



SECONDARY METABOLITES FROM THE STEM BARK OF *POLYALTHIA STENOPETALA* (HOOK. F. & THOMSON) RIDL. AND THEIR ACETYLCHOLINESTERASE ACTIVITY

Wan Mohd Nuzul Hakimi Wan Salleh^{1*}, Natasa Mohd Shakri¹, Mohd Azlan Nafiah¹, Nurunajah Ab Ghani^{2,3}, Salam Ahmed Abed⁴ and Abu-Baker M. Abdel-Aal^{1,5}

¹Department of Chemistry, Faculty of Science and Mathematics, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, 35900 Tanjong Malim, Perak, Malaysia

²Atta-ur-Rahman Institute for Natural Product Discovery (AuRIns), Universiti Teknologi MARA, Puncak Alam Campus, 42300 Bandar Puncak Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

³Faculty of Applied Sciences, Universiti Teknologi MARA, 40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

⁴Department of Pharmacognosy, College of Pharmacy, University of Kerbala, Iraq

⁵Department of Pharmaceutical Organic Chemistry, Faculty of Pharmacy, Assiut University, Assiut 71526, Egypt

Plants have always been a common source of medicaments, either in the form of traditional preparations or as pure active principles. *Polyalthia* belong to the Annonaceae family and are a type of evergreen trees distributed across many tropical and subtropical regions. *Polyalthia stenopetala* is locally used to treat rheumatic fever and diarrhea. Herein, we report the phytochemical composition and acetylcholinesterase (AChE) inhibitory activity of *Polyalthia stenopetala*. Fractionation and purification of the stem bark extract of *P. stenopetala* led to isolation and identification of laurotetanine (1), N-methyllaurotetanine (2), reticuline (3), liriodenine (4), yangambin (5), syringaresinol (6), vanillic acid (7), 4-hydroxybenzoic acid (8), cinnamic acid (9), and syringic acid (10). Structures of these ten compounds were elucidated using different spectral analyses and their comparison with previously reported data. All isolated compounds were found to inhibit AChE (inhibition of 40.2 to 80.6%). Our study highlights the potential of *Polyalthia* species as phytomedicinal sources.

Keywords: Annonaceae, *Polyalthia stenopetala*, alkaloid, lignan, acetylcholinesterase.

INTRODUCTION

Alzheimer's disease (AD), a neurodegenerative disease associated with memory loss and various psycho-behavioral issues, is due to a reduction in cholinergic transmission which ultimately leads to dementia with age progression. Acetylcholinesterase (AChE) inhibitors are used to treat AD by increasing acetylcholine in cholinergic neurons synapses¹. Tacrine, donepezil, rivastigmine, huperzine A, and galanthamine are the common medications

currently used to treat AD. Unfortunately, all these drugs have adverse effects and only moderate efficacy². Most of these drugs are linked to natural products which encourage the search for naturally occurring compounds from plants as potential sources of either new or more effective AChE inhibitors for treatment of AD³.

Polyalthia, one of the largest genera in the plant family of Annonaceae, has more than three hundred species of shrubs and trees⁴. It is mainly located in the palaeotropical area extending from Southeast Asia and southern

India to Northern Australia, and East Africa⁵. Several clerodane diterpenoids and alkaloids were isolated from *Polyalthia* plants which highlights their potential medicinal use^{6&7}.

Polyalthia stenopetala (Hook.f. & Thomson) Ridl. (Annonaceae) is known in Malaysia, as *jambul cicit* where it is locally used to treat rheumatic fever and diarrhea⁸. It grows as a shrub or a small to ten-meter tree with brownish inner bark and ginger-like smell⁴. These trees are suitable for urban site planting as it has green foliage with red leaves flushing, salmon pink flowers, and single-seeded, flattened squarish red fruits turning black upon maturity⁵. Our recently published study indicates that the essential oil obtained from *P. stenopetala* leaves contains thirty components representing about seventy percent of the oil with sesquiterpene hydrocarbons representing slightly above fifty percent of the oil⁸. The major constituents include α -cadinol, δ -cadinene, γ -elemene and germacrene D, respectively as 13.0%, 10.2%, 5.4%, 5.4%. Herein, we have investigated the phytochemistry and biological activity of the secondary metabolites isolated from the stem bark of *P. stenopetala* collected from Malaysia.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Plant material

The *P. stenopetala* stem bark (SK31/19, UKMB herbarium) was collected from Gambang, Pahang in Sep-2019 and identified by Dr Shamsul Khamis (UKM, Malaysia).

