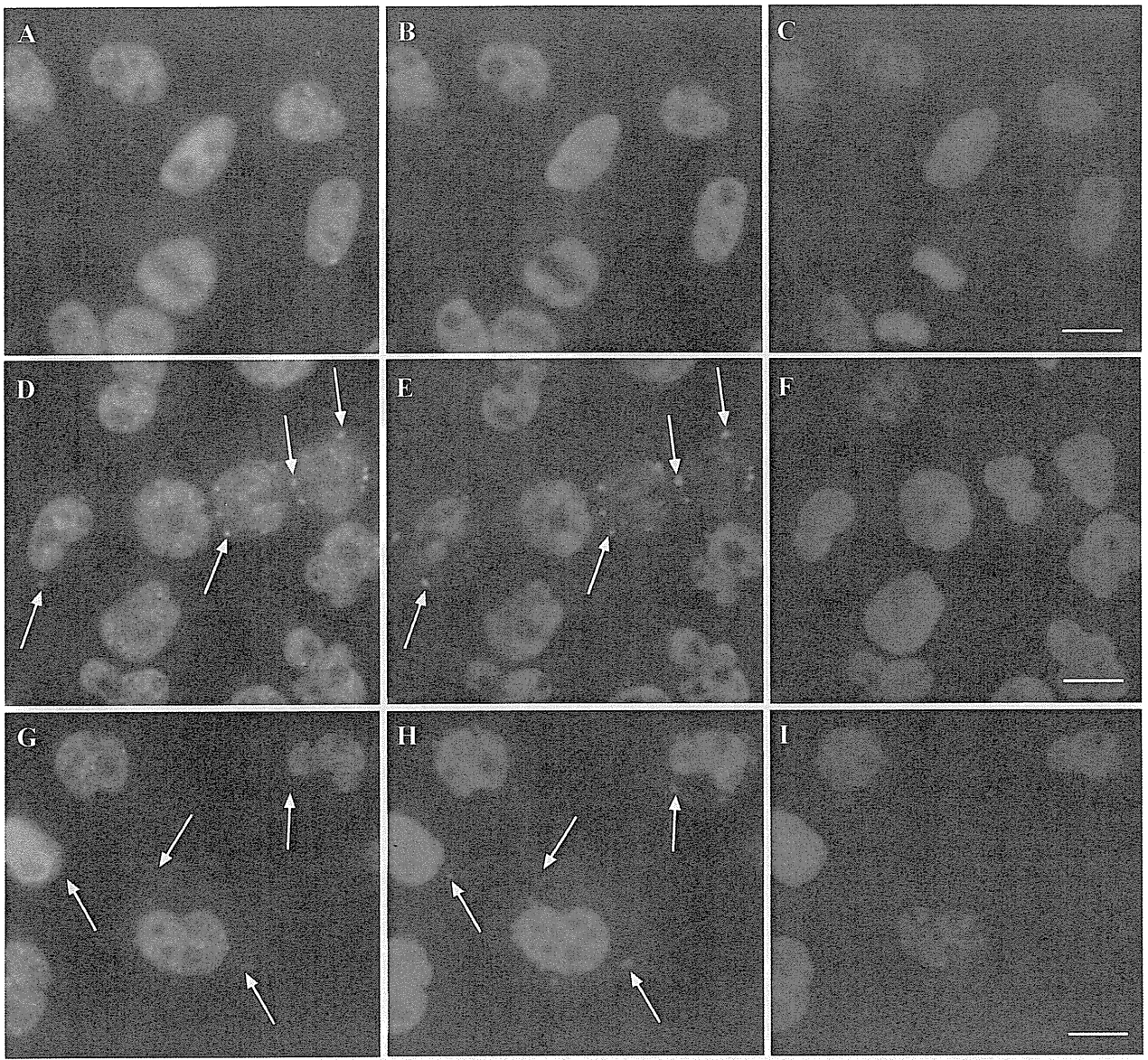

Figure 8 Treatment of HeLa cells with sodium arsenite induces JNK-dependent TDP-43 SGs. HeLa cells were treated for 1 hr with 0.5 mM sodium arsenite and cells were examined for TDP-43 and HuR localization by immunofluorescence. **A-C**: untreated, **D-F**: sodium arsenite-treated, **G-I**: sodium arsenite and SP600125. Green = TDP-43, red = HuR, blue = DAPI. Arrows indicate SGs. Bar = 10 μm. Representative images from three separate experiments performed in duplicate or triplicate.

[25,42] and that stress kinases including JNK can control the cellular localization and SG association of these hnRNPs [31-36]. Analysis of TDP-43 and hnRNP A1 during paraquat stress did not reveal any co-localization within SGs (Figure 10N-Q). In contrast, paraquat-treated cells revealed significant co-localization of hnRNP K and TDP-43 in SGs (Figure 10F-I). Interestingly, JNK inhibition fully blocked both TDP-43 and hnRNP K SG accumulation (Figure 10J-M). As hnRNP K is known to bind to TDP-43, associate with SGs and is phosphorylated by JNK, these findings suggest that modulation of TDP-43 SG association by JNK could be controlled through binding to hnRNP K. However, a comprehensive analysis of hnRNP interactions with JNK and TDP-43 is required to determine if this is the mechanism occurring in paraquat-treated cells and other stress-associated conditions leading to TDP-43 accumulation.

