In vitro Antiplasmodial Activity of Some Medicinal Plants Used in Folk Medicine in Burkina Faso Against Malaria

1Cheikna Zongo, 2Lamoussa Paul Ouattara, 1Aly Savadogo, 2Souleymane Sanon, 1Nicolas Barro, 3Jean Koudou, 2Issa Nebie and 1Alfred S. Traore

1Centre de Recherche en Sciences Biologiques, Alimentaires et Nutritionnelles (CRSBAN), UFR/SVT, Université de Ouagadougou, 03 BP 7021 Ouagadougou 03, Burkina Faso
2Centre National de Recherche et de Formation sur le Paludisme (CNRFP), Ouagadougou, 01 BP 2208 Ouagadougou 01, Burkina Faso
3Centre de Recherche en Pharmacopée et Médecine Traditionnelle (CERPHAMETRA), Université de Bangui, BP 1450 Bangui, République Centrafricaine

Abstract: The aim of this study was to evaluate the in vitro antimalarial activities of four plants used in traditional medicine. Hydroethanolic extract, hydroacetonic extract and aqueous extract of Mitragyna inermis (Willd.) O. Kuntze (Rubiaceae), Combretum sericeum G. Don (Combretaceae), Alternanthera pungens H.B. and K (Amaranthaceae) and Ampelocissus grantii (Baker) Planch (Vitaceae) have been tested in vitro against chloroquine-resistant strain (K1) and chloroquine-sensitive strain (3D7) of Plasmodium falciparum using pLDH assay. Aqueous extracts exhibited the best results against K1 with the 50% inhibitory concentration (IC50) values of 0.54±0.18, 1.72±0.99, 1.54±0.04 g/mL for respectively, M. inermis leaves, C. sericeum leaves and whole plant of A. pungens. Hydroethanolic extract from the leaves of M. inermis gave also IC50 value of 0.87±0.10 g/mL with 3D7. Extracts showed antimalarial activity against both chloroquine-sensitive and chloroquine-resistant P. falciparum strains. Our study justifies the use of these plants in traditional medicine and leads to further investigations.

Key words: Crude extracts, malaria, medicinal plants, Plasmodium falciparum, pLDH assay

INTRODUCTION

The use of plants for health care has existed for centuries and still on going nowadays. History reveals that plants have always been considered as an important source of medicine for human being. Phytomedicines have been an integral part of traditional health care system in most parts of the world for thousands of years (Rath et al., 2009). Despite the development of the pharmaceutical industry, more than 80% of the world's populations continue to use herbal remedies (Zirihi et al., 2005) to treat common diseases including malaria, one of the oldest recorded tropical disease which kills about 1.5 million people each year, the majority of them are children (Greenwood et al., 2005). Nowadays malaria chemotherapy is challenged by the emergence of drug resistant Plasmodium falciparum (Hyde, 2005). The most affordable agents, particularly chloroquine and sulfadoxine-pyrimethamine are now ineffective because of the widespread P. falciparum resistance to these drugs. Artemisinin-based combinations therapies (ACTs) which are recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO) as the first-line treatment of malaria (Mutabingwa, 2005) are not affordable for poorest people. Indeed, now more than ever, malaria is both a disease of poverty and a cause of poverty (Sachs and Malaney, 2002; Bourdy et al., 2008). For economic and historic reasons, most affected populations have little access to Western medicine and therefore turn towards traditional medicine for their primary healthcare. There is a need to carry out systematic investigations using modern scientific methods to establish the efficacy and toxicity of the medicinal plants commonly used by traditional medical practitioners (Ayuko et al., 2009). These investigations can lead to new chemical compounds active against P. falciparum or lead to ameliorated traditional drugs affordable, disposable and cheaper for people.

Medicinal plants typically contain mixture of different chemical compounds that may act individually, additively or in synergy to improve health. A single plant may, for example, contain bitter substances that stimulate digestion, anti-inflammatory compounds that reduce swellings and pain, phenolic compounds that can act as antioxidant and venotonics, anti-bacterial and anti-fungal that act as natural antibiotics, diuretic substances that...
enhance the elimination of waste products and toxins and alkaloids that enhance mood and give a sense of well-being (Gurib-Fakim, 2006).

In Burkina Faso where malaria is endemic, several plants are used by traditional practitioners for their antimalarial properties. Some of them such as *Cochlospernum planchonii*, *Cassia alata* and *Cryptolepis sanguinolenta* have been studied and are disposable and used by populations as complementary and alternative antimalarial drugs (Benoit-vical et al., 2003; Appiah, 2009; Bugyei et al., 2010). However, the effectiveness and safety of many plants remain to be validated. In the present study, the main goal is to evaluate the antiplasmodial properties of some medicinal plants used traditionally against malaria.

