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SAÚDE**

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**AVALIAÇÃO EXPLORATÓRIA DOS
EFEITOS DE COMPOSTOS
INDÓLICOS EM RATOS MACHOS E
FÊMEAS**

UFCSPA

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COMPOSTOS INDÓLICOS EM RATOS MACHOS E
FÊMEAS**

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RESUMO

Uma das condições de saúde ainda não bem elucidadas é o transtorno de uso de substâncias (TUS). Nem todos os indivíduos que usam drogas adquirem um transtorno de uso, o que indica que o TUS é caracterizado pela complexa interação de múltiplos fatores. Um potente psicoestimulante com grande potencial de gerar TUS é a cocaína. Existem evidências do envolvimento do sistema serotoninérgico na modulação de comportamentos relacionados com o uso de drogas. O aumento crônico de serotonina ou 5-hidroxitriptamina (5-HT), uma indolalquilamina, pode facilitar comportamentos relacionados com recompensa associada a drogas pelas interações entre serotonina e dopamina (DA). Alguns exemplos de moléculas semelhantes à 5-HT que modulam a DA são agonistas e antagonistas de receptores 5-HT usados na clínica, que mostraram efeitos sobre comportamentos relacionados ao uso e consumo de drogas, e novas substâncias psicoativas que possuem o sistema serotoninérgico como alvo, e que são bastante usadas concomitantemente com outros estimulantes, como a cocaína. Outra questão bastante intrigante é a susceptibilidade de fêmeas aos efeitos de drogas de abuso, principalmente por cocaína, devido a influências dos hormônios sexuais. Considerando as consequências danosas que o uso destas novas substâncias e de cocaína implicam no ser humano, o estudo de moléculas com estrutura semelhante à da serotonina se torna relevante, afim de avaliar potencial de abuso ou antiaditivo das mesmas. Assim, o objetivo deste estudo foi avaliar a potencial ação sobre o sistema nervoso central (SNC), de moléculas com núcleos indólicos que atuem sobre receptores 5-HT, sobre os efeitos da cocaína em ratos machos e fêmeas. Para tanto, foram usados ratos Wistar albinos machos e fêmeas mantidos em ambiente padrão (PD, n= 3 por caixa). Foram subdivididos em três grupos de tratamento: 1) veículo (VEI, ou solução fisiológica); 2) Molécula serotoninérgica SM7; 3) Molécula serotoninérgica SM12. A partir do dia 35 foi feita lavagem vaginal das fêmeas para identificar o ciclo estral. Após 50 dias, foi iniciado o protocolo de Condicionamento de Preferência de Lugar (CPL). O tratamento com moléculas SS7 ou SS12 ou VEI foi administrado no dia de teste do CPL e no último dia do protocolo, no qual foi realizado teste comportamental em campo aberto. Nenhuma das duas moléculas mostrou efeitos na locomoção e defecação, mas frequências de levantar nos machos expostos à COC do grupo SM7 foi significativamente maior quando comparado ao grupo não-exposto à cocaína. Nenhuma das moléculas mostrou potencializar ou reduzir as propriedades reforçadoras da cocaína, ainda que o número de entradas tenha sido mais elevado para as fêmeas que receberam SM12 comparadas às que receberam veículo. O perfil de citotoxicidade revelou menor viabilidade das células em concentrações mais altas de SM12. Estes resultados indicam poucos efeitos negativos da SM7 e da SM12 sobre SNC, porém, parece haver uma influência na emocionalidade considerando o comportamento de levantar no campo aberto promovido pela administração da molécula SM7 nos machos expostos à cocaína, o que poderia indicar efeito cumulativo desta molécula nos machos. A SM12, em fêmeas, aumentou o número de entradas no CPL, o que é similar a outros resultados, mostrando que a modulação do sistema serotoninérgico pode mudar parâmetros de locomoção em fêmeas. Em geral, SM12 mostrou maior citotoxicidade e efeitos comportamentais. Mais estudos

devem ser realizados para avaliar se esta molécula poderia influenciar outros aspectos do comportamento *in vivo*.