Discussion

Despite considerable research into TDP-43 in the past five years, little is known about the earliest pathological events associated with TDP-43 accumulation in ALS

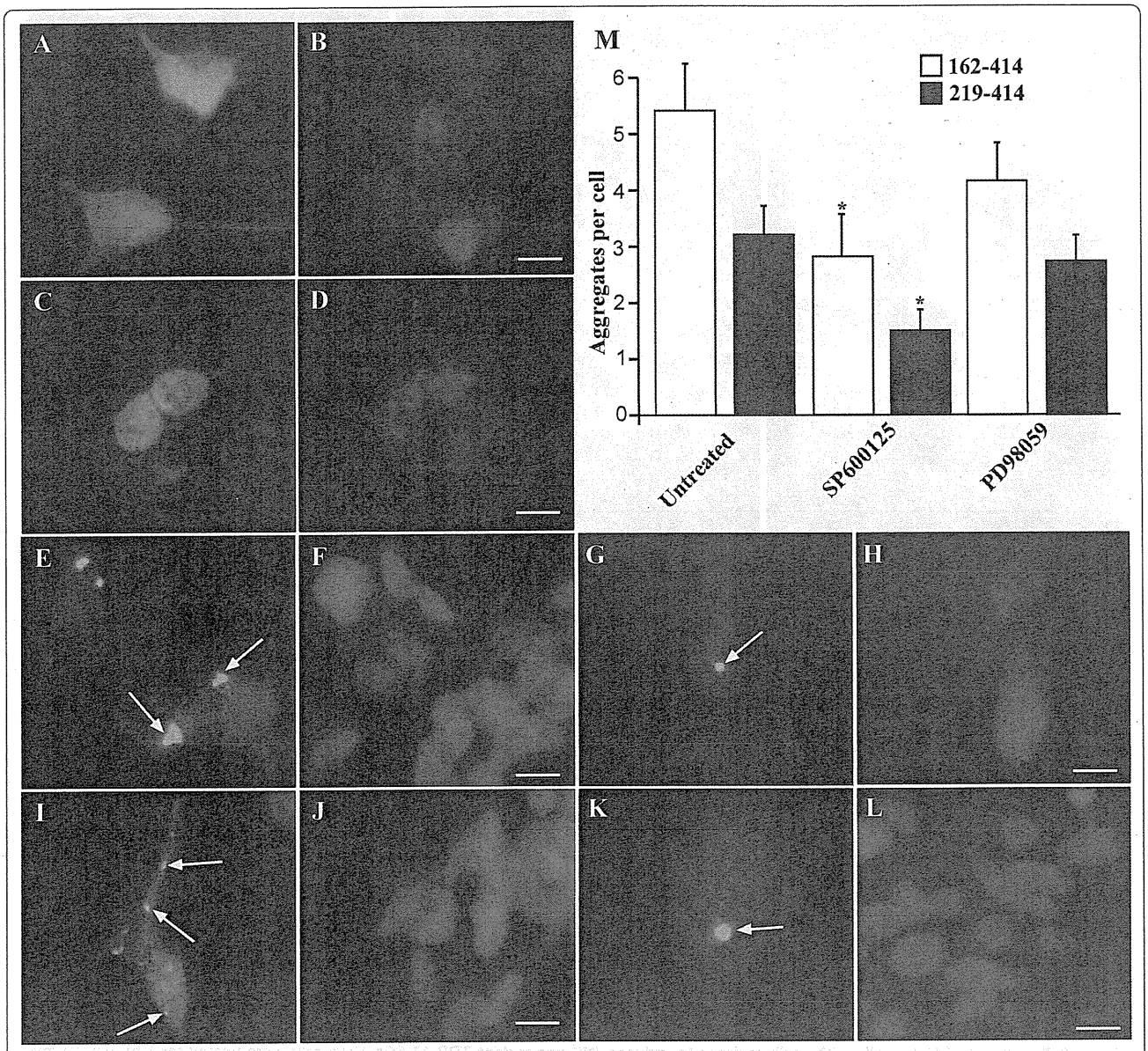

Figure 9 Aggregation of CTF-TDP-43 162-414 and 219-414 in SY5Y cells is partially associated with JNK. SH-SY5Y cells were transfected with GFP-tagged constructs for vector control (**A-B**), full length TDP-43 (**C-D**), CTF-TDP-43 219-414 (**E-H**) or CTF-TDP-43 162-414 (**I-L**). Green = TDP-43-GFP, blue indicates DAPI. Arrows indicate TDP-43 aggregates. Bar = 10 μm. Cells were transfected with CTF-TDP-43 162-414 or 219-414 for 24 hr and co-treated with SP600125 (JNK inhibitor) (**G-H** and **K-L**) or PD98059 (ERK inhibitor) (not shown) for a further 24 hr. The number of TDP-43-GFP aggregates per cell was determined (**M**). **p < 0.01. Representative images from two separate experiments performed in triplicate.

and FTD. In this study, we have developed a model of oxidative stress to investigate changes to endogenous TDP-43 processing during cell stresses that reflect the chronic nature of ALS and FTD. We show here that mild stress induced by paraquat, a well-characterized mitochondrial inhibitor and oxidative stress inducer, induced changes to TDP-43 metabolism that closely recapitulated features observed in brain and/or spinal cord of FTD and ALS patients. These changes included clearance of TDP-43 from cell nuclei, accumulation of diffuse TDP-43 in cytosol, aggregation into SGs, ubiquitination of a portion of these SGs and increased expression of the 35 kDa CTF-TDP-43. These are all considered important hallmarks of TDP-43 proteinopathies [6,8]. Importantly, we also found these changes to TDP-43 metabolism in differentiated neurons and additional cell-lines demonstrating that this was not a cell-specific effect. In addition, short term treatment of cells with paraquat (1 hr) had no effect on TDP-43, providing strong support for chronic cell stress as an important

