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## Review

# Weight of evidence evaluation of a network of adverse outcome pathways linking activation of the nicotinic acetylcholine receptor in honey bees to colony death

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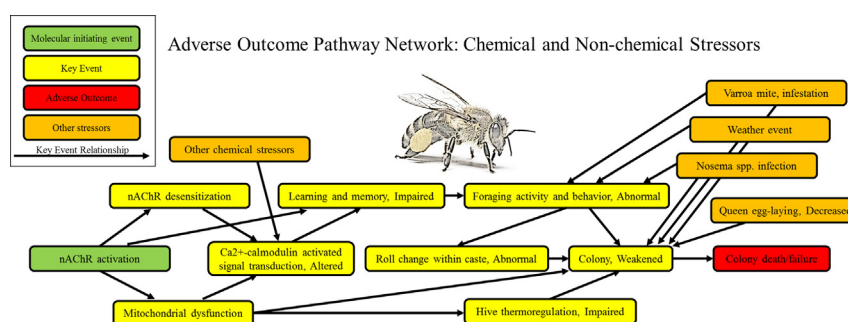
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## HIGHLIGHTS

- Six AOPs were developed describing perturbation of the honey bee nicotinic acetylcholine receptor leading to colony death.
- From weight of evidence evaluation, sufficient biological plausibility exists to link activation of nAChR to colony death.
- Uncertainties remain in the AOP descriptions, identifying knowledge gaps that can guide future research.
- These AOPs provide a foundation for future collaborations to understand chemical and non-chemical stressors on bee colonies.

## GRAPHICAL ABSTRACT



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## ABSTRACT

Ongoing honey bee (*Apis mellifera*) colony losses are of significant international concern because of the essential role these insects play in pollinating crops. Both chemical and non-chemical stressors have been implicated as possible contributors to colony failure; however, the potential role(s) of commonly-used neonicotinoid insecticides has emerged as particularly concerning. Neonicotinoids act on the nicotinic acetylcholine receptors (nAChRs) in the central nervous system to eliminate pest insects. However, mounting evidence indicates that neonicotinoids also may adversely affect beneficial pollinators, such as the honey bee, via impairments on learning and memory, and ultimately foraging success. The specific mechanisms linking activation of the nAChR to adverse effects on learning and memory are uncertain. Additionally, clear connections between observed impacts on individual bees and colony level effects are lacking. The objective of this review was to develop adverse outcome pathways (AOPs) as a means to evaluate the biological plausibility and empirical evidence supporting (or refuting) the linkage between activation of the physiological target site, the nAChR, and colony level consequences. Potential for exposure was not a consideration in AOP development and therefore this effort should not be considered a risk assessment. Nonetheless, development of the AOPs described herein has led to the

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identification of research gaps which, for example, may be of high priority in understanding how perturbation of pathways involved in neurotransmission can adversely affect normal colony functions, causing colony instability and subsequent bee population failure. A putative AOP network was developed, laying the foundation for further insights as to the role of combined chemical and non-chemical stressors in impacting bee populations. Insights gained from the AOP network assembly, which more realistically represents multi-stressor impacts on honey bee colonies, are promising toward understanding common sensitive nodes in key biological pathways and identifying where mitigation strategies may be focused to reduce colony losses.

