Evaluation of Antidepressant activity of *Bacopa monnieri* in rat: A study in Animal Model of Depression

Somoday Hazra², Ritabrata Banerjee¹, Biplab K. Das³, Anup K. Ghosh⁴, Tarit K. Banerjee⁵, Uday S. Hazra⁶, Susanta K. Biswas⁶, Amal C. Mondal⁷*

1. Senior Research Fellow (DST Sponsored Research Project, Govt. of India) Raja Peary Mohan College (Affiliated to University of Calcutta), Uttarpara, Hooghly, West Bengal-712258, India
2. Project Fellow (LSRB-DRDO Sponsored Research Project, Govt. of India) Raja Peary Mohan College (Affiliated to University of Calcutta), Uttarpara, Hooghly, West Bengal-712258, India
3. Laboratory Assistant (DST Sponsored Research Project, Govt. of India) Raja Peary Mohan College (Affiliated to University of Calcutta), Uttarpara, Hooghly, West Bengal-712258, India
4. Assistant Professor, Dept. of Instrumentation Science, Jadavpur University, Calcutta, West Bengal-700032, India
5. Associate Professor, Dept. of Zoology, Raja Peary Mohan College, (Affiliated to University of Calcutta), Uttarpara, Hooghly, West Bengal-712258, India
6. Assoc. Professor, Dept. of Mathematics, Raja Peary Mohan College, (Affiliated to University of Calcutta), Uttarpara, Hooghly, West Bengal-712258, India
7. Asst. Professor, Dept. of Physiology, Raja Peary Mohan College (Affiliated to University of Calcutta), Uttarpara, Hooghly, West Bengal-712258, India

*Corresponding author: Asst. Professor, Dept. of Physiology, Raja Peary Mohan College (Affiliated to University of Calcutta), Uttarpara, Hooghly, West Bengal-712258, India. E-mail: amalmondalpmc@gmail.com, Ph: +91 9432209050

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ABSTRACT

Major depression is a common and potentially life threatening condition. Stress induced helplessness in rodents constitutes a well-defined model to investigate physiological attributes of depression. The present study was undertaken to determine the antidepressant property of *Bacopa monnieri* using the stress induced animal model of depression. In this study, we have confirmed the actual doses of administration of this herbal product for recovery from stress related disorders in rats. Acute treatment with *Bacopa monnieri* extract of 80 and 120 mg/kg body weight, significantly reduced escape latency and plasma corticosterone level along with the significant restoration of body weight among the stressed rats. Such properties of Bacopa extract clearly coincides with the effects of well accepted antidepressant drug Fluoxetine hydrochloride and prominently fore casts the antidepressant property of *Bacopa monnieri* in stress related neuropsychiatric disorders.

Key words: Antidepressant, Bacopa, Depression, Fluoxetine, LH, Corticosterone.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Psychiatric disorder is a life threatening illness that affects millions of people worldwide. According to World Health Organization, depression is now the fourth most prevalent cause of loss of manpower and it will become the second by the year 2020. Depression can lead to suicide, a tragic fatality associated with the loss of 10.50 lives per 100,000 people in every year in India. Recent studies reported that depression and anxiety may occur together in association with sub threshold level of depression and anxiety. Anxiety may also predispose depression or vice-versa or symptoms of anxiety and depression may be external manifestation of underlying cause. A triad of clinical symptoms characterizes depression: low or depressed mood, anhedonia, and low energy or fatigue. Other symptoms, such as sleep and psychomotor disturbances, suicidal tendencies, decreased food-intake and body-weight are also often present (Banerjee et al., 2011a and Banerjee et al., 2011b).

Commonly antidepressant drugs available for the treatment of neuropsychiatric disorders are MAOIs, SSRIs, SNRIs and NRIs but these drugs only produce remission in 30% of patients because multiple pathogenic factors are involved in depression and also there are severe side effects while treated with those drugs. So, drugs having properties to combat both anxiety and...
Chemical Composition of BM

The herb contains the alkaloids brahmine, herpestine, and a mixture of three bases. It also contains the saponins, monnieri; hersaponin, bacoside A and bacoside B. Other constituents present in the plant are D-mannitol, betulic acid, 6- sitosterol, stigmasterol and its esters, heptacosane, octacosane, nonacosane, triacontane, hentriacontane, dotriacontane, nicotinic acid, 3-formyl-4-hydroxy-2H-pyran, luteolin and its 7-glucoside. The presence of a-alamine, aspartic acid, glutamic acid and serine is also reported.

