Volume 3, Issue 2, February 2025 ISSN (E): 2938-3765

IMPACT OF TRIBULUS TERRESTRIS ON TESTICULAR MORPHOLOGY AND MORPHOFUNCTIONAL STATUS OF THE TESTES

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Abstract
Tribulus terrestris, a plant widely recognized for its potential use in traditional medicine, has gained attention for its influence on male reproductive health. This literature review explores the effects of Tribulus terrestris on the morphological and morphofunctional state of the testes. Studies have demonstrated its role in enhancing spermatogenesis, increasing testosterone levels, and influencing the structural integrity of testicular tissue. The plant's bioactive compounds, particularly saponins, are thought to be responsible for its beneficial effects on male fertility. This review synthesizes findings from various experimental and clinical studies, examining the mechanisms by which Tribulus terrestris affects the testes and male reproductive function. The results suggest that Tribulus terrestris may have therapeutic potential for male infertility and related disorders, though further research is necessary to fully understand its efficacy and safety.

Keywords. Tribulus terrestris, testes, morphology, morphofunctional state, male reproduction, testosterone, spermatogenesis, fertility, plant-based medicine, saponins.

Introduction

Male infertility, characterized by the inability to achieve a clinical pregnancy after 12 months of unprotected intercourse, affects approximately 40% of couples worldwide. Among these cases, male factors contribute to about 50%, with idiopathic infertility remaining a significant challenge. Semen quality, encompassing sperm count, motility, and morphology, serves as a primary indicator of male fertility. Notably, sperm motility is a critical determinant, with a motility rate below 40% often associated with reduced fertility potential[1].

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the use of herbal supplements to enhance male reproductive health. Tribulus terrestris, a plant renowned for its traditional use as an aphrodisiac, has garnered attention for its potential effects on male fertility. Studies have indicated that Tribulus terrestris may influence various aspects of male reproductive function, including sperm parameters and hormonal levels [3].

A systematic review encompassing seven clinical trials concluded that Tribulus terrestris supplementation generally resulted in improvements in sperm parameters, such as count, motility,

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and morphology. Specifically, six out of the seven studies reported positive effects, suggesting a potential therapeutic role for Tribulus terrestris in male infertility[8].

Further research has explored the impact of Tribulus terrestris on sperm motility and viability. In rodent models, administration of Tribulus terrestris extract led to significant enhancements in sperm count, motility, and viability, indicating its potential to improve sperm quality[9].

The active compounds in Tribulus terrestris, particularly saponins like protodioscin, are believed to play a pivotal role in modulating male reproductive functions. Protodioscin is thought to increase androgen receptor sensitivity, thereby enhancing the effects of androgens such as testosterone and dihydrotestosterone. This mechanism may contribute to the observed improvements in sperm parameters and overall fertility [en.wikipedia.org].

Despite these promising findings, the clinical application of Tribulus terrestris in male fertility treatment remains a subject of debate. Variations in study designs, dosages, and methodologies have led to inconsistent results, underscoring the need for further rigorous clinical trials to establish definitive therapeutic guidelines.

This article aims to provide a comprehensive review of the current literature on the effects of Tribulus terrestris on the morphological and morphofunctional state of the testes. By synthesizing findings from various studies, we seek to elucidate the potential mechanisms underlying its effects and assess its viability as a therapeutic agent in male infertility management.

Literature Analysis

Tribulus terrestris, a plant of the Zygophyllaceae family, has been extensively studied for its potential effects on male reproductive health. Research indicates that Tribulus terrestris may influence testicular morphology and function through various mechanisms.

A study by Da Silva et al. (2023) investigated the impact of Tribulus terrestris on testicular morphology and sperm production in rats. The researchers administered a dose of 100 mg/kg body weight of Tribulus terrestris for 40 days. The results showed no significant differences in sperm concentration, motility, and viability between the treated and control groups. However, subtle modifications were observed in testicular morphology, including increased seminiferous epithelium height and tubular lumen surface density in the treated group. These findings suggest that while Tribulus terrestris may induce minor morphological changes, it does not markedly affect sperm parameters [2,10].

In contrast, a study by Sellandi et al. (2012) reported that supplementation with Tribulus terrestris extract led to significant improvements in sperm quality, including increased sperm count and motility. This discrepancy highlights the variability in outcomes across different studies, possibly due to variations in dosages, preparation methods, and experimental conditions[5,11].

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have led to inconsistent results, underscoring the need for further rigorous clinical trials to establish definitive therapeutic guidelines.

Methodology

This review synthesizes findings from various experimental and clinical studies to evaluate the effects of Tribulus terrestris on testicular morphology and function. The selection criteria for included studies were as follows:

- **Study Design**: Randomized controlled trials, cohort studies, and experimental animal studies.
- **Population**: Male subjects, including human participants and animal models such as rats and rabbits.
- **Intervention**: Administration of Tribulus terrestris in any form (e.g., extract, powder) and dosage.
- **Outcome Measures**: Assessment of testicular morphology (e.g., seminiferous tubule diameter, epithelium height) and function (e.g., sperm count, motility, viability).

Studies were identified through comprehensive searches of databases such as PubMed, Scopus, and Web of Science, using keywords including "Tribulus terrestris," "testicular morphology," "sperm quality," and "male fertility." Data extraction focused on study design, sample size, intervention details, outcome measures, and key findings.

The quality of the included studies was assessed using the Cochrane Risk of Bias Tool for randomized controlled trials and the SYRCLE's Risk of Bias Tool for animal studies. Data synthesis involved a qualitative analysis due to the heterogeneity of the studies, with a focus on identifying consistent patterns and discrepancies in the effects of Tribulus terrestris on male reproductive health.

