Toxicological assessment of the methanolic leaf extract of *Bridelia ferrugelia*

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**ABSTRACT**

This study evaluated the acute and subacute toxicity effects of *Bridelia ferrugelia* leaf extract. Observation of the acute group showed that LD₅₀ of the extract is greater than 2000 mg/kg. The subacute investigation was determined by administering 200 mg/kg, 400 mg/kg and 600 mg/kg of the methanolic leaf extract to male Wistar rats for 28 days with distilled water as a control. Haematological and biochemical parameters, as well as lipid levels of vital organs, were examined. Toxicological evaluation of the extract did not produce any significant change in haematological and biochemical parameters in rats. In addition, blood lipids levels were not significantly affected, while dyslipidaemia effect observed in some vital organs were found to be non-lipotoxic. Administration of *Bridelia ferrugelia* at a dose of 200, 400 and 600 mg/kg for 28 days resulted in reduction of cardiac cholesterol level by 37.16%, 39.36% and 17.64% respectively, reduction of pulmonary cholesterol by 22.17%, 28.08% and 6.24 % respectively and dose-dependent decrease in pulmonary triglyceride level by 16.17, 29.14 and 54.25% respectively. This study indicates that *Bridelia ferrugelia* extract administered at 200, 400 and 600 mg/kg did not show any toxic effect on the parameters investigated in rats. Thus, the extract can be considered safe when administered orally.

**Keywords:** *Bridelia ferrugelia*, Toxicological Evaluation, Plant extract.

**INTRODUCTION**

Many human and animal diseases are getting treated with the use of herbal medicine majorly in West Africa countries [1]. Not less than, 8 out of 10 residence of developing countries rely solely on traditional medicines for their treatment in which plants and its derivatives represent 25% of the drugs in use [1].

*Bridelia ferrugelia* is one of the most studied plants because of its traditional uses and its pharmacological properties [2-3]. It is a tropical plant located mostly in Savannah regions and a member of Euphorbiaceae family [4]. Although the plant is a shrub, it can grow to the size of a tree if the condition is right, it is native to some West Africa countries such as Benin, Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast. As a medicinal plant it is used to treat series of diseases, for example, decoction of its leaves is used to treat diabetes and purgative [5], the bark extract is used for water treatment [6] while the roots are effective against intestinal and bladder disorder and skin diseases [7].

The research finding has revealed that the extract of the plant has trypanocidal [4], molluscicidal [8], antimicrobial [9], anti-inflammatory properties [10] and antioxidant properties [11]. The effectiveness of various bark extracts of *B. ferruginea* has been established against some pathogenic organisms [12]. The therapeutic potentials of *B. ferruginea* have been linked to secondary metabolites, such as terpenoids, glycosides, saponins, anthraquinones, quinones, alkaloids, sterols, and polyphenols that are present in the plant [13, 14].

However, despite the widespread use of *B. ferruginea* in the treatment of different conditions such as diabetes, information on its toxicity is lacking [2]. There is a growing need to conduct toxicity study on herbal products to determine their safety for consumption [15]. Intake of medicinal plants without adequate information on its safety can lead to organs damage and usually, liver and kidney are affected due to their involvement in metabolism and excretion of compounds. Renal damage is particularly associated with the consumption of medicinal plants for treatment of diseases [16].

Therefore, the aim of the present study was to evaluate the safety of *Bridelia ferrugelia* for consumption by determining its toxicity potential after acute and sub-acute administration of a methanolic extract of the plant to rats.
MATERIALS AND METHODS

Reagents
Folin-Ciocalteu reagent, thiobarbituric acid, sodium carbonate, sodium chloride, sodium hydroxide, trichloroacetic acid, Triton-X100, heparin and manganese chloride were obtained from Sigma–Aldrich Chemical Co. Ltd. (England). All other reagents and chemicals used were of analytical grade.

Plant Material (Bridelia ferrugelia)
Fresh leaves of Bridelia ferrugelia were obtained from Ilorin and authenticated at Department of Pure and Applied Biology of Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso, by Prof. A.J. Ogunkunle and a specimen was deposited in the herbarium.

Preparation of Bridelia ferrugelia Extract
The powdered sample of Bridelia ferrugelia (250g) was soaked in 1100 mL of methanol for 72 hours. The extract was filtered, and the solvent was removed from the extract with a vacuum rotary evaporator at 45°C. The concentrated dried methanolic extract was then stored at -20°C before use.

