A phosphorylation-dependent switch of the lysosomal V-ATPase assembly regulates α-synuclein clearance in glia

Shiping Zhang[1,†], Linfang Wang[1,†], Shuanglong Yi[1,†], Shuhua Li[1], Honglei Wang[1], Ruiqi Wang[1], Yang Liu[4], Wei Yan[5], Chang Liu[5], Kai-Wen He[4], Margaret S. Ho[1,2,3,*]

[1]School of Life Science and Technology, ShanghaiTech University, Shanghai, 201210, China

[2]Institute of Neuroscience, National Yang Ming Chiao Tung University, Taipei, Taiwan

[3]Brain Research Center, National Yang Ming Chiao Tung University, Taipei, Taiwan

[4]Interdisciplinary Research Center on Biology and Chemistry, Shanghai Institute of Organic Chemistry, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Shanghai 201210, China

[5]Guangdong Provincial Key Laboratory of Brain Connectome and Behavior, CAS Key Laboratory of Brain Connectome and Manipulation, the Brain Cognition and Brain Disease Institute (BCBDI), Shenzhen Institutes of Advanced Technology, Chinese Academy of Sciences; Shenzhen-Hong Kong Institute of Brain Science-Shenzhen Fundamental Research Institutions, Shenzhen, 518055, China

[†]These authors contributed equally

21 *Corresponding author: Margaret S. Ho, Ph.D. Email:

22 margareth@shanghaitech.edu.cn

Abstract

Glia serve as double-edged swords to modulate neuropathology in Parkinson's disease

(PD), but how they react opposingly to be beneficial or detrimental under pathological

conditions, like promote or eliminate α-synuclein (α-syn) inclusions, remains elusive.

Here we present evidence that the PD risk factor Cyclin G-associated kinase

(GAK)/dAuxilin (dAux) regulates the lysosomal degradation of α-syn in glia. In

addition to a broad spectrum of parkinsonian symptoms in *Drosophila* and mice, lack

of glial Gak/dAux causes abnormally higher α-syn levels in fly and mouse brains, and

further enhances the α-syn preformed fibril levels in mouse brains. dAux

phosphorylates at the serine 543 of Vha44, the V1C subunit of the vacuolar H^+-ATPase

(V-ATPase), regulates the V-ATPase assembly, and controls the lysosomal

acidification and hydrolase activity to set an acidic milieu for α-syn degradation in glia.

Importantly, blocking Vha44 serine 543 phosphorylation disrupts V-ATPase assembly,

lysosome acidification, and hydrolase activity, leading to DA neurodegeneration and

locomotor deficits in flies. Our findings identify a phosphorylation-dependent switch

controlling the V-ATPase assembly for lysosomal α-syn degradation in glia. Targeting

the clearance of glial α-syn inclusions via this lysosomal pathway could potentially be a

therapeutical approach to ameliorate the disease progression in PD.

Keywords: Parkinson's disease; Lysosomal acidification; V-ATPase; α-syn

degradation; Glia

Introduction

Protein inclusions in the brains are the histological hallmarks for neurodegenerative diseases, and a strategic way to target them for elimination is urgently needed to resolve the pathology. Whereas Lewy bodies (LBs), the fibrillar aggregates of α-synuclein (α-syn), accumulate in neurons in Parkinson's disease (PD), evident α-syn inclusions are also detected in microglia, astrocytes, and oligodendrocytes due to prion-like propagation from neurons to glia[1-4]. In addition, glia (astrocytes and microglia) are double-edged swords in PD and respond to signals from neuronally-secreted α-syn by releasing pro- or anti-inflammatory factors to enhance or ameliorate PD progression, respectively[5-10]. While it is clear that neuronal α-syn inclusions are eliminated via the autophagy-lysosome pathway, the mechanism of how α-syn inclusions are eliminated in glia remains largely elusive.

Lysosomes, the acidic milieu containing hydrolases and other enzymes, are the final destinations for endocytic and autophagic pathways to digest extracellular and intracellular materials[11-13]. To maintain an optimal pH, the vacuolar H^+-ATPase (V-ATPase) localizes on the lysosomal membrane and pumps protons into the lumen[14-16]. V-ATPase is a multisubunit enzyme composed of a cytosolic V1 domain with eight subunits (A-H) mediating ATP hydrolysis and a membrane-bound V0 domain with six subunits (a, c, c'', d, e, and c' in yeast or Ac45 in higher eukaryotes) mediating proton transport[16-18]. Using the energy generated by ATP hydrolysis, V-ATPase drives the ion flux to regulate a variety of cellular processes, such as

endosome maturation and trafficking, receptor recycling, and nutrient signaling[19,20].

Notably, the function of V-ATPase in controlling lysosomal acidification could well

be a key factor tuning the level of protein inclusions in the disease brains; how

V-ATPase contributes to the pathological aggregate formation and elimination, awaits

to be further explored.

Here we present evidence that a lysosomal pathway orchestrated by a

phosphorylation-dependent switch of the V-ATPase assembly regulates α-syn

degradation in glia. dAuxilin (dAux), the *Drosophila* homolog of the human Cyclin

G-associated kinase (GAK, mouse Gak), regulates the serine 543 (S543)

phosphorylation of Vha44, the catalytic C subunit of the V-ATPase V1 complex. Lack

of dAux decreases Vha44 S543 phosphorylation, reduces V-ATPase assembly, and

disrupts lysosomal acidification and hydrolase activity in glia. These defects ultimately

cause α-syn accumulation, leading to a broad spectrum of parkinsonian phenotypes

including DA neurodegeneration and locomotor deficits in flies and mice. Our findings

identify a lysosomal α-syn clearance pathway that functions in a glial context

contributing to neurodegeneration; targeting the lysosomal α-syn degradation in glia

might be a strategic way to eliminate protein inclusions in PD.

