Correction of amygdalar dysfunction in a rat model of fragile X syndrome

Graphical abstract

Highlights

- Recall of conditioned fear is deficient in a rat model of fragile X syndrome
- Synaptic transmission, and plasticity underlying fear learning, is reduced in the BLA
- mGluR5 receptors are present in presynaptic terminals of the BLA
- Activation of BLA mGluR5 restores synaptic plasticity and fear learning in FXS rats

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In brief
Fernandes et al. investigate the synaptic basis of deficient conditioned fear and its reversal in FXS rats. They find presynaptic mGluR5 in the amygdala, activation of which restores normal synaptic transmission, plasticity, and fear learning. This highlights the importance of circuit-specific differences in FXS pathophysiology and mGluR-based therapeutic strategies.
Correction of amygdalar dysfunction in a rat model of fragile X syndrome

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INTRODUCTION

Fragile X syndrome (FXS), a commonly inherited form of autism and intellectual disability, is associated with emotional symptoms that implicate dysfunction of the amygdala. However, current understanding of the pathogenesis of the disease is based primarily on studies in the hippocampus and neocortex, where FXS defects have been corrected by inhibiting group I metabotropic glutamate receptors (mGluRs). Here, we observe that activation, rather than inhibition, of mGluRs in the basolateral amygdala reverses impairments in a rat model of FXS. FXS rats exhibit deficient recall of auditory conditioned fear, which is accompanied by a range of in vitro and in vivo deficits in synaptic transmission and plasticity. We find presynaptic mGluR5 in the amygdala, activation of which reverses deficient synaptic transmission and plasticity, thereby restoring normal fear learning in FXS rats. This highlights the importance of modifying the prevailing mGluR-based framework for therapeutic strategies to include circuit-specific differences in FXS pathophysiology.

SUMMARY

Fragile X syndrome (FXS), a commonly inherited form of autism and intellectual disability, is associated with emotional symptoms that implicate dysfunction of the amygdala. However, current understanding of the pathogenesis of the disease is based primarily on studies in the hippocampus and neocortex, where FXS defects have been corrected by inhibiting group I metabotropic glutamate receptors (mGluRs). Here, we observe that activation, rather than inhibition, of mGluRs in the basolateral amygdala reverses impairments in a rat model of FXS. FXS rats exhibit deficient recall of auditory conditioned fear, which is accompanied by a range of in vitro and in vivo deficits in synaptic transmission and plasticity. We find presynaptic mGluR5 in the amygdala, activation of which reverses deficient synaptic transmission and plasticity, thereby restoring normal fear learning in FXS rats. This highlights the importance of modifying the prevailing mGluR-based framework for therapeutic strategies to include circuit-specific differences in FXS pathophysiology.

INTRODUCTION

Fragile X syndrome (FXS), a leading genetic cause of intellectual disability and autism spectrum disorder, is caused by the absence of the fragile X mental retardation protein (FMRP) produced by the fragile X mental retardation1 (FMR1) gene. One key feature of the symptoms of FXS is abnormal emotional behavior, and clinical evidence points to the amygdala’s contribution to these affective symptoms. Neuroimaging revealed that men with the FMR1 pre-mutation exhibit reduced activation in the amygdala in response to fearful faces (Hessl et al., 2007). These men also had impaired startle potentiation while viewing fearful faces (Hessl et al., 2007). As predicted by the mGluR theory, downregulating mGluR, a group 1 metabotropic glutamate receptor, in the amygdala and hippocampus of FXS mouse models results in impaired LTD. In contrast, FXS rats exhibit deficient recall of auditory conditioned fear, which is accompanied by a range of in vitro and in vivo deficits in synaptic transmission and plasticity. We find presynaptic mGluR5 in the amygdala, activation of which reverses deficient synaptic transmission and plasticity, thereby restoring normal fear learning in FXS rats. This highlights the importance of modifying the prevailing mGluR-based framework for therapeutic strategies to include circuit-specific differences in FXS pathophysiology.
How do these divergent patterns of mGluR-plasticity, and their dysfunction in FXS, affect hippocampal versus amygdalar function in the intact animal? Despite extensive analyses of the molecular and synaptic signaling defects in the hippocampus of FXS mice, very few assessed how these alterations lead to specific behavioral abnormalities. For instance, abnormalities in hippocampal mGluR-LTD, and its reversal, have been studied in considerable detail. LTD and mGluR5 expression levels in the hippocampus also modulate spatial learning performance (Kemp and Manahan-Vaughan, 2004; Manahan-Vaughan and Brauneewell, 1999, 2005). However, the impact of defects in mGluR-LTD on hippocampal circuit function in vivo is not clear and has not yet been linked to specific deficits in learning and memory in mouse models of FXS.

An effective strategy to bridge these gaps comes from rodent models of fear memory, for which the neural circuitry has been characterized extensively across biological scales in the amygdala (Johansen et al., 2011; Maren and Quirk, 2004; Ressler and Maren, 2019; Tovote et al., 2015). Of direct relevance to FXS, the amygdala plays a pivotal role in fear conditioning and in LTP at synapses involved in fear conditioning (Rodrigues et al., 2002). Further, in vivo activation of mGluR5 receptors in the lateral amygdala enhances cue-specific fear, in addition to facilitating LTP in vitro (Rahman et al., 2017). Moreover, the gap between the synaptic and behavioral levels can be bridged in a fear conditioning-based framework because recordings in freely behaving animals have shown acquisition of conditioned fear responses to be associated with LTP-like physiological changes in vivo in the lateral amygdala (Rogan et al., 1997). An equivalent framework is not available with respect to hippocampal mGluR-LTD. Thus, as a model system, the amygdala offers a way to address several unresolved issues relevant to FXS. For instance, previous findings on synaptic dysfunction caused by FXS were gathered from in vitro measurements in amygdalar slices (Suvrathan et al., 2010), however, the functional consequences of these changes at the circuit and behavioral levels, remain unexplored in the intact animal. At the other end, earlier studies on fear-related behavior have yielded mixed results wherein knockout mice showed either impaired fear recall (Paradee et al., 1999) or no difference compared to normal mice (Dobkin et al., 2000; Hamilton et al., 2014; Peier et al., 2000). Further, in vivo electrophysiological analysis of these behaviors has not been attempted in rodent models of FXS. It is also unclear if pharmacological manipulations of mGluRs can correct potential abnormalities in amygdala-dependent conditioned fear and its synaptic correlates. Specifically, would the mGluR theory of FXS also hold in the amygdala despite the divergent patterns of plasticity defects seen in this brain area? The aim of the present study is to address these questions at multiple levels of neural organization in the amygdala of a rat model of FXS. Such analyses in the amygdala are essential for the development of novel strategies to treat the affective symptoms of FXS.

