

**Studies of Respiratory *Chlamydia* Infections in
Mouse Models of *Chlamydia* Infection
And Alzheimer's Disease**

**Thesis Submitted for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy (Medical Genetics)**

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Table of Contents

Statement of Originality.....	8
Acknowledgements.....	8
Abstract	9
List of Abbreviations	11
1. General Introduction: Alzheimer’s Disease	13
1.1 Background	13
1.1.1 Features and Progression	14
1.2 Alzheimer’s Disease Pathology	16
1.2.1 Amyloid Plaques and the A β Peptide.....	16
1.2.1.1 β -amyloidogenesis.....	16
1.2.1.2 Properties of A β	17
1.2.1.3 The Neurotoxicity of Various Amyloid Assemblies	18
1.2.2 Laboratory Methods for Detecting Amyloids and Conformational Diversity	20
1.3 Alzheimer’s Disease Genetics	25
1.3.1 Early-Onset Alzheimer’s Disease.....	26
1.3.2 Late-Onset Alzheimer’s Disease.....	26
1.4 Aetiology of Late-Onset Alzheimer’s Disease	26
1.4.1 Amyloid Cascade Hypothesis	27
1.4.1.1 Evidence from Gene Mutations.....	27
1.4.1.2 Evidence from Tau	27
1.4.1.3 Evidence from A β Neurotoxicity.....	28
1.4.1.4 Limitations	28
1.4.1.5 Neuroinflammation and Cytokines in Alzheimer’s Disease	29
1.4.1.6 Oxidative Stress in Alzheimer’s Disease.....	30
1.4.1.7 Unresolved Questions in the Amyloid Cascade Hypothesis	32
1.5 Experimental Models of Alzheimer’s Disease	33
1.6 Risk Factors: Pathogens with Brain Sequelae	35
1.7 Pathogens and Alzheimer’s Disease	37
1.7.1 Bacteria	37
1.7.1.1 <i>Chlamydia pneumoniae</i> - Introduction	37
1.7.1.2 <i>Chlamydia pneumoniae</i> – Human Studies.....	39
1.7.2 Fungi	44
1.7.3 Viruses	44
1.8 <i>Chlamydia</i> Brain Infections in Animal Models: Previous Studies.....	44
1.8.1 Modelling Human <i>Chlamydia pneumoniae</i> Infections.....	48
1.8.2 Microglia and Brain Infections.....	48
1.9 Conclusions	50
1.9.1 Expected Outcomes and Significance	52
1.10 Hypotheses	52
1.11 Aims	52
2. General Materials and Methods	54
2.1 Animals.....	54
2.2 Infections	54
2.2.1 Time Courses	55
2.2.1.1 Adult Infection, short-term follow up.....	55
2.2.1.2 Adult Infection, long-term follow-up.....	55
2.2.1.3 Neonatal Infection, long-term follow-up.....	56
2.3 Tissue Preparation.....	57
2.3.1 Brains	57
2.3.2 Lungs	59
2.4 <i>Chlamydia</i> Infection Model Validation	59

