

Apoptosis Induced by a New Member of Saponin Family Is Mediated through Caspase-8-Dependent Cleavage of Bcl-2

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ABSTRACT

OSW-1 is a new member of cholestane saponin family, which is cytotoxic against several types of malignant cells. We reported herein that OSW-1 induced apoptosis of mammalian cells in a concentration- and time-dependent manner. The drug-induced apoptosis was mediated through the mitochondrial pathway, involving the cleavage of Bcl-2. This drug-induced Bcl-2 cleavage in Chinese hamster ovary (CHO) cells could be suppressed either by dominant-negative caspase-8 or by a caspase-8 inhibitor, suggesting that the Bcl-2 cleavage is dependent on caspase-8. In contrast, the Bcl-2 cleavage was independent of caspase-3 activity. The inhibition of caspase-8 activity also resulted in the reduction of apoptotic cells, indicating that Bcl-2 cleavage induced by caspase-8 promotes the progression of

apoptosis. The involvement of the caspase-8 activity in the processes of the OSW-1-induced apoptosis was further examined by using caspase-8-deficient Jurkat T cells. It was found that the caspase-8-deficient cells were resistant to OSW-1-induced Bcl-2 cleavage or apoptosis. Furthermore, the small subunit of caspase-8 was found to interact with Bcl-2 as determined by yeast two-hybrid and coimmunoprecipitation assays. Overexpression of caspase-8 small subunit reduced the cleavage of Bcl-2 and inhibited the apoptosis induced by OSW-1. Taken together, these results demonstrate that OSW-1 is capable of inducing apoptosis in mammalian cells, in which the caspase-8-dependent cleavage of Bcl-2 plays an important role.

Saponins belong to a family of glycoconjugates with a broad spectrum of biological and pharmacological activities (Hostettmann and Marson, 1995). As a new member of cholestane saponin family, OSW-1 was first isolated from the bulbs of *Ornithogalum saundersiae* (Kubo et al., 1992). Its total chemical synthesis was subsequently accomplished (Deng et al., 1999). It has been reported that OSW-1 was cytotoxic against several types of malignant cells at nanomolar concentrations, which are approximately 10 to 100 times more potent than those of the clinically applied anticancer agents mitomycin C and doxorubicin (Mimaki et al., 1997). Despite its highly potent antitumor activity and unique chemical structure, the molecular basis of its mechanism of action has remained elusive.

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Apoptosis is a universal cellular process that plays an important role in normal development as well as pathology of a number of human diseases. The resistance to apoptosis is a general feature of cancer cells. Two main pathways are involved in apoptosis. The extrinsic apoptotic pathway is activated by the ligation of death receptors, whereas the intrinsic apoptotic pathway is mediated through mitochondria (Zimmermann et al., 2001). The death receptors, such as Fas, recruit the adaptor protein FADD, which in turn recruits the proform of caspase-8. Aggregation of procaspase-8 leads to its auto-activation and subsequent activation of executioner caspases (Thorburn, 2004). The apoptotic signal can also be amplified through the mitochondria by altering its membrane permeability to facilitate the release of apoptogenic proteins such as cytochrome *c*, which is regulated by the members of Bcl-2 family (Degli Esposti, 2004).

Bcl-2 family proteins are subdivided into either antiapoptotic members such as Bcl-2 and Bcl-X_L, which inhibited the cytochrome *c* release from mitochondria, or proapoptotic members, such as Bax and Bak, which promote the release of

ABBREVIATIONS: OSW-1, 3 β ,16 β ,17 α -trihydroxycholest-5-en-22-one 16-O-{O-(2-O-(4-methoxybenzoyl)- β -D-xylopyranosyl)-(1 \rightarrow 3)-2-O-acetyl- α -arabinopyranoside}; CHO, Chinese hamster ovary; EGFP, enhanced green fluorescent protein; GFP, green fluorescent protein; ANOVA, analysis of variance; FADD, Fas-associating death domain-containing protein; fmk, fluoromethyl ketone.

cytochrome *c* (Yang et al., 1997; Marzo et al., 1998). Overexpression of Bcl-2 prevents cells from undergoing apoptosis because of its ability to preserve the mitochondrial membrane integrity (Yang et al., 1997). It has been shown that Bcl-2 is cleaved by caspases during apoptosis, which results in the inactivation of Bcl-2 (Grandgirard et al., 1998), or even converts Bcl-2 to a Bax-like fragment (Cheng et al., 1997). The inhibition of caspase-induced Bcl-2 cleavage results in the suppression of apoptosis (Kim et al., 1998). Although some experiments showed that caspase-3 was involved in the Bcl-2 cleavage (Cheng et al., 1997; Grandgirard et al., 1998; Zhang et al., 1999), the importance of caspase-3 in this process remains unclear, because Bcl-2 cleavage has been shown to occur in caspase-3-deficient MCF-7 cells (Kim et al., 1998).

Bcl-2 family members may facilitate cross-talk between the death receptor and mitochondrial pathways. For example, the cleavage of Bid, a "BH3-domain-only" Bcl-2 family member, by caspase-8 activates the mitochondrial pathway in apoptosis induced by death receptors (Li et al., 1998). Some data suggest that caspase-8 is related to the regulation of the inhibitory effect of Bcl-2 on apoptosis. The inhibition of caspase activation by Bcl-2 could be overcome by adding active caspase-8 in the *Xenopus laevis* cell-free system (Kuwana et al., 1998), whereas Bcl-2 could inhibit activation of caspase-8 and cell death induced by tumor necrosis factor-related apoptosis-inducing ligand (Fulda et al., 2002). In this manuscript, we show that the cleavage of Bcl-2 induced by OSW-1 in mammalian cells is mediated by caspase-8 rather than by caspase-3, whereas this Bcl-2 cleavage might promote the progress of apoptosis.