RESULTS

As a first step in our analysis of how FXS disrupts amygdala-dependent behavior, we subjected Fmr1<sup>−/−</sup> rats to auditory fear conditioning, wherein animals rapidly learn to associate a previously neutral tone (conditioned stimulus [CS]) with a coincident aversive stimulus (unconditioned stimulus [US]). Re-exposure to the CS alone evokes a cessation of locomotor activity, or "freezing," which serves as a behavioral measure of the learned association. Accumulating evidence has established that plasticity in the basolateral amygdala (BLA) is essential for encoding fear memories (Blair et al., 2001; Rodrigues et al., 2001; Wilensky et al., 1999). Therefore, we characterized the effects of loss of FMRP on conditioned fear and then examined the underlying in vivo and in vitro mechanisms at lower levels of neural organization.

**Impaired recall of conditioned fear in Fmr1<sup>−/−</sup> rats**

Rats chronically implanted with recording electrodes in the BLA first underwent habituation to the context (days 1 and 2) (Figure 1A) and then to the tone that was subsequently used as the CS for repeated pairings with a foot shock (US) (day 3) (Figure 1A). Both wild-type (WT) and Fmr1<sup>−/−</sup> rats showed higher levels of freezing at the end of the CS-US pairings compared to tone habituation (Figure 1B) (unpaired t test, p < 0.001) (i.e., they were both capable of learning the tone-shock association). 24 hours later, Fmr1<sup>−/−</sup> animals exhibited significantly lower freezing, compared with WT animals, when presented with only the CS in a different context (testing, day 4) (Figure 1C). Together, these results point to impaired recall of fear memories in Fmr1<sup>−/−</sup> rats.

**Impaired potentiation of CS-evoked responses in the BLA of fear conditioned Fmr1<sup>−/−</sup> rats**

Next, we examined the neural basis of this memory deficit by recording CS-evoked local field potentials in the BLA of the same freely behaving rats (Figure 1D). Specifically, amplitudes of auditory evoked potentials (AEP), in response to the tone CS, were measured as the difference between the first maximum and first negative peak of the CS-evoked AEP (Figure 1E). During fear recall, AEPs in Fmr1<sup>−/−</sup> rats exhibited a significant reduction in amplitude (Figures 1E and 1F) as well as slope (Figure S1A) compared to WT rats. Because the same animals were used to simultaneously monitor changes in freezing behavior and in vivo recordings of AEPs in response to the same presentations of the CS, we also quantified the correlation between the two measures. This analysis revealed a significant positive correlation between the behavioral and electrophysiological responses (Figures 1G and S1B). Notably, WT animals exhibiting robust potentiation of CS-evoked AEPs in the BLA also responded to the CS with higher freezing, thereby clustering in the upper right quadrant of the correlation plot (Figure 1G). On the other hand, data points for the Fmr1<sup>−/−</sup> rats were clustered in the lower left quadrant, indicating deficits in both behavioral and electrophysiological indices of fear recall. Finally, increase in CS-evoked theta power has been identified as a neural correlate of conditioned fear (Likhtik et al., 2014). Consistent with this, BLA theta power (measured as the power of auditory evoked responses in the 2–12 Hz frequency band) exhibited a significant increase in WT rats but not Fmr1<sup>−/−</sup> rats during fear recall (Figures S1C and S1D).
Deficient LTP and excitatory synaptic transmission in the LA of Fmr1−/− rats

There is a significant body of evidence that acquisition of fear memory is associated with LTP of synaptic transmission at thalamic inputs to the LA (Bauer et al., 2001; McKernan and Shinnick-Gallagher, 1997; Rogan et al., 1997). Hence, we reasoned that impaired LTP is likely to underlie the deficits seen in our behavioral and in vivo analyses in the intact animal. To test this, we compared LTP in principal neurons of the LA using whole-cell current-clamp recordings in coronal brain slices prepared from Fmr1−/− and WT rats (Figure 2A). We monitored excitatory postsynaptic potentials (EPSPs) elicited by stimulation of thalamic inputs to LA neurons. Consistent with earlier reports, in brain slices from WT rats, two trains of 100 pulses at 30 Hz resulted in robust LTP. However, the same induction protocol failed to elicit any significant LTP in slices prepared from Fmr1−/− rats (Figures 2B and 2C). We next examined the overall status of basal synaptic transmission in these LA neurons by comparing the frequency and amplitude of miniature excitatory postsynaptic currents (mEPSCs) in slices from Fmr1−/− and WT rats. Fmr1−/− neurons exhibited a significant reduction in mEPSC frequency (Figures 2D and 2E) but not amplitude (Figure S2) compared to WT neurons in the LA, indicating a reduction in basal synaptic transmission.

Deficient mEPSC frequency in the LA of Fmr1−/− rats

Next, we probed these impairments in synaptic transmission and plasticity in the BLA at the level of postsynaptic glutamate receptors. Earlier studies have shown that the impact of exaggerated signaling through mGluR5, caused by a loss of the translational repressor FMRP, is manifested in hippocampal area CA1 as enhanced internalization of the AMPAR subunit, GluA1 (Muddashetty et al., 2007; Nakamoto et al., 2007; Snyder et al., 2001). Specifically, this abnormally high GluA1 internalization has been linked to greater mGluR-LTD in the hippocampus. If a similar mechanism is in play in the amygdala, it would disrupt the stabilization of LTP (Figures 2B and 2C). We investigated
surface GluA1 normalized to avidin. FMRP was absent in tissue from Fmr1 
±
mean Fmr1 (G) Surface expression of GluA1 in the BLA was reduced in 4 Cell Reports Fmr1 GluA1 in BLA slices from this possibility by quantifying levels of biotin-labeled surface Fmr1 the amygdala and hippocampus of 2F and 2G), which is in agreement with earlier findings in both the amygdala and hippocampus of Fmr1 
-1/+ 

teeth stimulation of thalamic afferents. (C) Summary of LTP experiments showing normalized EPSP slopes averaged over 25–30 min after tetanic stimulation. LA neurons in Fmr1 
-1/+ 

eXhibited impaired LTP. Unpaired t test, *p < 0.05. (D) Significantly higher frequency of mEPSCs re- corded in LA neurons of WT rats (n = 13) compared to that in Fmr1 
-1/+ 

rats (n = 8; unpaired t test, *p < 0.05) as evidenced by a rightward shift in the cum- ulative probability plot of inter-event intervals (Kolmogorov-Smirnov [KS] test, p < 0.001) and reduced mean frequency (inset, unpaired t test, *p < 0.05) in Fmr1 
-1/+ 

LA neurons. (E) Representative mEPSC traces. (F) Representative western blots showing levels of Fmr1 
-1/+ 

this possibility by quantifying levels of biotin-labeled surface GluA1 in BLA slices from Fmr1 
-1/+ 

and WT rats. We found a reduction in GluA1 surface expression in Fmr1 
-1/+ 

(Figures 2F and 2G), which is in agreement with earlier findings in both the amygdala and hippocampus of Fmr1 
-1/+ 
mice.

