different DE/AS/RIP data subsets
1209 **Supdata5.xlxs**
1210
1211 **Additional file 9**
1212 **Supplementary Data 6.** Functional Enrichment Analysis of target gene-dependent transcripts
1213 **Supdata6.xlxs**
1214
1215 **Additional file 10**
1216 **Supplementary Data 7.** Functional Module annotation
1217 **Supdata7.xlxs**
1218
1219 **Additional file 11**

1220 **Supplementary Figure S4: Evaluation of protein redundancy across functional modules.** (A)
1221 Complete-linkage hierarchical clustering using Jaccard's similarity coefficient for the 122 modules
1222 with a size between 10 to 100 proteins. The 52 modules passing the overall impact cut-off of >20% of
1223 transcripts altered in at least one knockdown are labeled in red. (B) Box plots describing the number
1224 of modules sharing at least one protein when comparing modules including less or more than 100
1225 proteins Wilcoxon test, p value 2.2×10^{-16}. (C) Bar plot indicating the number of proteins found in
1226 common between different super-modules. Colored horizontal bars indicate total number of
1227 proteins in each super-module. Black vertical bars indicate the overlap between super-
1228 modules. Only overlap sets including at least 5 proteins are shown.
1229
1230 **Additional file 12**
1231 **Supplementary Data 8.** NMJ Module
1232 **Supdata8.xlxs**
1233
1234 **Additional file 13**
1235 **Supplementary Methods.** Primers used for cloning and qRT-PCR
1236 **SupMethods.pdf**
1237

