



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

***DESIGN AND CHARACTERIZATION OF INHIBITORY PEPTIDES
AGAINST BLEG1_2478, B3 SUBCLASS METALLO- β -LACTAMASE***

GAYATHRI A/P SELVARAJU

FBSB 2021 36



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BLEG1_2478, B3 SUBCLASS METALLO- β -LACTAMASE**

By

GAYATHRI A/P SELVARAJU

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra
Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science**

April 2021

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science

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By

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April 2021

Chairman : Associate Professor Normi binti Mohd Yahaya, PhD
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Metallo- β -lactamase (MBL) is an enzyme which hydrolyses β -lactam antibiotics. Their production by bacteria, particularly bacterial pathogens, is one of the mechanisms used to resist the action of the antibiotics. MBL requires zinc ions for this particular function. There are four classes of MBLs, B1, B2, B3 and B4 MBLs. Among them B3 MBLs do not have available clinical inhibitors and they have the widest substrate degradation spectrum. Previously, a hypothetical protein (HP) termed Bleg1_2478, which has a 3-D predicted structure and tested activity spectrum similar to B3 class MBL was discovered from *Bacillus lehensis* G1 alkaliphile. However, phylogenetic analysis showed that it is not related to any currently circulating B3 MBLs. As clinical inhibitors for B3 MBL are absent and that Bleg1_2478 is not related to any currently circulating B3 MBLs, there is a need to develop inhibitors specifically for Bleg1_2478. Therefore, this study aimed to design and characterise peptides as inhibitors against Bleg1_2478. Inhibitory peptides were designed by retrieving peptides from CAMP_{R3} database and subsequently derivated based on functional residues around Bleg1_2478 active site which contains the zinc binding site. The binding energies of the peptides were determined via fixed protein-ligand docking using YASARA and AutoDock Vina software and compared with those of the preferred substrate, ampicillin. As a result, nine peptides with higher binding energies (>8.52 kcal/mol) towards the enzyme Bleg1_2478 were successfully designed. These peptides were then used for global protein-ligand docking to investigate other possible binding sites on the protein other than its active site. Inhibitory assay of these peptides on purified Bleg1_2478 recombinant protein was performed at 1, 10 and 20 μ M respectively. The inhibitory peptides, RSWPWH and SSWWDR, depicted approximately 50% of inhibition of Bleg1_2478 at concentrations as low as 0.90 μ M and 0.50 μ M respectively. Analysis of the peptide-protein interaction via isothermal titration calorimetry (ITC) showed a 1.5 and 3 fold increase in the binding affinity of RSWPWH and SSWWDR respectively towards

Bleg1_2478; as compared to ampicillin. More significant is the binding strength of these peptides whereby they exhibited a respective 34 to 68-fold increase compared to ampicillin. Similar to ampicillin, both of the inhibitory peptides bind to Bleg1_2478 at one binding site, as can be observed from their stoichiometric value. Physicochemical computation of both peptides revealed, the basic or cationic nature of RSWPWH and its predicted binding site near the vicinity of the active site of Bleg1_2478 may have contributed for to its ease of interaction with Bleg1_2478, hence, giving forth free energy (G) and enthalpy factor values that are more favourable and spontaneous. The dissociation constant, K_d , revealed that RSWPWH is more susceptible to dissociate from the protein due to the location of its binding site which expose it to pH changes caused by the cellular environment. On the other hand, SSWWDR inhibitory peptide is less prone to dissociate from the protein as it has zero net charge and it binds to the narrow groove of the Bleg1_2478 active site, an area that is less accessible and less susceptible to changes in the cellular environment. In conclusion, both peptides obtained can be used as a potential inhibitor against Bleg1_2478 and possibly other B3 MBLs.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sains

