In Vitro Assessment of Antioxidant Activity, Total Phenolic and Flavonoid Contents of Sweet Marjoram (Origanum majorana L.) Extract

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Abstract— Sweet marjoram (Origanum majorana L.) is cultivated as a condiment for its aromatic leaves for culinary purposes and utilized as a medicinal plant for many diseases. The aim of this study was to evaluate in vitro antioxidant activity of marjoram extract by the 2, 2-diphenyl-1-picrylhydrazyl–hydrate (DPPH) free radical scavenging method while total phenolic and flavonoid contents were quantified by spectrophotometry using Folin–Ciocalteu and aluminum chloride colorimetric methods, respectively. The extraction yield of sweet marjoram obtained by maceration in absolute ethanol at a ratio of 1/5 (w/v) for 24h at room temperature was 8.41 ± 0.76 % (w/w). The obtained results showed that the investigated extract contained a higher amount of phenolics: 164.96 ± 4.61 mg GAE/g of dry plant, lower flavonoid contents: 44.61 ± 2.08 mg QE/g of dry plant, and exhibited a strong antioxidant activity (IC50 value: 40.09 µg/ml) almost like those of the used standard products, namely ascorbic acid and butylated hydroxytoluene (BHT). Based on the obtained results, marjoram (Origanum majorana L.) features a potential application as natural antioxidants that could be exploited by the pharmaceutical and food industries.

Keywords— Antioxidant activity, DPPH, ethanolic extract, flavonoid contents, marjoram, phenolic contents.

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the employment of natural antioxidants from plant sources as green chemicals has attracted major interest and has provided a potential alternative to the commonly used synthetic antioxidant molecules that present potential human health risks especially butylated hydroxyanisole (BHA) and butylated hydroxytoluene (BHT) (Rodrigues et al., 2019; Suhaj, 2006).

Polyphenols and flavonoids are considered as natural compounds widely presents in plants (San-Feliciano et al., 2012). They are products of the secondary plant metabolism that are involved in hormone regulation of plant growth, in protection against UV rays and microbial infections, in the attraction of pollinators and contribute to the plant pigmentation (Naczk and Shahidi, 2004). Polyphenol and flavonoid compounds arouse important interest due to their potential beneficial effects on public’s health as they have demonstrated a multiple biological activities, such as antioxidant, antibacterial, antifungal, anti-spasmodic, analgesic and anti-hyperglycemic activities (Chishti et al., 2013). Their natural antioxidant activities are attracting increasing interest widely exploited in food and pharmaceutical industries (Chen et al., 2004). In food industry, phenolic compounds are used as additives and contribute particularly to slowing the oxidative degradation of lipids, thus improving the microbial and nutritional quality of food (Jukic et al., 2015). In addition, their presence in human diet is associated with beneficial
pharmacological effects that reduce the risk of various chronic diseases related to the oxidative stress (Zhou et al., 2006).

Origanum majorana L. also called sweet marjoram is a species of perennial plant in the Lamiaceae family, indigenous from Mediterranean and cultivated as a condiment for its aromatic leaves for culinary purposes (Sud and Kumar, 2004). Marjoram is also used as a medicinal plant for various diseases because it contains high amount of phenolic compounds such as carvacrol and thymol (Burt, 2004). Various authors have previously studied the effects of sweet marjoram extracts from different origin and demonstrated their antioxidant (Duletic-Lausevic et al., 2018; Guerra-Boone et al., 2015; Roby et al., 2013; Chrpaova et al., 2010; Vagi et al., 2005), antimicrobial (Duletic-Lausevic et al., 2018; Guerra-Boone et al., 2015; Hussain et al., 2011; Kozlowska et al., 2010; Charai et al., 1996), anti-inflammatory (Arranz et al., 2015), anticancer (Rao et al., 2014; Erenler et al., 2016), hormonal and menstrual cycle regulatory (Haj-Husein et al., 2016), cardio-protective (Ramadan et al., 2013), hepatoprotective (Mossa et al., 2013), gastric secretory (Rafsanjani et al., 2007), anticholinesterase (Chung et al., 2001; Mossa et al., 2011), antiulcer (Al-Howiriny et al., 2009) and antineurodegenerative activities (Duletic-Lausevic et al., 2018).

The present study is part of the context of exploiting and enhancing the biodiversity of aromatic plants for their natural properties. The aim consisted in assessing the total phenolic contents and the concentration of flavonoids, as well as to evaluate the antioxidant activity of the ethanolic sweet marjoram extract (Origanum majorana L.).