Figure 1

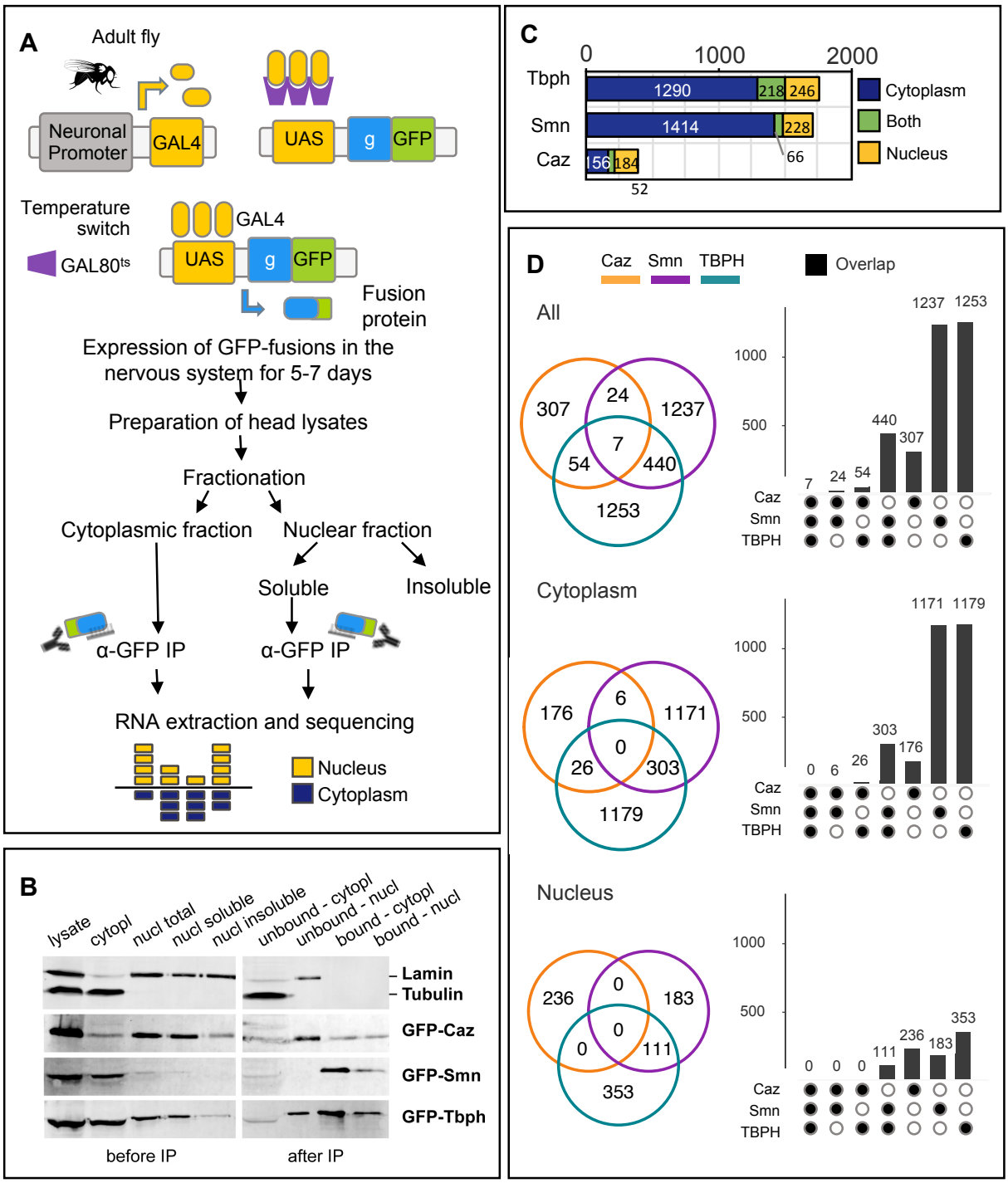

A
Adult fly
Neuronal Promoter
GAL4
UAS
g
GFP
Temperature switch
GAL80ts
GAL4
UAS
g
GFP
Fusion protein
Expression of GFP-fusions in the nervous system for 5-7 days
Preparation of head lysates
Fractionation
Cytoplasmic fraction
Nuclear fraction
Soluble
Insoluble
α-GFP IP
α-GFP IP
RNA extraction and sequencing
Nucleus
Cytoplasm
B
lysate
cytopl
nucl total
nucl soluble
nucl insoluble
unbound - cytopl
unbound - nucl
bound - cytopl
bound - nucl
Lamin
Tubulin
GFP-Caz
GFP-Smn
GFP-Tbph
before IP
after IP
C
0
1000
2000
Tbph
Smn
Caz
1290
218
246
1414
228
66
156
184
52
Cytoplasm
Both
Nucleus
D
Caz
Smn
TBPH
Overlap
All
307
24
1237
7
54
440
1253
1000
500
7
24
54
440
307
1237
1253
Caz
Smn
TBPH
Cytoplasm
176
6
1171
0
26
303
1179
1000
500
0
6
26
303
176
1171
1179
Caz
Smn
TBPH
Nucleus
236
0
183
0
0
111
353
1000
500
0
0
0
111
236
183
353
Caz
Smn
TBPH

