

1 **Fertility Enhancing Potential of Mucuna**
2 **Pruriens Seeds in Female Sprague-Dawley**
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13 **ABSTRACT (ARIAL, BOLD, 11 FONT, LEFT ALIGNED, CAPS)**
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Aims: To determine the effect of oral administration of methanolic seed extract of *Mucuna pruriens* (*M. pruriens*) on oestrous cycle, ovulation, reproductive hormones and oxidative stress in the ovary of cyclic Sprague-Dawley rats.

Design: Prospective animal study related to *M. pruriens* in reproductive area. .

Place and Duration: Animal Facility of the Department of Anatomy, Faculty of Basic Medical Sciences, College of Medicine of the University of Lagos, Nigeria between the months of June 2012 and August, 2012.

Methodology: Forty female Sprague-Dawley rats with regular 4 days cycle averagely weighing 145 g were used. Methanolic extract of *M. pruriens* was given orally at 50, 100 and 200 mg/kg body weight. Oestrous cycle was monitored daily. At the end of the experiment animals were sacrificed by cervical dislocation. Oocytes were counted, blood and ovaries were assayed for hormonal and biochemical studies respectively.

Results: Oestrous cycle remained unchanged in the treatment groups. Catalase and superoxide dismutase levels were increased slightly compared to control. A dose dependent increase in FSH and LH ($p < 0.05$ at 200 mg/kg) levels were observed with an increase in the number of oocytes released at ovulation compared to control.

Conclusion: *M. pruriens* seed extract has the potential to enhance fertility by increasing serum levels of FSH and LH which in turn increases the number of oocytes released at ovulation possibly through its antioxidant properties.

15
16 **Keywords:** [*Mucuna pruriens*, ovulation, oxidative stress markers, FSH, LH]

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20 **1. INTRODUCTION (ARIAL, BOLD, 11 FONT, LEFT ALIGNED, CAPS)**
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22 **Human health is of prime importance to a country's development and**
23 **progress. Herbal preparation and medications have been in use for the**
24 **treatment of diseases and various ailments since ancient times in many parts**
25 **of the world. In developed countries, despite newer formulations of effective**

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conventional drugs, the treatment of diseases and other ailments with herbal remedies is still very popular (1). In developing countries, the use of herbal remedies as alternatives to modern medicine is on the increase. In Nigeria, many indigenous plants have been used in herbal medicinal preparations to cure sicknesses and diseases and to heal injuries (2), (3). *M. Pruriens* is one such plant; it is a tropical legume known as velvet bean, belonging to the family *Fabaceae*. The plant is an annual climbing shrub with long vines that can reach over 15 m in length. When the plant is young, it is almost completely covered with fuzzy hairs but when it becomes older; it is almost completely free of hairs.

It is found in Africa, India and the Caribbean's; where it is widely known for its uses in various ailments as reported in literature (4-6). Phytochemical screening of the plant revealed that it contains alkaloids, flavonoids, tannins, saponins, cardiac glycosides, anthraquinones and carbohydrates (6-9). It is a constituent of more than 200 indigenous drug formulations (6), (10). Some authors have reported that all the various parts of the plant possess valuable medicinal properties (6), (11), (12). Following the discovery, that *Mucuna* seeds contain L-Dopa which is used in the treatment of Parkinson's disease; its demand even in the international market has increased considerably (6). This demand has motivated Indian farmers to start commercial cultivation of the *Mucuna* plant. It has widespread cultivation over most of the subcontinent and is found in bushes, hedges and dry deciduous low forests throughout the plains of India (10), (13), (14).

M. pruriens has been reported to enhance fertility in male rats (15-21) however; there is a dearth of literature on the effect of *M. pruriens* on the function of the female reproductive system. This study was carried out to evaluate the effect of *M. pruriens* on the reproductive function of the mature female Sprague-Dawley rats.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS / EXPERIMENTAL DETAILS / METHODOLOGY (ARIAL, BOLD, 11 FONT, LEFT ALIGNED, CAPS)

2.1 Plant source

The *M. pruriens* plant with mature seeds was harvested from Mowe area of Lagos, Nigeria. Both plant and seeds were identified and authenticated by Professor J.D. Olowokudejo of the Department of Botany of the University of Lagos. Voucher specimen with accession number LUH 4922 was deposited in the herbarium of the Department of Botany.

