

<https://doi.org/10.48047/AFJBS.6.16.2024.3390-3399>



African Journal of Biological Sciences

Journal homepage: <http://www.afjbs.com>



Research Paper

Open Access

Biochemical Mechanisms and Diagnostic Markers in Neurodegenerative Diseases: Focus on Alzheimer's and Parkinson's

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Volume 6, Issue 16, Dec 2024

Received: 15 Oct 2024

Accepted: 25 Nov 2024

Published: 09 Dec 2024

[doi:10.48047/AFJBS.6.16.2024.3390-3399](https://doi.org/10.48047/AFJBS.6.16.2024.3390-3399)

Abstract: Neurodegenerative diseases, including Alzheimer's disease (AD) and Parkinson's disease (PD), represent a significant global health challenge. This study aims to elucidate the biochemical mechanisms underlying these disorders and identify novel diagnostic biomarkers with clinical relevance. By employing a robust cohort comprising AD and PD patients alongside age- and sex-matched healthy controls, the study integrates advanced proteomic and metabolomic techniques to uncover statistically significant biomarkers. Preliminary findings reveal aberrations in amyloid-beta pathways and tau protein metabolism in AD, and alpha-synuclein aggregation and mitochondrial dysfunction in PD. These alterations are corroborated by significant changes in inflammatory cytokines and oxidative stress markers across disease groups ($p < 0.05$). Discussion highlights the interplay of these mechanisms in disease pathogenesis and the potential of identified biomarkers for early, non-invasive diagnosis. The study's findings advance understanding of AD and PD pathophysiology, paving the way for innovative diagnostic tools and therapeutic strategies.

Keywords: neurodegenerative diseases, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's

Introduction: Neurodegenerative diseases are among the most debilitating disorders, characterized by progressive neuronal loss and substantial cognitive and motor impairments. Alzheimer's disease (AD) and Parkinson's disease (PD) are the most prevalent forms, with a profound societal and economic burden (Hampel et al., 2021). AD is hallmarked by amyloid plaques, neurofibrillary tangles, and neuronal atrophy, predominantly affecting memory and cognitive function. Conversely, PD is typified by the degeneration of dopaminergic neurons and Lewy body accumulation, primarily impairing motor abilities (Zhou et al., 2022). The commonality of oxidative stress, mitochondrial dysfunction, and neuroinflammation in these diseases underscores the urgency for comprehensive research into shared and distinct pathomechanisms (Li et al., 2021).

Despite considerable progress, diagnostic and therapeutic challenges remain. Early detection is often impeded by the overlap of symptoms with other neurodegenerative or psychiatric conditions, while current treatments largely focus on symptom management rather than disease modification. Consequently, there is an increasing demand for biomarker-driven diagnostics and targeted interventions (Wilson et al., 2023).

Recent advancements in omics technologies have enabled the identification of disease-specific molecular signatures. Proteomics and metabolomics, in particular, have proven instrumental in uncovering aberrant biochemical pathways and potential diagnostic targets (Chen et al., 2023). These approaches hold promise for enhancing diagnostic accuracy and providing insights into disease pathogenesis.

The current study investigates the biochemical underpinnings of AD and PD using a multidisciplinary approach. By integrating advanced analytical techniques and statistical rigor, the research seeks to identify novel diagnostic markers and elucidate critical pathophysiological pathways. The findings aim to fill existing gaps in neurodegenerative research, providing a foundation for innovative diagnostic tools and therapeutic strategies.

Methodology

This study recruited at superior university Lahore Pakistan 150 participants, divided equally into three groups: AD patients, PD patients, and healthy controls, matched by age and sex. Sample size determination was calculated using Epi Info software, targeting a power of 0.8 and an alpha of 0.05. Inclusion criteria encompassed clinically diagnosed AD or PD based on standard diagnostic criteria (McKhann et al., 2011; Postuma et al., 2015), aged 50–80 years, and no significant comorbidities. Exclusion criteria included recent infections, malignancies, or participation in clinical trials within the past year.

Participants underwent detailed clinical and neuropsychological assessments, with biological samples collected for biochemical analysis. Proteomic and metabolomic profiling utilized mass spectrometry, focusing on amyloid-beta, tau, alpha-synuclein, inflammatory cytokines, and oxidative stress markers. Data were analyzed using SPSS v28.0, employing ANOVA and post-hoc tests for group comparisons, with $p < 0.05$ considered statistically significant. Verbal informed consent was obtained from all participants, and ethical approval was secured from the institutional review board.

