Antimicrobial property and antiproliferative activity of Centaurea babylonica (L.) L. on human carcinomas and cervical cancer cell lines

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Abstract
Introduction and objective. Since antiquity, C. babylonica (L.) L. extracts has been used as a remedy for primary health care in traditional medicine. In this study, a total of seven different crude extracts (acetone, chloroform, hexane, ethylacetate, methanol, ethanol and water) from branches and leaves of C. babylonica (L.) L. were prepared to determine antimicrobial and antiproliferative activity against cancer cell lines.

Materials and method. MIC assay was used for antimicrobial activity against gram positive and gram negative bacteria, and one yeast. MTT assay was applied to screen the antiproliferative activity of seven extracts, and to determine dose- and time-dependent effects of the acetone extract on A549, PC-3, MCF-7, and HeLa cell lines.

Results. The acetone extract of C. babylonica (L.) L. showed the best antibacterial activity against Bacillus cereus, P. aeruginosa and C. albicans (MIC: 1.6 mg/mL). GC-MS analyses allowed six compounds to be determined; the main constituents of acetone extract from C. babylonica (L.) L. were diacetone alcohol (53.47 %), 1-dexadecene (10.19 %) and 1-tetradecene (8.67 %). In addition, seven different solvent extracts at 500 µg/mL caused antiproliferative activity between 84% – 88%, compared to control. Dose-dependent effects of the extracts on A549 cells indicated that chloroform, ethyl acetate, and acetone extract were the most effective extracts with the IC50 values of 9, 33, and 36 µg/mL, respectively.

Conclusions. The results clearly demonstrate that C. babylonica (L.) L. exhibited a strong antimicrobial effect and antiproliferative activity against cancer cells in vitro. Further studies are required to isolate and characterize the active pure compounds responsible for the antimicrobial and antiproliferative activities.

Key words
Centaurea babylonica, antimicrobial activity, antiproliferative activity, A-549, PC-3, MCF-7 and HeLa cell lines, chemical composition, GC-MS

INTRODUCTION

Substantial research has been carried out to-date in order to understand microorganisms and their control. Many infectious diseases are mainly treated with antibiotics and herbel remedies; however, indiscriminate use of antibiotics rendered many pathogenic microorganisms resistant to almost all known antibiotics [1]. In addition, serious side-effects caused by some antibiotics limit their use in clinical application. Due to these problems, development of new antimicrobial agents is inevitable. About 250 – 500 thousand agents have been developed, but because of their toxicity and resistance caused by some antibiotics limit their use in clinical application. Due to these problems, development of new therapeutic option is a priority for many pharmaceutical companies and research centres. Phytochemicals from a variety of plant species have potential in the treatment and prevention of cancer [4]. In fact, plants have a long history of being used for many health benefits by all cultures. Traditional therapy mainly involves the use of plant extracts or their active compounds [5]. In order to overcome the toxic side-effects of chemotherapy drugs, using terrestrial plants is a practical approach for developing new anticancer agents that are both effective and safe.

The genus Centaurea belongs to the Asteraceae family and it is the third largest genus in terms of species number in Turkey. There are 217 species (146 endemics), 36 subspecies (22 endemics), 28 varieties (16 endemics), a total of 255 taxa and with an endemism ratio of 66.8% [6, 7]. According to phytogeographical distribution, C. babylonica (L.) L. is a Mediterranean element and distributed in Turkey, Lebanon, and Syria [8]. In Anatolia, the Centaurea L. species are called zerdali dikeni, Timur dikeni and peygamber çiçeği [9]. In traditional medicine, they are used for fever, menstrual disorders, vaginal candidiasis, the treatment of liver, kidney and ulcer diseases, as antidiarrheal, stomachic, tonic, appetitive, antidiabetic, antipyretic, as well as a diuretic.
and expectorant [10]. The genus *Centaurea* L. has also been the subject of many antimicrobial and antioxidant activity studies [11–21], antifungal [22, 23], anti-colon cancer [24] and cytotoxic activities [24, 25]. Additionally, the flower heads of *C. cyanus* are commonly used in European traditional medicine for the treatment of minor ocular inflammation, and *in vivo* anti-inflammatory and immunological activities of *C. cyanus* have been reported [26]. However, to the best of the authors’ knowledge, there is no study in the literature related to antimicrobial or antiproliferative effects of *C. babylonica* (L.) L. (from Adıyaman province in Turkey) crude extracts obtained with seven different solvents.