Results

Lack of glial Gak/dAux causes a broad spectrum of PD-like symptoms

Our previous study indicated that GAK/dAux plays a role in autophagy initiation in

glia[21,22]. Promoting autophagy initiation, however, is in apparent contradiction to the

observed block in substrate degradation in the absence of GAK/dAux, leading us to

speculate whether there are additional regulations conferred by GAK/dAux. We then

further investigated the pathological significance of lacking Gak/dAux, in hope to

gain more mechanistic details at the cellular level. As previously reported, two

independent transgenic fly RNAi lines targeting *daux*: *daux*-RNAi (V#16182) and

daux-RNAi[#2] (BL#39017) were expressed in glia using the pan-glial *repo*-GAL4[21].

Flies expressing *UAS-LacZ* or *UAS-luciferase*-RNAi (*luc*-RNAi, Figure S1) were

used as controls throughout the study. Consistent to our previous findings, lacking

glial dAux in flies caused age-dependent loss of dopaminergic (DA) neurons in the

PPM1/2 cluster (Figures 1A-1C, S1A and S1B, S2A and S2B), where DA neurons

have been shown to degenerate upon α-syn overexpression[23]. These flies also

exhibited locomotor deficits (Figures 1D, S1C, and S2C) and reduced lifespan

(Figures 1E and S1D). Some of the earlier PD-associated symptoms such as sleep

disturbance were also detected upon glial dAux depletion (Figures S3A and S3B).

Consistently, lacking microglial Gak caused significant DA neuron loss in the

conditional knockout (cKO) mice (*CX3CR1-Cre[+/-]; Gak[flox/flox]*, henceforth *Gak* cKO)[21]

(Figures 1F and 1G), locomotor deficits quantified by the footprint analysis and pole

test (Figures 1H and 1I), and body weight loss (Figure 1J). Taken together, Gak/dAux

expression in glia contributes to a broad spectrum of PD-like symptoms including DA

neurodegeneration, locomotor dysfunction, and shorten lifespan in flies and mice.

α-syn are accumulated in glial lysosomes in the absence of Gak/dAux

Importantly, upon co-expression of human α-syn in neurons and *daux*-RNAi in glia

using a GAL4/lexA binary system, total α-syn levels in the brains increased in the

absence of glial dAux (Figures 2A and 2B). α-syn proteins were also detected in the

sorted wild type fly glia, despite its neuronal origin (Figure S3C). These results

indicate that α-syn transmits from neurons to glia and accumulates in the absence of

glial dAux.

Furthermore, whereas *Gak* cKO microglia exhibited shorter processes, higher

CD68-positive phagocytic activity, and amoeboid-like structures in a potentially

activated state (Figures 2C-E), phosphorylated α-syn levels detected by the antibodies

against the phosphorylated serine 129 (pS129-α-syn) and its colocalization with the

microglia marker ionized calcium-binding adapter molecule 1 (Iba1) were also

elevated in *Gak* cKO microglia (Figures 2F and 2G). Upon the bilateral inoculation of

the α-syn preformed fibril (PFF) in the dorsal striatum, microglial pS129-α-syn

intensities and pS129-α-syn-Iba1 colocalization increased in the substantia nigra (SN)

(+/- PFF, Figures 2H-2J), and further increased in the PFF-treated *Gak* cKO mice

compared to the Cre alone controls, indicating that lacking microglial Gak promotes

pS129-α-syn accumulation (Figures 2I and 2J). These results demonstrate that

Gak/dAux regulates the degradation of pathological α-syn inclusions in glia.

By a closer look, the accumulated α-syn in adult fly brains were enriched in glial

lysosomes as both the α-syn intensities inside the Lamp1-positive lysosomes and

α-syn-Lamp1 colocalization increased upon *daux*-RNAi expression in glia (Figures

2K and 2L). Consistently, pS129-α-syn were also highly colocalized with lysosomes

in the *Gak* cKO microglia (Figures 2M and 2N). These results implicate a lysosomal

pathway orchestrated by Gak/dAux for degrading pathological α-syn in glia.

Lack of Gak/dAux increases lysosome biogenesis and disrupts lysosomal

acidification in glia

To further dissect the role of Gak/dAux in lysosomal α-syn degradation, Lamp1-GFP

was co-expressed to label glial lysosomes. Upon *daux*-RNAi expression, the number

of glial Lamp1-positive lysosomes increased in the brains (Figures 3A and 3B).

Consistent to observations in previous studies[24-26], some of these lysosomes were

enlarged and clustered, implying non-degraded substrate accumulation (Figures 3A

and 3B, S1E and S1F, S2D and S2E). Moreover, the lysosomal intensities in both the

immortalized microglia (IMG) treated with siRNAs targeting *Gak* (*Gak* siRNA[#1] and

Gak siRNA[#2]) and *Gak* cKO microglia were elevated (Figures 3C-3F). The

Lamp1-positive puncta size and the Lamp1-Iba1 colocalization in these microglia

were also increased (Figures 3E and 3F). These results suggest conserved function of

Gak/dAux on lysosome biogenesis. Next, ultrastructural analysis by Transmission

Electron Microscopy (TEM) also revealed an increase in the lysosome number and

size in the absence of glial dAux (Figures 3G and 3H, yellow arrowheads). Notably,

some of the large lysosomes were with electron-lucent dots inside or decreased

intensity (Figures 3G and 3H, red or blue arrowheads, respectively), suggesting

disrupted lysosomal pH[27,28].

