

Phosphorylation-Dependent Lys⁶³-Linked Polyubiquitination of Daxx Is Essential for Sustained TNF- α -Induced ASK1 Activation

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Abstract

Apoptosis signal-regulating kinase 1 (ASK1) is a key regulatory kinase in the proapoptotic response to various stresses. ASK1 phosphorylation of Daxx, an ASK1 activator protein, increases Daxx accumulation in cells and further enhances ASK1 activity through a positive feedback mechanism. Here, we show that ASK1-dependent phosphorylation of Daxx induces Lys⁶³ (K63)-linked polyubiquitination on Lys¹²² of Daxx. Polyubiquitination is dispensable for Daxx accumulation or Daxx interaction with ASK1 because mutant Daxx deficient in polyubiquitin still exhibits ASK1-dependent accumulation and interaction with cellular ASK1. However, K63-linked Daxx polyubiquitination is required for tumor necrosis factor- α (TNF- α)-induced activation of ASK1. Therefore, K63-linked polyubiquitination of Daxx functions as a molecular switch to initiate and amplify the stress kinase response in the TNF- α signaling pathway. [Cancer Res 2009;69(19):7512-7]

Introduction

Apoptosis signal-regulating kinase 1 (ASK1) is a mitogen-activated protein kinase kinase kinase that plays an essential role in the apoptotic response induced by tumor necrosis factor- α (TNF- α), Fas ligand, and oxidative stress (1, 2). Activated ASK1 phosphorylates MKK4/MKK6 mitogen-activated protein kinase kinases, leading to c-Jun NH₂-terminal kinase (JNK)/p38 mitogen-activated protein kinase activation. ASK1 can also be activated through direct interaction with Daxx, a Fas death domain-binding protein (3). Moreover, a positive feedback mechanism links Daxx and ASK1 (4), as ASK1 phosphorylation of two Daxx serine residues (Ser¹⁷⁶ and Ser¹⁸⁴) results in Daxx stabilization and accumulation, further enhancing ASK1 activation. In contrast, tumorigenic mutant p53 directly interacts with Daxx and inhibits Daxx accumulation and ASK1 activation, which prevents JNK activation and apoptosis (4, 5). These findings suggest that the Daxx-ASK1 positive feedback loop reinforces the amplification of downstream kinase activations, including JNK and p38, and that breaking this

circuit is part of the mechanism by which p53 gain-of-function mutations contribute to tumorigenesis.

Protein phosphorylation can induce polyubiquitination that results in proteasome-dependent protein degradation, a mechanism well documented for transcription factor NF- κ B activation. When TNF-associated factor 2 is activated, the NF- κ B inhibitor I κ B is phosphorylated by IKK α / β kinase and subsequently undergoes polyubiquitination-mediated degradation to release active NF- κ B, which then localizes to the nucleus (6). Target proteins destined for degradation through 26S proteasome-dependent mechanisms are generally conjugated with an identifying polyubiquitin chain(s) linked through internal ubiquitin Lys⁴⁸ (K48) residues (7). However, recent studies have identified chain elongations that occur via alternative ubiquitin lysine residues and that have proteasome-independent functions. One such example is Lys⁶³ (K63)-mediated polyubiquitination, which can mediate cellular signaling, DNA repair, protein localization, and endocytosis (8–10). The ubiquitin ligases TNF-associated factors 2 and 6, which harbor intact RING finger domains, mediate K63-linked polyubiquitination of themselves as well as stress-responsive kinases in signaling pathways activating JNK, p38, and IKK (11). Therefore, it is likely that the mode of ubiquitin chain linkage is closely related to their biological functions.

We report here that, following Daxx phosphorylation by ASK1, Daxx undergoes K63-linked polyubiquitination that, although not required for either Daxx interaction with ASK1 or Daxx stabilization, plays a critical role in Daxx-mediated ASK1 activation.