Effects of mGluR-activation on synaptic transmission in the amygdala

The results presented so far identify a range of deficits in amygdalar function in Fmr1 
-1/+ 
mice, from impaired fear learning to a reduction in synaptic plasticity and transmission. The mGluR theory of FXS predicts that inhibition of mGluR activity can correct FXS-induced aberrations in the hippocampus (Bear et al., 2004; Dölen et al., 2007). Contrary to this prediction, a previous study found that pharmacological inactivation of mGluR5 with 2-methyl-6-phenylethynyl-pyridine (MPEP) failed to rescue deficient LTP in the LA of Fmr1 
-1/+ 
mice (Suvrathan et al., 2010). Perhaps this is not surprising because MPEP is known to block mGluR-dependent LTP (Rodrigues et al., 2002), which was already impaired in the LA of Fmr1 
-1/+ 
mice. However, a separate study in rats showed that the opposite manipulation—in vitro activation of group 1 mGluRs in the LA using the agonist (RS)-3,5-dihydroxyphenylglycine (DHPG)—caused a robust facilitation of weak LTP, although DHPG by itself did not induce LTP (Rahman et al., 2017). How DHPG achieves its facilitating effects on synaptic transmission in the LA remains unclear.

Studies in the hippocampus reported that DHPG treatment reduces the surface expression of postsynaptic AMPA receptors, a process thought to underlie mGluR-dependent LTD (Fitzjohn et al., 2001; Snyder et al., 2001; Xiao et al., 2001). Hence, we first quantified the impact of bath applied DHPG on the levels of biotin-labeled surface GluA1 in BLA slices (Figure 3A, top). We found a persistent reduction in GluA1 surface expression in slices treated with 50 μM DHPG (Figure 3B). Thus, the reduction in postsynaptic GluA1 surface expression in the amygdala is similar to that reported previously in the hippocampus. Therefore, we reasoned that the difference in the electrophysiological effects on synaptic transmission between the two brain areas is likely to lie on the presynaptic side. Hence, we recorded mEPSCs from the same LA principal neurons before, during, and after bath application of DHPG (Figure 3A, middle). Using this within-cell comparison, we found that the same in vitro application of DHPG, despite reducing postsynaptic surface GluA1, increased the frequency of mEPSCs that persisted even after the drug was washed out (Figures 3C and 3D). There was no change in the amplitude of mEPSCs (Figure S3A). Further, DHPG failed to alter the mEPSC frequency in the presence of an mGluR5 antagonist, 3-[(2-methyl-1,3-thiazol-4-yl) ethynyl] pyridine (MTEP) (Figures S3B–S3D), indicating that the increase in mEPSCs frequency was due to DHPG-induced activation of mGluR5. Because this increase in mEPSC frequency is suggestive of changes in presynaptic release probability, we also analyzed the effects of DHPG on paired-pulse facilitation at thalamic inputs to LA neurons. Specifically, we measured paired-pulse ratios (PPR) of evoked EPSCs before, during, and after bath application of DHPG in the same LA neuron (Figure 3A, bottom). This within-cell comparison revealed that DHPG also causes a reduction of PPRs, indicating an increase in presynaptic release.
probability (Figures 3E and 3F). Together, these results suggest that although DHPG strengthens the presynaptic component of transmission in LA neurons, it has the opposite effect on the postsynaptic side.

Presynaptic mGluR5 in the amygdala

Postsynaptic mechanisms of mGluR signaling and plasticity have received greater attention in published analyses of FXS-induced changes in hippocampal area CA1. Analyses using a mouse model of FXS revealed lower presynaptic release as evidenced by a decrease in the frequency mEPSCs, increased PPR, and slower use-dependent block of NMDA receptor currents in the LA (Suvrathan et al., 2010). Further, in vitro mGluR-activation using DHPG enhances presynaptic release (Figure 3), which is also consistent with previous findings (Rahman et al., 2017). However, an earlier study on mGluR-dependent plasticity and fear learning, using light and electron microscopy, found that mGluR5 is predominantly located in postsynaptic structures in the LA (Rodrigues et al., 2002). To reconcile the different loci of mGluR action, we examined the localization of mGluR5 in the amygdala and hippocampus. To assess the distribution of mGluR5 relative to the pre- and postsynaptic compartment with high spatial resolution, we used super-resolution protein retention expansion microscopy together with immunocytochemistry (Tillberg et al., 2016). With an increased resolution (of up to ~4x), expansion microscopy allowed us to better measure and quantify mGluR5 localization to either the pre- or postsynaptic compartment (Chien et al., 2015; Hafner et al., 2019). We examined the localization of mGluR5 relative to pre- and postsynaptic terminal markers, RIM1 (Kaeser et al., 2017).
et al., 2011) and Homer1 (Ehrengruber et al., 2004), in the BLA (Figures 4A and 4C, top) and CA1 region of the hippocampus (Figures 4A and 4C, bottom). We assessed the signal distribution of mGluR5 relative to the pre- and postsynapse, by calculating the peak-signal to peak-signal distance of the immunolabeled puncta for mGluR5 and RIM1 or Homer1 in both the BLA and CA1 (see STAR Methods). We found that mGluR5 was positioned closer to the postsynaptic protein Homer1 in the CA1 area compared to the BLA (Figure 4B). In contrast, mGluR5 was localized closer to the presynaptic protein RIM1 in the BLA than in CA1 (Figure 4D). Taken together, these data indicate a predominantly presynaptic localization for mGluR5 in the BLA.

The analysis in the BLA using expansion microscopy reveals the presence of presynaptic mGluR5 in the BLA. If this is indeed adequate for DHPG to enhance mEPSC frequency, then disrupting the signaling cascade triggered by postsynaptic mGluR5 in the recorded neuron should not diminish the presynaptic effects of DHPG manifested as electrophysiological changes in mEPSC frequency. To test this, we added the Ca²⁺-chelator, 1,2-bis(2-aminophenoxy)ethane-N,N,N',N'-tetraacetic acid (10 mM BAPTA) in the pipette solution while recording the effects of bath-applied DHPG on LA mEPSCs (using the same protocol depicted in Figure 3A, middle). Strikingly, this manipulation did not prevent the DHPG-induced enhancement in mEPSC frequency in the LA (Figures 4E, 4F, and S4). This argues strongly for a presynaptic mechanism of action for DHPG in enhancing synaptic transmission in the LA.

