Study on the antioxidant activity and in vitro antifungal activity of *Verbascum speciosum* methanolic extract

Katayoon Nofouzi*

Department of Pathobiology, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, University of Tabriz, Tabriz, Iran

* Corresponding Author: E-mail: nofouzi@tabrizu.ac.ir, Tel.: +98 413 6378734 Fax: +98 413 6378734.

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Abstract:

The present study was conducted to determine the antioxidant and antifungal effects of methanol extract from aerial part of *Verbascum speciosum*. The total phenolic and flavonoid content and the antioxidant activity of the plant extract were determined by using the Folin-Ciocalteau and the 2, 2-diphenyl-1-picrylhydrazyl (DPPH) free radical scavenging assays. The total phenols and flavonoid content of leaves were determined as 82±6.43 mg GAE/g extract and 30.79±0.5 mg RE/g extract, respectively. The extract exhibited significant radical scavenging activity with IC₅₀ value of 32.35µg/ml. The methanolic extract was investigated for its antifungal activity against some fungal reference strains which include: *Candida albicans*, *Candida tropicalis*, *Candida parapsilosis*, *Candida krusei*, *Candida dubliniensis*, *A. flavus*, *A. niger*, *Penicillium* and *Alternaria*. For minimum inhibitory concentrations (MICs) determination, a broth microdilution method according to CLSI M27-A and M38-A for yeasts and filamentous species was performed. The results showed that the highest in vitro antifungal activities were against *C. parapsilosis* and *Alternaria*. However, there were no significant differences between different fungal species. These results indicate a high potential of antifungal properties of this methanolic extract. Therefore, it can be suggested to be an effective replacement treatment for fungal infections or for the preservation of foods against pathogenic and toxigenic microorganisms.

Keywords: DPPH, methanolic extract, phenolic component, *Verbascum speciosum*.

Introduction

For a very long time now, plants have been widely used for their useful natural products such as antioxidants. Excessive production of free radicals in the body causes numerous problems such as coronary heart disease, cancer and acceleration of age (Karimian and Ghasemlou, 2013). Phenolic components of plants are considered as an excellent antioxidant agent with useful properties. The genus *Verbascum* L. (*Scrophulariaceae*) comprises of about 323 species distributed throughout the world (Saltan et al., 2011). The drug, prepared from several parts of the plant has been used as an expectorant and for the treatment of cough and chills (Tatli et al., 2004). GC-mass analysis and total phenol and flavonoids contents of *V. phlomoides* flower extracts were investigated (Armatu et al., 2011).
Antimicrobial and antioxidant potential of the aerial parts of four new *Verbascum* species which include *V. bellum*, *V. detepisite*, *V. myriocarpum* and *V. pestalozzae* from Turkey origin were determined previously (Saltan et al., 2011). Some *Verbascum* species have been found to have antibacterial activity against methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (Duglar and Hacioglu, 2009). In a recent study in Iran, total phenolic content, antioxidant and antibacterial activities of three *Verbascum* species including *V. speciosum*, *V. nudicaule* and *V. sinuatum* were investigated (Karimian and Ghasemlou, 2013). In the present study, total phenolic and flavonoid content, antioxidant and antifungal activity of *V. speciosum* of Mahabad origin were investigated.

**Materials and Methods**

**Plant material**
The *V. speciosum* were collected from Mahabad (Northwest of Iran). The plant identity was confirmed by herbarium of the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Tabriz, under code number 16696 Tbz-Fph.

**Preparation of the methanolic extract**
The dried and powdered plant materials (15g) were extracted successively with 150 mL of methanol (99%) by Soxhlet extractor for 72 h at a temperature not exceeding the boiling point of the solvent (Sokmen et al., 1999). The methanolic extracts were filtered using Whatman filter paper (No. 1) and then concentrated *in vacuo* at 40°C using a rotary evaporator. The extract was black and very sticky. The extract yield obtained was 20.66%. Dried extract was stored in labeled sterile screw-capped bottle at 4°C and later used for *in vitro* study (Tambekeker and Dahikar, 2011).

**Antioxidant activity**

**The DPPH assay**

In this assay, hydrogen atom or electron donation ability of the essential oil was evaluated by measuring the bleaching of the purple-colored methanol solution of DPPH (Sigma, Aldrich). Five milliliters of a 0.004% methanol solution of DPPH radical was mixed with 50 µl of various concentrations of the extract. The mixture was incubated at room temperature for 30 min, and then the absorbance was read against a blank at 517 nm using a spectrophotometer (Pharmacia, Uppsala, Sweden). Inhibition of the free radical DPPH in percent (I %) was calculated using the following equation:

\[ I \% = \left( \frac{A_{\text{blank}} - A_{\text{sample}}}{A_{\text{blank}}} \right) \times 100 \]

where \( A_{\text{blank}} \) is the absorbance of the control reaction (containing all reagents except the test compound) and \( A_{\text{sample}} \) is the absorbance of the test compound. The IC\(_{50}\) value is defined as the concentration of the extract that resulted in 50% inhibition (Mahmoudi et al., 2013). Vitamin C and rutin were used as standard controls.

