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Protease Inhibitory Activity and Protein Analysis of Catfish (*Pangasius hypophthalmus*) and Swamp Eel (*Monopterus albus*) Blood Plasma

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ABSTRACT

Protease inhibitors can prevent protein from degradation caused by protease activity. Blood plasma contains a variety of protease inhibitors. The objective of this study was to investigate the potential use of crude blood plasma from catfish (*Pangasius hypophthalmus*) and swamp eel (*Monopterus albus*) as protease inhibitors. The parameters observed were moisture content, protein content, ash content, inhibitory activity to trypsin and papain enzymes and protein profile of blood plasma. The inhibitory activity increased as the volume of blood plasma increased (25 μ L, 50 μ L, 75 μ L, 100 μ L). The inhibitory activity of blood plasma from catfish was 7.66-50.73% to trypsin enzyme and 20.34-83.05% to papain enzyme while the inhibitory activity of blood plasma from swamp eel was 9.49-46.35% to trypsin enzyme and 28.81-64.41% to papain enzyme. The highest inhibitory activity was demonstrated by swamp eel blood plasma with molecular weight between 19.84-174.14

kDa (13 proteins). Protein content of blood plasma from swamp eel (11.92%) was lower than catfish (16.63%) but resulted higher enzyme inhibitory activity. Further research can be conducted to carry out purification steps on blood plasma that are expected to show better inhibitory activity.

Keywords: Blood plasma, catfish, protease inhibitor, swamp eel

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INTRODUCTION

Fish is a commonly used food around the world and is classified as perishable food. One of the factors that affect the rapid change in fish quality is the high protein content. In general, protein content in fish is 15-20%, but protein content lower than 15% and higher than 28% is also found in some fish species (Murray & Burt, 1983). Protease enzymes act on fish protein to bring about its deterioration in its quality.

The decline in quality after the post mortem phase is one of the most unfavourable changes in fish muscle. During post mortem, degradation of muscle proteins contributes to the rapid softening of flesh. The protein proteolysis can be attributed to endogenous protease activity (Chéret et al., 2007). Two characterized proteolytics are known to hydrolyze protein during post mortem storage of meat and fish muscle: calpains and cathepsins (Jiang, 2000; Ouali, 1992). Cathepsin L is one of the most important protease enzymes in the softening process in fish meat, and in surimi processing it is a problem because washing cannot eliminate it. The presence of cathepsin enzyme in surimi or fish mince results in a decrease in gel strength with a brittle and non-elastic gel at temperature around 60°C (Rawdkuen et al., 2007). Ho et al. (2000) reported that cathepsin L and L-like in mackerel surimi had Myosin Heavy Chain (MHC)-degrading ability which consequently caused gel softening during setting at 40-45°C. In addition, texture softening also occurs in grass carp fillets caused by Cathepsin B and L as the

major endogenous enzymes that leads to proteolytic degradation (Ge et al., 2014).

One way to inhibit proteolytic degradation by cathepsin enzymes is by using blood plasma. Blood plasma contains a variety of protease inhibitors, including α 2-macroglobulin which is a protease inhibitor of some protease classes with its mechanism of action baits and traps (Barret, 1981). Many studies have been conducted using plasma to inhibit the work of cathepsin enzymes, including cow blood plasma (Kang & Lanier, 1999; Marquez-Alvarez et al., 2015), pig blood plasma (Benjakul et al., 2001; Benjakul & Visessanguan, 2000), chicken blood plasma (Rawdkuen et al., 2007a) and salmon blood plasma (Fowler & Park, 2015). However, the utilization of blood plasma from cattle and chickens is limited due to mad cow disease infection as well as avian influenza in poultry.

Blood plasma comprises 46-63% of total blood volume, with moisture content being 92% (Martini, 2005). According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (Nomura, 2007), the global fish catch and aquaculture amounted to 106 million tons in 2004, and since blood is about 7% of body weight (Philips & Williams, 2011), this would amount to 7 million tons. Fish blood is generally not utilized but has the potential to be collected and processed to produce value-added foods based on its nutritional value and functional properties (Lynch et al., 2017). Fish blood can be extracted for application in the food, biomedical and pharmaceutical sectors (Lafarga et al., 2015; Lafarga et al., 2016; Mullen et al., 2015).