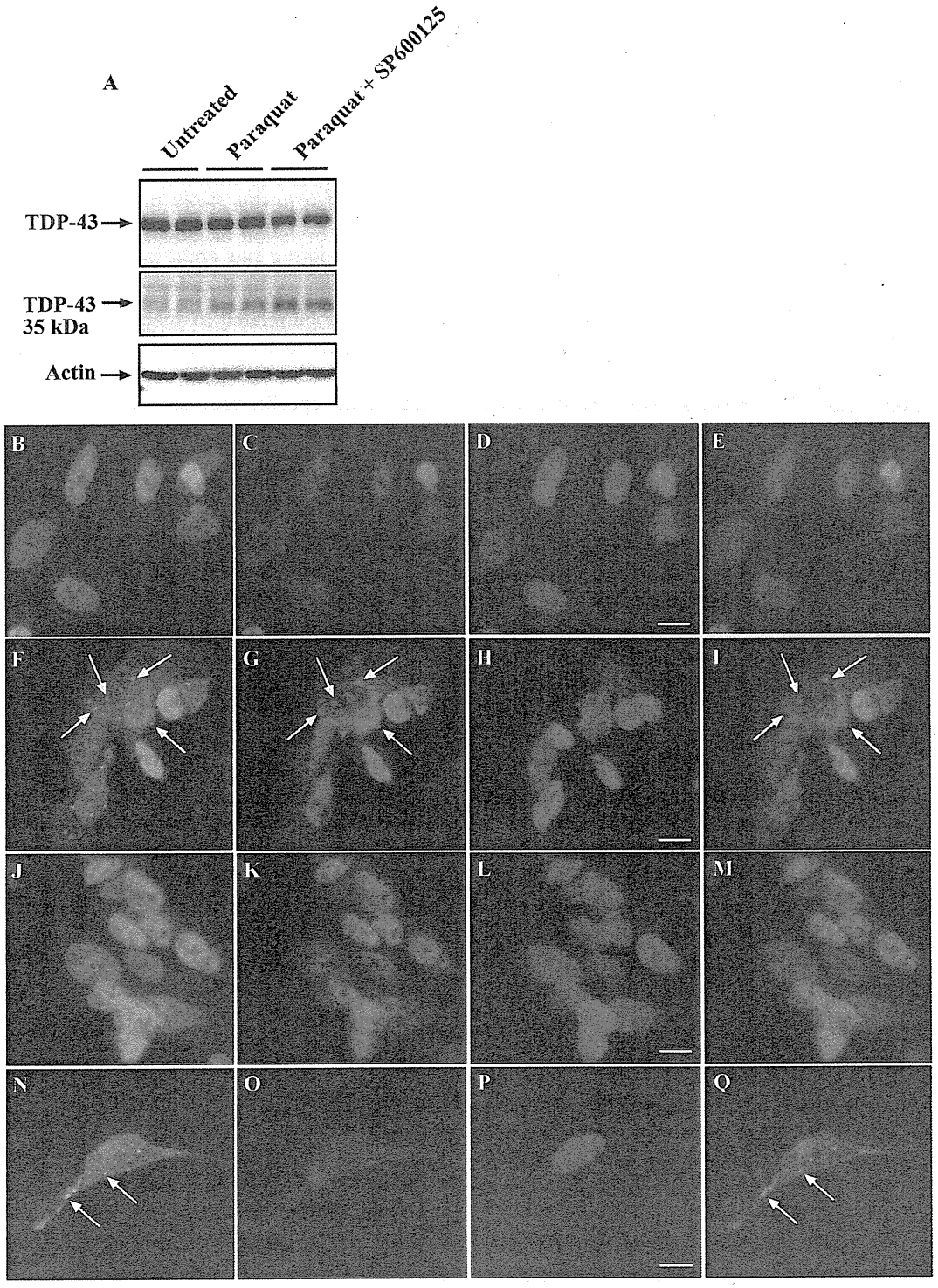

Figure 10 JNK inhibition blocks association of hnRNP K and TDP-43 with SGs. SH-SY5Y cells were treated with 1 mM paraquat overnight in the presence and absence of SP600125. **A**: Cells were immunoblotted for full length TDP-43 and 35 kDa CTF-TDP-43, **B-Q**: Cells were treated with paraquat and SP600125 and examined for TDP-43, hnRNP K or hnRNP A1 by immunofluorescence. **B-E**: untreated, labeled for TDP-43 (green) and hnRNP K (red); **F-I**: paraquat-treated, labeled for TDP-43 (green) and hnRNP K (red); **J-M**: paraquat and SP600125, labeled for TDP-43 (green) and hnRNP K (red); **N-Q** paraquat-treated, labeled for TDP-43 (green) and hnRNP A1 (red). Right-hand panel indicates merged images from TDP-43 and hnRNP panels. Arrows indicate SGs. Bar = 10 μm. Representative images from three separate experiments performed in duplicate or triplicate.

mediator of TDP-43 abnormal processing as observed in ALS and FTD CNS tissues.