**mGluR-activation corrects deficient synaptic transmission and LTP in the LA**

Taken together, these results suggest that activation of mGluRs using DHPG may be well suited to reverse the range of amygdalar deficits we have identified in the Fmr1¹⁻/⁻ rats. We tested this at three different levels of neural organization (Figures 5 and 6). First, because DHPG enhances mEPSC frequency and the same measure of basal synaptic transmission is suppressed in LA neurons of Fmr1¹⁻/⁻ rats (Figures 2D and 2E), we examined the effects of mGluR-activation in LA slices prepared from Fmr1¹⁻/⁻ rats. To this end, we recorded mEPSCs from LA principal neurons before, during, and after bath application of 100 μM DHPG (using the same protocol depicted in Figure 3A, middle). This within-cell comparison revealed that 100 μM DHPG
DHPG causes a significant increase in mEPSC frequency in Fmr1<sup>−/−</sup> neurons that reached levels comparable to baseline transmission in WT neurons (Figure 5A). This enhancement persisted even 30 min after DHPG was washed out (Figures 5A and 5B). As in the case of WT neurons, DHPG did not change the amplitude of mEPSCs in LA neurons from Fmr1<sup>−/−</sup> rats (Figure S5). Next, we examined the effects of DHPG bath application on LTP in LA slices applying the same induction protocol used earlier (Figures 2A and 2B). After incubation with 100 µM DHPG, tetanic stimulation of thalamic inputs to LA principal neurons triggered robust LTP in Fmr1<sup>−/−</sup> slices, which was significantly greater than the impaired LTP seen in Fmr1<sup>−/−</sup> LA neurons in the absence of DHPG (Figures 5C–5E). Thus, mGluR-activation also reversed the deficient LTP in amygdalar slices from Fmr1<sup>−/−</sup> rats.

**mGluR-activation in the amygdala also restores normal fear learning in Fmr1<sup>−/−</sup> rats**

What are the behavioral consequences of these synaptic changes induced by mGluR-activation? Specifically, will the reversal of the deficits in basal synaptic transmission and LTP in the LA also restore recall of conditioned fear in the intact Fmr1<sup>−/−</sup> rat? To address this question, we combined the same fear conditioning procedure used earlier (Figure 1A) with targeted in vivo infusion of saline or DHPG directly into the BLA of freely behaving Fmr1<sup>−/−</sup> and WT rats (Figure 6A, top). Following context habituation, animals were subjected to bilateral in vivo infusions of saline into the BLA and 30 min later underwent habituation to the CS that was subsequently used for auditory conditioning (Figure 6A, bottom). 24 h later, this conditioning led to a significant increase in the freezing response to the CS (Figure 6B) in WT rats (i.e., robust recall of conditioned fear). However, the same conditioning was unable to produce any detectable change in CS-induced freezing in the saline-infused Fmr1<sup>−/−</sup> rats 24 h later (Figure 6B), thereby demonstrating an impairment in fear recall similar to that presented earlier in Figure 1. Next, a separate group of Fmr1<sup>−/−</sup> and WT animals received in vivo infusions of DHPG into the BLA, followed by the same sequence of tone habituation and auditory conditioning (Figure 6A, top). In contrast to saline, infusions of DHPG caused higher freezing in both control and Fmr1<sup>−/−</sup> animals before the onset of the first tone (pre-CS) (day 1) (Figure 6A), as well as during subsequent tone habituation (Figure 6A). A day later, however, these animals did not exhibit enhanced pre-CS freezing in the testing context (Figure 6A) but only a selective increase in freezing to the CS (testing, day 2) (Figure 6B). Notably, the levels of CS-induced freezing during the testing session were indistinguishable between the DHPG-treated Fmr1<sup>−/−</sup> and WT rats (Figure 6B). Thus, auditory conditioning, in conjunction with simultaneous in vivo activation of mGluR in the BLA, restored normal recall of fear memory in Fmr1<sup>−/−</sup> rats.
In vivo activation of mGluRs in the BLA restores learning-induced increase in behavioral and in vivo electrophysiological responses to the CS in Fmr1<sup>−/−</sup> rats

These results demonstrating reversal of amygdalar deficits in FXS rats, using in vitro and in vivo DHPG treatment, were gathered from separate measurements across levels of neural organization. The DHPG-induced corrections achieved at the level of synaptic plasticity and fear memory are consistent with each other, suggesting a link between them. To strengthen this link further, we attempted to integrate these different measures with DHPG infusion into a single experiment. To this end, we monitored if DHPG infusions into the BLA simultaneously corrected deficient recall of fear memory and its underlying in vivo correlate – impaired learning-induced potentiation of CS-responses in the BLA – in the same animal. Here too, we used the same fear conditioning protocol (Figure 6D) with targeted bilateral in vivo infusion of saline or DHPG directly into the BLA of freely behaving Fmr1<sup>−/−</sup> and WT rats, while carrying out in vivo recordings of the changes in CS-evoked AEPs unilaterally from the BLA (Figures 6C, S6B, and S6C). First, consistent with results shown in Figure 6B, in vivo mGluR activation in the BLA once again restored normal recall of conditioned fear in Fmr1<sup>−/−</sup> rats (data not shown). Next, in these same rats, simultaneous recordings of CS-evoked responses in the BLA (Figure 6E) allowed us to compare baseline AEPs (dotted lines) recorded on day 1 before infusion of saline/DHPG with those recorded during testing of fear recall (solid lines) on day 2 in both WT (black) and Fmr1<sup>−/−</sup> (red) rats. In rats receiving saline infusion into the BLA, auditory fear conditioning caused an increase in AEP amplitude in WT, but not Fmr1<sup>−/−</sup>, rats (Figure 6F). In striking contrast, in conditioned Fmr1<sup>−/−</sup> rats receiving DHPG infusions in the BLA, learning-induced potentiation of CS-evoked AEPs was restored (Figure 6F). Thus, in conditioned Fmr1<sup>−/−</sup> rats receiving DHPG infusions in the BLA, the deficient potentiation of CS-evoked responses in the BLA was prevented, allowing normal recall of fear memory. The deficit in learning-induced increase in theta power, seen in Fmr1<sup>−/−</sup> rats, was not fully restored by DHPG infusion into the BLA (Figures S6D and S6E). Finally, if learning-
lateral amygdala (LA)—that is known to mediate this behavior. Enhanced freezing behavior elicited by the tone CS was accompanied by increases in CS-evoked auditory-evoked field potentials in the intact LA of conditioned WT, but not Fmr1<sup>+/y</sup> rats. This deficit was also evident at the synaptic level as impaired LTP in LA principal neurons. Consistent with this LTP deficit, postsynaptic surface expression of the AMPA receptor subunit, GluA1, was reduced in the LA. We also found evidence for reduced presynaptic release in the Fmr1<sup>+/y</sup> rats manifested as a reduction in mEPSC frequency. This presynaptic effect, in turn, served as the starting point for a second line of inquiry—how these deficits associated with FXS may be reversed by targeting mGluRs. Strikingly, in contrast to earlier strategies involving inactivation of mGluR-signaling to correct abnormalities in the hippocampus (Dölen et al., 2007), pharmacological activation of mGluRs reversed the impairment in presynaptic release, as well as LTP, in the LA. mGluR-activation caused a reduction in postsynaptic surface expression of GluA1, suggesting a presynaptic mechanism through which DHPG strengthens synaptic transmission. Consistent with this, our analysis demonstrates the presence of mGluR5 in the presynaptic compartment of LA synapses. We confirmed the functional consequences of activating these presynaptic receptors by showing that DHPG was capable of enhancing mEPSC frequency even when signaling triggered by postsynaptic mGluRs was blocked by chelating Ca<sup>2+</sup> in the postsynaptic neuron. Upon probing the benefits of this intervention at the behavioral level, we found that <i>in vivo</i> mGluR-activation in the BLA of freely behaving Fmr1<sup>+/y</sup> rats reversed deficient fear recall. Finally, this behavioral rescue was accompanied by a simultaneous reversal of the circuit level deficit in the same animal—the impairment of learning-induced enhancement of CS responses was also corrected by <i>in vivo</i> mGluR-activation in the amygdala. Together, these results demonstrate the contrasting nature of FXS-induced defects in the amygdala compared to previous findings in the hippocampus. Importantly, this led us to adopt an opposite pharmacological strategy to correct amygdalar aberrations—from synapses through circuit to behavior—in Fmr1<sup>+/y</sup> rats. Thus, group 1 mGluR signaling may still be an effective target for therapeutic interventions against amygdalar defects caused by FXS but in a manner that takes into account circuit-specific differences and presynaptic mechanisms.