To further probe lysosomal pH, Lysotracker Green (LTG), a fluorescent dye that

specifically labels acidic organelles including the lysosomes, was used. The number

and intensities of LTG-positive puncta were significantly reduced in flies lacking glial

dAux, indicating that lysosomes are not properly acidified (Figures 3I and 3J, S1G

and S1H, S2F and S2G). In addition, the activity of the lysosomal hydrolase

Cathepsin B (CTSB) stained by Magic Red (MR) was significantly decreased

(Figures 3K and 3L, S1I and S1J, S2H and S2I), and the processing of CTSB and

another lysosome hydrolase Cathepsin D (CTSD) was also impaired (Figures 3M-3P).

In the scale of a single glial lysosome, the mean intensities of Lysotracker Red (LTR)

or MR per Lamp1-positive lysosome also decreased significantly upon dAux

depletion (Figures 3Q-3T, S1K-S1N, S2J and S2K). It is noteworthy to mention that

the expression of either fly dAux or human GAK (Flag-hGAK)[21] fully rescued the

daux-RNAi-induced lysosomal acidification defects (Figures S4A and S4B),

suggesting conserved GAK/dAux function on lysosome acidification. As a

consequence, autophagic substrates Ref(2)P (the *Drosophila* ortholog of P62) and

Ubiquitin (Ubi) accumulated in these defective lysosomes (Figures 3U and 3V, S1O

and S1P, S2L and S2M). In summary, lack of glial dAux disrupts lysosomal

acidification and hydrolase activity, leading to impaired substrate degradation.

dAux regulates Vha44 S543 phosphorylation

Previous studies have revealed an impact on lysosome homeostasis using GAK kinase

inhibitors[24,25]. However, whether Gak/dAux regulates lysosome biogenesis and

acidification via its kinase activity remains largely unexplored. To this end,

phosphoproteomic analysis was conducted using adult fly head samples from the

control and *repo>daux*-RNAi flies[21] (Figures S4C-G). Interestingly, a list of proteins

encoding different subunits of the lysosomal V-ATPase were identified (Figures

4A-4D). As V-ATPase is the main driving force to maintain lysosomal pH, we paid

special attention to the phosphorylation profiles of these subunits. Among all, the

phosphorylation level at the S543 of the V-ATPase V1C subunit, Vha44 isoform F,

was significantly decreased upon glial dAux depletion (*daux*-RNAi/LacZ ratio 0.634,

Figure 4D). Motif analysis also predicted that S543 belongs to a sequence motif prone

to be phosphorylated (xxxxPx_S_Pxxxxx, Figure 4E). These results suggest that

Vha44 is likely a dAux kinase substrate.

To support our hypothesis, co-immunoprecipitation (Co-IP) analysis was first

conducted. Our results revealed that dAux interacts with Vha44 both endogenously

and upon overexpression in S2 cells (Figures 4F and 4G). In addition, antibodies that

specifically recognize the synthesized phosphopeptides EFPL(S-p)PAEL, sequence

correlating with the identified motif, were raised (anti-pVha44^{S543}). Dot blot analysis

validated the specificity of anti-pVha44^{S543} antibodies to the phosphopeptide

immunogen (Figure 4H). Consistent to results from the phosphoproteomic analysis,

endogenous Vha44 S543 phosphorylation probed by the anti-pVha44^{S543} antibodies

was significantly reduced in adult fly brains expressing the *daux*-RNAi in glia

(Figures 4I and 4J). These results suggest that dAux phosphorylates Vha44 at S543.

Of note, expression of the dAux variant lacking the kinase domain (Flag-dAux$^{\Delta Kinase}$)

failed to restore the *daux*-RNAi-induced lysosomal acidification defects, reinforcing

the importance of the dAux kinase activity (Figures S4A and S4B).

Vha44 S543 phosphorylation regulates lysosomal acidification in glia

Next, we investigated if Vha44 S543 phosphorylation, like dAux, regulates lysosome

acidification in glia. Consistent to the results from *daux*-RNAi-expressing flies, glial

expression of *vha44*-RNAi, which efficiency was validated by qRT-PCR and WB

analyses (Figures S5A-S5C), caused a reduction in the number of LTG- and

MR-positive puncta in adult fly brains (Figures 5A and 5B, S5D and S5E). The

intensities of the LTG- or LTR-positive puncta in the brains or per glial

Lamp1-positive lysosome, respectively also decreased significantly upon dAux

depletion (Figures 5A and 5B, 5E, and 5F). These results demonstrate that Vha44

regulates lysosomal acidification in glia.

Next, transgenic flies were made to express the wild type Vha44 (Myc-Vha44)

or the non-phosphorylatable Vha44 mutant with alanine substitution of S543

(Myc-Vha44^{S543A}). These Vha44 variants were expressed properly as validated by

WB (Figure S5F). Notably, glial expression of Myc-Vha44[S543A], but not Myc-Vha44,

caused a significant reduction on the number and intensities of the LTG-positive

puncta in the adult fly brains (Figures 5C and 5D). In addition, the mean LTR

intensities per Lamp1-positive lysosome were also reduced upon Myc-Vha44[S543A]

expression in glia (Figures 5G and 5H). On the other hand, glial expression of either

Myc-Vha44 or Myc-Vha44[S543A] reduced the intensities of the MR-positive puncta in

the brains, with the latter exhibited a more potent suppression (Figures S5G and S5H).