**Total phenols assay**
The total phenolic content of *V. speciosum* extract was determined by employing the method described by Chandler & Dodds (1983). Folin-Ciocalteu reagent and gallic acid (both Sigma–Aldrich) were used as standard. Briefly, 0.1 ml of extract solution containing 1 mg of extract was mixed with 46 ml distilled water, and then 1 ml Folin-Ciocalteu reagent was added to the flask and was shaken thoroughly. After 3 min, 3 ml of 2% \( \text{Na}_2\text{CO}_3 \) solution was added and the mixture was incubated for 2 h with intermittent shaking. Absorbance was determined at 760 nm. The same procedure
was performed for all standard gallic acid solutions (0–1000 mg in 0.1 ml). The standard curve was obtained according to the following equation:

\[ \text{Absorbance} = 0.0012 \times \text{Gallic acid (µg)} + 0.0033 \]

**Estimation of total flavonoid concentration**

The flavonoids content in extract was determined by using a method based on the formation of a complex flavonoid–aluminum using aluminum chloride and rutin solutions. One milliliter of the diluted sample was mixed with 1 ml of 2% aluminum chloride methanolic solution. The absorbance of the reaction mixture was measured against a blank at 430 nm with a spectrophotometer, after incubation at room temperature for 15 min. The total flavonoid was determined as mg rutin equivalent (RE)/g extract.

**Determination of minimum inhibitory concentration (MIC) and minimum fungicidal concentrations (MFC)**

The tested fungi, including *C. albicans*, *C. tropicalis*, *C. parapsilosis*, *C. krusei*, *C. dubliniensis*, *A. flavus*, *A. niger*, *Penicillium* species and *Alternaria* species were cultured on Sabouraud dextrose agar (Merck, Germany) at 30°C for 48 h before the experiment. The correct concentrations of prepared suspension of the fungi were adjusted by hemocytometer count. Broth microdilution method (M27-A) as described by CLSI was used to determine *in vitro* MIC of methanolic extract against fungi strains. The test was performed in 96-well flat bottomed microtiter plates, using RPMI 1640 which had been buffered to pH 7.0 with 0.165 M morpholinopropanesulfonic acid (Sigma). 100 µl extract (20%) was added to first well containing 100 µl medium, then serially diluted twofold. The yeast inoculum was adjusted to a concentration of 0.5×10³ to 2.5×10⁵ CFU/ml and an aliquot of 100µl was added to each well of the microdilution plate. The filamentous fungi inoculums were adjusted to a concentration of 0.5×10⁴ to 1x10⁴ CFU/ml and an aliquot of 100µl was added to each well of the microdilution plate. The plates were incubated at 35°C for 48 h. MIC was determined as the lowest concentration of extract which inhibited the visual growth of fungi and MFC, the lowest concentration resulting in total growth inhibition. The test was performed twice on separate plates.

**Results**

**Antifungal activity**. The antifungal activities of *V. speciosum* extract assayed against the microorganisms in the current study were quantitatively assessed by evaluating MIC values. The results are given in Table 1. The results showed that methanol extract of *V. speciosum* had antifungal activity against 10 fungi. The methanolic extract showed highest antifungal activity against *C. parapsilosis*, followed by *Alternaria*. These fungi were followed by *C. albicans*, *A. flavus*, *A. niger* and *Penicillium*. As shown in the results of the present study, the highest MFC value was determined for *C. parapsilosis* followed by *C. albicans*. The lowest MICs and MFCs of the extract were 0.09 (0.39) µg/mL against *C. parapsilosis*, followed by *C. albicans* (MIC values is 1.56 (3.12) µg/mL).
Table 1. MIC and MFC of *Verbascum speciosum* methanolic leaf extract against fungal strains

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verbascum speciosum methanolic extract</th>
<th>MIC (µg/ml)</th>
<th>MFC (µg/ml)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>C. albicans</em></td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>3.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>C. tropicalis</em></td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>6.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>C. parapsilosis</em></td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>C. krusei</em></td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>A. flavus</em></td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>A. niger</em></td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Penicillium</em></td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Alternaria</em></td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>C. dubliniensis</em></td>
<td>2.125</td>
<td>12.5</td>
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**Antioxidant activity:** The hydrogen atoms or electron donating ability of *V. speciosum* methanolic extract was determined by measurement of DPPH radical scavenging activity. Methanol extract was able to reduce the stable radical, DPPH the yellow-colored diphenylpicrylhydrazine with an IC$_{50}$ value of 32.35 µg/mL. The IC$_{50}$ value for ascorbic acid was 5.18 µg/mL.

**Total phenolic and flavonoid contents**

In the present study, total phenolic content was determined by using the Folin-Ciocalteu reagent. Total phenolic content of *V. speciosum* was solvent dependent and expressed as milligrams of gallic acid equivalents (GAE). The content of flavonoid was expressed as rutin equivalent (Table 2).