2.4.1	Detection of Chlamydia by Real-Time Reverse Transcription PCR.....	59
2.4.1.1	RNA Isolation	59
2.4.1.2	Reverse Transcription.....	60
2.4.1.3	Real-time Reverse Transcription Polymerase Chain Reaction (RT-PCR)	60
2.5	Histology and Immunolabelling	62
2.5.1	Thioflavin S.....	62
2.5.2	Congo Red	62
2.5.3	A β Immunohistochemistry	62
2.6	Image Analysis	63
2.6.1	Congo Red Fluorescence	64
2.6.2	Thioflavin S.....	64
2.6.3	Congo Red Polarisation.....	65
2.6.4	A β Immunohistochemistry	66
2.7	Statistics.....	66
2.7.1	Infection Model Validation, <i>Chlamydia</i> Detection, RT-PCR.....	67
2.7.2	Brain Amyloid Histology and Immunohistochemistry.....	67
3.	<i>Chlamydia</i> Infection in Adult Mice	68
3.1	Introduction.....	68
3.2	Materials and Methods	69
3.2.1	Animals and Infections.....	69
3.2.2	Tissue Preparation	69
3.2.3	Infection Model Validation.....	69
3.2.4	Detection of <i>Chlamydia</i> by Immunolabelling	70
3.2.5	Histology and Immunolabelling for A β	71
3.2.6	Image Analysis	71
3.2.7	Expression of AD-Related Genes by RT-PCR	71
3.2.8	Statistics.....	71
3.3	Results	72
3.3.1	Validation of Infection Model.....	72
3.3.1.1	Weight Loss Post-Infection	72
3.3.1.2	<i>Chlamydia</i> Detection Studies in Lung and Brain – Adult Mice Followed-up Short-term	72
3.3.1.3	Antibody Labelling of Chlamydial Antigens for Adult Mice Infection Followed-up Short-term	75
3.3.1.4	<i>Chlamydia</i> Detection Studies in Brain – Adult Mice Followed-up Long-term	76
3.3.2	Investigation of Amyloid and A β Deposition: Adult Mice Followed-up Short-term.....	77
3.3.2.1	Thioflavin S Staining.....	77
3.3.2.2	Congo Red Fluorescence	79
3.3.2.3	Congo Red Polarisation.....	79
3.3.2.4	A β Immunolabelling	83
3.3.3	Investigation of Amyloid and A β Deposition: Adult Mice Followed-up Long-term	85
3.3.3.1	Thioflavin S Staining.....	85
3.3.3.2	Congo Red Fluorescence	85
3.3.3.3	Congo Red Polarisation.....	88
3.3.3.4	A β Immunolabelling	88
3.3.4	Comparison of Laboratory Amyloid Methods	91
3.3.5	Investigation of Infection-Induced Brain Transcriptional Changes: Adult Mice Followed-up Short-term.....	94
3.3.6	Investigation of Infection-Induced Brain Transcriptional Changes: Adult Mice Followed-up Long-term	94
3.4	Discussion	95
3.4.1	Infection Model Validation in Adult Mice – Does <i>Chlamydia</i> Enter the Brain?	95

3.4.2	Do Adult <i>Chlamydia</i> Infections Alter Amyloid or A β Deposition? Do Fluorescence and Antibody-Based Methods Only Detect A β -Amyloid?	97
3.4.3	Do Adult <i>Chlamydia</i> Infections Alter Brain Gene Expression?	101
3.4.4	Limitations	102
3.4.5	Conclusion.....	104
4.	<i>Chlamydia</i> Infection in Neonatal Mice	106
4.1	Introduction.....	106
4.2	Materials and Methods	106
4.2.1	Animals and Infections.....	106
4.2.2	Tissue Preparation	107
4.2.3	Infection Model Validation.....	107
4.2.3.1	Lung Damage Assessment.....	107
4.2.4	Histology and Immunolabelling for A β	107
4.2.5	Image Analysis	108
4.2.6	Gene Expression Microarray	108
4.2.6.1	RNA Isolation, Purification and cRNA Synthesis.....	108
4.2.6.2	Gene Expression Microarray	109
4.2.6.3	Bioinformatics Pathway Enrichment Analyses	110
4.2.7	Expression of AD-Related Genes by RT-PCR	112
4.2.8	Statistics.....	112
4.3	Results	113
4.3.1	Validation of Infection Model.....	113
4.3.1.1	Weight Loss Post-Infection	113
4.3.1.2	Assessment of Lung Damage.....	114
4.3.1.3	<i>Chlamydia</i> Studies in Lung and Brain – Neonatal Mice Followed-up Long-term	114
4.3.2	Investigation of Amyloid and A β Deposition: Neonatal Mice Followed-up Long-term	115
4.3.2.1	Thioflavin S Staining.....	115
4.3.2.2	Congo Red Fluorescence and Polarisation.....	115
4.3.2.3	A β Immunolabelling	119
4.3.3	Investigation of Infection-Induced Transcriptional Changes in Brain: Neonatal Mice Followed-up Long-term.....	121
4.3.3.1	Gene Expression Microarray: Pathway Enrichment Analysis	121
4.3.3.2	Gene Expression Microarray: Analysis of Individual Genes	125
4.3.3.3	Validation of Select Transcripts by RT-PCR	128
4.4	Discussion	129
4.4.1	Infection Model Validation in Neonatal Mice – Does <i>Chlamydia</i> Enter the Brain?	130
4.4.2	Do Neonatal <i>Chlamydia</i> Infections Alter Amyloid or A β Deposition?	130
4.4.3	Do Neonatal <i>Chlamydia</i> Infections Alter Brain Gene Expression?	130
4.4.4	Limitations	133
4.4.5	Conclusion.....	134
5.	Microglial Responses to Respiratory <i>Chlamydia</i> Infection.....	136
5.1	Introduction.....	136
5.2	Materials and Methods	136
5.2.1	Animals and Infections.....	136
5.2.2	Tissue Preparation	137
5.2.3	Microglia; IBA1 Immunohistochemistry	137
5.2.4	Congo Red Staining and IBA1 Immunohistochemistry.....	137
5.2.5	Expression of Microglia-Related Genes by RT-PCR.....	138
5.2.6	IBA1 Immunohistochemistry Image Analysis	138
5.2.7	Brain Microglia Immunohistochemistry Statistics	140
5.3	Results	141
5.3.1	Investigation of Microglial Activation and Proliferation: Adult Mice Followed-up Short-	