ABSTRACT

One of the not well elucidated health conditions to date is the substance use disorder (SUD). Not all individuals who use drugs acquire a use disorder, indicating SUD is characterized by the complex interaction of multiple factors. A heavy psychostimulant with great potential to cause SUD is cocaine (COC). There are evidences of serotonergic system's involvement in modulation of drug-related behaviors. Chronic increase in serotonin or 5-hydroxytryptamine (5-HT), an indole alkylamine, can facilitate behaviors related to reward associated with drugs, caused by interactions between serotonin and dopamine (DA). Some examples of DA modulating 5-HT-like molecules are 5-HT agonists and antagonists used in the clinic, which show effects upon drug use and intake-related behaviors, as well as new psychoactive substances that target the serotonergic system, which are also much used concurrently with other stimulants, as cocaine. Another very intriguing question is female susceptibility to effects of drugs of abuse, mainly by cocaine, due to influences of sex hormones. Considering the harmful consequences of the use of 5-HT-like molecules becomes relevant, aiming to evaluate its abuse or antiaddictive potential. Therefore, the main goal of this study was to evaluate the potential effects on SNC of molecules with indole nuclei which act as antagonists or partial agonists of 5-HT receptors upon cocaine's effects on male and female rats. For that, male and female Wistar albino rats were received on post-natal day (PND) 21, in standard housing (SH, n = 3 per box). These groups were subdivided in three treatment groups: 1) vehicle (VEH, or physiological saline solution); 2) serotonergic molecule SM7; 3) serotonergic molecule SM12. Food and water were provided ad libitum. Vaginal smear was done on females starting from PND 35 to verify hormonal activity. Around PND 50, conditioned place preference (CPP) was initiated. Treatment with SM7 or SM12 molecules or VEH was administered in CPP's test day and on the last day of life, when it was performed behavioral testing in an open field. Neither of the two molecules has shown effects on locomotion or defecation, however, rearing counts were greater for SM12 group when comparing cocaine exposed to cocaine-naïve males. None of the molecules showed to potentiate or reduce cocaine's reinforcing properties, although number of entries was higher for SM12 females than for females who received vehicle. The cytotoxicity profile has revealed reduced viability for SM12 in higher concentrations. These results indicate there is little evidence of a toxicity of SM7 and SM12 to the central nervous system (CNS), although there seems to be an influence on emotionality, considering rearing counts for SM12 cocaine exposed males, which could be meaning there is a possibility of a cumulative effect of this molecule in males. SM12 on females increased the number of entries, which is similar to other results, showing the modulation of serotonergic system can change locomotion parameters in females. Overall, SM12 demonstrated more cytotoxicity and toxicity to the CNS. More studies should be performed to evaluate if this molecule could influence other aspects of behavior in vivo.

LISTA DE ABREVIATURAS

5-HT	5-hidroxitriptamina
18-MC	18-metoxicoronaridina
ANF	Anfetamina
ATV	Área Tegmental Ventral
BDNF	<i>Brain-derived Neurotrophic Factor</i>
CPL	Condicionamento de Preferência de Lugar
DA	Dopamina
DMSO	Dimetilsufóxido
DPN	Dia Pós-Natal
DSM-V	<i>Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition</i>
EA	Enriquecimento Ambiental
GABA	Ácido gama-aminobutírico
GAD	Glutamato Descarboxilase
HPA	Eixo Hipotálamo-Pituitária-Adrenal
IC	Isolamento Social
i.p.	Intraperitoneal
i.v.	Intravenosa
NAc	Núcleo Accumbens
NE	Norepinefrina
NGF	<i>Nerve Growth Factor</i>
NIDA	<i>National Institute on Drug Abuse</i>
p.e.	Por Exemplo
SNC	Sistema Nervoso Central
TUS	Transtorno de uso de substâncias
UNODC	<i>United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime</i>

LISTA DE FIGURAS E TABELAS

Figura 1 - Síntese do indol descoberta por Baeyer e Knop	Erro! Indicador não definido.
Figura 2 - Compostos indólicos agonistas e antagonistas da serotonina.....	13
Figura 3 - Fotografia de caixa de condicionamento de preferência de lugar.....	26
Figura 4 - Esquematização do protocolo de condicionamento de preferência de lugar	27