**OBJECTIVE**

The aim of this study is to evaluate the antimicrobial activity of seven different extracts (acetone, chloroform, hexane, ethylacetate, methanol, ethanol and water) of *C. babylonica* (L.) L against both clinical and food borne microorganisms; to identify the chemical composition of the most effective extract; and to assess the antiproliferative potential of the extracts against four different human cancer cell lines.

**MATERIALS AND METHOD**

**Collection of plant material.** Samples of *C. babylonica* (L.) L. were collected on 2 July 2016 from near Gölbaşı-Sürgü road, on serpentine soil in the Gölbaşı district of Adıyaman province in Turkey. The plants were collected and identified by Dr. Hasan Yildirim at the Department of Biology/Botany, Faculty of Science at Ege University, Izmir, Turkey. A voucher specimen has been deposited in the Herbarium of Ege University in Izmir, Turkey (EGE-42441).

**Preparation of leaf and branch extracts.** The whole plant (leaf and branches) above ground was collected, without flowers, dried on newspapers to a constant weight in a sunless environment, and milled to a fine powder using a porcelain miller. The powdered leaf (60 g) was soaked in 1,500 mL of DMSO to prepare the extract, and in 150 mL of absolute ethanol (96°, Fluka Chemical), and in 1,500 mL of absolute methanol (97°, Fluka Chemical), acetone (96°, Fluka Chemical), chloroform (96°, Fluka Chemical), hexane (96°, Fluka Chemical), and ethylacetate (96°, Fluka Chemical), to prepare the acetone, chloroform, hexane, ethylacetate, ethanolic and methanolic extracts. The suspension was stirred at 200 rpm at room temperature for four days, after which it was filtered through a Whatman No. 1 filter paper. The residue was reextracted with 1,500 mL of the solvent, as described. The combined extracts were then evaporated to dryness at 40 °C, re-dissolved in the corresponding solvent to obtain extracts (8mg/mL) and stored at 4 °C prior to use [18, 27, 28].

**Microorganisms and culture conditions.** Antimicrobial studies were carried out against 16 bacteria strains, three Gram-positive bacteria strains, including *Staphylococcus aureus* ATCC 6538P, *Bacillus subtilis* ATCC 6633 and *Bacillus cereus* CCM 99, three Gram-negative bacteria strains, including *Escherichia coli* ATCC 29998, *Salmonella typhimurium* CCM 3819, *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* ATCC 27853 and yeast *Candida albicans* ATCC 10259. The species of bacteria were grown overnight at 37 °C in Mueller-Hinton Broth (Merck). *C. albicans* was grown for 48 h at 30 °C in Sabouraud Dextrose Broth (Oxoid).

**Antimicrobial assays – determination of minimum inhibitory concentration (MIC).** The MIC was evaluated on plant extracts as antimicrobial activity. The MIC was taken as the lowest concentration that inhibited growth after incubation. The microdilution assay was performed as described in the CLSI standards with some modifications [29, 30]. This test was performed at final concentrations of each extract (51.2, 25.6, 12.8, 6.4, 3.2, 1.6, 0.8 and 0.4 mg of extract / mL) Sterile 96-well microtiter plates were used in this assay. Mueller-Hinton Broth for bacteria or Sabouraud Dextrose Broth for *C. albicans* was added to give final concentrations. 50 µL of broth containing bacterial suspension (5×10⁶ cfu/mL) or yeast (5×10⁵ cfu/mL) was then added to each well. Each column of wells contained a single antimicrobial extract in progressive dilutions, and inoculated with a single microorganism. Each plate had a set of both growth and sterility control. Plates were sealed with clean film to ensure that microorganisms did not become dehydrated. The plates were prepared and placed in an incubator set at 37 °C for 18–24 h and at 30 °C for 48 h, respectively, for bacteria and *C. albicans*.