2.1.1 Seed extraction

The extraction was carried out in the Pharmacognosy Department of the Faculty of Pharmacy, University of Lagos. Briefly, seeds were obtained from the pods, air-dried and grounded into fine powder using the mortar and the pestle. 450 g of fine powder was mixed with alcohol and placed in the Soxhlet apparatus. The mixture was heated at 60 °C and the extract was obtained by distillation. The powder obtained (107.6 g, 23.9% yield) was stored

69 at room temperature of 25 °C before use. All dilutions of the extract were made in distilled
70 water.

71 2.1.2 Dose selection

72 Our choice of dosage selection was based on a previous study conducted in India in which
73 the authors reported a significant increase in fertility indices when *M. pruriens* was
74 administered to male albino rats (18).

75 2.2 Animals

76 Forty, two months old female Sprague-Dawley rats of Wistar strain weighing between 140 -
77 150 g obtained from the Animal House of the College of Medicine, University of Lagos,
78 Nigeria were used in this study. They were housed five animals per cage at the Animal
79 Facility of the Department of Anatomy, College of Medicine of the University of Lagos,
80 Nigeria. The animals had free access to water and standard commercial rat chows
81 purchased from Pfizer Nigeria Limited and were maintained at 12-h light/12-h dark cycle and
82 at temperatures between 25 to 28 °C. The animals were allowed to acclimatize for two
83 weeks before the commencement of the experiment. Throughout the duration of the
84 experiment, the animals were observed for adverse effects such as fur loss, diarrhea,
85 bleeding, ataxia, morbidity and mortality resulting from administration of the extract. All
86 procedures were approved by the Departmental Committee on the use and care of animals
87 and tissue collection.

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91 2.3 Determination of the oestrous cycle

92 Oestrous cycle was monitored for 24 days. Oestrous cyclicity was determined daily between
93 8 a.m. and 9:30 a.m. using the vaginal smear method. Vaginal secretion was collected with a
94 plastic pipette filled with 10 µL of normal saline (NaCl 0.9%). The vagina was flushed two or
95 three times with the pipette and the vaginal fluid was placed on a glass slide. A different slide
96 was used for each animal. The unstained secretion was observed under a light microscope.
97 Only animals with a 4-day oestrous cycle were selected for this study.

98 2.3.1 Oestrous Cyclicity Study

99 Twenty rats divided into 4 groups of 5 rats in each were used for this study. *M. pruriens* was
100 administered orally using an oro-gastric tube daily for 24 days at 50, 100 and 200 mg/kg
101 body weights while control animals received distilled water. Animals were sacrificed by
102 cervical dislocation. Laparotomy was performed; ovaries were removed, trimmed of fat and
103 stored at -80 °C for biochemical analysis.

104

105 2.3.2 Ovulation study

106 Twenty animals were used for this study. The animals received a single oral dose of *M.*
107 *pruriens* at 50, 100 and 200 mg/kg body weight at 9 a.m. on the day of proestrus using an

108 oro-gastric tube. Distilled water was given to the control animals. The rats were sacrificed by
109 cervical dislocation the next day (estrus) at 10 a.m. A ventral laparotomy was performed and
110 the oviduct was dissected out, placed on glass slides with a drop of saline and covered with
111 cover-slips. This was squeezed with both sides being gently rocked and each ovum found in
112 the distended ampulla was counted under a light microscope (22).

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115 2.4 Biochemical analysis

116 The right ovaries were homogenized using a Potter–Elvehjem homogenizer. A 20% (1/5 w/v)
117 homogenate of the tissue was prepared in 50 mM Tris-HCl buffer (pH 7.4) containing 1.15%
118 potassium chloride and centrifuged at 10,000 rpm at 4 °C for 10 min.

