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**Enriquecimento ambiental concomitante ao estresse crônico imprevisível induz comportamento tipo-ansioso e diminui a expressão do fator neurotrófico derivado do cérebro (BDNF) no córtex pré-frontal de camundongos**

**Versão Corrigida**

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## RESUMO

SILVA, Nívea Karla de Gusmão Taveiros. **Enriquecimento ambiental concomitante ao estresse crônico imprevisível induz comportamento tipo-ansioso e diminui a expressão do fator neurotrófico derivado do cérebro (BDNF) no córtex pré-frontal de camundongos.** Tese (Doutorado em Ciências) – Instituto de Ciências Biomédicas, Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo, 2021.

O enriquecimento ambiental (EA) é um paradigma experimental complexo que fornece estímulos como exercício, novidade, atividade exploratória e contato social. Por promover neurogênese, o EA tem sido apontado como protetor mediante situações de injúrias, como no estresse, uma vez que estímulos estressores podem deflagrar processos neurodegenerativos e acarretar danos neuronais. Devido ao impacto decorrente do estresse em transtornos como ansiedade, o envolvimento de fatores neurotróficos como o BDNF tem sido amplamente estudado. Além da regulação dependente de estímulos, a transcrição de BDNF também parece sofrer regulação epigenética. Diante disto, o presente trabalho avaliou os efeitos do EA sobre o comportamento tipo-ansioso, parâmetros bioquímicos e expressão gênica de *Bdnf* no córtex pré-frontal (CPF) de camundongos *Swiss* machos expostos ao estresse crônico imprevisível (ECI), levando em conta o envolvimento de modificações epigenéticas. O grupo exposto ao EA e submetido ao ECI (EA-ECI) exibiu comportamento tipo-ansioso no labirinto em cruz elevado. Esse comportamento foi revertido após o pré-tratamento com um inibidor de metilação do DNA (5-azacitidina). Na análise da corticosterona, apenas o grupo enriquecido não estressado (EA-NS) apresentou aumento nas concentrações plasmáticas. Embora o EA *per se* tenha promovido maior expressão do RNAm do éxon IX, considerado o éxon codificante do gene, o grupo EA-ECI apresentou redução na expressão gênica dos éxons I, II, IV, VI e IX do *Bdnf* no CPF. Em relação à epigenética, as três sequências analisadas para metilação do DNA de *Bdnf* no respectivo éxon não mostraram diferenças significativas na porcentagem de metilação do DNA nas ilhas CpG investigadas. Em suma, o presente estudo mostrou evidências de que o EA concomitante ao ECI desencadeia comportamento tipo-ansioso, o qual é revertido por um pré-tratamento com inibidor de metilação do DNA. Isso é acompanhado por uma redução marcante da expressão de *Bdnf* no CPF, sem afetar a metilação do DNA do éxon IX do gene. Juntos, esses achados auxiliam a compreensão da base molecular da complexa interação entre estresse e ambiente no comportamento, o que pode ter implicações no desenvolvimento de novos alvos terapêuticos para o tratamento de transtornos relacionadas ao estresse.

Palavras-chave: Enriquecimento ambiental; estresse crônico imprevisível; epigenética.

## ABSTRACT

SILVA, Nívea Karla de Gusmão Taveiros. **Environmental enrichment concomitant with chronic unpredictable stress induces anxiety-like behavior and decreases the expression of brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF) in mice prefrontal cortex.** Thesis (PhD in Sciences) - Institute of Biomedical Sciences, University of São Paulo, São Paulo, 2021.