term	141
5.3.2 Investigation of Microglial Activation and Proliferation: Adult Mice Followed-up Long-term	141
5.3.3 Investigation of Microglial Activation and Proliferation: Neonatal Mice Followed-up Long-term	145
5.3.4 Investigation of Infection-Induced Microglial Transcriptional Changes	152
5.4 Discussion	153
5.4.1 Does Respiratory <i>Chlamydia</i> Infection Alter Brain Microglial Phenotype?.....	154
5.4.2 Limitations	157
5.4.3 Conclusion.....	159
6. General Discussion.....	160
6.1 Limitations and Future Directions.....	166
6.2 Conclusion.....	168
7. Appendices.....	170
7.1 Figures	170
7.2 Tables.....	171
7.3 Legal Information	172
7.4 Publications	172
7.5 Presentations (presenting author underlined)	174
7.5.1 International Conferences.....	174
7.5.2 National Conferences	174
7.5.3 Local Conferences and Other	174
8. References	176

Table of Figures

Figure 1. Estimated number of people living with dementia in Australia by year (left) and age (right).	13
Figure 2. Neuropathological features of Alzheimer’s disease (AD): neuritic A β -amyloid plaques (extracellular brown clumps) and neurofibrillary tangles (intracellular blue clumps).....	15
Figure 3. Macroscopic anatomy of a healthy adult brain and the brain of an Alzheimer’s disease patient.....	16
Figure 4. The pathways of APP processing.	17
Figure 5. Amino acid sequence of A β peptide (blue) and position in its precursor (orange).	18
Figure 6. Aggregation of A β [83]	19
Figure 7. Amyloid cascade hypothesis [285].	30
Figure 8. Neuroinflammation is mediated by specific glial populations; microglia (purple) and astrocytes (blue).	31
Figure 9. Neuroinflammation and oxidative stress in Alzheimer’s disease [291].....	33
Figure 10. Life cycle of <i>Chlamydia pneumoniae</i> [353].	38
Figure 11. Summary diagram of the putative mechanisms of <i>Cpn</i> brain infection in AD.....	51
Figure 12. Schematic of all infection scenarios used throughout the project.	56
Figure 13. Mouse brain section sampling scheme.	58
Figure 14. Processing of Congo red fluorescence images.	65
Figure 15. Post-intervention body weights of sham infected and <i>Cmu</i> -infected mice.	72
Figure 16. Relative expression of <i>Cmu</i> 16S rRNA in the lung (A) and brain (B) and relative expression of transcripts belonging to the innate immune system in the brain (C-L), assessed by RT-PCR in wild-type (WT) and APP/PS1 mice infected as adults and followed-up short-term.	74
Figure 17. <i>Chlamydia</i> Cel LPS kit labelling of brains from animals sham infected or <i>Cmu</i> -infected as adults, followed-up short-term.....	75
Figure 18. Immunofluorescence labelling with the pan- <i>Chlamydia</i> antibody, goat anti- <i>Chlamydia</i>	

