Ovicidal and adulticidal effects of monoterpenoids against permethrin-resistant human head lice, Pediculus humanus capitis

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Ovicidal and adulticidal effects of monoterpenoids against permethrin-resistant human head lice, Pediculus humanus capitis

A. C. Toloza, C. Vas sena and M. I. Picollo
Centro de Investigaciones de Plagas e Insecticidas (CITEFA-CONICET), Villa Martelli, Buenos Aires, Argentina

Abstract. The improper use of pediculicides containing permethrin has led to the development of resistance. Thus, new alternatives for control are needed. Plant-derived insecticides are attractive alternatives to common chemical insecticides because most of them are environmentally friendly and non-toxic to mammals. The toxic activity of 23 monoterpenoids belonging to several chemical classes was tested against the eggs of permethrin-resistant head lice, Pediculus humanus capitis De Geer (Phthiraptera: Pediculidae). Significant differences in ovicidal action were observed among the tested substances. The most effective chemicals were hydrocarbons and ethers, followed by ketones, alcohols, phenols and esters. A linear relationship between egg mortality and knockdown time (KT\textsubscript{50}) on adults by the tested components revealed that most of the components were effective on both egg and adult stages. The monoterpenoids described herein are good candidates as effective pediculicides.

Key words. Pediculus humanus capitis, adult head lice, fumigant activity, head lice eggs, monoterpenes, toxicity.

Introduction

The human head louse, Pediculus humanus capitis De Geer, is an important cosmopolitan pest mainly affecting school-aged children. Louse infestation is annoying and may cause itching, loss of sleep and social sanctioning (Gratz, 1997). The spread of lice occurs mainly through direct host-to-host contact (Roberts, 2002). Although head lice have not been incriminated in the transmission of deleterious pathogens, it has been suggested that they can be potential transmitters of Rickettsia prowazekii Da Rocha-Lima, a causative agent of epidemic typhus, and Bartonella quintana Brenner, a causative agent of trench fever (Robinson et al., 2003; Sasaki et al., 2006).

There are several treatment options for the control of head lice, which include over-the-counter products, prescription pediculicides, manual removal (wet combing), homeopathic remedies and oral therapy (West, 2004). Infestation with head lice is increasing every year in both developed and developing countries, as reflected in pediculicide failure through resistance, improper application and formulation changes (Burgess, 2004). Since the mid-1990s, levels of resistance to the synthetic pyrethroids permethrin and phenothrin have been widely reported in several countries, such as France (Coz et al., 1993), the Czech Republic (Rupes et al., 1995), the U.K. (Burgess et al., 1995), Israel (Mumcuoglu et al., 1995), the U.S.A. (Pollack et al., 1999), Denmark (Kristensen et al., 2006), Japan (Tomita et al., 2003), Australia (Hunter & Barker, 2003) and Argentina (Picollo et al., 1998, 2000; Vassena et al., 2003). Therefore, the use of alternative plant-derived products has increased worldwide due to the tendency of consumers to prefer ‘natural’ products. Plant essential oils, the steam distillate of aromatic plants, constitute a rich source of bioactive chemicals with compounds generally consisting of low-molecular-weight monoterpenes and phenols (Guenter, 1972). Some of these components are effective against a wide variety of insect pests (Rice & Coats, 1994; Isman, 1999), including human lice (Burgess, 2004; Priestley et al., 2006; Toloza et al., 2006). Plant-derived products such as shampoos, sprays and lotions have previously been reported to be effective as pediculicides (Mumcuoglu et al., 2002; Heukelbach et al., 2006; Abdel-Ghaffar & Semmler, 2007; Gonzalez-Audino et al., 2007). In general terms, adult lice are easier to kill than eggs. Effective control is to ensure that the dosage, exposure and formulation of the products are sufficient to kill them (Buxton, 1947; Veal, 1996). Concerning eggs, there are two...
types of mortality: the embryo in the egg is killed or the developing nymph dies when it comes into contact with the surface insecticide as it chews its way out of the chorion during eclosion (Leonard et al., 1991). Differences among the biological systems of eggs and hatched forms include the absence of a differentiated nervous system in early embryonic stages and certain processes for utilization of stored energy that are not common to hatched forms. On the other hand, mature embryos have some of the same vital systems found in newly emerged nymphs, such as the nervous, respiratory and circulatory systems. Thus, it may be possible to develop an ovicidal product that is effective against all stages, if it could target vital processes common to mature embryos and hatched forms, as well as those that are unique to embryos (Smith & Wagenknecht, 1959). The aim of this work was to study the pediculicidal activity of several monoterpenoids against eggs and adults of P. h. capitis populations reported to have permethrin resistance.