119 Superoxide dismutase was assayed utilizing the technique of (23). A single unit of enzyme
120 was expressed as 50% inhibition of Nitroblue tetrazo-lium (NBT) reduction/min/mg/protein.

121 Catalase was assayed colorimetrically at 620 nm and expressed as μ moles of H₂O₂
122 Consumed/min/mg/protein as described by (24).

123

124 2.5 Hormonal assay studies on Follicle stimulating hormone and Luteinizing hormone

125 Blood was obtained from the angular vein of the eye of the Sprague-Dawley rats at 6 p.m. in
126 the evening of proestrus and collected into heparinised bottles. Each blood sample was spun
127 at 2,500 rpm for 10 minutes in an angle-head desktop centrifuge at temperatures of 25 °C.
128 Serum samples were assayed in batches with control sera at both physiological and
129 patho-logical levels by Standard Quantitative Enzyme- Linked Immunosorbent Assay
130 (ELISA) technique with Microwell kits from Syntro Bioresearch Inc., California, USA.

131

132 2.6 Statistical analysis

133 Results were analyzed and expressed as Mean \pm SD and were subjected to one-way
134 ANOVA with Newman-Kenls post hoc test version 5.0 for windows. Statistical significance
135 was considered at P = .05.

136

137 3. RESULTS

138 All the treated rats showed normal behaviour throughout the study. No signs of adverse
139 effects were observed.

140 3.1 Oestrous Cycle

Analysis of the oestrous cycle revealed that oral administration of 50 mg, 100 mg and 200 mg/kg body weight of methanolic seed extract of *M. pruriens* did not produce any irregularity/derangement in the cycle pattern. Also, length of cycle remained unchanged in all the treated rats; animals showed a regular four days cycle as shown (table 1).

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Table 1. Effect of the oral administration of *M. pruriens* for 24 days on the length of the oestrous cycle in Sprague-Dawley rats.

	Treatment groups	Length of oestrous cycle in days
152	Control	4.0 ± 0.00
153	50 mg/kg	4.0 ± 0.10
154	100 mg/kg	4.0 ± 0.20
155	200 mg/kg	4.0 ± 0.40

n = 5. Values are expressed as mean ± standard deviation

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3.2 Antioxidant status of Catalase and Superoxide dismutase

The extract exhibited a dose dependent increase in catalase and superoxide dismutase activities in the treatment groups compared to the control group however; this increase was not statistically significant (Table 2).

Table 2. Effect of the oral administration of *M. pruriens* on the enzymatic antioxidant activities of catalase and superoxide dismutase in the ovary of Sprague-Dawley rats.

	Treatment groups	SOD (min/mg protein)	CAT (Mmol/min/mg protein)
164	Control	1.50 ± 0.30	60.17 ± 16.50
165	50 mg/kg	1.65 ± 0.37	60.83 ± 16.57
166	100 mg/kg	1.67 ± 0.56	61.14 ± 15.30
167	200 mg/kg	1.88 ± 0.90	62.67 ± 17.40

168 n = 5. Values are expressed as mean \pm standard deviation.

169

170 3.3 Serum concentrations of follicle stimulating hormone and luteinizing Hormone

171 A dose dependent increase in serum concentrations of follicle stimulating hormone and
172 luteinizing hormone was observed. This increase was significant for luteinizing hormone at
173 200 mg/kg (table 3).
174

175 Table 3: Effect of the oral administration of *M. pruriens* on serum concentrations of follicle
176 stimulating hormone and luteinizing hormone at 6.00 p.m. on proestrus.