(ab106853) of brains from animals sham infected or <i>Cmu</i> -infected as adults, followed-up short-term.	75
Figure 19. Relative expression of <i>Cmu</i> 16S rRNA in the brain (A) and relative expression of transcripts belonging to the innate immune system in the brain (B-L), assessed by RT-PCR in wild-type (WT) and APP/PS1 mice infected as adults and followed-up long-term.	77
Figure 20. Thioflavin S (TS) staining of infected adult wild-type (WT, A-B) and APP/PS1 (C-D) mice, followed-up short-term.	78
Figure 21. Congo red (CR) staining of infected adult wild-type (WT, A-B) and APP/PS1 (C-D) mice, followed-up short-term.	80
Figure 22. Congo red (CR) staining of infected adult wild-type (WT, A-B) and APP/PS1 (C-D) mice, followed-up short-term.	81
Figure 23. Positive controls for both Congo red (CR) fluorescence and Congo red polarisation, and magnified examples of A β -amyloid in the APP/PS1 mouse brain.	82
Figure 24. 4G8 antibody immunolabelling of A β for infected adult wild-type (WT, A-B) and APP/PS1 (C-D) mice, followed-up short-term.	84
Figure 25. Thioflavin S (TS) staining of infected adult wild-type (WT, A-B) and APP/PS1 (C-D) mice, followed-up long-term.	86
Figure 26. Congo red (CR) staining of infected adult wild-type (WT, A-B) and APP/PS1 (C-D) mice, followed-up long-term.	87
Figure 27. Congo red (CR) staining of infected adult wild-type (WT, A-B) and APP/PS1 (C-D) mice, followed-up long-term.	89
Figure 28. 4G8 antibody immunolabelling of A β for infected adult wild-type (WT, A-B) and APP/PS1 (C-D) mice, followed-up long-term.	90
Figure 29. Congo red polarised light microscopy compared to other common amyloid methods.	92
Figure 30. Examples of non-amyloid objects that were positive by Congo red fluorescence and quantification of the differences between all four A β methods.	93
Figure 31. Relative expression of <i>App</i> (A), <i>Psen1</i> (B) and <i>Mapt</i> (C) transcripts in wild-type (WT) and APP/PS1 mice infected as adults, followed-up short-term as determined by RT-PCR.	94
Figure 32. Relative expression of <i>App</i> (A), <i>Psen1</i> (B) and <i>Mapt</i> (C) transcripts in wild-type (WT) and APP/PS1 mice infected as adults, followed-up long-term as determined by RT-PCR.	95
Figure 33. Post-intervention body weights of sham infected and <i>Cmu</i> -infected mice.	113
Figure 34. Alveolar diameter of mice infected as neonates, followed-up long-term, as measured with the mean linear intercept (MLI) method.	114
Figure 35. Relative <i>Cmu</i> 16S rRNA expression in the lung (A) and brain (B), assessed by RT-PCR in wild-type (WT) and APP/PS1 mice <i>Cmu</i> -infected as neonates and followed-up long-term.	115
Figure 36. Thioflavin S (TS) staining of infected neonatal wild-type (WT, A-B) and APP/PS1 (C-D) mice, followed-up long-term.	117
Figure 37. Congo red (CR) staining of infected neonatal wild-type (WT, A-B) and APP/PS1 (C-D) mice, followed-up long-term.	118
Figure 38. Congo red (CR) staining of infected neonatal wild-type (WT, A-B) and APP/PS1 (C-D) mice, followed-up long-term.	119
Figure 39. 4G8 antibody immunolabelling of A β for infected neonatal wild-type (WT, A-B) and APP/PS1 (C-D) mice, followed-up long-term.	120
Figure 40. Venn diagram representing the four lists of differentially expressed brain transcripts identified by microarray for APP/PS1 mice <i>Cmu</i> -infected as neonates and followed-up long-term, using four normalisation and analysis methods.	122
Figure 41. Relative expression of (A) <i>App</i> , (B) <i>Psen1</i> , (C) <i>Mapt</i> and (D) <i>Casp1</i> transcripts in wild-type (WT) and APP/PS1 mice <i>Cmu</i> -infected as neonates, followed-up long-term as determined by RT-PCR.	129
Figure 42. Processing of IBA1 brightfield images.	139
Figure 43. IBA1 immunolabelling of infected adult wild-type (WT, A-B) and APP/PS1 (C-D) mice, followed-up short-term.	142