The key finding of this study was that cell kinase activity and in particular, JNK activation, modulates TDP-43 localization to SGs. This is the first report of TDP-43 localization controlled by kinase activity. This process is perhaps not surprising as previous reports describe the nuclear-cytoplasmic movement and SG localization of alternative hnRNPs and HuR. Habelhah et. al., have shown that phosphorylation of hnRNP K by ERK can modulate cytoplasmic accumulation [34]. In a separate study they also demonstrated that hnRNP K is phosphorylated by JNK at serine 216 and serine 353 [43]. Moreover, p38 phosphorylates hnRNP A1 inducing SG localization [35,36]. There is also evidence that JNK modulates localization and activity of HuR [44]. Importantly, several studies have shown that HuR and hnRNP A1 and K as well as other hnRNPs directly bind TDP-43 [25,42,45]. Interestingly this is mediated through interaction at the C-terminal region of both proteins. The C-terminal domain of TDP-43 is where the majority of known ALS/FTD disease mutations have been identified [11]. Moreover, there are key JNK phosphorylation consensus sites (Ser/Thr-Pro) within the C-terminal region of hnRNP K and HuR [43]. It is possible that kinase (especially JNK) phosphorylation of hnRNPs modulates interaction with TDP-43, thus mediating SG association. Alternatively, specific phosphorylation of hnRNPs may simply target them to SGs and due to TDP-43 association with these hnRNPs, it becomes localized to SGs where hnRNPs are present. Further support for an hnRNP-TDP-43 association was found in our model where we showed that JNK inhibition blocked localization of both TDP-43 and hnRNP K to SGs. This is particularly interesting as hnRNP K is phosphorylated by JNK [43] and the phosphorylation site lies within the hnRNP C-terminal domain that interacts with TDP-43 in studies on other hnRNPs [42]. Further support for this was shown by the fact that there was no specific localization of hnRNP A1 with paraquat-induced TDP-43 SGs in our study. Interestingly, the only JNK phosphorylation consensus site on hnRNP A1 is in the N-terminal region (Ser7/Pro8) rather than in the C-terminal region that would interact with TDP-43. In addition to these findings, we observed that JNK inhibition did not decrease CTF-TDP-43 generated by paraquat treatment and in fact increased expression. This indicated that JNK is more likely to be controlling localization of cytoplasmic TDP-43 to SGs similar to that reported for other kinases and hnRNPs, rather than modulating the formation of CTF-TDP-43. Whether it is CTF-TDP-43 or full length TDP-43 or both that is aggregating into SGs in this model remains to be seen. Due to the loss of nuclear TDP-43 expression and the fact that CTF-TDP-43 only accounted for approximately 10% of total TDP-43 on Western blots, strongly suggested that the SGs probably contained full length TDP-43 or a mixture of full length and CTF-TDP-43.

There must also be additional factors associated with TDP-43 localization to SGs. JNK activation is not specific for paraquat and in fact, alternative mitochondrial inhibitors used in this study also induce JNK activation [38]. Phosphorylation of JNK is a common downstream effect of oxidative and other cells stresses. The specificity of paraquat to induce JNK-mediated localization of TDP-43 may be related to specific sub-cellular localization of activated JNK or modulation of additional co-factors. Considerable investigation will be required to delineate the specific processes induced by paraquat that leads to JNK-mediated TDP-43 SG accumulation and how these may relate to neurodegenerative diseases such as ALS.

While some recent studies have reported a possible association between TDP-43 and TIA-1 [16,17], these have been demonstrated with transfected cells and no clear evidence of endogenous TDP-43-TIA-1 interaction was identified. Moreover, TIA-1 does not contain JNK consensus sites and there are no reports of JNK control of TIA-1 localization. We believe that the data presented here are more consistent with a potential interaction between TDP-43 and hnRNP K (Figure 11). However, further studies will be required to demonstrate specific interaction in this chronic stress model and to determine if mutation of the C-terminal JNK phosphorylation site on hnRNP K prevents TDP-43 association with SGs. It was also clear from our findings that additional kinases can control TDP-43 and probably a range of hnRNPs during stress. It will take a considerable effort to delineate the role of p38, ERK and additional kinases on TDP-43 accumulation both *in vitro* and *in vivo*.

We also observed partial JNK-mediated control of TDP-43 localization to SGs induced by sodium arsenite, the most common method used for SG induction. The lack of complete inhibition of TDP-43 SG accumulation was possibly related to the fact that sodium arsenite rapidly induces SGs (minutes), while paraquat had no effect on TDP-43 in short-term treatment even at very high doses. This suggests that while sodium arsenite and paraquat induce SGs and both involve JNK, there are different cellular mechanisms involved in short term and longer term SG formation. This is consistent with the previously reported concept that different stresses have diverse affects on SG formation [18]. In this context, we feel that our paraquat-based mild oxidative stress model is an important tool for delineating TDP-43 SG association as it occurs under mild stress conditions expected in chronic neurodegenerative diseases

