Antiandrogenic activity of *Ruta graveolens* L in male Albino rats with emphasis on sexual and aggressive behavior

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**Abstract**

**BACKGROUND:** The *Ruta graveolens* L. is currently used by the Jordanian populations systemically for its antispasmodic, diuretic, sedative, and analgesic effects and externally for its antirheumatic effect.

**OBJECTIVE:** To study plant effects on the reproductive system and fertility using adult male albino rats with special emphasis on the aggressive behavior and sex behavior. The aqueous extracts of *Ruta graveolens* L. solution was fed orally to male albino rats at a dose of 500 mg/kg body weight for 60 days.

**RESULTS:** This dose induces a significant decrease in the weight of reproductive organs (P<0.01) when compared to controls. The sperm motility and density in cauda epididymes and testicular ducts were significantly decreased (P<0.01). A significant decreased (P<0.001) in spermatogenesis activity is observed in somniferous tubule. Treated rats testicular cell population showed a decrease in number of spermatocytes and spermatids (P<0.001) when compared to controls. Serum hormonal assay indicated a decrease in Testosterone and Follicular Stimulating Hormone levels in treated rats. A decreased in number female rats impregnated by males receiving treatment was observed and demonstrated by a decrease in the implantation sites and viable fetuses number (P<0.01). The ingested extract also suppresses the sexual behavior in adult male rats expressed by a prolongation of first mount time, increase in intromission latency, decrease in intromissions number, and prolongation of the post-ejaculatory interval. This led to reduce the ejaculation time and increase the post ejaculatory intervals. Ingestion of *R. graveolens* markedly abolished aggressive behavior parameters in adult male treated rats namely, a suppression in lateralization, boxing bouts and ventral presenting postures.

**CONCLUSION:** that the aqueous extracts of *Ruta graveolens* L might have adverse effects on territorial aggression and sexual behavior in male albino rats.
1. Introduction

Plant preparations play an important role in fertility regulation, a fact that has been reported in the ancient literature of indigenous systems of medicine. A number of plant species have been tested for fertility regulation beginning about 50 years ago and were subsequently fortified by national and international agencies (Sinha, 1990; Purohit and Daradka, 1999).

Ethanobotanical knowledge provide a very useful basic clues not only in the problem relating to nomenclature identification of crude drugs extract but also in the discovery and the use of medicinal plants. The *Ruta graveolens* L. is currently used by the Jordanian populations systemically for its antispasmodic, diuretic, sedative, and analgesic effects and externally for its anti-rheumatic effect.

The role of this indigenous plant products in the induction of male and female fertility in experimental animals has drawn the attention of researchers over the turn of the century (Fransworth, et al. 1975; Bhargave, 1988a; Bhargave, 1988b). Several authors have reported the anti-fertility outcome activity of this plant (Pakarashi & Pakarashi (year); Sethi et al. 1990; Desta, 1994). Many others researchers also focused on the study of the fertility regulations by this plant in different other countries such as Japan (Uuki & Ichikawa, 1989; Usiroyama et al. 1991; Noda et al. 1993), China (Li, 1988), India (Bhargave, 1988a; Purohit & Daradka, 1999), Brazil (Elisabetsky & Posey, 1989), as well as in Ethiopia (Desta, 1994).

In light of these facts, this work was conducted to monitor the plant effects on the reproductive system and fertility using adult male albino rats with special emphasis on the aggressive behavior and sex behavior.

2. Material and method

2-1. Animals:

Adult male and female albino rats of Sprague Dawley strain, weighing about 300 g were raised in the Animal House Unit in Faculty of Medicine, Jordan University of Science and Technology under controlled temperature of 21 ±1°C and 12 hours light: 12 hours darkness schedule (lights on 06.00 AM–18.00PM hr). Food and Water were available ad libitum.

2-2. Plant and treatment:

*Ruta graveolens* L. plant were obtained from a local market in Irbid (Jordan). The plant was dissolved by boiling in distilled water and administered orally to rats after cooling using animal feeding intubations needles (Popper and Sons, New York) in concentration of 500 mg/kg.

2-3. Experimental Design

Male rats were divided into following groups.

**Group 1** - Intact (Control) rats of this group received vehicle (distilled water) treatment for 60 days.

**Group 2** - Rats of this group received an aqueous extracts of *Ruta graveolens* L. in a dose of 500 mg/kg body weight for 60 days representing the full reproductive cycle.

After 24 hours of the last dose, animals were weighed and autopsied under light ether anesthesia. The blood was collected through cardiac puncture using a sterile syringe for serum analysis.