Materials and Methods

Plasmids construction. Specific Daxx substitution mutants were generated by site-directed mutagenesis. Daxx 75K, 122K, 135K, 140-2K, 208K, K0, and K122R were constructed by PCR with the primers:

K75R/F (5'-CTTGAACCTTTGTAGGATGCAGACAGCAGAC-3') and K75R/R (5'-GTCTGCTGTCTGCATCCTACAAAGTCAAG-3'), K122R/F (5'-CGGAGCCGGCCAGCGGACTTATGTCTAC-3') and K122R/R (5'-GTAGACATAGAGTCGCGCTGGCCGGCTCCG-3'), K135R/F (5'-CTCTGCACTGTCTCAGGGCCCACTCAGCC-3') and K135R/R (5'-GGCTGAGTGGCCCTGAGAACAGTGCAGAG-3'), K140-2R/F (5'-GCCCACTCAGCCAGACGCTGACTGAACTGGCC-3') and K140-2R/R (5'-GGCCAAGTTCAGTCGACGTCTGGCTGAGTGGGC-3'), and K208R/F (5'-CGGCGGCTGCAGGAACGCGAGTTGGATCTC-3') and K208R/R (5'-GAGATCCAACCTCGGTTCTGCAGCCGCCG-3').

Ub lysine mutants were constructed based on pCMV-Myc-His-Ub wild-type.

Note: Supplementary data for this article are available at Cancer Research Online (<http://cancerres.aacrjournals.org/>).

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Cell culture and transfection. Cells were cultivated in DMEM (HyClone) supplemented with 10% FCS. For transfection with plasmid DNA, 293 cells were transfected by using FuGene 6 (Roche) as recommended by the manufacturer. Transfections into either HeLa or MCF cells were done by electroporation with Nucleofector (Amaxa Biosystems) and OMNI kit (Magus Reagents) according to the manufacturer's directions. For ubiquitination assays, 2 days after transfection, cells were treated with 10 μ mol/L proteasome inhibitor MG115 for 12 h and harvested for protein analyses. For TNF- α stimulation, either HeLa or MCF7 cells were treated with TNF- α (Peprtech) for 18 h.

Immunoprecipitation and immunoblot analysis. Procedures for preparation of cell lysates, immunoprecipitation, and immunoblot are described previously (5). The primary antibodies were anti-green fluorescent protein (B-2; Santa Cruz Biotechnology), anti-FLAG (M5; Sigma), anti-HA (3F10; Roche), anti-Daxx (Sigma), anti-tubulin (Islet Cell Antibody), and anti-poly(ADP-ribose) polymerase (Affinity Bioreagents).

Results and Discussion

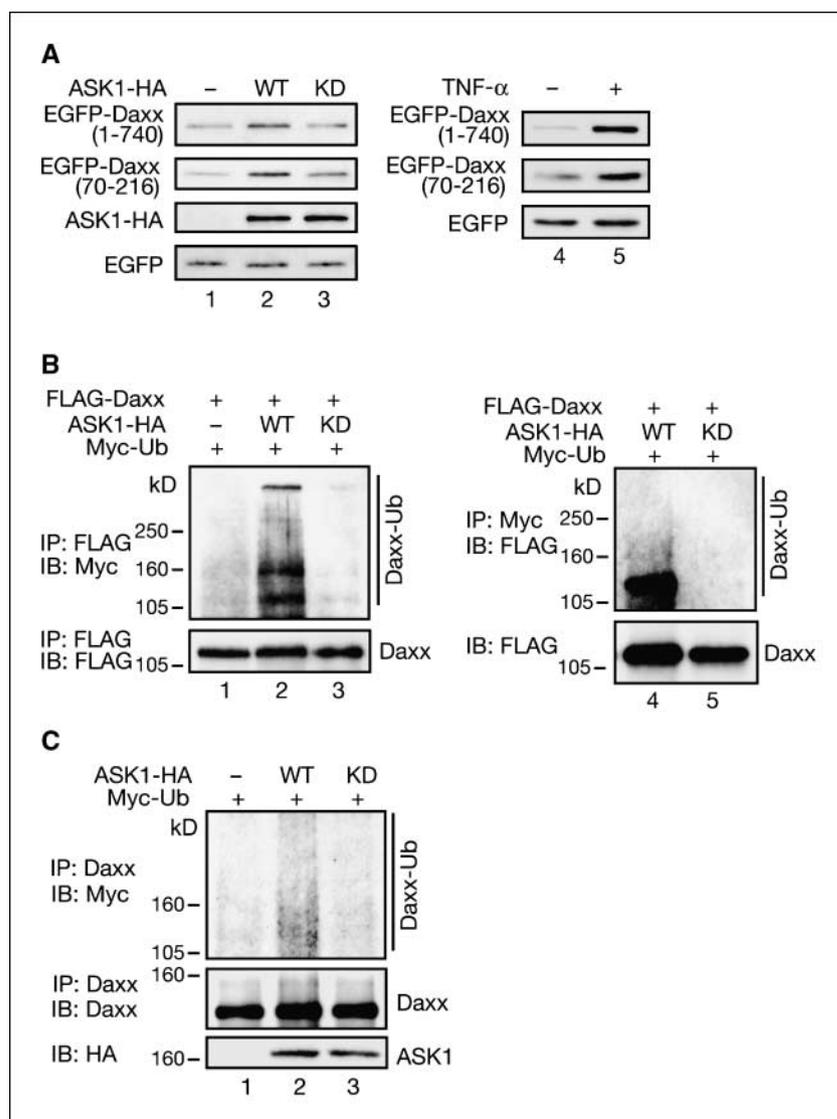
ASK1 kinase stabilizes Daxx and induces Daxx ubiquitination. Gene transfection studies indicate that expression of wild-type, but not kinase-defective (K709M), ASK1 induces Daxx