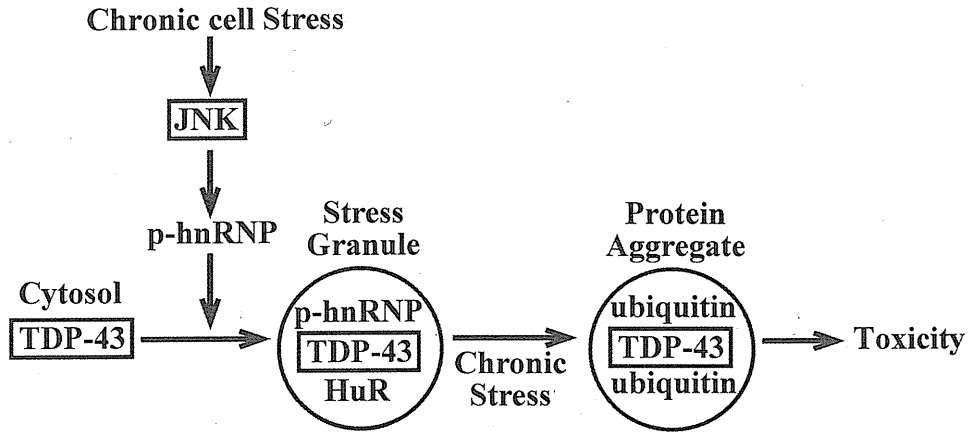

Figure 11 Schematic of proposed stress-mediated TDP-43 accumulation into SGs. Chronic cell stress (eg oxidative stress) induces activation of stress kinases such as JNK. This may phosphorylate hnRNPs such as hnRNP K resulting in phosphoryated forms (p-hnRNP). This could modulate interaction with TDP-43 and association with SGs. Prolonged stress may lead to progression of SGs to protein aggregates containing TDP-43 and subsequent cell toxicity.

and better re-capitulates the features of TDP-43 proteinopatheis than sodium arsenite. It is possible that the latter, (ie acute sodium arsenite exposure) rapidly drives SG formation in cells that are experiencing high levels of toxicity. As shown in Additional File 1B, treatment with 500 μM sodium arsenite overnight results in almost total loss of cell viability as compared to only 15% decrease in viability with 1 mM paraquat overnight.

Whether JNK directly modulates TDP-43 is not known. TDP-43 does not contain known consensus sites for JNK, p38 or ERK. However, it does contain two putative JNK binding domains (RxxxKxxxLxV and KxxRxxxxVxF) at 98-108 and 224-235 respectively. It remains a possibility that JNK binds to TDP-43 and acts as a scaffolding protein affecting SG localization. While no other studies have demonstrated a TDP-43-JNK association, a previous report described a role for a JNK-interacting protein, WDR62 in SG formation [41]. Interestingly, they reported that inhibition of JNK during sodium arsenite treatment increased the number of SGs (in HEK293 cells) but decreased the size of the granules. This is in contrast to our finding in HeLa cells where we found a partial decrease in TDP-43 SG association but no observable changes to HuR SG formation with SP600125. In addition, JNK inhibition did not block SG formation by paraquat as determined by HuR staining but did block TDP-43 and hnRNP K localization. However, these differences are again likely to be due to acute sodium arsenite treatment compared to longer paraquat treatment used here, different cell lines and different markers of SGs eg HuR and TIA-1. Importantly, the findings show that different model systems may give a range of different outcomes and in terms of understanding TDP-43 pathological changes, it will be important to ensure that the model gives an accurate reflection of the disease processes. With that in mind, we are currently investigating TDP-43 metabolism in primary neuronal and glia cell cultures as this may be a more accurate model system to understand TDP-43 SG dynamics.

The role for stress kinases such as JNK and p38 in ALS has been suggested through recent studies. SOD1 ALS models have shown enhanced activity of these kinases as well as modulation of ERK [46-50]. Interestingly, a recent report by Ayala et al. [51] found ERK aggregates in stressed cells and ALS tissues and inhibition of ERK lead to increased TDP-43 aggregation in cultures. While these affects appear to contrast with our own findings, the differences may reflect different intensity and form of stress as well as different cell models and time frame. It will be important to determine the kinetics of ERK and other kinases activation across the disease course in ALS. A single report on JNK activation in ALS patients has described increased activity in astrocytes but not neurons in spinal cord of these patients [52]. We found that paraquat induced TDP-43 aggregation in both neuronal-like and astroglial cell lines in this study. Whether JNK or additional kinases are associated with early changes to TDP-43 accumulation in vivo is not known due to the difficulty of obtaining relevant early disease tissues. It is likely that with the current development of multiple animal models of TDP-43 proteinopathy that re-capitulate human disease neuropathology, we will be able to determine the early events in TDP-43 processing. It is also uncertain what role hnRNPs have in determining TDP-43 aggregation in ALS or FTD. While a large number of hnRNPs have been shown to bind to TDP-43 and many are associated

with SGs, their role in ALS and FTD has not been established. It is important to note, however, that several recent studies have shown that TDP-43 and FUS are associated with SG marker proteins in ALS tissues [17,24].

An important outcome from this study is that kinases may be an important target for therapeutic intervention in ALS and FTD. Should further studies show that kinase activation controls TDP-43 aggregation especially early in disease, it may be possible to inhibit this process with kinase inhibitors. Interestingly, the only approved treatment for slowing ALS disease progression, Riluzole, is known to modulate stress kinase activity [53], and kinase modulators have been discussed previously as possible therapeutic agents for ALS.

