In Vivo Toxicological and Histopathological Effects of Aflatoxin B1 Exposure and Related Risk

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Abstract

Aflatoxin B₁ are toxic metabolites of Aspergillus flavus and Aspergillus parasiticus which usually contaminant foods such as peanuts, corn, and other grains as well as animal feeds resulting into intoxication. Studies have been conducted to elucidated the mechanism of AFB₁ toxicity however, there is still a challenge explore the risk associated with AFB₁. Therefore, the main objective of this research was to performed toxicological and histopathological analysis of aflatoxin B₁ and related risk. Populations of mice were treated with ascending dosed of 3mg/Kg, 6mg/Kg, 9mg/Kg and 12mg/Kg of AFB₁; the LD₅₀ was then recorded, the liver biopsy from scarified and dead mice were screened for analysis of distribution of AFB₁. Enzyme transaminases activity and total bilirubin content was then analysed by spectrometry, histology was then performed on biopsy lastly; prothrombin time analysis conducted to assess the effect of AFB₁ on blood clotting factors. From the results death occurred within 48 hours for most mice treated with doses of 9mg/Kg and 12mg/Kg, biochemical test showed significant increase transaminases (ALT, AST and AP) activity with fluctuation of bilrubin content with gradual increases in prothrombin time (PTT). Liver biopsy showed bile duct proliferation, vacuolation of hepatocytes, enlargement of hepatic cells, fatty infiltration, necrosis, hemorrhage, and apoptosis. We concluded that prolonged consumption of AFB₁ contaminated feed or food at dose range of 3-6 mg/Kg may result to development of hepatocellular carcinoma while 9-12mg/Kg AFB₁ may lead to server liver injury. Thus there are higher risk of AFB₁ to induce hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC), mutagenic and Immune-suppression to both humans and animals.

Keywords: AFB₁, LD₅₀, PTT

Presenting Author’s biography

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Introduction

In the recent years, much effort and investment have been channeled towards food security, food safety and epidemiology mitigation by developing countries. In 2005 WHO epidemiology report shows that in Asia, Africa and South America the prevalence of cancer and infant mortality have skewed up by 60% the past two decades [7][16][18]. The susceptible individuals are families that feed on corn and other cereals as staple food, study have postulated that this might have been as result of exposure to food contaminated by aflatoxins [2][19]. An aflatoxin outbreak initially reported in United Kingdom in 1962 it affected poultry and it was name turkey “X” disease [3]. Outbreaks of acute aflatoxicosis are a recurring public health problem throughout the world [1, 8, 13,14]. The effects of aflatoxins on humans, as with animals, are dependent upon dosage and duration of exposure [21]. Acute exposure can result in aflatoxicosis, which manifests as severe, acute hepatotoxicity with a case fatality rate of approximately 25% [11][22]. Early symptoms of hepatotoxicity from aflatoxicosis can manifest as anorexia, malaise, and low-grade fever. Acute high level exposure can progress to potentially lethal hepatitis with vomiting, abdominal pain, jaundice, fulminant hepatic failure, and death [10]. The route cause of hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC) is due to chronic exposure to AFB1 based on previous studies. Moreover, it is generally associated with hepatitis B virus or other risk factors [5, 9, 10, 11,]. In 1976 , the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) first recognized aflatoxins as carcinogenic and has subsequently reaffirmed naturally occurring mixtures of aflatoxins and aflatoxin B1 as Group 1 carcinogens (carcinogenic to humans) [8]. Additional effects of chronic exposure have not been widely studied but are thought to include immunologic suppression, impaired growth, and nutritional interference [10, 11,12]. Therefore, objective of this research is to perform in vivo toxicological and histopathological effects of AFB1. To achieve this we (i) performed LD50 test to determine lethal dose of AFB1 (ii) evaluate the distribution of AFB1 in liver biopsy (iii) perform histology to examine the cytopathology. Lastly perform biochemical analysis to test the (iv) the effect of AFB1 on the enzyme activity, bilirubin content and blood clotting factor.