	Treatment groups	Follicle stimulating hormone	Luteinizing hormone
		(mIU/ml)	(mIU/ml)
177	Control	1.83 \pm 0.77	1.13 \pm 0.15
178	50 mg/kg	1.87 \pm 0.04	1.56 \pm 0.81
179	100 mg/kg	1.95 \pm 0.63	1.90 \pm 0.51
180	200 mg/kg	2.01 \pm 0.02	2.03 \pm 0.76*

181 n = 5. Values are expressed as mean \pm standard deviation. * P < 0.05

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184 3.4 Ovulation and number of ova shed

185 A slight increase in the number of oocytes released in the oviduct was observed in the
186 treated animals compared to the control (table 4).
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Table 4: Effect of the oral administration of a single dose of *M. pruriens* on the number of ova shed in the oviduct in the morning of estrus in Sprague-Dawley Rats.

	Treatment groups	Number of ova shed in the oviduct
Control		7.5 ± 2.40
50 mg/kg		7.6 ± 1.30
100 mg/kg		7.6 ± 1.50
200 mg/kg		8.1 ± 2.50

n = 5. Values are expressed as mean ± standard deviation.

DISCUSSION

Estrogens and progesterone are important in the normal functioning of the female reproductive system. They are responsible for the development and maturation of reproductive organs and also provide the proper environment required for the transport of gametes and nidation. The balance in hormonal interplay between estrogens and progesterone is responsible for a normal regular cycle (25), (26). This study revealed that the oral administration of *M. pruriens* seed extract did not alter the oestrous cycle in all the treated animals throughout the treatment period of 24 days. The treated animals maintained a normal cycle pattern and cycle length that was comparable with the control animals. Although authors did not determine the levels of progesterone and estrogens in this study however, we can deduce from our findings that *M. pruriens* did not produce any negative effect either directly on the pituitary or indirectly on the hypothalamus to disrupt the intricate balance in hormonal interplay between progesterone and estrogens levels that is necessary to maintain a normal cycle.

Literature is rife with studies reporting that *M. pruriens* has an excellent scavenging ability that mops up excessive production of reactive oxygen species and free radicals (8), (20), (27-29). Reactive oxygen species plays both a physiological as well as a pathological role in the female reproductive tract. Numerous animal and human studies have demonstrated the presence of reactive oxygen species in the female reproductive tract such as in the ovaries (30-32), the fallopian tubes (33) and in embryos (34). Reactive oxygen species is involved in the modulation of an entire spectrum of physiological reproductive functions such as oocyte maturation, ovarian steroidogenesis, corpus luteal function and luteolysis (30), (32), (35). On the other hand, the pathological effects are exerted by various mechanisms including lipid damage, inhibition of protein synthesis, and depletion of ATP (36). Reactive oxygen species have been implicated in more than 100 diseases (37-39). The superoxide radical is formed when electrons leak from the electron transport chain (40). Superoxide dismutase decomposes superoxide anion into hydrogen peroxide and oxygen at very high rates. Superoxide radical is involved in diverse physiological and pathophysiological processes (41). Catalase catalyses the decomposition of hydrogen peroxide to water and oxygen. High concentration of hydrogen peroxide is deleterious to cells such as DNA, proteins, and lipids, leading to mutagenesis and cell death (42).

233 The slight increase in the activities of superoxide dismutase and catalase observed in the
234 ovary in this study is an indication of the antioxidant properties inherent in *M. pruriens*. The
235 upregulation in these markers of oxidative stress is in response to reactive oxygen species
236 and free radicals. As earlier stated, both animal and human studies have demonstrated the
237 presence of reactive oxygen species in the ovary. **Phytochemical** analysis has shown that *M.*
238 *pruriens* seeds contain flavonoids and tannins (6-9). Flavonoids and tannins are phenolic
239 compounds, and plant phenolics are a major group of compounds that act as primary
240 antioxidants or free radical scavengers (43). In addition, *M. pruriens* seeds are a rich source
241 of L-Dopa and its metabolites. In vitro antioxidant assays have supported the antioxidant
242 property of L-Dopa (44). Dopamine, a product of L-Dopa metabolism, has also been found to
243 possess strong anti-oxidant capacity and free radical scavenging activity (45), (46).
244 Antioxidants prevent oxidative stress caused by free radicals which damage cells and vital
245 biomolecules. They terminate chain reactions triggered by free radicals by removing free
246 radical intermediates and inhibit other oxidation reactions (47). The antioxidant capacity of
247 the extracts may be attributed to the presence of L-Dopa and its metabolite, dopamine and
248 also, the identified phytochemicals.