Conclusions

In summary, it has been difficult to accurately model endogenous aberrant TDP-43 in cell models. Treatment of cells with sodium arsenite or osmotic stress induces robust TDP-43 containing SGs however, these models have not recapitulated the broad features of TDP-43 mis-metabolism observed in ALS and FTD brain and spinal cord tissues in a manner consistent with transfection of CTF-TDP-43 constructs. The latter however, are likely to be prone to spontaneous aggregation when over-expressed and may not represent an accurate model of the cellular control of TDP-43 processing during chronic stress. Likewise, although studies with mutant TDP-43 constructs can help to understand the disease processes, the majority of ALS and FTD cases are sporadic and probably involve only endogenous, non-mutated TDP-43. Our model has recapitulated a number of features of aberrant endogenous TDP-43 metabolism including loss of nuclear staining, accumulation of diffuse cytoplasmic TDP-43, formation of CTF-TDP-43, aggregation into SGs and ubiqitination of a portion of these SGs indicating the possible transition to irreversible protein aggregates. The aggregation of TDP-43 into SGs is controlled by JNK and SG formation is controlled by additional kinases and these factors are associated with chronic stress. Future studies will be required to fully delineate the mechanism by which kinases control TDP-43 aggregation and whether this is involved in TDP-43 aggregation in vivo. These findings may have important implications for identifying potential therapeutic targets for intervention in ALS and FTD.

Methods

Materials

4',6' Diamino-2-phenylindole dihydrochloride (DAPI) was obtained from Invitrogen (Mount Waverley, Victoria, Australia). (3-(4,5-Dimethylthiazol-2-yl)-2,5-diphenyltetrazolium bromide (MTT), N, N'-dimethyl-4,4'-bipyridinium dichloride (paraquat), rotenone, 1-methyl-4-phenylpyridinium (MPP+), sodium azide, sodium arsenite, 3-nitropropionic acid (3-NP) and 3-Morpholinosyndnomine (SIN-1) were from Sigma Aldrich (Sydney, NSW, Australia) and LDH assay kit was purchased from Roche Diagnostics (Castle Hill, NSW, Australia). SP600125, PD98095, SB203580 were purchased from Merck Biosciences (Melbourne, Victoria, Australia). BI-78D3 and D4476 were purchased from Tocris Bioscience (Ellisville, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia). Z-VAD-fmk was obtained from Promega (Sydney, Australia).

Polyclonal TDP-43 antisera were purchased from Proteintech Group (Chicago, IL, USA). Monoclonal antisera to the phosphorylated form of TDP-43 (ser409/410) were obtained from Cosmo Bio (Tokyo, Japan). Antisera to ubiquitin were from Santa Cruz Biotechnology (Santa Cruz, CA, USA). Monoclonal antisera to hnRNP A1 and hnRNP K were purchased from Abcam (Waterloo, Australia). Monoclonal antisera to HuR were obtained from Invitrogen (Mount Waverley, Victoria, Australia). Antisera to total and phosphorylated forms of p38, ERK and JNK, as well as antibodies to actin and GAPDH were purchased from Cell Signalling Technologies (Arundel, Queensland) or BD Bioscience (North Ryde NSW, Australia).

Methods

Cell Culture

The cell lines used in this study were human neuroblastoma SH-(SY5Y) cell line, human epithelial HeLa cell line, human embryonic kidney cell line (HEK293), human fibroblast cell line (GSM2069) and human astroglial U87MG cell line. Cells were passaged and maintained in DMEM plus 5% FBS (HeLa and HEK293 cells), DMEM/F12 plus 10% FBS (SH-SY5Y and U87MG cells) or BME plus 10% FCS (GSM2069 fibroblasts). To induce differentiation, SY5Y cells were treated with 10 μM retinoic acid for 7 days. Differentiation was confirmed by morphological changes (neurite extension) and up-regulated expression of synaptophysin, tyrosine hydroxylase and VMAT2. All cells were grown in 5% CO_2 at 37°C.

Cell viability and cell lysis assays

Assays for cell viability (MTT) and cell lysis (LDH) were performed as previously described [28].

Exposure of cell to stress

Undifferentiated cells were grown in 24 or 6-well plates or on 12 mm coverslips (for immunofluorescence) for 2-3 days before experiments (~80% confluent). Differentiated SH-SY5Y cells were cultured in the presence of retinoic acid for 7 days before experiments. Inducers of

nitrosative stess (arginine, paraquat and SIN-1) or oxidative stress (rotenone, 3-NP, sodium azide, MPP+, sodium arsenite and paraquat) were prepared in dH_2O and added at indicated concentrations and the medium was briefly mixed by aspiration. Incubations were performed for periods stated in individual experiments. Where indicated, cells were co-treated with kinase inhibitors (SP600125 (JNK), BI-78D3 (JNK), PD98095 & U0126 (ERK), SB203580 & SB202190 (p38), D4476 (casein kinase 1) from stock solutions prepared at 10 mM in DMSO. Control cultures were treated with vehicle alone. For immunoblotting, cells were harvested into Phosphosafe Extraction Buffer (Merck Biosciences, San Diego, CA, USA) containing protease inhibitor cocktail (Roche Diagnostics) and stored at -80°C until use. For immunofluorescence studies, cells were grown on glass coverslips and fixed by treating with 4% paraformaldehyde for 30 min.