Taken together, Vha44 S543 phosphorylation regulates lysosomal acidification in glia.

dAux regulates lysosomal acidification and hydrolase activity via Vha44 S543

phosphorylation in glia

Given that both dAux and the Vha44 S543 phosphorylation are involved in regulating

lysosomal acidification in glia, we next tested if altering the Vha44 S543

phosphorylation affects the *daux*-RNAi-induced lysosomal defects. By epistatic

genetic analysis, Myc-Vha44 expression in the presence of *daux*-RNAi significantly

rescued the decrease in the number and intensities of LTG- or MR-positive puncta in

the whole brains or per glial Lamp1-positive lysosome, respectively, whereas the

Myc-Vha44[S543A] expression in glia failed to restore such decrease (Figures 5I and 5J,

and S5I-S5N). These results further demonstrate that dAux regulates lysosomal

acidification and hydrolase activity via Vha44 S543 phosphorylation in glia.

dAux-mediated Vha44 S543 phosphorylation regulates V-ATPase assembly in glia

V-ATPase is the key factor controlling lysosomal pH by pumping protons into the lumen. As we are seeing consistent phenotypes on lysosomal acidification, we next asked if the V-ATPase function, mainly relying on its V1-V0 subcomplex assembly, is regulated by the Vha44 S543 phosphorylation. Transgenic flies that express EGFP-Vha44 labeling the V1C subunit and mCherry-Vha100-2 labeling the V0a subunit were made to analyze the fluorescent signal colocalization of these two subunits, an indicator of how well the V-ATPase assembles (Figure 6A). As EGFP-Vha44 expression in glia revealed signals mainly distributed on the glial processes, mCherry-Vha100-2 expression in glia exhibited as puncta, localizing on the lysosomal membrane (Figure 6). The EGFP-mCherry co-positive signals represent how well the two subunits colocalize, providing insights into the V-ATPase assembly process. Interestingly, EGFP-mCherry co-positive signals decreased significantly upon glial dAux depletion (Figures 6B and 6C). Using the mCherry-Lamp1 as a different reporter, the EGFP-mCherry co-positive signals representing the Vha44 colocalization with Lamp1 also decreased significantly (Figures 6D and 6E). In addition, live-cell imaging analysis showed that the percentage of EGFP-positive puncta (Vha44) being trafficked to the vicinity of mCherry-positive puncta (Vha100-2, within a radius of 0.38 um) decreased (Figures 6F and 6G) and the duration time of the Vha44-Vha100-2 contact was shorter (Figures 6F and 6H) upon glial dAux

depletion. The trafficking speed of EGFP- and mCherry-positive puncta increased and

remain unaffected, respectively in the absence of glial dAux, suggesting that Vha44 is

more mobile (Figures 6F and 6I). Altogether, these results demonstrate that glial dAux

regulates the V-ATPase assembly.

To analyze whether Vha44 S543 phosphorylation affects the V-ATPase assembly,

transgenic flies expressing the EGFP-Vha44^{S543A} variant carrying the alanine

substitution of S543 were made. Compared to EGFP-Vha44, EGFP-Vha44^{S543A}

expression in glia reduced the Vha44^{S543A} colocalization with Vha100-2 or Lamp1,

suggesting that Vha44 S543 phosphorylation is crucial for the V-ATPase assembly

(Figures 6B-6E). Whereas *daux*-RNAi expression in glia reduced Vha44

colocalization with Vha100-2 or Lamp1, it failed to impact on the Vha44^{S543A}

colocalization with either, suggesting that dAux mediates V-ATPase assembly via

Vha44 S543 phosphorylation (Figures 6B-6E). Accordingly, it is noteworthy to

mention that Manders' Correlation was carefully chosen to analyze the colocalization

of EGFP-Vha44 or EGFP-Vha44^{S543A} with Vha100-2 or Lamp1 as EGFP levels were

affected by dAux (Figures 6C and 6E)[29-32].

dAux-mediated Vha44 S543 phosphorylation contributes to DA

neurodegeneration and locomotor function

Given that lack of Gak/dAux leads to a broad spectrum of PD-like symptoms, we next

investigated if Vha44 and its S543 phosphorylation are also regulators of these

parkinsonian phenotypes. The number of DA neurons in the PPM1/2 cluster were

significantly reduced in flies lacking Vha44 or expressing Myc-Vha44^{S543A} in glia in

an age-dependent manner (Figures 7A-7D). Myc-Vha44 expression in glia caused an

increase in the DA neuron number at day 3, but not day 10 or 20 (Figures 7C and 7D).

Furthermore, glial expression of Myc-Vha44, but not Myc-Vha44^{S543A}, restored the

daux-RNAi-induced DA neuron loss (Figures 7E and 7F). On the other hand,

vha44-RNAi or Myc-Vha44^{S543A} expression in glia disrupted fly locomotion in an

age-dependent manner, whereas Myc-Vha44 expression in glia affects fly locomotion

in various time points less potently than Myc-Vha44^{S543A} (Figures 7G and 7H).

Re-introducing Myc-Vha44 expression in glia significantly rescued the

daux-RNAi-induced locomotor deficits, whereas Myc-Vha44^{S543A} did so less potently

(Figure 7I). Altogether, these results suggest that dAux-mediated Vha44 S543

phosphorylation underlies the mechanism of DA neurodegeneration and locomotor

function in PD.

Discussion

Although neurodegeneration is the pathological hallmark for neurodegenerative

diseases, glial responses that constitute of neuroimmune activation and signaling

crosstalk during different stages have also been shown to widely contribute to the

disease pathology. Furthermore, the intriguing phenomenon of protein inclusions

observed in both neurons and glia raises substantial interest on how these pathological

aggregates are formed, transmitted, and eliminated in different cell types. Our

findings in flies and mice demonstrate that α-syn is degraded via a lysosomal

pathway in glia; alternation in the lysosome environment/acidification impairs α-syn

clearance. This disruption in lysosomal pH is caused by a phosphorylation-dependent

regulation on the V-ATPase assembly, controlling the pumping of protons into the

lysosomal lumen to construct the acidic milieu for substrate degradation. The PD risk

factor, Gak/dAux, plays a critical role in such regulation. Phenotypically, the lack of

Gak/dAux causes endogenous and PFF-injected α-syn accumulation in glia, owing to

the lack of phosphorylation on the serine 543 of the catalytic V1C subunit of the

lysosomal V-ATPase, Vha44. The V-ATPase assembly is therefore hindered,

disrupting the lysosomal pH for α-syn degradation (Figure 8).