Bacterial growth was assessed by adding 10 µL of 0.2% 2,3,5-triphenyl tetrazolium chloride (TTC) solution to each well of the microtitre plate. The plates containing TTC were incubated for one h at 37 °C for reaction. The colour change was then assessed visually. Any colour changes from purple to pink showed the growth of microorganism. MIC concentration did not exhibit reduction of TTC into formazan; therefore, the MIC was defined as the lowest inhibitory concentration of the antimicrobial agent contained in the microtiter well in which the absence of visual colour change (colourless) was first observed. Acetone, chloroform, hexane, ethylacetate, methanol and ethanol were used as negative control. Erythromycin was used as a standard antibiotic for the bacteria for positive control; nystatin was used for *C. albicans*. They were tested between 0.78 – 400 mg/mL (prepared from 1 mg/mL stock) concentrations.

**GC-MS analysis.** The steam-distilled components were analysed by GC-MS. A HP 6890 gas chromatograph equipped with a HP-PTV; a 0.32 m X 0.60 m HPInnowax capillary column (0.5 µm coating) was employed for the GC analysis. GC-MS analysis was performed on a HP-5973 mass selective detector coupled with a 6890 gas chromatograph, equipped with a HP 6890 gas chromatograph. The column temperature was programmed from an initial temperature of 60 °C to a final temperature of 250 °C at 15 °C/min. The carrier gas was helium (14.1 mL/min). Identification of the individual components was performed by comparison of mass spectra with literature data, and by a comparison of their retention time (RT) relative to a C8-C32 n-alkanes mixture [31]. A computerized search was carried out using the Wiley 7.n GC-MS library and ARGEFAR GC-MS library created with authentic samples.

**Cell lines and cell culture.** Human lung carcinoma (A549), human prostate carcinoma (PC-3), human breast adenocarcinoma (MCF-7) and human cervical cancer (HeLa) were tested between 0.78 – 400 µM. The cell lines were grown in RPMI 1640 supplemented with 10% fetal bovine serum (Merck). The absorbance (OD) at 570 nm was measured using a microplate reader (Mithras LB 940).
cell lines were procured originally from the American Type Culture Collection (ATCC). All cell lines were maintained by serial sub-culturing in RPMI 1640 medium (Biochrom, Germany), supplemented with 10% foetal bovine serum (FBS, Biochrom, Germany), penicillin (100U/mL) and streptomycin sulphate (100 mg/mL) (Biochrom, Germany). Cells were incubated at 37 °C in 5% CO₂, 95% air in a humified incubator.

MTT assay. Antitumoral activity of the plant extracts was determined by colorimetric MTT tetrazolium (Applichem, USA) reaction which reduces yellow MTT to purple formazan by mitochondrial dehydrogenase in living cells. Optical density of reaction reflects the function of mitochondria and cell viability [32]. Exponentially growing cells at 2x10^5 cells/mL were seeded in triplicate into 96-well plates (Greiner, Germany) in 200 µL of growth medium. Cells were incubated for 24 h before the addition of extracts to allow attachment to the plate. Extracts from six different solvents were dissolved in 10% DMSO and added to the cell culture at the final concentration of 0.5 mg/mL, to be tested against four cancer cell lines. Cells were incubated for 72 h at 37 °C in a 5% CO₂ incubator. In order to determine dose and time responsiveness, cells were treated with the extracts at 0.5 mg/mL, 0.25 mg/mL, 0.12 mg/mL, 0.06 mg/mL, 0.03 mg/mL, and 0.015 mg/mL final concentrations, and incubated for 24, 48, and 72 h. After removing the medium, 100 µL of fresh medium supplemented with 10 µL of PBS containing 5 mg/mL MTT was added to each well. After 4 h incubation, the medium was discarded and formazan purple crystals formed in the cells were dissolved in 100 µL DMSO. Colour intensity was measured by reading the absorbance at 540 nm on an ELISA plate reader (Thermo Scientific Multiscan Spectrum). Untreated cells served as a negative control. Cell viability was expressed as the ratio of absorbance value of treated cells to untreated control cells, and multiplied by 100 to obtain a percentage. The IC₅₀ value was calculated from a plot of % cell viability against substance concentrations using a GraphPad PRISM (GraphPad Software, Inc., San Diego, CA, USA).