Deficient excitatory synaptic transmission and plasticity in the amygdala, and its behavioral manifestation as impaired recall of cue-specific fear, are consistent with accumulating clinical evidence suggesting disruption of appropriate encoding of fear-related information seen in FXS individuals. For example, functional MRI revealed reduced amygdalar activity in affected individuals while viewing fearful facial expressions compared with other stimuli (Kim et al., 2014). Notably, the decrease in amygdala activation in these individuals was fear-specific because this was not seen when participants were viewing happy compared with other types of facial expressions. In men with the FMR1 premutation, attenuated amygdalar activation has also been seen during an emotion-matching task, as well as impaired startle potentiation while viewing fear faces (Hessl et al., 2011). Consistent with these neuroimaging studies, emotion-potentiated startle, a probe of amygdala activation, was found to be reduced in children and adolescents with FXS compared to a typically developing control group (Ballinger et al., 2014).

In the broader context of earlier findings, our analyses reveal differences, as well as common endpoints, underlying FXS-related synaptic defects in the amygdala and hippocampus. First, we found lower surface GluA1 in BLA slices, similar to that reported in cultured hippocampal neurons (Nakamoto et al., 2007). Second, DHPG application caused a postsynaptic reduction of surface GluA1 in the BLA, which is also similar to what has been seen in hippocampal neurons (Fitzjohn et al., 2001; Snyder et al., 2001; Xiao et al., 2001). Thus, the postsynaptic effects of both FXS and DHPG—reduction of surface GluA1—are similar in the amygdala and hippocampus. However, where the two brain areas appear to differ is on the presynaptic side. Consistent with earlier reports of lower presynaptic release in the LA of a mouse model of FXS (Suvrathan et al., 2010), we report reduced mEPSC frequency in the present study. However, no such reduction in presynaptic release has been observed in hippocampal area CA1 of adult Fmr1<sup>+/y</sup> mice (Braun and Segal, 2000; Pfeiffer and Huber, 2007). In fact, the opposite effect—higher spontaneous EPSC frequencies and lower pairwise-pulse ratios—have been reported in the hippocampus of younger Fmr1<sup>+/y</sup> mice (Contractor et al., 2015; Tyzio et al., 2014; Klemmer et al., 2011). The most notable difference emerges from the divergent effects of the mGluR-agonist, DHPG, in the two structures. Although DHPG is known to induce LTD in hippocampal area CA1, we show here that it reverses the impairment of LTD in the LA of Fmr1<sup>+/y</sup> rats, despite the baseline reduction in postsynaptic surface AMPARs. Moreover, although an earlier study (Rodrigues et al., 2002) reported postsynaptic localization of mGluR5 in the LA, here we identify presynaptic mGluR5 in the LA, providing a basis for the presynaptic effects of DHPG in the amygdala. The synaptic effects of DHPG in the hippocampus and amygdala are particularly interesting in light of our observations using expansion microscopy, which revealed the existence of both pre- and postsynaptic mGluR5 in these two brain areas. This analysis suggests a greater abundance of presynaptic mGluR5 in the BLA relative to the CA1 area, and more postsynaptic mGluR5 in area CA1 compared to the BLA. Hence, future studies will have to take into account both pre- and postsynaptic effects of mGluR-activation, as well as their brain region-specific variations.

This is also interesting in light of accumulating evidence for the presence of fragile X mental retardation protein (FMRP) in pre-synaptic or axonal FMRP-containing granules (Akins et al., 2012, 2017; Christie et al., 2009). Specifically, FMRP, which regulates mRNA localization and translation, exhibits distinct brain region-specific patterns of expression in presynaptic compartments and its dysregulation may also contribute to the neurological symptoms of FXS (Akins et al., 2009). This warrants exploring if the levels of presynaptically localized FMRP are different between the LA and the hippocampus. Further, it was recently shown that fear conditioning elicits changes in the translatore in cortical axons that project to the LA (Ostroff et al., 2019). Notably, pathway analysis of the fear learning-induced changes in ribosome-bound mRNAs indicates that FMRP is one of the key upstream regulators of axonal protein synthesis in the LA. In the hippocampus, it is well known that
DHPG stimulates postsynaptic protein synthesis (Raymond et al., 2000; Weiler and Greenough, 1993), which is disrupted in Fmr1<sup>−/−</sup> mice (Bowling et al., 2019; Darnell and Klann, 2013; Hou et al., 2006; Osterweil et al., 2010; Waung and Huber, 2009). Thus, it will be important to determine whether fear conditioning-induced presynaptic protein synthesis in the LA requires mGluR5 and whether it is disrupted in Fmr1<sup>−/−</sup> rats.

Finally, these differences in mGluR-dependent synaptic transmission, and its aberration in FXS, add to growing evidence for brain region-specific, even cell-type-specific, changes induced by the loss of FMRP (Contractor et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2014). This also poses a significant therapeutic challenge because a pharmacological strategy that is effective in one brain area, such as an mGluR5-antagonist in the hippocampus, may need to be modified for another area like the amygdala. Recent failures of clinical trials using mGluR5-antagonists may be indicative of some of these issues related to circuit-specific differences. For example, a randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled trial using a selective mGluR5-antagonist did not reveal any significant effect on emotional function in FXS patients (Berry-Kravis et al., 2016). Thus, an essential step toward overcoming these challenges requires us to focus on specific behavioral symptoms of FXS and then probe the underlying functional changes at the synaptic and molecular levels within specific circuits underlying those particular behavioral deficits. In the present study, we attempted to achieve this by leveraging the advantages offered by auditory fear conditioning, a well-established model of fear learning for which the underlying neural circuitry has been characterized extensively. This enabled us to systematically probe if perturbations caused by FXS at one level of neural organization are consistent with predicted alterations at another. Findings gathered from such an approach offer a new framework, spanning biological scales, for understanding and modulating activity in a well-defined fear circuit and thereby suggesting strategies for treating affective symptoms associated with FXS.

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**SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION**

Supplemental information can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.celrep.2021.109805.

