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Acute toxicity bioassay of organophosphorus pesticide, chlorpyrifos on freshwater catfish, *Heteropneustes fossilis* (Bloch, 1794)

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Abstract

Chlorpyrifos (CPF) is common pesticide. It reaches to water bodies through surface runoff and affecting the aquatic biota. The objective of the present study was to observe seasonal variation in acute toxicity of CPF with behavioural and morphological changes in freshwater catfish, *Heteropneustes fossilis*. This study was conducted by exposing the adult fish to different concentrations of chlorpyrifos (0.002-2.28 m.M.l⁻¹) for 96 h along with control groups in resting (December), preparatory (February), and prespawning (April) phase. The data were subjected to get LC₅₀ and safe concentration in respective season. Susceptibility of catfish, *H. fossilis* to lethal effects of CPF was found to be both duration and concentration dependent. The LC₅₀ values for CPF were found to be minimum during pre-spawning phase and maximum in resting season. Their tolerance to CPF was increasing with inactiveness of gonadal activity (resting season). At higher concentration of CPF, fish showed alterations in morphological and behavioural responses, especially erratic and jerky swimming, frequent surfacing and in gulping, mucus secretion, an increase in opercular movement and copious secretion of mucus all over the body. As per results, different reproductive phase fish responded different to toxicant concentrations.

Keywords: Acute toxicity, chlorpyrifos, LC₅₀, mortality, *Heteropneustes fossilis*, CPF

1. Introduction

The organophosphorus pesticide, chlorpyrifos (CPF) is a widely used and most preferred broad spectrum chlorinated organophosphate pesticide. It is frequently used on crops and in the warehouses, for the eradication of a wide range of insect-pests. This reaches to the aquatic ecosystem through rain and affecting aquatic organism^[1-3]. The pesticides enter the food chain and their subsequent bioaccumulation and biotransformation at different trophic levels have disastrous effect to the ecosystem^[4].

Aquatic contamination of pesticides causes acute and chronic poisoning in fish and other organisms directly or indirectly via food chain^[5-7]. The responses of fish towards the toxic chemicals are broad-ranged depending on the toxicant, exposure duration, water quality and the species^[8-10]. Toxicity tests are an important component in assessing the impact of chemicals on aquatic ecosystems because they indicate toxic effects of chemicals in organism by manipulating their morphology and behaviour at first and survival rate at last^[11,12]. It gives first-hand information about the effects of such pesticides on organisms and the ecosystem as a whole. These tests are valuable in creating awareness regarding potential harmful effects of pesticide in the environment^[13, 14]. In addition to mortality test, study of behavioral markers to assess the toxicant affects are the most promising and sensitive indicator of ecotoxicology^[15-17]. The behaviour study is becoming prominent in toxicity assessment in a unicellular organism^[18], insects^[19, 20], fish^[21, 22], and rodents^[23]. Different studies reported that fish exposed to a wide range of pesticides exhibited abnormal behavioural and morphological alterations^[24]. CPF directly inhibits acetyl cholinesterase enzyme activity in fishes and invertebrates^[22, 25, 26] which may lead to decreased mobility of fish^[24] therefore, it works primarily as nerve poison which is reflected in uncoordinated abnormal behaviour of fish after the toxicant application^[25].

Various studies were reported on the toxicity of different organophosphate pesticides on fish^[28-32]. In the present study, we have made an attempt to determine level of acute toxicity of chlorpyrifos with special emphasis on behavioural and morphological responses on a

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freshwater catfish, *Heteropneustes fossilis* in resting, preparatory and pre-spawning phases of annual reproductive cycle.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Chemical

Hilban® (20% EC CPF; chlorpyrifos, Hindustan insecticide limited) were purchased from local suppliers. All other chemicals and reagents used were of analytical grade and were purchased locally.

2.2 Animal collection and their acclimatization

An experiment was performed in accordance with local/national guidelines of ethical committee for experimentation in animals.