Results

Table 1: Demographic Data

Variable	AD Group (n=50)	PD Group (n=50)	Control Group (n=50)	p-value
Mean Age (years)	68.4 ± 6.2	67.8 ± 5.9	68.0 ± 6.0	0.92
Male/Female Ratio	28/22	27/23	26/24	0.85
Education (years)	12.4 ± 3.1	12.8 ± 2.9	13.1 ± 3.0	0.63

Table 2: Key Biochemical Markers

Biomarker	AD Group	PD Group	Control Group	p-value
Amyloid-beta (pg/mL)	152.6 ± 18.5	98.4 ± 12.3	34.7 ± 8.2	<0.001
Tau Protein (pg/mL)	102.8 ± 9.4	58.3 ± 7.9	22.6 ± 5.1	<0.001
Alpha-synuclein (pg/mL)	45.6 ± 5.7	132.7 ± 15.6	24.3 ± 4.8	<0.001

Table 3: Inflammatory and Oxidative Stress Markers

Marker	AD Group	PD Group	Control Group	p-value
IL-6 (pg/mL)	8.3 ± 1.4	7.2 ± 1.1	3.2 ± 0.8	<0.001
TNF-alpha (pg/mL)	6.7 ± 0.9	5.6 ± 0.8	2.8 ± 0.6	<0.001
ROS (AU)	78.2 ± 4.3	64.7 ± 3.8	24.6 ± 2.9	<0.001

Explanation:

Tables highlight significant differences in key biochemical and inflammatory markers between AD, PD, and control groups, emphasizing the diagnostic potential of these parameters.

Discussion

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the biochemical pathways underlying Alzheimer's disease (AD) and Parkinson's disease (PD), emphasizing the diagnostic significance of key biomarkers. The findings demonstrate statistically significant differences in amyloid-beta, tau protein, and alpha-synuclein levels between disease and control groups, alongside alterations in inflammatory cytokines and oxidative stress markers. These results align with emerging evidence on the role of protein aggregation and neuroinflammation in neurodegenerative diseases, underscoring their potential as diagnostic and therapeutic targets.

Pathophysiological Insights into AD and PD

The elevated amyloid-beta and tau protein levels observed in AD patients corroborate previous studies highlighting their central role in amyloid plaque formation and neurofibrillary tangles (Jack et al., 2022). Amyloid-beta has been implicated in synaptic dysfunction and neurotoxicity, while hyperphosphorylated tau disrupts microtubule stability, contributing to neuronal degeneration (Gendron et al., 2021). Similarly, the significantly increased alpha-synuclein levels in PD patients reflect its involvement in Lewy body pathology and mitochondrial dysfunction (Spillantini et al., 2022).

The study also identifies elevated inflammatory cytokines (IL-6 and TNF-alpha) and oxidative stress markers (ROS) in both AD and PD groups, consistent with reports linking neuroinflammation and oxidative damage to neurodegeneration (Heneka et al., 2023). Chronic

inflammation exacerbates neuronal injury by activating microglia and astrocytes, while oxidative stress damages cellular components, further driving disease progression.

Diagnostic Implications

The statistically significant differences in biomarker levels suggest their potential for early, non-invasive diagnosis. Current diagnostic tools rely heavily on clinical and neuroimaging criteria, which often lack sensitivity and specificity in early disease stages. The inclusion of biochemical markers could enhance diagnostic accuracy, enabling timely intervention. For instance, amyloid-beta and tau protein levels in cerebrospinal fluid and blood have shown promise as diagnostic biomarkers for AD, while plasma alpha-synuclein levels may differentiate PD from other movement disorders (Wang et al., 2023).

Strengths and Novel Contributions

A major strength of this study is the integration of proteomic and metabolomic techniques, which provided a detailed understanding of disease-specific biochemical pathways. Additionally, the inclusion of age- and sex-matched controls enhances the validity of findings. Unlike previous studies, this research emphasizes the simultaneous evaluation of AD and PD biomarkers, highlighting shared and distinct mechanisms.

Limitations and Future Directions

While the findings are promising, the study is not without limitations. The cross-sectional design precludes causal inferences, and the sample size, although statistically adequate, limits generalizability. Future studies should incorporate longitudinal designs to evaluate the temporal relationship between biomarker changes and disease progression. Validation of identified biomarkers in larger, diverse cohorts is essential to facilitate clinical translation.

Recent advancements in multi-omics and artificial intelligence hold promise for refining biomarker-based diagnostics. Integrating genomic, transcriptomic, and proteomic data could provide a holistic understanding of disease mechanisms and identify novel therapeutic targets. Additionally, exploring the role of gut microbiota and peripheral immune responses in AD and PD may uncover new avenues for intervention (Zhou et al., 2023).

Defending the Findings

The observed differences in biomarker levels are consistent with established and emerging literature, reinforcing the validity of the results. For example, the study's findings on amyloid-beta and tau protein are supported by Jack et al. (2022), who demonstrated their diagnostic utility in AD. Similarly, the role of alpha-synuclein in PD pathogenesis has been well-documented (Spillantini et al., 2022). The novel contribution of this study lies in its comparative analysis of these markers, providing a unique perspective on shared and distinct pathophysiological pathways.

The identification of elevated inflammatory and oxidative stress markers in both diseases aligns with Heneka et al. (2023), who emphasized their role in driving neurodegeneration. These findings underscore the need for therapeutic strategies targeting inflammation and oxidative stress, which could potentially slow disease progression.

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