Materials and Method

This research was conducted in Histopathology and Biochemistry laboratory (Department of Human Pathology) Faculty of Medicine and department of Biochemistry and Biotechnology respectively at Kenyatta University, Chromatographic and Purified AFB1 sample was prepared in the laboratories of Kenya Breuer of standards and Government Chemist Nairobi Kenya.

A population of 280 white papsy mice was breed at biochemistry animal house; the mice were supplied ad libitum and maintained in colony cage at ambient room condition for 3 months to achieve the desired population and size. The animals were sorted into males, female and winners (young mice). For AFB1 stock solution preparation, 1g of crystal AFB1 was dissolved into 1000ml dimethylformamide. for efficacy evaluation we prepared lethal doses of 3mg/Kg, 6mg/Kg, 9mg/Kg and 12mg/Kg.

LD50 Test

In this analysis 200 mixed population was used the mice were divided into five groups consisting of 40 mice each labeled A, B, C D and E respectively. Serial ascending dose of 3mg/Kg, 6mg/Kg , 9mg/Kg and 12mg/Kg of pure AFB1 was administered by injected intraperitoneally to group A,B,C and D respectively. Nonetheless, group E were treated with only 0.1 ml of dimethylformamide (DMF). Eq.1 was used to calculate the amount of AFB1 administer to each mouse.

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\text{AFB1 administered (ml)} = \frac{\text{Concentration of AFB1 (mg/l)}}{\text{Body Weight of mouse (Kg)}}
\]  

Eq.1
The LD$_{50}$ was estimated using the Weil method [3]; the toxic dose range of the four dosed was recorded based on the number of mice died.

**Histology**

After LD50 test, dead mice were autopsied and affected organs were screened using a hand-held UV lamp at a wavelength of 420nm. The affected biopsy were removed and fixed in 10% formal saline (Helly’s fluid), embedded in paraffin wax, microtomed (sectioned) at 5 μm and stained with haematoxylin and eosin. For some sections, we used additional stain in this case Masson’s trichrome stain and methyl-green pyronin. Others, liver biopsies were stained using oil red "0”.

**Biochemical analysis**

Population of fifty mice were breed at Kenyatta university zoology laboratory, the mice were the selected randomly and divided into 5 groups with 10 mice in each then feed and water were offered *ad lib*. The first group was given chromatographic purified AFB$_1$ as single dose of 9 mg AFB$_1$ per Kg body weight of mice. The second groups were maintained for 14 days again treated with AFB$_1$. The third group was placebo (control) and maintained on AFB$_1$ free feed. In addition, five mice were randomly selected from each group and bleed them by cardiac puncture euthanatized and necropsies daily during the first 7 days. After 2 week serum of each mice were separated and used for estimation of AP according to Kind and King 1954, transeaminase (ALT and AST) according to Reitman and Frankel [3] and bilirubin content according to Jendrassik and Gorf [3]. Enzyme kit was used for testing AP, AST, ALT and for bilirubin content we used stock solution of reference 605-11(sigma) to prepare the test solution.

**Prothrombin Time Analysis (PTT)**

To determined prothrombin time, a population of 30 mice was used from this a set of 12 mice with estimated average weight of 30g, fed for one week ad libitum on the feed treated by single dose of 12 mg/Kg of AFB1. The other three groups of 6 similar male mice were injected intraperitoneally with ascending doses of 6 mg/Kg, 9 mg/kg and 12 mg/Kg AFB$_1$ (Hopkins & Williams, Essex, England). Another group of mice was kept as placebo on the uncontaminated diet. The blood clotting times of the test animals and their controls were determined using the thrombotest reagent according to Owren [3].

**Results**

![Fig.1 Internal hemorrhages caused by AFB1 intoxication (A) normal mice with no internal hemorrhage (B) AFB1 treated mice show internal hemorrhage](image)
Fig. 2 shows the distribution of AFB1 in the liver biopsy: (a) at 12mg/Kg medial distribution of AFB1 (b) at 6 mg/Kg marginal distribution (c) normal liver biopsy AFB1 free (d) 9mg/Kg zonal distribution of AFB1.