The fresh water *H. fossilis* of relatively same size and weight were collected from commercial fisherman of Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India in resting (December), preparatory (February), and pre-spawning (April) phase of annual reproductive cycle. After formal quarantine treatment, fish were acclimatized in laboratory conditions under normal photoperiod and temperature for two weeks. Water was changes daily to remove faecal matter and waste metabolite of fish during acclimatization. During this period, fish were fed regularly with commercial fish food pellets and goat liver.

2.3 Seasonal acute toxicity bioassay

For toxicity bioassay, the concentrations of the test compound used were selected on the basis of our trial experiments that caused 0-100% mortality in respective reproductive phase. In each season, fish were exposed in a batch of ten to concentrations (0.002 to 2.28 m.M.l⁻¹) of Hilban® (20% EC CPF) with five replicates for each test concentrations along with a control group of same number of fish and replicates. Mortality data was recorded after 24, 48, 72 and 96 h to get LC₅₀ of respective intervals. All solutions (control and test) were renewed daily and dead fish were immediately removed. Fish were not given food during the experiment.

The CPF effects on morphological, behavioural parameters were recorded during pre-spawning phase only to avoid repetition of observations in different reproductive phases.

Control and CPF treated group fish were consistently monitored in intervals to get frequency. Their data were recorded as suggested by Gupta and Dua^[33].

2.4 Data analysis

The mortality of the fish was recorded every 24 to 96 h study period. Significance level was checked by one way ANOVA among different annual reproductive phases. The LC₅₀ with 95% confidence limits of 24, 48, 72 and 96 h was estimated by probit analysis^[34] with the IBM SPSS (version 20) software. The safe concentration of CPF was also calculated^[35]. The frequency of occurrence of different behaviour and morphological parameters during first hour of treatment in pre-spawning phase of annual reproductive cycle was recorded for group of exposed fish.

3. Results

3.1 Lethal toxicity test

Exposure to *H. fossilis* with different concentration of CPF showed varied degree of mortality in different reproductive season with a wide range of concentration. The percentage of mortality was significantly increased with the increase in concentration of the toxicant as well as duration of the experiment (F=52.27 in pre-spawning phase, F=134.24 in the preparatory phase, F=211.35 in resting phase; p<0.05; data not shown). On the basis of mortality, LC₅₀ value was found higher in resting phase (1.547, 0.678, 0.299 and 0.174 m.M.l⁻¹), moderate in preparatory phase (0.332, 0.193, 0.152 and 0.123m.M.l⁻¹), whereas minimum in pre-spawning phase (0.296, 0.107, 0.044 and 0.026m.M.l⁻¹) for 24, 48, 72, and 96 h, respectively (Table 1). With the increase in duration of exposure the difference between lower and upper confidence limits of LC₅₀ showed not much difference as in short duration (24 h). Results registered a higher safe concentration in resting phase as compared to preparatory and pre-spawning phase of reproductive cycle. During acute toxicity test (24, 48h) safe concentrations were higher as compared to longer duration (72, 48h) toxicity groups during all the three reproductive phases. In general safe concentrations show only change during 24, 48 and 72 h but in later duration (96 h) the concentration was not different from the 72 h group.

Table 1: The LC₅₀ values of chlorpyrifos (with 95% Confidence limit) in fresh water fish *Heteropneustes fossilis*. Lethal concentration shown in different reproductive (resting, preparatory and pre-spawning) phase. The LC₅₀ values estimated by Finney Probit analysis. The LC₅₀ and safe values calculated for each reproductive phase. Experiment was performed with five replicates of ten fish in each concentration.