Figure 2

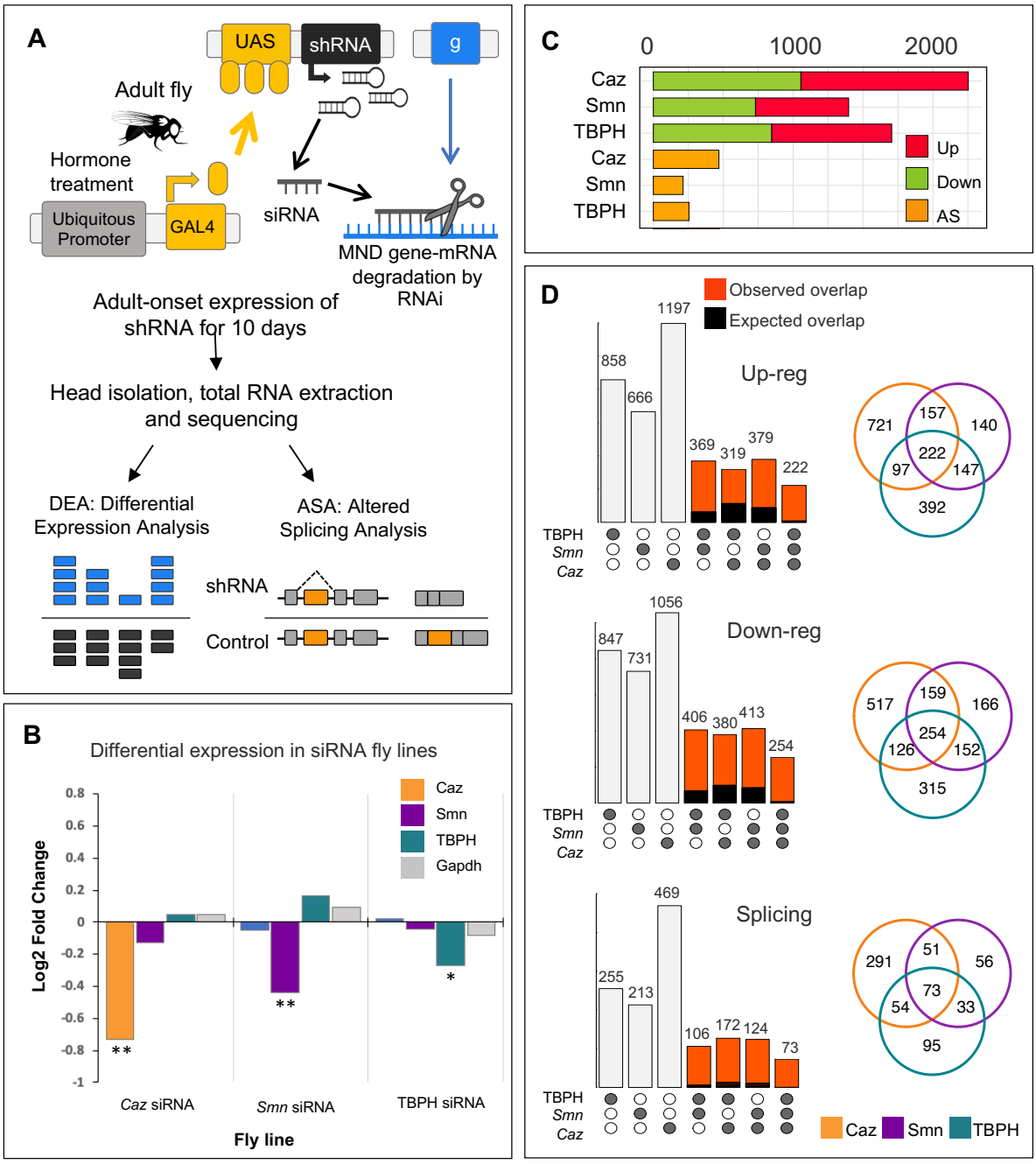

A
UAS
shRNA
g
Adult fly
Hormone treatment
Ubiquitous Promoter
GAL4
siRNA
MND gene-mRNA degradation by RNAi
Adult-onset expression of shRNA for 10 days
Head isolation, total RNA extraction and sequencing
DEA: Differential Expression Analysis
ASA: Altered Splicing Analysis
shRNA
Control
B
Differential expression in siRNA fly lines
Log2 Fold Change
Caz
Smn
TBPH
Gapdh
Caz siRNA
Smn siRNA
TBPH siRNA
Fly line
C
0
1000
2000
Caz
Smn
TBPH
Caz
Smn
TBPH
Up
Down
AS
D
Observed overlap
Expected overlap
Up-reg
858
666
1197
369
319
379
222
721
157
140
222
97
147
392
Down-reg
847
731
1056
406
380
413
254
517
159
166
254
126
152
315
Splicing
255
213
469
106
172
124
73
291
51
56
73
54
33
95
TBPH
Smn
Caz
Caz
Smn
TBPH