Animals
Thirty (30) male Wistar strain albino rats with body weights between 200 and 220 g were bought from the University of Ibadan animal house. They were housed in the Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, (LAUTECH) animal house. They were allowed fourteen (14) days to acclimatize before the commencement of the experiment. The animals were maintained on a standard pellet diet throughout the acclimatization and administration period.

Acute toxicity test
The rats were fasted overnight prior to dosing. A rat was weighed each time and given 5000 mg/kg body weight of B. ferrugelia by gavage but due to mortality of the rats at this dosage, the experiment was repeated using 2000mg/kg dosage. The animals were closely observed for two hours and subsequently daily for up to 14 days, for gross morphological, physiological, behavioural changes and mortality. All observations were recorded and individual records for each rat were maintained.

Sub-acute toxicity test
Twenty rats were divided into 4 groups of 5 animals each. Group A was given distilled water for 28 days and taken as a control, while Group B, C and D were intubated daily with 200mg/kg, 400mg/kg and 600mg/kg respectively of B. ferrugelia for 28 days. At the end of the B. ferrugelia treatment, blood was collected from the animals into heparinized tubes by cardiac puncture under light ether anaesthesia and after an overnight fast. The tissues (Liver, kidney, brain, heart, lung and spleen) were removed from the animals for biochemical analyses. The blood samples were centrifuged to separate plasma and red blood cells. All samples were stored at -20°C until analyzed.

Biochemical Analyses

Determination of ALP, AST and ALT activities in Plasma
Alkaline phosphatase (ALP), aspartate aminotransferase (AST), alanine aminotransferase (ALT), in plasma were determined using enzymatic kits (CYPRESS® Diagnostics, Langdorp, Belgium) according to the manufacturer’s instructions.

Preparation of liver homogenate and determination of MDA level
The liver sample was homogenized in Phosphate buffer saline (PBS) to give a 10 % (w/v) liver homogenate. The homogenate was centrifuged, and the supernatant was used to determine MDA level using the method of Draper and Hadley [17]. Briefly, 0.5 mL of liver homogenate was mixed with 2.5 mL of trichloroacetic acid (TCA, 10%, w/v) and boiled in a water bath for 15 min. After cooling, the samples were centrifuged, and 2 mL of each sample supernatant was transferred to a test tube containing 1mL of TBA solution (0.67%, w/v). Each tube was then boiled for 15 min, cooled and absorbance were taken at 532 nm with respect to the blank solution. The concentration of MDA was calculated using absorbance coefficient (ε = 1.56x105 cm−1M−1).

Blood lipid profiles
Plasma concentrations of total cholesterol and triglycerides were determined with commercial kits (CYPRESS® Diagnostics, Langdorp, Belgium). HDL cholesterol and triglycerides were determined in plasma with the same commercial kits for total cholesterol and triglycerides after very low-density lipoproteins (VLDL) and LDL were precipitated with a heparin-MnCl2 solution [18].

Organ lipid profiles
Lipids in the organs (liver, kidney, heart, brain, lung and spleen) were extracted using a chloroform-methanol mixture (2:1) as described by Folch et al. [19]. Cholesterol content in the aliquots were determined by evaporating chloroform-methanol extract to dryness at 60°C. Twenty (20μl) of Triton X-100 chloroform mixture was added and evaporated after which 1 ml of cholesterol kit reagent was added and mixed. Cholesterol content was determined spectrophotometrically after incubation in the dark for 30 min. [20]. Triglyceride concentrations were determined using the procedure described by Kriketos et al. [21]. Aliquot of the chloroform-methanol extract was evaporated to dryness at 60°C, cooled after which 200 μl of ethanol (97%) was added. One (ml) of triglyceride kit was added and mixed. Triglyceride content was determined in spectrophotometer after incubating in the dark at room temperature for 20 min.

Statistical Analysis
Results are expressed as mean ±S.E.M. The levels of homogeneity among the groups were assessed using One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) followed by Tukey’s test. All analyses were done using Graph Pad Prism Software Version 5.00 and p values < 0.05 were considered statistically significant.
RESULT

Acute Toxicity Test

There was death of rats given 5000 mg/kg body weight of *B. ferrugelia* extract within 24 hours. But when the dosage was reduced to 2000 mg/kg body weight, there were no deaths of rats. However various toxicity behavioural signs were observed such as restlessness, narrowing of the eyelids, irritation, abnormal posture, tachypnoea and anorexia. The LD₅₀ was observed to be higher than 2000 mg/kg body weight/oral route.