V-ATPase subunit phosphorylation, assembly, and its pathological implication

The V-ATPase activity is modulated by the reversible association/dissociation of V1

and V0 subcomplexes in response to various conditions, such as glucose[33], amino

acid[34], feeding[35], serotonin (5-hydroxytryptamine, 5-HT)[36], and cell maturation[37].

Previous reports have shown that some of the V-ATPase subunits are targets for

phosphorylation. For instance, AP2 interacts and phosphorylates the V1B subunit[38];

PKA or AMP-activated protein kinase (AMPK) phosphorylates the V1A subunit[39,40];

Arabidopsis AtWNK8 phosphorylates the V1C subunit at multiple sites[41].

Nonetheless, how these modifications on different V-ATPase subunits impact on its

activity and function remains largely unknown. While some of the subunits are

phosphorylated in isolation, some might require to be part of the complex allowing

phosphorylation occurs[40,42]. Our present study uncovers a phosphorylation-dependent

switch of the V-ATPase assembly, linking the subunit phosphorylation with the

activity of the whole enzyme; blocking Vha44 S543 phosphorylation faithfully

disrupts V-ATPase assembly.

Dysregulation of V-ATPase activity has been shown in many neurodegenerative

disorders including PD[19,43]. For instance, the modification, protein level, or

protein-protein interaction of the V0a1 subunit is critical for the pathology of different

types of neurodegenerative diseases[44-47]. The PD risk factor leucine-rich repeat kinase

2 (LRRK2) also regulates V0a1 protein level and localization[45]. Interestingly, our

current findings reveal a critical role of the V1C subunit in PD. Lack of Vha44 or

blocking Vha44 S543 phosphorylation causes impaired lysosomal acidification and

hydrolase activity, constituting unfavorable venues for α-syn degradation.

Furthermore, flies exhibit DA neurodegeneration and locomotor deficits in the

absence of Vha44 or its S543 phosphorylation. These findings indicate that wrongly

modified V-ATPase subunit hinders its proper assembly and impairs lysosomal

acidification, leading to potential α-syn accumulation and ultimately PD-like

symptoms.

Gak/dAux: a kinase regulating lysosomal function associated with α-syn

degradation in PD

Targeting protein aggregates and inclusions in the degenerative brains has been

considered as a strategic means for ameliorating disease progression. Our findings

uncover the mechanism of a potential PD risk factor regulating α-syn clearance in

glia. Despite that *GAK* functions in PD remains unclear, multiple SNPs have been

identified in the locus containing *GAK*[48-50], implicating its clinical relevance. We

identified the *Drosophila* GAK homolog, dAux, functioning as a kinase in

phosphorylating Vha44 S543. In the absence of dAux, Vha44 S543 phosphorylation

is significantly reduced. Considering the V-ATPase disassembly, lysosomal defects,

and brain α-syn accumulation observed in the absence of glial dAux, the mechanism

of dAux-mediated Vha44 S543 phosphorylation likely constitutes a lysosomal

pathway associated with α-syn clearance in glia. Notably, glial expression of the

dAux lacking the kinase domain causes DA neuron loss and fly locomotor deficits,

and fails to rescue both in the absence of dAux (Figure S6). These parkinsonian

phenotypes further link our newly identified pathway to PD. Of note, GAK interacts

with LRRK2[51], yet these two proteins modulate the V-ATPase activity via different

subunits: LRRK2 interacts with V0a1 whereas dAux interacts with V1C, potentiating

different V-ATPase-mediated mechanisms underlying PD.

A glia-specific lysosomal pathway contributes to PD

While most of the hypotheses that underlie PD pathology are often driven by a

neuronal origin of dysfunctional machineries or cellular defects, glia have only

recently drawing more attention as possible drivers for neurodegeneration[7]. For

instance, the AD risk factor gene *Apolipoprotein E* (*APOE*) is predominantly

expressed in astrocytes[52] and its genetic mutations are associated with an increasing

risk of developing AD, supporting a role for genetic causes from glia driving

neurodegeneration. Many PD risk genes, like *LRRK2*, *atg9*, and *vps13*, are also

expressed in glia, and modulate neurodegeneration and α-syn accumulation in a

non-cell-autonomous manner[53-56]. Our findings implicate another potential PD risk

factor functioning in a glial context. Lack of glial Gak/dAux leads to a broad

spectrum of parkinsonian symptoms in both flies and mice, including DA

neurodegeneration, dysfunctional locomotor activity, shorten lifespan, microglial

activation, and some of the earlier symptoms such as sleep defects. Consistently, DA

neurodegeneration and locomotor deficits are also detected in the absence of glial

Vha44. Glial expression of Vha44, but not the non-phosphorylatable Vha44 variant,

restores these parkinsonian deficits. In combination with our cellular observations,

these behavioral deficits together demonstrate a kinase-dependent lysosomal pathway

regulating the parkinsonian symptoms in PD. Interestingly, lysosomal acidification

remain largely intact upon neuronal dAux inhibition, further demonstrating the

specificity of this lysosomal pathway (Figure S7).

The present study identifies a glia-specific pathway for the lysosomal degradation

of α-syn. Our findings unravel the underlying mechanism of PD by uncovering a

cell-type specific clearance program for the brain α-syn inclusions. With

accumulating evidence demonstrating the importance of glia in neurodegenerative

diseases, these findings will help to pinpoint potential therapeutical targets from a

glial perspective to ameliorate PD.

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Author contributions

S.Z, L.W, S.Y, and M.S.H conceived and designed the study. S.Z, L.W, S.Y, S.L, H.W,

R.W, Y.L, and W.Y performed the experiments. S.Z, L.W, S.Y, C.L, K.W.H, and

M.S.H analyzed the data. S.Z, L.W, S.Y, and M.S.H wrote the paper. All authors read

and approved the manuscript.