Environmental enrichment (EE) is a complex experimental paradigm that provides stimuli such as exercise, novelty, exploratory activity and social contact. As it promotes neurogenesis, EE has been identified as a protective agent against injury situations, such as stress, since stressful stimuli can trigger neurodegenerative processes and cause neuronal damage. Due to the impact of stress on disorders such as anxiety, the involvement of neurotrophic factors such as BDNF has been widely studied. In addition to stimulus-dependent regulation, BDNF transcription also appears to undergo epigenetic regulation. In view of this, the present study evaluated the effects of EE on anxiety-like behavior, biochemical parameters and *Bdnf* gene expression in the prefrontal cortex (PFC) of Swiss male mice exposed to chronic unpredictable stress (CUS), taking into account the involvement of epigenetic changes. The group exposed to EE and submitted to CUS (EE-CUS) exhibited anxiety-like behavior in the elevated plus-maze. This behavior was reversed after pretreatment with a DNA methylation inhibitor (5-azacytidine). In corticosterone analysis, only the enriched and non-stressed group (EE-NS) showed an increase in plasma concentrations. Although EE *per se* had promoted greater expression of exon IX, considered the exon encoding the gene, the EE-CUS group showed a reduction in the gene expression of exons I, II, IV, VI and IX of *Bdnf* in the PFC. Regarding epigenetics, the three sequences analyzed for *Bdnf* DNA methylation in the respective exon did not show significant differences in the percentage of DNA methylation in the investigated CpG islands. In short, the present study showed evidence that EE concomitant with CUS triggers anxiety-like behavior, which is reversed by a pretreatment with DNA methylation inhibitor. This is accompanied by a marked reduction in *Bdnf* expression in the PFC, without affecting the DNA methylation of exon IX of the gene. Together, these findings help to understand the molecular basis of the complex interaction between stress and environment in behavior, which may have implications for the development of new therapeutic targets for the treatment of stress-related disorders.

Keywords: Environmental enrichment; chronic unpredictable stress; epigenetics.

## 1. INTRODUÇÃO

Em 1947, Donald Hebb constatou que ratos permitidos a andar livremente apresentavam uma melhora no comportamento cognitivo quando comparados aos alojados em gaiolas padrão (HEBB, 1947). Desde então, o enriquecimento ambiental (EA) vem sendo descrito como um paradigma experimental complexo no qual objetos como brinquedos, rodas de exercícios, túneis e casas de diferentes cores, formas e texturas são inseridos em gaiolas de animais a fim de promover uma melhor qualidade de vida aos animais (BELZ et al., 2003) e fornecer estímulos como exercício, novidade, atividade exploratória e contato social (ROSENZWEIG et al., 1978; VAN PRAAG; KEMPERMANN; GAGE, 2000). Inclusive, já foi associado a um efeito recompensador e liberação de dopamina no *nucleus accumbens* (BARDO; BEVINS, 2000; BELKE, 2000; BEVINS; BARDO, 1999; LOUILOT; LE MOAL; SIMON, 1986; REBEC et al., 1996).

O EA pode incluir estímulos físico e social, onde o primeiro envolve a inserção de aparatos que permitem exercício e exploração do ambiente, enquanto o segundo consiste em alojar animais em grupos a fim de promover interação social entre eles. Entretanto, a combinação dos dois tipos de enriquecimento é vista como sinérgica, de modo que busca otimizar funções sensoriais, cognitivas e motoras dos animais, favorecendo processos como memória e aprendizado (B.B.; A.-L., 1996; NITHIANANTHARAJAH; HANNAN, 2006; SIMPSON; KELLY, 2011; VAN PRAAG; KEMPERMANN; GAGE, 2000). O contato social promovido pelo EA parece ser de suma importância para seus efeitos, uma vez que animais criados em isolamento apresentam comportamentos relacionados à ansiedade e depressão (WRIGHT; UPTON; MARSDEN, 1991).

Diversos estudos indicam efeitos benéficos do EA em doenças como câncer (CAO et al., 2010); acidente vascular encefálico (RISEDAL et al., 2002) e doença de Huntington (VAN DELLEN et al., 2000). No sistema nervoso, já foi relatado que o EA promove neurogênese hipocampal (BRUEL-JUNGERMAN; LAROCHE; RAMPON, 2005) e proliferação celular (KEMPERMANN; KUHN; GAGE, 1998), além de melhorar processos de memória (BAYAT et al., 2015; NILSSON et al., 1999) e aprendizado (CORTESE et al., 2018), sendo estes efeitos observados desde a exposição pré-desmame (LU et al., 2017) até a velhice (KEMPERMANN; GAST; GAGE, 2002).

O aumento da conectividade sináptica e neurogênese hipocampal (HOSSEINY et al., 2015; KEMPERMANN; BRANDON; GAGE, 1998; KEMPERMANN; KUHN; GAGE, 1996, 1998) é frequentemente relacionado a propriedades antidepressivas e ansiolíticas por parte do EA (BRENES; RODRÍGUEZ; FORNAGUERA, 2008; BRENES SÁENZ; VILLAGRA; FORNAGUERA TRÍAS, 2006; CHAPILLON et al., 1999; FRISKE; GAMMIE, 2005; PEÑA et al., 2006; SOARES et al., 2015; URAKAWA et al., 2013).