General experimental procedures

Dried sample were subjected to cold extraction using different polarity solvents. Merck silica gel 60 was used as stationary phase of vacuum liquid chromatography (VLC: 230-400 mesh) and column chromatography (CC, 70-230 mesh). Merck pre-coated silica (SiO₂) gel F₂₅₄ plates were used for TLC and spots were visualized under UV light (254 and 366 nm) and stained with Dragendorff's reagent for detection of alkaloids. Melting points were measured using Leica Gallen III as uncorrected. Bruker Avance 400 Spectrometer was used for ¹H-NMR (400 MHz) and ¹³C-NMR (100 MHz) spectra using CDCl₃ as the NMR solvent. Perkin Elmer ATR and 1600 IR (USA) were used for IR spectra (KBr disc).

The mass spectra were obtained using Shimadzu LCMS-IT-TOF (Japan). The optical rotations were recorded on a Perkin Elmer 341 Polarimeter equipped with a sodium lamp, obtained from New England Discovery Partners (NEDP) Analytical Services, USA.

Extraction and isolation

Air-dried stem bark of *P. stenopetala* (300 g) was exhaustively extracted with hexane (5L, 12h) and the residue was dried, moistened with 10% ammonium hydroxide (4 hrs), then macerated in dichloromethane (DCM, 5 L, 4 days) and filtered. The DCM supernatant was evaporated to 500 mL at rt and alkaloids were extracted with 5% HCl until a negative Mayer's test. The aqueous fraction was rendered alkaline (pH 11) with NH₄OH and alkaloids were re-extracted with DCM. The re-extracted DCM fraction was washed with distilled H₂O, dried over anhydrous sodium sulphate, and evaporated to give crude alkaloid residue (10 g) which was subjected to exhaustive CC using DCM-MeOH. This led to the separation of 10 fractions which were combined based on their TLC behavior. Fractions 2-5 (2.0 g), afforded two alkaloids identified as compound **1** (5 mg, PTLC-DCM:MeOH 92:8) and compound **2** (7 mg, PTLC-DCM:MeOH 95:5). Fraction 7-8 (2 g) yielded compound **3** (5 mg, PTLC-DCM:MeOH 95:5) and compound **4** (5 mg, PTLC-DCM:MeOH 94:6). On the other hand, the non-alkaloid organic fraction (2 g) was also subjected to exhaustive CC using hexane:DCM to yield two compounds: **5** (8 mg) and **6** (10 mg). Meanwhile, silica gel column chromatographic separation of the first hexane extract was carried out using hexane:CHCl₃:EtOAc and successfully yielded four compounds **7-10**.

Acetylcholinesterase activity

AChE inhibitory activities were measured using a spectrophotometric method [9] with electric eel AChE, acetylthiocholine iodides and 5,5'-Dithio-bis(2-nitrobenzoic) acid (DTNB) were employed. Briefly, sodium phosphate buffer (140 μ L, pH 8.0), DTNB (20 μ L), tested compound (20 μ L, 1 mg/mL) and of AChE solution (20 μ L) were incubated in a 96-well microplate (15 min, 25°C). The enzyme catalyzes hydrolysis of acetylthiocholine iodide

(10 μ L) forming yellow 5-thio-2-nitrobenzoate anion which is measured at 412 nm using microplate reader (Epoch Micro-Volume Spectrophotometer, USA). AChE percentage inhibition (I%) was determined in triplicates (mean \pm SD) with galantamine as a positive control and reaction rates of samples were compared with blank sample (ethanol in phosphate buffer pH = 8):

$$I\% = [E - S / E] \times 100;$$

where activity of enzyme without test sample is (E) and with the test sample is (S). Statistical analyses were carried out by employing one-way ANOVA ($p > 0.05$). The experiment has been conducted at the Laboratory of Natural Products, UPSI.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Numerous secondary metabolites have been isolated and identified as a consequence of phytochemical research on *Polyalthia* species. Studies on the stem bark of *P.*