REKAAN DAN PENCIRIAN PEPTIDA PERENCATAN TERHADAP BLEG1_2478, METALLO- β -LACTAMASE SUBKELAS B3

Oleh

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Metallo- β -laktamase (MBL) ialah enzim yang menghidrolisis antibiotik β -laktam. Penghasilannya oleh bakteria, terutama bakteria patogenik merupakan salah satu mekanisme yang digunakan untuk merintang tindakan antibiotik. MBL memerlukan ion zink bagi fungsi ini. Terdapat 4 kelas MBL iaitu B1, B2, B3 and B4 MBL. Di kalangannya subkelas B3 MBL tidak mempunyai sebarang perencat klinikal dan ia mempunyai spektrum degradasi substrat yang paling luas. Sebelumnya, suatu protein hipotetikal (HP) yang dikenali sebagai Bleg1_2478, yang mempunyai struktur ramalan 3D dan spektrum aktiviti yang diuji yang sama seperti subkelas B3 MBL telah ditemui di dalam *Bacillus lehensis* G1 alkalifil. Namun, analisis filogenetik menunjukkan bahawa ia tidak mempunyai perkaitan dengan sebarang B3 MBL yang sedang beredar. Oleh kerana perencat klinikal untuk B3 MBL masih tiada dan Bleg1_2478 tidak berkaitan dengan sebarang B3 MBL yang sedang beredar, terdapat keperluan untuk membangunkan perencat khususnya untuk Bleg1_2478. Maka, kajian ini bertujuan untuk mereka cipta dan mencirikan peptida sebagai perencat terhadap Bleg1_2478. Peptida perencat telah direka dengan memuat turun peptida dari pangkalan data CAMPR3 dan kemudiannya diterbitkan berdasarkan residu-residu fungsian di sekitar tapak aktif Bleg1_2478 yang mengandungi tapak pengikatan zink. Tenaga pengikatan peptida ditentukan melalui pendokan tetap protein-ligan dengan menggunakan perisian YASARA dan AutoDock Vina dan dibandingkan dengan substrat terpilih iaitu ampisilin. Hasilnya, sembilan peptida dengan tenaga pengikatan yang lebih tinggi (>8.52 kcal/mol) terhadap enzim Bleg1_2478 berjaya direka cipta. Peptida-peptida ini kemudian digunakan untuk pendokan global protein-ligan untuk menyiasat tapak pengikatan yang berkemungkinan ada pada protein tersebut selain daripada tapak aktifnya. Ujian perencatan peptida ini pada protein rekombinan Bleg1_2478 yang telah dituliskan dilakukan pada 1, 10 dan 20 μM masing-masing. Peptida perencat, RSWPWH dan SSWWDR, menunjukkan anggaran 50% perencatan pada Bleg1_2478 pada kepekatan serendah 0.90 μM dan

0.50 μM masing-masing. Analisis interaksi peptida-protein melalui isothermal kalorimetri penittratan (ITC) menunjukkan peningkatan sebanyak 1.5 dan 3 kali ganda dalam afiniti pengikatan RSWPWH dan SSWWDR masing-masing terhadap Bleg1_2478; berbanding dengan ampisilin. Lebih signifikan ialah kekuatan pengikatan peptida ini di mana kedua-duanya menunjukkan peningkatan 34 hingga 68 kali ganda berbanding ampisilin. Sama seperti ampisilin, kedua-dua peptida perencat mengikat pada Bleg1_2478 pada satu tapak pengikat, seperti yang boleh diperhatikan daripada nilai stoikiometrinya. Pengiraan fizikokimia kedua-dua peptida mendedahkan bahawa sifat bes atau kationik RSWPWH dan tapak pengikatannya yang diramalkan berhampiran kawasan aktif Bleg1_2478 mungkin telah menyumbang kepada kemudahannya berinteraksi dengan Bleg1_2478, maka, memberikan tenaga bebas (G) dan nilai faktor entalpi yang lebih digemari dan spontan. Pemalar penceraian, K_d , mendedahkan bahawa RSWPWH lebih cenderung untuk berpisah dari protein tersebut kerana lokasi tapak pengikatannya yang mendedahkannya kepada perubahan pH yang disebabkan oleh persekitaran sel. Sebaliknya, peptida perencat SSWWDR tidak cenderung untuk berpisah daripada protein tersebut kerana ia mempunyai cas bersih sifar dan ia mengikat pada alur sempit tapak aktif Bleg1_2478, iaitu suatu kawasan yang sukar diakses dan kurang cenderung terhadap perubahan persekitaran sel. Kesimpulannya, kedua-dua peptida yang diperolehi boleh digunakan sebagai perencat yang berpotensi terhadap Bleg1_2478 dan kemungkinan juga B3 MBL yang lain.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Foremost, I would like to express gratitude to my supervisor, Associate Professor Dr. Normi Mohd Yahaya, for giving me the opportunity to work in this project. I could not find words to express my love and respect for her. She has been a great supervisor who always motivates me, and she is honest, strict, and patient. Her guidance helped me a lot in research and writing this thesis, and it is impossible to complete this project without her support. Next, I would like to thank my supervisory committee, Professor Dato' Dr. Abu Bakar Bin Salleh, and Associate Professor Dr. Adam Leow Thean Chor, for their guidance and insights on this research area. Moreover, my sincere appreciation to all the lecturers of the Enzyme and Microbial Technology (EMTech) research group.