Materials and Methods

Cell Culture. Chinese hamster ovary (CHO) cells were grown in Dulbecco's modified Eagle's medium with 10% fetal bovine serum and 100 μ M nonessential amino acids (Invitrogen, Carlsbad, CA). FADD and caspase-8-deficient Jurkat T cells (Juo et al., 1998, 1999) as well as their corresponding parental cell line A3 were kindly provided by Dr. Junying Yuan (Harvard Medical School, Cambridge, MA) and maintained in RPMI-1640 medium supplemented with 10% fetal bovine serum.

Plasmid Constructions. The pEGFP-bcl-2 encoding EGFP-Bcl-2 fusion protein under the control of cytomegalovirus promoter was constructed by inserting full-length human bcl-2 cDNA into pEGFP-C vector (BD Biosciences Clontech, Palo Alto, CA). A pEGFP-C vector containing catalytically inactive mutant caspase-3 gene was constructed by introducing into a point mutation that substituted serine for the active site cysteine-163 of caspase-3. The following mutagenesis primers were used to generate caspase-3 mutant: 5'-forward (5'-CATTATTCAGGCTCCCGTGGTACAG-3') and 3'-reverse (5'-CTGTACCACGGGAGGCCTGAATAATG-3'). In addition, the pFLAG-caspase-8 dominant-negative plasmid was a gift from Dr. Teshiyuki Miyashita (U et al., 2001). pEGFP-casp8p10 was generated by inserting caspase-8 small subunit p10 sequence into pEGFP-C vector.

Stable Transfections. CHO 400 cells were transfected with pEGFP-bcl-2 and CHO AA8 cells were transfected with pFLAG-caspase-8 dominant-negative plasmid by Lipofectamine 2000 system (Invitrogen). The cells were selected in the presence of G418 in Dulbecco's modified Eagle's medium for approximately 20 days. After the selection, Bcl-2 expression level of individual clones was determined by the detection of EGFP expression level with flow cytometer (FACScan; Becton Dickinson, Franklin Lakes, NJ), whereas the FLAG-caspase-8 expression was determined by Western blotting with an anti-FLAG antibody (Sigma-Aldrich, St. Louis, MO).

Transient Transfections. CHO AA8 cells were transiently transfected with mutant caspase-3 plasmid and pEGFP-casp8p10 plasmid, respectively, by electroporation with Nucleofector T kit according to the manufacturer's instructions (Amaxa Biosystems, Cologne, Germany). The overexpression of mutant caspase-3 or p10 of caspase-8 was verified either by the detection of EGFP expression level on flow cytometer or by Western blotting assay. The transfection efficiency was up to 70%.

Preparation of Cytosolic and Mitochondrial Extracts by Digitonin Treatment. CHO AA8 cells were harvested and resuspended in a buffer (20 mM HEPES-KOH, pH 7.3, 110 mM KAc, 5 mM NaAc, 2 mM MgAc₂, and 1 mM EGTA) containing 200 μ g/ml digitonin (Calbiochem-Novabiochem, La Jolla, CA) on ice for 10 min. The permeabilized cells containing cellular organelles and nuclei were pelleted by centrifugation as mitochondrion-fractions, and the supernatants were collected as cytosolic fractions.

Western Blotting Analysis. Intact cells, supernatants, and the pellets of digitonin-treated cells were added with loading buffer (50 mM Tris-HCl, pH 6.8, 100 mM dithiothreitol, 2% SDS, 10% glycerol, and 0.1% bromophenol blue). The equalized amounts of proteins from each sample were subjected to SDS-polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis. Western blotting was carried out with primary antibodies anti-Bax, anti-cytochrome *c*, and anti-GFP (Santa Cruz Biotechnology, Santa Cruz, CA); anti-Bcl-2 (human) and anti-Bcl-2 (hamster) (Sigma-Aldrich, St. Louis, MO); anti-caspase-8 and anti-FADD (BD Biosciences, San Diego, CA); anti-caspase-3 (Cell Signaling Technology, Beverly, MA), followed by horseradish peroxidase conjugated secondary antibodies (Santa Cruz Biotechnology). Immune complexes were detected by the enhanced chemiluminescence system according to the manufacturer's instructions (ECL; GE Healthcare, Little Chalfont, UK).

Immunoprecipitation Analysis. CHO AA8 cells stably transfected with the pEGFP-casp8p10 or the vector were lysed in the cell lysis buffer (50 mM Tris-HCl, pH 7.6, 0.5% Triton X-100, 5 mM EDTA, 1 mM Na₃VO₄, 2 μ g/ml leupeptin, 2 μ g/ml antipain, 20 μ g/ml benzamide, 2 μ g/ml chymostatin, 2 μ g/ml pepstatin, and 1 mM phenylmethylsulfonyl fluoride) and ultrasonicated for 2 min on ice. The mixtures were centrifuged and the supernatants were incubated first with anti-Bcl-2 antibody at 4°C for 3 h, and then incubated with protein G-agarose (Santa Cruz Biotechnology) overnight. The washed immunoprecipitates were subjected to immunoblot analysis with anti-GFP and anti-Bcl-2 antibodies.

Flow Cytometric Analysis. To identify sub-G₁ DNA region (below the G₀/G₁ peak), which is indicative of cells undergoing apoptosis, the drug-treated cells were harvested and fixed with 70% ethanol. The fixed cells were stained with propidium iodide and analyzed by the flow cytometer (FACScan; BD Biosciences, Franklin Lakes, NJ). Flow cytometric analysis with Annexin V-fluorescein isothiocyanate was done according to the manufacturer's instructions (BD Pharmingen, San Diego, CA).

DNA Fragmentation Assay. DNA of CHO AA8 cells was prepared as described by Hockenbery et al. (1990). In brief, the drug-treated cells were lysed in a cell lysis buffer (10 mM Tris-HCl, pH 8.0, 25 mM EDTA, and 0.25% Triton X-100) on ice for 30 min. After centrifugation of the cell lysates, the supernatants were incubated with 100 μ g/ml RNase at 37°C for 30 min and then with 200 μ g/ml proteinase K at 56°C overnight. The mixture was extracted with phenol-chloroform and precipitated with ethanol. The pellets were resuspended in Tris-EDTA buffer and subjected to agarose gel electrophoresis.