siRNA knockdown of JNK

ON-TARGETPlus human JNK1 siRNA pool, JNK2 siRNA pool and non-targeting siRNA pool (D-001810-10-20, Negative control) were obtained from Dharmacon and resuspended in RNAase free water at 100 μM. Human JNK1 siRNA pool target sequences were 5'-GCCCAGUAAUAUAGUAGUA-3', 5'-GGCAUGGGCUACAAGGAAA-3', 5'-GAAUAGUAUGCGCAGCUUA-3' and 5'-GAUGACGCCUUAUGUAGUG-3'. Human JNK2 siRNA pool target sequences were 5'-UCGUGAACUUGUCCUCUUA-3', 5'-AGCCAACUGUGAGGAAUUA-3', 5'-GGCUGUCGAUGAUAGGUUA-3' and 5'-GAUUGUUUGUGCUGCAUUU-3'. Cells were seeded on coverslips at 5×10^4 cells per cm^2 in Opti-MeM to give 40% confluency on treatment day. Cells were transfected with pooled JNK1 and JNK2 siRNA or Negative control siRNA in Lipfectamine 2000 for 5 hr at room temperature (0.5 μg RNA per well). Media was then replaced with normal SY5Y growth medium overnight before treatment with paraquat (1 mM) overnight. Cells were then collected for Western blot for JNK or fixed for immunofluoresence of TDP-43 and HuR.

Western blot analysis of protein expression and phosphorylation

Cell lysates prepared in Phosphosafe Extraction Buffer at equal protein concentration were mixed with electrophoresis SDS sample buffer and separated on 12% SDS-PAGE Tris-Glycine gels. Proteins were transferred to PVDF membranes and blocked with 4% skim milk solution in PBST before immunoblotting for total or phospho-specific proteins. For detection of total TDP-43, membranes were probed with polyclonal antisera (1:1500) against TDP-43. Secondary antiserum was rabbit-HRP at 1:5,000 dilution. For detection of total and phospho-forms of JNK, ERK and p38, membranes were probed with anti-JNK, anti-ERK or anti-p38 (each at 1:5000) and antisera to phospho-forms of each protein (each at 1:5000). Blots were developed using GE Healthcare ECL Advance Chemiluminescence and imaged on a Fujifilm LAS3000 imager (Berthold, Bundoora, Australia). Expression of GAPDH or actin was determined using antisera at 1:5000 and 1:3000 respectively for protein loading controls where necessary.

Immunofluorescence analysis

SH-SY5Y cells were grown on 12 mm diameter coverslips and treated with stresses as indicated. Cells were fixed with 4% w/v paraformaldehyde in PBS for 30 min and permeabilized with 90% chilled methanol for 5 min. After blocking for 1 hr with 10% normal goat serum, cells were incubated with primary antibody for total TDP-43 (1:1500), ubiquitin (1:150), HuR (1:50), hnRNP A1 (1:200) or hnRNP K (1:200) for 2 hr at room temperature or overnight at 4°C. This was followed by labeling with secondary AlexaFluor or FITC goat anti-mouse or anti-rabbit antisera at 1:500 for 2 hr at room temperature or overnight at 4°C. After washing, the coverslips were incubated with DAPI at 0.5 μg/ml for 5 min and analyzed using a Leica inverted microscope with Zeiss Axiocam digital camera. Images shown are representative of multiple fields and triplicate coverslips per experiment. TDP-43 and HuR-positive stress granules (SGs) were counted in cultures where indicated. A minimum of 500 cells was counted across multiple fields of view (and multiple coverslips) for each treatment. The number of TDP-43 and HuR-positive SGs were counted in these cells. The total number of cells was divided by the total number of SGs to provide a measure of mean SGs per cell. SGs were not observed in untreated cells.

Preparation of TDP-43 plasmids

Plasmid DNA corresponding to GFP-tagged full-length wild-type (WT) TDP-43 (pEGFP-TDP WT), C-terminal fragments of TDP-43, (pEGFP-TDP 162-414 and pEGFP-TDP 219-414) or empty expression vector pEGFP-C1 were prepared as described by Nonaka et al. [15]. Briefly, plasmid DNA was used to transform MAX Efficiency® DH5α™ Competent Cells (Invitrogen, Mount Waverley, Victoria, Australia) as described by the manufacturer. Transformants were grown and colonies were picked based on kanamycin-resistance and grown in liquid culture for subsequent plasmid purification. DNA was purified using the Wizard® *Plus* Midiprep DNA Purification System (Promega Corporation) as per manufacturer's instructions. DNA was quantified and TDP-43 inserts were identified positively by digestion with *BamHI* and *XhoI*.

Transfection and expression of plasmids

SH-SY5Y cells were seeded at 2 × 10^5 cells per well in 24 well-plates on coverslips. Cells were transfected 24 hr after seeding with the pEGFP-C1 empty vector, pEGFP-TDP WT, pEGFP-TDP 162-414 and pEGFP-TDP 219-414 using Attractene (Qiagen) according to manufacturer's instructions. After 48 hr incubation, cells were fixed with 4% w/v paraformaldehyde in PBS for 30 min. and permeabilized with 90% chilled methanol for 5 min. After washing, the coverslips were incubated with DAPI at 0.5 μg/ml for 5 min and analyzed using a Leica inverted microscope with Zeiss Axiocam digital camera. Expression of TDP-43 was determined by the EGFP-tagged construct. Efficiency of transfection with pEGFP-C1 vector was approximately 20-25%.

Statistical analysis

All data described in graphical representations are mean ± standard error of the mean (SEM) unless stated from a minimum of three experiments. Results were analysed using a two-tailed Student's *t*-test.

