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Effect of Carvedilol on Reproductive Parameter in Male Wistar Rats

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Abstract

Aim: This study was designed to investigate the effect of carvedilol on reproductive parameter in male Wistar rats.
Methods: Ten male Wistar rats (120 - 140 g) were divided into control (distilled water) and carvedilol-treated (0.09 mg/kg) groups (5 per group) for hormonal assay, andrological and histopathological studies. The animals were orally treated on daily basis for 50 days. Plasma testosterone level was assayed using Enzyme-linked Immuno-sorbent Assay (ELISA) and semen analysis was done microscopically. Histology of testes was also done. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and student's t-test at p=0.05.
Results: Treatment of rats with carvedilol (0.09 mg/kg) caused no significant ($p>0.05$) change in testosterone level relative to control. Treatment of rats with carvedilol (0.09 mg/kg) caused significant ($p<0.05$) reductions in progressive sperm motility and sperm count relative to their respective controls. It can therefore be concluded that carvedilol probably has deleterious effect on the reproductive function in male rats.

Keywords: Carvedilol, Rats, Sperm count, Sperm motility, Testosterone.

INTRODUCTION

Carvedilol is a novel adrenergic antagonist that competitively blocks β_1 and β_2 vascular receptors, primarily through a selective α_1-blockade [1]. The drug has been introduced for the treatment of congestive heart failure, mild to moderate hypertension and myocardial infection [2, 3].

Carvedilol has been shown to have greater cardioprotective efficacy than other β-blockers in animal models of cardiac ischemia [4] as well as scavenge oxygen free radicals **[5]** and to inhibit lipid peroxidation in biological systems [6, 7]. It has been reported to decrease portal pressure and endothelial-related vasodilatory activities [8]. It has protective effect on paracetamol-induced hepatotoxicity in rats [9] as well as decreased cleft palate induced by caffeine in rats' embryos in prenatal period [10].

However, due to scanty information from literature on the effect of carvedilol on reproductive parameter in male rats, this study therefore aims at investigating the effect of this antiarrythmic agent on this aforementioned parameter in male rats.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Experimental Animals

Adult male rats weighing between 120 – 140 g bred in the Pre-Clinical Animal House of the College of Medicine and Health Sciences, Afe Babalola University were used. They were housed under standard laboratory conditions and had free access to feed and water; they were acclimatized for two weeks to laboratory conditions before the commencement of the experiments. All experiments were carried out in compliance with the recommendations of Afe Babalola University Ethics Committee on guiding principles on care and use of animals.

Drug

Carvedilol tablets (TEVA UK, Ltd.) were bought from Danax Pharmacy, Ibadan, Nigeria.

Carvedilol (3.125 mg) was dissolved in 10 ml of distilled water to give a concentration of 0.313 mg/mL.

The dosage of carvedilol used in this study was in accordance with that reported by the manufacturer.

Body Weight

Body weight was monitored on weekly basis throughout the duration of the experiment for each rat.

Experimental Design

Ten male rats (120 – 140 g) were randomly divided into two groups, with each consisting of five animals. The two groups were subjected to the following oral treatments once a day for fifty (50) days:

Group I: received 0.5 mL/100 g of distilled water as control group.

Group II: received 0.09 mg/kg of carvedilol.

Collection of Blood Samples

Twenty four hours (day 51) after the last dosing of the groups, blood samples were collected from all the animals through the medial cantus for the determination of plasma testosterone levels. All the animals were later sacrificed by an overdose of diethyl ether and the testes were removed along with the epididymides for semen analysis.

Hormonal Assay

Plasma samples were assayed for testosterone using the enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA) technique using the Fortress kit.

Semen Collection

The testes were removed along with the epididymides. The caudal epididymides were separated from the testes, blotted with filter papers and lacerated to collect the semen.