Os efeitos produzidos pelo EA parecem variar em função do tempo de exposição ao protocolo. Dados indicam que mesmo exposições intermitentes a um ambiente complexo por períodos curtos de tempo (3h por dia, durante 14 dias) são suficientes para promover maior neurogênese no giro denteado e aumento da memória de longo prazo (BRUEL-JUNGERMAN; LAROCHE; RAMPON, 2005). Estudos prévios do nosso grupo de pesquisa indicam que períodos de 21 dias de EA são capazes de induzir alterações comportamentais e moleculares em modelo de sensibilização induzida por etanol (RUEDA et al., 2012). Aliado a isto, a exposição prolongada ao EA (10 meses) demonstrou-se eficaz em aumentar a neurogênese hipocampal, a qual permaneceu elevada com a exposição contínua ao ambiente complexo (KEMPERMANN; GAST; GAGE, 2002).

O nível persistentemente elevado de neurogênese hipocampal (KEMPERMANN; GAST; GAGE, 2002), o efeito pró-sobrevivência celular (KEMPERMANN; KUHN; GAGE, 1996, 1998; NILSSON et al., 1999; VAN PRAAG et al., 1999), e o aumento no comprimento, ramificações, número de espinhas dendríticas e eventos sinápticos em populações neuronais promovidos pelo EA (CONNOR; WANG; DIAMOND, 1982; GREENOUGH; VOLKMAR, 1973; GREENOUGH; VOLKMAR; JURASKA, 1973; LEGGIO et al., 2005), sugerem que esse paradigma experimental atua capacitando o cérebro para utilizar redes neuronais de forma otimizada, além de recrutar redes alternativas quando necessário (NITHIANANTHARAJAH; HANNAN, 2006), inclusive diante de situações de injúrias, como no estresse.

Fatores estressantes leves já foram associados à resiliência em macacos (LYONS; PARKER, 2007). Esse processo teria como base o princípio da inoculação do estresse, onde repetidas exposições a estímulos estressores considerados “leves” promoveriam resiliência a futuros estressores severos (FOX; MERALI; HARRISON, 2006; LYONS et al., 2009; MEICHENBAUM, 2017). Diante disto, foi postulada a

hipótese de o EA atuar como um promotor de resiliência (LEHMANN; HERKENHAM, 2011), uma vez que a exposição diária a fatores estressantes leves como a presença da novidade e a constante exploração do meio, além da convivência em grupo em um ambiente complexo que exige interação social e resposta a diferentes estímulos, ajudariam o animal a lidar melhor com situações posteriores de estresse mais severo (CROFTON; ZHANG; GREEN, 2015; LARSSON; WINBLAD; MOHAMMED, 2002).

Em contraste com o estresse crônico leve causado pelo EA (CROFTON; ZHANG; GREEN, 2015), estímulos estressores tidos como intensos podem acarretar danos neuronais e deflagrar processos neurodegenerativos principalmente a longo prazo, afetando a morfologia de dendritos (MAGARIÑOS et al., 1996; WATANABE; GOULD; MCEWEN, 1992), promovendo neurotoxicidade (MCEWEN; SAPOLSKY, 1995) ou mesmo modificando a plasticidade hipocampal (KIM; FOY; THOMPSON, 1996; KIM; YOON, 1998). Dessa forma, estímulos estressantes são relacionadas na literatura com o desenvolvimento de transtornos de humor como comportamentos tipo-ansioso (MALCON et al., 2020; NAKAGAWA et al., 2019; NOVAES et al., 2017) e tipo-depressivo (BANASR et al., 2010; ELIZALDE et al., 2010; SHILPA et al., 2017)

Os efeitos do estresse sobre o sistema nervoso, todavia, parecem variar de maneira região-dependente. Enquanto há aumento de arborização dendrítica e densidade de espinhos neurais na amígdala (COLYN et al., 2019), foram observadas atrofia dendríticas no hipocampo (MAGARIÑOS et al., 1996; SOUSA et al., 2000; WATANABE; GOULD; MCEWEN, 1992) e redução de espinhos dendríticos apicais em neurônios do córtex pré-frontal (CPF) (COLYN et al., 2019; COOK; WELLMAN, 2004; LI et al., 2011).