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**AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS**

G.F., P.K.M., M.M.R., and S.C. designed the study. G.F., P.K.M., M.S.N., P.G.D.-A., A.H., S.K., A.K., and D.S. conducted the experiments and analyzed data. M.M.R. provided computer code for and assisted in the analysis of in vivo electrophysiological data. G.F. and S.C. wrote the paper along with input from all authors.

**DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

The authors declare no competing interests.

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KEY RESOURCES TABLE

| REAGENT or RESOURCE | SOURCE | IDENTIFIER |
|---------------------|--------|------------|
| Antibodies          |        |            |
| anti-GluR1 NT, mouse monoclonal | Millipore, MAB2263. | RRID:AB_11212678 |
| anti-avidin, mouse monoclonal | Invitrogen, MA1-21418 | RRID:AB_557672 |
| anti-RIM1, guinea pig polyclonal | Synaptic Systems, 140005 | RRID:AB_2661872 |
| anti-Homer, guinea pig polyclonal | Synaptic Systems, 160004 | RRID:AB_10549720 |
| anti-mGluR5, rabbit polyclonal | Neuromics, RA16100 | RRID:AB_1619239 |
| IR dye 680RD anti-Rabbit IgG | Li-COR Biotecology | Cat# - P/N 926-68071 |
| IR dye 800CW anti-mouse IgG | Li-COR Biotecology | Cat# - P/N 926-32210 |
| Chemicals, peptides, and recombinant proteins | | |
| (S) 3,5-Dihydroxyphenylglycine (DHPG) | Abcam | Cat# - Ab120007 |
| EZ-Link™ Sulfo- NHS-SS-Biotin | Thermo Fisher | Cat# - 21331 |
| Pierce Neutravidin agarose | Thermo Fisher | Cat# - 29200 |
| Experimental Models: Organisms/Strains | | |
| Rat: Fmr1<sup>−/−</sup>, Sprague Dawley | Sage Labs (now part of Horizon Discovery) | |

Deposited data

Code used in data analysis | This paper | https://zenodo.org/record/5502814 |

RESOURCES AVAILABILITY

Lead contact
Further information and requests for resources and reagents should be directed to and will be fulfilled by the corresponding author, Dr. Sumantra Chattarji (shona@ncbs.res.in).

Materials availability
This study did not generate new unique reagents or biological samples.

Data and code availability
All data reported in this paper is available from the Lead Contact upon request.

All original code has been deposited at Zenodo and is publicly available as of the date of publication. The DOI is listed in the Key resources table.

Any additional information required to reanalyze the data reported in this work is available from the Lead Contact upon request.

EXPERIMENTAL MODEL AND SUBJECT DETAILS

Male Fmr1<sup>−/−</sup> Sprague Dawley rats and their wild-type (WT) littermate controls (8-10 weeks old, 300-350 g) were obtained from Sigma Advanced Genetic Engineering (SAGE) Labs (St. Louis, MO, USA) and maintained on a 14-h/10-h light/dark cycle with food and water provided ad libitum. All experimental subjects were group housed (2-5 animals/cage) to avoid the effects of isolation and randomly assigned to experimental groups. Experiments were done blind to genotype. Rats were handled for 2-3 days to habituate them to the experimenter before the start of each experiment. All experiments were conducted in accordance with the guidelines of the CPCSEA, Government of India and approved by the Institutional Animal Ethics Committees of the National Centre for Biological Sciences and the Institute for Stem Cell and Regenerative Medicine.

METHOD DETAILS

Behavioral protocols
Fear conditioning and fear memory recall tests were performed in different contexts located inside sound-isolation boxes (Coulbourn Instruments, Whitehall, PA, USA). Foot-shocks (US) were delivered through metal grids on the floor (context A: 12 inches wide x 10
and fall, 70

five presentations of an auditory tone (5 kHz, 30 s tone consisting of 30 pips of 100 ms duration at a frequency of 1 Hz; 5 ms rise and fall, 70 ± 5 dB sound pressure level) in context A. This was immediately followed by the fear conditioning protocol, where the tone (CS) was paired (7 pairings, average inter-trial interval < ITI > = 120 s, with a range of 80–160 s) with a co-terminating 0.5 s scrambled foot shock (US; 0.5 mA). In the testing session (Day 4), the rats were introduced into context B and presented with the same tone (CS) to test recall of fear memory. Behavioral recordings were made using a video camera fixed to the wall of the sound isolation box and a frame grabber (sampling at 30 Hz). The videos were stored offline for further manual quantification of freezing behavior by a blind experimenter. Freezing was defined as the absence of movement except due to respiration. In addition to the time spent freezing to the tones, freezing levels were measured for a 10 s period (pre-CS) immediately before the start of the tone trials for every session to assess context-dependent fear. In experiments with targeted bilateral infusions (Figure 6), saline or DHPG was infused into the BLA 30 min before tone habituation. In experiments with both infusions and AEP recordings (Figures 6C–6G), a baseline was included immediately before the infusion of saline or DHPG.

Surgical procedures and in vivo extracellular recordings

Rats were subjected to anesthesia with 5% isoflurane and then sustained in anesthesia with 1.5%–2% isoﬂurane. The level of anesthesia was frequently monitored throughout the procedure using the pedal withdrawal reflex to toe pinch and body temperature maintained with a heating pad. Burr holes were drilled at the stereotaxic co-ordinates of the BLA (3.3 mm posterior to bregma and ± 5.3 mm lateral to midline) and a bundle of 4 formavar-insulated stainless steel electrodes (50 μm diameter; AM Systems, Carpinteria, WA, USA) were implanted using the stereotaxic frame (8.3 mm ventral from the brain surface). The implant was secured using anchor screws and dental acrylic cement. One of the anchor screws was connected to the ground electrode. Similar surgical procedures were used during bilateral implantation of stainless-steel cannulae (Figures 6 and S6) for targeted infusion of DHPG into the BLA. Guide cannulae were implanted using the stereotaxic frame (7.0 mm ventral from the brain surface) and dummy cannulae (28 gauge, with a 0.5 mm projection) were inserted into them to prevent clogging. In experiments with both infusion and AEP recordings (Figures 6 and S6), bundled electrodes (as described above) were attached to one of the guide cannulae and implanted unilaterally. Rats were permitted to recover for 7–10 days following surgery. In the post-surgery period, the rats were singly housed in separate cages. AEPs were recorded using a unit gain buffer head stage (HS-36-Flex; Neuralynx, Bozeman, MT, USA) and the Digilynx data acquisition system (Neuralynx). Signals were amplified (1000X) and acquired at a sampling rate of 1 kHz followed by a band-pass filter (1-500 Hz) using Cheetah data acquisition software (Neuralynx).

Data analysis

AEPs -

The recorded AEPs were averaged over all the tone pips for the specified trial blocks. Averaged AEPs were quantified by measuring the amplitude and slope as the difference between the maxima after the onset of the response and the negative peak. AEP amplitudes and slopes were calculated during tone habituation and testing of fear memory. All AEP amplitudes and slopes were normalized as a percentage of the value during tone habituation (Figure 1) or pre-infusion baseline (Figures 6C–6G) for each animal.