Semen Analysis

Progressive sperm motility: This was done immediately after the semen collection. Semen was squeezed from the caudal epididymis onto a pre-warmed microscope slide (27^{O}C) and two drops of warm 2.9% sodium citrate was added, the slide was then covered with a warm cover slip and examined under the microscope using x400 magnification. Ten fields of the microscope were randomly selected and the sperm motility of 10 sperms was assessed on each field. Therefore, the motility of 100 sperms was assessed randomly. Sperms were labelled as motile, sluggish, or immotile. The percentage of motile sperms was defined as the number of motile sperms divided by the total number of counted sperms (i.e. 100) [11].

Sperm viability (Life/dead ratio): This was done by adding two drops of warm Eosin/Nigrosin stain to the semen on a pre-warmed slide, a uniform smear was then made and dried with air; the stained slide was immediately examined under the microscope using x400 magnification. The live sperm cells were unstained while the dead sperm cells absorbed the stain. The stained and unstained sperm were counted and the percentage was calculated [12].

Sperm morphology: This was done by adding two drops of warm Walls and Ewas stain (Eosin/Nigrosin stain can also be used) to the semen on a pre-warmed slide, a uniform smear was then made and air-dried; the stained slide was immediately examined under the microscope using x400 magnification [12]. Five fields of the microscope were randomly selected and the types and number of abnormal spermatozoa were evaluated from the total number of spermatozoa in the five fields; the number of abnormal spermatozoa was expressed as a percentage of the total number of spermatozoa.

Sperm count: This was done by removing the caudal epididymis from the right testes and blotted with filter paper. The caudal epididymis was immersed in 5 mL formol-saline in a graduated test-tube and the volume of fluid displaced was taken as the volume of the epididymis. The caudal epididymis and the 5 mL formol-salline were then poured into a mortar and homogenized into a suspension from which the sperm count was carried out using the improved Neubauer haemocytometer under the microscope.

Testicular Histology

After removing the testes, they were immediately fixed in Bouin's fluid for 12 hours and the Bouin's fixative was washed from the samples with 70 % alcohol. The tissues were then cut in slabs of about 0.5 cm transversely and were dehydrated by passing through different grades of alcohol: 70 % alcohol for 2 hours, 95 % alcohol for 2 hours, 100 % alcohol for 2 hours, 100 % alcohol for 2 hours and finally 100 % alcohol for 2 hours. The tissues were then cleared to remove the alcohol, the clearing was done for 6 hours using xylene. The tissues were then infilterated in molten Paraffin wax for 2 hours in an oven at 57^{O}C, thereafter the tissues were embedded. Serial sections were cut using rotary microtone at 5 microns (5 μm). The satisfactory ribbons were picked up from a water bath (50^{O}-55^{O}C) with microscope slides that had been coated on one side with egg albumin as an adhesive and the slides were dried in an oven. Each section was deparaffinized in xylene for 1 minute before immersed in absolute alcohol for 1 minute and later in descending grades of alcohol for about 30 seconds each to hydrate it. The slides were then rinsed in water and immersed in alcoholic solution of hematoxylin for about 18 minutes. The slides were rinsed in water, then differentiated in 1 % acid alcohol and then put inside a running tap water to blue and then counterstained in alcoholic eosin for 30 seconds and rinsed in water for a few seconds, before being immersed in 70 %, 90 % and twice in absolute alcohol for 30 seconds each to dehydrate the preparations. The preparations were cleared of alcohol by dipping them in xylene for 1 minute. Each slide was then cleaned, blotted and mounted with DPX and cover slip, and examined under the microscope. Photomicrographs were taken at x40, x100 and x400 magnifications

Statistical Analysis

The mean and standard error of mean (S.E.M.) were calculated for all values. Comparison between the control and the treated group was done using student's t-test. Differences were considered statistically significant at $p<0.05$.

RESULTS

Effect on Body weight

Treatment of rats for fifty days with carvedilol (0.09 mg/kg) produced significant ($p<0.05$) reduction in body weight on the 45^{th} day of treatment relative to the control (Fig. 1).