My sincere gratitude to Ms. Azyyati Binti Mohd. Padzil, Malaysian Genome Institute (MGI), for guiding me in Isothermal Titration Calorimetry (ITC). My sincere thanks extended to all the postgraduate students of EMTech and Protein Engineering Laboratory, who shared their knowledge and also supported me. My gratitude extended to the staff of Biotechnology and Biomolecular Sciences, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), for their help and cooperation. I am so grateful to *L'Oréal-Unesco Fellowship for Women in Science* grant (Grant No.: 6300833), Putra Research Grant UPM (Grant No.:9502100), and Graduate Research Fellowship (GRF) for providing financial support to carry out this research.

I am very much indebted to my parents, Mr. Selvaraju Gopal and Mrs. Tulasiamah Angamuthu, and all my family members for their love and moral support. Last but not least, my friends Ashwaani Mangavelu, Revathi Kavirajan, Durgadevi Mohan, and Fatin Lyana Azman Shah, who stood with me in my ups and downs. Finally, my sincere appreciation extended to the people who indirectly contributed to this research. Thank you.

This thesis was submitted to the Senate of the Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

%	Percentage
°C	Degree Celsius
µg/mL	Microgram per milliliter
µL	Microliter
µM	Micro molar
3D	Three Dimensional
Å	Angstrom
A _{600nm}	Optical density at wavelength 600 nanometer
Ala	Alanine
AMP	Antimicrobial peptide
AMR	Antimicrobial resistance
Arg	Arginine
Asn	Asparagine
Asp	Aspartic acid
BSA	Bovine serum albumin
CA	Community-associated
Cation-π	Cation-pi
Cys	Cysteine
DNA	Deoxyribonucleic acid
EDTA	Ethylene-diamine-tetraacetic acid
g	Gram
Gln	Glutamine
Glu	Glutamic acid
Gly	Glycine
HA	Hospital-associated

H-Bond	Hydrogen Bond
His	Histidine
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
Ile	Isoleucine
IPTG	Isopropyl-Beta-D-Thiogalactoside
Kcal/ mol	kilocalorie per mole
k Da	Kilo Dalton
kJ/ mol	kilo Joule per mole
L	Litre
LB	Luria-Bertani
Leu	Leucine
M	Molar
MBL	Metallo- β -lactamase
Met	Methionine
MgSO ₄	Magnesium Sulphate
mL	Milli Liter
mM	Millimolar
MRSA	Methycillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus
NaCl	Sodium chloride
NaPO ₄	Sodium phosphate
Ni	Nickel
nm	Nano meter
ns	Non-susceptible
OD	Optical Density
PBP	Penicillin-binding protein
Phe	Phenylalanine

Pro	Proline
s	Seconds
SDS - PAGE	Sodium deodecyl sulphate Polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis
Ser	Serine
Thr	Threonine (T)
Tyr	Tyrosine
w/v	Weight per volume
WHO	World Health Organization
Zn	Zinc
ZnSO ₄	Zinc Sulfate
α	Alpha
β	Beta
π-π	pi-pi

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

β -lactam antibiotics have been used widely as frontline therapeutics in treating bacteria related infections and diseases (Huttner et al., 2015). These molecules specifically target bacterial pathogens by interfering bacterial cell wall synthesis, which will eventually cause cell lysis. However, the emergence of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) among bacterial pathogens had raised major concerns in global public health.