stenopetala species were conducted in light of the reported medicinal benefits leading to isolation and structure elucidation of ten metabolites including alkaloids, lignans, and phenolics. Isolated compounds were identified as laurotetanine (1), *N*-methyllaurotetanine (2), reticuline (3), liriodenine (4), yangambin (5), syringaresinol (6), vanillic acid (7), 4-hydroxybenzoic acid (8), cinnamic acid (9), and syringic acid (10), as shown in Figure 1. To the best of our knowledge, the current study is the first to isolate and identify the above-mentioned metabolites from *P. stenopetala*. Alkaloids have been reported from other *Polyalthia* species such as *P. sumatrana*⁹, *P. cauliflora*¹⁰, *P. laterifolia*¹¹, and *P. insignis*¹². Meanwhile, lignans were also reported from *P. rumphii*¹³, and compound (5) was firstly reported from the genus *Polyalthia*. These beneficial alkaloids and lignans are found in a variety of species, which increases their chemical diversity and supports chemotaxonomic research on the *Polyalthia* species and its family of Annonaceae.

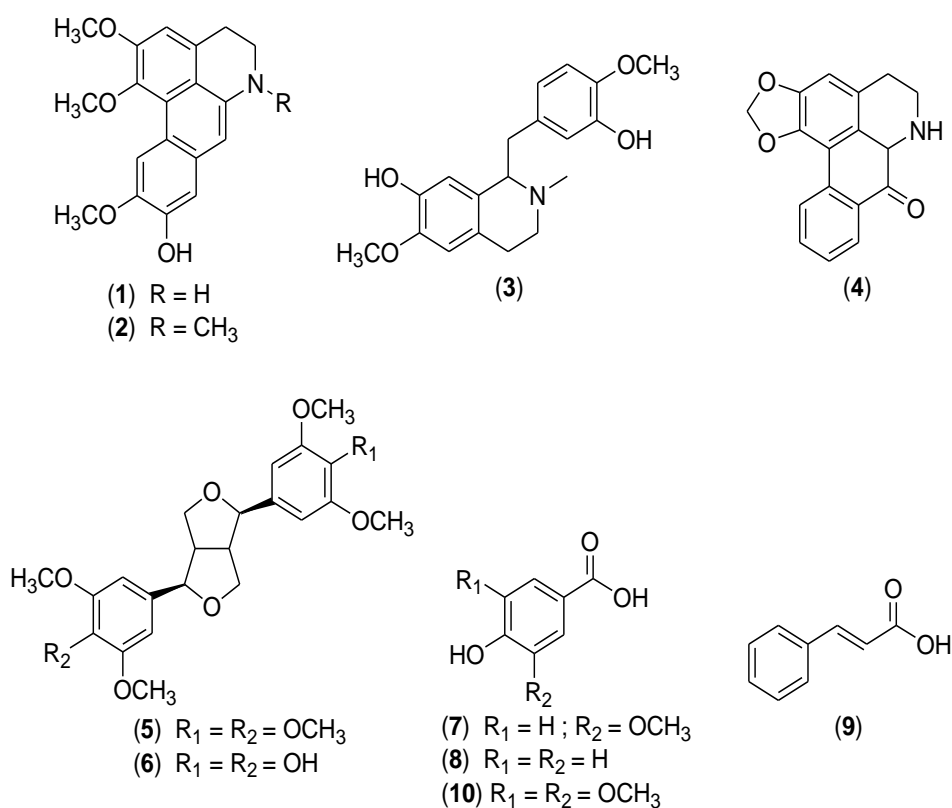


Fig.1: Chemical structures of isolated compounds.