SUMÁRIO

1 INTRODUÇÃO	9
1.1 Compostos indólicos	9
1.2 Avaliação pré-clínica na descoberta de moléculas promissoras	16
1.3 Transtorno de uso de substâncias	21
1.4 Modelos animais em TUS	24
1.5 Diferença entre sexos	28
2 JUSTIFICATIVA	32
3 OBJETIVOS	34
3.1 Objetivo Geral	34
3.2 Objetivos Específicos	34
4 REFERÊNCIAS	35
5 ARTIGO CIENTÍFICO	48
6 CONCLUSÃO	72
ANEXO I	74
ANEXO II	75

1 INTRODUÇÃO

1.1 Compostos indólicos

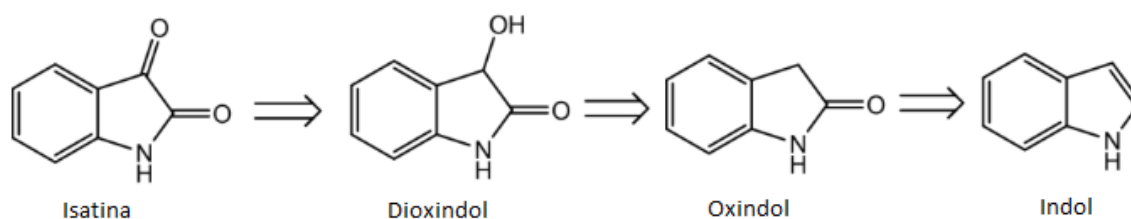
Compostos heterocíclicos apresentam grande importância em múltiplas atividades biológicas, por apresentarem semelhança com moléculas circulantes, como peptídeos, e mostrarem afinidade por proteínas. Também apresentam alta variedade de fórmulas moleculares, e, deste modo, é possível combiná-los facilmente, de forma a criar novas estruturas com alta probabilidade de aplicação (FRANZÉN, 2000; KAUSHIK et al., 2013).

Indois são moléculas heterocíclicas planas contendo um anel benzênico (anel aromático) fusionado a um anel pirrólico (anel de cinco carbonos com um átomo de nitrogênio na posição, 1, 2 ou 3) (KAUSHIK et al., 2013; SHAFKAT ALI et al., 2013). Os indois são, provavelmente, os compostos heterocíclicos mais amplamente distribuídos na natureza que possuem relevância clínica; esta característica o que explica o extenso uso de alcaloides indólicos antigamente como fármacos ou para uso recreativo, mesmo que atualmente estes tenham sido substituídos por versões sintéticas (KAUSHIK et al., 2013). Exemplos de indois comercializados atualmente incluem: a indometacina, um anti-inflamatório não esteroide que inibe a produção de prostaglandinas (FERREIRA; MONCADA; VANE, 1971); a oxipertina, um antipsicótico e antidepressivo usado para esquizofrenia, da classe das fenilpiperazinas (FLAXBART, 1996; PREDESCU et al., 1969); a pravadolina, um agonista canabinoide com potente efeito analgésico (HAUBRICH et al., 1990); a ioimbina, usada para tratamento da disfunção erétil (ANDERSSON, 2001). Várias substâncias derivadas dos alcaloides Vinca possuem efeito antineoplásico, como é o caso da vincristina e vimblastina, compostos de origem natural, e vinorelbina e vindesina, derivados semi-sintéticos (DUFLOS; KRUCZYNSKI; BARRET, 2002).

A estrutura do indol foi proposta pela primeira vez em 1866 por Baeyer e Knop quando estudava o corante vermelho isatina, que, reduzida, produzia dioxindol e oxindol, e, após destilado com pó de zinco, era reduzido a indol (BAEYER; KNOP, 1866; PARTINGTON, 1964). Algumas fórmulas moleculares

estão representadas na Figura 1. A partir disso, nomearam estes compostos de “indol”, nome esse criado a partir do índigo, um corante arroxeado obtido a partir de plantas, e do óleo, ou ácido sulfúrico fumegante (SINGH; SINGH, 2017). Em 1869, Baeyer e Emmerling propuseram a síntese do indol por meio do ácido orto-nitrocínâmico e pó de ferro (BAEYER; EMMERLING, 1869). Após isso, Baeyer continuou estudos usando a isatina e se inspirou no trabalho de Laurent, que conseguiu obter isatina da oxidação do índigo (LAURENT, 1840), fazendo a reação inversa e convertendo a isatina em um derivado clorado, mais sensível a reduções, e propondo a síntese, pela primeira vez, do índigo (BAEYER; EMMERLING, 1870).