accumulation (Fig. 1A). Stabilization was also observed with a truncated enhanced green fluorescent protein (EGFP)-Daxx (70-216), indicating that the domain(s) required for ASK1-dependent stabilization should be localized within Daxx amino acids 70 to 216, which also contain the ASK1 phosphorylation sites Ser¹⁷⁶ and Ser¹⁸⁴ (4). A similar Daxx accumulation was also observed in TNF- α -treated cells without ASK1 transfection (Fig. 1A).

It has been well documented that phosphorylation of I κ B, cyclin-dependent kinase, or CDC25A triggers polyubiquitination of the proteins (12, 13). Because Daxx undergoes proteasome-mediated degradation (14, 15), we asked whether ASK1-dependent Daxx phosphorylation affected its ubiquitination status. Immunoprecipitation experiments revealed that active, but not kinase-defective, ASK1 induced Daxx polyubiquitination of both ectopically expressed Daxx (Fig. 1B) and endogenous Daxx (Fig. 1C). As expected from the previous results, the truncated form of FLAG-Daxx (amino acids 1-216) also showed ASK1-dependent polyubiquitination as well (Supplementary Fig. S1).

Phosphorylation of Daxx by ASK1 induces K63-linked polyubiquitination on Daxx Lys¹²². ASK1-dependent Daxx

Figure 1. ASK1 stress kinase expression induces Daxx polyubiquitination. **A**, ASK1 and TNF- α stabilize Daxx. EGFP-Daxx or EGFP-Daxx (70-216) was expressed in 293 cells in the presence of ASK1-HA wild-type (WT) or a kinase-dead (KD; K709M) mutant or 18 h TNF- α treatment. EGFP served as an expression control. **B**, ASK1 increases polyubiquitination of Daxx. 293 cells were transfected with expression plasmids for ASK1-HA wild-type or kinase-defective together with FLAG-Daxx and Myc-Ub and cultured for 48 h. *Left*, Daxx was immunoprecipitated with anti-FLAG antibody and the precipitated materials were analyzed by immunoblotting with an antibody against Myc or FLAG. *IP*, immunoprecipitation; *IB*, immunoblotting. *Right*, reciprocal detection of ubiquitinated Daxx. Ubiquitinated Daxx products are indicated as Daxx-Ub. **C**, ASK1 induces the polyubiquitination of endogenous Daxx. 293 cells expressing Myc-Ub together with ASK1-HA wild-type or kinase-defective mutant were subjected to immunoprecipitation with anti-Daxx antibody followed by immunoblotting with anti-Myc or anti-Daxx antibodies.