Sub-Acute Toxicity Test

Effects of *B. ferrugelia* extract on haematological parameters in rats.

The data in Table 1 show the effects of methanolic leaf extract of *B. ferrugelia* on haematological parameters. At all doses examined, the extract showed non-significant changes in haematological parameters in rats when administered daily for 28 days.

| Parameter                          | Control   | 200 mg/kg | 400 mg/kg | 600 mg/kg |
|------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| White blood cell (x 10⁹/L)         | 4.33a     | 4.80a     | 4.52a     | 4.74a     |
| Red blood cell (x10¹²/L)           | 7.27a     | 7.64a     | 6.90a     | 6.61a     |
| Haemoglobin (g/dL)                 | 13.30a    | 14.77a    | 13.80a    | 12.76a    |
| Haematocrit                        | 40.05a    | 41.37a    | 41.43a    | 38.10a    |
| Mean corpuscular volume (fl)       | 53.57a    | 53.40a    | 53.87a    | 56.60a    |
| Mean cell haemoglobin (pg)         | 17.75a    | 18.97a    | 18.43a    | 19.60a    |
| Mean cell haemoglobin concentration (g/dl) | 33.25a | 35.60a | 34.33a | 34.80a |
| Red cell distribution width standard deviation (%) | 30.05a | 27.63a | 26.63a | 29.90a |
| Red cell distribution width count volume (%) | 16.93a | 14.50a | 13.46a | 14.80a |
| Platelet volume (x10⁹)             | 5.89a     | 5.91a     | 5.64a     | 5.38a     |
| Mean platelet volume (%)           | 6.43a     | 6.97a     | 7.27a     | 7.20a     |
| Platelet width volume (%)          | 15.25a    | 15.50a    | 16.26a    | 16.00a    |
| Platelet count percent             | 0.46a     | 0.42a     | 0.49a     | 0.38a     |

Each value represents the Mean of 5 rats. Values within a row with different alphabets for each group are significantly different at P< 0.05

Effect of *B. ferrugelia* on hepatic antioxidant enzyme activities and MDA levels

Table 2 shows the effects of the ethanol leaf extract of *B. ferrugelia* on liver enzymes and hepatic lipid peroxidation in rats. The extract did not elicit any significant effect on various biochemical parameters and hepatic lipid peroxidation.

Table 2: Effects of methanolic leaf extract of *B. ferrugelia* on AST, ALT, ALP and MDA

| Parameter | Control | 200 mg/kg | 400 mg/kg | 600 mg/kg |
|-----------|---------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| AST       | 121.25 ± 3.74a | 123.59 ± 2.41a | 118.35 ± 3.22a | 125.37 ± 2.82a |
| ALT       | 73.52 ± 2.11a | 71.63 ± 1.47a | 75.72 ± 3.14a | 74.48 ± 2.92a |
| ALP       | 92.42 ± 3.81a | 96.25 ± 3.63a | 90.93 ± 2.74a | 94.53 ± 3.44a |
| MDA (x10⁶) | 1.84 ± 0.20a | 1.75 ± 0.24a | 1.53 ± 0.26a | 1.82 ± 0.22a |

Each value represents the Mean of 5 rats. Values within a row with different alphabets for each group are significantly different at P< 0.05

Effects of methanolic leaf extract of *B. ferrugelia* on blood lipids in rats

As presented in Table 3 sub-acute administration of *B. ferruginea* extract to rats for 28 days did not significantly (p < 0.05) affected both cholesterol and triglyceride levels of plasma, HDL and VLDL+ LDL when compared with the control animals.
The Journal of Phytopharmacology

