

Bioaccumulation and evidence of hormonal disruptions in tilapia fish (*Oreochromis spp.*) exposed to sub-lethal concentrations of pesticides in Sinaloa, M exico

ABSTRACT

Endocrine disruption in tilapia fish (*Oreochromis spp.*) caused by exposure to sub-lethal concentrations of endosulfan, lindane, diazinon and malathion was evaluated by the quantification of 17- β -estradiol, progesterone and testosterone in fish blood. Tilapia juveniles were exposed to 2.8, 15, 225 and 315 μ g/l of endosulfan, lindane, diazinon, and malathion, respectively, for 21 days. At the end this period, the accumulation of pesticides in muscular tissue of fishes was quantified using gas chromatography with an electron capture detector (ECD) and a flame ionization detector (FID). The hormonal concentration in blood plasma was measured using high-performance liquid chromatography (HPLC). The bioaccumulation factors were 760, 310, 41.3 and 11.9 for endosulfan, lindane, malathion, and diazinon, respectively. 17- β -estradiol and testosterone concentrations in blood were significantly lower in exposed fishes than in controls, while progesterone was lower in fishes exposed to endosulfan, lindane and malathion, and higher for fishes exposed to diazinon. Results suggest that pesticides assayed, are endocrine disruptors in tilapia, which can affect the re production and other biochemical and physiological functions controlled by hormones. On the other hand, pesticides accumulated in fish muscle represent a risk for public health, since tilapia is a popular food in Mexico like in others developing countries.

Keywords: Endocrine disruption, tilapia, pesticides, progesterone, testosterone, 17- β -estradiol

1. INTRODUCTION

The tilapia (*Oreochromis spp.*) is a very important source of protein in the developing world. Its production in hatcheries, ponds, dams, etc., has grown exponentially over the past 30 years (Figure 1) [1].

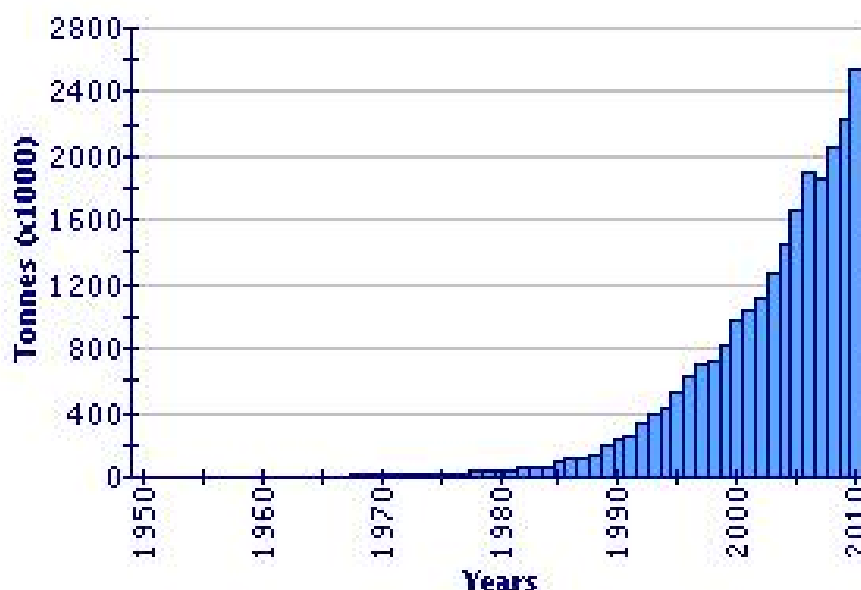


Figure 1. Global aquaculture production of Tilapia (*Oreochromis* spp.)

The principal growers are China, Egypt, Philippines, Thailand, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Colombia, Honduras and Brazil. It was recently reported that tilapia is one of three main fishery products of Latin America and the Caribbean [2]. In Mexico, the estimated production of tilapia for 2012 is about 75000 metric tons [3] and new projects have been initiated for the production of tilapia in Chiapas and Sinaloa States (provinces). In Sinaloa, the use of pesticides to control agricultural pests, exo-parasites in cattle and domestic animals, and vectors of diseases like dengue and malaria, has increased considerably during the last decades, causing environmental contamination and an endless number of negative effects for non-target species, as well as for human health [4, 5]. Due to their physical-chemical properties (low reactivity, little solubility, etc.), many pesticides can directly enter in aquatic organisms by diffusion through the skin and by the processes of breathing and feeding [6, 7, 8].