Caspase-8 Activity Assay. CHO cells were treated with OSW-1 for indicated time. Then the caspase-8 activities were monitored using the caspase-8 activity assay kit according to the manufacturer's protocol (Calbiochem-Novabiochem).

Yeast Two-Hybrid Assay. The yeast two-hybrid assay for detecting interaction between caspase-8 and Bcl-2 was carried out basically according to the strategies from the reference Kamada and Tsujimoto (2000), in which both large and small subunits of

caspase-8 separately expressed in yeast can be kept in equimolar ratio of large to small subunits. In brief, fragments encoding caspase-8 subunits or Bcl-2 protein were generated by PCR and cloned into pGAD10, pGAD10 Δ AD (pGAD10 lacking the Gal4 activation domain) or pBTM116, to get pGAD10-bcl-2, pGAD10 Δ AD-casp8-p18, pBTM-casp8-p10 and pBTM-casp8-p18. The fragment bearing casp8-p18 under control of ADH1 promoter from pGAD10 Δ AD-casp8-p18 was cloned into the PvuII site of pBTM-casp8-p10 to generate pBTM-casp8-p10p18. p18^m was constructed by introducing a point mutation (Cys \rightarrow Ser), which is the same as the mutation in the pFLAG-caspase-8 dominant-negative plasmid, into the p18 fragment. The bait plasmid pBTM-casp8-p10p18, pBTM-casp8-p10, or pBTM-casp8-p18 was cotransformed into yeast strain L40 (*MAT a trp1 leu2 his3 ade2 LYS::LexA-His3 URA3::LexA-lacZ*) with the prey plasmid pGAD10-bcl-2 by LiAc yeast transformation assay. β -Galactosidase activity was detected by the filter lift assay according to the Yeast Protocols Handbook (BD Biosciences Clontech). The plasmids pBTM116 and pGAD10, and the yeast strain L40 were gifts from Dr. Youshihide Tsujimoto (Department of Medical Genetics, Biomedical Research Center, Osaka University Medical School Osaka, Japan).

Statistical Analysis. All the data in this study were expressed as the mean \pm S.D. from at least three independent experiments. Statistical analysis was performed using one-way ANOVA or by independent-samples *t* test. A value of *p* < 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

Results

OSW-1 Induces Apoptosis in CHO Cells in a Dose- and Time-Dependent Manner. OSW-1 has been shown to possess potent antitumor activity (Mimaki et al., 1997). To analyze its biological effects, exponentially growing CHO AA8 cells were treated with 200 ng/ml synthetic OSW-1 for 24 h. Apoptosis of the drug-treated cells was measured by three apoptotic assays, including sub-G₁ DNA content analysis, Annexin-V assay, and DNA fragmentation assay (Vermes et al., 1995; Sgonc and Gruber, 1998; Zhang and Xu, 2000) (Fig. 1A). Significant apoptosis was seen by all three assays. Further analysis showed that OSW-1 induced apoptosis in CHO cells in a dose- and time-dependent manner (Fig. 1B).

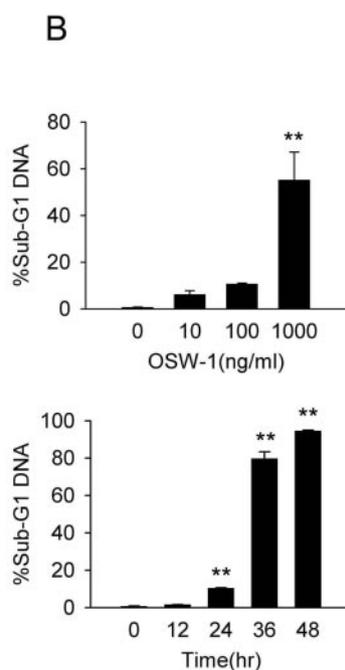
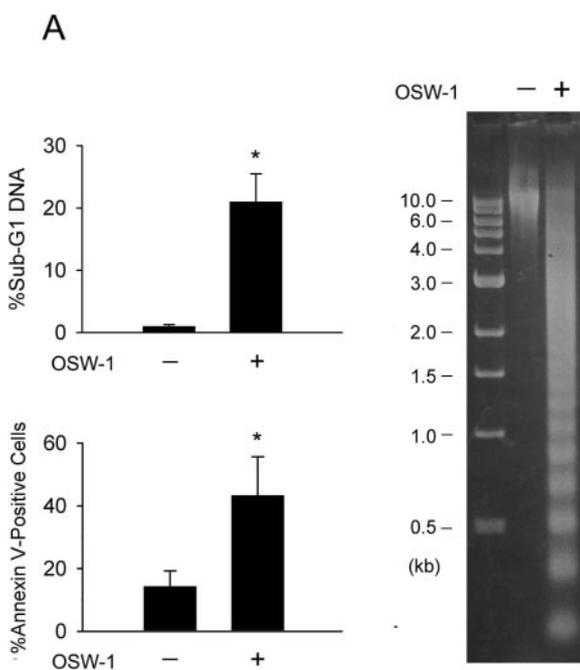


Fig. 1. Apoptosis of CHO cells is induced by OSW-1. A, detection of apoptotic CHO cells in the presence of OSW-1. CHO AA8 cells were treated with 200 ng/ml OSW-1 for 24 h. Then, the treated cells were subjected to sub-G₁ analysis (top left), annexin-V analysis (bottom left) and DNA-fragmentation analysis (right). *, *p* < 0.05 compared with control. B, OSW-1 induces apoptosis in a dose- and time-dependent manner. Flow cytometric analysis was used to detect sub-G₁ DNA content of cells incubated with OSW-1 at indicated concentrations for 24 h (top) or with 100 ng/ml OSW-1 for indicated times (bottom). **, compared with control *p* < 0.01, ANOVA followed by post hoc test.

results suggest that Bcl-2 cleavage induced by OSW-1 is required for the drug-induced apoptosis.