Figura 1 - Síntese do indol descoberta por Baeyer e Knop



Fonte: Traduzido de Kiran; Sarangapani ([s.d.]).

Dois importantes indóis podem ser citados, com relação a compostos de ação no SNC: o triptofano, um aminoácido essencial de ocorrência natural, e a serotonina, um neurotransmissor que é produzido a partir do triptofano (COOPER; BLOOM; ROTH, 2003). O triptofano, além de compor grande gama de proteínas (KAUSHIK et al., 2013) é usado como suplemento alimentar. Foram feitas pesquisas verificando sua eficácia em tratar transtornos mentais, mostrando que pode melhorar a atenção e a memória (JENKINS et al., 2016). A 5-hidroxitriptamina (5-HT) ou serotonina é uma indolalquilamina, possuindo um núcleo indólico (Figura 2), um grupo hidroxila na posição 5 e uma amina nitrogenada primária. Foi isolada do soro em 1948 (RAPPORT; GREEN; PAGE, 1948) e causa vasoconstrição por meio de ação sobre o músculo liso de vasos sanguíneos, sendo produzida pelas plaquetas, com o fim de facilitar a agregação plaquetária sobre vasos danificados (HENSLENER, 2012). Por este motivo, foi nomeada de “serotonina”, o fator tônico do soro. Também foi encontrada no

sistema gastrointestinal, promovendo o mesmo efeito de contração na musculatura lisa, no entanto, produzida pelas células enterocromafins e denominada, dessa forma, “enteramina”. Por ser hidrofílica, não passa a barreira hematoencefálica com facilidade, assim, tem que ser produzida pelos neurônios para ter ação central. No entanto, foi apenas no começo dos anos 1950 que os pesquisadores descobriram, por meio de variados experimentos com o ácido lisérgico (LSD), a existência de neurônios serotoninérgicos no SNC (COOPER; BLOOM; ROTH, 2003).

A serotonina é uma das aminas biogênicas que agem no SNC mais antigas do ponto de vista evolucionário (FILIP et al., 2005). O sistema serotoninérgico é um dos principais sistemas endógenos envolvidos em processos fisiológicos. Portanto, seus distúrbios afetam a saúde mental, cardiovascular (SCV), do trato gastrointestinal (TGI) e imunológico, sendo autacoide de distribuição generalizada e neurotransmissor no SNC e periférico, e, conseqüentemente, está envolvido na fisiopatologia de inúmeras doenças mentais e sistêmicas (BLACKBURN, 2009). Existem agentes farmacológicos, de ação indireta, que aumentam a quantidade de serotonina nos espaços extracelulares próximos às células efectoras, como os bloqueadores da recaptação da serotonina (MULLER; JACOBS, 2009).

Há algumas décadas, vem sendo evidenciada a relação e a integração de sistemas neurotransmissores como entre o serotoninérgico e o dopaminérgico, tanto anatomicamente quanto quimicamente. Um estudo, usando técnicas de eletrofisiologia *in vivo*, demonstrou que a fluoxetina e o citalopram, inibidores seletivos da recaptação da serotonina (ISRS), são capazes de inibir a taxa de disparo de neurônios dopaminérgicos da área tegmental ventral (ATV) de modo dose-dependente, propondo os receptores 5-HT_{2C} como mediadores desta ação (PRISCO; ESPOSITO, 1995). Além disso, outro estudo (MINABE; EMORI; ASHBY, 1996) mostrou que animais com lesão por *para*-clorofenilalanina, substância capaz de esgotar 5-HT das vesículas, apresentaram redução no número de neurônios ativos dopaminérgicos na porção compacta da substância negra e na ATV. Este mesmo estudo verificou também redução do padrão de disparos dessas regiões, verificado por meio da análise do intervalo de

interspikes, que apareceram aumentados, e por meio do disparo do tipo *burst*, ou trem de disparo, que se apresentou diminuído.