In the Sinaloa State, Mexico, many agricultural fields are located close to tilapia hatcheries and places where they are cultured (damps, ponds, etc.). Therefore, pesticide residues from the agricultural fields can enter to aquatic environments and lead to exposure of aquatic organisms, which eventually can affect the endocrine systems of organisms, and those of subsequent generations, which are more vulnerable because their organ and neural systems are developing [9, 10]. The pesticides or their residues can interfere with production, transport, metabolism, reception, and alteration of hormones, which regulate the homeostasis of the organisms, i.e. disrupt the endocrine system. The endocrine system also regulates part of the sexual and reproduction processes [11, 12, 13]. However, many substances such as chemical and pharmaceutical products, heavy metals, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDEs), polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), dioxins and furans, among others, have been reported as endocrine disruptors (EDs) [11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17]. Therefore, the objective of this study was to investigate the potential impacts of pesticides currently used in Sinaloa, Mexico as (EDs) on tilapia, with the view to reinforce regulation and policies in the management of these pesticides. This could help to prevent health hazards, since humans rely on tilapia as one of the main sources of protein, especially when it is commercially produced in bodies of water which could be polluted by pesticides.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

2.1 Tilapia exposure to pesticides

Juveniles of tilapia (*Oreochromis spp.*) were obtained from the aquaculture laboratory of Instituto Tecnológico de Mazatlán. The organisms were sorted by size, weight and sex. The sex identification in tilapia was done by observing the genital papilla; the males have two openings in the papilla, whereas females have three [18]. After a conditioning period (56 days), separate cohorts of male and female tilapias (3 per aquarium) of sizes between 14 to 19 cm and weights from 96 to 110 g were exposed to sub-lethal concentrations of the following pesticides: endosulfan (2.8 µg/L); lindane (15.0 µg/L); diazinon (225.0 µg/L) and malathion (315.0 µg/L) for a period of 21 days, with daily application of 3 mL of pesticide solutions in acetone to each aquarium. However, due to insufficient of tilapias male, the males were exposed only to malathion and endosulfan. Controls consisted of fishes of the same sizes, weights and sex, and 3 mL of acetone (the

same volume of the pesticide solutions) was added. During this period, commercial food (Purina®) was supplied twice daily, at a rate of 5% the gross weight of the tilapias. The water temperature fluctuated between 26 and 27 °C, and the salinity between 3 and 5 PSU. Constant aeration of the aquariums was maintained and the periods of illumination were normal hours of day and night. At the end of the exposure period, blood was extracted, then the fishes were sacrificed and the dorsum-lateral tissue dissected.

2.2 Hormones in blood plasma

The blood from each fish was extracted by puncturing the caudal fin vein using a syringe impregnated with an anticoagulant, ethylenediaminetetraacetic acid (EDTA). The blood samples were centrifuged (822 g, 15 min.) to separate the plasma, and saponified with NaOH-Ethanol (55°C, 10 min.) to separate the hormones from the lipids. The hormones were extracted from the saponified solution with n-hexane by vigorous agitation for 5 minutes. The extracts were taken to dryness and re-dissolved in 1 mL of acetone plus 0.5 mL of a hormone mixture solution (containing progesterone, testosterone and 17-β-estradiol each with concentration of 0.5 µg/mL) to fortify the samples. The identification and quantification of hormones in the extracts was carried out by high performance liquid chromatography (HPLC) using a Shimadzu LC-10A, coupled to an UV-Vis detector Shimadzu SPD-10A, and a column Supelcosil-LC-18-T (15cm x 4.6mm, 3µm) from Supelco® [19]. The mobile phase was acetonitrile-water (50-50 v/v) at a 1mL per min flow rate, during 18 min. The absorbance was recorded at 205 and 270 nm wavelength, and as hormone standards, the same mixture solution used to fortify the samples was used.