Declaration of Interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

Figure Legends

Figure 1. Glial Gak/dAux contributes to a broad spectrum of PD-like symptoms

(**A**) Illustration of an adult fly brain with different DA neuron clusters. The selected

areas in red dotted rectangle identify PPM1/2 clusters and are enlarged in B. The adult

brain for imaging is positioned with coordinates described (A: Anterior, P: Posterior,

M: Medial, L: Lateral, D: Dorsal, V: Ventral). (**B** and **C**) Representative images (B)

and quantifications (C) of DA neuron number in the control and *UAS-daux*-RNAi;

repo-GAL4 (*repo>daux*-RNAi) adult fly brains. Note that DA neuron number in the

PPM1/2 cluster decreases in an age-dependent manner upon glial dAux depletion. At

2 hours after eclosion, the DA neuron number remains similar, ruling out the

developmental defects. (**D** and **E**) Locomotor function and lifespan of both male and

female flies are disrupted upon glial dAux depletion. (**F** and **G**) The number of DA

neurons marked by the anti-TH antibodies in the substantia nigra (SN) decreases in

microglial *Gak* cKO (*CX3CR1-Cre$^{+/-}$; Gak$^{flox/flox}$*) mice at 36 weeks. (**H-J**) Footprint

analysis, pole test and the body weight of the microglial *Gak* cKO mice. Note that

these mice exhibit locomotor deficits and weight lighter at 21 and 36 weeks. Scale

bars and the sample number present as scatter dots are indicated in the Figures. A

serial confocal Z-stack sections were acquired at the similar plane of brains across all

genotypes, with representative images shown as maximal projection. Data are shown

as mean ± SEM. P-values of significance (indicated with asterisks, ns no significance,

* $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$, *** $p<0.001$, and **** $p<0.0001$) are calculated by two-tailed

unpaired t-test, Mann Whitney test, ordinary one-way ANOVA followed by Tukey's

multiple comparisons test, or Kruskal-Wallis tests followed by Dunn's multiple

comparisons test.

Figure 2. Lack of Gak/dAux causes α-syn accumulation in the glial lysosomes (**A**

and **B**) Representative images (A) and quantifications (B) of α-syn intensities

(Myc-positive, green) in adult fly brains expressing *daux*-RNAi in glia and *SNCA* in

neurons using a GAL4/lexA binary system (*UAS-daux*-RNAi; *repo-GAL4*,

UAS-mCD8-RFP, *GMR57C10*-lexA, *lexAop-6xMyc-SNCA*). *UAS-mCD8-RFP* is

co-expressed by *repo-GAL4* to label glial processes (red). Note that total α-syn

intensities significantly increase upon glial dAux depletion. (**C-E**) Representative

images (C) and quantifications (D and E) of *Gak*-deficient microglia. Both the

intensity of CD68 (a macrophage marker indicating the phagocytic activity of

microglia, green) in Iba1-positive microglia (red) and the CD68-Iba1 colocalization

increase when lacking microglial *Gak*. 3D reconstruction reveals activated microglia

with shorter branches, fewer terminal points, and larger cell bodies upon Gak

depletion. (**F** and **G**) Representative images (F) and quantifications (G) of

pathological α-syn phosphorylated on S129 (pS129-α-syn, green) in Iba1-positive

microglia (red). Note that both pS129-α-syn intensities in Iba1-positive microglia and

pS129-α-syn-Iba1 colocalization increase in *Gak*-deficient microglia. (**H**) Illustration

of mouse brains bilaterally inoculated with the α-syn preformed fibril (PFF) in the

dorsal striatum. (**I** and **J**) Representative images (I) and quantifications (J) of

pathological α-syn in mouse brains injected with α-syn preformed fibril (PFF). Note

that both pS129-α-syn intensities in Iba1-positive microglia and the

pS129-α-syn-Iba1 colocalization increase in PFF-treated mouse brains. Lacking

microglial Gak further enhances both. (**K and L**) Representative images (K) and

quantifications (L) of lysosomal α-syn intensities in adult fly brains expressing

mCherry-Lamp1 and *daux*-RNAi in glia and *SNCA* in neurons (*UAS-mCherry-Lamp1*,

UAS-daux-RNAi; *repo*-GAL4, *GMR57C10*-lexA, *lexAop-6xMyc-SNCA*). Note both

the α-syn intensities in Lamp1-positive lysosomes and α-syn-Lamp1 colocalization

increase upon glial dAux depletion. (**M and N**) The pS129-α-syn-Lamp1

colocalization in mouse SN microglia increases upon microglial Gak depletion. Scale

bars and the sample number present as scatter dots are indicated in the Figures. A

serial confocal Z-stack sections were taken at the similar plane of brains across all

genotypes, with representative images shown as single layer or maximal projection.

Colocalization is analyzed using the Pearson's Correlation and present as the

Pearson's R value. Quantification Figures from the same images but with different

parameters are shown under the same label unless noted otherwise. Data are shown as

mean ± SEM. P-values of significance (indicated with asterisks, ns no significance, *

$p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$, *** $p<0.001$, and **** $p<0.0001$) are calculated by two-tailed

unpaired t-test, Mann Whitney test, or Kruskal-Wallis tests followed by Dunn's

multiple comparisons test.