O CPF, uma região envolvida em processos cognitivos como tomada de decisão e memória de trabalho (KOLB; WHISHAW, 2001), parece ser uma região mais sensível ao estresse quando comparado ao hipocampo, visto que estresses agudos, como nado forçado de 10 minutos (IZQUIERDO; WELLMAN; HOLMES, 2006) ou mesmo estressores leves como injeções diárias de veículos, podem modificar sua morfologia (BROWN; HENNING; WELLMAN, 2005). Depressão e transtorno bipolar já foram associadas à morte celular nessa região (ÖNGÜR; DREVETS; PRICE, 1998; RAJKOWSKA et al., 1999). Além disso, estímulos agudos, como estresse de contenção, levam a déficits nas funções cognitivas dependentes do CPF, tais como

prejuízo na memória de trabalho e no desempenho de tarefas (ARNSTEN, 2009; MIZOGUCHI et al., 2000; SHANSKY et al., 2006).

Outros fatores primordiais para os efeitos do estresse são duração e intensidade do estímulo aplicado. Modelos de estresse crônico como derrota social e estresse imprevisível são amplamente utilizados para estudar transtornos relacionados ao estresse, uma vez que promovem efeitos deletérios tanto no cérebro como em outros órgãos (JOHNSON et al., 1992; KOOLHAAS et al., 1997; KUDRYAVTSEVA, 2000). Contudo, embora evidências apontem que o estresse crônico imprevisível (ECI) promova comportamento do tipo ansioso (BONDI et al., 2008; LOPES et al., 2016; ZHU et al., 2014, 2011), modelos de estresses crônicos previsíveis (como 5 minutos de contenção diária) já foram associados a aumento de neurogênese no hipocampo e melhora em processos de memória e aprendizado (PARIHAR et al., 2011).

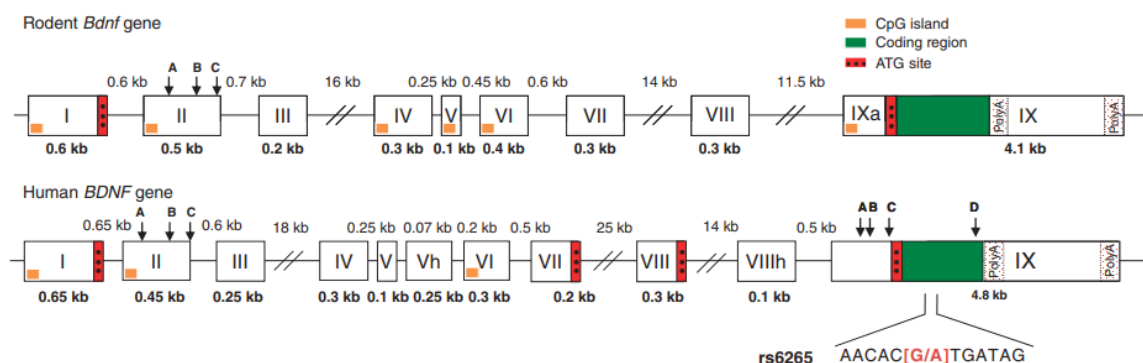
O ECI é composto por diversos estímulos – como isolamento, modificações no ciclo circadiano e privação de água e comida, combinados de maneira crônica e ininterrupta (WILLNER et al., 1987). Esse estresse constitui um modelo que representa a condição humana de exposição a diferentes fatores estressantes diariamente, desencadeando comportamentos relacionados à depressão e anedonia (para revisão, ver Antoniuk et al., 2019) e promovendo contínua ativação do eixo hipotálamo-pituitária-adrenal (HPA) (MUSCAT; WILLNER, 1992; WILLNER et al., 1987; ZHANG et al., 2015). Logo, a duração do modelo e a capacidade de hiperativação contínua do eixo HPA parecem ser elementos fundamentais para a obtenção dos efeitos deletérios e para a difícil adaptação ao ECI (COVINGTON; MICZEK, 2005; FRANCO et al., 2016; WILLNER, 2017).