The objective of this study was to investigate the ability of blood plasma from two freshwater tropical fish (catfish and swamp eel) to function as protease inhibitor towards the enzymes trypsin and papain.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Materials

Live catfish (*Pangasius hypophthalmus*) (size 2-4/kg) and swamp eel (*Monopterus albus*) (size 10-15/kg) were obtained from Indralaya traditional market, South Sumatera, Indonesia. Trypsin (from bovine pancreas), papain (from papaya latex), N_α -Benzoyl-L-arginine-DL β -naphthylamide (BANA) and N_α -Benzoyl-L-arginine 4-nitroanilide hydrochloride (BAPNA) were purchased from Sigma Aldrich (USA).

Collecting of Blood Plasma

The collecting of crude blood plasma was according to methods described in Fowler and Park (2015). Whole blood was collected from bleeding fish into bottles containing EDTA (Ethylenediaminetetraacetic acid), and then centrifuged for 15 min at 1500 g at 4°C. The supernatant was regarded as plasma and kept in freezer until it was used.

Proximate Analysis

Protein Content (Bradford, 1976). The protein analysis followed the method of Bradford (1976) and the Bovine Serum Albumin (BSA) was used as the standard.

Preparation of Bradford Reagent Solution. A 25 mL aliquot of ethanol (95%) was

mixed with 5 mg of Commassie Brilliant Blue G250. The solution was then added to 50 mL H_3PO_3 85% and homogenized. The mixture was adjusted with distilled water until it reached a volume of 100 mL and kept at 4°C before use.

Preparation of Standard Solution. The preparation of standard solutions for protein analysis is given in Table 1. Ten mg of BSA was added to 10 mL of distilled water and then stirred with a magnetic stirrer to give a homogeneous solution. Specific volumes of BSA (0.1, 0.2, 0.4, 0.6, 0.8 and 1 mL) were added to different volume of distilled water (0.9, 0.8, 0.6, 0.4, 0.2 and 0 mL) respectively, and then 5 mL of Bradford solution was added to each mixture. The mixtures were allowed to react for 30 minutes at room temperature. The absorbance was read at 595 nm.

Table 1
The concentration of standard solution (Bovine Serum Albumin)

BSA (mL)	Distilled water (mL)	Concentration (mg/mL)
0.1	0.9	0.1
0.2	0.8	0.2
0.4	0.6	0.4
0.6	0.4	0.6
0.8	0.2	0.8
1	0	1

Preparation of Blank. One mL of distilled water was mixed with 5 mL of Bradford solution which was then homogenized and allowed to react for 30 minutes at room temperature. The absorbance was read at 595 nm.

Sample Assay. A 1 mL of sample plasma was mixed with 9 mL of distilled water. A 0.5 mL of the mixture was then added to 1.8 mL of Bradford reagent. The solution was allowed to react at room temperature for 30 minutes. The absorbance was read at 595 nm. The concentration of protein was determined by the following equation:

$$y = ax + b$$

y = absorbance of sample

a = slope

b = intercept

x = protein concentration of sample

Moisture Content. The moisture content was determined using the evaporation principle until the sample reached a constant weight at 105°C (Association of Official Analytical Chemists [AOAC], 2005). The blood plasma sample used was 1 mL.

Ash Content. The ash content analysis was determined by the combustion of organic compounds at 550°C (AOAC, 2005). The blood plasma sample used was 1 mL.

Trypsin Inhibition Assay. Trypsin inhibition was determined according to the methods of Fowler and Park (2015). Four different blood plasma volumes ((25, 50, 75, 100 µL) (Table 2) were diluted with distilled water and adjusted to 0.2 mL. 150 µL of the inhibitor solution was added to 300 µL of trypsin enzyme (20 µg/mL) and 150 µL of distilled water and pre-incubated at 37°C for 10 min. 750 µL of 0.4 mg/mL BAPNA in 50 mM tris-HCl buffer (pH 8.2) containing 20 mM CaCl₂ and pre-warmed to 37°C was then added, and the reaction mixture was incubated for 37°C for 10 minutes. The reaction was stopped by adding 150 µL of 30% acetic acid (v/v). Absorbance was read at 410 nm and inhibitory activity was expressed as percent decrease in OD₄₁₀ compared to the control.

