EVENT RELATED EVOKED POTENTIALS IN HYPERTENSIVE SUBJECTS

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Abstract: Cognitive functions were assessed in hypertensive and sex and age matched healthy controls using auditory event related evoked potential 'odd ball' paradigm. The N2 and P3 latencies in the hypertensive subjects were significantly delayed as compared to controls. There was also correlation of blood pressure (BP) with N2 latency in hypertensive group. These findings suggest that cortical neurophysiological events, depicting information processing and memory are modulated by rise in BP and cognition is delayed in hypertensive cases.

Key words: event related evoked potential
          P3 potential
          hypertension
          cognition

INTRODUCTION

Diffuse cerebrovascular abnormalities on postmortem have been found in hypertensive patients despite their having no neurological complications (1). Inspite of such frequent cerebral damage, neurological symptoms and signs seem to be rare and mild in hypertensive patients (2). Higher brain functions including attributes of behaviour have not been well documented in hypertensive cases, though behavioral factors have been implicated in the pathophysiology of hypertension. These psychosomatic or behavioural factors may induce personality profiles making individual vulnerable to stressful influences and cause permanent enhancement of the CNS autonomic drive (3). Hence the hypertensive individuals often report slightly decreased power of concentration, light headedness and easy fatigue causing impairment in intellectual performance (4). These symptoms might correlate with diffuse and mild cerebrovascular abnormalities, but might also be explained by neurophysiological cortical depression, clearly shown in experimental models (5) or by emotional reactions to illness. As such, effect of raised blood pressure on cognitive function is a controversial issue. Some reports advocate adverse effect on memory, logical reasoning and attention (6). While others deny this and also the association of BP with cognitive performance (7). In the present study we wish to report an electrophysiological evidence of delay in cognitive function in patients suffering from essential hypertension.

METHODS

Twenty four middle aged (twelve normal healthy controls, 12 hypertensive patients) were the subjects of the study. Newly diagnosed patients from OPD of GTB Hospital having a diastolic BP above 90 and systolic > 140 mm Hg on three consecutive visits, belonging to mild to moderate grades of hypertension were selected for this study. They were thoroughly investigated and labelled as cases of essential hypertension. Before putting them on any therapy, they were tested for cognitive evoked potential responses. Age and sex matched normal controls were picked.

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up from the paramedical staff of the UCMS & GTB Hospital. Auditory event related evoked potential responses were studied in these subjects using standard 'odd ball' paradigm. The details of the methods used are given in our earlier studies (8–9). The process basically involves recording of P3 potential from the CZ–PZ scalp regions during a task in which subject concentrates on rare high pitched click sound and presses button when he hears them in a train of low pitched frequent and high pitched infrequent click sounds. Thirty two such responses were averaged during each trial. Unpaired student 't' test was done to find out significant changes in latency and amplitude of P3 in hypertensive subjects and compared to controls. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was also done to compare various parameters (wt, ht, age) and BP (systolic and diastolic) with N2, P3 latencies and P3 amplitude of the event related evoked potentials and correlation coefficients worked out.

RESULTS

The subjects were middle aged and in each group there were 8 males and 4 females. The latencies of N2, P3 and amp. of P3 along with BP and physical parameters are shown in Table I. N2 and P3 latencies are significantly increased in hypertensive subjects. The other positive finding is the correlation between N2 latency and diastolic BP in hypertensives (Table II).

### TABLE I: Composite data giving Mean ± SD values of various physical and B.P. parameters and P3 event related evoked responses in controls and hypertensives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Control</th>
<th>Hypertensive</th>
<th>P-value</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age (yrs)</td>
<td>49.83 ± 11.0</td>
<td>48.75 ± 7.0</td>
<td>0.777</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Height (cms)</td>
<td>158.5 ± 7.7</td>
<td>162.33 ± 4.3</td>
<td>0.152</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weight (kg)</td>
<td>64.08 ± 5.3</td>
<td>58.55 ± 7.0</td>
<td>0.165</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systolic BP (mmHg)</td>
<td>129.17 ± 4.1</td>
<td>155.50 ± 20.5</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diastolic BP (mmHg)</td>
<td>77.7 ± 8.0</td>
<td>102.83 ± 8.1</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N2 (msec)</td>
<td>207.45 ± 45.5</td>
<td>256.83 ± 23.9</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3 (msec)</td>
<td>325.42 ± 17.4</td>
<td>360.0 ± 34.1</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3 amp (µV)</td>
<td>17.62 ± 2.2</td>
<td>12.47 ± 3.5</td>
<td>0.356</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE II: Showing values of correlation coefficients between different parameters in controls and hypertensives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Control</th>
<th>Hypertensive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N2</td>
<td>P3</td>
<td>P3 amp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wt.</td>
<td>0.154</td>
<td>0.3181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ht.</td>
<td>-0.3602</td>
<td>-0.515</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPS</td>
<td>0.2754</td>
<td>0.1656</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPD</td>
<td>0.514</td>
<td>0.3569</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N2</td>
<td>1.0000</td>
<td>-0.0235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>-0.0235</td>
<td>1.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3 (amp)</td>
<td>-0.3395</td>
<td>-0.1261</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Significant 0.05
DISCUSSION

The values of $N_2$, $P_3$ latencies in our control group were $207.4 \pm 45.5$ and $325.4 \pm 17.4$ (m sec), which are higher than the ones reported in our earlier study in young healthy adults (8). This may be due to the fact that these subjects were middle aged ($49.8 \pm 11.0$ yrs) and age related increase in latency of $P_3$ has been well documented (10). There was no significant difference in $N_2$ and $P_3$ latencies in male and females. Similar observation indicating that $P_3$ remains stable within individuals and is unaffected by sex has been reported (11).

The significant increase in $N_2$ and $P_3$ latency in the hypertensive subjects is an important finding (Table I). This would suggest that raised BP, somehow interacts with the generators of these potentials in the brain. The location of these generators is debated. Most of the reports say that they lie in hippocampus with cholinergic mediation and are concerned with memory (13-14). The $P_3$ latency and to a lesser extent preceding $N_2$ component is systematically related to the cognitive status of the patient as revealed by psychometry (14). Both $N_2$ and $P_3$ latencies covary and $N_2$ latency was found to correlate with the $P_3$ latency (15). Hence increased latency of both $N_2$ and $P_3$ components in the hypertensive group, would reflect impaired cognition. The initial $N_2$ component of the event related potential might represent sensory information processing and perceptive function and the $P_3$, the actual memory updating process.

Reports suggesting changes in vascular responses of blood vessels in the brain to the raised blood pressure, delaying sensory conduction are available (17). Hence something similar might be happening to blood vessels of the cortical brain areas where generators of event related evoked potentials are located, causing delay in sensory information processing ($N_2$ latency) and memory updating ($P_3$ latency). Exact mechanism of this effect on cognition in hypertensive patients needs further systematic studies. The negative correlation between diastolic BP and $N_2$ latency (Table II and Fig. 1) is yet another important finding, at present, it is difficult to explain this correlation. Since $N_2$ represents sensory information processing and it has correlation with BP in hypertensive subjects, it implies that brain generators for $N_2$ component of event related evoked potentials, modulate its own sensory inputs/transmission for cognitive functions. Already numerous studies have established this fact including studies from our laboratory (18-20). The exact interactions between vasomotor mechanisms controlling BP and the higher cortical areas concerned with cognitive functions needs to be explored.

![Fig. 1 Scatter diagram and regression line showing correlation between $N_2$ latency and diastolic B.P. in hypertensive cases.](image-url)
REFERENCES