Achados contraditórios aos citados acima foram encontrados por alguns estudos, como o de Sekine et colaboradores (2007), que encontrou que o tratamento agudo com fluoxetina aumentou o número de neurônios dopaminérgicos ativos na porção compacta da substância negra e ATV, e o tratamento crônico com fluoxetina, citalopram e paroxetina aumentou o número de neurônios ativos na ATV. Outro estudo demonstrou que a lesão seletiva de neurônios 5-HT aumentou a atividade de neurônios de DA da ATV em 36% (GUIARD et al., 2008). Essas discrepâncias apontam a relevância de se elucidar os circuitos relacionados a estes dois sistemas neurotransmissores e por quais mecanismos o sistema serotoninérgico influencia o sistema dopaminérgico na dependência de drogas.

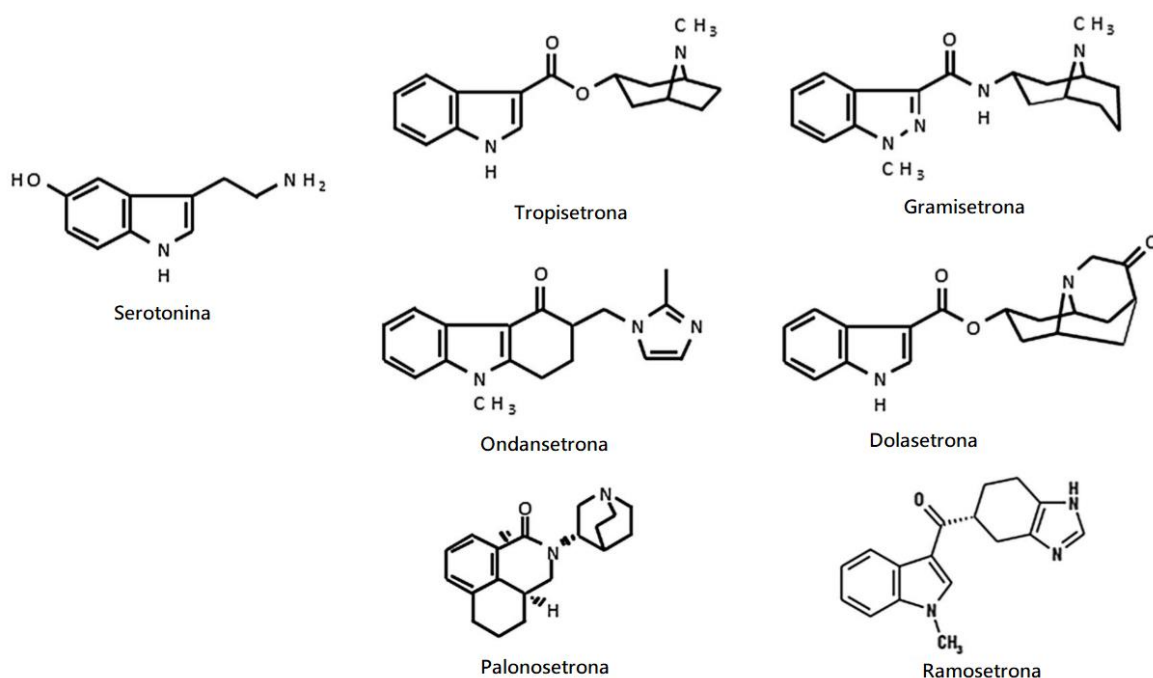
Outros dados também indicam que a serotonina pode estar relacionada com os estágios da adição. Alguns estudos mostraram que, durante retirada de drogas, há reduções na atividade do sistema mesolímbico dopaminérgico e na neurotransmissão serotoninérgica no NAc para variados tipos de drogas (WEISS et al., 1992, 1996).

Os receptores 5-HT são metabotrópicos ou ionofóricos. Os receptores 5-HT₁ e 5-HT₂ são associados a proteínas G. Os receptores 5-HT₃ são constituídos por cinco subunidades dispostas em torno de um poro central condutor de cátions, causando despolarização do neurônio (BLACKBURN, 2009; HENSLER, 2012).