**METHODOLOGY**

**Parasites strains and in vitro culture:** Two references *Plasmodium falciparum* strains were used for this study: K1 (chloroquine-resistant strain) and 3D7 (chloroquine-sensitive strain) both obtained from London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM), England. Parasites were maintained in continuous culture in the parasitology laboratory of Centre National de Recherche et de Formation sur le Paludisme, using a slightly modified method of Trager and Jensen (1976).

Briefly, parasites were cultured on washed human erythrocytes (blood group O+ obtained from donors) used as host cells, in RPMI 1640 medium supplemented with 0.5% Albumax, 0.05% Hypoxanthine, 2% L-Glutamine (200 mM), 2% N-2-hydroxyethylpiperazine- N-2-ethanesulfonic acid (HEPES 1 M) and 0.5% Gentamicin (10 mg/mL). The culture was performed in 25 cm² sterile flasks containing 5 mL of the culture media with 0.4% hematocrit and were incubated at 37°C in an atmosphere of 93% N₂, 5% CO₂ and 2% O₂ with 90% humidity for 72 h. Parasite cultures were performed daily. Culture medium was also renewed daily. The stock solutions were further diluted with culture media to achieve the required concentrations before being tested in culture.

**Plants collection:** Plant parts (leaves and bark of the roots for *Mitragyna inermis* inermis, rhizomes for *Ampelocissus graniiti*, whole plant for *Combretum sericeum*) *Alternanthera pungens* and leaves for *Combretum sericeum* were collected in the area of Saponé (Department of Bazèga Province in central Burkina Faso) located at about 45 Km south Ouagadougou, in March 2009. These plants were taxonomically authenticated at the Department of Plant Biology and Ecology of the University of Ouagadougou.

Plant parts were air-dried during 2 weeks in the laboratory under continuous ventilation, away from sun light and dust. The samples were then pulverized into fine powder with a mechanical crusher and the powder was hermetically sealed in polythene bags and stored away from light and moisture until the time of extraction and analysis.

**Plant extracts preparation:** Acetone-water (70/30) extract and ethanol-water (70/30) extract were obtained as described previously (Zongo et al., 2010). For water extracts, 25 g of each sample boiled in distilled water for 30 min and cooled at room temperature. The extracts were then decanted and filtered through Whatman filter paper Nº 1 and the resulting filtrates were concentrated at low pressure with a rotary evaporator (BÜCHI, Labortechnik, Switzerland) and lyophilized. All extracts were stored at 4°C until analysis. Total alkaloids of *M. inermis* were extracted using liquid-liquid partition as described previously (Zongo et al., 2009).

**In vitro antiplasmodial activity assessment:** Stock solutions of the crude extracts were prepared at 10 mg/mL. Lyophilized water extracts were dissolved in de-ionised water. Hydroacetonic and hydroethanolic extracts were dissolved in dimethylsulphoxide (DMSO) and distilled water (1:1 in volume). Total alkaloids were dissolved in 100% DMSO. All stock solutions were sterilized by filtration through 0.22 µm syringe microfilters (Fisherbrand). Stock solutions of the reference drugs [chloroquine diphosphate (CQ) and Dihydroartemisinin (DHA)] were similarly prepared in sterile de-ionised water at respectively 1600 and 256 nM. The stock solutions were further diluted with culture media to achieve the required concentrations before being tested in culture.

The antiplasmodial assays were carried out on 96-well flat-bottomed micro-culture plates (Costar Glass Works, Cambridge, UK) using the Plasmodium lactate dehydrogenase (pLDH) method (Makler et al., 1993; Kaddouri et al., 2006). Serial two fold dilutions of the extracts and the reference drugs (CQ and DHA) were made in duplicate in the plate. The concentrations of the tested extracts ranged from 50 to 0.78 µg/mL, those of CQ from 800 to 12.5 nM and those of DHA from 12.8 to 0.2 nM. 100 µL of the parasitized blood adjusted at 2% hematocrit with parasitemia between 1.5 and 2% were added to each well containing 100 µL of extracts or drug dilution. Final volume in the wells was 200 µL at 1% hematocrit and around 1% parasitemia. Positive control (parasitized blood only) and negative control (non parasitized blood) were prepared in plate. The plates were incubated at 37°C in an atmosphere of 93% N₂, 5% CO₂ and 2% O₂ with 90% humidity for 72 h. Parasite
inhibition was then determined spectrophotometrically at 650 nm, by measuring the activity of the pLDH in control and drug treated cultures, using a microplate reader (BioTek Instrument, USA). At the end of incubation, another 96 well microtiter plate was carefully labeled and filed with 100 µL of the Malstat reagent, 25 µL of NBT/PES (Nitro Blue Tetrazolium/Phenazine Ethosulphate). The cultures were resuspended and 20 µL were transferred into each corresponding well and the plate was incubated in the dark for 10 min before the spectrophotometric assessment. Parasite growth which is correlated with the pLDH activity is considered to be 100% in the positive control wells. The pLDH activity expressed as a percentage of growth for each extracts or drug concentration was calculated using the following formula:

\[
\text{Growth} \%(\%) = \frac{\text{Odext} - \text{Odnc}}{\text{ODpc}} \times 100
\]

where, Growth % is the percentage of the growth of the parasites in contact with the extract, ODext the Optical Density of each tested well, ODnc the Optical Density of negative control and ODpc the Optical Density of positive control.