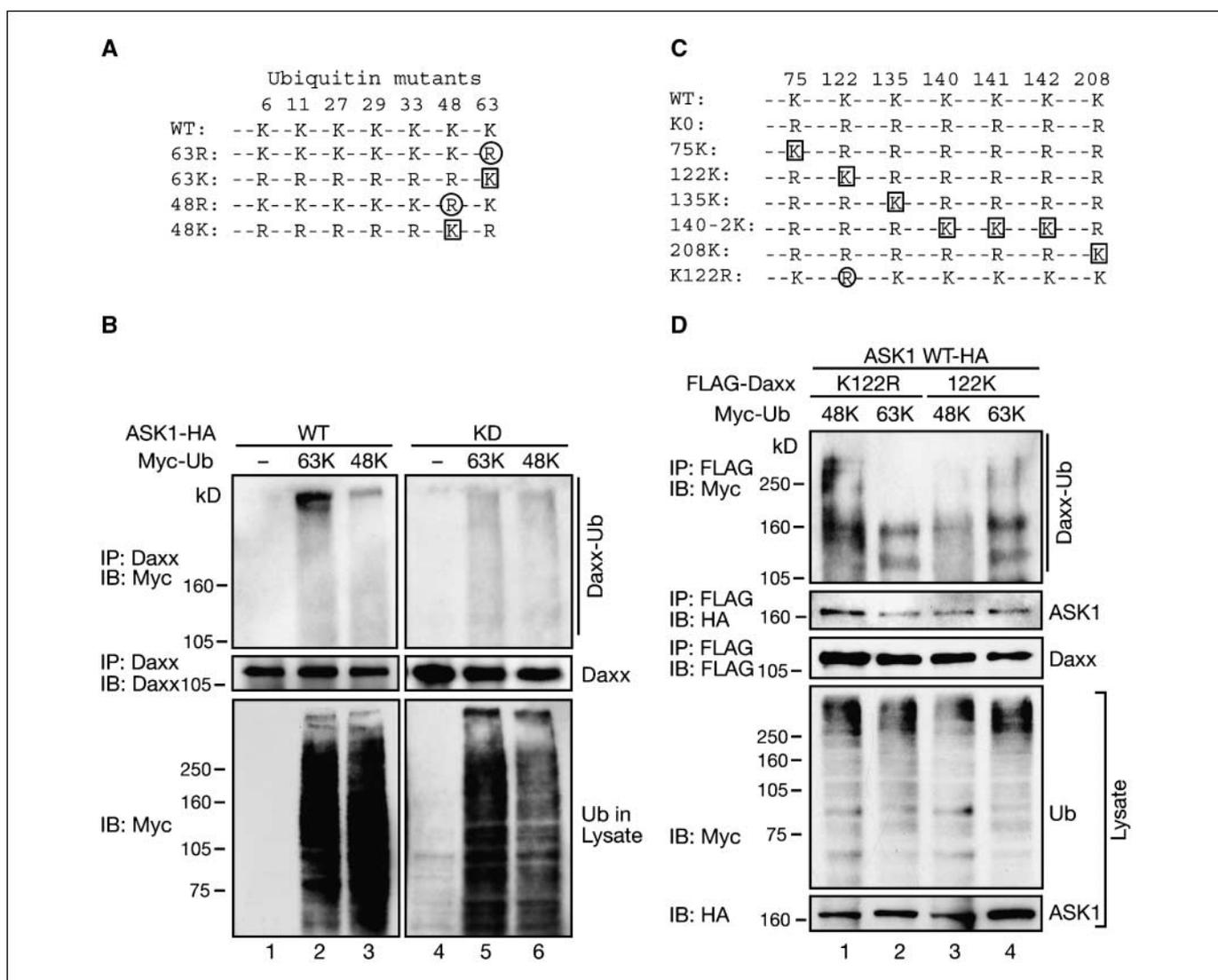


Figure 2. ASK1 induces K63-linked polyubiquitination of Daxx at K122. *A*, schematic diagrams of wild-type and mutant ubiquitin where arginine (R) amino acids are substituted for lysine (K). *B*, ASK1 induces K63-linked ubiquitination on endogenous Daxx. Cells were transfected with the indicated plasmids and cultured for 48 h. Daxx was immunoprecipitated with anti-Daxx antibody and the precipitated materials were subjected to immunoblotting. *C*, schematic diagram of wild-type and lysine mutants of Daxx. *D*, FLAG-Daxx mutants (K122R and 122K) were expressed in 293 cells together with ASK1-HA wild-type and Myc-Ub (48K or 63K).