Figure 3

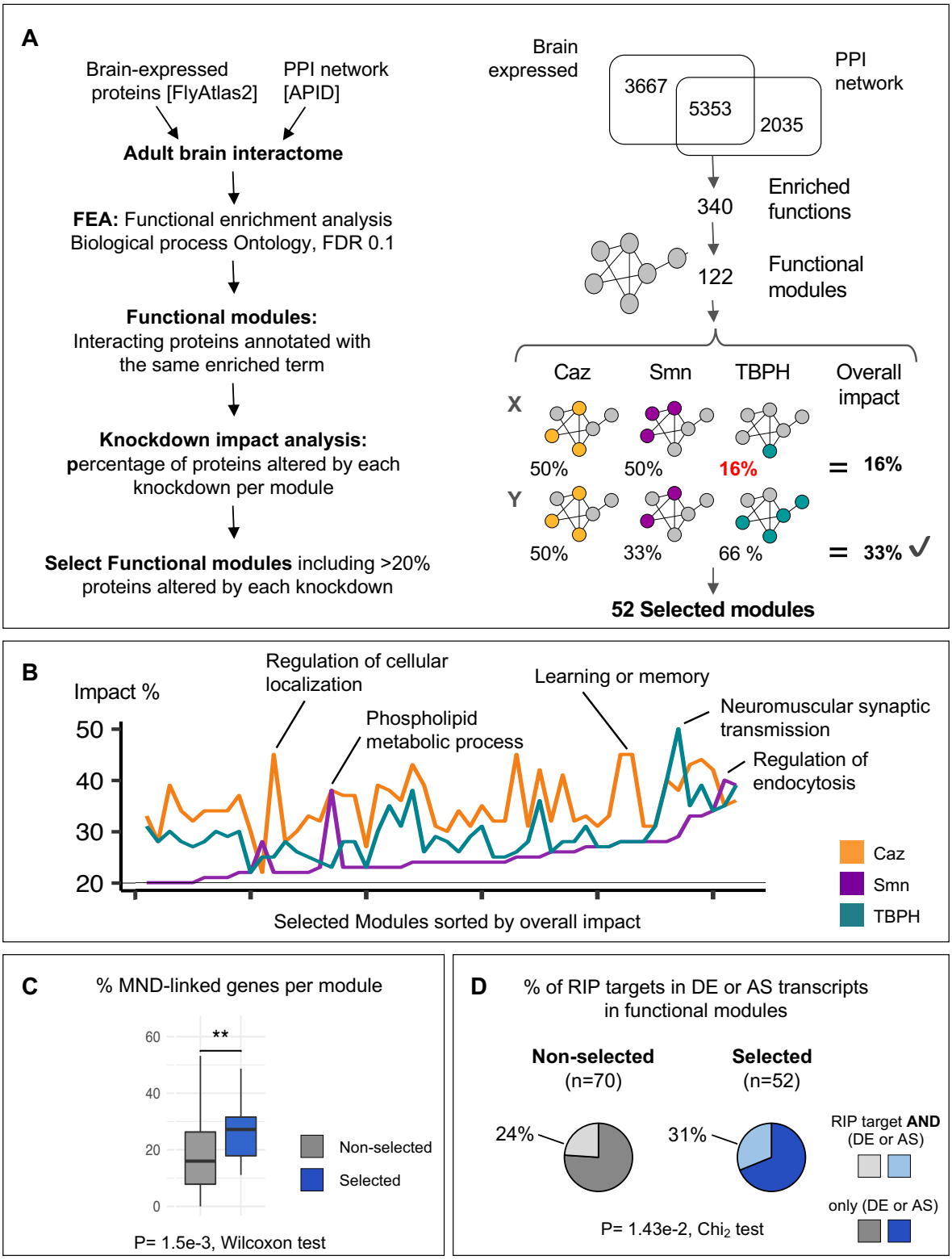

A
Brain-expressed proteins [FlyAtlas2]
PPI network [APID]
Adult brain interactome
FEA: Functional enrichment analysis Biological process Ontology, FDR 0.1
Functional modules: Interacting proteins annotated with the same enriched term
Knockdown impact analysis: percentage of proteins altered by each knockdown per module
Select Functional modules including >20% proteins altered by each knockdown
Brain expressed
PPI network
3667
5353
2035
340
Enriched functions
122
Functional modules
Caz
Smn
TBPH
Overall impact
X
50%
50%
16%
= 16%
Y
50%
33%
66 %
= 33%
52 Selected modules
B
Impact %
50
40
30
20
Regulation of cellular localization
Phospholipid metabolic process
Learning or memory
Neuromuscular synaptic transmission
Regulation of endocytosis
Caz
Smn
TBPH
Selected Modules sorted by overall impact
C
% MND-linked genes per module
60
40
20
0
**
Non-selected
Selected
P= 1.5e-3, Wilcoxon test
D
% of RIP targets in DE or AS transcripts in functional modules
Non-selected (n=70)
Selected (n=52)
24%
31%
RIP target AND (DE or AS)
only (DE or AS)
P= 1.43e-2, Chi2 test