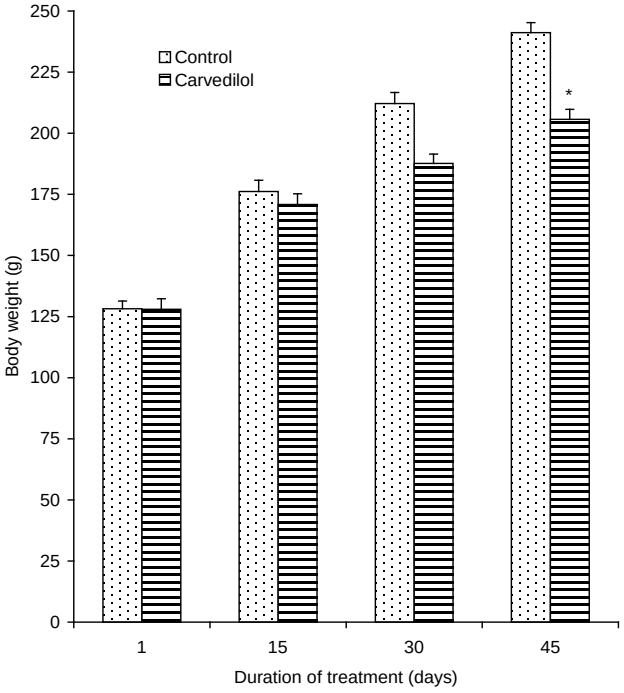

Fig.1: Body weight changes in control rats and rats treated with carvedilol for 50 days (n=5, *$p<0.05$)

Effect on Plasma Testosterone Level

Treatment of rats for fifty days with carvedilol (0.09 mg/kg) produced no significant ($p>0.05$) change in testosterone level relative to control (Fig. 2)

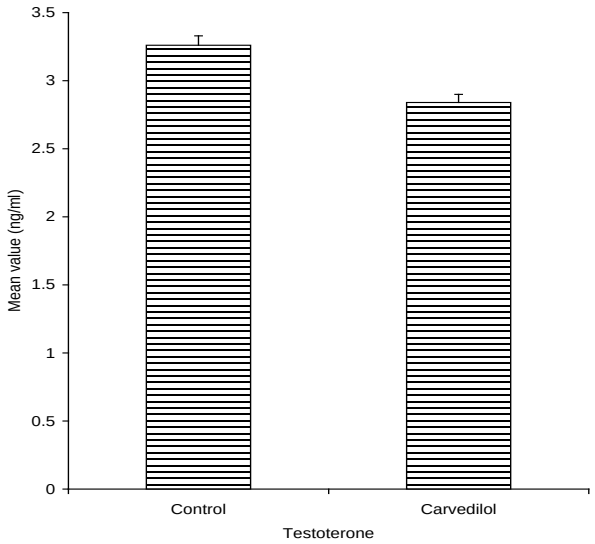

Fig. 2: Effect of treatment of rats for 50 days with carvedilol on plasma testosterone level (n=5, *p<0.5)

Effect on Sperm Characteristics

The effect of 50 days treatment of rats with carvedilol (0.09 mg/kg) on sperm characteristics are shown in Fig. 3 and 4.

Treatment of rats with carvedilol (0.09 mg/kg) for 50 days caused significant ($p<0.05$) reduction in progressive sperm motility, but produced no significant ($p>0.05$) changes in the percentages of viable sperm cells and abnormal sperm cells relative to their respective controls. However, carvedilol (0.09 mg/kg) caused significant ($p<0.05$) reduction in sperm count relative to the control.