Figure 3. Lack of Gak/dAux increases lysosome biogenesis and disrupts

lysosomal acidification in glia (**A**-**F**) Representative images (A, A', C, and E) and

quantifications (B, D, and F) of glial lysosomes in adult fly brains (A , A', and B),

IMG cells (C and D), and mouse SN microglia (E and F). Glial lysosomes (green) are

marked by Lamp1-GFP in fly glia (*UAS-Lamp1-GFP; repo*-GAL4) and anti-Lamp1

antibodies in IMG cells and mouse microglia. The selected areas in white dotted

squares in A are enlarged aligning on the right (A'). Note that Lamp1-positive

lysosome number (B), intensities (D and F), size (F), and Lamp1-Iba1 colocalization

(F) increase upon dAux or Gak depletion by *daux*-RNAi (A, A', and B), *Gak* siRNAs

(C and D), or in the *Gak* cKO mice at 36 weeks (E and F). (**G** and **H**) Representative

TEM images (G and G') and quantifications (H) of lysosomes in control and

repo>daux-RNAi adult fly brains. The selected areas in white dotted squares in G are

enlarged aligning on the right (G'). Note that the number and size of lysosomes

(yellow arrows) increase when *daux*-RNAi is expressed in glia, and some large

lysosomes exhibit electron-lucent dots inside (red arrows) or decreased intensity (blue

arrow). (**I**-**L**) Representative images (I and K) and quantifications (J and L) of

Lysotracker Green (LTG) and Magic Red (MR) staining in adult fly brains. Note that

both number and intensities of LTG- and MR-positive puncta decrease upon glial

dAux depletion. (**M**-**P**) The processing of the lysosomal proteases CTSB and CTSD

were analyzed by WB analysis. Note that lacking glial dAux decreases the

mature/total CTSB or CTSD ratio. (**Q**-**T**) Representative images (Q, Q', S, and S')

and quantifications (R and T) of glial lysosomes (Lamp1-GFP, green) staining with

Lysotracker Red (LTR, Q, Q', and R) or MR (S, S', and T) in adult fly brains. Note

that LTR- or MR-positive intensities in glial lysosomes decrease. The selected areas in

white dotted squares in Q and S are enlarged aligning on the right (Q' and S'). (**U** and

V) Representative images (U) and quantifications (V) of Ubiquitin (Ubi) and Ref(2)P

levels in adult fly brains expressing *daux*-RNAi. Note that both the intensities of Ubi

and Ref(2)P and the colocalization of Ubi-Lamp1 and Ref(2)P-Lamp1 increase upon

glial dAux depletion. Scale bars and the sample number present as scatter dots are

indicated in the Figures. A serial confocal Z-stack sections were taken at the similar

plane across all genotypes, with representative images shown as single layer or

maximal projection. Colocalization is analyzed using the Pearson's Correlation and

present as the Pearson's R value. Quantification Figures from the same images but

with different parameters are shown under the same label unless noted otherwise.

Data are shown as mean $\pm$ SEM. P-values of significance (indicated with asterisks, ns

no significance, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$, and **** $p < 0.0001$) are

calculated by two-tailed unpaired t-test, Mann Whitney test, or ordinary one-way

ANOVA followed by Tukey's multiple comparisons test.

Figure 4. dAux regulates Vha44 S543 phosphorylation (**A**) Illustration of the

V-ATPase structure. Note that V-ATPase is assembled from the V1 and V0

subcomplexes, and Vha44 is the V1C subunit. (**B**) Advanced volcano plot drawn with

the phosphoproteomic data by the OmicStudio tools. The variance threshold is larger

than 1.5 or less than 0.5, while the p-value is less than 0.05. Samples were collected

from control or *repo>daux*-RNAi adult fly brains. (**C** and **D**) The V-ATPase subunit

Vha44 phosphorylation at serine 543 is greatly reduced upon glial dAux depletion as

shown by the heatmap (C) and the table listing all the affected V-ATPase subunits (D).

(**E**) The sequences near S543 site of Vha44 belongs to a phosphorylation motif

xxxxPx_S_Pxxxxx identified by the MoMo analysis tool using the motif-x algorithm.

The motif consists of 6 amino acids upstream and downstream of the potential dAux

modification site. Preferred amino acids are indicated with larger font, while less

preferred amino acids are indicated with smaller font. (**F**) Co-IP analysis using fly S2

cells reveals that endogenous dAux interacts with Vha44, detected by the anti-dAux

and mammalian anti-ATP6V1C1 antibodies, respectively. (**G**) S2 cell lysates

expressing Flag-dAux and EGFP-Vha44 were pulled down by beads conjugated to

anti-Flag or anti-EGFP antibodies. Note that dAux and Vha44 are within the same

complex by both pull downs. (**H**) Dot blot analysis revealed that the anti-pVha44^{S543}

antibodies only recognized the phosphopeptide immunogen, but not the

nonphosphopeptide immunogen, proving the specificity of the pVha44^{S543} antibodies.

(**I** and **J**) Representative images (I) and quantifications (J) of Vha44 S543

phosphorylation. The anti-pVha44^{S543} antibodies specifically detect the

phosphorylation status on Vha44 S543. Note that Vha44 S543 phosphorylation levels

are reduced after normalization (pVha44^{S543}/ATP6V1C1) upon glial dAux depletion.

Sample number present as scatter dots are indicated in the Figures. Data are shown as

mean ± SEM. P-values of significance (indicated with asterisks, ns no significance, *

p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001, and **** p<0.0001) are calculated by two-tailed

unpaired t-test.

Figure 5. dAux-mediated Vha44 S543 phosphorylation regulates lysosome

acidity in glia (**A-D**) Representative images (A and C) and quantification (B and D)

of LTG-positive puncta in adult fly brains expressing *vha44*-RNAi, Myc-Vha44, and

Myc-Vha44^{S543A}. Note that the number and intensities of LTG-positive puncta

decrease upon *vha44*-RNAi or Myc-Vha44^{S543A} expression. (**E-J**) Representative

images (E, E', G, G', I, and I') and quantifications (F, H, and J) of glial lysosomes

(Lamp1-GFP, green) stained with LTR in adult fly brains. Note that the LTR

intensities in the Lamp1-positive lysosomes are reduced when expressing

vha44-RNAi or Myc-Vha44^{S543A} in glia. Expression of Myc-Vha44, but not

Myc-Vha44^{S543A}, rescues the *daux*-RNAi-induced decrease in the LTR intensities.