Statistical analysis. Data represent the mean ± SD of triplicate samples for each dose. Data were analysed by one-way ANOVA, aster which Dunnett post hoc test was performed to compare the findings among the groups. A difference was considered to have significance at *p<0.05, **p<0.01 and ***p<0.001. Two-way ANOVA was used to compare data from time and dose dependent assays.

**RESULTS**

Aceton extracts of *C. babylonica* (L.) L. showed the best antibacterial activities against endospor-forming bacteria *B. cereus* (15 mm) and *B. subtilis* (14 mm) (Tab. 1). Similarly, the ethyl acetate extracts had the highest inhibitory zones on these two bacteria. On the contrary, none of the plant extracts had antimicrobial activity on the gram-negative bacterium *P. aeruginosa*. The aceton extracts also displayed the highest antifungal activity against *C. albicans* (14 mm).

The antimicrobial activities of six extracts of *C. babylonica* (L.) L. were also tested *in vitro* by using the microdilution method. According to these results, the ethylacetate extracts of *C. babylonica* (L.) L. leaves and branches showed the best antibacterial activity against *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* (1.6 mg/mL) (Tab. 2). The chloroform extracts of *C. babylonica* (L.) L. displayed the best antibacterial activity against *S. typhimurium* (0.4 mg/mL); ethanol extracts of *C. babylonica* (L.) L. showed the best antibacterial activity against *B. subtilis* (1.6 mg/mL); acetone extracts of *C. babylonica* (L.) L. showed the best antibacterial activity against *P. aeruginosa* and *B. cereus* (1.6 mg/mL); and the acetone extracts of *C. babylonica* (L.) L. leaves and branches showed the best antifungal activity (1.6 mg/mL) (Tab. 2).

**Table 1.** Antimicrobial activity of 6 extracts of *C. babylonica* (L.) L. leaves and branches by the disc diffusion method

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Microorganisms</th>
<th>Inhibitory zone (mm)*</th>
<th>Extracts</th>
<th>Antibiotics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>S. aureus</em></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>EA</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>B. cereus</em></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>B. subtilis</em></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>E. coli</em></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>S. typhimurium</em></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>P. aeruginosa</em></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>C.albicans</em></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>EA</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Results (mean of 3 replicates) indicate zone of inhibition in mm and include filter paper disc diameter (6 mm).*

**Table 2.** MIC values of *Centaurea babylonica* leaves and flowers, erithromycin and nystatin against test microorganisms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Microorganisms</th>
<th>MIC values (µL)</th>
<th>Extracts</th>
<th>Antibiotics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>S. aureus</em></td>
<td>51.2</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>51.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>B. cereus</em></td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>51.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>P. aeruginosa</em></td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>51.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>S. typhimurium</em></td>
<td>51.2</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>&gt; 51.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>E. coli</em></td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>51.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>B. subtilis</em></td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>C. albicans</em></td>
<td>51.2</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>51.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*EA – Ethyl acetate; E – Ethanol; M – Methanol; H – Hegzan; A – Aceton; C – Chloroform; Er – Erithromycin; Am – Ampicillin; N- Nystatin; DM – Dimethyl Sulfoxide; NT – Not tested – No inhibition**