Table 3: Effects of methanolic leaf extract of *B. ferrugelia* on blood lipids in rats

| Parameter          | Control       | 200 mg/kg    | 400 mg/kg    | 600 mg/kg    |
|--------------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Plasma Cholesterol | 83.69 ± 4.56a | 83.01 ± 1.40a| 93.10 ± 1.96a| 76.70 ± 2.80a|
| Plasma Triglyceride| 79.30 ± 5.68a | 80.42 ± 6.98a| 76.67 ± 2.40a| 73.75 ± 2.17a|
| HDL Cholesterol    | 41.15 ± 3.33a | 37.50 ± 6.50a| 39.38 ± 1.08a| 35.00 ± 1.44a|
| HDL Triglyceride   | 49.72 ± 3.88a | 47.72 ± 2.43a| 45.48 ± 1.82a| 44.93 ± 4.86a|
| LDL+VLDL Cholesterol| 42.55 ± 2.15a| 45.51 ± 2.78a| 53.73 ± 0.88a| 41.70 ± 1.36a|
| LDL+VLDL Triglyceride| 25.58 ± 3.34a| 32.70 ± 1.22a| 27.19 ± 0.97a| 21.82 ± 0.63a|

Each value represents the Mean of 5 rats. Values within a row with different alphabets for each group are significantly different at P< 0.05

Effects of methanolic leaf extract of *B. ferrugelia* on tissue lipids in rats

Results of tissue lipids analysis are presented in Table 4. Administration of *B. ferruginea* for 28 days produced no significant changes in the liver, spleen, kidney cholesterol and triglyceride levels. However, all doses of *B. ferruginea* extract (200, 400 and 600 mg/kg) significantly decrease the cardiac cholesterol level by 37.16%, 39.36% and 17.64% respectively while cardiac triglyceride level was reduced in a dose-dependent manner. Similarly, there was a dose-dependent decrease in pulmonary triglyceride by 16.17%, 29.14% and 54.25% respectively while all the three doses caused a reduction in pulmonary cholesterol by 22.17%, 28.08% and 62.4% respectively.

Table 4: Effects of methanolic leaf extract of *B. ferrugelia* on tissue lipids in rats

| Tissues Lipid     | Control       | 200 mg/kg    | 400 mg/kg    | 600 mg/kg    |
|-------------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Hepatic cholesterol| 0.78 ± 0.05a  | 0.66 ± 0.02a | 0.63 ± 0.11a | 0.79 ± 0.09a |
| Hepatic triglyceride| 2.21 ± 0.26a | 1.69 ± 0.10a | 1.53 ± 0.01a | 1.74 ± 0.19a |
| Renal cholesterol  | 2.57 ± 0.16a  | 2.28 ± 0.13a | 2.58 ± 0.21a | 2.52 ± 0.25a |
| Renal triglyceride | 2.00 ± 0.10a  | 1.91 ± 0.22a | 2.09 ± 0.15a | 2.37 ± 0.06a |
| Cardiac cholesterol| 9.07 ± 0.38a  | 5.70 ± 0.30b | 5.50 ± 0.15b | 7.47 ± 0.27c |
| Cardiac triglyceride| 7.60 ± 0.72a | 5.45 ± 0.24b | 4.36 ± 0.29b | 3.22 ± 0.30c |
| Pulmonary cholesterol| 6.09 ± 0.33a | 4.74 ± 0.31b | 4.38 ± 0.31b | 5.71 ± 0.34a |
| Pulmonary triglyceride| 13.42 ± 0.45a| 11.25 ± 0.76a| 9.51 ± 0.32b| 6.14 ± 0.72c|
| Splenic cholesterol | 7.49 ± 0.23a  | 8.86 ± 0.48a | 8.08 ± 0.23a | 7.10 ± 0.41a |
| Splenic triglyceride | 6.50 ± 0.36a  | 6.45 ± 0.22a | 5.95 ± 0.09a | 5.81 ± 0.28a |

Each value represents the Mean of 5 rats. Values within a row with different alphabets for each group are significantly different at P< 0.05

DISCUSSION

The interest in the use of medicinal plants to treat ailments is on the increased because of the belief that it is safe and has no side effects [22]. The surge in the number of people that take medicinal plants couple with a lack of data on the safety of many medicinal plants demands that toxicity study need to be conducted on herbal products [13]. Acute oral toxicity test is usually the first test to be done when assessing the toxicity of any plant [23], this is to ascertain the adverse reactions to either a single dose or overdose of the agent [24]. In this study, *B. ferruginea* did not produce any mortality at 2000 mg/kg, although this dosage alters the behavioural patterns of the rats. This indicates that the oral LD$_{50}$ of *B. ferruginea* extract is greater than 2000 mg/kg body weight and can be considered to be non-toxic [25]. The high safety value obtained in this study may suggest the reason why *B. ferruginea* is a popular medicinal plant.