The Cleavage of Bcl-2 Is Mediated by Caspase-8 Rather Than by Caspase-3. Because some previous experiments indicated that caspase-3 was involved in the cleavage of Bcl-2 (Cheng et al., 1997; Grandgiard et al., 1998; Zhang et al., 1999), the relationship between caspase-3 activity and Bcl-2 cleavage was examined in the context of OSW-1-induced apoptosis. The time course of activation of caspase-3 was determined by Western blotting analysis, in which an active form of caspase-3 should be cleaved to yield a p19 fragment (Li et al., 2002). The p19 fragment of caspase-3 was detected when the cells were treated with OSW-1 for more than 22 h (Fig. 3A, top). In contrast, the cleavage of Bcl-2 could be detected as early as 18 h after drug treatment (Fig. 3A, bottom). These results indicate that the time course of activation of caspase-3 is different from that of the Bcl-2 cleavage.

To further investigate the role of caspase-3 in Bcl-2 cleavage, a caspase-3 selective inhibitor, *N*-benzyloxycarbonyl-DQMD-fmk (Chou et al., 2004), was administered to the cells treated with OSW-1. The inhibition of the caspase-3 activity by DQMD-fmk did not prevent the cleavage of Bcl-2 (Fig. 3B, top). The inhibition of caspase-3 activity was confirmed by the observation that the p19 fragment of caspase-3 was replaced by a p20 fragment (Fig. 3B, lower), which represents

an inactive middle product of caspase-3 (Li et al., 2002). Furthermore, CHO cells overexpressing dominant-negative caspase-3 were generated by substituting the catalytically active site cysteine with serine, which specifically blocked the activation of endogenous caspase-3 (Aouad et al., 2004). As shown in Fig. 3C, OSW-1-induced Bcl-2 cleavage was detected in the cells transfected with either the vector or the catalytically mutant caspase-3 plasmid. These results support the notion that OSW-1-induced Bcl-2 cleavage is independent of the caspase-3 activity.

Because it has been reported that caspase-8 is activated before the activation of caspase-3 (Scheel-Toellner et al., 2004), we next examined the relationship between caspase-8 activity and Bcl-2 cleavage. A widely used caspase-8 inhibitor, CP-IETD-cho (Suen et al., 2003), was added to cells treated with OSW-1. OSW-1-induced cleavage of Bcl-2 was inhibited by IETD-cho (Fig. 4A, right) when the activity of caspase-8 was inhibited as expected (Fig. 4A, left). To confirm this result, a CHO cell line stably transfected with a caspase-8 dominant-negative plasmid was established (see *Materials and Methods*). OSW-1-induced Bcl-2 cleavage was undetectable in the cells overexpressing the catalytically inactive mutant of caspase-8 (Fig. 4B), consistent with the observation that inhibition of caspase-8 activity prevents the Bcl-2 cleavage. In addition, the inhibition of caspase-8 activity either by the inhibitor or by the dominant-negative