The selected areas in white dotted squares in E, G, and I are enlarged aligning on the

right (E', G', and I'). Scale bars and the sample number present as scatter dots are

indicated in the Figures. A serial confocal Z-stack sections were taken at the similar

plane of brains across all genotypes, with representative single layer images shown.

Quantification Figures from the same images but with different parameters are shown

under the same label unless noted otherwise. Data are shown as mean ± SEM.

P-values of significance (indicated with asterisks, ns no significance, * $p<0.05$, **

$p<0.01$, *** $p<0.001$, and **** $p<0.0001$) are calculated by two-tailed unpaired t-test,

Mann Whitney test, ordinary one-way ANOVA followed by Tukey's multiple

comparisons test, or Kruskal-Wallis tests followed by Dunn's multiple comparisons

test.

Figure 6. dAux-mediated Vha44 S543 phosphorylation regulates V-ATPase

assembly in glia (**A**) Illustration of the V-ATPase structure, highlighting the subunits

Vha44 tagged with EGFP (green) and Vha100-2 tagged with mCherry (red). (**B-E**)

Representative images (B, B', D, and D') and quantifications (C and E) of the

Vha44-Vha100-2 or Vha44-Lamp1 colocalization in adult fly brains. Note that both

types of colocalization decrease upon *daux*-RNAi expression in glia. Compared to

EGFP-Vha44, EGFP-Vha44^{S543A} expression reduces the colocalizations. Unlike

EGFP-Vha44, the colocalizations of EGFP-Vha44^{S543A} is not altered by co-expression

of *daux*-RNAi. (**F-I**) Live-cell imaging (F) and quantifications (G-I) of Vha44

trafficking to Vha100-2 in adult fly brains. Note that upon glial dAux depletion, the

percentage of Vha44-positive puncta being trafficked to the vicinity of

Vha100-2-positive puncta (with a radius of 0.38 um) decreases (G), and the duration

time of the Vha44-Vha100-2 contact is shorter (H). The trafficking speed of

Vha44-positive puncta increases while Vha100-2-positive puncta remains unaffected

(I). Scale bars and the sample number present as scatter dots are indicated in the

Figures. A serial confocal Z-stack sections were taken at the similar plane of brains

across all genotypes, with representative single layer images shown. Colocalization is

analyzed by Manders' Correlation, taking into account the change in the protein level.

Quantification Figures from the same images but with different parameters are shown

under the same label unless noted otherwise. Data are shown as mean ± SEM.

P-values of significance (indicated with asterisks, ns no significance, * $p<0.05$, **

$p<0.01$, *** $p<0.001$, and **** $p<0.0001$) are calculated by two-tailed unpaired t-test,

Mann Whitney test, ordinary one-way ANOVA followed by Tukey's multiple

comparisons test, or Kruskal-Wallis tests followed by Dunn's multiple comparisons

test.

Figure 7. dAux-mediated Vha44 S543 phosphorylation contributes to DA

neurodegeneration and locomotor function (**A-F**) Representative images (A, C, and

E) and quantifications (B, D, and F) of DA neuron number in the adult fly brains with

the indicated genotypes. Note that DA neuron number in the PPM1/2 cluster

decreases in an age-dependent manner upon expressing *vha44*-RNAi or

Myc-Vha44^{S543A} in glia. Myc-Vha44, but not Myc-Vha44^{S543A}, rescues the

daux-RNAi-induced decrease in the DA neuron number. (**G-I**) Analysis of fly

locomotor function in both males and females. Note that *vha44*-RNAi or

Myc-Vha44^{S543A} expression in glia induces significant decline of climbing distance.

Myc-Vha44, but not Myc-Vha44^{S543A}, expression in glia rescues the

daux-RNAi-induced locomotor deficits. Scale bars and the sample number present as

scatter dots are indicated in the Figures. A serial confocal Z-stack sections were taken

at the similar plane of brains across all genotypes, with representative shown as

maximal projection. Quantification Figures from the same images but with different

parameters are shown under the same label unless noted otherwise. Data are shown as

mean ± SEM. P-values of significance (indicated with asterisks, ns no significance, *

$p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$, *** $p<0.001$, and **** $p<0.0001$) are calculated by two-tailed

unpaired t-test, Mann Whitney test, ordinary one-way ANOVA followed by Tukey's

multiple comparisons test, or Kruskal-Wallis tests followed by Dunn's multiple

comparisons test.

Figure 8. Glial Gak/dAux contributes to PD pathology via regulating the

V-ATPase assembly by a kinase-dependent switch The schematic diagram

illustrating how Gak/dAux contributes to the underlying mechanisms of PD from a

glial perspective. Lack of glial Gak/dAux induces a broad spectrum of parkinsonian

symptoms in both flies and mice, including DA neurodegeneration, locomotor

dysfunction, shorten lifespan, accumulation of pathological pS129-α-syn inclusions,

and microglia activation. Mechanistically, dAux phosphorylates Vha44 at the serine

543 and affects the V-ATPase assembly, regulating lysosomal function and subsequent

substrate degradation in glia.

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Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 4

Figure 5

Figure 6

Figure 7

Figure 8

wild type

Gak/daux deficient glia

PD model

GAK

Gak

dAux

Glial
mechanism

Locomotor ability   Life span

DA neuron loss

Pole test   Footprint gait   Resting microglia

DA neuron loss   Activated microglia

Cytosol   Cytosol

V1   H⁺

H⁺

V0

H⁺   H⁺

H⁺   H⁺

Lysosome

Nucleus

V1

V0

Lysosome

α-syn monomer   dAux   V1   V-ATPase holoenzyme   Active cathepsins
α-syn oligomer   Inactive cathepsins
α-syn fiber   V0