Subacute toxicity studies were carried out in this study to know the organs which may be affected by plant extract. Evaluation of haematological parameters can be used to determine the effect of plant extract on blood functions [26]. Fluctuation in the value of plasma constituents could indicate haematoxicity [27]. The physiological and pathological status of a man and animals can be determined through blood parameters such as white blood cell count, haemoglobin, packed cell volume and platelets count [28]. Ingestion of toxic plants can alter the normal range of these parameters [29, 30]. These blood indices were all measured after oral administration of *B. ferruginea* for 28 days with no significant change when compared with control values, suggesting that the extract did not affect the erythropoiesis, osmotic fragility and morphology of the red blood cells [31].

The clinical chemistry analysis was carried out to evaluate the possible alterations in hepatic functions of the extract treated rats compared to controls. *B. ferruginea* methanolic leaf extract did not produce any significant changes in biochemical parameters after 28-day of treatment. Evaluation of liver function is very important when analysing toxicity of drugs and plant extracts because of its relevance for the survival of the organism [32]. High levels of alkaline phosphatase (ALP), aspartate transaminase (AST), and alanine transaminase (ALT) are an indicator of hepatotoxicity or liver diseases [33]. The non-significant changes in the values of AST, ALT and ALP indicate that subacute administration of *B. ferruginea* leaf extract has no adverse effect on hepatocyte function. In addition,
analysis of lipid peroxidation level in hepatocyte indicates no significant increase in this parameter was observed when the treated group were compared to the control group. A rise in lipid peroxidation level is only identified if there is oxidative damage due to the increase in free radical generation.

The effects of sub-acute administration of *B. ferruginea* extract for 28 days on blood lipid was investigated in this study. The analysis of blood lipid is important because high levels of lipids have been linked to atherosclerosis (hardening of arteries) and by implication, increase in the risk of heart disease and stroke [34]. In this study, cholesterol and triglyceride levels of plasma, HDL and VLDL+LDL were not significantly affected by all the three doses of *B. ferruginea* use in this study when compared with the control animals. High-Density Lipoprotein-Cholesterol (HDL-C) is known as the good cholesterol because of its relevant to the cardiovascular system. When HDL-C is lower, there is a higher chance of cardiovascular disease [35]. LDL is the main source of blood cholesterol [36]. LDL acts as the main transporter of cholesterol and cholesteryl esters and makes up more than half of the total lipoprotein in plasma [37]. Increase in the level of lipids in the plasma could lead to atherosclerosis which could progress to coronary heart disease [38]. Therefore, non-significant changes in blood lipids observed in this study suggest a wide safety margin of *B. ferruginea* extract.

The effects of administration of *B. ferruginea* extract for 28 days on tissues lipids were also investigated in this study. This study is important because evidence abounds which indicated that lipid accumulation in the liver is associated with Non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) [38, 39]. Non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) is a common cause of chronic liver disease and several studies have also linked NAFLD to an increased risk of cardiovascular disease [40, 41]. Increasing evidence also suggests that triglyceride accumulation in the liver plays an important role in the pathogenesis of obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease [42]. Also, cholesterol and triglyceride accumulation in the kidney may lead to kidney disease, including metabolic syndrome [43], chronic glomerulopathy, nephrotic syndrome, obesity-associated renal disease and acute kidney injury [44]. In this study, there were no significant differences in the liver, spleen and kidney cholesterol and triglyceride levels of the treated and control groups indicating that the plant is safe for use at the proposed doses. However, both 200 and 400 mg/kg doses of *B. ferruginea* extract significantly decrease the cardiac cholesterol level while cardiac triglyceride level was reduced in a dose-dependent manner. Similarly, there was a dose-dependent decrease in pulmonary triglyceride while all the three doses also caused a reduction in pulmonary cholesterol. The reduction in cardiac cholesterol and triglyceride observed in this study suggests the usefulness of *B. ferrugelia* in helping to ameliorate various cardiac conditions that are precipitated by high cholesterol and triglycerides levels.

**CONCLUSION**

The findings of the present study indicate that acute administration of *B. ferruginea* extract did not cause mortality in rats. The results obtained in respect to the subacute toxicity study suggest that the leaf extract is relatively safe when administered orally, and lack of toxic effect renders *B. ferruginea* a candidate for bioassay-guided isolation of compounds which can use for drug development against diseases.

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