Antidepressant: An antidepressant is a psychiatric medication used to alleviate mood disorders, such as major depression and dysthymia and anxiety disorders such as social anxiety disorder. According to Gelder, Mayou & Geddes (2005) people with a depressive illness will experience a therapeutic mood; however, this will not be experienced in healthy individuals. Drugs including the monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOIs), tricyclic antidepressants (TCAs), tetracyclic antidepressants (TeCAs), selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), and serotonin-norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs) are most commonly associated with the term. These medications are among those most commonly prescribed by psychiatrists and other physicians, and their effectiveness and adverse effects are the subject of many studies and competing claims.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Animals

Male Sprague-Dawley rats were used in the current experiment. At the start of the experiment, rats were of the same age (approximately 2 months) weighing 224±1.5 gm. All rats were individually housed in temperature controlled (22–24°C) room for at least 1 week prior to the experimentation, with ad libitum access to food and water. Rats were maintained on a 12 h light/dark cycle (lights on at 7 a.m.). All experimental protocols were designed to minimize the number of animals and sufferings were approved by the Institutional Animal Ethics Committee (IAEC) of the Raja Peary Mohan College, Uttarpara, West Bengal. Socially housed male rats were randomly assigned to 4 experimental groups prior to the experiment (Fig.1).

Control group (n = 10): subjected to no foot shock throughout the experiment.

Stress group (n = 10): received 60 foot shocks daily for first 21 days followed by next 9 days with alternating exposure to foot shocks.

Recovery group I, treated with Bacopa monnieri (BM) (n = 30): exposed to inescapable stress produces deficits in escape testing and evaluation was done by using shuttle box escape test. This animal model offers an opportunity to understand the behavioral correlation of clinical depression and efficacy of antidepressant drugs that have been investigated.

Figure 1

Schematic overview of the 30-day experimental protocol. Control Group: rats were subjected to no foot shocks. Stress Group: rats received foot shocks daily for 21 days followed by 9 days of alternating exposure to the foot shocks. BM Treated Recovery Group: rats received foot shocks daily for 21 days followed by a 7-day acute BM treatment instead of foot shocks. FLX Treated Recovery Group: rats received foot shocks daily for 21 days followed by a 7-day acute FLX administration instead of foot shocks. The escape test was performed five times (day1, 21, 28, 29 and 30) during the entire 30 days stress paradigm.

2.2. Stress Procedure

The foot shock chamber consists of a box containing an animal space positioned on a metallic grid floor connected to a shock generator and scrambler. Rats in stress group were placed in a box and received 60 inescapable foot shocks (0.8 mA intensity and 15 s duration with interval of 45 s) with randomized starting time (between 9:00 and 17:00 hours) and intervals during a 30 to 120
Learned helplessness: Learned helplessness is a technical term that refers to the condition of a human or animal that has learned to behave helplessly, failing to respond even though there are opportunities for it to help itself by avoiding unpleasant circumstances or by gaining positive rewards. Learned helplessness theory is the view that clinical depression and related mental illnesses may result from a perceived absence of control over the outcome of a situation. Organisms which have been ineffective and less sensitive in determining the consequences of their behavior are defined as having acquired learned helplessness.

2.3. Shuttle Box Testing
Shuttle box sessions were run by PC computer with custom software developed for the system (TSE Active Avoidance Systems GmbH, Bad Hamburg, Germany). At the start of each shuttle box session, animals were exposed to a 5 min habituation period in the same chamber where inescapable shock (IS) or escapable shock (ES) was applied. This was followed by 30 escape trials in which the arch door separating the two halves of the shuttle box opened 5 s prior to the shock onset followed by randomized foot shocks delivered at an intensity of 0.6 mA for 30 s duration of escape latency (Shirayama et al., 2002). The test consisted of five fixed-ratio 1 (FR-1) trials during which one shuttle-crossing terminated shock. FR-1 trials were used to determine the normal motor function of the rats. For escape testing, FR-1 trials were followed by 25 trials during which the rat had to cross from one side of the shuttle-box to the other, and then return, to terminate the shock (fixed-ratio 2 or FR-2 trials). Shock terminated automatically if the response requirement was not met within 30 s of the shock onset. A mean latency for the 25 FR-2 trials of ≥ 20 s is defined as learned helpless (LH) min session to make the procedure as unpredictable as possible. On last day rats were sacrificed using isoflurane anesthesia.

2.4. Administration of BM
We collected BM Extract (≥40% w/w) from Natural Remedies Pvt. Ltd., Bangalore, India and prepared the solution by dissolving 450 mg of dried powder in 80 ml distilled water and used for the study (Paulose et al., 2008) and administered orally to the rat once daily with the help of a specially designed feeding needle for next 7 days (from day 22 to day 28). Control group of animals received saline water. BM was administered at the same time on each day (8 a.m.–9 a.m.). Experiments were conducted after one hour of last dose of BM administration (day 28, day 29 and 30).

2.5. Administration of FLX
Fluoxetine hydrochloride (Sigma Aldrich, St. Louis, MI, USA) was dissolved in 0.9% physiological saline and injected intraperitoneally (i.p.) at the dose of 10 mg/kg body weight of the rats. The dosage of FLX was based on studies demonstrating a reversal of shuttle box escape deficits, after injections of FLX or exposure to chronic unpredictable shock. Antidepressant drug was administered from day 22 to day 28 once per day (Banerjee et al., 2012a). Experiments were conducted after one hour of last dose of FLX administration (day 28, day 29 and 30).