The anti-malarial activity of the each extract was then expressed as IC_{50} [mean±Standard Deviation (S.D)] of two separate experiments performed in duplicate. The data analyzing software, TableCurve 2Dv5 was used for IC_{50} determination.

Resistance Indexes (RI) for extracts and reference drugs were calculated as (K1 IC_{50})/(3D7 IC_{50}).

Plant extracts were prepared in the Laboratory of Pharmacology and Biochemistry of the CRSBAN (Centre de Recherche en Sciences Biologiques, Alimentaires et Nutritionnelles) and the antimalarial assays were performed in Laboratory of Parasitology of The CNRFP (Centre de National de Recherche et de Formation sur le Paludisme). Both centers are in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.

RESULTS

The in vitro activity of the different extracts from the plants against CQ-sensitive (3D7) and CQ-resistant (K1) P. falciparum strains are summarized in Table 1. According to criteria established by Deharo et al. (2001), an extract can be considered active when its IC_{50} is less than 5 µg/mL, moderately active when its IC_{50} is between 5 and 10 µg/mL, inactive when its IC_{50} is over 10 µg/mL.

The activities obtained (Table 1) indicate that most of our extracts can be classified active against both P. falciparum strains. However, 70% ethanol extract from M. inermis roots and A. pungens, just as 70% acetone extract from C. sericeum and A. grantii were inactive against P. falciparum K1 strain (IC_{50}>10 µg/mL) but have moderate activity towards 3D7 strain (5 µg/mL<IC_{50}<10 µg/mL). All extracts from M. inermis leaves were active (IC_{50} ranged from 0.54 to 3.02 µg/mL). The most active extract was the aqueous extract (IC_{50} = 0.54 µg/mL).

The IC_{50} values recorded with P. falciparum K1 and 3D7 strains are respectively 304.50±20.50 nM and 74.87±0.69 nM for chloroquine diphosphate (CQ), 2.53±0.53 nM and 1.61±0.48 nM for dihydroartemisinin (DHA) (Table 2). Total alkaloids of M. inermis already tested in several previous studies and used here as reference compound gave 2.02±0.60 µg/mL and 1.61±0.28 µg/mL for respectively K1 and 3D7 P. falciparum strains.

Table 1: In vitro antimalarial activity of the reference drugs (CQ and DHA) and total alkaloids of Mitragyna inermis against P. falciparum K1 (CQ-resistant) and 3D7 (CQ-sensitive) strains by pLDH assay

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IC_{50} (µg/mL) ± SD</th>
<th>70% acetone extract</th>
<th>70% ethanol extract</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aqueous extract</td>
<td>3D7</td>
<td>K1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M. inermis (leaves)</td>
<td>2.03±0.35</td>
<td>3.02±0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M. inermis (roots)</td>
<td>5.4±1.60</td>
<td>ND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. sericeum (leaves)</td>
<td>74.87±0.69</td>
<td>9.97±0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. grantii (rhizomes)</td>
<td>2.32±1.32</td>
<td>9.97±0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. pungens (whole plant)</td>
<td>4.95±0.33</td>
<td>ND</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ND: Not determinate

Table 2: In vitro antimalarial activity of the extracts against Plasmodium falciparum K1 (CQ-resistant) and 3D7 (CQ-sensitive) strains by pLDH assay

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IC_{50} (µg/mL) ± SD</th>
<th>K1</th>
<th>3D7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chloroquine diphosphate (CQ)</td>
<td>74.87±0.69 nM</td>
<td>2.02±0.60 µg/mL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dihydroartemisinin (DHA)</td>
<td>1.61±0.48 nM</td>
<td>1.61±0.28 µg/mL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total alkaloids of M. inermis</td>
<td>1.61±0.48 nM</td>
<td>1.61±0.28 µg/mL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Total alkaloids of M. inermis are used here as reference compound
Table 3: Comparison of Resistance Index (RI) of CQ, DHA with the extracts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plants</th>
<th>Aqueous extract</th>
<th>70% acetone extract</th>
<th>70% ethanol extract</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M. inermis (leaves)</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>3.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M. inermis (roots)</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>1.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. sericeum (leaves)</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>ND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. grantii (rhizomes)</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. pungens (whole plant)</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>ND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CQ</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>ND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DHA</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>ND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total alkaloids</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>ND</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ND: Not determine
DISCUSSION