2.3 Pesticides in muscular tissue

The dorsum-lateral muscle (5 g) of each exposed fish was dissected and then crushed using a tissue homogenizer (Omni TH®). The pesticides from the crushed tissues were extracted by successive additions of n-hexane and anhydrous sodium sulfate as dehydrating agent in a beaker, vigorously agitated and the liquid decanted to centrifuge tubes and centrifuged to separate the tissue debris. Each extract was separated from dehydrated tissue mass by centrifugation (822 g, 15 min.) The extracts were clean-up passing the extracts through packed columns of Alumina, Florisil, Silica-gel and anhydrous sodium sulfate (3+3+3+1.5 g). The cleaned extracts were concentrated to dryness using a rotary evaporator (Brinkmann®) and re-dissolved in 2ml of iso-octane, following the protocol proposed in [5]. The identification and quantification of pesticides in the samples was performed by gas chromatography (GC) with an electron capture detector (ECD) and a flame ionization detector (FID). The column used was an Equity5 (30m X 0.25 mm I.D., 0.25 µm thickness) from Supelco® and N₂ (99.99 % purity) as carrier gas. Details of the analyses are presented in [5].

2.4. Statistical Analyses.

All experiments were performed by triplicate and a SYSTAT software (Version 11, SPSS) was used to calculate averages and standard deviations of each experiment data, also ANOVA tests were performed for the comparison between treatments and controls, and a Fisher Least Significant Difference, with significant level at $P < .05$ was calculated for each experiment.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

As can be observed in (Fig. 2), the hormone standards of 17-β-estradiol and progesterone showed higher response at 270 nm wavelength compared to 205 nm, whereas testosterone registered lower response at 270 than at 205 nm. Therefore, the analyses of hormones in blood samples were done using both wavelengths.

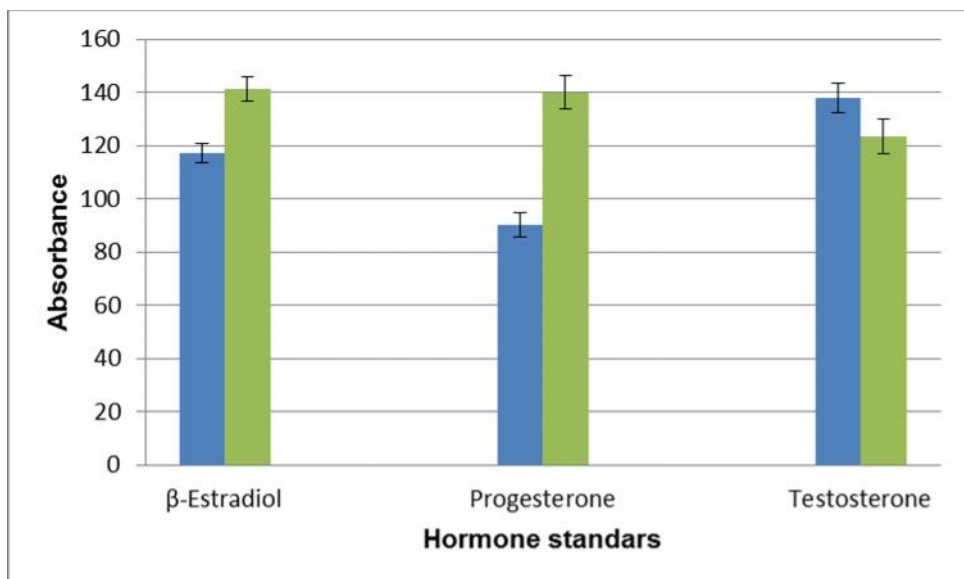


Figure 2. Absorbance values of hormone standards recorded at 205 nm (blue bars) and 270 nm (green bars) of wavelengths

The 17-β-estradiol concentrations in blood of tilapia exposed to pesticides are shown in (Fig 3.). At both wavelengths the concentration of 17-β-estradiol was significantly lower (P values ranged from .00 to .03) in exposed fishes than those of controls.