Figure 4

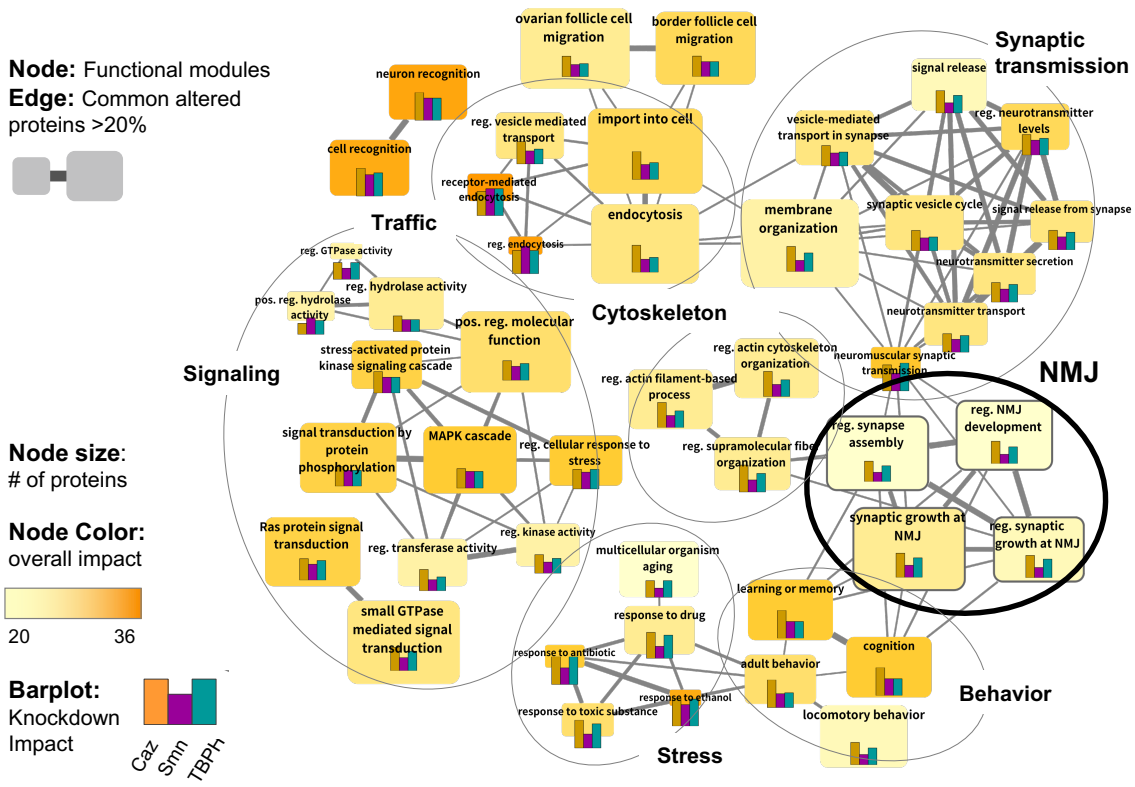

Node: Functional modules
Edge: Common altered proteins >20%
Node size: # of proteins
Node Color: overall impact
20
36
Barplot: Knockdown Impact
Caz
Smn
TBPh
ovarian follicle cell migration
border follicle cell migration
neuron recognition
cell recognition
reg. vesicle mediated transport
import into cell
receptor-mediated endocytosis
endocytosis
reg. endocytosis
Traffic
Synaptic transmission
signal release
reg. neurotransmitter levels
vesicle-mediated transport in synapse
membrane organization
synaptic vesicle cycle
signal release from synapse
neurotransmitter secretion
neurotransmitter transport
neuromuscular synaptic transmission
reg. GTPase activity
reg. hydrolase activity
pos. reg. hydrolase activity
pos. reg. molecular function
Cytoskeleton
reg. actin cytoskeleton organization
reg. actin filament-based process
Signaling
stress-activated protein kinase signaling cascade
NMJ
reg. NMJ development
reg. synapse assembly
signal transduction by protein phosphorylation
MAPK cascade
reg. cellular response to stress
reg. supramolecular fiber organization
synaptic growth at NMJ
reg. synaptic growth at NMJ
Ras protein signal transduction
reg. transferase activity
reg. kinase activity
multicellular organism aging
learning or memory
small GTPase mediated signal transduction
response to drug
response to antibiotic
cognition
adult behavior
response to ethanol
response to toxic substance
locomotory behavior
Behavior
Stress