In Burkina Faso, as in all developing countries, plants are regularly solicited by healers to treat recurrent fever and malaria. In this study, we evaluated the in vitro antiplasmodial activities of crude extracts from four African traditional medicinal plants using pLDH assay. According to our results, most of extract including aqueous extracts exhibited good antiparasitological activity against 3D7 (CQ-sensitive) and K1 (CQ-resistant) *P. falciparum* strains. There were no significant differences in the growth inhibition of the two kinds of parasites (Fig. 1). This suggests that extracts act on resistant parasites like on sensitive parasites. This is confirmed by RI calculation. Indeed, it can be seen from the Table 3 that most of RI values are low (<2), indicating activity of these extracts on CQ-sensitive strains as well on CQ-resistant strains. It may be explained by the fact that crude extracts contain mixtures of different chemical compounds that may act individually, additively or in synergy against parasites. Besides, in order to limit increasing parasite resistance to antimalarial drugs, the World Health Organization (WHO) recommended that all countries experiencing resistance to conventional monotherapies, such as chloroquine, amodiaquine or sulfadoxine-pyrimethamine, should use combination therapies, preferably ACTs (Artemisinin-based Combination Therapies) for *P. falciparum* malaria (WHO, 2001a, b).

IC$_{50}$ values of CQ, DHA and total alkaloids of *M. inermis* (Table 3) used here as references are not far from those reported in literature in antimalarial assessment. The commonly accepted IC$_{50}$ on 3D7 is <4 nM (Savini et al., 2010). Previous studies reported IC$_{50}$ values less than 5 (IC$_{50}$<5 µg/mL) for total alkaloids (Traore-Keita et al., 2000; Azas et al., 2002). Azas et al. (2002) reported 2.4±0.5 µg/mL for W2 (CQ-resistant strain) and 2.11±1.00 for D6 (CQ-sensitive strain). Reference values are very important in a test for this test validation.

Our results show good antimalarial activity for all *M. inermis* extracts with the lowest value of IC$_{50}$ for aqueous extract (IC$_{50}$ = 0.54±0.18 µg/mL). This results didn’t much with those of Mustofa et al. (2000) who reported IC$_{50}$ values of 40.71±7.21, 44.86±0.93 and 45.49±2.16 µg/mL with aqueous extract of *M. inermis* respectively on FcM29-Cameroon (CQ-resistant strain), FeH1-Columbia (CQ-resistant strain) and Nigerian (CQ-sensitive strain) using the radioactive micromethod of Desjardins et al. (1979) with some modifications. In our study, *M. inermis* leaves extracts showed better antimalarial activity than roots extracts. For roots extracts, only hydroethanolic extract showed good antimalarial activity (IC$_{50}$ = 1.82±1.5 µg/mL for K1 and 2.32±1.32 µg/mL for 3D7). Antimalarial compounds seem to be more concentrated in leaves of this plant than in its roots.

For *C. sericeum*, *A. pungens* and *A. grantii*, their use in traditional medicine for malaria, fever and other diseases treatment has been reported by several ethnobotanical studies (Koné et al., 2004; De Albuquerque et al., 2007; Ayodele et al., 2010; Zirihi et al., 2010). Our study reports for the first time their in vitro evaluation for antimalarial activity. As shown in Table 1, aqueous extracts from *C. sericeum* leaves and *A. pungens* exhibited good antimalarial activity on K1 strain (IC$_{50}$ = 1.72±0.99 µg/mL and IC$_{50}$ = 1.5±0.04 µg/mL, respectively. The results also indicated that extract from *A. grantii* which showed good antibacterial activity (Zongo et al., 2010) have globally moderate antimalarial activity (IC$_{50}$ value ranged from 3.47±1.25 to 20.21±4.71 µg/mL).

Roughly speaking, the plants tested in this study showed antimalarial activity. The classification of the activity as good, moderate and inactive depends on the chosen criteria. For Rasoanaiva et al. (2004) the antimalarial activities of the extracts are qualified as “inactive” when IC$_{50}$ value is above 50 µg/mL. It have been noticed that aqueous extracts were more active against parasites. This suggests that most antimalarial compounds of these plants are extractible in hot water. Water is the main solvent used in traditional medicine to prepare remedies and most of time, this preparation is made by decoction similarly to what we done in this study.

In conclusion, our study justifies the use of these plants in folk medicine for malaria /fever treatment. This study is a preliminary approach. Further investigations guided on cytotoxicity, acute and chronic toxicity, genotoxicity and LD$_{50}$ (Dose that kills 50% of experimented animals) determination can lead to efficient, safely, cheaper and disposable enhanced traditional medicines. Bioguided fractionation of these crude extracts can also lead to new active antimalarial compounds.

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