2.6. Determination of Plasma Corticosterone levels
Plasma corticosterone levels were measured in all four groups of rat: Control, Stress, graded doses of Bacopa treated recovery group I and FLX treated positive control group II. Blood samples were collected after sacrificing the animals and centrifuged immediately at 2000g at 4°C for 15 min. Corticosterone levels were measured using commercially available Radioimmunoassay kit (ICN Biomedical, Costa Mesa, CA, USA).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
The mean FR-2 escape latencies were significantly higher (F4,195 = 15.71; p < 0.05; Fig.3) in the stress group compared to normal controls,
Depression: The learned helplessness model (LH), one of the well validated animal models, is the best replicated one. The rationale is that exposure to uncontrollable and stressful life events makes people feel like losing control, and sometimes leads to a depressive like behavior. The model is based on the observation that animals also develop deficits in escape, cognitive and rewarded behaviors when they have been subjected to repeated unavoidable and uncontrollable shocks. LH is induced in one day or over several days of repeated inescapable stress by the treating of tail or foot shock in shuttle boxes.

Figure 5
Representation of daily body weight gain among the 4 Experimental Groups. BM treated group is subdivided into 3 subgroups. Body weight is significantly restored among BM 80, BM 120 and FLX treated rats compared to Stress group rat (tBM80 = 3.92; df= 29; *p<0.001; tBM120 = 4.5; df= 29; *p<0.001 and tFLX = 3.72; df= 29; *p<0.001). BM and FLX treated recovery groups. BM showed significant anti-depressant activity in the most commonly used paradigms of stress induced animal model depression LH. During the shuttle box escape test, 80 and 120 mg/kg body weight doses of BM significantly reduced escape latency compared to stress group rats (tBM80 = 4.97; df= 29; *p<0.001; tBM120 = 5.31; df= 29; *p<0.001; and tFLX = 3.84; df= 29; *p<0.001).

Figure 6
Representation of Plasma Corticosterone levels among the 4 Experimental rat groups. BM treated group is subdivided into 3 subgroups. Plasma Corticosterone level significantly reduced among BM 80, BM 120 and FLX treated rats compared to Stress group rat (tBM80 = 24.28; df= 9; *p<0.001; tBM120 = 29.84; df= 9; *p<0.001; and tFLX = 39.84; df= 9; *p<0.001). Loss of Body weight, the well established physiological marker of depression and the restoration of body weight along with FLX treated group rats clearly exhibited that there was no significant variation among BM 80, BM 120 and FLX administered rats (F2, 87 = 0.29; p > 0.05; Fig.5). Statistical analysis clearly indicated that there was no significant alteration on rats’ body weight compared to stress group individuals (tBM40 = 1.43; df= 29; p = 0.08; Fig.5).

Plasma corticosterone levels (ng/ml) were measured in all four groups of rats and were as follows: Control group rats: 254.8; Stress group rats: 359.85; BM 40 treated group rats: 355.42; BM 80 treated group rats: 262.81 and FLX treated group rats: 259.38. Plasma corticosterone levels did not differ among Control, BM 80, BM 120 and FLX treated rats (F3,36 = 0.86; p > 0.05; Fig.6). Similarly there is no alteration in plasma corticosterone levels among stress group and BM 40 treated group.
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(F1,18 =0.80; p > 0.05; Fig.6; tBM80= 0.90; df= 9; p=0.19; Fig.6). After administration of BM 80, BM 120 and FLX, plasma corticosterone levels showed significant reduction compared to stress group rats (tBM80= 24.28; df= 9; p<0.001; Fig.6 and tBM120= 29.84; df= 9; p<0.001; Fig.6 and tFLX= 39.84; df= 9; p<0.001; Fig.6).

4. CONCLUSION
In conclusion, to our knowledge, this is the first study that examines the effect of Bacopa monnieri in graded doses as antidepressant drug to the LH model of stress induced behavioral depression. Our study demonstrates diminished activation of avoidance response during shuttle box escape test among the LH rats which can be restored by acute treatment with BM 80 and BM 120. Similarly these doses have the capability to reduce plasma corticosterone levels significantly along with the significant restoration of animal’s body weight. Our present study clearly elucidates the antidepressant properties of our experimental herbal product BM. Our study not only suggests the antidepressant property of Bacopa monnieri but also raises actual admissible dose of it required for recovery from depression and other stress-related psychiatric disorders.

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH
1. Restoration of avoidance response among the LH rats due to acute treatment of Bacopa monnieri, which clearly corroborates the property of well established reference antidepressant drug Fluoxetine hydrochloride.
2. Significant restoration of body weight of animal through acute administration of BM 80 and BM 120
3. Significant reduction of plasma corticosterone levels after acute treatment with BM (BM 80 and BM 120) clearly coincide with FLX treated corticosterone level.

FUTURE ISSUES
1. Evaluation of Bacopa monnieri as antidepressant drug to decipher the signaling cascade in stress related neuropsychiatric disorders in animal model of depression.

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