



**POTENTIAL OF *ELATERIOSPERMUM TAPOS* BLUME EXTRACT AS  
CONJUGATION INHIBITOR FOR PREVENTING DISSEMINATION OF  
TETRACYCLINE RESISTANCE GENE TRANSFER**

**By**

**NUR AINAA NABIHAH BINTI MOHD GHAZALI**

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

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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

**POTENTIAL OF *ELATERIOSPERMUM TAPOS* BLUME EXTRACT AS CONJUGATION INHIBITOR FOR PREVENTING DISSEMINATION OF TETRACYCLINE RESISTANCE GENE TRANSFER**

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**December 2021**

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**Faculty : Medicine and Health Sciences**

Dissemination of antibiotic resistance has caused major threat to human health especially in causing hospital-acquired infections. Horizontal gene transfer, mainly conjugation is the responsible transfer mechanism of antibiotic resistance genes among antibiotic resistant bacteria. The search for specific compounds or molecules that are able to inhibit conjugation is therefore significant for preventing antibiotic resistance gene transfer. Unsaturated fatty acids specifically oleic, linoleic and alpha-linolenic acids are known as conjugation inhibitors due to their conjugation inhibition ability, although most of the previous studies used synthetic unsaturated fatty acids. In this study, *Elateriospermum tapos* seed oil (ETSO) with high unsaturated fatty acids composition was obtained using Soxhlet extraction method and used to determine its potential in preventing conjugal transfer of tetracycline resistant-gene (*tetM*). Antimicrobial susceptibility testing was carried out to determine resistance profiles of bacterial strains prior to conjugation assay. Filter mating experiment between *Lactococcus garvieae* KHS-97051, *Enterococcus faecalis* JH2-2, *Clostridium difficile* ribotype 014 and *Enterococcus faecalis* ATCC 51299 were conducted to determine suitable donor and recipient cells for conjugation inhibition study. Successful transfer of *tetM* gene in transconjugants was confirmed by colony re-streaking, Gram-staining and polymerase chain reaction (PCR). *E. faecalis* JH2-2 transconjugants conferring *tetM* resistance were produced from mating between *L. garvieae* KHS-97051 donor and *E. faecalis* JH2-2 recipient. Transfer frequency decreased from  $(6.11 \pm 1.80) \times 10^{-6}$  to  $(5.99 \pm 3.44) \times 10^{-10}$  transconjugant per donor and  $(5.85 \pm 1.58) \times 10^{-8}$  to  $(5.89 \pm 2.31) \times 10^{-10}$  transconjugant per recipient after exposed to ETSO. Transconjugant colonies following ETSO exposure was reduced from 163 to 9 colonies with 94.48% of

conjugation inhibition. Although, no transconjugant was observed from two conjugation sets of *C. difficile* donor and *E. faecalis* JH2-2 and *E. faecalis* ATCC 51299 recipients proven that mating is a donor-recipient specific event. Scanning (SEM) and transmission electron microscopy (TEM) were used to identify the effects of ETSO exposure towards donor and recipient cells during conjugation. The average size of pili produced from control and ETSO exposed mating cells were  $0.213 \pm 0.029$  and  $0.093 \pm 0.042$   $\mu\text{m}$ , respectively hence demonstrated that there is significant difference between the two groups. Aside from conjugative pili, there was no appearance of short, numerous attachment pili known as fimbriae on the cell surface of both cells. However, less cell-to-cell contact and pili formations were captured in the exposed donor and recipient cells. Smooth continuous cell wall and membrane of non-exposed recipient cell was observed but the cell thickness increased in the exposed recipient cell. There was no difference in cell diameter before and after ETSO exposure. No damaging effects were observed towards the exposed cells. The COIN potential of ETSO highlighted in this study will extend the current knowledge on the antimicrobial resistance in bacteria and enable the future development of a promising alternative bottom-up strategy to control the emergence and spread of antimicrobial-resistant bacteria.