2-4. Fertility Test

Fertility was estimated in adult male rats treated with Aqueous extracts of *Ruta graveolens* and in the control males counterparts. Each male was placed in an individual cage with two virgin untreated females of the same strain they were left together for 10 days during which two estrous cycles had elapsed (Rugh, 1968). One week after the removal of the exposed males, pregnant females rats were killed by cervical dislocation under light ether anesthesia and the number of implantation sites, the number of viable fetuses and the number of resorption sites were recorded.

2-5. Body and Organ Weights

The initial and final body weight of the animal were recorded. The reproductive tract was taken out trimmed free of fat and each organ was weighed separately on electronic balance. The reproductive organ taken into account for study in male include testes, epididymides, ventral prostate, seminal vesicle, and vas deferens. Some vital organs such as the liver and heart were also obtained, weighed and kept in 90% formaldehyde for further analysis. Reproductive organs along with a small piece of the obtained liver, heart and kidney were fixed in Bouin’s fixative for histological studies.

2-6. Sperm Motility and Count

To determine the sperm count and motility, a 100mg of cauda epididymides was minced in 2 ml of physiological saline and one drop of the evenly mixed sample was applied to a Neubauer’s counting chamber under cover slip. Quantitative motility expressed as percentage was determined by counting both motile and immotile spermatozoa per unit area. Cauda epididymal and testicular sperm counts were made by routine procedure and expressed as million/ml of suspension (Prasad, 1972).

2-7. Histological analysis

The Bouin’s fixed reproductive organs (testes, epididymides, seminal vesicle, ventral prostate, vas deferens) along with liver, kidney and heart were cut into small pieces and processed for histological slides. After dehydration using different concentration of alcohol, specimens were embedded in paraffin blocks and sectioned at 5 μm, placed on a clean histological glass slide and stained using Haematoxyline and Eosin.

2-8. Histometry

With the help of Camera Lucida, one hundred of circular appearing somniferous tubules were traced at x80 magnification and the diameter of each tubule was measured separately. The measurement was expressed...
in terms of mean of all the traced tubules. Similarly, Leydig cell and their nuclei were traced at × 800. In addition, epithelial cell height of cauda epididymides, caput epididymides and seminal vesicle were also traced at X-360 and recorded.

2-9. Testicular Cell Population Counting
Spermatogenic elements namely spermatogonia, spermatocytes and spermatids were counted in 5 um thick cross sections of 10 sonniferous tubules obtained from 10 animals of each group. All raw counts were transformed to ‘true’ counts by an adaptation of Abercrombie formula (Abercrombie, 1946) from germ cell diameter measurement. Interstitial cell types (such as fibroblast, immature and mature Leydig cells and degenerating cells) were estimated, applying a differential count over 200 cells population and statistically verified by the binominal distribution (Dixon and Massey, 1957).

2-10. Serum Biochemistry
Total protein, cholesterol, triglycerides, Serum glutamic oxaloacetic transaminase (SGOT), serum glutamic pyruvic transaminase (SGPT) were determined in blood serum using commercial kits (Cis BIO International Gif sur Yvette, France).

2-11. Hormonal Assays
Blood Plasma FSH and Testosterone concentrations was measured by Radioimmunoassay using two commercial kits (Cis BIO International Gif sur Yvette, France).

2-12. Statistical analysis
All values of body/organ weight biochemical estimation and histometric analysis were expressed in terms of mean value ± S.D. The different treatment groups were compared with control group using chi-square test and Student’s “t” test (Ipstein and Poly 1970). Data were expressed as mean ± S. D. Differences between control and sodium fluoride exposed groups were analyzed using either the Chi-square test or Student “t” test [31].

2-13. Aggressive Behavior Testing
A rectangular observation cage with a Plexiglas front (45 cm length × 27cm breadth X 40cm height was used for rats aggression testing behavior. A stud male rat was placed in the testing arena for 10 days. A second male (control) was placed in the test arena with the stud male for 5 minutes, and the following parameters were recorded: (1) Lateralization by the stud male (2) Boxing bouts with stud male (3) fights of stud with the control male (4) Ventral presenting postures of the stud male (Bataineh et al 1997; Bataineh et al 1998).

2-14. Sex Behavior Testing Procedures
Animals were placed in the same observation rectangular cage with a Plexiglas front and a lightened bulb of 15 W was used above this cage. These observations were performed between 9:00 am and 3:00 pm. All behavioral measures were monitored by a single observer unfamiliar with the exposed groups.