Time-frequency analysis -

Event related variations in spectral power were calculated by time-frequency analysis executed using continuous wavelet transformation (MATLAB, MathWorks Inc., Natick, MA, USA) on the averaged AEPs. Complex Morlet wavelets were used to compute the phase and amplitude of evoked responses within a frequency range from 2 to 100 Hz in steps of 0.1 Hz. The bandwidth parameter and center frequency of the mother wavelet were 2 and 1 Hz respectively. Subsequently, the wavelet power of the time series was calculated and expressed in decibels. Baseline average power for the duration of 0 to –200 ms was subtracted across all time points for each frequency bands. Tone evoked theta power was computed over the duration of 0 to 250 ms from tone onset for frequencies from 2 to 12 Hz.

Targeted pharmacological infusion of DHPG into the BLA

Bilateral infusion of DHPG in the BLA was done using standard pressure injection methods (Rahman et al., 2017). During the infusion procedure, the rats were retained in their home cages and an injection cannula with 1 mm projection (28 gauge, Plastic One, Roanoke, VA, USA) were inserted through the guide-cannula. Using polyethylene tubing, the injection cannulae was connected to a Hamilton syringe (10 μl), mounted on an infusion pump (Harvard Apparatus, Holliston, MA, USA). Either vehicle (0.9% (vol/vol) NaCl (1.0 μl per side) or DHPG (1.0 μl per side, 50 μM in saline; Ab120007 Abcam, Cambridge, UK) was infused at a rate of 0.2 μl/min. The injection cannula was held in place for 5 min after the end of infusion, to permit the drug to diffuse into the tissue.

Histology

After the experiment was completed, rats were deeply anesthetized (ketamine/xylazine, 100/20 mg per kg) and electrolytic lesions (20 μA, 20 s) were made through the implanted cannulae and electrodes to mark the recording and infusion sites. The animals were
then perfused transcardially with ice-cold saline (0.9%) followed by 10% (vol/vol) formalin. The perfused brain was left in 10% (vol/vol) formalin overnight. Coronal sections (80 μm) were prepared using a vibrating microtome (VT 1200S, Leica Microsystems, Wetzlar, Germany) and mounted on gelatin-coated glass slides. Sections were stained with 0.2% (wt/vol) cresyl violet solution and mounted with DPX. The slides were imaged to identify and reconstruct recording and infusion sites. 2 rats were excluded from the study due to incorrect positioning of the electrode bundles (Figure 1). Another 11 rats were excluded due to incorrect placement of either or both the electrodes and infusion cannulae (Figure 6).

In vitro coronal slice preparation
Rats were anaesthetized using halothane, decapitated and their brains were quickly dissected out and transferred to oxygenated, ice-cold cutting solution containing (in mM): 75 sucrose, 86 NaCl, 25 glucose, 2.5 KCl, 1.2 NaH₂PO₄, 25 NaHCO₃, 3.3 HEPES, 7 MgCl₂, 0.5 CaCl₂; equilibrated with 95% O₂ and 5% CO₂, pH 7.3, 305-310 mOsm. Acute coronal brain slices (400 μm thick) containing the amygdala were obtained in the cutting solution using a vibrating microtome (VT 1200S, Leica Microsystems), transferred to a submerged holding chamber and allowed to recover for 1 h at room temperature.

Whole-cell recordings
Slices were transferred to a submersed recording chamber (maintained at 28 ± 2°C) and perfused at a flow rate of 1.5-2 ml/min with oxygenated artificial cerebrospinal fluid (ACSF) consisting of (in mM): 115 NaCl, 25 glucose, 25.5 NaHCO₃, 1.05 NaH₂PO₄, 3.3 KCl, 2 CaCl₂ and 1 MgSO₄. LA principal neurons were visually identified using an upright differential interference contrast microscope (BX50WI, Olympus, Tokyo, Japan). Patch pipettes (3-5 MΩ resistance), pulled from thick walled Borosilicate glass using a P1000 Flaming/Brown micropipette puller (Sutter Instruments, Novato, CA, USA) and filled with an internal solution containing (in mM) 120 K-glucone, 20 KCl, 10 HEPES, 4 NaCl, 4 MgATP, 0.3 NaGTP, 0.2 EGTA and 10 phosphocreatine (pH 7.4, ~285 mOsm) were used to patch on to principal neurons in the LA. In experiments where evoked responses were recorded, a bipolar electrode (25 μm diameter Platinum/Iridium, FHC, Bowdoin, ME, USA) connected to an ISO-Flex stimulator (A.M.P.I., Jerusalem, Israel) was used to stimulate the internal capsule containing the thalamic inputs to the amygdala. For all recordings, neurons were held at −70 mV. Neurons were used for recording if the initial resting membrane potential (Vₘᵦ) < −60 mV and series resistance (Rₛ) between 15-25 MΩ. Neurons that exhibited more than a 20% change in Rₛ during the recording were not included for analysis. Data were acquired using an EPC-9 amplifier (HEKA Elektronik GmbH, Lambrecht/Pfalz, Germany), filtered at 2.9 kHz (Bessel filter) and digitized at 20 kHz. Data acquisition and current injections were performed using the Patchmaster software (HEKA Elektronik GmbH). Electrophysiological data were analyzed using custom-written programs in IGOR Pro (WaveMetrics, Portland, OR, USA), unless otherwise stated.

Long-term potentiation (LTP)
Evoked responses of neurons in the lateral amygdala (LA) were recorded in response to stimulation of internal capsule fibers containing thalamic inputs to the LA (at 0.05 Hz). In the ‘DHPG’ groups (Figures 5A–5C), 100 μM DHPG was bath applied to the slices for 10 min after transferring to the recording chamber. Following this, a 5 min stable baseline was recorded, at 0.05 Hz and LTP induced at the thalamic inputs no later than 30 min after termination of DHPG incubation. LTP was induced by application of 2 trains of 100 pulses, each at 30 Hz frequency. Post LTP induction, EPSPs were recorded for 30 min at 0.05 Hz. LTP was quantified in Igor Pro (WaveMetrics) by measuring the initial slope of the EPSP, calculated during a 1–2 ms period, by placing cursors within the 10 to 90 range of the baseline EPSP slope. The same cursor settings were maintained for slope measurements over the entire pre and post-LTP time course for each cell. The measured EPSP slopes were then normalized to the average baseline value for each cell. For statistical comparison, EPSP slope values normalized to baseline, during the 25-30 min period after LTP induction was compared across groups.