phosphorylation followed by Daxx ubiquitination does not cause Daxx degradation. Instead, phosphorylation results in Daxx accumulation. The ubiquitin molecule contains seven lysines, which are potential conjugation residues for ubiquitin polymerization (ref. 16; Fig. 2A). To determine the mode of ASK1-induced ubiquitin conjugation on Daxx, we tested ubiquitin mutants with a single arginine-substituted mutation at position 63 (63R) or 48 (48R) as well as mutants containing only one lysine at position 63 (63K) or 48 (48K) for their incorporation in polyubiquitin chain(s) (Supplementary Fig. S2). The polyubiquitination of endogenous Daxx was induced by active ASK1 with primarily K63-linked but not K48-linked form (Fig. 2B). With kinase-defective ASK1, significantly less K63-conjugated Daxx was detected, confirming the requirement for ASK1 phosphorylation of Daxx for K63-linked ubiquitination. To identify the primary Daxx K63-linked ubiquitination site, a series of Daxx mutants with lysine point mutations in the NH₂-terminal region were

constructed (Fig. 2C). Among mutants, only the 122K revertant Daxx mutant showed preferential K63-linked polyubiquitination over K48-linked polyubiquitination when expressed with ASK1 (Fig. 2D). Analysis using truncated Daxx (1-216) yielded similar results (Supplementary Fig. S3). Furthermore, the K122R mutant, which is deficient in ubiquitination on Lys¹²² of Daxx, subsequently showed a preferential K48-linked ubiquitin conjugation (Fig. 2D; Supplementary Fig. S3). Immunoprecipitation experiments revealed that all constructed Daxx mutants, including K0 and K122R, showed similar level of ASK1-Daxx interaction (Fig. 2D; Supplementary Fig. S3). Therefore, K63-linked polyubiquitination of Lys¹²² in the Daxx molecule is not required for interaction with ASK1.

The Lys¹²² ubiquitination site and surrounding amino acid sequence is evolutionally well conserved as are the ASK1 target serines, Ser¹⁷⁶ and Ser¹⁸⁴. This suggests that ASK1-dependent K63-linked polyubiquitination on Lys¹²² of Daxx could be an important regulatory mechanism for Daxx function throughout many species.

ASK1-dependent specific Daxx phosphorylation is required for K63-linked ubiquitination of Daxx. Because ASK1 kinase activity is required for the K63-linked ubiquitination of Daxx, phosphorylation on Ser¹⁷⁶ and Ser¹⁸⁴ of Daxx is likely to play a critical role for its ubiquitination. The K63-linked ubiquitination of Daxx was induced by ASK1 transfection, whereas the phosphorylation-deficient mutant Daxx S176/184A had drastically reduced K63-linked ubiquitination levels in ASK1-transfected cells (Fig. 3A). Kinase-defective ASK1 failed to induce ubiquitination of Daxx. Thus, the K63-linked ubiquitination of Daxx depends on phosphorylation of Daxx on Ser¹⁷⁶ and Ser¹⁸⁴ by ASK1.

Next, we analyzed whether phosphorylated Daxx was simultaneously conjugated with K63 ubiquitin (Fig. 3B). Phosphorylated Daxx was immunoprecipitated with anti-phosphorylated Daxx-specific antibody (4), which recognizes phosphorylated Daxx Ser¹⁷⁶ and Ser¹⁸⁴; then, the ubiquitination status of the immunoprecipitated Daxx was analyzed. Phosphorylated FLAG-Daxx was preferentially conjugated with K63-linked polyubiquitination rather than K48-linked polyubiquitination (Fig. 3B). These results show that ASK1-phosphorylated Daxx is preferentially K63-linked polyubiquitinated.

