



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

***CLINICO-PATHOLOGICAL AND HAEMATO-BIOCHEMICAL
RESPONSES IN SHEEP FED WITH LOW AND HIGH LEVELS OF
Brachiaria decumbens (Stapf) DIET***

KALAI VAANI A/P MUNIANDY

IPTSM 2021 11



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By

KALAI VAANI A/P MUNIANDY

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

July 2021

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

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July 2021

Chairman : Eric Lim Teik Chung, PhD
Institute : Tropical Agriculture and Food Security

Brachiaria decumbens is a highly productive tropical grass for ruminant production that present abundantly in Malaysia. Nevertheless, there were many reports of sporadic outbreaks of general ill-thrift and deaths in ruminants attributable to the presence of steroidal saponins. As a result, farmers would not be able to utilise this grass as a feed source for ruminants. The present study aims to determine the clinico- pathology, haemato-biochemistry, and acute phase proteins (APPs) responses of sheep fed with low and high levels of *B. decumbens* diets at different time phases. A total of 30 six-month-old male Dorper cross sheep were randomly divided into three treatment groups consisted of 10 sheep each. Treatment 1 (control) sheep were fed with *Pennisetum purpureum* and concentrates as the basal diet, whereas Treatment 2 and 3 sheep were fed with low (10%) and high (60%) level of *B. decumbens*, respectively. The low and high levels were determined by evaluating the saponins concentration of *B. decumbens* at different percentages mixed with *P. purpureum*. This study was conducted in two phases consisted of the acute (7 days) and chronic (90 days) stages. Throughout the experiment, the clinical responses such as rectal temperature, respiratory rate, heart rate, and mucous membrane colour were evaluated and recorded. At day 0, 7, and 90, blood samples were collected via jugular venipuncture for complete blood count and acute phase proteins analysis, while cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) were collected via lumbar puncture at the lumbosacral site for haptoglobin (Hp) and serum amyloid A (SAA) analyses. At the end of 7th day (acute stage) and 90th day (chronic stage) of experiment period, five animals from each treatment group were slaughtered for post mortem examination and histopathology evaluation. There were no significant changes ($p > 0.05$) in the rectal temperature, pulse, and respiration rate throughout the study period except for the mucous membrane colour. T3 sheep demonstrated pale mucous membrane starting from day 60 until the end of experiment on day 90, whereas T2 sheep only showed pale mucous membrane at the chronic phase of the study which was on day 90. In addition, the haematology results revealed significant differences ($p < 0.05$) in the red blood cells (RBC), mean corpuscular volume (MCV), mean corpuscular hemoglobin concentration

(MCHC), white blood cells (WBC), neutrophils, monocytes, eosinophils, basophils, platelets, and plasma proteins between groups. Except for packed cell volume (PCV), there were also significant differences in all haematology parameters at different time phases. All biochemistry parameters except creatinine revealed significant differences ($p < 0.05$) among treatment groups. There were significant differences in all parameters between phases. On the other hand, APPs results also showed significant differences ($p < 0.05$) in the serum Hp, serum SAA, and CSF SAA between groups and time. At necropsy, no apparent lesions were observed in all organs as well as no significant differences in the organ morphometric analysis. Histologically, both T2 and T3 sheep exhibited mild and moderate necrosis & degeneration; haemorrhages & congestion; and oedema of the liver and brain respectively. In summary, this study has established the effects of the low and high levels of *B. decumbens* diets and at different time phases in sheep which could provide valuable information to future *B. decumbens* research.



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

RESPON KLINIKO-PATALOGI DAN HEMATO-BIOKIMIA PADA BIRI-BIRI YANG DIBERI MAKAN *Brachiaria decumbens* (Stapf) PADA TAHAP RENDAH DAN TINGGI