The aceton extract of the herb was also evaluated for its chemical composition by GC-MS, which allowed six compounds to be determined; the main constituents of the *C. babylonica* (L.) L. leaves and branches acetone extract were diaconote alcohol (53.47%), 1-decandec (10.19%) and 1-tetradecane (8.67%) (Tab. 3). Even though many anti-cancer agents have been isolated from different plant species, there still remain many attempts to be made investigate the anti-cancerous compounds in unexplored plant species. Therefore, the antiproliferative effects of *C. babylonica* (L.) L. extracts against different cancer cell lines were investigated for the first time in this study. The anti-tumour effects of crude extracts obtained from seven different solvents on the viability of A549, PC-3,
MCF-7 and HeLa cells were investigated by MTT assay. For initial screening of antiproliferative activity, the extracts were used at the high concentration (0.5 mg/mL). Water extract exhibited moderate antiproliferative activity, 58%, and 42%, against MCF-7 and A549 cells, respectively (Fig. 1), whereas 22% and 15% anti-tumour activities were observed against PC-3 and HeLa cells (Fig. 1). Unlike water extract, all six extracts of C. babylonica resulted in cytotoxic activity between 72% – 90% against all cancer cell lines tested, indicating significant antiproliferative activity (***p<0.001), compared to the control.

Dose-response curves of A549 cells treated with different concentration of each extract were prepared to determine the IC₅₀ value (concentration, µg/ml). Based on the results, chloroform, ethyl acetate, and acetone extracts were the most effective because their IC₅₀ values were 9, 33 and 36 µg/mL (Fig. 2). According to the US NCI plant screening program, if the IC₅₀ value of a crude extract after treatment of cancer cells for 48 – 72 h is less than 20 µg/mL, it is considered to be an ideal concentration during the preliminary investigation of cytotoxic studies of plant extracts [32]. Therefore, findings obtained in the current study indicate that chloroform, ethyl acetate, and acetone extracts of C. babylonica (L.) L. have ideal IC₅₀ values for initial examinations of antiproliferative activity against the A549 cell line. These extracts may serve as a significant source for further isolation of individual compounds for cytoxicity of cancer cells.

![Figure 1. Antiproliferative effects of the different extracts (0.5 mg/ml) on different cancer cell lines. Cells were incubated for 72 hr in the absence or presence of the extracts and cell survival determined using MTT assay. The data represent mean ± SE of three replicates. *P<0.05; **P<0.01; ***P<0.001.](image-url)
Moreover, time and dose responsiveness of A549, HeLa, PC-3, and MCF-7 cell lines were determined after 24, 48 and 72 h treatment with the acetone extract at different concentrations. Results show that MCF-7 cell line was the most sensitive cell type which demonstrated 50% cell death with the extract at 3 µg/mL, even after 48 hr treatment (Fig. 3). PC-3 cells exhibited 78% cell death after treatment with six µg/mL acetone extract. In addition, the dose response curve of HeLa cells was similar to that of PC-3 cells after 48 and 72 h treatment. However, 50% cell death was obtained with the extract at six µg/mL. In comparison with other cell lines, A549 cells were less sensitive to acetone extract because it
Nur Ceyhan Güvensen, Dilek Keskin, Hatice Güneş, Müjgan Kesik Oktay, Hasan Yıldırım. Antimicrobial property and antiproliferative activity of Centaurea babylonica (L.) L. ...

...caused 50% cell death at around 30 µg/mL. In other words, acetone extract at less than 15 µg/ml reduced cell viability to less than 30% in HeLa, PC-3 and MCF-7 cells, but not in A549 cells. Taken together, these data indicate that the antiproliferative effects of acetone extract on cancer cell lines were time- and dose-dependent; moderate antiproliferative effects were also observed for acetone extract with IC\textsubscript{50} in the range of 3 – 6 µg/mL for MCF-7, HeLa, and PC-3 cells.

DISCUSSION

Natural products have been used to treat many human diseases, including bacterial infection, cancer and immune disorders [33]. Centaurea species have a wide distribution in the Mediterranean region and Turkey is the centre for a variety of these species. Many biological properties were attributed to C. species [34]. In the presented study, seven different extracts of C. babylonica (L.) L. leaves and branches were evaluated for the first time for their antimicrobial and antiproliferative potetials against cancer cells. The chemical composition of the most effective acetonic extract was also identified.