Papain Inhibition Assay. Papain inhibition was determined according to the method of Fowler and Park (2015). Four different blood plasma volumes ((25, 50, 75, 100 µL) (Table 2) were diluted with distilled water and

Table 2

Volume of catfish and swamp eel blood plasma sample for trypsin and papain inhibition assay

Sample	Papain Assay			Trypsin Assay		
	Plasma Volume (µL)	Protein Concentration (mg/mL)	Plasma Concentration (mg/mL)	Plasma Volume (µL)	Protein Concentration (mg/mL)	Plasma Concentration (mg/mL)
Catfish Plasma	25	0.21	1.25	25	2.08	12.5
	50	0.42	2.5	50	4.16	25
	75	0.62	3.75	75	6.24	37.5
	100	0.83	5	100	8.32	50
Swamp eel Plasma	25	0.15	1.25	25	1.49	12.5
	50	0.30	2.5	50	2.98	25
	75	0.45	3.75	75	4.47	37.5
	100	0.60	5	100	5.96	50

adjusted to 2 mL. 2 mL of 0.25 M sodium phosphate buffer (pH 6.0) containing 2.5 mM EDTA and 25 mM β -mercaptoethanol (β ME) was added to 0.1 mL of papain solution (100 μ g/mL) containing 25 mM sodium phosphate buffer (pH 7.0) and 2 mL of inhibitor solution. After preincubation at 37°C for 5 min, 0.2 mL of 2 mM BANA was added to initiate the reaction. After 10 min of incubation, 1 mL of cold 2% HCl in ethanol was added to stop the reaction. 1 mL of 0.06% ρ -dimethylamino-cinnamaldehyde was then added to show the colour of the final solution. Absorbance was read at 540 nm and the inhibitory activity was expressed as the percent decrease in OD₅₄₀ compared to the control.

Molecular Weight of Inhibitor

The SDS-PAGE procedure was followed according to the method described by Laemmli (1970). A 12% resolving gel and a 3.5% stacking gel were used. The sample buffer consisted of 188 mM M Tris-HCl pH 6.8, 15% β -mercaptoethanol, 3% SDS, 0.01% bromophenol blue, and 30% glycerol in deionized water. Sample preparation was conducted by mixing protein samples with loading buffer in a ratio 1:1 and heating the mixture to 95°C for 10 min to denature the protein samples. An SDS-PAGE broad-range molecular weight standard (6.5 to 200 kDa) (Bio-Rad, Alfred Nobel Drive, Hercules, CA, U.S.A) was used. The running buffer consisted of 0.12 M Tris base, 0.95 M glycine and 0.5% SDS (w/v) in deionized water. Samples and protein standard were run into well. After finishing

the process, gels were then immersed in deionized water for 5 min and stained with coomassie blue stain buffer for 20 minutes and destained with a destaining buffer for 1 min. The gels were then immersed in 1% acetic acid and incubated for 1 h on a shaker. The acetic acid was replenished every hour until the gel was completely de-stained.

Statistical Analysis

Only descriptive statistics was utilized for the reporting of the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Proximate Analysis of Blood Plasma

Table 3 shows the proximate analysis for each blood plasma. The moisture content of catfish blood plasma was 91.46% and 93.05% for the swamp eel.

Table 3
The proximate analysis of catfish (Pangasius hypophthalmus) and swamp eel (Monopterus albus) blood plasma

Source of plasma	Proximate Analysis		
	Moisture content (%)	Protein (mg/mL)	Ash (%)
Cat Fish	91.46	16.63	0.75
Swamp eel	93.05	11.92	0.92

According to Kisia (2016) and Martini (2005), moisture content in plasma of vertebrates is 90-92%. The difference of moisture content in plasma is due to differences in the chemical composition, such as protein content and ash content, which affects moisture content. Proteins are important components and functions in maintaining water balance in the blood and

tissues, regulating blood volume, helping the transport of fat, vitamins, and hormones and as antibodies.