AMR can render the commonly used antibiotics and antimicrobial therapy ineffective, prolong hospital stay and increase medical expenses. Severe cases of AMR can lead to more complicated medical procedures such as surgery to remove the focal point of infection and even untimely deaths. AMR will exert a huge impact on the world economy in the future if the current situation is not tackled. According *Antimicrobial Resistance: Tackling a crisis for the health and wealth of nations* (2014), the forecasted death toll by the year 2050 due to AMR is reported to be 300 million people with declination of world's GDP around 2 to 3.5% (O'Nei, 2014).

AMR among bacteria can be acquired through various means i.e. through: (1) hydrolysis or inactivation of antibiotics by synthesizing enzymes (Bassetti et al., 2013); (2) redox process i.e. exploiting the oxidation or reduction process of the antibiotics (Yang et al., 2004); (3) modification of antibiotics by chemical substitution (Schwarz et al., 2005); (4) target modification (modification of the target site) (Spratt, 1994); (5) mutations on genes that encode the target or efflux pump that effect antibiotics uptake (Ruiz, 2003); (6) horizontal gene transfer where resistant genes are transferred from one pathogen to another via transduction, conjugation or transformation (Abushaheen et al., 2020).

One of the well-studied AMR mechanisms involves β -lactamase enzymes. β -lactamases deactivates β -lactam antibiotics before they reach their target. They exert their function by hydrolysing the β -lactam ring of the β -lactam antibiotics. Metallo- β -lactamases (MBLs) are β -lactamases that specifically require Zn^{2+} metal ions as cofactor for their catalysis and are among the most studied group of β -lactamases due to their broad substrate spectrum. Among MBLs, the B3 subclass in particular has garnered attention in the recent decade due to their inability to be inhibited by commonly used clinical inhibitors or drug combinations (Rojas et al., 2017; Gangadharappa et al., 2019).

As a result, the growth of the antibiotics industry in search of new molecules experienced tremendous growth. The *Antibiotics Market Size and Share: Industry Trends Report, 2019-2026* (2019) highlighted that the global antibiotics market for the year 2018 was USD 45.31 billion and was forecasted to reach USD 62.06 billion by the year 2025 with the compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 4.0% per year. One of the main reasons for the increment in growth of the market size is due to the imbalance of supply and demand.

Previously, a hypothetical protein termed Bleg1_2437 (currently renamed as Bleg1_2478) which has comparable sequence identity to MBL in the range of 43-65% was discovered from the pool of hypothetical proteins of *Bacillus lehensis* G1 alkaliphile. Its predicted *in silico* structure revealed that Bleg1_2478 contained the $\alpha\beta\alpha$ fold and global topology similar to MBLs. Analysis on its active site and metal-binding ligands revealed similarity to B3 MBLs. Biochemical analysis of purified recombinant Bleg1_2478 protein showed β -lactam hydrolysis with ampicillin as the preferred substrate (Tan et al., 2017). However, based on evolutionary relationship, it did not exhibit relatedness to other currently circulating B3 MBLs (Tan et al., 2017).

With the lack of inhibitors against B3 MBLs and the fact that Bleg1_2478 is not related to any currently circulating B3 MBLs, and yet has the ability to hydrolyse β -lactam antibiotics, this is of concern to local public health related to AMR. Hence, the general aim of this study is to design inhibitory peptides against Bleg1_2478 B3 subclass MBL and characterize their inhibitory potential and properties. The specific objectives are:

1. To design inhibitory peptides against Bleg1_2478 via *in silico* approach
2. To evaluate their binding properties and effect on the structure of Bleg1_2478 B3 MBL via docking analysis
3. To biochemically and biophysically characterize the inhibitory activities and properties of the peptides via *in vitro* assays with Bleg1_2478 purified enzyme.

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