Figure 5

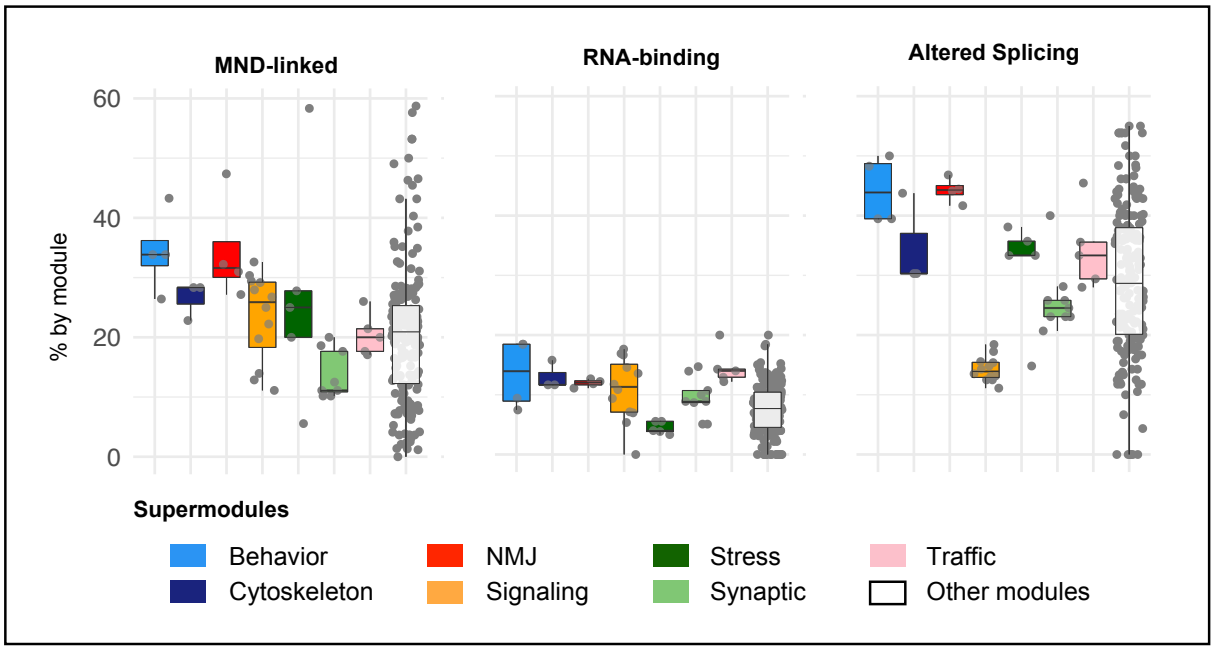
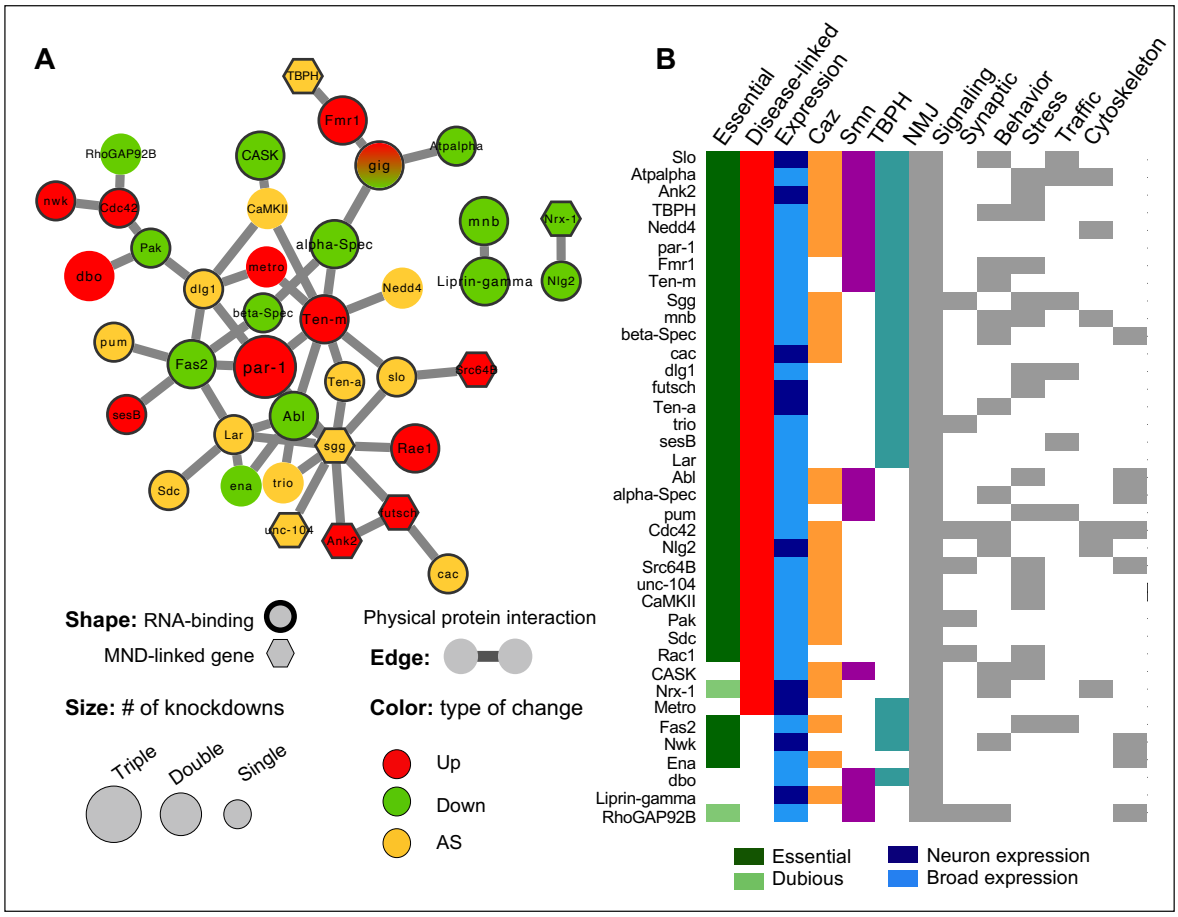