(+)-Laurotetanine (1). Brown amorphous solid, mp 126-127°C. $[\alpha]_D^{+95}$ (c 0.5, EtOH). MS m/z 328 $[M+H]^+$, $C_{19}H_{21}NO_4$. 1H NMR (400 MHz, $CDCl_3$, δ , ppm, J/Hz): 2.72 (2H, m, H7), 3.05 (2H, m, H4), 3.35 (2H, m, H5), 3.64 (3H, s, 1-OCH₃), 3.82 (1H, m, H6a), 3.86 (3H, s, 2-OCH₃), 3.90 (3H, s, 10-OCH₃), 6.58 (1H, s, H3), 6.80 (1H, s, H8), 8.05 (1H, s, H11). ^{13}C NMR (100 MHz, $CDCl_3$, δ , ppm): 29.0 (C4), 36.0 (C7), 43.2 (C5), 53.5 (C6a), 55.5 (10-OCH₃), 56.0 (2-OCH₃), 60.5 (1-OCH₃), 110.2 (C3), 111.8 (C11), 113.6 (C8), 124.0 (C11a), 126.2 (C1a), 127.5 (C1b), 128.2 (C3a), 129.2 (C9), 129.5 (C7a), 144.2 (C1), 145.8 (C10), 152.0 (C2).

(+)-N-Methylaurotetanine (2). Brownish amorphous solid, mp 139-140°C. $[\alpha]_D^{+80}$ (c 0.5, $CHCl_3$). MS m/z 342 $[M+H]^+$, $C_{20}H_{23}NO_4$. 1H NMR (400 MHz, $CDCl_3$, δ , ppm, J/Hz): 2.45 (2H, d, J = 3.6, H5), 2.55 (2H, d, J = 3.6, H7), 2.56 (3H, s, N-CH₃), 2.66 (2H, dd, J = 16.0, 4.4, H4), 2.97 (1H, m, H6a), 3.65 (3H, s, 1-OCH₃), 3.88 (3H, s, 2-OCH₃), 3.90 (3H, s, 10-OCH₃), 6.58 (1H, s, H3), 6.85 (1H, s, H8), 8.02 (1H, s, H11). ^{13}C NMR (100 MHz, $CDCl_3$, δ , ppm): 29.0 (C4), 34.2 (C7), 53.0 (C5), 55.6 (10-OCH₃), 56.0 (2-OCH₃), 60.4 (1-OCH₃), 62.5 (C6a), 110.0 (C3), 111.2 (C11), 113.5 (C8), 124.2 (C11a), 127.0 (C1a), 127.5 (C3a), 128.5 (C1b), 130.2 (C7a), 144.0 (C1), 144.5 (C9), 145.5 (C10), 151.1 (C2).

(+)-Reticuline (3). Brown amorphous solid, mp 203-200°C. $[\alpha]_D^{+85}$ (c 0.5, $CHCl_3$). MS, m/z 330 $[M+H]^+$, $C_{19}H_{23}NO_4$. 1H NMR (400 MHz, $CDCl_3$, δ , ppm, J/Hz): 2.42 (3H, s, N-CH₃), 2.57 (1H, m, H4 β), 2.65 (2H, m, H4), 2.74 (1H, d, J = 14.0, H β), 2.78 (1H, m, H3 β), 2.82 (1H, m, H4 α), 2.92 (2H, m, H3), 3.04 (1H, dd, J = 14.0, 6.0, H α), 3.18 (1H, m, H3 α), 3.62 (1H, dd, J = 6.0, 14.0, H1), 3.82 (6H, s, 4',6-OCH₃), 6.35 (1H, s, H8), 6.50 (1H, s, H5), 6.57 (1H, dd, J = 2.0, 8.0, H6'), 6.70 (1H, d, J = 8.3, H5'), 6.75 (1H, d, J = 2.0, H2'). ^{13}C NMR (100 MHz, $CDCl_3$, δ , ppm): 25.0 (C4), 40.0 (C α), 42.5 (N-CH₃), 46.2 (C3), 55.8 (4', 6-OCH₃), 64.5 (C1), 110.5 (C5), 110.5 (C5'), 113.6 (C8), 115.6 (C2'), 120.8 (C6'), 125.0 (C8a), 130.2 (C4a), 133.2 (C1'), 143.5 (C7), 145.0 (C6), 145.2 (C3'), 145.5 (C4').