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Chemicals

Absolute ethanol and methanol were purchased from Honeywell Riedel-de Haën, Seelze, Germany. Standards of phenolic acid (Gallic acid), Folin–Ciocalteu’s phenol reagent, 2, 2-diphenyl–1–picrylhydrazyl–hydrate (DPPH), 3, 5–di–tert–butyl–4–hydroxyltoluene (BHT) and ascorbic acid were purchased from Sigma-Aldrich Chemical Co., St Louis, MO, USA. Flavonoid (Quercetin) was purchased from Merck Chemicals Ltd., Nottingham, United Kingdom. Aluminum chloride (AlCl3) was from Fluka Chemie AG, Buchs, Switzerland. Sodium hydroxide (NaOH), sodium nitrite (NaNO2), and sodium carbonate (Na2CO3) were purchased from Carlo Erba reagent, Milan, Italy. Ultra-pure water was obtained with a Milli-Q water purification system.

Plant material

Fresh marjoram was purchased from local market in April 2019. The plants were botanically identified as Origanum majorana L. Aerial parts of Marjoram were dried at room temperature (20 °C) in the dark to preserve their molecular integrity. The plant materials were individually ground into a fine powder (500 μm, ISO, 1999).

Preparation of plant extract

Extraction was made in line with the method reported by Bensid et al. (2014) with slight modifications. Sample was macerated at room temperature in absolute ethanol in a ratio of 1:5 for 24h. Extract was filtered over Whatman No. 1 filter paper. Activated carbon was appended to filtrate (20 g of activated carbon / 100 g of plant material) and was immediately removed by filtration. After that, all ethanol was evaporated under reduced pressure using a Büchi Rotavapor R-200 at 50 °C. Then, extract was stored in amber flasks at refrigerated conditions until use.

Determination of total phenolic compounds

Total phenolic contents (TPC) were evaluated using the spectrophotometric analysis with Folin–Ciocalteu’s phenol reagent (Waterhouse, 2002). Briefly, 100 μL of appropriately diluted sample was added to 400 μL of a 1:10 diluted Folin–Ciocalteu’s reagent. After 5 min, 500 μL of a saturated sodium carbonate (Na2CO3) solution and 1.5 mL of ultrapure water were added. The mixture was incubated in dark at room temperature for 2 h and the absorbance was determined at 765 nm against water blank on spectrophotometer. Calibration curve was made using gallic acid standard solution (100, 80, 60, 40 and 20 μg/mL) under the same procedure as above and results are expressed as milligram of gallic acid equivalents (GAE) per g of dry Plant.

Determination of flavonoid contents

Total flavonoids were determined using a colorimetric assay (Kim and lee, 2004). A 500 μL aliquot of appropriately diluted sample was put into a volumetric flask containing 2 mL of ultrapure water. At zero time, 150 μL of 5 % sodium nitrite (NaNO2) was added to the flask. At 5 min, 150 μL of 10 % aluminum chloride (AlCl3) was added. At 11 min, 1 mL of 1M sodium hydroxide (NaOH) was appended into the mixture. Forthwith, the contents of the reaction flask were diluted with 1.2 mL of ultrapure water and carefully blended. Mixture absorbance was read at 510 nm against water blank. Calibration curve for flavonoids was set using quercetin standard solution (100, 80, 60, 40 and 20 μg/mL) under the same procedure as above and results are expressed as milligram of quercetin equivalents (QE) per g of dry Plant.
Evaluation of antioxidant activity

The plant extract ability to scavenge DPPH free radicals was evaluated by the standard method as reported by Stanković (2011). Briefly, 1950 µL of methanolic solution of DPPH were mixed with 50 µL of diluted solutions obtained from each stock solution (100, 80, 60, 40 and 20 µg/ml). The mixture was loudly shaken and incubated in darkness at room temperature for 30 min. The absorbance was recorded at 517 nm against water control. The percentage of the radical scavenging activity was calculated using the following equation: DPPH scavenged (%) = [(A of control − A of sample) / A of control] × 100, while IC50 value which defined as the concentration of the sample leading to inhibition of 50 % of the DPPH concentration was determined by linear regression and was expressed as milligrams per g of sample. Ascorbic acid and butylated hydroxytoluene BHT was used for comparison.

Statistical analysis

Average values and standard deviations were obtained from triplicate data. One-way ANOVA followed by Duncan's post-hoc was performed to compare differences of the data at P value < 0.05.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Ethanolic extracts were prepared to examine the total phenolic compounds, flavonoid contents and antioxidant activity. The extraction yield of phenolic compounds obtained from plant material was determined to be 8.41 ± 0.76 % (w/w). Similarly, Benchikha et al. (2013) reported a yield of extract of 8.16 %.

Total phenolic compounds present in the examined plant extract measured by Folin–Ciocalteu’s reagent were calculated using the standard curve equation of gallic acid: y = 0.051x − 0.071, r² = 0.979 and expressed in gallic acid equivalents (GAE) per gram dry plant weight. The concentration of total phenols in our study was found to be 164.96 ± 4.61 mg of GAE/g. Pereira et al. (2012) and Fernandes et al. (2016) reported lower values of 72.87 and 46.86 mg GAE/g, respectively.