Miniature excitatory postsynaptic current (mEPSC) recordings
mEPSCs were recorded in voltage-clamp mode using an internal solution containing (in mM): 110 gluconic acid, 110 CsOH, 20 CsCl, 0.2 EGTA, 10 HEPES, 4 NaCl, 4 Mg-ATP, 0.3 Na-GTP, 10 phosphocreatine, 5 QX-314 (pH 7.4; ~295 mOsm). mEPSCs were isolated in the presence of picrotoxin (75 μM) and TTX (0.5 μM) in the perfusate. 10μM of 3-[(2-methyl-1,3-thiazol-4-yl) ethynyl] pyridine (MTEP) was added to the perfusate to inhibit mGlur5. In experiments where post-synaptic Ca²⁺ was chelated out (Figures 4E and 4F), BAPTA (1,2-bis(o-aminophenoxy)ethane-N,N,N',N'-tetraacetic acid, 10 mM) was added in the internal solution. Baseline current traces of 5 min duration (beginning at least 5 minutes after achieving whole-cell configuration) were recorded. 100 μM of DHPG was applied in the bath solution for 10 minutes and then washed out for 30 min. Baseline synaptic activity was determined by analyzing 5 min of continuous current traces immediately before DHPG application. To study the effect of DHPG on the mEPSCs, 5 min of recordings were performed during the drug application and the last 5 min of the DHPG washout recordings were analyzed to assess the post-DHPG synaptic release. Mini Analysis Program (Synaptosoft Inc., Decatur, GA, USA) was used for analyzing the traces. One outlier sample (> 2 SD) was excluded from the Fmr1⁺/− group in Figures 2C and S2.

Paired-pulse ratios
Evoked EPSCs from principal neurons in the LA were obtained upon stimulation of the internal capsule containing thalamic inputs to the LA. A pair of stimuli was delivered with an interstimulus interval of 25ms and the responses averaged across 10 trials. Paired-pulse
Biochemical analysis of surface and total GluA1

Coronal slices were obtained as described above and allowed to recover at RT for 1h in ACSF containing (in mM): 115 NaCl, 25 glucose, 25.5 NaHCO3, 1.05 NaH2PO4, 3.3 KCl, 3.3 HEPES, 2 CaCl2 and 1 MgSO4. Slices were then transferred to a chamber with 50µM DHPG for 10 min at RT followed by incubation with 0.6mg/ml biotin (EZ-Link™ Sulpho- NHS-SS-Biotin, Thermo Fisher, Waltham, MA, USA) at 4°C for 45 min. Ice cold 25mM Tris-ACSF was added to stop the biotinylation reaction. The BLA was micro-dissected out, flash-frozen and stored at −80°C. The tissue were homogenized in RIPA buffer containing 50mM Tris-HCl, 1% TritonX, 0.5% Na-deoxycholate, 0.1% SDS, 150mM NaCl, 50mM NaH2PO4, 2mM EDTA, 2X protease inhibitor cocktail, 1X phosphatase inhibitor cocktail 2, and phosphatase inhibitor cocktail. 100 µg of each sample was incubated overnight with 40mg of precleared Neutravidin beads at 4°C. The beads were washed three times with RIPA buffer. Finally, 40ul of 2X laemmli buffer (20% glycerol, 4% SDS, 125mM ris-HCl, PH-6.8, 0.004% bromo-phenol Blue, 1% beta mercapto-ethanol) was added to the beads, heated at 90°C for 5 min and spun down. 10ul of the supernatant was loaded and separated in a precast gradient gel (NuPAGE 4%-12% Bis-Tris Protein Gels, Thermo Fisher). The resolved proteins were transferred to nitrocellulose membrane in a Bio-Rad transfer apparatus. Membranes were washed with 1X Tris-buffered saline (TBS) and blocked with 1:1 TBS: Odyssey Blocking Buffer (LI-COR Biosciences, Lincoln, NE, USA) containing 0.1% Tween20 for 1h at RT followed by incubation with primary antibodies (1:1000 anti-GluA1, Millipore, RRID:AB_11212678; 1:1000 anti-avidin, RRID:AB_557672, Thermo Fisher) overnight at 4°C. After washing with 1X TBST, the membranes were incubated for 1 h with secondary antibodies (1: 10,000 IRDye 800CW goat anti-rabbit IgG; 1: 10,000 IRDye 680LT goat anti-mouse IgG; LI-COR Biosciences) at RT followed by washes in 1X TBST. The immunoblots were dried and digitally scanned by using the Fc Odyssey Infrared Imaging System, (LI-COR Biosciences). Densitometric analysis was performed with the help of the Li-Cor Image Studio Lite software.

Immunofluorescence in tissue sections

Brain sections were incubated in 4% goat serum + 0.5% Triton X-100 for 4 h. Primary antibody staining (1:500 anti-RIM1, RRID:AB_2661872; 1:500 anti-Homer1, RRID:AB_10549720; Synaptic Systems; 1:500 anti mGluR5, RRID:AB_1619239; Neuromics) was carried out overnight in the same buffer at 4°C. Samples were washed 5x in PBS before carrying out secondary antibody staining for 3 h at room temperature.

Expansion microscopy

Following immunofluorescence labeling, samples were treated with Acryloyl-X-SE (Thermo Fisher) overnight at RT. 200 µl of monomer solution was added to the coverslip and gelation was carried out at 37°C for 1 h. Tissue sections were pre-incubated in monomer solution at 4°C for 30 min, prior to transferring the samples to 37°C for 2 h to allow gelation to occur. Following ProteinaseK digestion overnight, slightly expanded gels were transferred to a larger dish and water exchange was performed until gels were fully expanded. Expanded gels were transferred into 50x7 mm glass bottom dishes for imaging. Expanded gels were imaged using Zeiss (Jena, Germany) LSM780/880 confocal microscopes and a 40x oil objective (NA 1.3, PSF: LSM780- 0.217/0.260/0.566 μm; LSM880- 0.238/0.253/0.636 μm x/y/z). Z stacks (0.37 μm 63x/ 0.43 μm 40x) spanning the entire volume of tissue were obtained and analyzed using Imaris (Bitplane, Zürich) and ImageJ.

Image analysis

The maximum intensity projections of both the amygdala and hippocampus were assessed in order to evaluate the position of mGluR5 relative to pre (RIM1) and post-synaptic (Homer1) markers (Hafner et al., 2019). Line scan analysis was performed through single synapses where both synaptic signals (mGluR5 & either RIM1/Homer1) were present. Only signals where a 1 μm x 1 μm ROI fully encompassed adjacent/co-localized signals were included for analysis. Performing a line scan of a 1 μm ROI through the signals of interest, the intensity distribution for over 200 individual synapses were assessed per condition/per experiment. The peak-to-peak distance was then calculated for the sum of all the assessed pairs for each experiment.

QUANTIFICATION AND STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

For all plots, ‘n’ denotes the number of neurons while ‘N’ denotes number of rats, unless otherwise stated. All figures represent mean ± SEM (except the cumulative probability graphs). All statistical tests were performed using GraphPad Prism (GraphPad Software Inc., San Diego, CA, USA) and are included in the figure legends. Data points deviating more than 2 SD values from the mean were excluded from the analyses. All datasets passed a test for normality (D’Agostino-Pearson test) and significance was determined using parametric tests (with an exception of the KS test) with an alpha value of 0.05. All tests were performed using a two-tailed design, assumption of equal variances and corrected for multiple comparisons. Sample sizes were not determined prior to the experiments and were sufficient to get significant effects.