K63-linked polyubiquitination of Daxx is required for TNF- α -induced sustained JNK activation and apoptosis. We next determined the role of K63-linked Daxx ubiquitination in TNF- α signaling. Sustained JNK activation by full-length Daxx was observed only when active ASK1 was expressed (Fig. 4A), indicating that Daxx-dependent JNK activation is mediated through ASK1. When the K63 ubiquitination-deficient Daxx mutant K122R was expressed in cells, TNF- α -induced JNK

activation was strongly inhibited (Fig. 4B). In addition, TNF- α -dependent apoptosis, as measured by poly(ADP-ribose) polymerase cleavage, was also prevented when the K122R mutant was expressed (Fig. 4C). The antiapoptotic effect of K122R mutant Daxx on TNF- α -dependent apoptosis was also shown by the additional method of measuring sub-G₁ fraction by fluorescence-activated cell sorting analysis (Supplementary Fig. S4). In Daxx wild-type transfected cells, the sub-G₁ fraction increased from 27.8% to 40.2% following TNF- α treatment, whereas transfection with the K122R mutant Daxx had essentially no effect on TNF- α -induced apoptosis (from 24.2% to 23.1% by TNF- α treatment). These results indicate that K63-linked polyubiquitination of Daxx on K122 is essential for TNF- α -dependent ASK1 activation, although K122 is dispensable for ASK1-induced Daxx accumulation. Because the K122 mutant Daxx still binds to ASK1 (Fig. 2D), K63-linked Daxx polyubiquitination is more likely involved in a post-interaction ASK1 activation step. This is also supported by the observation that the K122R Daxx mutant inhibited TNF- α -induced JNK activation and apoptosis, thereby functioning as dominant-negative fashion (Fig. 4B and C).

The NH₂-terminal domain of ASK1 inhibits the endogenous kinase activity (17), suggesting that the Daxx K63-linked polyubiquitin tail may induce an ASK1 conformational change resulting in kinase activation. Moreover, this NH₂-terminal domain is also the binding site for the ASK1 inhibitor thioredoxin, a reduction/oxidation-regulatory protein (17). Thus, the polyubiquitin tail may also prevent thioredoxin from interacting with ASK1. Alternatively, K63-linked polyubiquitin may recruit an activating cofactor(s), such as TNF-associated factor 2 (18), critical for sustained ASK1 kinase