MND-linked
RNA-binding
Altered Splicing
% by module
60
40
20
0
Supermodules
Behavior
Cytoskeleton
NMJ
Signaling
Stress
Synaptic
Traffic
Other modules

Figure 6


A
TBPH
Fmr1
gig
Atpalpha
RhoGAP92B
CASK
nwk
Cdc42
CaMKII
mnb
Nrx-1
Pak
alpha-Spec
dbo
metro
dlg1
Nedd4
Liprin-gamma
Nlg2
beta-Spec
Ten-m
pum
Fas2
par-1
Ten-a
slo
Src64B
sesB
Abl
Lar
sgg
Rae1
Sdc
ena
trio
futsch
unc-104
Ank2
cac
Shape: RNA-binding
MND-linked gene
Physical protein interaction
Edge:
Size: # of knockdowns
Triple
Double
Single
Color: type of change
Up
Down
AS
B
Essential
Disease-linked
Expression
Caz
Smn
TBPH
NMJ
Signaling
Synaptic
Behavior
Stress
Traffic
Cytoskeleton
Slo
Atpalpha
Ank2
TBPH
Nedd4
par-1
Fmr1
Ten-m
Sgg
mnb
beta-Spec
cac
dlg1
futsch
Ten-a
trio
sesB
Lar
Abl
alpha-Spec
pum
Cdc42
Nlg2
Src64B
unc-104
CaMKII
Pak
Sdc
Rac1
CASK
Nrx-1
Metro
Fas2
Nwk
Ena
dbo
Liprin-gamma
RhoGAP92B
Essential
Dubious
Neuron expression
Broad expression