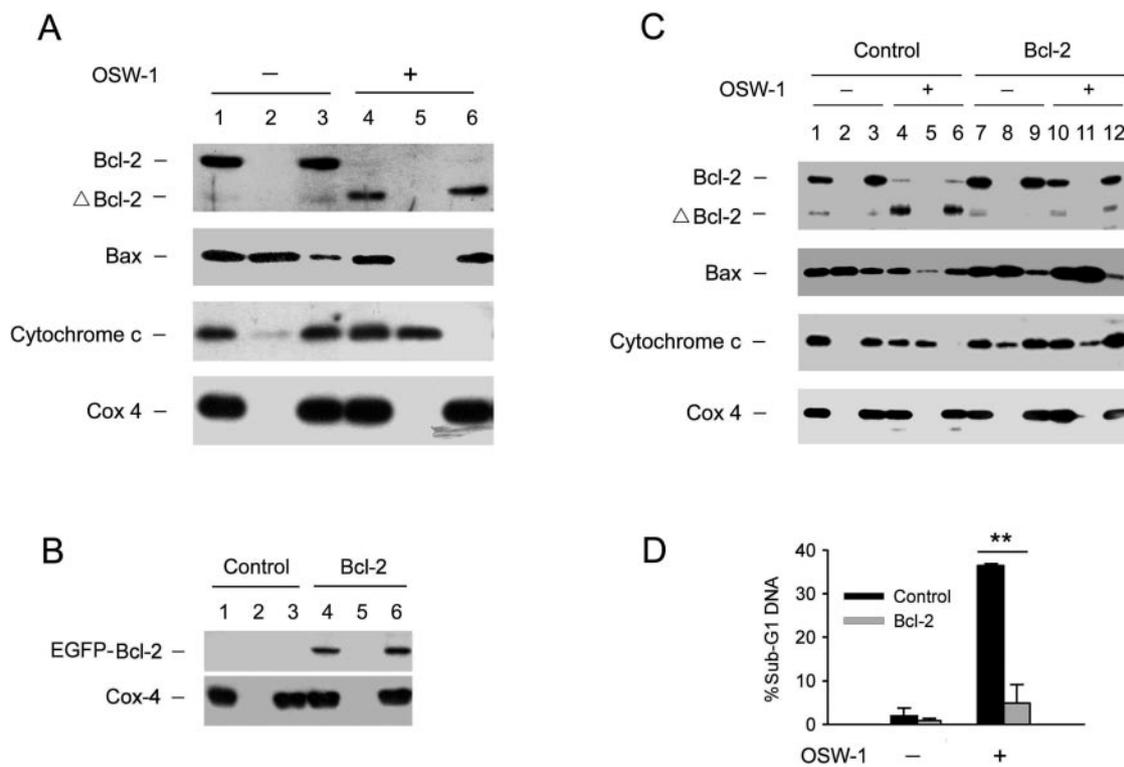


Fig. 2. OSW-1-induced apoptosis is involved in mitochondria-mediated pathway. **A**, analysis of Bcl-2 cleavage, Bax translocation and cytochrome *c* release during the apoptotic process in CHO AA8 cells. After the drug treatment, the floating cells taken as apoptotic cells in the late stage of apoptosis were harvested and fractionated as described under *Materials and Methods*. The total cell lysates (lanes 1 and 4), cytosolic fractions (lanes 2 and 5) and mitochondrion-fractions (lanes 3 and 6) were subjected to Western blotting. Δ Bcl-2 is a cleaved form of Bcl-2 approximately 23 kDa. Cytochrome *c* oxidase IV (Cox 4) was shown as a quality control for fractionations. **B**, overexpression of Bcl-2 in the stably transfected CHO 400 cells. The subcellular localization of expressed EGFP-Bcl-2 fusion protein was analyzed. The total cell lysates (lanes 1 and 4), cytosolic fractions (lanes 2 and 5), and mitochondrion fractions (lanes 3 and 6) were subjected to Western blotting with an anti-GFP antibody. **C**, cleavage of endogenous Bcl-2 and the translocation of Bax and cytochrome *c* are blocked in the cells overexpressing Bcl-2. After the treatment with 100 ng/ml OSW-1 for 30 h, the transfected cells and the control cells were harvested and fractionated. The total cell lysates (lanes 1, 4, 7, and 10), cytosolic fractions (lanes 2, 5, 8, and 11), and mitochondrion fractions (lanes 3, 6, 9, and 12) were subjected to Western blotting. **D**, OSW-1-induced apoptosis is inhibited by overexpressing Bcl-2. The sub-G₁ DNA contents of treated cells were analyzed by flow cytometer. **, $p < 0.01$, ANOVA followed by post hoc test.

caspase-8 mutant did reduce the amount of apoptotic cells under OSW-1 treatment (Fig. 4C), suggesting that caspase-8 activity is required for the OSW-1-induced apoptosis, at least partially, by cleaving Bcl-2 molecules.

Caspase-8 Null Cells Are Resistant to the OSW-1-Induced Apoptosis. If caspase-8 is involved in the OSW-1-induced apoptosis, the deficiency of caspase-8 should lead to the resistance of the cells to the drug-induced apoptosis. Thus, Jurkat T cells deficient in caspase-8 were treated with OSW-1. The wild-type A3 cells were employed as a positive control and Jurkat T cells deficient in FADD were used as a negative control, which are known to be resistant to death receptor-mediated apoptosis (Juo et al., 1998, 1999). Caspase-8-deficient Jurkat T cells treated with OSW-1 failed to undergo apoptosis ($p > 0.05$; Fig. 5B). In contrast, both wild-type A3 cells and FADD-deficient Jurkat T cells underwent apoptosis upon treatment with OSW-1 (Fig. 5B), although the apoptotic population of A3 cells was much higher than that of the FADD deficient cells (Fig. 5B). It has been shown that the Bcl-2 could be cleaved in Jurkat T cells although the Bcl-2 cleavage was not significant, consistent with the previous observation (Shim et al., 2002). In the present study, our results showed that the Bcl-2 cleavage was detectable in wild-type cells and inconspicuous in FADD $^{-/-}$ cells (Fig. 5A), whereas no Bcl-2 cleavage was detected in caspase-8 $^{-/-}$ cells (Fig. 5A). Taken together, these results suggest that the caspase-8-deficient cells are resistant to OSW-1-induced Bcl-2 cleavage or apoptosis.

There Are Physical and Functional Interactions between Caspase-8 and Bcl-2. The results of the caspase-8-dependent cleavage of Bcl-2 indicated that Bcl-2 might be a proteolytic substrate of caspase-8; thus, these two proteins might have physical interactions with each other. To test this speculation, a yeast two-hybrid system was developed basically according to the strategies by Kamada and Tsujimoto, 2000 (see *Materials and Methods*). It was shown that either a bait plasmid containing both large and small subunits (p10p18) of active caspase-8 or only the small subunit (p10) resulted in the blue-color reaction for β -galactosidase filter assay (Fig. 6A), indicating that caspase-8 is capable of interacting with Bcl-2 via its small subunit. To further confirm this observation, a point mutation was introduced into active site cysteine of p18, which prevents the proteolytic cleavage of the substrate and results in the formation of a stable enzyme-substrate complex in yeast cells (Kamada and Tsujimoto, 2000). Indeed, the bait plasmid containing both the small subunit and mutated large subunit (p10p18^m) resulted in higher β -Gal activity, indicative of stronger interactions (Fig. 6A). Furthermore, the coimmunoprecipitation assay was applied to verify the existence of the physical association between caspase-8 small subunit and Bcl-2. In CHO cells, the endogenous Bcl-2 was found to coimmunoprecipitate with the ectopically expressed EGFP-fused p10 subunit (Fig. 6B). These results strongly suggest that Bcl-2 is capable of associating with caspase-8, which may facilitate its cleavage by caspase-8 during OSW-1-induced apoptosis.