Quando o indivíduo é exposto a um estímulo estressor, há secreção de Fator Liberador de Corticotrofina (CRF) pelo hipotálamo, o qual age sobre a glândula pituitária estimulando a liberação de hormônio adrenocorticotrófico (ACTH) que, por sua vez, age nas glândulas adrenais promovendo a secreção de cortisol (em humanos) ou corticosterona (em animais). A exposição prolongada a estes hormônios mediada por estresses crônicos promove, portanto, mudanças a longo prazo no eixo HPA e no cérebro, aumentando a suscetibilidade do indivíduo ao estresse e atuando como fator de risco para o desenvolvimento de transtornos mentais (CROFTON; ZHANG; GREEN, 2015; LEVINE, 1957; MCEWEN, 2000a, 2000b; ROCERI et al., 2004).

Levando em conta o impacto decorrente do estresse nas funções cognitivas, neurogênese, sobrevivência neuronal, ansiedade e depressão, o envolvimento de fatores neurotróficos como o Fator Neurotrófico Derivado do Cérebro (do inglês, *Brain-Derived Neurotrophic Factor* - BDNF) tem sido cada vez mais estudado. O BDNF é um membro da família das neurotrofinas, sintetizado no corpo celular de neurônios e células da glia (LESSMANN; BRIGADSKI, 2009) e amplamente expresso no SNC, principalmente no hipocampo (HOFER et al., 1990). A síntese dessa neurotrofina se inicia a partir do seu precursor pro-BDNF, o qual é clivado posteriormente em BDNF maduro (LEAL et al., 2015). Todavia, é importante ressaltar que os efeitos positivos na plasticidade sináptica e sobrevivência neuronal parecem ser decorrentes do balanço pro-BDNF e BDNF, uma vez que a ação do pró-BDNF já foi associada à sinalização apoptótica, morte celular e degradação sináptica (BOULLE et al., 2012; LU, 2003; LU; JONES; TUSZYNSKI, 2005; PARK; POO, 2013)

A estrutura do *Bdnf* de roedores conta com uma sequência de 8 éxons não codificantes (I-VIII) com um nono éxon codificante em comum (IX); e apesar destes promotores expressarem diferentes transcritos, cada um deles codifica a mesma proteína BDNF (AID et al., 2007; LIU et al., 2005, 2006; PRUUNSILD et al., 2007)

**Figura 1. Representação esquemática do gene do *Bdnf* em roedores e humanos**



Fonte: BOULLE et al., 2012.

Considerando a relação entre níveis reduzidos de BDNF e o desenvolvimento de transtornos de humor, além da possível atenuação do quadro pelo uso de fármacos antidepressivos (DUMAN; MONTEGGIA, 2006; LARSEN et al., 2010; MOLTENI et al., 2010), o papel dessa neurotrofina em transtornos neuropsiquiátricos vem sendo largamente descrito. Já foi descrito que pacientes com depressão apresentam níveis séricos e plasmáticos de BDNF reduzidos em comparação com indivíduos controle



(AYDEMIR; DEVECI; TANELI, 2005; KAREGE et al., 2002, 2005; PICCINNI et al., 2008; SHIMIZU et al., 2003). Além disso, indivíduos suicidas apresentam níveis mais baixos de RNAm de *Bdnf* tanto no CPF quanto no hipocampo (DWIVEDI et al., 2003); pacientes esquizofrênicos tem menor RNAm de *Bdnf* no CPF dorsolateral (WEICKERT et al., 2003); e pacientes com transtorno bipolar exibem diminuição do RNAm de *Bdnf* no hipocampo (RAY et al., 2011).

Uma vez que transtornos de ansiedade podem ser desencadeados por estresse e têm alta taxa de comorbidade com transtornos depressivos, o *Bdnf* também tem se tornado um gene de interesse nessa patologia. Contudo, a relação entre essa neurotrofina e o desenvolvimento de ansiedade ainda é controversa. Estudos clínicos demonstraram tanto redução (DELL'OSSO et al., 2009; DOS SANTOS et al., 2011; MAINA et al., 2010; STRÖHLE et al., 2010; WANG et al., 2011), quanto aumento (HAUCK et al., 2010) de BDNF associado a transtornos de ansiedade; enquanto outros estudos não encontraram diferenças nos níveis dessa neurotrofina (BONNE et al., 2011; MOLENDIJK et al., 2011). Ainda, animais transgênicos para superexpressão de BDNF em regiões do córtex, estriado e hipocampo apresentaram déficits de memória e aprendizado (CUNHA et al., 2009), além de aumento no comportamento tipo-ansioso, o qual foi associado a maior densidade de espinhos dendríticos na amígdala basolateral (BLA) (GOVINDARAJAN et al., 2006).