This methodology aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current evidence regarding the impact of Tribulus terrestris on testicular morphology and function, highlighting areas of consensus and identifying gaps in the literature that warrant further investigation.

Results

The effects of Tribulus terrestris (Tt) supplementation on testicular morphology and sperm quality were evaluated through a comprehensive analysis of various studies. The findings are summarized as follows:

Testicular Morphology

- **Seminiferous Epithelium Height**: In a study by Da Silva et al. (2024), rats treated with Tt exhibited a significant increase in seminiferous epithelium height compared to the control group, indicating potential alterations in spermatogenic activity[10].

- **Tubular Lumen Surface Density**: The same study reported an augmentation in tubular lumen surface density in the Tt-treated group, suggesting changes in the structural configuration of seminiferous tubules[7,10].

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- **Leydig Cell Morphometry**: Research by Oliveira et al. (2015) demonstrated that supplementation with Tt extract led to increased nuclear and cytoplasmic volumes of Leydig cells, which are responsible for testosterone production[6,11].

Sperm Quality

- **Sperm Motility**: In a clinical trial by Salgado et al. (2017), men supplemented with Tt exhibited a significant improvement in sperm motility, with motile sperm increasing from 68% in the control group to 80% in the Tt group [12].

- **Sperm Count**: The same study observed an increase in sperm concentration from 90 million/mL in the control group to 120 million/mL in the Tt group, indicating enhanced spermatogenesis[4,12].

- **Sperm Viability**: No significant differences were noted in sperm viability between the control and Tt-treated groups, suggesting that Tt supplementation did not adversely affect sperm membrane integrity[11].

Hormonal Levels

- **Testosterone**: Studies have shown that Tt supplementation can lead to increased serum testosterone levels. For instance, a study by Gauthaman et al. (2002) reported a significant rise in testosterone concentrations in rats treated with Tt extract[11].

Statistical Analysis. The studies reviewed employed various statistical methods to analyze the data:

- **Student's t-test**: Used to compare means between two groups, as seen in the study by Da Silva et al. (2024) assessing sperm parameters[10].

- **Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)**: Employed in studies like that of Oliveira et al. (2015) to compare multiple groups, followed by post-hoc tests to identify specific differences[11].

- **Chi-square Test**: Utilized in clinical trials such as that by Salgado et al. (2017) to analyze categorical data like sperm morphology[12].

The results indicate that Tribulus terrestris supplementation may induce subtle morphological changes in the testes, such as increased seminiferous epithelium height and tubular lumen surface density, without significantly affecting sperm count, motility, or viability. Additionally, Tt supplementation appears to enhance testosterone levels, which could contribute to improved sperm quality. However, the variability in study designs, dosages, and methodologies underscores the necessity for further rigorous clinical trials to establish definitive therapeutic guidelines.

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Discussion

The present review critically examines the impact of *Tribulus terrestris* (Tt) on testicular morphology and sperm quality, integrating findings from various experimental and clinical studies. While some studies report beneficial effects, others indicate minimal or no significant changes, underscoring the complexity of Tt's role in male reproductive health.

Testicular Morphology

In rodent models, Tt supplementation has been associated with subtle alterations in testicular architecture. For instance, a study by Da Silva et al. (2023) observed an increase in seminiferous epithelium height and tubular lumen surface density in rats treated with Tt. However, these changes did not translate into significant differences in sperm concentration, motility, or viability [10].

Similarly, Oliveira et al. (2015) reported that supplementation with Tt extract led to increased nuclear and cytoplasmic volumes of Leydig cells, which are responsible for testosterone production. These findings suggest that while Tt may induce minor morphological changes, its impact on sperm parameters remains inconclusive [11].

Sperm Quality

Clinical trials have yielded mixed results regarding Tt's effect on sperm quality. A systematic review encompassing seven clinical trials concluded that Tt supplementation generally resulted in improvements in sperm parameters, such as count, motility, and morphology. Specifically, six out of the seven studies reported positive effects, suggesting a potential therapeutic role for Tt in male infertility [8].

Conversely, other studies have found no significant improvements in sperm quality following Tt supplementation. For example, a study by Haghmorad et al. (2019) reported that while Tt supplementation influenced spermatogenesis, it did not improve sperm quality in male Wistar rats[11].

Hormonal Effects

The impact of Tt on hormonal levels, particularly testosterone, is also a subject of debate. Some studies have reported significant increases in serum testosterone levels following Tt supplementation. For instance, Gauthaman et al. (2002) observed a significant rise in testosterone concentrations in rats treated with Tt extract [11].

However, other studies have found no significant changes in testosterone levels. For example, a study by Haghmorad et al. (2019) reported that Tt supplementation did not affect serum testosterone levels in male Wistar rats[11].

Mechanisms of Action

The active compounds in Tt, particularly saponins like protodioscin, are believed to play a pivotal role in modulating male reproductive functions. Protodioscin is thought to increase androgen receptor sensitivity, thereby enhancing the effects of androgens such as testosterone and

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dihydrotestosterone. This mechanism may contribute to the observed improvements in sperm parameters and overall fertility [11].

Conclusion

The effects of Tribulus terrestris on testicular morphology and sperm quality remain inconclusive. While some studies suggest potential benefits, others indicate minimal or no significant changes. The variability in study designs, dosages, and methodologies underscores the necessity for further rigorous clinical trials to establish definitive therapeutic guidelines. Future research should focus on standardized protocols, appropriate dosages, and comprehensive assessments to elucidate the true impact of Tt on male reproductive health.

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