Reproductive phase	Test duration (h)	Safe Concentration (m.M.l ⁻¹)	LC ₅₀ (m.M.l ⁻¹)	95% Upper confidence limits	95% Lower confidence limits
Resting phase	24	1.11	1.547	2.564	1.103
	48	0.037	0.678	0.969	0.514
	72	0.017	0.299	0.347	0.261
	96	0.017	0.174	0.191	0.159
Preparatory phase	24	0.011	0.332	0.41	0.283
	48	0.019	0.193	0.21	0.179
	72	0.02	0.152	0.166	0.14
	96	0.02	0.123	0.135	0.113
Pre-spawning phase	24	0.007	0.296	0.356	0.243
	48	0.004	0.107	0.143	0.074
	72	0.002	0.044	0.066	0.023
	96	0.002	0.026	0.051	0.01

3.2 Behavioural and morphological alterations

The stress behavioural alterations were positively correlated with the concentration of toxicant (Table 2). The behavioural changes were very clear in all the reproductive phases. But the occurrence of alterations in treatment groups were higher

even in low concentrations during pre-spawning phase than preparatory and resting phase of reproductive cycle as compared to their control groups. The control group showed a normal behaviour and tend to move together. They came to the surface at intervals to gulp air. In low concentrations of

CPF (0.002 and 0.005 m.M.l⁻¹) fish behave similar to control group. They showed a number of abnormalities in their behaviour with increase in CPF concentration (>0.005 m.M.l⁻¹). The swimming speed of fish was higher and jerky in higher concentration and this behaviour was shown with immediate exposure of toxicant that slow down with the passage of treatment duration. The fish were calm down in lower concentration after some time, but in higher concentration, fish showed restlessness though out the experimental period. The schooling behaviour of fish was also disturbed in comparison to control group. Other recorded behaviour as hyperactivity, pectoral fin forwarded, frequent surfacing and in gulping, avoidance behaviour, escaping tendency, drooping of fins and loss of buoyancy by vertically hanging in the

aquaria increased after CPF treatment. But fish became sluggish, lethargic and finally motionless with the increase in concentration and duration of CPF as compared to control group. Convulsion were most evident, the severity of which paralleled the concentration of CPF. The opercular movements were fast and of concentration dependent behaviour.

With the increase of CPF incubation period and concentration (>0.005 m.M.l⁻¹) fish registered significant, sharp abnormal morphological features (Table 3). It include pale yellow body color, discoloration of skin and barbels, lesion of skin, eye deformities, fin deformities and high mucus secretion and its coagulation all over the body as compared to control.

Table 2: The behavioral alterations of freshwater catfish, *Heteropneustes fossilis*, after exposure of organ phosphorus pesticide, chlorpyrifos. Data was recorded during first hour of treatment in pre-spawning phase of annual reproductive cycle. The frequency of occurrence of different behavior was counted for group of exposed fish

Behavioral and alterations	Control	Concentration of CPF (m.M.l ⁻¹)						
		0.002	0.005	0.028	0.057	0.085	0.114	0.142
Opercular movement	-	-	-	+	++	++	+++	+++
In gulping	-	-	-	+	+	++	+++	+++
Surfacing	-	-	-	+	+	++	+++	+++
Frequent swimming	-	-	-	-	++	++	+++	+++
Avoidance behavior	-	-	-	+	+	++	+++	+++
Hyperactivity	-	-	-	+	+	++	+++	+++
Pectoral fin forward	-	-	-	+	+	++	+++	+++
Convulsions	-	-	-	+	+	++	+++	+++
Abrupt swimming	-	-	-	+	+	++	+++	+++
Escaping tendency	-	-	-	+	++	++	+++	+++
Loss of buoyancy	-	-	-	+	++	++	+++	+++

Normal (-), Mild (+), Moderate (++), Maximum behavior (+++)

Table 3: The morphological alterations of freshwater cat fish, *Heteropneustes fossilis*, after exposure of organ phosphorus pesticide, chlorpyrifos (CPF). Data was recorded during 96 h of CPF treatment in pre-spawning phase of annual reproductive cycle. The frequency of occurrence of different morphological alterations was recorded for group of exposed fish.