Fig 3. Shows liver biopsy of AFB1 treated mice: (A) Vacuolar degeneration (H.&E. stain, 10x10); (B) Half moon or shrunk nuclei (arrows) in addition to vacuolar degeneration and glycogen infiltration (10x10); (C) Liver of mice sacrificed 48 hours after single dose of aflatoxin B1, showing early perportal zone of necrosis. H. and E. X 40. (D) Liver of mice killed 72 hours after single dose of AFB1, showing early biliary proliferation. H. and E. X 250. (E) Liver of male mice sacrificed after 72 hours after showing fat-laden parenchymal cells adjacent to zone of necrosis. Oil red 0. X 100. (F) Liver of mice showing well developed biliary proliferation. H. and P. X 100. (G) Biliary proliferation. H. and E. X 250. (H) Extensive biliary proliferation. H. and E. X 100. (I) Early development of cirrhosis cholangio fibrosis, a small hyperplastic nodule large hyperchromatic parenchymal cell. H. and E. x 400
Discussion

The LD₅₀ experiment showed that, most of the mice died in 2-4 days after treatment with AFB₁. There was no death reported within the initial 24 hours or after 7 days. In addition, no deaths were reported in the placebo animals given DMF alone. The LD₅₀ for male mice with estimated weight of 30g in this study proved similar to that of the smaller mice. This was evidenced by clinical symptoms in the initial 2-3 days the mice lost appeared weak (poor condition) and lost weight. In addition those mice that died during this time there was little stomach conten in their gastrointestinal tract (GIT). However, on the 3-4 days, the survived mice started gaining weight and appeared to eating and drinking normally. Those which died at a later time failed to show any weight gain while others showed symptoms of jaundice after four or five days. At autopsy, the livers of male mice during and some on early stages were pale pink in colour with an accentuated lobular pattern and occasional macroscopic areas of haemorrhage (see fig.3 slide H and G). On the other hand, the livers of female mice were pale yellow in colour. The lungs were congested and there were occasional haemorrhagic, bilateral adrenal haemorrhages (see fig.1). After one week, autopsied mice showed ascites and oedema of the omentum alimentary tract was filled blood and malaena faeces. There was no macroscopic ulceration seen observed. For placebo mice, there were no macroscopic alterations in the livers and pathology on other organs.
Histopathological investigation revealed that the liver is the target organ for AFB$_1$ and Ingestion of aflatoxin B1 contaminated food, is capable of inducing acute intoxication, aflatoxicosis that is believed to be candidate agent to induce hepatoma. It was postulated that AFB$_1$ might have been converted into its epoxide which is acts as the derivative to produces DNA adducts hence causing flaking of DNA strand leading to point mutation This condition, results into active process of cellular self-destruction leading to apoptosis. Our investigation on AFB$_1$ treated mice showed hepatic damage. The morphological changes of hepatocytes in AFB$_1$ treated mice was described by Saraste and Pulkki where there was contraction in cell volume, condensation of the nucleus and the nucleus fragmentation. Finally, the cell itself fragments to form apoptotic bodies, which are engulfed nearby phagocytes. Similarly, according to Shen et al., findings in vivo evidence showed that AFB$_1$ can cause lipid peroxidation in rat liver [22]. The authors suggested that oxidative damage caused by AFB$_1$ might be one of the underlining mechanisms for AFB$_1$ induced cell injury and DNA damage, which eventually lead to tumorigenesis [24].