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Brachiaria decumbens adalah rumput tropika yang sangat produktif untuk produksi ruminan. Walaubagaimana pun, terdapat banyak kes mengenai wabak penyakit dan kematian pada ruminan disebabkan oleh saponin bersteroid yang terdapat dalam rumput ini. Oleh itu, peladang tidak dapat menggunakan rumput ini sebagai sumber makanan untuk ternakan ruminan. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menyiasat perubahan klinikal-patologi, haemato-biokimia, dan kepekatan akut protein fasa (APP) dalam bebiri selepas diberi rumput *B. decumbens* yang mengandungi tahap saponin rendah dan tinggi pada fasa masa yang berbeza. Sebanyak 30 ekor bebiri (Dorper cross) berusia enam bulan dibahagikan sama rata kepada tiga kumpulan rawatan yang masing-masing terdiri daripada 10 ekor bebiri. Kumpulan 1 (kawalan) diberi makan dengan *Pennisetum purpureum* dan pellet sebagai diet basal, sedangkan kumpulan 2 dan 3 diberi masing-masing diberi *B. decumbens* tahap saponin rendah (10%) dan tinggi (60%). Tahap saponin rendah dan tinggi ditentukan dengan menilai kepekatan saponin *B. decumbens* pada peratusan berbeza yang dicampurkan dengan *P. purpureum*. Kajian ini dilakukan dalam dua fasa yang terdiri daripada tahap akut (7 hari) dan kronik (90 hari). Sepanjang eksperimen ini, perubahan klinikal seperti suhu, kadar pernafasan, kadar denyutan jantung (TPR), dan perubahan warna membran mukus dinilai dan direkodkan. Sampel darah dan cecair serebrospinal (CSF) diambil pada hari 0, 7, dan 90 bagi analisis untuk menentukan kepekatan akut protein fasa. Pada akhir hari ke-7 dan hari ke-90, lima bebiri dari setiap kumpulan rawatan disembelih untuk penilaian bedah siasat dan pemeriksaan histopatologi. Tidak ada perbezaan yang signifikan ($p > 0.05$) pada suhu, kadar pernafasan, dan kadar degupan jantung sepanjang kajian ini kecuali warna membran mukus. Biri-biri T3 menunjukkan membran mukus pucat bermula dari hari ke 60 hingga akhir kajian, sementara biri-biri T2 menunjukkan membran mukus pucat hanya pada hari ke-90. Di samping itu, analisis darah menunjukkan perbezaan yang signifikan ($p < 0.05$) dalam sel darah merah (RBC), rata-rata isipadu korpuskular (MCV), kepekatan hemoglobin korpuskular (MCHC), sel darah putih (WBC), neutrofil, monosit, eosinofil, basofil, platelet, dan protein plasma antara kumpulan. Kecuali PCV, terdapat perbezaan

yang signifikan dalam semua parameter hematologi pada fasa waktu yang berbeza. Semua parameter biokimia kecuali kreatinin menunjukkan perbezaan yang signifikan antara kumpulan rawatan. Terdapat perbezaan yang signifikan dalam semua parameter antara fasa. Selain itu, keputusan APP menunjukkan perbezaan yang signifikan bagi serum haptoglobin, serum SAA, dan CSF SAA antara kumpulan dan masa. Semasa bedah siasat, tidak ada kecederaan yang nyata pada semua organ dan tidak terdapat perbezaan yang signifikan pada organ morphometrik. Pada analisis histologi, organ hati and otak masing-masing daripada kumpulan T2 dan T3 menunjukkan nekrosis dan degenerasi; pendarahan, dan edema pada skor ringan dan sederhana. Kesimpulannya, kajian ini telah membuktikan kesan tahap saponin rendah dan tinggi *B. decumbens* pada fasa masa yang berbeza dalam biri-biri dan dapat dijadikan maklumat yang baru untuk penyelidikan *B. decumbens* pada masa akan datang.



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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

<i>B. decumbens</i>	<i>Brachiaria decumbens</i>
CSF	Cerebrospinal fluid
APP	Acute phase proteins
APR	Acute phase responses
Hp	Haptoglobin
SAA	Serum Amyloid A
RBC	Red blood cells
Hb	Hemoglobin
PCV	Packed cell volume
MCV	Mean corpuscular volume
MCHC	Mean corpuscular hemoglobin concentration
WBC	White blood cells
AST	Aspartate aminotransferase
GGT	Gamma-glutamyltransferase
A:G	Albumin:Globulin ratio
T1	Treatment group 1
T2	Treatment group 2
T3	Treatment group 3
H&E	Hematoxylin and Eosin
ELISA	Enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The small ruminant sub-sector in Malaysia is very small compared to the poultry, swine and cattle industry. Most small ruminants are mainly operated by smallholder farmers. In 2019, the populations of sheep and goat consist of only 127,796 and 371,747 respectively (Department of Veterinary Services Malaysia, 2020). Although the per capita consumption (PCC) for mutton is the lowest at 1.1 kg/year compared to the other commodity, the self-sufficiency level (SSL) of mutton in Malaysia is only at 12.1% in 2019. As result, the small ruminant industry is heavily dependent on the importation of mutton and chevon from other countries. The lag in the sheep and goat industry is normally associated with several factors such as the lack of land resources; high feed price; cheaper import substitutes; poor private-sector involvement; inefficient disease prevention and control; lack of quality breeds, expertise, and workforce (National Agro-food Policy, 2011-2020). Nevertheless, feed constitutes the biggest proportion of the cost of production in any livestock industry. The small ruminant industry depends primarily on locally available feedstuffs, with only some supplementation provided by imported ingredients. The major local materials used are crop residues and other by-products such as rice bran, copra cake, palm kernel cake, oil palm frond, sago, tapioca, and broken rice as alternative feed (Zahari and Wong, 2009). Therefore, more research and development are required to identify and improve local forage that is vastly abundant in Malaysia such as the *Brachiaria decumbens*.