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

**POTENSI EKSTRAK *ELATERIOSPERMUM TAPOS* BLUME SEBAGAI PENGHALANG KONJUGASI BAKTERIA UNTUK MENCEGAH PEMINDAHAN GEN RINTANGAN TETRACYCLINE**

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Penyebaran rintangan antibiotik telah menyumbang kepada ancaman besar terhadap kesihatan manusia terutamanya dalam menyebabkan jangkitan di hospital. Pemandahan gen mendatar, terutamanya konjugasi merupakan mekanisme utama yang terlibat dalam pemandahan gen rintangan antibiotik. Asid lemak tak tepu khususnya asid oleik, linoleik dan alpha-linolenik dikenali sebagai penghalang konjugasi berikutan keupayaannya dalam menghalang konjugasi bakteria. Namun begitu, kebanyakan kajian yang lepas hanya menggunakan asid lemak tak tepu tiruan. Menerusi kajian ini, minyak biji *Elateriospermum tapos* atau juga dikenali sebagai buah Perah yang tinggi dengan kandungan asid lemak tak tepu telah diekstrak menggunakan kaedah Soxhlet dan digunakan dalam menentukan keupayaannya dalam mencegah pemandahan konjugasi gen rintangan tetracycline (*tetM*). Ujian kerentanan antibiotik telah dilakukan untuk menentukan profil ketahanan strain bakteria sebelum ujian konjugasi. Saringan pengawanan melibatkan sekumpulan bakteria jenis *Lactococcus garvieae* KHS-97051, *Enterococcus faecalis* JH2-2, *Clostridium difficile* ribotype (RT) 014 dan *Enterococcus faecalis* ATCC 51299 telah dijalankan untuk menentukan sel penderma dan penerima yang sesuai untuk kajian perencatan konjugasi. Kejayaan pemandahan gen *tet(M)* telah disahkan melalui pencoretan semula, pewarnaan Gram dan tindak balas berantai polimerase (PCR). Transkonjugan *E. faecalis* JH2-2 mengandungi gen *tet(M)* berjaya dihasilkan melalui pengawanan antara sel penderma *L. garvieae* KHS-97051 dan sel penerima *E. faecalis* JH2-2. Kekerapan pemandahan menurun daripada  $(6.11 \pm 1.80) \times 10^{-6}$  kepada  $(5.99 \pm 3.44) \times 10^{-10}$  transkonjugan per penderma dan daripada  $(5.85 \pm 1.58) \times 10^{-8}$  kepada  $(5.89 \pm 2.31) \times 10^{-10}$  transkonjugan per penerima selepas pendedahan terhadap minyak biji buah

Perah. Jumlah koloni sel transkonjugan yang dihasilkan berikutan pendedah minyak biji buah Perah berkurang daripada 163 ke 9 koloni dengan peratusan perencatan konjugasi sebanyak 94.48%. Walau bagaimanapun, pengawanan antara dua kumpulan bakteria penderma *C. difficile* dengan sel penerima *E. faecalis* JH2-2 serta *E. faecalis* ATCC 51299 tidak menghasilkan sebarang transkonjugan. Hal ini menunjukkan bahawa proses pengawanan bakteria memerlukan sel penderma dan sel penerima yang khusus. Mikroskopi elektron pensakanan dan trasmisi telah digunakan untuk mengenal pasti kesan pendedahan minyak biji buah Perah terhadap sel penderma dan penerima semasa konjugasi. Purata saiz pili yang terhasil dari proses konjugasi control dan yang terdedah kepada minyak biji buah Perah adalah  $0.213 \pm 0.029$  dan  $0.093 \pm 0.042 \mu\text{m}$ . Ini jelas menunjukkan bahawa terdapat perbezaan dalam saiz pili antara dua kumpulan tersebut. Selain pili konjugasi, tiada cerapan kemunculan pili pendek dan bercantum yang dikenali sebagai fimbriae dihasilkan. Namun demikian, terdapat pengurangan dalam pembentukan pili konjugasi dan jarak perhubungan antara sel yang terdedah kepada minyak biji buah Perah. Kajian ini mendapati bahawa pendedahan terhadap minyak biji buah Perah tidak menyebabkan perbezaan dalam diameter sel bakteria dan kerosakan kepada sel yang terdedah. Potensi perencatan konjugasi oleh minyak biji buah Perah yang diketengahkan dalam kajian ini dapat memperluas pengetahuan terkini mengenai ketahanan antimikrob dalam bakteria dan membolehkan pengembangan strategi alternatif dalam mengawal kemunculan dan penyebaran bakteria tahan antimikrob.