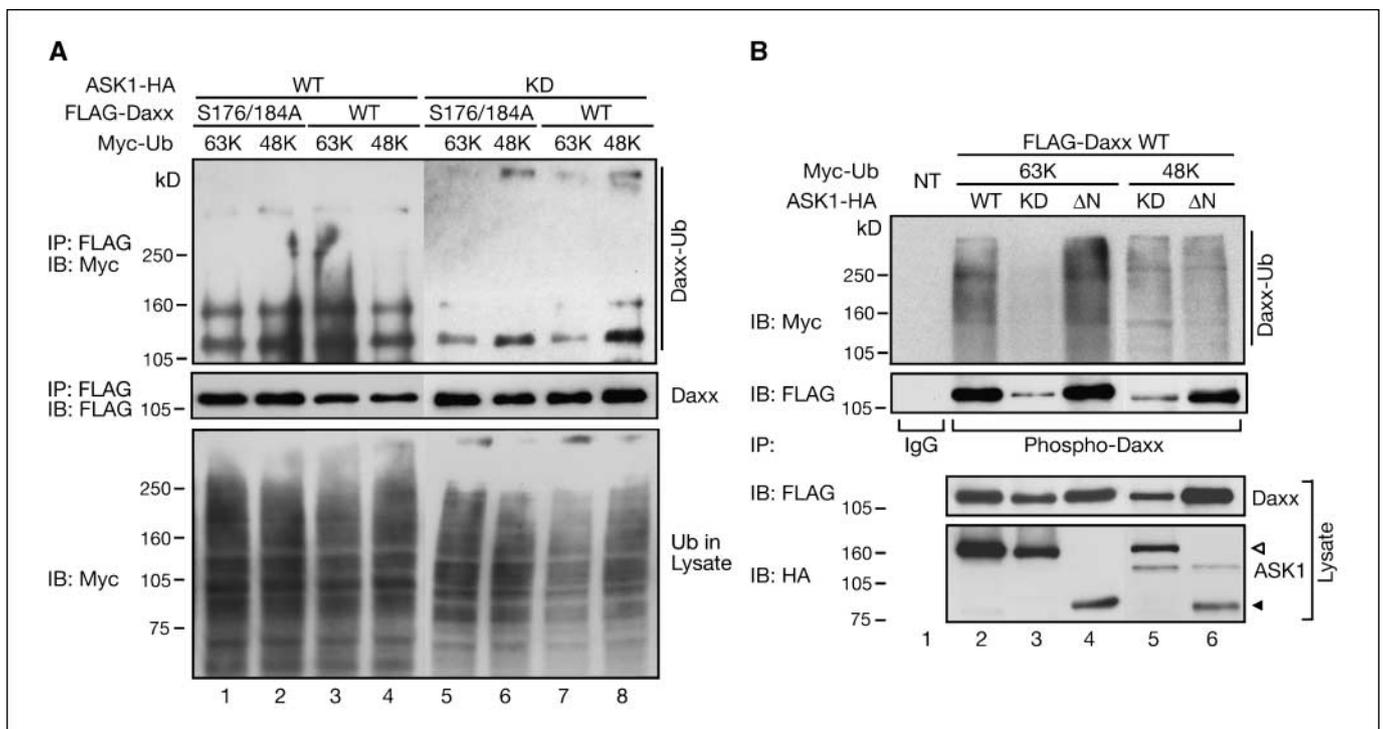


Figure 3. ASK1-dependent Daxx phosphorylation is required for K63-linked ubiquitin conjugation to Daxx. *A*, ASK1-dependent phosphorylation is required for Daxx K63-linked ubiquitination. Daxx was immunoprecipitated with anti-FLAG antibody and the precipitated materials were subjected to immunoblotting with anti-Myc or anti-FLAG antibodies. *B*, phosphorylated Daxx is K63-linked polyubiquitinated. FLAG-Daxx was coexpressed with Myc-Ub (63K or 48K) and ASK1-HA (wild-type, kinase-defective, or its constitutive active mutant Δ N; ref. 17). Cell lysates were subjected to immunoprecipitation with anti-phosphorylated Daxx antibody followed by immunoblotting with anti-Myc and anti-FLAG antibodies.