Female rats of the same strain were used in this experiment receiving sequential subcutaneous treatment with 12.5 mg/animal estradiol benzoate (Sigma Chemical Co. St Louis, MO, USA) 54 h before testing and 0.5 mg/animal progesterone (Gift from Roussel Uclaf, Paris, France) 6 h before testing in order to be brought into estrus cycle. The hormones were dissolved in corn oil (ALFCO: Arab International Food and Oil Processing Co.) in a total volume of 0.1 ml. Male rats were left in testing arena placed in for 5 minutes before the receptive females were introduced. Mating performance of male rats and the number of ejaculations were classified as follows:

1. Number of mounts: The time to the first mount (Body Contact) and the number of mounts without penile intromission.
2. Intromission latency: time in minutes from the presentation of the female to the first intromission.
3. Intromissions: number of mounts with penile intromissions.
4. Ejaculation latency: time from the first intromission until ejaculation.
5. Post-ejaculatory interval (latency period): time from the end of ejaculation until the next intromission. These observations were terminated when: (1) No intromission had occurred within 15 min. after presentation of the female. (2) The male had not ejaculated within 30 minutes after the first intromission. (3) The first intromission following an ejaculation had occurred. (4) No intromission had occurred within 15 minute after ejaculation (Klint and Larsson 1995; Bataineh et al 1997; Bataineh et al 1998).

2-15. Statistical analysis
All the values of body/organ weight biochemical estimation and histometry were expressed in terms of mean value ± S.D. The different treatment groups were compared with control group using chi-square test and Student’s “t” test (Ipstein and Poly 1970). Data were expressed as mean ± S. D. Differences between control and Boric acid exposed groups were analyzed using either the Chi-square test or Student “t” test (Siegel, 1956 and Ipstein and Poly 1970).

3. Results

3-1. Effect of R. graveolens on Body and Body and Organ Weights
Table 1 shows the effect of intra-gastric administration of R. graveolens caused an increased in body weight in treated animals, when initial and final body weight were compared with controls. The weight of the testes, epididymides, seminal vesicle, ventral prostate and vas deferens however, were found to be significantly decreased in treated male rats when compared with the weights of the same organs obtained from control rats.
Table 1: Body and organ weights of male albino rats treated with Ruta graveolens for 60 days and compared to controls.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Body weight (gm)</th>
<th>Testes</th>
<th>Epididymides</th>
<th>Seminal vesicle</th>
<th>Ventral Prostate</th>
<th>Vas deferens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Initial</td>
<td>Final</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control group</td>
<td>304± 2.80</td>
<td>319± 2.65</td>
<td>895± 25.21</td>
<td>367± 21.61</td>
<td>376± 14.38</td>
<td>226± 4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment group</td>
<td>322± 4.55</td>
<td>348± 7.6</td>
<td>797**± 32.1</td>
<td>365.2** ± 19.3</td>
<td>434** ± 28.1</td>
<td>213** ± 11.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results are expressed as mean ± S.D.

\*p < 0.05, \**p < 0.01 significantly different from control group (Student's \("t\) test).

Table 2: Histometrical parameters and sperm dynamics findings in male albino rats treated with Ruta graveolens for 60 days compared to controls.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Sperm density million/ml</th>
<th>Sperm motility %</th>
<th>Seminiferous tubule diameter µm</th>
<th>Leydig cell nuclear diameter µm</th>
<th>Epithelial cell height µm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Testes</td>
<td>Cauda</td>
<td>Testes</td>
<td>Cauda</td>
<td>Caput</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Group</td>
<td>4.75±0.47</td>
<td>56.0±1.94</td>
<td>74.1±1.94</td>
<td>290.6±3.2</td>
<td>6.45±0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment group</td>
<td>3.55**±0.14</td>
<td>31.185**±1.08</td>
<td>47.26**±1.08</td>
<td>218.27**±2.35</td>
<td>4.18**±0.762</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results are expressed as mean ± S.D.

\*p < 0.05, \**p < 0.01, \***p < 0.001 significantly different from control group (Student's \("t\) test).

Table 3: Testicular cell population dynamics findings in male albino rats treated with Ruta graveolens for 60 days compared to controls.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Germinal cell types</th>
<th>Interstitial cell type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spermatogonia</td>
<td>Spermatocyte (primary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control group</td>
<td>23.99±0.93</td>
<td>18.85±0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment group</td>
<td>17.05±4.44</td>
<td>12.96***±2.41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results are expressed as mean ± S.D.

\*p < 0.05, \**p < 0.01, \***p < 0.001 significantly different from control group (Student's \("t\) test).

3-2. Effect of R. graveolens on sperm dynamics and histometrical parameters.

Table 2 shows that the sperm motility in cauda epididymis was decreased to a significant levels (P<0.001) in treated animals with R. graveolens L when compared with the controls. A significant decrease in sperm density, seminiferous tubule diameter and leydig cell nuclear diameter was also observed in treated rats (P<0.01). Epithelial cell height in epididymides (cauda and caput) and seminal vesicle were found to be significantly decreased as well in treated group (P<0.01).

3-3. Effect of R. graveolens on Testicular Cell Population Dynamics

Table 3 shows that the administration of R. graveolens extract causes a significant decreased (P< 0.001) in rats germinal cell population namely spermatocytes (primary and secondary) and spermatids. Similarly the immature and mature Leydig cells number were also decreased to a significant levels, whereas the degenerating cell numbers were observed to be significantly increased (P<0.001). Fibroblast and spermatogonia numbers were not altered in treated rats.