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This thesis was submitted to the Senate of 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

%	Universiti Putra Malaysia
°C	degree Celsius
µg	Microgram
µg/ml	Microgram per millilitre
µL	Microliter
µm	Micrometre
Amp	Ampicillin
ATCC	American Type Culture Collection
ATP	Adenosine triphosphate
BHI	Brain Heart Infusion
BLASTn	Basic Local Alignment Search Tool nucleotide
bp	Base pair
<i>C. difficile</i>	<i>Clostridium difficile</i>
CDC	Centers for Disease Control
CFU	Colony Forming Unit
Cn	Gentamicin
DMSO	Di-methyl sulfonium oxide
DNA	Deoxyribonucleic acid
<i>E. faecalis</i>	<i>Enterococcus faecalis</i>
<i>E. tapos</i>	<i>Elateriospermum tapos</i>
ETSO	<i>Elateriospermum tapos</i> seed oil
Fa	Fusidic acid

g	Gram
Kb	Kilobase
L	Litre
<i>L. garvieae</i>	<i>Lactococcus garvieae</i>
MRSA	Methicillin-resistant <i>Staphylococcus aureus</i>
NCBI	National Center of Biotechnology Information
NIH	National Institute of Health
nm	nanometer
OD <sub>600</sub>	Optical density 600
PCR	Polymerase Chain Reaction
Rif	Rifampicin
rpm	rotation per minute
RT	PCR ribotyping
SEM	Scanning Electron Microscopy
Tc	Tetracycline
TEM	Transmission Electron Microscopy
<i>tet(M)</i>	Tetracycline M
V	Volts

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background

Antibiotics discovery is one of the most significant medical breakthroughs of the 20th century. Antibiotics have helped many physicians in saving patients' lives and successfully played a key role in achieving major advances in medicine and surgery (Gould and Bal, 2013). Aside from being used for preventing or treating infections in patients who are receiving chemotherapy treatments and those with chronic diseases, most modern medical procedures today are made possible with antibiotics. This includes organ transplants, joint replacements and open-heart surgery (Golkar et al., 2014). However, the overuse and misuse of antibiotics have unfortunately caused the evolution of antibiotic resistance which now has become a major threat to human health (Rossolini et al., 2014).

The rapid rise of antibiotic resistance has made many previously efficient antimicrobial drugs turn out to be no longer effective for some infections. Lack of access to quality antibiotics remains a global issue and antibiotic shortages are affecting countries of all levels of development (Carlet et al., 2012). Bacteria acquired antibiotic resistant genes through horizontal gene transfer and spontaneous mutation. Previous studies have confirmed that antibiotic resistance is mainly transferred among bacteria of different species via bacterial conjugation (van Hoek et al., 2011). These antibiotic-resistant bacteria may then infect humans and animals thus, causing severe illnesses, increasing mortality rates and risk of complications and admission to hospital.

The World Health Organisation (WHO, 2016) has introduced a global action plan on antimicrobial resistance with five strategic objectives mainly focusing on improving awareness and understanding, strengthening surveillance and research, reducing the incidence of infection, optimizing the use of antimicrobial drugs and ensuring sustainable investment in countering antimicrobial resistance. In the mid of losing the battle against infectious diseases, scientists are continuously searching for a specific molecule or compound that may be able to inhibit antibiotic resistant genes transfer during bacterial conjugation, henceforward preventing the widespread of antibiotic resistance (Cabezón et al., 2017). Studies have proven that unsaturated fatty acids such as oleic-, linoleic- and alpha-linolenic acids share similar characteristics allowing these compounds to inhibit bacterial conjugation and are known as specific conjugation inhibitors. However, previous researches have mostly used synthetic oleic and linolenic acids to investigate their conjugation inhibitory

potential (Ripoll-Rozada et al., 2016), yet the status of unsaturated fatty acids derived from natural sources are still unknown.

In Malaysia, the seed of *Elateriospermum tapos* or also known as *buah perah* is discovered as a new source of seed oil containing a high percentage of unsaturated fatty acids such as oleic-, linoleic- and alpha-linolenic acids (Tan et al., 2014). Due to the availability of this underutilized species of plant in Peninsular Malaysia, this potential local plant to be further explored as the next conjugation inhibitor to tackle the worldwide antibiotic resistance problem.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

The fast spread of antibiotic resistance demands effective means to stop, or at least slow down their dissemination. Since antibiotic resistance genes disseminate mostly by conjugation, strategies to control conjugation could provide effective means to curb antibiotic resistance dissemination. Hence, the search for compounds that can specifically inhibit bacterial conjugation is crucial in the fight against antibiotic resistant bacteria.

## **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

### **1.3.1 General Objectives**

The main objective of this study is to investigate the potential of *E. tapos* extract as a conjugation inhibitor in preventing the spread of tetracycline resistance gene transfer.

### **1.3.2 Specific Objectives**

- i. To screen for suitable donor and recipient strains as conjugation model.
- ii. To determine the potential of *E. tapos* seed oil as a conjugation inhibitor for antibiotic resistant gene transfer.
- iii. To observe the phenotypic effects of the donor and recipient cells in response to *E. tapos* seed oil exposure during conjugation.

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