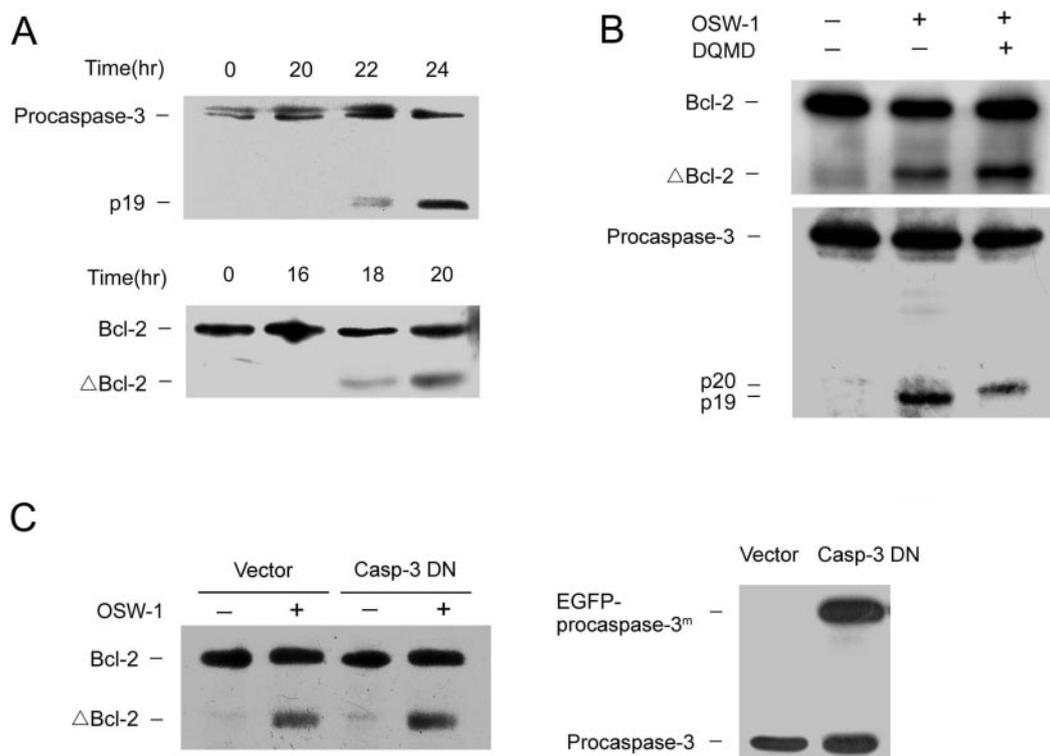


Fig. 3. OSW-1-induced Bcl-2 cleavage is independent of caspase-3. **A**, Bcl-2 cleavage occurs before the activation of caspase-3 in the presence of OSW-1. CHO AA8 cells were treated with 200 ng/ml OSW-1 for indicated times. The cleavage of Bcl-2 and procaspase-3 were analyzed by Western blotting. A p19 fragment was detected as the active form of caspase-3. **B**, OSW-1 induces Bcl-2 cleavage in the presence of a caspase-3 inhibitor. The CHO cells treated with 40 μ M caspase-3 inhibitor DQMD-fmk 1 h, followed by addition of 200 ng/ml OSW-1 and incubation for 24 h. The samples were subjected to Western blotting. The bottom shows a p20 fragment that is an immature cleavage product of caspase-3 in the presence of the caspase-3 inhibitor. **C**, OSW-1 induces Bcl-2 cleavage in cells expressing a caspase-3 dominant-negative (DN) mutant. CHO AA8 cells were transiently transfected with a mutant caspase-3 plasmid as described under *Materials and Methods*. The transfected cells were treated with 200 ng/ml OSW-1 for 24 h. The cells were harvested and lysed for Western blotting. Right, transient expression of mutant caspase-3 protein that is fused with EGFP (EGFP-caspase-3^m) by Western blotting with anti-caspase-3 antibody.

In addition, we also determined whether the interaction between the small subunit of caspase-8 and Bcl-2 might have functional consequences in vivo. Indeed, Bcl-2 cleavage was partially inhibited in OSW-1-treated CHO cells upon transient overexpression of p10 (Fig. 7A), accompanied by the reduction of the number of apoptotic cells (Fig. 7B). We surmise that the overexpressed caspase-8 small subunits in the OSW-1 treated cells compete with the endogenous caspase-8 molecules to the binding site of Bcl-2 molecules, thereby preventing active caspase-8 molecules from cleaving Bcl-2 proteins.

Discussion

Although it has been reported by some groups that the Bcl-2 cleavage was carried out by caspase-3 (Cheng et al., 1997), this notion was challenged by the observation that the cleavage of Bcl-2 was detected in caspase-3 mutant

MCF-7 cells (Kim et al., 1998). It has been reported that several purified recombinant human caspases, such as caspase-1, -5, -7, and -8, can cleave Bcl-2 in vitro (Kim et al., 1998). Furthermore, Bcl-2-coated beads could sequester procaspase-8 in cell lysates by the formation of caspase-8/Bcl-2 complex (Poulaki et al., 2001). These results are consistent with our observation, that Bcl-2 cleavage was mediated by caspase-8 rather than by caspase-3 in mammalian cells upon treatment with OSW-1.

An important remaining question is how caspase-8 is activated in the cells treated with OSW-1. It has been known that activation of caspase-8 is mediated through the death receptor pathway (Thorburn, 2004). We addressed this question, at least in part, by treating Jurkat T cells either deficient in FADD or caspase-8 with OSW-1. The significant suppression of the cell death in either FADD or caspase-8 mutant cells suggests that the death receptor pathway is