3-4. Effect of R. graveolens on Biochemical Changes Analysis

The results presented in Table 4 shows that blood glucose level was increased to a significant values (P<0.01), while bilirubin, total cholesterol and triglycerides level remain within a normal range. Serum glutamic oxaloacetic transaminase (SGOT), Serum glutamic pyruvic transaminase (SGPT) were observed to increased (P<0.05) in treated groups when compared to controls. Levels of plasma FSH and Testosterone were found to be significantly decreased (P< 0.01) in treated group when compared with controls.

3-5. Effect of R. graveolens on Male Rat Fertility

The results presented in table 5 shows that intra-gastric administration of R. graveolens diet at dose (500 mg/kg body weight) for 60 days to male rats causes a significant decreased (P< 0.01) in the number of females impregnated by male treated rats. The number of implantations and the number of viable fetuses calculated after cesarean suctions were significantly decreased (P< 0.01) in female rats impregnated by treated males when compared with females impregnated with untreated rats. On other hand the number...
of resorptions sites were found to be increased to a significant values (P< 0.05) in females impregnated by treated male rats when compared to controls.

3-6. Effect of *R. graveolens* on Sex Behavior

The results presented in Table 6 shows the effect of *R. graveolens* on the parameters related to male rats sex-behavior. Male treated rats presented with a significant decrease (P< 0.001) in the number of mounts where a significant increased (P<0.001) in ejaculation time was observed when compared to controls. In addition, a significant increase (P<0.001) in the post ejaculatory interval was found evident when treated rats where exposed to female rats of the same strain and when compared with control rats.

3-7. Aggressive behavior parameters

Table 7 shows the effects of long-term ingestion of *R. graveolens* on the parameters of territorial aggression in adult male rats. Male treated rats had significantly reduced effect on lateralization and boxing bouts (p < 0.001). A significant reduction (P<0.05) in the number of ventral presenting postures was observed in treated rats when compared with controls. Although there was a higher tendency rate to reduce the fighting when adult treated male have been exposed to untreated male rats, this effect did not reach a recognized significant level. Therefore, so was unlikely possible to draw any conclusion from these results.
4. Discussion

The *R. graveolens* is currently used by many people in Jordan as a phrodisiac and fertility promoting agent. In this experiment, the animal model has been used previously by several workers to assess the adverse effects of this extract obtained from medicinal plants on reproductive functions in male (Pakrashi, A. and Pakrashi, P.L.,1977; Lohiya et al.,1994)

In rats the whole spermatogenic cycle process requires 53 days out which spermatozoa spends the last 6 to 7 days in its final transition through epididymides (Ke and Tso,1982). Treatment presented as an extract obtained from *R. graveolens* was administrated for one complete spermatogenic cycle. The present investigation clearly shows that oral administration of *R. graveolens* promoted a decreased male albino rats fertility. This is further illustrated from the data obtained regarding the weight of reproductive organs were a markedly decreased in the organ's weight was observed as indicated by table number 1. It is well known that the weight, size and the secretory function of testes, epididymes, seminal vesicles, ventral prostate, and vasa differentsia are closely regulated by androgens hormones (Choudhary and Steinberger,1975, Agrawal et al.,1986). Therefore, it could be that the treatment may act directly or indirectly on the pituitary gland secretory function leading to an increase in the main hormones controlling spermatogenesis process. It has been demonstrated that the process of spermatogenesis and the accessory reproductive organs function are androgen dependent. Therefore, an changes in the androgen production would reflect and explain the decrease in number of mature Leydig cells and their functional status. In this present study our findings indicated that the number of degenerating Leydig cells were significantly decreased that lead to a decrease in the serum androgen level observed in our results. Our findings that a decrease in number of spermatoocytes (primary and secondary) and spermatids observed together with this perversely mentioned observations go hand in hand with and further confirm our hypothesis leading to conclude that these stages are completely androgen dependent (Dym et al.,1979).

Histometric analysis of reproductive organs, on the other hand, further confirmed the androgenic effect. This is illustrated by the finding that a significant decrease in the sperm motility was observed in the cauda epididymis in treatment group. The results presented in this paper also indicated that ingestion of *R. graveolens* by adult male rats reduces the number of females impregnation as shown in table number 5. In addition, the number of implantations and the number of viable fetuses were decreased, this decreased could be a reflect and may be due to the decrease in sperm motility and sperm density observed in this study. This may be due to the activity effects of *R. graveolens* on the enzymes involved in the oxidative phosphorylation process.

In conclusion *R. graveolens* ingestion diet possesses strong compound or principles that decreased fertil-

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