Further, the histopathological findings showed that AFB$_1$ induced hepatotoxic effects, in the form of degenerative and necrobiotic changes that were evidenced by vacuolar degeneration as well as appearance of minute foci of necrosis (see fig. 3. E and F). It also induced apoptosis of the hepatocytes in the most of the mice exposed to 12mg/Kg AFB$_1$. From this research we discovered that only case showed preneoplastic foci (see fig.3. A). In this senario hepatocyte damage was evidenced by condensation of nuclear chromatin by defined masses that marginated against nuclear membrane as well as formation of half moon shaped or round dense nuclear remnants. The cells were shrinkage and the cytoplasm was condensed. In addition, the appearance of many apoptotic bodies might have been engulfed by adjacent kupffer cells. In summary, we used all these features to describe the morphological criteria to evaluate AFB$_1$ effects liver biopsy.

The Enzyme activity in mice showed that within 24 hours of treatment with ascending doses of AFB$_1$ (9mg/Kg, 6mg/Kg and 12mg/Kg AFB$_1$ body weight) the level of bilirubin content and activity of AST, ALT and AP increased by significantly by 162%, 398%, 342% and 102% respectively. The maximum levels of AFB$_1$ effects were achieved within 48hours with an increase in concentration bilirubin content and AST at 232% and 359% respectively. Three days after, ALT level were 392% while the levels of AP 113%, however with the decrease in bilirubin level and subsequent decrease in serum activity approaching at relatively significant minimum threshold level. After one week, the mice were treated again with AFB$_1$ and the enzyme activity of ALT, AST and AP recorded 67%, 65% 55% and 35% higher than the initial day (day 0). We noticed that at the end of one week after treating mice with AFB$_1$ the activity of all the enzymes were normalized and the bilirubin activity recorded the same activity levels of 37% slightly higher than the placebo sera level. The raise in the activity of sera transminases (ALT, AST and AP) and bilirubin content treated with AFB1 induced acute liver injury. After one month, the enzyme activity and bilirubin content increased gradually to 265%, 269%, 115% and 165%. Based on this we concluded that mice treated by AFB1 the serum activities of those enzymes tremendously increased to significantly higher levels and later remained higher[23][25].

Previous studies of acute effects of aflatoxin B$_1$ in dogs by Newberne, Russo & Wogan [16] observed occasional haemorrhage in the gastrointestinal tract, also found that the blood clotting time was prolonged by a factor of 10. In a review by Schoental [20], emphasis was placed on the need for studies on the anticoagulant property (amongst other pharmacological properties) of aflatoxin in doses, which are not acutely toxic [20]. The prothrombin time analysis in this research show that the blood of mice treated with AFB1 showed prolonged blood clotting time at different doses this was due to effect of AFB$_1$ as anticoagulants activity (see graph fig.7). The thrombo test technique the phyligogram showed effect of AFB$_1$ on blood clotting factors especially factors II (prothrombin), VII (proconvertin), IX (plasma
thromboplastin component) and X (Stuart-Prower factor) were likely affected by AFB₁. According to Asao et al. (1963) evidence showed that aflatoxin B₁ is a coumarin type compound, having a central 5-methoxycoumarin moiety that interfere with the activity of blood clotting proteins.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, in this experiment, the mice treated with AFB₁ showed clinical symptoms of aflatoxicosis at dose range of 3-6 mg/Kg and those exposed to higher dose range of 9-12 mg/Kg died. However, those that survive this dose experienced more severe liver damage than the dead mice. This was evidenced by increasing the transaminases activities, bilirubin contents and histopathology change of liver biopsy evidenced by bilary proliferation and apoptosis. In addition, we discovered that AFB₁ also interfere with blood clotting factors II, VII, IX and X. This was again evidenced by prolong prothrombin time and internal hemorrhage. In summary we deduced that there is higher chances of AFB₁ induce massive damage hepatocyte resulting into liver dysfunction associated with biochemical disturbances in oxidant or antioxidant balance system which interlinked pathogenic networks of the AFB₁ toxicity. Thus of ingestion of AFB₁ contaminated food or feed calls for urgent clinical measures before server of liver, which may result to death. Our future work is conduct research to explore clinical measures to diagnose of aflatoxicoses and afltoxicosis by regulating apoptosis with potentially excellent target for diagnosis and therapeutic intervention in AFB₁ induced liver dysfunction.

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**References**