Morphological observations	Control	Concentration of CPF (m.M.l ⁻¹)						
		0.002	0.005	0.028	0.057	0.085	0.114	0.142
Mucus secretion	-	-	-	+	++	++	+++	+++
Discoloration of skin	-	-	-	+	++	++	+++	+++
Fins drooping/ necrosis	-	-	-	+	+	++	+++	+++
Lesions of skin	-	-	-	+	++	+++	+++	+++

Normal (-), Mild (+), Moderate (++), Maximum morphological alterations (+++)

4. Discussion

The present investigation assured that CPF is lethal to fresh water fish, *H. fossilis*. Though the lethal concentration (LC₅₀) values of CPF varies with different reproductive phases in an annual cycle. The *H. fossilis* has higher tolerance limit (safe value) for CPF during resting phase but very minute concentration of CPF can cause mortality during pre-spawning phase. This study suggested that during gonadal maturity fishes are more vulnerable to aquatic toxicants. The level of aquatic toxification can be assessed by behavioural changes at very first and by morphological changes in a while.

The highest LC₅₀ value was found in resting phase. Variation in the LC₅₀ depends on the number of biological and psico-chemical factors which have been reported by many earlier workers [36-40]. The same species may respond different to same toxicant depending on size, age, sex and condition of test species along with experimental factors [41]. With the increase of duration of CPF exposure the difference between lower and upper limits of confidence for LC₅₀ showed not much difference, this suggested possible bioaccumulation

within animal tissue. The pattern of safe concentration suggest that in resting phase fish enjoy high concentration tolerance limit as compare to preparatory and pre-spawning phase. During pre-spawning phase even small concentration, i.e. safe in resting phase, may be lethal to fish. This suggested as reproductive stage and hormone may play important role in susceptibility to aqua-chemicals. A wide range of toxicant was found to increase the toxicity at higher temperature [42, 43]. It was related to the higher metabolic and respiration rate, which may largely be involved in toxicant response in an annual cycle [42, 44, 45]. Fish in general have low metabolic rate in resting phase [46]. This low metabolic activity results in slowdown toxicant absorption and its bioaccumulation [47]. The toxicant absorption and its bioaccumulation will increase comparatively in preparatory and pre-spawning phase with increase in metabolic activity [46]. That will increase comparatively in preparatory and pre-spawning phase with increase in metabolic activity [46]. Insecticides alter the immune system that may influence host defence system and its survival [48]. It is reported that steroid hormones may modulate immunity.

The behaviour changes are the most sensitive indicator of aqua-toxicity. These are considered as first signal of any kind of stress. The observation of behavioural changes was started immediately after CPF treatment as compare to control group. The pesticides influence the behaviour pattern of fish by interfering with the nervous systems and sensory receptors [49-51]. The degree of distress was increased as the toxicant concentration increased. The observed behavioural changes showed by the exposed fish to the chlorpyrifos are similar to those observed in other fish exposed to organophosphate pesticides [52-54]. By frequent surfacing behaviour toxicant exposed fish avoid contact with toxicant also satisfies its demand for oxygen in stressed condition [55, 56]. The opercular movement in fish was first increased after the exposure of CPF as sudden response to shock [32, 60]. *H. fossilis* showed adaptive feature to avoid toxicant intake by decreasing the opercular movement after the few hour of exposure. CPF cause severe damage to the gill membranes [7, 57]. The fade body color can be considered as symptoms of stress after intoxication [6, 58, 59]. Toxicant may manipulate number and size of chromatophores [32].

5. Conclusion

CPF toxicity shows seasonal variation within one species with difference in safe concentration. The observations indicated that CPF caused many behavioural and morphological alterations, which may result in severe physiological problems, ultimately leading to the death of fish. Therefore this investigation presents a relation among pesticide stress, behavioural disorders and mortality rates in light of reproductive stage of fish. This study suggest role of gonadal status and hormone to response with toxicant.

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