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Genetic and Developmental Analysis of Zebrafish Reveals Candidate Genes Linked to Nicotine Addiction Vulnerability and Impulsivity

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We performed genetic and developmental analyses in zebrafish to identify genes and cellular processes underlying behaviors predictive of addiction vulnerability: nicotine reward and impulsivity. Forward genetic screens identified 19 families exhibiting heritable impulsivity or increased sensitivity to nicotine reward. Co-segregation analysis of known candidate mutations within these families led to the identification of candidate risk genes (*znf804a*, *hdac1*, *yif1a*, *col25a1*, *prkcb*). We generated lines carrying loss of function (LoF) mutations in these genes and in candidate genes previously associated with nicotine preference in humans (*ANKK1*, *RBFOX1*) or in analysis conducted by other researchers in the NAGC (*TNIK*, *FEZ1*) using CRISPR-Cas9 gene editing. *yif1a*, *fez1*, *tnika* and *rbfox1* LoF larvae showed hyperactivity, reduced rate of habituation to acoustic startle and increased impulsivity. *yif1a* and *fez1* LoF larvae showed altered sensitivity to dopaminergic drugs (apomorphine and amisulpride) and changes in the expression of key dopaminergic pathway components consistent with the observed behavioural alterations. *tnika* LoF larvae showed reduced sensitivity to clozapine (an antipsychotic drug known to reduce substance use among patients with schizophrenic disorders) on habituation. This study identifies critical genes, including *yif1a*, associated with addiction vulnerability and impulsivity, demonstrating the potential of zebrafish as a model for studying drug abuse-related phenotypes.