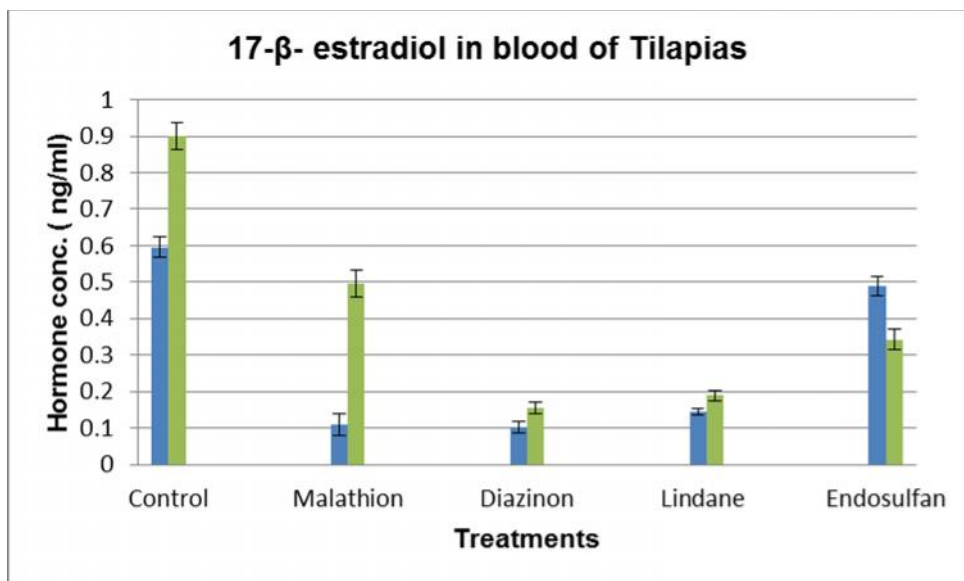


Figure 3. 17-β-estradiol in blood of Tilapias exposed to sub-lethal concentration of pesticides. Blue bars correspond to values calculated from absorbance lectures at 205 nm, and green bars to those at 270 nm.

The progesterone concentrations are show in (Fig. 4). The values measured at 205 nm, were significantly lower in exposed fishes compared to control group for all pesticides assayed (P values ranged from .000 to .009). Whereas at 270 nm, the concentrations were significantly lower in fishes exposed to malathion, lindane and endosulfan (P values ranged from .000 to .007) than control, whereas for diazinon was slight higher (P =.054).

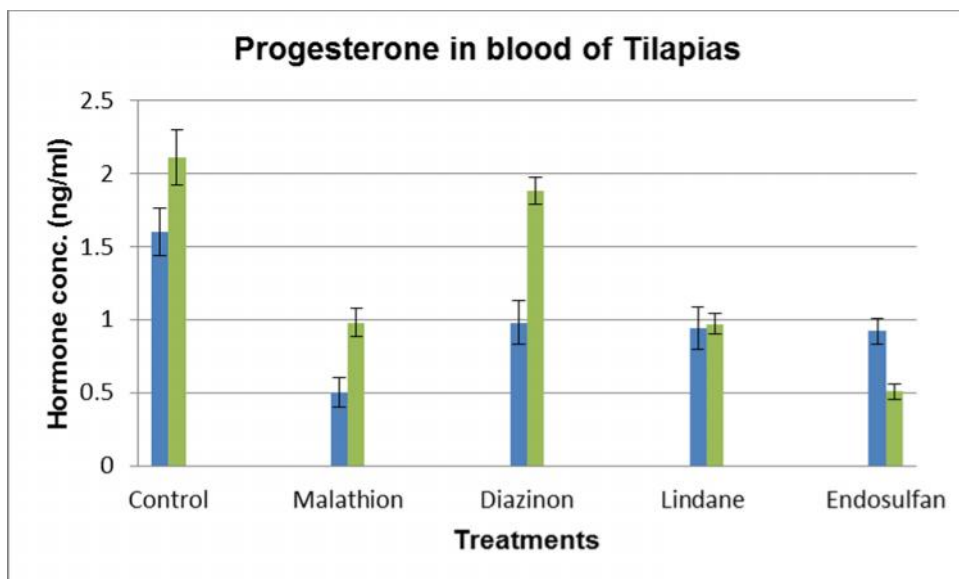


Figure 4. Progesterone in blood of Tilapias exposed to sub-lethal concentration of pesticides. Blue bars correspond to values calculated from absorbance lectures at 205 nm, and green bars to those at 270 nm.