Figure 44. Additional measures of IBA1 immunolabelling of infected adult wild-type and APP/PS1 mice, followed-up short-term (10 days post-infection)	144
Figure 45. IBA1 immunolabelling of infected adult wild-type (WT, A-B) and APP/PS1 (C-D) mice, followed-up long-term.	146
Figure 46. Additional measures of IBA1 immunolabelling of infected adult wild-type and APP/PS1 mice, followed-up long-term (3 months post-infection)	148
Figure 47. IBA1 immunolabelling of infected neonatal wild-type (WT, A-B) and APP/PS1 (C-D) mice, followed-up long-term.	149
Figure 48. Additional measures of IBA1 immunolabelling of infected neonatal wild-type and APP/PS1 mice, followed-up long-term (6 months post-infection)	151
Figure 49. Relative expression of <i>Trem2</i> , <i>Cxcl14</i> and <i>C1qa</i> transcripts in wild-type (WT) and APP/PS1 mice as determined by RT-PCR..	153

Table of Tables

Table 1. Human studies investigating Alzheimer’s disease patients for <i>Chlamydia pneumoniae</i> infection.	41
Table 2. Forward and reverse primer sequences for RT-PCR.....	61
Table 3. PANTHER pathway enrichment analysis for the microarray intersection data.	123
Table 4. DAVID pathway enrichment analysis for the microarray union data.	123
Table 5. PANTHER pathway enrichment analysis for the microarray union data.	123
Table 6. GSEA pathway enrichment analysis on all four microarray datasets, partial list.	124
Table 7. Expression of transcripts in the “Alzheimer’s disease” KEGG pathway by microarray.	126
Table 8. Expression of additional genes in the AlzGene database by microarray.....	127
Table 9. Other notable gene expression changes by microarray.....	128
Table 10. GSEA pathway enrichment analysis on all four microarray datasets, full list.	171

Statement of Originality

"I hereby certify that the work embodied in the thesis is my own work, conducted under normal supervision. The thesis contains no material which has been accepted, or is being examined, for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made. I give consent to the final version of my thesis being made available worldwide when deposited in the University's Digital Repository, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968 and any approved embargo."

_____, 01/05/2020

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"If you wish to make an apple pie from scratch, you must first invent the universe."

— Carl Sagan, *Cosmos*

Abstract

Alzheimer's disease (AD) is a neurodegenerative proteopathy associated with progressive cognitive impairment and characterised neuropathologically by neurofibrillary tangles and A β -amyloid plaques. Brain presence of the common respiratory bacteria *Chlamydia pneumoniae* (*Cpn*) is proposed to induce AD β -amyloidosis but this is controversial, with human studies giving inconsistent results. Mouse studies have also been inconclusive, having previously used only wild-type mice, which do not usually form A β -amyloid, together with methods that do not distinguish non-amyloid A β deposits from A β -amyloid deposits. In addition, *Cpn* is not a natural mouse pathogen, requiring large inocula that are not physiologically relevant.