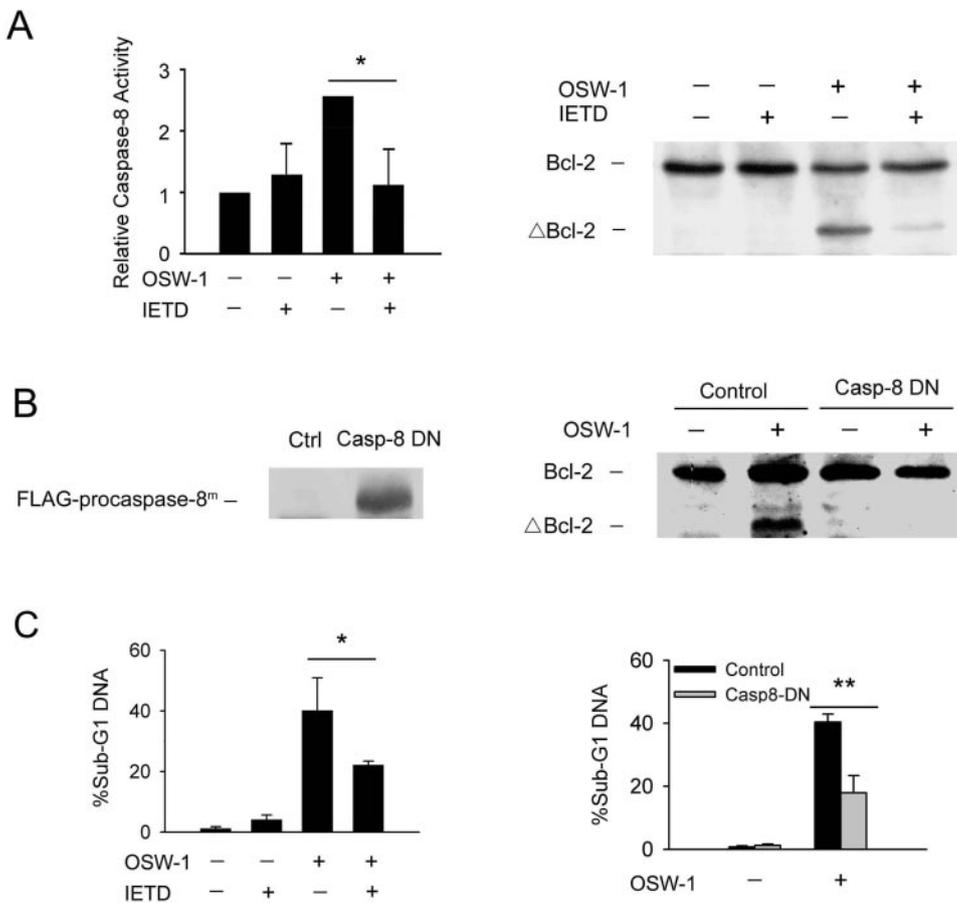


Fig. 4. OSW-1-induced Bcl-2 cleavage is caspase-8-dependent. A, inhibition of OSW-1-induced Bcl-2 cleavage in the presence of a caspase-8 inhibitor. CHO AA8 cells were treated with 40 μM caspase-8 inhibitor IETD-cho 1 h, followed by addition of 200 ng/ml OSW-1 and incubation for an additional 20 h. The relative caspase-8 activity was measured (left), and the Bcl-2 cleavage was analyzed by Western blotting (right). *, *p* < 0.05, ANOVA followed by post hoc test. B, inhibition of OSW-1-induced Bcl-2 cleavage in the cells stably transfected with caspase-8 dominant-negative (DN) plasmid. Stably transfected CHO AA8 cells expressing dominant-negative caspase-8 mutant were isolated as described under *Materials and Methods*. The transfected cells were treated with 200 ng/ml OSW-1 for 20 h. The cleavage of Bcl-2 was analyzed by Western blotting (right). The left shows the expression of mutant caspase-8 protein fused with FLAG (FLAG-caspase-8^m), which was detected by anti-FLAG antibody. C, inhibition of caspase-8 activation reduces the OSW-1-induced apoptosis. The sub-G₁ DNA content of cells either in the presence of IETD-cho (left) or transfected with caspase-8 DN (right) was analyzed with flow cytometer. *, *p* < 0.05 and **, *p* < 0.01, ANOVA followed by post hoc test.

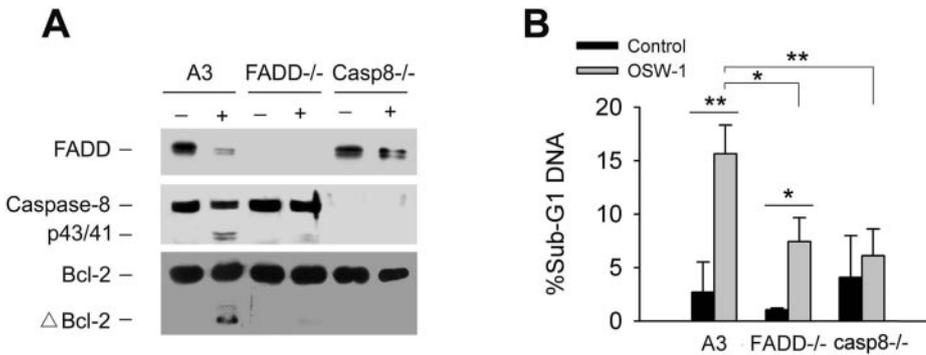


Fig. 5. Caspase-8-deficient cells are resistant to OSW-1-induced Bcl-2 cleavage and apoptosis. A, Bcl-2 cleavage is inhibited in the FADD or caspase-8 mutant cells in the presence of OSW-1. Jurkat T cell lines deficient in FADD or caspase-8 and the wild-type cell line A3 were treated with 100 ng/ml OSW-1 for 12 h and analyzed by Western blotting. The upper shows a p43/41 fragment that is an active product cleaved from procaspase-8. B, caspase-8-deficient cells are insensitive to apoptosis induced by OSW-1. Sub-G₁ DNA contents were detected by flow cytometric analysis after the drug treatment. *, *p* < 0.05 and **, *p* < 0.01, ANOVA followed by post hoc test.

involved in the OSW-1-induced apoptosis (Fig. 5B). However, caspase-8 was still slightly activated in FADD^{-/-} cells, whereas the cell death induced by OSW-1 in FADD^{-/-} cells was more pronounced than that in caspase-8^{-/-} cells (Fig. 5B), suggesting that except for the Fas/FADD receptor pathway, there is another route activating caspase-8, which might be independent of the death receptor pathway (Ryu et al., 2005).

The interplay between the mitochondrial and the death receptor-mediated pathways is regulated by Bcl-2 family. A BH-3 only protein Bid has been identified to provide the link between these two pathways, which is cleaved by caspase-8 and translocated to mitochondria to play its pro-apoptotic role (Li et al., 1998). The present work suggests that caspase-8 directly participates in the cleavage of Bcl-2, which makes a new link for the cross-talk between the mitochondrial and the death receptor-mediated pathways.

Because it was observed that the cleavage of Bcl-2 by caspase-8 took place before the Bax translocation in the OSW-1-treated CHO cells (data not shown), we suggest that caspase-8-dependent cleavage of Bcl-2 contributes to the amplification of death signals through promoting the translocation of Bax from cytosol to mitochondria, which results in the release of cytochrome *c* from mitochondria. On the other hand, we cannot exclude the possibility that caspase-8-mediated cleavage converts Bcl-2 to a pro-apoptotic fragment as described previously (Cheng et al., 1997), which might directly promote the cytochrome *c* release from mitochondria.