Additional material

Additional file 1: SH-SY5Y cell viability after exposure to nitrosative or oxidative stress inducers. SH-SY5Y cells were treated with indicated compounds overnight and cell viability was measured with the MTT assay. **A:** Mild neurotoxicity was induced with all compounds tested. Concentrations were SIN-1, 0.1 mM; arginine, 1 mM; Paraquat, 1 mM and 2 mM; 3-NP, 1 mM; MPP+, 2 mM; sodium azide, 5 mM and rotenone, 0.075 mM. **B:** Comparison of neurotoxicity induced by 1 and 2 mM paraquat or 0.05 mM and 0.5 mM arsenite treatment overnight. *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01. n = three experiments.

Additional file 2: Treatment of SH-SY5Y neurons induces SG formation associated with mild toxicity. Non-differentiated (**A-C**) or differentiated (**D-K**) were treated with 0-2 mM (**A-C**) or 1 mM (**D-K**) paraquat overnight. **A**: Cell viability was determined by MTT assay. **B**: Cell death was determined by LDH assay. **C**: Stress granules (SGs) per cell were determined. *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01. **D-K**: TDP-43 and HuR immunofluorescence was examined in retinoic acid-differentiated neurons after treatment with 1 mM paraquat. Green =. TDP-43, Red = HuR, Blue = DAPI. Arrows indicate SGs. Bar = 10 μm. **G** and **K** represent merged images. n = three experiments.

Additional file 3: Paraquat treatment did not induce phosphorylation of TDP-43 in SGs. Cells were treated overnight with 1 mM paraquat and examined for phosphorylated TDP-43 by immunofluorescence. **A-C:** untreated, **D-F:** paraquat treated. Green = HuR, Red = phospho-TDP-43, blue = DAPI. Bar = 10 μm. **G:** Immunoblot for phospho-TDP-43 (p-TDP-43) in paraquat-treated cultures. Representative images from three separate experiments.

Additional file 4: Treatment of SH-SY5Y cells with different mitochondrial inhibitors did not induce HuR SGs. Cells were treated with vehicle control (**A-B**), 2 mM MPP+ (**C-D**), 1 mM 3-NP (**E-F**), 0.075 mM rotenone (**G-H**) or 5 mM sodium azide (**I-J**). Cells were analyzed for HuR localization by immunofluorescence. Red = HuR, blue = DAPI. Bar = 10 μm. **K:** Treatment with 1 mM paraquat (PQ) overnight induced phospho-JNK (pJNK) and this was inhibited by co-treatment with 20 μM SP600125. Representative images from three separate experiments.

Additional file 5: Treatment of SH-SY5Y cells with siRNA to JNK inhibits TDP-43 accumulation in SGs. A: Cells were treated with pooled siRNA against JNK1 and JNK2 or with negative control siRNA and examined for JNK expression. siRNA to JNK significantly reduced expression of JNK1 and JNK2. **B-E:** Untreated control cells. **F-I:** cells treated with negative control siRNA reveal TDP-43 and HuR-positive SGs. **J-M:** Cells treated with siRNA to JNK reveal lack of TDP-43 but not HuR-positive SGs. Green = TDP-43, red = HuR, blue - DAPI. Arrows indicate SGs. Bar = 10 μm. Representative images from two-three separate experiments performed in triplicate.

Additional file 6: Treatment of U87MG astroglial and HeLa epithelial cells with paraquat results in TDP-43 SGs. U87MG (**A-F**) and HeLa (**G-L**) cells were treated overnight with 1 mM paraquat and analyzed for TDP-43 and HuR localization by immunofluorescence. **A-C**: Untreated U87MG cells, **D-F**: paraquat-treated U87MG cells, **G-I**: untreated HeLa cells, **J-L**: paraquat-treated HeLa cells. Green = TDP-43, red = HuR, blue = DAPI. Arrows indicate SGs. Bar = 10 μm. Representative images from three separate experiments performed in duplicate or triplicate.

Abbreviations

ALS: amyotrophic lateral sclerosis; CTF: C-terminal fragment; ERK: extracellular signal-regulated kinase; FTD: frontotemporal dementia; hnRNP: heterogeneous nuclear ribonucleoprotein; JNK: c-JUN N-terminal kinase; SG: stress granule; SOD: superoxide dismutase; TDP-43: TARDP-binding protein 43.

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Authors' contributions

JM performed cell culture assays, immunofluorescence studies, immunoblotting and contributed to the preparation of the manuscript. SJP performed cell culture assays, immunofluorescence studies, immunoblotting transfected cells with constructs and contributed to the preparation of the manuscript. LJV prepared TDP-43 CTF constructs. KAP prepared, treated and collected cell cultures for analysis. JRL participated in the study design and coordination, contributed to experimental data collection and helped to draft the manuscript. AC performed cell culture assays, immunofluorescence studies, immunoblotting and contributed to the preparation of the manuscript, Q-XL participated in the study design and coordination, contributed to experimental data collection and helped to draft the manuscript. CLM helped to draft the manuscript. TN generated TDP-43 constructs. MH generated TDP-43 constructs. KMK participated in the study design and coordination, contributed to experimental data collection and helped to draft the manuscript. DCHN and MAB developed molecular tools

for JNK analysis and contributed to the preparation of the manuscript. PJC participated in the study design and coordination, contributed to experimental data collection and helped to draft the manuscript. ARW conceived the study, participated in the study design and coordination, and helped to draft the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Competing interests
The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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