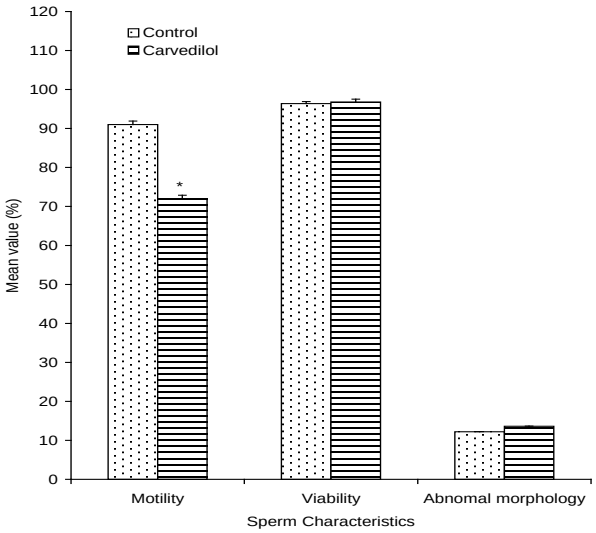

Fig. 3: Spermogram showing the effect of 50 days treatment of rats with carvedilol on sperm characteristics (n=5, *p <0.05)

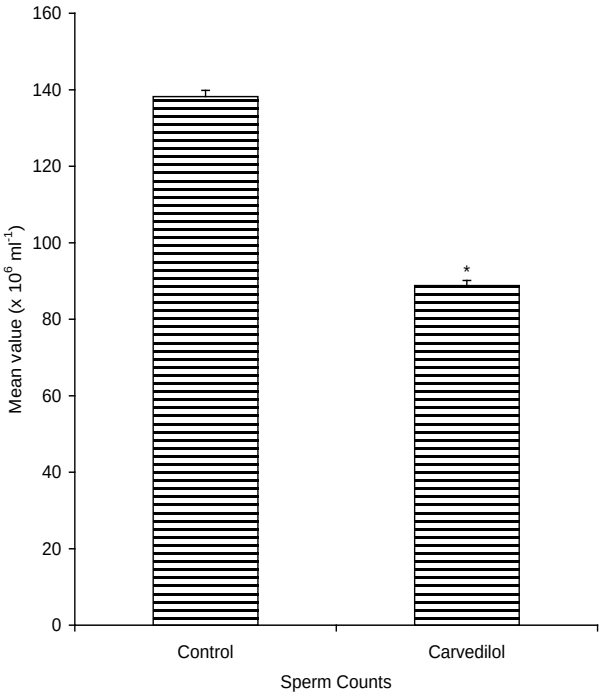

Fig. 4: Spermogram showing the effect of 50 days treatment of rats with carvedilol on sperm count (n=5, *p<0.05)

Histopathological Effect

Plates 1 and 2 respectively show the transverse sections through the testes of control rat and rat treated with carvedilol (0.09 mg/kg) for fifty days.

Treatment of rats with carvedilol (0.09 mg/kg) caused no visible lesion in the testes of rats, which is similar to what was observed in the control rats.

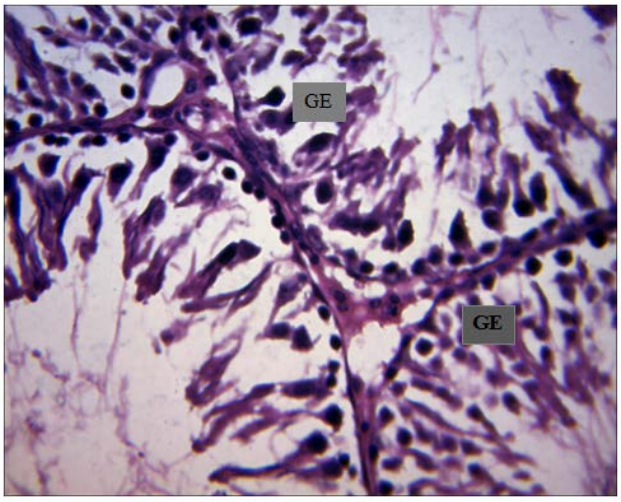

Plate 1: Effect of 50 days treatment of rat with distilled water (control) on rat's testis (×400). Photomicrograph showing normal viable germinal epithelium (GE) with no visible lesion seen.