(+)-Liriodenine (4). Yellow needles, mp 280-282°C. $[\alpha]_D^{+75}$ (c 0.8, EtOH). MS m/z 275 $[M^+]$ $C_{17}H_9NO_3$. 1H NMR (400 MHz, $CDCl_3$, δ , ppm, J/Hz): 6.42 (2H, s, OCH₂O),

7.15 (1H, s, H3), 7.60 (1H, td, J = 7.8, 1.5, H9), 7.75 (1H, td, J = 7.2, 1.2, H10), 7.82 (1H, d, J = 5.1, H4), 8.60 (1H, dd, J = 7.8, 1.2, H8), 8.64 (1H, d, J = 7.2, H11), 8.90 (1H, d, J = 5.1, H5). ^{13}C NMR (100 MHz, $CDCl_3$, δ , ppm): 102.5 (OCH₂O), 103.6 (C3), 108.5 (C1a), 123.6 (C3b), 124.5 (C4), 127.8 (C11a), 128.7 (C9), 129.0 (C8), 131.5 (C7a), 133.0 (C11a), 134.5 (C10), 136.2 (C3a), 145.2 (C5), 145.7 (C6a), 148.5 (C2), 152.2 (C2), 182.6 (C7).

(+)-Yangambin (5). White solid, mp 125-128°C. $[\alpha]_D^{+85}$ (c 0.02, $CHCl_3$). MS m/z 446 $[M^+]$ $C_{24}H_{30}O_8$. 1H NMR (400 MHz, $CDCl_3$, δ , ppm, J/Hz): 3.12 (2H, m, H8, H8'), 3.86 (6H, s, 2 \times OCH₃), 3.88 (12H, s, 4 \times OCH₃), 3.95 (2H, dd, J = 9.2, 3.5, H9 β , H9 β'), 4.35 (2H, dd, J = 9.2, 3.5, H9 α , H9 α'), 4.76 (2H, d, J = 4.4, H7, H7'), 6.62 (4H, s, H2, H6, H2', H6'); ^{13}C NMR (100 MHz, $CDCl_3$, δ , ppm): 54.2 (C8, C8'), 56.0 (4 \times OCH₃), 60.4 (2 \times OCH₃), 71.6 (C9, C9'), 85.8 (C7, C7'), 102.6 (C2, C2', C6, C6'), 136.5 (C1, C1'), 137.5 (C4, C4'), 153.4 (C3, C3', C5, C5').

(+)-Syringaresinol (6). Colorless needle, mp 183-184°C. $[\alpha]_D^{+145}$ (c 0.02, $CHCl_3$). MS m/z 418 $[M^+]$ $C_{22}H_{26}O_8$. 1H NMR (400 MHz, $CDCl_3$, δ , ppm, J/Hz): 3.10 (1H, m, H8, 8'), 3.90 (12H, s, 4 \times OCH₃), 3.94 (2H, m, H9 β , H9 β'), 4.30 (2H, m, H9 α , H9 α'), 4.75 (1H, d, J = 4.5, H7, H7'), 5.96 (2H, s, 2 \times OH), 6.60 (4H, s, H2, H2', H6, H6'). ^{13}C NMR (100 MHz, $CDCl_3$, δ , ppm): 54.5 (C8, C8'), 56.6 (4 \times OCH₃), 71.5 (C9, C9'), 86.0 (C7, C7'), 102.7 (C2, C6, C2', C6'), 132.0 (C1, C1'), 134.3 (C4, C4'), 147.2 (C3, C5, C3', C5').

NMR spectral data of vanillic acid (7), 4-hydroxybenzoic acid (8), cinnamic acid (9), and syringic acid (10) were... in accordance with previously published data¹⁴⁻¹⁶.

Inhibition of AChE is the current strategy for treatment of AD and the search for novel anticholinesterase alkaloids is attracting interest since the approval of galantamine for the treatment of AD patients. Alkaloids have received great attention due to their well-known anticholinergic activity, which generally has in common the presence of nitrogen atoms in a cyclic ring. This fact has motivated the screening of isolated alkaloids as possible AChE inhibitors. Galantamine is used as a standard in this study. It was the first alkaloid isolated from different species of

Amaryllidaceae and the most recently AChE inhibitor approved in Europe and the United States for the symptomatic treatment of AD. Aside from alkaloids, some plant terpenoids and shikimate-derived compounds may inhibit AChE to a lesser degree.