The protein content of catfish plasma was 16.63 mg/mL and the swamp eel plasma was 11.92 mg/mL. Protein in plasma reflects the blood protein content, except for hemoglobin. Plasma proteins are divided into three main components [21] albumin (42% w / v), globulin (56%) (α 1-globulin, α 2-globulin, β -globulin, and γ -globulin) and fibrinogen (1%). The largest proportions contained in solutes include proteins, which account for 6% -8% in blood plasma (Moure et al., 2003). Kisia (2016) suggested that solutes in fish blood plasma varied between freshwater fish and marine fish. The protein content of fish plasma is relatively low when compared to other vertebrates. The blood proteins are important in the maintenance of the right osmotic pressure and viscosity of blood.

The ash content of catfish and swamp eel plasma were 0.75% and 0.92% respectively. The difference of the ash content in plasma is related to endogenous (genetically controlled and associated with species-specific life cycles) and exogenous (such as environmental and dietary) factors (Perschbacher & Stickney, 2018). Ash content reflects the mineral content in blood plasma. Minerals in the blood plasma are part of a minor component of blood plasma which amounts to 1% (Martini, 2005; Moure et al., 2003). Minerals make up the normal extracellular fluid ion composition for vital cellular activity and contributes to the osmotic pressure of body fluids. The major

plasma electrolytes are Na^+ , K^+ , Ca^{2+} , Mg^{2+} , Cl^- , HCO_3^- , HPO_4^{2-} , and SO_4^{2-} (Martini, 2005).

Inhibitory Activity of Blood Plasma

The inhibitory activity of blood plasma to protease enzyme increased as the concentration of blood plasma for both fishes increased. The protease inhibitory activity ranged from 7.66 to 50.73% for trypsin and 20.34 to 83.05% for papain for the catfish blood plasma (Figure 1), while the protease inhibitory activity of the swamp eel blood plasma ranged from 9.49 to 46.35% for trypsin and 28.81 to 64.41% for papain (Figure 2).

The blood plasma protease inhibitory activity to papain was higher than that of trypsin. This result was in contrast with the recommendation of Yongswatdigul et al. (2014) and Sriket (2014), where the surimi made from tropical fish were susceptible to serine protease attacks that caused protein degradation. But this was in line with the result of Ge et al., (2013) that reported softening occurred in grass carp fillets caused by cathepsin B and L as the major endogenous enzymes leading to proteolytic degradation.

The highest protease inhibitory activity on trypsin and papain was by the swamp eel blood plasma even though its protein concentration was lower than that of the catfish blood plasma (0.15-0.60 mg/mL and 0.21-0.83 mg/mL, respectively). This was probably due to the higher efficacy of the protein plasma of the eel acting as a protease inhibitor as compared to that in

the catfish. Fowler and Park (2015) showed that protease inhibitory activity of salmon plasma ranged between 25% - 81% for papain and below 20% for trypsin. The higher inhibitory activity of the salmon

blood plasma as compared to that of the catfish and swamp eel (this study) was probably related to it being free of impurities such as water, fat, ash, and other non-protein components.

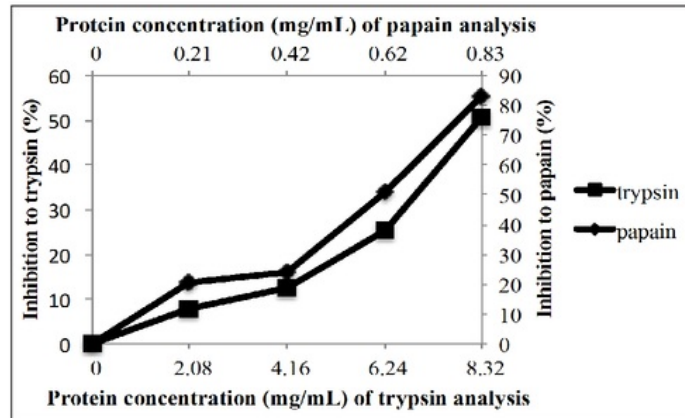


Figure 1. Inhibitory activity of catfish (*Pangasius hypophthalmus*) blood plasma to trypsin and papain enzymes

