Journal of Clinical & Experimental Neuroimmunology

Review Article Open Access

Exploring Current and Emerging Antipsychotic Medications: A Comprehensive Review of Proposed Mechanisms of Action for Effectiveness

Kavin Halkman*

Department of Neuroscience, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

Abstract

Antipsychotic medications are vital for the management of various psychiatric disorders, including schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and certain types of depression. This review explores both current and emerging antipsychotic medications, focusing on their mechanisms of action for effectiveness. Traditional antipsychotics primarily target dopamine receptors, while atypical antipsychotics also modulate serotonin receptors, leading to improved efficacy and tolerability. Emerging research suggests involvement of glutamatergic modulation, anti-inflammatory properties, and neuroplasticity in the therapeutic effects of antipsychotics. Understanding these mechanisms is crucial for advancing treatment strategies and developing novel therapies for psychotic disorders.

Introduction

Antipsychotic medications represent a cornerstone in the treatment of various psychiatric disorders, including schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and certain types of depression. Over the years, the understanding of their mechanisms of action has evolved, leading to the development of both traditional and atypical antipsychotics [1]. In recent times, research efforts have been focused on exploring newer agents with potentially improved efficacy and fewer adverse effects. This comprehensive review aims to delve into the proposed mechanisms of action for the effectiveness of both current and emerging antipsychotic medications.

Traditional Antipsychotics

Traditional antipsychotics, also known as first-generation antipsychotics (FGAs), primarily exert their therapeutic effects through blockade of dopamine D2 receptors in the brain. By inhibiting the excessive dopamine activity implicated in psychosis, FGAs alleviate positive symptoms such as hallucinations and delusions. However, their clinical utility is often limited by extrapyramidal side effects (EPS), including dystonia, akathisia, parkinsonism, and tardive dyskinesia [2].

Atypical Antipsychotics

Atypical antipsychotics, or second-generation antipsychotics (SGAs), were developed to address the limitations of FGAs while potentially offering broader efficacy and improved tolerability. These agents exhibit a more complex pharmacological profile, with varying degrees of dopamine D2 receptor antagonism alongside antagonism or partial agonism at serotonin (5-HT) receptors, particularly 5-HT2A [3]. By modulating both dopamine and serotonin neurotransmission, SGAs not only target positive symptoms but also demonstrate efficacy against negative and cognitive symptoms of psychosis.

Proposed Mechanisms of Action

Dopamine and serotonin receptors: Both traditional and atypical antipsychotics exert their primary effects through dopamine receptor blockade. However, atypical antipsychotics possess additional serotonergic activity, particularly antagonism at 5-HT2A receptors. This dual mechanism is thought to contribute to their enhanced efficacy and reduced risk of EPS compared to FGAs.

Glutamatergic system modulation: Emerging research suggests that modulation of the glutamatergic system may play a role in the therapeutic effects of antipsychotic medications. Agents such as ketamine, which acts as an N-methyl-D-aspartate (NMDA) receptor antagonist, have shown promise in the treatment of treatment-resistant schizophrenia [4]. This has led to the exploration of glutamatergic modulators as potential adjunctive therapies to standard antipsychotic treatment.

Neuroinflammation and oxidative stress: There is growing evidence implicating neuroinflammation and oxidative stress in the pathophysiology of psychotic disorders. Antipsychotic medications, particularly SGAs, have been shown to possess anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties, which may contribute to their therapeutic effects beyond neurotransmitter modulation.

Neuroplasticity and neurotrophic factors: Dysfunction in neuroplasticity and neurotrophic factors, such as brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF), has been implicated in the pathogenesis of schizophrenia and mood disorders. Antipsychotic medications have been shown to influence neuroplasticity and BDNF expression, potentially contributing to their long-term therapeutic effects and neuroprotective properties.

Gene expression and epigenetic regulation: Recent studies have highlighted the role of gene expression and epigenetic regulation in response to antipsychotic treatment [5]. SGAs have been shown to influence gene expression patterns and epigenetic modifications, providing insights into individual variability in treatment response and potential targets for personalized medicine approaches.