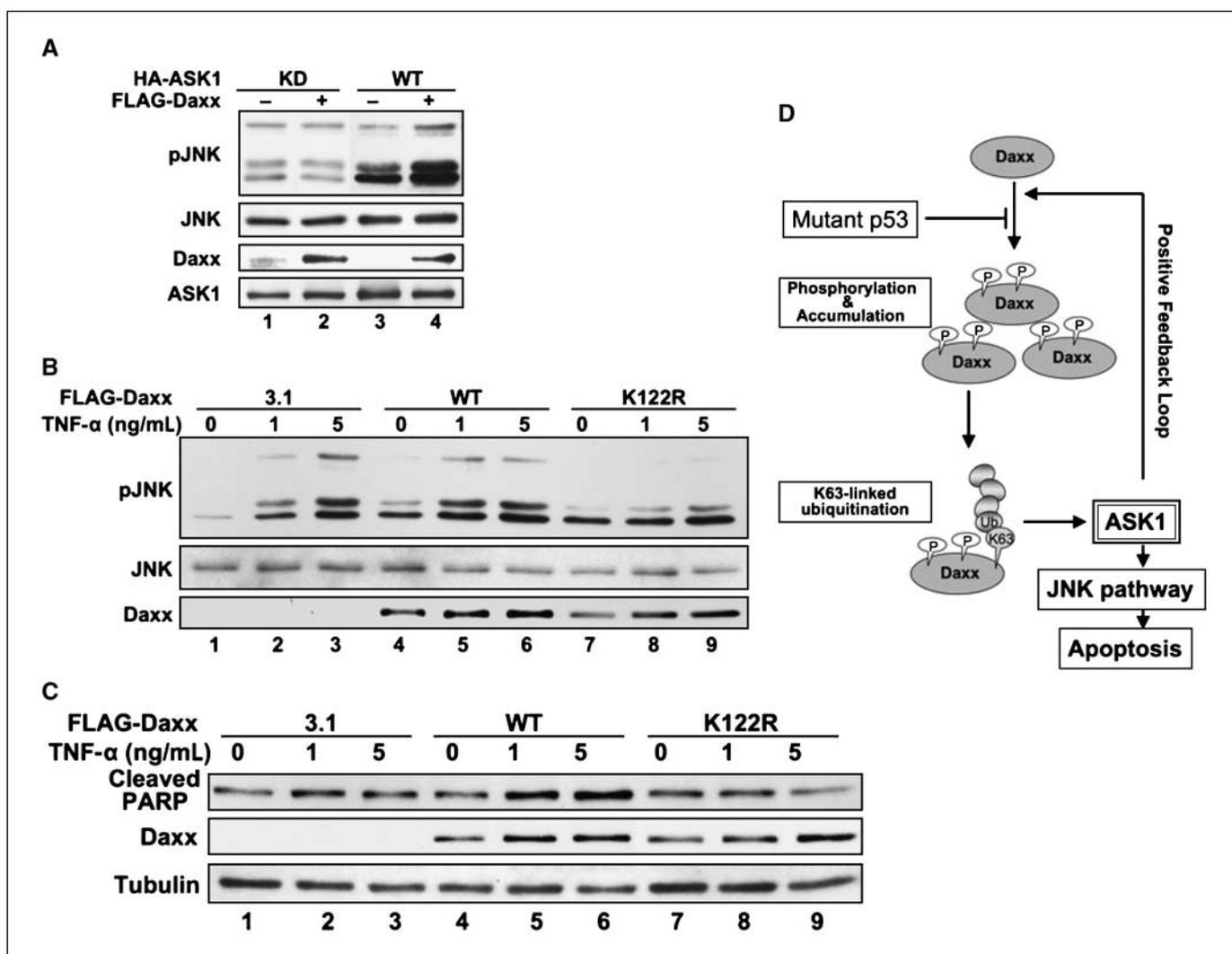


Figure 4. TNF- α -dependent JNK activation and apoptosis require K63-linked polyubiquitination of Daxx. **A**, Daxx-dependent sustained JNK activation is ASK1-dependent. HeLa cell extracts were prepared and analyzed for the expression levels of phosphorylated JNK, total JNK, Daxx, and HA-ASK1 by immunoblotting. **B**, K122 in Daxx is critical for TNF- α -induced sustained JNK activation. Two days posttransfection, HeLa cells were incubated with TNF- α (0, 1, or 5 ng/mL) for 18 h. **C**, Daxx K122 is essential for TNF- α -induced apoptosis. After 48 h of transfection, MCF7 cells were treated with TNF- α . The expression levels of cleaved poly(ADP-ribose) polymerase (*PARP*), which is an indicator of apoptosis, FLAG-Daxx, and tubulin were determined by immunoblotting. **D**, role of K63-linked polyubiquitination of Daxx in TNF- α signaling pathway. See text for details.

activity. The precise molecular mechanism for how Daxx K63-linked ubiquitination activates ASK1 remains to be elucidated.

TNF- α signaling involves TNF-associated factor 2 phosphorylation followed by K63-linked ubiquitination (19). Here, we show that phosphorylation induced K63-linked ubiquitination of Daxx plays a critical role in the Daxx-ASK1 positive feedback loop (Fig. 4D). Depletion of Daxx in cells produces resistance to cell death induced by UV irradiation and oxidative stress and an impaired JNK activation (20), suggesting that Daxx plays a critical role on JNK-induced apoptosis.

Daxx is essential for the sustained activation of JNK and TNF- α -induced apoptosis in cells (4). ASK1 is required for sustained activation of JNK/p38 and apoptosis (21). When ASK1 is activated by TNF receptor signaling, it phosphorylates Daxx at Ser¹⁷⁶ and Ser¹⁸⁴. This phosphorylation stabilizes Daxx due to a reduced K48-linked polyubiquitination content causing cellular Daxx levels increase. Phosphorylated Daxx is then modified by K63-linked

polyubiquitination at Lys¹²². Polyubiquitination is not required for interaction with ASK1 but is essential for ASK1 activation. These findings establish a physiological significance to the network of Daxx-ASK1-JNK signaling in TNF- α -dependent cell death in which the K63-linked polyubiquitin tail on Daxx functions as a molecular switch for ASK1 activation.

Disclosure of Potential Conflicts of Interest

No potential conflicts of interest were disclosed.

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