Sabe-se que a exposição a estímulos estressores é largamente associada a alterações nos níveis de BDNF. Contudo, a complexa transcrição desse fator pelos diferentes promotores, a natureza e duração do estresse, bem como a região-alvo estudada parecem influenciar diretamente os efeitos observados (GRAY; MILNER; MCEWEN, 2013). Já foi observado que um estresse pré-natal agudo aumenta os níveis de RNAm de *Bdnf* no CPF (LUONI et al., 2016), ao passo que um estresse crônico de isolamento social aumenta os níveis de BDNF no CPF medial e hipocampo (MENG et al., 2011). Ainda, o estresse por separação materna acarretou maior comportamento tipo-ansioso e tipo-depressivo associados a maior expressão de BDNF no núcleo oval do núcleo intersticial da estria terminal (BNST) (HU et al., 2020).

Apesar dos dados de aumento de BDNF após estresse, o desenvolvimento de transtornos de humor é mais associado ao precursor pro-BDNF (BAI et al., 2016); de forma que estímulos estressantes são normalmente associados à redução do BDNF. O

estresse de separação materna, por exemplo, reduz a expressão de BDNF no CPF (ROCERI et al., 2004). No estresse por imobilização, há redução do RNAm de *Bdnf*, especialmente no hipocampo (LAKSHMINARASIMHAN; CHATTARJI, 2012; NIBUYA et al., 1999; SMITH et al., 1995; UEYAMA et al., 1997). O estresse de derrota social, por sua vez, promove diminuição na expressão do RNAm de *Bdnf* no hipocampo e na amígdala basolateral (BLA) após 24h (PIZARRO et al., 2004); enquanto o estresse de isolamento reduz a expressão de RNAm de *Bdnf* no hipocampo, PFC e amígdala, além de diminuir a proteína BDNF no hipocampo, CPF, sangue e saliva (BARRIENTOS et al., 2003; DJOUMA et al., 2006; HAN et al., 2011; NAKAGAWA et al., 2019; SCACCIANOCE et al., 2006).

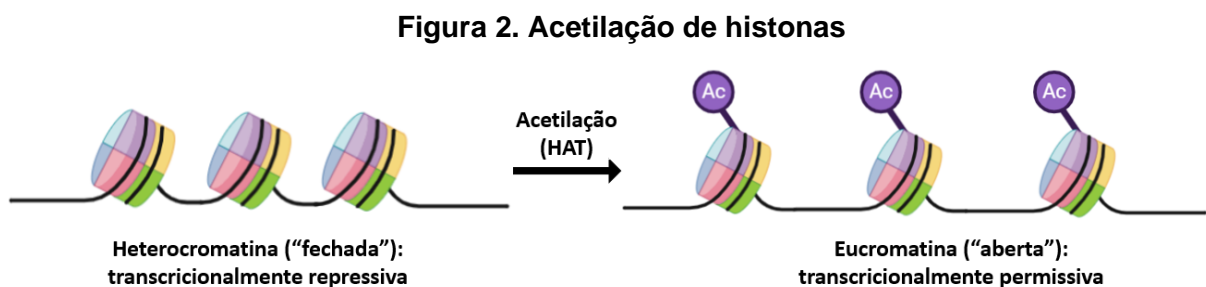
Em contrapartida, a exposição ao EA melhora parâmetros moleculares e comportamentais em modelos de estresse, como má nutrição perinatal (ALBERCA et al., 2020; BERARDINO et al., 2019), estresse por imobilização ou contenção (ASHOKAN; HEGDE; MITRA, 2016; BHAGYA et al., 2017; MARIANNO; ABRAHAO; CAMARINI, 2017; MORADI-KOR et al., 2019; NOVAES et al., 2017; SHILPA et al., 2017) e separação ou privação materna (FRANCIS et al., 2002; MENEZES et al., 2020). Uma vez que o EA promove um efeito pró-sobrevivência celular (KEMPERMANN; KUHN; GAGE, 1996, 1998; NILSSON et al., 1999; VAN PRAAG et al., 1999), além de aumentar a neurogênese hipocampal (KEMPERMANN; GAST; GAGE, 2002), tem sido sugerido que os efeitos positivos deste paradigma em modelos de estresse são mediados pelo BDNF.