In this regard, compounds **1-6** of *P. stenopetala* were subjected to AChE inhibitory activity and the results are shown in Table 1. Among the tested alkaloids, compound **4** showed the highest inhibitory activity, 80.6%. The difference in the activity towards the cholinesterase could be attributed to the bulkiness and skeleton structure of the alkaloids especially the high degree of methoxylation at ring A and the presence of tertiary amine^{17&18}. In addition, the aporphine type alkaloid is an important class of natural AChE inhibitors and there are several sub-type aporphine alkaloids that have been obtained as AChE inhibitors^{19&20}.

Table 1: Acetylcholinesterase inhibitory activity of isolated compounds from *P. stenopetala*.

Compounds	AChE inhibition (I%)
(+)-Laurotetanine (1)	45.0%
(+)-N-Methylaurotetanine (2)	40.2%
(+)-Reticuline (3)	58.2%
(+)-Liriodenine (4)	80.6%
(+)-Yangambin (5)	60.5%
(+)-Syringaresinol (6)	69.5%
Galantamine	85.5%

Conclusion

Plant secondary metabolites provide a promising source for the discovery of new acetylcholinesterase inhibitors which are important for the treatment of various neurodegenerative diseases. The current study highlighted the effect of *P. stenopetala* alkaloids/lignans as AChE inhibitors. Further studies are needed to reveal the mode of action of these alkaloids to understand their possible roles in human physiology.

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نشرة العلوم الصيدلانية جامعة أسيوط



الأيضات الثانوية من اللحاء الجذعي لنبات بولي الثيا ستينوبيتالا (هوك. و. وطومسون ريدل) و نشاط أسيتيل كولين استيراز خاصتهم

وان محمد نزل حكيمي وان صالح^١ - ناتاسا محمد شاكري^١ - محمد أزلان نافع^١ - نورونجاه
أب غاني^{٢,٣} - سلام أحمد عابد^٤ - أبوبكر م. عبد العال^٥

^١ قسم الكيمياء، كلية العلوم والرياضيات، جامعة بنديكان سلطان إدريس، ٣٥٩٠٠ تانجونج ماليم، بيراك،
ماليزيا

^٢ معهد عطاء الرحمن لاكتشاف المنتجات الطبيعية (AuRIns)، جامعة مارا للتكنولوجيا، حرم بونشاك علم،
٤٢٣٠٠ بندر بونشاك علم، سيلانجور، ماليزيا

^٣ كلية العلوم التطبيقية، جامعة مارا للتكنولوجيا، ٤٠٤٥٠ شاه علم، سيلانجور، ماليزيا

^٤ قسم العقاقير، كلية الصيدلة، جامعة كربلاء، العراق

^٥ قسم الكيمياء العضوية الصيدلانية، كلية الصيدلة، جامعة أسيوط، أسيوط ٧١٥٢٦، مصر

تعتبر النباتات مصادر مهمة جدًا للعديد من المركبات الحيوية النشطة ذات القيمة التي تفيد صحة الإنسان والحيوان. هنا، نقوم بنشر التركيب الكيميائي النباتي والنشاط المثبط لانزيم أسيتيل كولينستراز لنبات بولي الثيا ستينوبيتالا. أدى تجزئة وتنقية مستخلص لحاء ساق هذا النبات إلى الفصل والتعرف علي لوروتيتانين (١)، ن-ميثيل لوروتيتانين (٢)، ريتيكولن (٣)، ليريودينين (٤)، يانجامبين (٥)، سرنجاريزينول (٦)، حمض فانيليك (٧)، وحمض ٤-هيدروكسي بنزويك (٨)، وحمض سيناميك (٩)، وحمض السرنجك (١٠). تم التعرف علي التركيب الكيميائي لهذه المركبات باستخدام تحليلات طيفية مختلفة ومقارنتها مع البيانات التي تم نشرها مسبقًا. قامت جميع المركبات بنتشيط انزيم أسيتيل كولينستراز بنسب تتراوح بين ٤٠.٢ و ٨٠.٦%. تسلط دراستنا الضوء على أنواع البولي الثيا كمصادر طبية نباتية.