The concentration of flavonoids present in the Marjoram extract was determined using spectrophotometric method with aluminum chloride. The flavonoid contents were calculated using the equation: y = 0.013x − 0.053, r² = 0.998 extracted from standard curve of quercetin. The concentration of flavonoids was found to be 44.61 ± 2.08 mg QE/g of dry plant, which was very similar to the value reported by Gawlic-Dziki (2012).

The recorded differences in the extraction yield and in the contents of polyphenol compounds (total phenolics and flavonoids) contained in the studied plant extract might be due on one hand to extrinsic factors related to the plant such as; the origin, plant species and considered organ (Valnet, 1980). Indeed, Smallfield (2001) and Bruneton (1993) report that environmental and climatic conditions, the stage and harvest period, the vegetative cycle and/or the techniques and time of conservation can influence the extraction yields and the contents of compounds. On the other hand, due to factors related to the extraction procedures used such as; particle size, choice and concentration of solvent, exhaustion, temperature, pressure, time, ratio and / or extraction methods (maceration, decoction, infusion, hydro distillation, etc.) (Silva et al., 2007; Min and Chun-Zhao, 2005; Naczk and Shahidi, 2004; Zhou and Yu, 2004).

It should be noted that the determination of the content by those methods do not reflect the absolute value of the amount of phenolic compounds present in the extract (Sengul et al., 2009; Singleton et al., 1999). The interference of the sought compounds with other products used during the assay can also affects the final results. For example, the low specificity of the Folin–Ciocalteu reagent is the main inconvenient of the colorimetric assay (Roby et al., 2013; Kim and Lee, 2004). This reagent is extremely sensitive to the reduction of all hydroxyl groups, not only those of phenolic compounds but also of certain sugars, proteins, carotenoids, etc. (Gomez-Caravaca et al., 2006).

Therefore, the assay carried out by this reagent represents a crude evaluation of all hydroxyl groups contained in the extract because it is not specific to phenolic, but many compounds can react with this reagent, resulting in high values (Tawaha et al., 2007). For this reason, High Performance Liquid Chromatography (HPLC) analysis is interesting for the determination of the individual phenolic constituents in the plant extract.

The antioxidant activity of ethanolic plant extract from marjoram was evaluated using a methanol solution of DPPH reagent and was compared to that of natural and synthetic antioxidants currently used in therapy and food industry, namely; ascorbic acid and BHT, respectively. The antioxidant activity of all samples: the studied plant extract, natural and synthetic antioxidants (ascorbic acid and BHT) was determined using a spectrophotometer by following the transition of color from purple to yellow once the reduction of DPPH free radical (Majhenic et al., 2012).
activity of ascorbic acid was significantly different (P < 0.05) from that of BHT and ME which they showed no significant difference (P > 0.05). Ascorbic acid had relatively high free radical scavenging activity with 93.34 % at 0.1 mg/mL while BHT and marjoram extract showed values of 76.32 % and 72.53 % respectively at the same concentration. Our extract has an important antioxidant power which can replace synthetic antioxidant because it presents a potential free radical scavenging activity similar to those observed for the used reference standard antioxidant products. This potential free radical scavenging ability can be attributed to the active hydrogen donor ability of hydroxyl substitution due probably to the high level of phenolic compounds containing in extract (Sidduraju, 2007).

The anti-radical activities of samples stated as IC50, which was defined as the effective concentration (in µg/mL) of substrate required to scavenge the DPPH radical by 50 %, were determined by linear regression. Awa et al. (2018) and Spanou et al. (2008) reported that the lower the IC50 value the higher the antioxidant activity of a sample. IC50 values of ascorbic acid, BHT and the studied extract was determined as 15.34, 37.39 and 40.09 µg/mL, respectively. The results showed that ascorbic acid had the most powerful antioxidant activity (P < 0.05). However, natural extract obtained in our study (marjoram) and BHT exhibited similar anti-radical activities (P > 0.05), thus claiming that our extract had a significant antioxidant activity which can replace the synthetic antioxidant (BHT).

IV. CONCLUSION

Based upon the obtained results in the present study, we can conclude that ethanolic extract of marjoram (Origanum majorana L.) contains a considerable amount of phenols (phenolic and flavonoid contents), exhibits a strong antioxidant power and a potential free radical scavenging ability that can replace the synthetic antioxidant (BHT). These indicate that marjoram represents a significant source of natural antioxidants which might be helpful in the pharmaceutical and food industries. Nevertheless, further studies are required to determine and quantify the individual phenolic constituents containing in the extract.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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