B. decumbens or known as signal grass is the most favoured species and covers more than 80% of pasture land in Malaysia and other tropical regions due to its tolerance to low soil fertility, high dry matter production, and drought resistance (Faccin et al., 2014; Low, 2015; Chung et al., 2018). Even though *B. decumbens* is an important source of forages for ruminant, there have been many reports of toxicity in grazing livestock including sheep due to the naturally occurring toxic compounds found in *B. decumbens* (Graydon et al., 1991; Cruz et., 2001; Brum et al., 2007; Castro et al., 2011; Assumaidee and Mustapha, 2012). Protodioscin is the main steroidal saponins found in *B. decumbens* which is associated with secondary hepatogenous photosensitization in ruminants (Low, 2015). Sheep are more susceptible than other ruminants and the young are more predisposed than adults (Riet-Correa et al., 2011; Faccin et al., 2014). Additionally, young leaves of *Brachiaria spp.* contain higher saponins concentration than mature plants (Castro et al., 2011; Riet-Correa et al., 2011).

The clinical signs of *B. decumbens* intoxication are jaundice, hepatogenous photosensitization, anorexia, facial or submandibular oedema and neurological signs at the later stage as the disease progresses (Assumaidee et al., 2010; Lelis et al., 2018). Secondary or hepatogenous photosensitization in ruminants occurs as a result of liver

damage that is caused by the toxicity of *B. decumbens* (Knight and Walter, 2003). The damaged liver is incapable of removing chlorophyll (phyloerythrin), therefore leads to the development of skin lesions when exposed to sunlight (De Oliveira et al., 2013).

Previous studies on *B. decumbens* reported that increased liver enzymes such as serum aspartate aminotransferase (AST), serum gamma-glutamyltransferase (GGT), and bilirubin levels are the cause of impaired liver functions (Castro et al., 2011; Riet-Correa et al., 2011; De Oliveira et al., 2013). High bilirubin will also cause a high degree of renal susceptibility due to ischaemia. As a result, an increase in the concentrations of serum urea and creatinine are related to the decrease in glomerular filtration rate or indicators of renal impairment (Gracindo et al., 2014; Lelis et al., 2018). In the meantime, acute phase proteins (APPs) are blood proteins produced by the liver during acute phase responses (Jesse et al., 2019). This is an early defense system that is activated by inflammation, infection, stress, or trauma (Cray et al., 2009). In ruminants, haptoglobin (Hp) and serum amyloid A (SAA) are the major APPs identified as a marker during infection and inflammation, being more sensitive and specific than blood profile analysis (Eckersall et al., 2007; Cecilian et al., 2012).

At post mortem, the most remarkable lesions associated with *B. decumbens* toxicosis could be observed in the liver and kidney (Castro et al., 2011; Riet-Correa et al., 2011). Gross lesions such as enlarged, mottled, brown discolouration of liver with distended gall bladder (De Oliveira et al., 2013; Faccin et al., 2014) and swollen, grey yellowish kidney may be observed in *B. decumbens* intoxicated animals (Assumaidee and Mustapha, 2012).

Histopathologically, the lesions are also more appreciable in the liver and kidneys as these organs are the major sites of cellular damage. Dominantly, the liver histopathology is characterised by hydropic degeneration of hepatocytes, hyperplasia of bile duct epithelium, and mononuclear inflammatory cells infiltration (Graydon et al., 1991; Faccin et al., 2014). Furthermore, there will be the presence of birefringent crystals within the bile ducts and accumulations of foamy macrophages during the chronic stage (Driemeier et al., 2002; Riet-Correa et al., 2011). Besides, degenerative and necrotic changes of the renal epithelial cells will also be observed in the kidneys in the later stage of intoxication (Graydon et al., 1991).

1.2 Problem statements

1. *B. decumbens* is a highly productive tropical grass that present abundantly in Malaysia, but there were many reports of sporadic outbreaks of general ill-thrift and deaths in ruminants attributable to the presence of steroidal saponins.
2. Farmers are not be able to utilise this grass effectively as a feed source for ruminants because information on the low and high levels of *B. decumbens* toxicity is still unknown.

3. In addition, information on the clinical responses, haematology changes, and APPs responses are not available, which could be used as potential biomarkers for early diagnosis for *B. decumbens* toxicity.

1.3 Hypotheses

It is hypothesized that there will be different responses in sheep fed with various level of *B. decumbens* and at different time phases as compared to the control group.

1. Sheep fed with high and low level of *B. decumbens* diets will show changes in clinico-pathological, haemato-biochemical changes, and APPs responses as compared to the control group.
2. Sheep in chronic stage will show more severe clinico-pathological, haemato-biochemical changes and APPs responses as compared to sheep in the acute stage.

1.4 Objectives

The general aim of this study was to determine the clinico-pathology, haemato-biochemistry, and acute phase proteins (APPs) responses of sheep fed with low and high levels of *B. decumbens* diets at different time phases. The specific objectives were:

1. To determine the clinical signs of sheep fed with low and high levels of *B. decumbens* diets and at different time phases.
2. To determine the haemato-biochemistry changes in sheep fed with low and high levels of *B. decumbens* diets and at different time phases.
3. To measure the APPs responses of both serum and cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) in sheep fed with low and high levels of *B. decumbens* diets and at different time phases.
4. To evaluate the gross pathology, organ morphometric, and histopathology in sheep fed with low and high levels of *B. decumbens* diets and at different time phases.

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