If *Chlamydia* has roles in AD pathogenesis, treating AD patients for *Cpn* infection may be a viable strategy. This study tests the broad hypothesis that respiratory *Chlamydia* infection can gain entry to the brain, increase brain A β or A β -amyloid deposition, trigger AD-relevant gene expression changes and cause neuroinflammation. To address limitations of past research, both wild-type mice and the APP/PS1 transgenic mouse model of β -amyloidosis were infected with *Chlamydia muridarum* (*Cmu*), a related natural mouse pathogen more appropriately modelling respiratory *Chlamydia* infection. Also, since a defining feature of amyloid is affinity for the dye Congo red, with concomitant yellow-green birefringence under cross-polarised light, 'gold standard' Congo red polarisation microscopy was used to assess A β -amyloid.

Wild-type and APP/PS1 mice were intranasally infected with *Cmu*, or sham infected with vehicle alone, and brains examined at 6 months of age. There were three endpoint matched infection scenarios: i) adult mice (6 months) followed-up short-term 10 days post-infection to assess *Cmu* brain entry and acute responses during peak respiratory infection, ii) adult mice (3 months) followed-up long-term at 3 months post-infection to assess *Cmu* brain persistence and longer-term responses and iii) neonatal mice (24 hours) followed-up long-term at 6 months to assess if early-life exposure may cause long-term changes.

Adult mice infected with 100 inclusion forming units (IFU) and followed-up short-term (10 days) had high *Cmu* 16S rRNA signal in lungs by real-time reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) and considerable weight loss, consistent with severe infection. Adult mice followed-up long-term (3 months) were therefore given a slightly lower dose (75 IFU) and showed modest weight loss, consistent with moderate infection. Neonatal mice, which require higher *Cmu* doses to produce the same disease severity, probably due to differences in immune responses, received 400 IFU within 24 hours after birth and were followed-up long-term (6 months). There was no clear weight loss but alveolar damage (estimated with mean linear intercept method in lung sections) was consistent with successful infection.

Only adult mice followed-up short-term had evidence of *Cmu* brain entry by 16S rRNA RT-PCR. Signal was small but increased brain levels of innate immune response gene transcripts were detected by RT-PCR, suggesting *Cmu* may have entered the brain in small quantities in early infection but was subsequently cleared, with no evidence of *Cmu* in the brain at long-term follow-up. Peripheral immune responses signalling across brain barriers could feasibly alter brain A β deposition whether or not brain entry occurred. However, there was no evidence for changes in A β or A β -amyloid deposition in any infection scenario by antibody 4G8 immunolabelling, thioflavin S or Congo red staining by fluorescence or polarised light microscopy, the 'gold standard' for amyloid detection.

Notably, 75% of A β -immunoreactive structures and 20% of fluorescent structures were non-birefringent.

No changes clearly relevant to AD were observed in expression of the AD-related genes *App*, *Psen1*, and *Mapt* with RT-PCR. Microarray and bioinformatics analyses of neonatal mice followed-up long-term also showed minor long-term changes but none appeared relevant to AD. There were no differences in microglial proliferation or morphology in any scenario as assessed by morphometric analysis of antibody IBA1-immunolabelled microglia.

The results support the hypothesis that respiratory *Chlamydia* infection can gain entry to the brain in early or later life but do not provide evidence for short- or long-term effects on brain A β deposition. Future studies could assess the validity of these findings by intracerebral injection of larger inocula of *Cmu*, or by infecting older mice with age-related immunosenescence. However, based on present evidence, there is no justification for screening and treating AD patients without concurrent respiratory illness for *Cpn* infection.

This project highlights the need for future AD studies to complement other methods with polarised light microscopy of Congo red staining, which is currently rarely performed in AD studies. Differentiating A β -amyloid and non-amyloid A β structures should improve understanding of the mechanisms underlying β -amyloidosis and of the actions of new drugs on A β deposition and β -amyloidosis in animal models before proceeding to human trials.