Table 2. Flavonoids and Phenol content in *Verbascum speciosum*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plant name</th>
<th>Flavonoids (mg/g)</th>
<th>Phenol (mg/g)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td><em>Verbascum speciosum</em></td>
<td>30.79 ± 0.5*</td>
<td>82 ± 6.43*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion**

Several techniques have been used to determine the antioxidant activity *in vitro* in order to allow rapid screening of substances since substances that have low antioxidant activity *in vitro*, will probably show little activity *in vivo* (Saeed et al., 2012). Natural antioxidants present in spices are responsible for inhibition or prevention of the deleterious consequences of oxidative stress. Spices and herbs contain free radical scavengers like polyphenols, flavonoids and phenolic compounds. In the present study, the free radical scavenging activity of methanolic extract of *V. speciosum* was evaluated. The results indicate that the antioxidant activity of the crude extract of *V. speciosum* is lower than that of ascorbic acid, since their IC$_{50}$
value was found to be higher. A previous study revealed that extract of V. pestalozzae was the most active, providing an IC50 value at 15 µg/mL. The IC50 values of other studied species of Verbascum were 27 µg/mL for V. detersile, 130 µg/mL for V. bellum and 220 µg/mL for V. myriocarpum (Saltan et al., 2011). Another study showed that methanol and water extracts of three Verbascum species exhibited greater antioxidant activity than those of other plant extracts with an IC value of 130.8, 309.3, 65.5, 235.6, 123.8 and 132.8 µg/mL for V. leptocladum, V. mucronatum and V. davisianum, respectively (Alan et al., 2009). According to previous studies, leaves of V. speciosum contain boric acid, phenol and pyrrolidine. Therefore, it can be assumed that these components are involved in antioxidant activity of methanolic extract. Based on the results of the present work, the V. speciosum methanolic extract has antioxidant activity and remarkable phenolic content, thus, it can serve as an excellent natural source of antioxidant agents.

Free radicals have wide adverse effects on cells, resulting in many disease conditions such as coronary disease or cancer. Phenolic components act as free radical scavengers and cause delay or prevent oxidative stress caused by free radicals (Katirae et al., 2015). In the present study, total phenolic content was determined by using the Folin-Ciocalteu reagent. It was 82±6.43mg/g, presented as gallic acid equivalent in milligrams per gram of methanolic extract. In a previous study, total phenolic contents of methanolic extract of V. speciosum was investigated and found to be 95.83±1.39 mg/g (Karamian and Ghasemlou, 2013). Phenolic compounds may contribute directly to desirable and undesirable aromas and tastes of food. Phenolic compounds contribute to the aroma and taste of certain spices and plant extracts. Considerable variation was found in phenolic compounds of different species. As a result of the diversity and complexity of natural mixtures of phenolic compounds in hundreds of herb extracts, it is rather difficult to characterize every compound and elucidate its structure, but it is not difficult to identify major groups and important aglycones of phenolic compounds. The contents of phenolic compounds, measured by HPLC after enzymatic hydrolysis, were different from those values measured using the Folin-Ciocalteu method. The amount of polyphenols was also dependent on the extraction method. The samples for HPLC were subjected to enzymatic hydrolysis which in contrast to methanol extraction, resulted in specific disruption of linkages and deglycosylation of phenolic compounds (Wojdylo et al., 2007). In a study in Hatay, Turkey the phenolic component of V. antiochium was determined to be 92.71 mg of GAE/g (Ozcan et al., 2010).

The results of general screening for antifungal activity are shown in Table 1. There was antifungal activity of V. speciosum methanolic extract against all the tested fungi. The methanolic extract showed highest antifungal activity against C. parapsilosis, followed by Alternaria. These two fungi were followed by C. albicans, A. flavus, A. niger and Penicillium which were affected at the same level by methanolic extract. According to the results of the present study, the highest MFC value was determined for C. parapsilosis followed by C. albicans. Antimicrobial activities of V. speciosum have been investigated previously by the disc diffusion method (zone size, mm) and showed its ability to inhibit Bacillus anthracis (15.3±0.33), S.aureus (12.6±0.33), Salmonella (11.3±0.33), Bacillus cereus (9.6±1.2) and Listeria monocytogenes.
Biological effects of Verbascum speciosum

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In terms of their antimicrobial activity, Verbascum species have a broad variation. For instance, the methanolic extract of V. antiochium had no antifungal effect against C. albicans by disc diffusion method (Ozcan et al., 2010). Verbascum L. species owe their antimicrobial activities to a wide range of compounds such as glycosides, alkaloids and saponins (Kalpoutzakis et al., 1999). There are many reports suggesting that phenolic compounds have antimicrobial activity. In conclusion, phytochemicals of Verbascum can be used against some pathogenic bacteria and fungi (Saltan et al., 2011; Ozcan, et al., 2010; Karimian and Ghasemlou, 2013). The results of this study revealed that V. speciosum methanolic extract with its potent antifungal activity can serve as an excellent natural source for use in traditional medicine.

In this study, methanolic extract of aerial part of V. speciosum showed effective in vitro antifungal activity against all the studied species. Further investigations on the components which are mainly responsible for these effects and their mechanism of action would be valuable.

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References