In the current study, all the extracts exhibited the strongest antimicrobial activity against B. cereus and B. subtilis in the range of inhibition zone between 7 – 15 mm. In addition, ethyl acetate and acetic extracts were found to be the most effective extracts against S. aureus, B. cereus, B. subtilis and C. Albicans, compared to other extracts (Tab. 1). Kumarasamy et al. (2002) tested Centaurea scabiosa L. seeds for antimicrobial activity and found that the extracts were effective only for Proteus mirabilis bacterium. On the other hand, they found significant antimicrobial activity of serotonin conjugates from Centaurea nigra L. against penicillin-resistant Escherichia coli [14]. However, in the current study, little antimicrobial activity against this bacterium using four different extracts was observed (Tab. 1).

Moreover, Cansaran et al. (2010) examined the antimicrobial activity of various extracts of Centaura cankiriense [35]. Both the ethyl acetate and methanol extracts of this species inhibited the growth of 13 bacteria, and the MIC values of the ethyl acetate extracts were determined as 250 mg/mL for E. coli and 62.5 mg/mL for S. aureus. Unlike the results obtained by Cansaran et al., the current study found that ethyl acetate and methanol extracts of C. babylonica exhibited MIC values of 51.6 mg/mL for E. coli and 51.2 mg/mL for S. aureus (Tab. 2). In other words, ethyl acetate and methanol extracts of C. babylonica include more effective phytochemical compounds against these bacteria than that of C. cankiriense. Furthermore, Ugur et al. (2009) reported that the chloroform and ethyl alcohol extracts of Centaurea cariensis Boiss. subsp. nivo-tomentosa (Hub.-Mor.) Wagenitz exhibited strong antibacterial activities on many resistant bacteria, especially Staphylococcus strains [21].

Some authors focused on the antimicrobial activity of the essential oil of Centaurea species, for example, Yayli et al. ...
(2005) investigated the antimicrobial effect of the essential oils from two Centaura species (Centaura appendicigera, K. Koch. and Centaura helenioides, Boiss & Hausskn.) and demonstrated a moderate antibacterial activity on Gram-positive and Gram-negative bacteria [16]. Similar results were obtained for the essential oils of Centaura sessilis Wildl. and Centaura armena Boiss. The essential oil of Centaura aladaghensis Wagenitz had an antibacterial effect against seven human pathogenic microorganisms [36]. However, the essential oils of Centaura nicaeensis All. and Centaura parlatoris Helder. showed low activity on 14 selected microorganisms [37].

Although many studies on the antifungal activity of Centaura taxa can be found in the literature [27, 28, 38], the presented study is the first record of the antimicrobial activity of the aerial parts of extracts of C. Babylonica, and in which a moderate antimicrobial activity was observed against the bacteria and yeast tested. Among the extracts, acetonic extract was the most effective extract against C. albicans with a 14 mm inhibition zone whereas hexane and chloroform extracts were less effective extracts, with a nine mm inhibition zone (Tab. 1). Cansaran et al. reported that the ethyl acetate extract of C. cankiriense showed weak activity profile in C. albicans [35]. They reported 12 and 14 mm inhibition zones against C. albicans with the plant extracts from flower and stem part of the plant, respectively. Similarly, ethyl acetate extract also showed 12 mm inhibition zone against C. albicans in the presented study. In contrast to the results related with C. babylonica and C. cankiriensis, Yayli et al. reported no antifungal activity of two Centaura species Centaura sessilis and Centaura armena against C. albicans and C. tropicalis [16].

Several studies investigated the effects of different Centaura species on cytotoxicity of different cancer cell lines. For example, in the studies of Zater et al., raw chloroform extract of Centaura diluta subsp. algieriensis were investigated for cytotoxicity, and showed that the viability of A549 cells was reduced with the IC$_{50}$ value of 21 µg/ml [39]. In contrast to the above result, in the current study it was found that the IC$_{50}$ value of nine µg/ml on the same cell line, indicating that chloroform extract of C. babylonica (L.) L. is more effective against A549 cells than that of C. diluta subsp. algieriensis. In addition, crude methanolic and aqueous extracts of three different Centaura species, C. calcitrapa, C. ptilosinappana and C. Spicata, were evaluated for cytotoxic activity against HeLa and Vera cells by Erol-Dayi et al. [40]. They observed the highest cytotoxicity against both cell lines with <100 µg/mL IC$_{50}$ value of C. calcitrapa methanolic extract. Methanolic extracts of the other two species exhibited cytotoxicity with the IC$_{50}$ value of ≥ 250 µg/mL. However, the IC$_{50}$ value of aqueous extract was higher than 1,000 µg/mL for C. ptilosinappana and C. spicata. Similarly, in the current study, it was found that aqueous extract exerted the least antiproliferative effect (Fig. 1), whereas methanolic extract of C. babylonica (L.) L. was the least effective extract for cytotoxicity of A549 cells with the IC$_{50}$ value of 230 µg/mL, compared to other the extracts (Fig. 2).