De fato, o efeito protetor do EA no estresse de separação materna foi associado ao aumento do BDNF no hipocampo (DANDI et al., 2018). Em ratos expostos ao chumbo durante o desenvolvimento, o EA promoveu melhora no desempenho de aprendizagem, o que foi associado à indução da expressão do RNAm de *Bdnf* no hipocampo (GUILARTE et al., 2003). Além disso, um EA de 14 dias reduziu o efeito tipo-ansioso em animais submetidos ao estresse crônico de imobilização e evitou o aumento do RNAm de *Bdnf* na BLA (ASHOKAN; HEGDE; MITRA, 2016). Ademais, o EA restaurou déficits cognitivos induzidos pelo estresse crônico de imobilização via modulação de fatores neurotróficos, incluindo o BDNF (SHILPA et al., 2017). O EA agiria, portanto, capacitando o cérebro tanto para utilizar redes neuronais existentes de forma otimizada, quanto para recrutar redes alternativas quando necessário (NITHIANANTHARAJAH; HANNAN, 2006) diante de situações de injúrias, como as

ocasionadas pelo estresse.

Além da regulação dependente de estímulos, a transcrição de BDNF também parece sofrer ampla regulação epigenética. Os mecanismos epigenéticos incluem modificações sobre o DNA e proteínas histonas (GRÄFF; MANSUY, 2008), e integram influências genéticas, fisiológicas e ambientais ao longo da vida (MILOSAVLJEVIC, 2011); as quais podem promover ou reprimir a transcrição do gene (GRÄFF; MANSUY, 2008; CHAHROUR et al., 2008; MIRANDA; JONES, 2007; SUZUKI; BIRD, 2008).

A acetilação de histonas (Fig.2) é um processo que culmina na redução da interação eletrostática entre estas proteínas e o DNA, o que supostamente relaxa a estrutura da cromatina e torna o material genético mais acessível aos reguladores transcricionais (BANNISTER; KOUZARIDES, 2011). Histonas são proteínas formadas por 4 subunidades (H2A, H2B, H3 e H4) que se dispõem em octâmeros, onde a cromatina é envolvida e passa por um complexo processo de superenovelamento, resultando em uma estrutura altamente compacta que permite regular a expressão gênica pela permissão ou repressão de fatores transcricionais (FELSENFELD & GROUDINE, 2003; LI; CAREY; WORKMAN, 2007; LUGER & RICHMOND, 1998). Dessa forma, a hiperacetilação dessas proteínas pelas histonas acetiltransferases (HATs) está ligada à ativação transcricional (CHEUNG et al., 2000), enquanto sua hipoacetilação ou desacetilação – mediada pelas histonas deacetilases (HDACs), está relacionada ao silenciamento de genes (KOUZARIDES, 2007; LEE; WORKMAN, 2007).



Fonte: criado com BioRender.com

A metilação do DNA (Fig.3) é uma modificação epigenética catalisada por enzimas denominadas DNA metiltransferases (DNMTs) e consiste na adição de um grupo metil a um resíduo de citosina na posição C-5 (5º átomo do anel) (BESTOR, 2000; GOLL; BESTOR, 2005; KLOSE; BIRD, 2006). Este mecanismo epigenético regula a expressão gênica alterando a acessibilidade do DNA à maquinaria de

transcrição sem alterar o código genético (FENG; FAN, 2009). Embora esteja predominantemente associada ao silenciamento de genes, a metilação do DNA é um mecanismo comum em todo o genoma e fundamental para o desenvolvimento normal, impressão genética e inativação do cromossomo X (KIM; FRISO; CHOI, 2009; MIRANDA; JONES, 2007; NEWELL-PRICE; CLARK; KING, 2000; SINGAL; GINDER, 2011).

**Figura 3. Metilação do DNA**



Fonte: criado BioRender.com

Evidências sugerem que experiências ambientais induzem alterações na estrutura da cromatina e desencadeiam mudanças de longa duração no gene, afetando a disponibilidade e função da proteína BDNF e contribuindo para os efeitos fenotípicos (BOULLE et al., 2012). Já foi observado que estresses pré-natais reduzem a expressão de *Bdnf* hipocampal na prole, o que foi atribuído a menor acetilação e maior expressão de histonas deacetilases (ZHENG et al., 2016b). Estresses perinatais, por sua vez, também diminuem o RNAm de *Bdnf* no hipocampo, efeito associado à diminuição da acetilação da histona H3 e maior metilação do resíduo K27 da mesma histona no promotor IV do gene do *Bdnf* (ONISHCHENKO et al., 2008).