Both the control of cell proliferation and the regulation of apoptosis are known to be dysregulated during cancer development (Evan and Vousden, 2001). A higher incidence of genetic alterations of apoptotic mediators occurs in malignant tumors, such as Bcl-2 overexpression (Raffo et al., 1995) or Apaf-1 inactivation (Soengas et al., 2001). Therefore, a

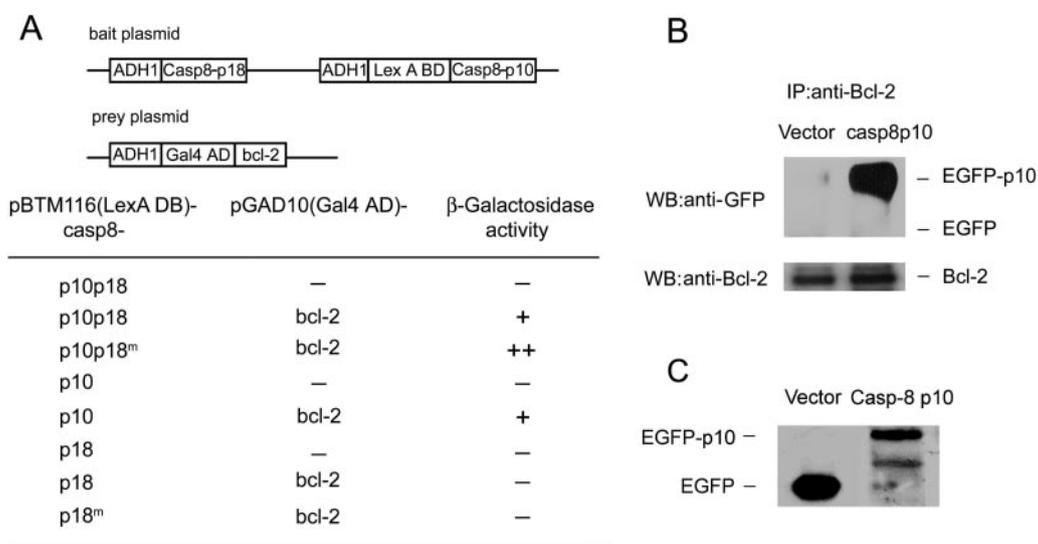


Fig. 6. Physical interaction between caspase-8 and Bcl-2. A, yeast L40 cells were cotransformed with plasmids for LexA DNA binding domain and Gal4 activation domain fusion proteins as indicated. The bait plasmids containing sequences for both large (p18) and small (p10) subunits of caspase-8 were expressed separately under ADH1 promoters, whereas the small subunit was fused to LexA DNA binding domain. p18^m represents a p18 mutant fragment, which is the same as caspase-8 DN at the active site in p18 subunit. The expression of reporter gene *Lac Z*, which is induced by the interaction between caspase-8 and Bcl-2 in this yeast two-hybrid system, caused pink yeast clones to change into blue color in the presence of X-gal. + and ++ indicate the development of blue color within 2.5 h and 2 h, whereas - indicates no such color development. B, coimmunoprecipitation of Bcl-2 and EGFP-p10. The whole-cell lysates of CHO cells stably transfected with pEGFP-casp8p10 were immunoprecipitated with anti-Bcl-2 antibody. Immunoprecipitates were immunoblotted by anti-GFP antibody (top), whereas the amount of immunoprecipitates was controlled with antibody against Bcl-2 (bottom). IP, immunoprecipitation; WB, Western blotting. C, the detection of EGFP-p10 fusion protein. The whole-cell lysates of CHO cells stably transfected with pEGFP or pEGFP-casp8p10 were subjected to Western blotting with anti-GFP antibody.

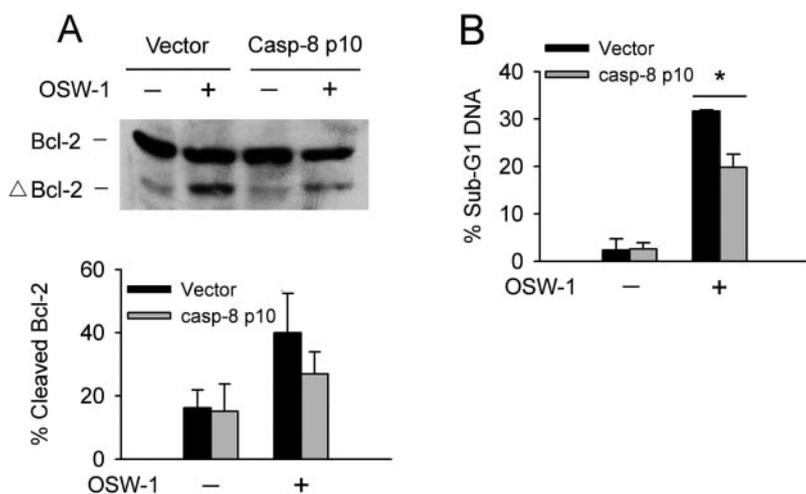


Fig. 7. Functional consequence of the interaction between caspase-8 small subunit and Bcl-2 in vivo. CHO AA8 cells were transiently transfected with a plasmid expressing EGFP-p10 (caspase-8) or the vector. A, Bcl-2 cleavage is partially inhibited by p10 overexpression. The transfected cells were treated with 200 ng/ml OSW-1 for 20 h and analyzed by Western blotting (top). The signals from three independent blots were quantified and analyzed statistically (bottom). B, overexpression of p10 reduces OSW-1-induced apoptosis. The percentage of sub-G₁ DNA content was analyzed with flow cytometer. *, *p* < 0.05, ANOVA followed by post hoc test.

promising strategy for developing new cancer chemotherapy is to develop anticancer drugs that either activate apoptosis or increase the susceptibility to apoptosis among malignant cells (Bamford et al., 2000; Kaufmann and Earnshaw, 2000). Our results demonstrate that OSW-1 belongs to this class of apoptosis-inducing agents, raising the possibility that OSW-1 could be developed as a potential antitumor drug.

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