One recent study examined the anticancer activity of C. babylonica (L.) on Glioma, A549, and MCF-7 cells [27], in which there occurred a cytotoxic effect against these cell lines, but did not explain the IC$_{50}$ value. Sekeler et al. investigated the anticancer effect of chloroform extracts of five different Centaura species against HepG2 cells, and found that C. cuneifolia Sm. (CCC) was the most effective extract with a 0.002 µg/mL IC50 value [41]. Artun et al. also reported the cytotoxic activities of methanolic plant extracts, including C. nerimaniae and C. antiochia. Two Centaura species displayed cytotoxic activity against HeLa cells with LC$_{50}$ values of 253µg/mL; 427µg/mL and Vero cells with LC$_{50}$ values of 194µg/mL and 1,000µg/mL, respectively [42]. Similarly, the current study indicates that methanolic extract of C. babylonica exhibited cytotoxicity with a similar LC$_{50}$ value of 239 µg/mL. However, it was found that chloroform, ethyl acetate, and aceton extracts of C. babylonica L. were the most effective extracts with the IC$_{50}$ values of 9, 33, and 36µg/mL on cytotoxicity of cancer cell lines. These findings indicate that plant extracts from the same genus or from the same species exert cytotoxicity at different levels, depending on the type of solvents used for extraction, type of cell lines tested, and chemical profiles of the plants.

It is known that plant extracts or essential oils have a very different mode of action in eukaryotic and bacterial cells. For bacterial cells, they show strong bactericidal properties, while in eukaryotes, they modify apoptosis and differentiation, post-translational modification of cellular proteins and expression of hepatic detoxifying enzymes. Therefore, plant extracts may induce very different effects in prokaryotes and eukaryotes [43]. In the presented study, GC-MS analysis indicated the presence of six different volatile compounds and one unidentified compound in acetone extract. All these substances were first identified for C. babylonica. Diaceton alcohol was the main constituent (54%) while tetradecamethyl cycloheptasiloxane was less frequent compound of the extract. Köse et al. reported that hexadecanoic acid (28.9 %) and dodecanolic acid (22.8 %) were the main constituents of the oil of Centaura paphlagonica [44]. In the study of Belgaity, 1-Hexanol, 2 ethyl (70 %) was the main constituent of ether extracts of Centaura scoparea [45]. It was reported that ethanolic extracts exhibited promising anti-tumour activity against HeLa, Hep-G2, HCT-116 and MCF-7 cell lines. Even though sesquiterpene lactone extract of C. scoparea did not cause antiinflammatory activity against HeLa cells, this extract was more effective than ethanol extracts on the other cell lines. However, acetone extract of C. babylonica (L.) L. exerted similar antiproliferative activity against A549, HeLa, PC-3 and MCF-7 cells after treatment with 60 µg/mL extract for 72 hr. In future studies, isolated pure compounds may be required to reveal the most potent substance of acetone extract for cytotoxicity on cancer cell lines.

CONCLUSIONS

The study proved that C. babylonica (L.) L. exhibited a strong antimicrobial and antiproliferative activity in vitro. These findings suggest that C. babylonica (L.) L. have a good potential to be used as the source of natural antimicrobial and antiproliferative substances for a new drug. Further studies are needed to isolate and characterize each active compound responsible for the antimicrobial and/or antiproliferative activities.

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