***Corresponding author:** Kavin Halkman , Department of Neuroscience, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore; E-mail: Kavin Halkman@gmail.com

Received: 01-Jan-2024, Manuscript No. jceni-24-131483; **Editor assigned:** 03-Jan-2024, Pre QC-No. jceni-24-131483 (PQ); **Reviewed:** 17-Jan-2024, QC No: jceni-24-131483; **Revised:** 23-Jan-2024, Manuscript No. jceni-24-131483 (R); **Published:** 31-Jan-2024, DOI: 10.4172/jceni.1000225

Citation: Kavin H (2024) Exploring Current and Emerging Antipsychotic Medications: A Comprehensive Review of Proposed Mechanisms of Action for Effectiveness. J Clin Exp Neuroimmunol, 9: 225.

Receptor Binding profile of antipsychotic medications

Antipsychotic medications exert their therapeutic effects through the modulation of neurotransmitter systems in the brain, primarily targeting dopamine and serotonin receptors. Understanding the receptor binding profiles of these medications is essential for elucidating their mechanisms of action and predicting their clinical effects. This article provides an overview of the receptor binding profiles of antipsychotic medications, including both traditional and atypical agents [6].

Dopamine receptors

Dopamine receptors are categorized into several subtypes, including D1, D2, D3, D4, and D5. Among these, the D2 receptor has received significant attention due to its central role in the pathophysiology of psychosis. Traditional antipsychotics primarily exert their effects through blockade of D2 receptors, leading to the alleviation of positive symptoms such as hallucinations and delusions. However, this blockade is also associated with extrapyramidal side effects (EPS) due to the inhibition of dopamine transmission in the nigrostriatal pathway.

Atypical antipsychotics, on the other hand, exhibit varying degrees of D2 receptor blockade along with antagonism at serotonin receptors, particularly 5-HT2A. This dual mechanism is thought to contribute to their improved tolerability compared to traditional antipsychotics, as serotonin receptor antagonism counteracts the adverse effects of dopamine receptor blockade.

Serotonin receptors

In addition to dopamine receptors, serotonin receptors play a crucial role in the pharmacology of antipsychotic medications. Atypical antipsychotics exhibit varying affinities for different serotonin receptor subtypes, particularly 5-HT2A and 5-HT1A [7]. Antagonism at 5-HT2A receptors is believed to contribute to the efficacy of atypical antipsychotics against both positive and negative symptoms of psychosis. Conversely, agonism at 5-HT1A receptors may enhance dopamine release in certain brain regions, further improving their therapeutic effects.

Other receptors

Beyond dopamine and serotonin receptors, antipsychotic medications may also interact with other neurotransmitter systems, including glutamate, GABA, and histamine receptors. For example, glutamatergic modulation has garnered interest as a potential target for novel antipsychotic therapies. Agents that modulate NMDA receptors, such as ketamine, have shown promise in the treatment of schizophrenia, highlighting the importance of glutamatergic neurotransmission in the pathophysiology of psychosis [8-10].

Conclusion

The treatment of psychotic disorders continues to evolve with the development of both traditional and atypical antipsychotic medications. While dopamine receptor blockade remains a central mechanism of action, emerging research has shed light on additional pathways implicated in the therapeutic effects of these agents. From modulation of glutamatergic signaling to anti-inflammatory properties, antipsychotic medications exert their effects through a complex interplay of neurobiological mechanisms. Understanding these mechanisms is essential for the development of novel therapies and the optimization of existing treatment strategies for individuals affected by psychotic disorders. Further research into the neurobiology of psychosis and the mechanisms of action of antipsychotic medications holds the promise of improved outcomes and quality of life for patients in the future. While traditional antipsychotics primarily target dopamine receptors, atypical agents exhibit broader pharmacological profiles, including antagonism at serotonin receptors. Understanding these receptor interactions is crucial for optimizing treatment strategies and developing novel therapeutics with improved efficacy and tolerability profiles. Further research into the neurobiology of psychosis and the mechanisms of action of antipsychotic medications is warranted to advance our understanding and treatment of these debilitating disorders.

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