List of Abbreviations

4-HNE	4-hydroxynonenal
A β	amyloid- β
ABC	avidin-biotin complex
AD	Alzheimer's disease
ADAM	a disintegrin and metalloprotease
AICD	amyloid intracellular domain
ANOVA	analysis of variance
APOE	apolipoprotein E
APP	amyloid precursor protein
AUD	Australian dollar
BACE	β -site APP cleaving enzyme (also known as β -secretase)
BACT	β -actin
BLAST	Basic Local Alignment Search Tool
C1QA	complement C1q subcomponent subunit A
CA	cornu Ammonis (of hippocampus)
CASP	caspase
CD	cluster of differentiation
CERAD	Consortium to Establish A Registry for Alzheimer's Disease
CI	confidence interval
<i>Cmu</i>	<i>Chlamydia muridarum</i>
CNS	central nervous system
<i>Cpn</i>	<i>Chlamydia pneumoniae</i>
CR	Congo red
CS	cubic spline
CSF	cerebrospinal fluid
CXCL	C-X-C motif chemokine ligand
DAB	3,3'-diaminobenzidine
DAPI	4',6-diamidino-2-phenylindole
DAVID	Database for Annotation, Visualisation, and Integrated Discovery
Db	fractal dimension
ddH ₂ O	deionised, distilled water
DG	dentate gyrus
DNA	deoxyribonucleic acid
dNTP	deoxynucleotide triphosphate
DPX	di-n-butylphthalate in xylene
EB	elementary body
EDTA	ethylenediaminetetraacetic acid
EGF	epidermal growth factor
ELISA	enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay
EM	electron microscopy
EOAD	early onset Alzheimer's disease
FAD	familial Alzheimer's disease
FDR	false discovery rate
FGF	fibroblast growth factor
FITC	fluorescein isothiocyanate
GAPDH	glyceraldehyde 3-phosphate dehydrogenase
GFAP	glial fibrillary acidic protein
GSEA	gene set enrichment analysis
GSK-3 β	glycogen synthase kinase-3 β
GWAS	genome-wide association studies
HIV	human immunodeficiency virus
HPRT	hypoxanthine-guanine phosphoribosyl transferase
HRP	horseradish peroxidase
HSV	herpes simplex virus
IBA1	ionized calcium binding adaptor molecule 1

IHC	immunohistochemistry
IF	immunofluorescence
IFN	interferon
IFU	inclusion forming unit
IL	interleukin
iNOS/NOS2	inducible nitric oxide synthase
IVT	<i>in vitro</i> transcription
KEGG	Kyoto Encyclopaedia of Genes and Genomes
LOAD	late onset Alzheimer's disease
LPS	lipopolysaccharide
MAPT	microtubule-associated protein tau
MCI	mild cognitive impairment
M.O.M.	mouse-on-mouse
MS	multiple sclerosis
NCBI	National Centre for Biotechnology Information
NDS	normal donkey serum
NES	normalised enrichment score
NF- κ B	nuclear factor kappa-light-chain-enhancer of activated B cells
NGS	normal goat serum
NFT	neurofibrillary tangle
NMDA	N-methyl-D-aspartate
NSAID	non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug
NTP	nucleotide triphosphate
O.C.T.	optimal cutting temperature
PAMP	pathogen-associated molecular pattern
PANTHER	Protein Analysis through Evolutionary Relationships
PB	persistent body
PBS	phosphate buffered saline
PET	positron emission tomography
PP2A	protein phosphatase 2A
p-tau	phospho-tau
PS/PSEN	presenilin
r^2	coefficient of determination
RB	reticulate body
RNA	ribonucleic acid
rRNA	ribosomal RNA
ROS	reactive oxygen species
RT	room temperature
RT-PCR	real-time reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction
RTP	Research Training Program
Saa3	serum amyloid A 3
S.E.M.	standard error of the mean
SPG	sucrose-phosphate-glutamate
Stat	signal transducer and activator of transcription
tau	microtubule-associated protein tau
Th1	Type 1 T helper
TLR	toll like receptor
TM	transmembrane
TNF	tumour necrosis factor
TREM	triggering receptor expressed on myeloid cells
TS	thioflavin S
TSPO	translocator protein 18 kDa
TUNEL	terminal deoxynucleotidyl transferase dUTP nick end labelling
TX-100	Triton X-100
WT	wild-type