Em relação à metilação do DNA do gene do *Bdnf*, tem-se bastante destaque para os promotores IV e IX, os quais parecem ser amplamente regulados por esse mecanismo epigenético (LUBIN; ROTH; SWEATT, 2008; MA et al., 2009; MARTINOWICH et al., 2003). Estressores ambientais como exposição perinatal ao metilmercúrio levam à hipermetilação do DNA do éxon IV do *Bdnf* no hipocampo (ONISHCHENKO et al., 2008). Estresses gestacionais aumentam a expressão de DNMT1 e a metilação do DNA de diversos éxons do *Bdnf*, incluindo IV e IX, o que foi relacionado à menor expressão de *Bdnf* hipocampal na prole (ZHENG et al., 2016b). Além disso, estresses psicossociais reduzem a expressão de BDNF e aumentam a metilação do DNA do éxon IV do *Bdnf* no hipocampo dorsal, com hipermetilação na região CA1 (ROTH et al., 2011).

Na região do CPF, foi visto que estresses no início da vida induzem aumento na metilação dos éxons IV e IX do DNA do *Bdnf* de ratos adultos, perpetuando esse padrão ao longo de uma geração, o que é resgatado pelo tratamento com inibidor de metilação do DNA (ROTH et al., 2009). Além disso, ratos machos submetidos a estresses imprevisíveis no período pré-natal apresentam maior metilação em diversas ilhas CpG do éxon IV do *Bdnf* no CPF medial (BLAZE et al., 2017a). Todavia, a exposição ao estresse de derrota social na adolescência não alterou a porcentagem de metilação do DNA do éxon IV de *Bdnf* no CPF de camundongos adultos (XU et al., 2018).

Em contraste, modelos de EA têm sido associados a modificações epigenéticas que favorecem a transcrição de *Bdnf*. Animais submetidos a um enriquecimento social apresentaram maior acetilação em alguns promotores do *Bdnf*, tornando a estrutura do gene mais suscetível à transcrição (BRANCHI et al., 2011). Além disso, o EA aumentou a trimetilação da histona H3 em níveis de lisina 4 (H3K4me3) em torno do *Bdnf* no hipocampo de ratos idosos, o que parece estar associado ao resgate de déficits de memória (MORSE et al., 2015). Ainda, camundongos submetidos ao EA apresentaram regulação positiva na transcrição dos éxons IV e VI do *Bdnf* no hipocampo (ZAJAC et al., 2010).

A transcrição de *Bdnf* e comportamentos relacionados a transtornos de humor são bem discutidos na literatura. Contudo, o impacto do EA e da exposição ao estresse nos comportamentos relacionados à ansiedade e o envolvimento de modificações epigenéticas, especificamente a metilação do DNA, no gene do *Bdnf* ainda precisam de mais investigações, especialmente na região do CPF. Diante disto, o presente estudo teve como objetivo investigar os efeitos do EA sobre o modelo de estresse crônico imprevisível (ECI) nos comportamentos relacionados à ansiedade e na transcrição de *Bdnf*, no que diz respeito à expressão gênica de diferentes éxons e à metilação do DNA genômico.

## **6. CONCLUSÃO**

O presente estudo mostrou evidências substanciais de que o enriquecimento ambiental concomitante ao estresse crônico imprevisível desencadeia comportamento tipo-ansioso, o qual é revertido por um pré-tratamento com inibidor de metilação do DNA. Em animais não-tratados com o inibidor, este comportamento é acompanhado

por uma redução marcante da expressão de *Bdnf* no CPF, sem afetar a metilação do DNA do éxon IX do gene. Juntos, esses achados lançam luz pela primeira vez no sentido de compreender a base molecular da complexa interação entre estresse e EA no comportamento, o que pode ter implicações no desenvolvimento de novos alvos terapêuticos para o tratamento de psicopatologias relacionadas ao estresse. O envolvimento de mecanismos epigenéticos nesse contexto requer investigações mais aprofundadas.

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