Materials and methods

Chemicals

The monoterpenoids tested were those previously evaluated against adult head lice (Toloza et al., 2006). All compounds were of more than 98% purity (Fig. 1), and were supplied by Fluka, Munich, Germany and by Sigma, St. Louis, MO.

Head lice

Adults and eggs were collected in 2007 from infested children 6–12 years old, using a fine-toothed antilouse comb. Head lice were obtained from three elementary schools located in different parts of Buenos Aires city. Previously, a topical application method (Vassena et al., 2003) had demonstrated high levels of

Fig. 1. Structures of the monoterpenoids selected for investigation.
resistance to permethrin in these schools (resistance ratios >150), which were confirmed to be at a similar level during the present study. The material was collected and transported to our laboratory as previously reported (Picollo et al., 1998, 2000). The protocol for adult and egg collection was approved by the ad hoc committee at the Centro de Investigaciones de Plagas e Insecticidas (Research Centre of Pests and Insecticides, Buenos Aires, Argentina) and archived in our laboratory.

**Ovicidal effects of monoterpenoids on Pediculus humanus capitis eggs**

Each experimental unit consisted of a covered plastic Petri dish (55 mm diameter), a filter paper and 60 µL of a test substance on a small plastic container. The negative control consisted of the same experimental unit without the addition of any substance. Groups of 10–20 late development viable eggs were selected, as described previously by Mougabure Cueto et al. (2006), and transferred to the enclosed chamber. Late eggs showed black eye spots and clearly visible appendages of the embryo. Each set of eggs was exposed to the test monoterpenoid for 24 h at 28 ± 1°C and 75 ± 5% RH. After this time, the small container with the test substance was removed and the treated batches of eggs were incubated at 28 ± 1°C and 75 ± 5% RH (closed containers with saturated aqueous solutions of NaCl). Mortality data of treated eggs were recorded 5 days after the eclosion of controls. Treatments and controls were replicated three times. The criterion for mortality was eggs with a closed operculum or eggs with an opened operculum and the nymph inside (Mougabure Cueto et al., 2006).

**Fumigant activity against adult head lice**

The method of Toloza et al. (2006) was employed to evaluate the fumigant activity of those monoterpenoids whose efficacy has not been previously reported. The compounds were evaluated in an enclosed chamber (9 cm diameter Petri dish) containing 60 µL of the test substance. A 5.5 cm diameter Petri dish with a filter paper and 15 adult head lice was placed within the chamber. The control test consisted of the same unit without the addition of any substance. Knockdown of exposed lice, defined here as the inability of the insects to walk on a filter paper, was recorded every 5 min for 1 h.

With the fumigant data reported here and those previously reported by us (Toloza et al., 2006), a linear regression analysis was performed between knockdown time (KT50) values on adults and the percentage mortality of the eggs.

**Statistical analysis**

All mortality data were corrected for control mortality by using Abbott’s equation (Abbott, 1925). The percentage mortality was determined and transformed to arcsine square-root values for ANOVA. Treatment means were compared and separated by the Duncan test at $P < 0.05$ (StatSoft Inc., 2001). The relationship between KT50s on adults and egg mortality was estimated by regression analysis. All statistical tests were performed with $\alpha = 0.05$ for significance of statistical tests.

**Results**

The ovicidal activity of monoterpenoids, the negative control and permethrin are summarized in Fig. 2. Significant differences in ovicidal action were observed among the tested substances ($F = 14.88, \text{d.f.} = 23, 58, P < 0.0001$). Ten of the compounds gave louse egg mortality above 80% (as compared with the negative control). The most effective chemicals were hydrocarbons and ethers, followed by ketones, alcohols, phenols and esters. Assays of individual monoterpenoids indicated that the most effective were anisole (100%), α-pinene (96.7 ± 4.7%), β-pinene (96.4 ± 6.2%), (+)-α-pinene (96 ± 1.4%), 1S-(−)-α-pinene (94.21 ± 0.3%), anethole (92.5 ± 7.5%), carvone (91.6 ± 11.7%), limonene (89.88 ± 11.3%), linalool (88.17 ± 10.9%) and 1,8-cineole (84.47 ± 8.0%) at the 95% confidence level.

The toxicity of six monoterpenoids against adult *P. h. capitis* are shown in Table 1. Of the tested compounds, only (+)-α-pinene and S-(−)-α-pinene were effective on head lice. Additionally, the fumigant activity of monoterpenoids previously reported by Toloza et al. (2006) is shown in comparison (Table 1).