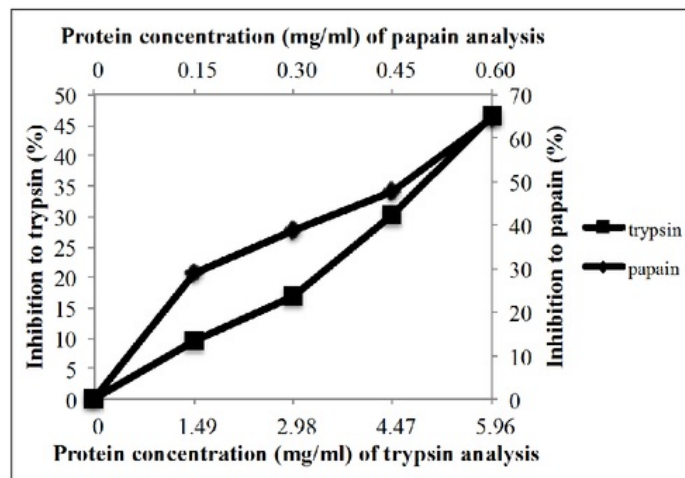


Figure 2. Inhibitory activity of swamp eel (*Monopterus albus*) blood plasma to trypsin and papain enzymes

Molecular Weight of Blood Plasma

The molecular weight of catfish (C1-C3) and swamp eel blood plasma (S1-S3) is in the range of 9.64 to 124.36 kDa (10 proteins)

and 19.84 to 174.14 kDa (13³² proteins) respectively (Figure 3). The molecular weight of the protein bands detected in the blood plasma of the catfish and swamp eel (this study) showed similarities with

molecular weight of pig plasma. The band is presumed to be α -globulin protein to have molecular weight ranging from 105 kDa - 150 kDa, while albumins had molecular weight of 65 kDa - 69 kDa. α_2 -globulin is a protease inhibitor and indigenously in blood plasma and shows inhibitory activity against serine, cysteine, carboxyl and metallo-proteinases (Benjakul et al., 2001; Lee et al., 2000). According to Benjakul and Visessanguan (2000), the serine protease inhibitor is in the range of 58-64 kDa and this is within the range of the proteins in catfish and eel plasma which is able to inhibit the enzymes chymotrypsin and trypsin. Li et al. (2008) reported the presence of the cysteine protease inhibitor at 55 kDa. The variation of the proteins from the catfish and swamp eel determined by the SDS-PAGE analysis reflected their inhibitory activity. The higher variation of the proteins in the swamp eel blood plasma may explain its higher inhibitory activity than that of the catfish.

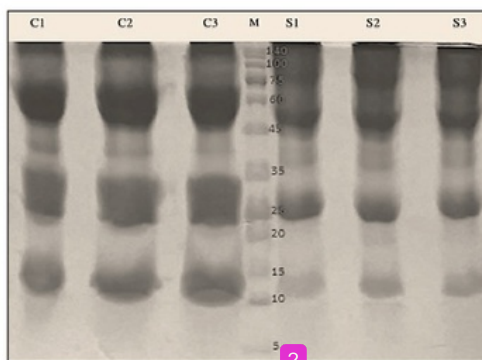


Figure 3. Molecular weight of catfish (*Pangasius hypophthalmus*) (C1, C2, C3) and swamp eel (*Monopterus albus*) (S1, S2, S3) blood plasma (M= protein marker)

CONCLUSION

Both the catfish and swamp eel blood plasma showed inhibitory activity towards trypsin and papain. Papain is a cysteine protease and its inhibition was higher than that of trypsin. The highest inhibitory activity to protease enzyme was from the swamp eel blood plasma.

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