249 Our study showed a dose dependent increase in the levels of follicle stimulating hormone
250 and luteinizing hormone compared to the control. Increase in luteinizing hormone was
251 significant at 200 mg/kg body weight of the extract. Treatment with *M. pruriens* significantly
252 improved blood levels of dopamine, adrenaline and noradrenaline in infertile males (16). L-
253 Dopa and its metabolite dopamine have been reported to stimulate the hypothalamus and
254 forebrain to secrete gonadotropin-releasing hormone (GnRH) (16), (20), (48). This ultimately
255 will activate the anterior lobe of the pituitary gland to secrete follicle stimulating hormone and
256 luteinizing hormone. The report of this study is in agreement with studies carried out by
257 elegant researchers in other parts of the world on both animal and human males in which
258 follicle stimulating hormone and luteinizing hormone levels increased significantly following
259 the administration of *M. pruriens*. (16), (17), (18), (28).

260

261 Luteinizing hormone is critical to ovulation because it is responsible for all the processes and
262 events that accompany ovulation. The rapid surge of luteinizing hormone that occurs
263 between 5 to 7 p.m. in the evening of proestrus induces follicular rupture and ovulation in
264 rats (49). The present study showed a dose dependent increase in luteinizing hormone
265 levels and a slight increase in oocyte number at 50 and 100 mg/kg body weights. However,
266 at the highest dosage of 200 mg/kg we recorded a significant increase in the levels of
267 circulating luteinizing hormone and also a concomitant increase in the number of oocytes
268 released at ovulation compared to the control. Increase in testosterone levels resulting from
269 increase in circulating luteinizing hormone levels have been recorded following treatment
270 with *M. pruriens* in both human and animal studies. This in turn has increased fertility indices
271 such as sperm count, sperm motility, sperm morphology and libido (15), (19), (20), (28).
272 Therefore, the report of this study suggests that the increasing levels of circulating luteinizing
273 hormone from the anterior pituitary produced by the administration of *M. pruriens* was
274 responsible for the increase in the number of oocytes released at ovulation.

275 4. CONCLUSION

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277 *M. pruriens* enhances fertility in female Sprague-Dawley rats by producing a dose dependent
278 increase in FSH and LH which in turn increased the number of oocytes released at ovulation
279 possibly through **its rich source of L-Dopa and its metabolite, dopamine**. From this study, it
280 could be inferred that at higher dosages than was administered in this study, the number of

281 ova shed at ovulation may be significantly increased. Thus, the use of *M. pruriens* in the
282 treatment of female infertility caused by anovulation seems promising.
283

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289

290 **COMPETING INTERESTS**

291
292 "Authors declare that no competing interests exist".
293

294 **AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS**

295 First author wrote the first part of the manuscript, managed the analysis of the study and
296 performed the statistical analysis. Second author designed the study, performed literature
297 search and wrote the final manuscript in accordance with the guideline of this journal. Third
298 author wrote the protocol and edited the manuscript for submission.
299 "All authors read and approved the final manuscript."
300

301 **ETHICAL APPROVAL (WHERE EVER APPLICABLE)**

302
303 **"ALL AUTHORS HEREBY DECLARE THAT "PRINCIPLES OF LABORATORY**
304 **ANIMAL CARE" (NIH PUBLICATION NO. 85-23, REVISED 1985) WERE**
305 **FOLLOWED, AS WELL AS SPECIFIC NATIONAL LAWS WHERE APPLICABLE.**
306 **ALL EXPERIMENTS HAVE BEEN EXAMINED AND APPROVED BY THE**
307 **APPROPRIATE ETHICS COMMITTEE"**
308

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428 **DEFINITIONS, ACRONYMS, ABBREVIATIONS**

429 Here is the Definitions section. This is an optional section.

430 **Term:** Definition for the term

431 **APPENDIX**

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