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Fig. 2. Ovicidal effects of compounds against *Pediculus humanus capitis*. Different letters are significantly different by Duncan’s test ($P < 0.05$).

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Table 1. Fumigant activity of monoterpenoids against adult head lice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chemical class</th>
<th>Monoterpenoid</th>
<th>KT 50 (95% confidence level)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ether</td>
<td>1,8-cineole</td>
<td>11.10 (8.32–13.11)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eugenol</td>
<td>&gt;60*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anethole</td>
<td>&gt;60*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Amisole</td>
<td>12.7 (10.80–14.40)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hydrocarbon</td>
<td>Limonene</td>
<td>27.20 (22–32.41)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Terpinene</td>
<td>&gt;60*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>α-Pinenone</td>
<td>33.86 (28–39.61)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(+)–α-Pinenone</td>
<td>42.70 (31.50–62.20)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(-)–α-Pinenone</td>
<td>34.48 (25.31–53.97)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IS-(–)–α-Pinenone</td>
<td>28.54 (19.89–43.35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>Linalool</td>
<td>37.73 (34.79–40.49)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Citronellol</td>
<td>&gt;60*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Benzyl alcohol</td>
<td>59.72 (55–68.90)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nonyl alcohol</td>
<td>&gt;60*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Isomenthol</td>
<td>&gt;60*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(+)–Menthol</td>
<td>&gt;60*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Geraniol</td>
<td>&gt;60*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ketone</td>
<td>Menthone</td>
<td>39.70 (35.60–43.60)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Carvone</td>
<td>&gt;60*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Camphor</td>
<td>&gt;60*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phenol</td>
<td>Thymol</td>
<td>&gt;60*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ester</td>
<td>Mentyl acetate</td>
<td>&gt;60*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Linalyl acetate</td>
<td>&gt;60*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative control</td>
<td></td>
<td>&gt;60*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Data from Toloza et al. (2006).
KT 50, knockdown time (min).

When adult P. h. capitis fumigant KT 50,5 were compared with ovicidal mortality percentages, we detected a strong relationship between the pediculicidal activity of the monoterpenoids in both adult and egg stages (KT 50 = 62.9234–0.290902 egg mortality, r² = 0.47, F = 17.61, d.f. = 1, 20, P < 0.001) (Fig. 3).

Discussion

The present work reports that some monoterpenoids are potentially useful for head louse control because many of them were effective against both adults and eggs. These results suggest that the process involved in killing both later development eggs and adults may be similar. Previous studies have also reported the efficacy of some essential oil components on P. humanus eggs (Lahlu & Berrada, 2003; Yang et al., 2004; Priestley et al., 2006), however, different bioassay methodologies were employed. In comparison with the results of Yang et al. (2004), who used a filter paper contact bioassay and observed that 1,8-cineole was ineffective, our results indicate that it was highly effective. In addition, the most effective components reported by Priestley et al. (2006), who employed an immersion methodology on clothing lice, ranged from ineffective to moderately effective in our study. This difference may be related, at least in part, to the mode of application. The fumigant action of monoterpenoids, which have a high vapour pressure, indicates that the toxicity of the compounds offers an effective means of penetration via the respiratory system (Smith & Salkeld, 1966). Monoterpenoids are lipophilic compounds, and Veal (1996) mentioned that penetration through the louse haemolymph may be slow and limited, and instead entry may occur via the tracheal system. In eggs, the exchange of gases between the atmosphere and the embryo depends upon diffusion through the micropores of the operculum, and monoterpenoids may reach the embryo through these structures. Moreover, changes in the membranes surrounding the embryo affect the permeability of the shell, increasing the toxicity of the insecticide (Smith & Salked, 1966).

Differences in the evaluation of pediculicide efficacy could also be due to differences in the mortality criteria applied. According to Heukelbach et al. (2008), head lice can recover within 180 min of sham death after exposure to a pediculicide. Thus, a short post-treatment recording time could overestimate the mortality of lice and the efficacy of a tested substance or product. Our study indicates that monoterpenoids could be incorporated into formulations as potential pediculicides against both eggs and adults. Moreover, the addition of excipients to increase the efficacy and stability of the products should also be taken into account (Burgess, 2004). High volatility might be remedied by formulating candidate monoterpenoids for sustained release, or by formulating them with other compounds in a vehicle base. Further complementary studies including human health, such as burning sensations and skin irritation, should also be considered before any of these compounds can be employed as commercial products.

Acknowledgements

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