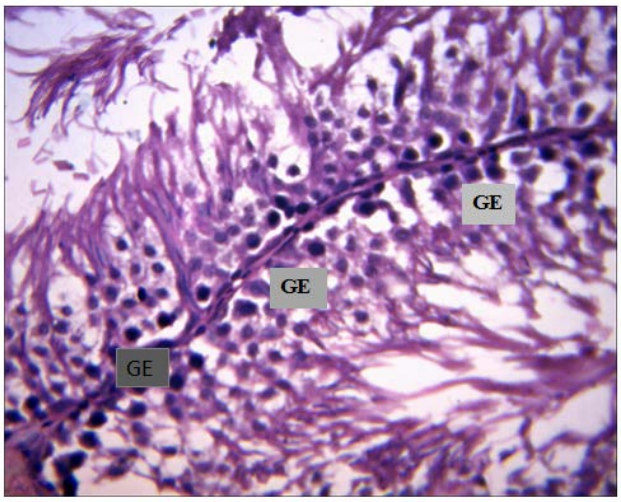

Plate 2: Effect of 50 days treatment of rat with carvedilol (0.09 mg/kg) on rat's testis (x400).
Photomicrograph showing normal viable germinal epithelium (GE) with no visible lesion seen.

DISCUSSION

This study has shown that the treatment of rats with carvedilol caused significant change in body weight of rats at a later stage during the treatment period. This suggests that carvedilol could be toxic to the animals [13]. This could also be due to the absence of androgenic property in this drug, since it has been reported that androgens possess anabolic activities [14]. It could also be due to presence of anorectic and lipolytic properties in this drug [15]. Contrary result was reported by [16] in *Vernonia amygdalina* extract treated rats.

The drug caused no significant change in testosterone level. This probably indicates that carvediolol did not significantly inhibit the mechanism involved in the process of hormone synthesis in the Leydig cells. Contrary report was given by [13] in rats treated with aspirin.

Carvedilol caused significant reduction in sperm motility. This suggests that the drug was able to permeate the blood-testis barrier with a resultant alteration in the micro-environment of the seminiferous tubules, since it has been reported that the decrease the in sperm motility caused by chemical agents was due to their ability to permeate the blood-testis barrier [17] and thus creating a different micro-environment in the inner part of the wall of the seminiferous tubules from the outer part [18]. Similar report was given by [19] in rats treated with *sarcotemma acidum* extract. The significant reduction in sperm motility could also be due to high level of sperm DNA fragmentation.

There were no significant changes in the percentages of sperm viability and morphologically abnormal sperm cells induced after treatment of rats with carvedilol. This could be due to the inability of the drug to either interfere with the spermatogenic processes in the seminiferous tubules and epididymal functions which may result in non-alteration of spermatogenesis [20, 21]. Contrary result was reported by [22] in isolated tetracyclic steroid treated rats.

Sperm count is considered to be an important parameter with which to access the effect of chemicals on spermatogenesis [23]. Spermatogenesis is influenced by the hypothalamic- adenohypophysial-Leydig cell system relating gonadotropin releasing hormone, luteinizing hormone and androgen. The significant reduction in sperm count induced by carvedilol probably implies that this drug could influence the hypothalamic-adenohypophysial-Leydig cell system. Similar report was given by [24] in *Terminalia chebula* extract treated rats.

Photomicrographs revealed that rats treated with carvedilol presented with normal germinal epithelium with no visible lesions. Similar results were reported by [25] in rats treated with *Hibiscus macranthus and Basella alba* extracts. This suggests that carvedilol has no toxic effect on the exocrine function of the testes at histological level [13].

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study has shown that carvedilol has spermatotoxic or antispermatogenic effect in male rats. However, the effect of this drug on human reproductive function is unknown. Nevertheless, considering these findings in animal model, it is recommended that moderation should be exercised in the consumption of this drug by those taking it for therapeutic purpose.

Conflict of Interest

We vehemently declare that there is no conflict of interests in this research work.

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