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## Contents

1.	Introduction . . . . .	0
2.	Development of adverse outcome pathways . . . . .	0
3.	AOP descriptions . . . . .	0
3.1.	Chemical initiators . . . . .	0
3.2.	MIE: nicotinic acetylcholine receptor activation . . . . .	0
3.3.	KE1: desensitization of nicotinic acetylcholine receptor. . . . .	0
3.3.1.	Normal biology . . . . .	0
3.4.	KER1: nAChR activation leads to desensitization . . . . .	0
3.4.1.	Consideration of biological plausibility and empirical support. . . . .	0
3.4.2.	Weight of evidence for KER1 . . . . .	0
3.5.	KE2: mitochondrial dysfunction . . . . .	0
3.5.1.	Normal biology . . . . .	0
3.6.	KER 2: nAChR activation leads to mitochondrial dysfunction . . . . .	0
3.6.1.	Consideration of biological plausibility and empirical support. . . . .	0
3.6.2.	Weight of evidence consideration for KER2 . . . . .	0
3.7.	KE3: $Ca^{2+}$ -calmodulin activated signal transduction, altered . . . . .	0
3.7.1.	Normal biology (Fig. 2; steps 1–5, 8–12) . . . . .	0
3.8.	KER3: nAChR desensitization leads to altered $Ca^{2+}$ -calmodulin activated signal transduction . . . . .	0
3.8.1.	Consideration of biological plausibility and empirical support. . . . .	0
3.8.2.	Weight of evidence for KER3 . . . . .	0
3.9.	KER4: mitochondrial dysfunction leads to altered $Ca^{2+}$ -calmodulin activated signal transduction . . . . .	0
3.9.1.	Consideration of biological plausibility and empirical support. . . . .	0
3.9.2.	Weight of evidence for KER4 . . . . .	0
3.10.	KE4: learning and memory, impairment . . . . .	0
3.10.1.	Normal biology . . . . .	0
3.11.	KER5: altered $Ca^{2+}$ -calmodulin activated signal transduction leads to impaired learning and memory. . . . .	0
3.11.1.	Consideration of biological plausibility and empirical support . . . . .	0
3.11.2.	CREB signaling pathways and memory . . . . .	0
3.11.3.	Adenylyl cyclase inhibition and impaired memory (Fig. 2; step 4) . . . . .	0
3.11.4.	Protein kinase A and impaired memory (Fig. 2; steps 6 and 9) . . . . .	0
3.11.5.	CaMKII and impaired memory (Fig. 2; step 8) . . . . .	0
3.11.6.	Inhibition of MAPK cascade and impaired memory (Fig. 2; step 10) . . . . .	0
3.11.7.	Inhibition of CREB transcriptional activation leads to impaired memory (Fig. 2; steps 11–12) . . . . .	0
3.12.	KER 6: nAChR activation leads to impaired learning and memory . . . . .	0
3.12.1.	Consideration of biological plausibility and empirical support . . . . .	0
3.12.2.	Weight of evidence consideration for KER6 . . . . .	0
3.13.	KE5: foraging activity and behavior, abnormal . . . . .	0
3.13.1.	Normal biology . . . . .	0
3.14.	KER7: impaired learning and memory leads to abnormal foraging activity and behavior . . . . .	0
3.14.1.	Consideration of biological plausibility and empirical support . . . . .	0
3.15.	KE6: role change within caste, abnormal. . . . .	0
3.15.1.	Normal biology . . . . .	0
3.16.	KER8: abnormal foraging activity and behavior leads to abnormal role change within caste . . . . .	0
3.16.1.	Consideration of biological plausibility and empirical support . . . . .	0
3.16.2.	Weight of evidence for KER8 . . . . .	0
3.17.	KE7: hive thermoregulation, impaired . . . . .	0
3.17.1.	Normal biology . . . . .	0
3.18.	KER9: mitochondrial dysfunction leads to impaired hive thermoregulation . . . . .	0
3.18.1.	Consideration of biological plausibility and empirical support . . . . .	0
3.18.2.	Weight of evidence consideration for KER9 . . . . .	0
3.19.	KE8: colony weakened (Fig. 3) . . . . .	0
3.19.1.	Normal biology . . . . .	0
3.20.	KER10: mitochondrial dysfunction leads to weakened colony . . . . .	0
3.20.1.	Consideration of biological plausibility and empirical support . . . . .	0
3.21.	KER11: abnormal foraging activity and behavior leads to weakened colony . . . . .	0
3.21.1.	Consideration of biological plausibility and empirical support . . . . .	0
3.22.	KER12: abnormal role change within caste leads to weakened colony. . . . .	0
3.22.1.	Consideration of biological plausibility and empirical support . . . . .	0

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