Although testosterone was measured only in tilapia exposed to malathion and endosulfan, the hormone values at both wavelength were significantly lower (P values ranged from .000 to .001) in fishes exposed than those in controls (Fig. 5).

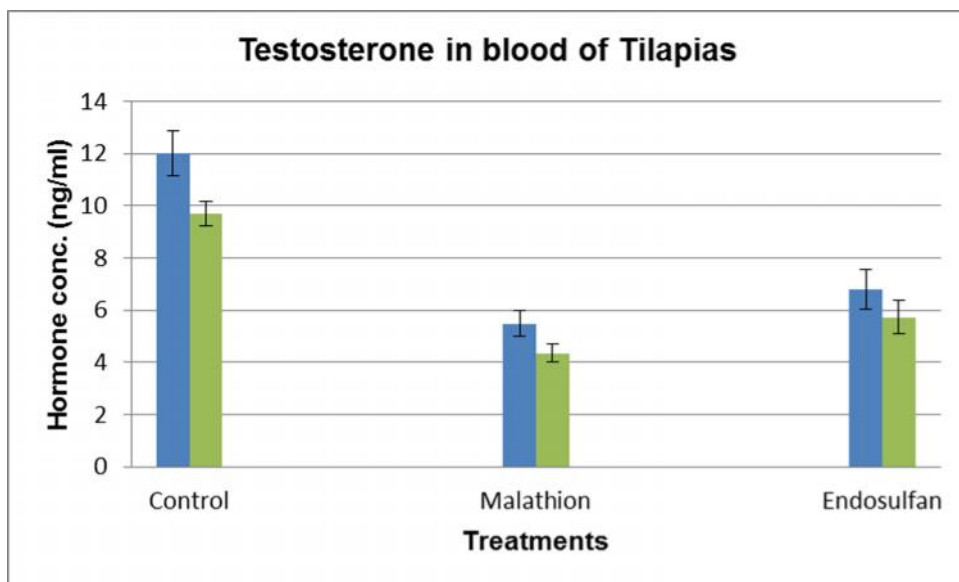


Figure 5. Testosterone in blood of Tilapias exposed to sub-lethal concentration of pesticides. Blue bars correspond to values calculated from absorbance lectures at 205 nm, and green bars to those at 270 nm.

The bioaccumulation factors (ppm in tissue/ppm in the water) of pesticides in the dorsum-lateral tissue of fishes exposed are shown in (Fig. 6). The organochlorine pesticides presented bioaccumulation factors much higher than those of organophosphorus pesticides: 760 for endosulfan and 310 for lindane compared with 41.3 for malathion and 11.9 for diazinon.

