

Trabalho



Título em Português: Avaliação Biológica e In Silico de Candidatos a Novos Fármacos para Doença de Chagas

Título em Inglês: Biological and In Silico Evaluation of New Drug Candidates for Chagas Disease

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AVALIAÇÃO BIOLÓGICA E *IN SILICO* DE CANDIDATOS A NOVOS FÁRMACOS PARA DOENÇA DE CHAGAS

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Objetivos

(i) Avaliação da atividade antiparasitária de compostos da classe Acenafto[1,2-b]pirróis; (ii) Determinação de citotoxicidade frente a fibroblastos humanos; (iii) Estudos de modelagem molecular com a proteína cruzaina; (iv) Predição de propriedades físico-químicas e farmacocinéticas.

Métodos e Procedimentos

A atividade antiparasitária foi realizada contra a forma amastigota intracelular de *T. cruzi* Tulahuen *LacZ*, infectando fibroblastos humanos (linhagem HFF-1). A detecção da atividade foi realizada usando o substrato CPRG (Sigma-Aldrich). A citotoxicidade foi avaliada em fibroblastos mediante análise colorimétrica de redução da resazurina em resorufina em células viáveis. Os valores de IC_{50} e CC_{50} foram determinados pelo software GraphPad Prism 8, sendo utilizados para o cálculo do índice de seletividade ($IS = CC_{50}/IC_{50}$). Os ensaios de modelagem molecular foram conduzidos através do software GOLD v.2022.1.0 [1] e os resultados foram analisados visualmente usando o Discovery Studio Visualizer versão v21.1.0 e

PyMOL versão v3.0. A predição de propriedades físico-químicas e farmacocinéticas foi realizada usando a ferramenta online SwissADME.

Resultados

A identificação de candidatos a novos fármacos para a doença de Chagas se baseou em uma triagem fenotípica de uma série de 5 compostos da classe Acenafto[1,2-b]pirróis. Dentre os compostos testados o composto **3** apresentou a maior atividade inibitória ($IC_{50} < 10 \mu M$ e $CC_{50} > 64 \mu M$). Além disso, os compostos **1** e **2** apresentaram um índice de seletividade maior que **5**. Com base nesses resultados, esses três compostos foram selecionados para investigação quanto à possível atividade em uma proteína essencial para a viabilidade do parasita, a cruzaina. A enzima cruzaina é a principal cisteína protease do *T. cruzi* e é um alvo validado para a doença de Chagas [2]. Ensaios de modelagem molecular com a proteína cruzaina identificaram que o composto **2** apresentou a maior afinidade pelo sítio ativo da proteína. Essa afinidade foi evidenciada pela formação de ligações de hidrogênio com os resíduos GLN19, GLY66 e ASP158, os mesmos envolvidos nas interações do ligante

- [1] "BdEC." [Online]. Available: bdec.dotlib.com.br/inicio_csds/application/Hermes. [Accessed: 19-Jan-2024].
- [2] M. L. De Souza *et al.*, "Discovery of Potent, Reversible, and Competitive Cruzain Inhibitors with Trypanocidal Activity: A Structure-Based Drug Design Approach," *J. Chem. Inf. Model.*, vol. 60, no. 2, pp. 1028–1041, 2020.
- [3] Lipinski, C. A., Lombardo F., Dominy B. W., & Feeney P. J. Experimental and computational approaches to estimate solubility and permeability in drug discovery and development settings. *Advanced Drug Delivery Reviews*, 23, 3-25, 1997.

BIOLOGICAL AND *IN SILICO* EVALUATION OF NEW DRUG CANDIDATES FOR CHAGAS DISEASE

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Objectives

(i) Antiparasitic activity evaluation of compounds from the acenaphtho[1,2-b]pyrrole class; (ii) Cytotoxicity investigation against human fibroblasts; (iii) Molecular modeling studies with the cruzain protein; (iv) Prediction of physicochemical and pharmacokinetic properties.

Materials and Methods

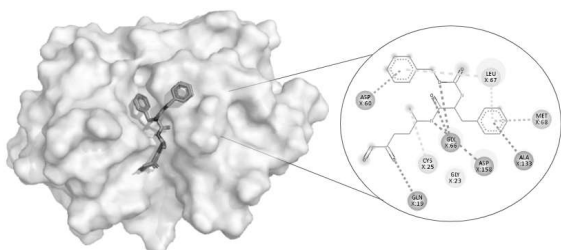
The antiparasitic activity assessment was evaluated against the intracellular amastigote form of *T. cruzi* Tulahuen LacZ, infecting human fibroblasts (HFF-1 cell line). Activity detection was performed using the CPRG substrate (Sigma-Aldrich). Cytotoxicity was assessed in fibroblasts through a colorimetric assay based on the reduction of resazurin to resorufin in viable cells. IC₅₀ and CC₅₀ values were determined using GraphPad Prism 8 and employed to calculate the selectivity index (SI = CC₅₀/IC₅₀). Molecular modeling studies were carried out using GOLD v.2022.1.0 [1], and results were visually analyzed with Discovery Studio Visualizer v21.1.0 and PyMOL v3.0. Prediction of physicochemical and

pharmacokinetic properties were performed using the online SwissADME tool.

Results

The identification of new drug candidates for Chagas disease was based on a phenotypic screening of five compounds from the acenaphtho[1,2-b]pyrrole class. Among the tested compounds, compound **3** exhibited the highest inhibitory activity (IC₅₀ < 10 µM; CC₅₀ > 64 µM). In addition, compounds **1** and **2** showed a selectivity index greater than 5. Based on these results, these three compounds were selected for further investigation regarding their potential activity against cruzain, an essential protein for parasite viability. Cruzain is the main cysteine protease of *T. cruzi* and a validated target for Chagas disease [2]. Molecular modeling assays with cruzain revealed that compound **2** displayed the strongest affinity for the enzyme's active site. This affinity was evidenced by the formation of hydrogen bonds with residues GLN19, GLY66, and ASP158, the same residues involved in interactions with the co-crystallized ligand (Figure 1). The evaluation of physicochemical and pharmacokinetic properties indicated that the compounds exhibit drug-like characteristics, with no violations to Lipinski's rules. Lipinski's

rules relate lipophilicity, the number of hydrogen bond donors and acceptors, and molecular weight to the likelihood of a compound being orally active [3]. Regarding pharmacokinetic properties, the compounds showed similar behaviors, with high gastrointestinal absorption and permeability across the blood-brain barrier.



Picture 1: Redocking performed with cruzain (PDB: 1U9Q), root-mean-square deviation (RMSD) of 0.45. Hydrogen bonds are represented in green.

Conclusions

Among the five compounds tested, three showed a selectivity index (SI) > 5 and were further investigated for potential affinity with the cruzain protein through molecular modeling, in which compound **2** displayed the highest affinity. In addition, all investigated compounds were predicted to have high gastrointestinal absorption. Therefore, the results obtained in this work may contribute to the design of a new series of selective molecules for Chagas disease treatment.

The authors declare no conflict of interest. M.A. carried out the *in vitro* experiments, computational investigations, and wrote the abstract. A.R.C. supervised the *in vitro* experiments and contributed to the writing and final revision of the abstract. J.V.S.S. supervised the molecular modeling studies and contributed to the writing and final revision of the abstract. A.D.A. conceived and designed the study, supervised the activities, and contributed to the writing and final revision of the abstract.

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