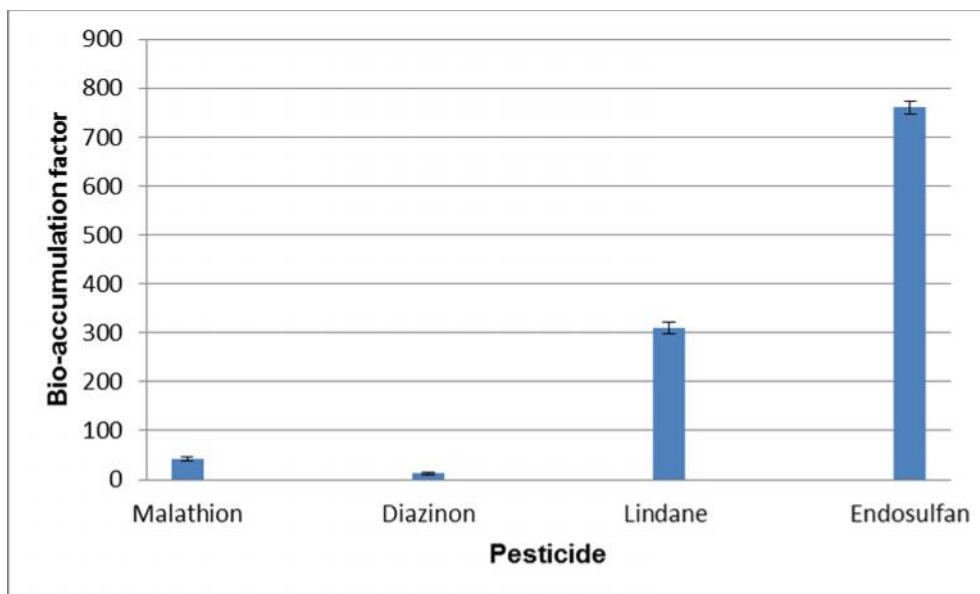


Figure 6. Bioaccumulation factors of pesticides in the dorsolateral tissue of tilapias exposed to sub-lethal concentration of pesticides.

3.2 Discussion

The four pesticides assayed caused reduction in the hormonal levels in blood, particularly 17- β -estradiol. They may therefore be considered endocrine disruptors. This is in agreement with their listing in the European Census of Endocrine Disruptors [20, 21].

In previous studies, the pesticides utilized in this work have been reported in water, sediments, shrimps and fishes of coastal ecosystems of Sinaloa [22, 23, 24]. It is also well documented that they are widely used in the agricultural fields of this region [4]. Endosulfan is an organochlorine pesticide widely used in Sinaloa due its great efficiency and low cost. Its residence in the soils is reported between 60 to 800 days [25] and has been reported as an endocrine disruptor [26]. Lindane (γ - hexachlorocyclohexane) is also an organochlorine pesticide used in agricultural fields of Sinaloa. Although it is legal, its use has been restricted in Mexico. Its toxicity is moderate, but it is very persistent in the environment and can cause injuries to the nervous, endocrine and reproductive systems [25]. Diazinon is an organophosphorous pesticide that is highly toxic but not persistent. It reportedly does not accumulate in animal tissues and is eliminated by organisms in few days. However, in this work its bioaccumulation factor in fish tissue during the exposure time, was 11.9. Malathion is also an organophosphorus pesticide widely used in Sinaloa, particularly in sanitary campaigns for controlling dengue's vector (*Aedes spp.* mosquitoes). The majority of data on their toxic effects on fauna have been generated in studies with fishes and amphibians [15, 25].

Several pesticides have been identified as endocrine disruptors in other vertebrate fishes, including atrazine, 2,4-D, DDE, DDT, diazinon, diuron, endosulfan, fenthrothion, glyphosate, lindane, parathion, and permethrin; for instance, it has been shown that DDT and methoxychlor have xenoestrogenic activity, meaning that they are chemically similar to estrogens and trigger hormonal responses in exposed organisms, including the induction of vitellogenesis in young male fishes [11]. In normal conditions, only the females are able to produce vitellogenin, due to the action of hormone 17- β -estradiol. It has been previously reported that tilapia (*Oreochromis spp.*) like other vertebrate fishes, response to stressing compounds (pesticides, PCBs and other pollutants) can produce several biochemical and physiological responses in nervous and endocrine systems, such as increasing or reducing the hormonal levels in the blood, the branchial blood flow, the muscular activity and induction of vitellogenesis [27].

4. CONCLUSION

From the results can be concluded that pesticides assayed are endocrine disruptors in tilapia fish, and consequently, important endocrine functions are impaired, such growing, sexual maturity, reproduction, etc. On the other hand, the pesticides accumulated in tilapia's tissue represent a risk in public health, since this organism is a popular food in Mexico and other developing countries.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors declare to have no conflict of interests

ETHICAL APPROVAL

All authors hereby declare that "Principles of laboratory animal care" (NIH publication No. 85-23, revised 1985) were followed, as well as specific national laws where applicable. All experiments have been examined and approved by the appropriate ethics committee.

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