A pesquisa com agonistas e antagonistas de receptores serotoninérgicos, principalmente 5-HT₃ e 5-HT_{1B}, cresceu em número de estudos entre o final dos anos 80 e 2000, com enfoque na descoberta de fármacos que fossem capazes de inibir a busca pela droga ou prevenir recaída em modelos animais. No entanto, a administração de fármacos como o ondansetron e tropisetron, bemmesetron, mostraram resultados contraditórios em diferentes protocolos e com diferentes drogas de abuso (revisado em ENGLEMAN et al., 2008; FILIP et al., 2005; MISZKIEL; FILIP; PRZEGALIŃSKI, 2011). Alguns estudos demonstram que agonistas 5-HT_{1B} e 5-HT₃ podem intensificar os efeitos da dopamina (DE

DEURWAERDÈRE; STINUS; SPAMPINATO, 1998; PARSONS; KOOB; WEISS, 1995), já agonistas de 5-HT_{2C} inibem esses efeitos (WALSH; CUNNINGHAM, 1997). Alguns exemplos são demonstrados a seguir. Vale ressaltar a presença do núcleo indólico destacado nas estruturas químicas dos fármacos citados anteriormente (Figura 2).

Figura 2 - Compostos indólicos agonistas e antagonistas da serotonina



Fonte: KOVAC, 2016.

Em estudos usando morfina e nicotina, alguns destes antagonistas e agonistas mencionados anteriormente foram capazes de reduzir níveis de dopamina e preferência ou consumo pela droga, porém, interessantemente, quando administradas na presença de anfetamina e/ou cocaína, não se obteve o mesmo efeito (CARBONI et al., 1988, 1989a, 1989b; CERVO; POZZI; SAMANIN, 1996; DE DEURWAERDERE et al., 2005; PELTIER; SCHENK, 1991).

Além de fármacos atuando sobre receptores 5-HT, alguns estudos centraram-se no uso de inibidores da recaptação da serotonina. Alguns indicaram uma função de potencialização de efeitos da cocaína por meio de administração de ISRS (CUNNINGHAM; CALLAHAN, 1991; KLEVEN; KOEK, 1998). Já estudos em camundongos mostram que o *knockout* das duas cópias de DAT e uma ou

duas cópias de SERT é capaz de eliminar preferência de lugar por cocaína (HALL et al., 2004) e deficientes de dopamina mostraram CPL por cocaína quando expostos à fluoxetina (HNASKO; SOTAK; PALMITER, 2007), deficiência essa produzida por knockout da tirosina hidroxilase. A tirosina hidroxilase é uma enzima que catalisa a síntese de dopamina e outras monoaminas nos neurônios dopaminérgicos (COOPER; BLOOM; ROTH, 2003). Ambos tipos de receptores 5-HT₃ (A e AB) são expressos em humanos, ratos e camundongos e o código genético disponível se relaciona a uma variedade de patologias centrais e periféricas. Nos últimos 10 anos, o receptor 5-HT₃, o único ionóforo entre os receptores serotoninérgicos, tem despontado como um possível alvo terapêutico para doenças mentais, inclusive dependência química, agravada ou não por patologias periféricas (COSTALL; NAYLOR, 2004; KOVAC, 2016). O aumento crônico de 5-HT pode facilitar comportamentos relacionados com recompensa associada a drogas. Há interações entre serotonina e dopamina (DA) com relação à recompensa e com hiperatividade motora pela cocaína em ratos (SASAKI-ADAMS; KELLEY, 2001). O receptor 5-HT₃ mostrou efeitos semelhantes a ansiolíticos, discreta atividade anti-dopaminérgica, melhora na cognição e bons resultados na retirada e abuso de drogas (COSTALL; NAYLOR, 2004).

Estudos clínicos e pré-clínicos mostram uma forte relação do receptor 5-HT_{1B} com a dependência à cocaína (ALEX; PEHEK, 2007). Foi sugerido que a ação de antagonistas deste receptor poderia inibir comportamentos de busca pela cocaína induzidos pela droga e por pistas, sem afetar outros comportamentos, como manutenção da autoadministração, preferência de lugar ou sensibilização (MISZKIEL; FILIP; PRZEGALIŃSKI, 2011). Já a estimulação farmacológica dos receptores 5-HT_{1B} parece aumentar os efeitos da cocaína (CERVO et al., 2002). Neste contexto, acredita-se que a adequada modulação da expressão ou da atividade dos receptores 5-HT pode ter consequências no processo de dependência a cocaína.

Compostos indólicos sintéticos ou semissintéticos são formados por um heterociclo nitrogenado amplamente empregado na indústria agroquímica, ciência de materiais e também farmacêutica (BANDINI; EICHHOLZER, 2009), por terem ampla aplicação como antimicrobianos, antimicobacterianos, antimaláricos,

antirretroviral, anti-inflamatórios, antitumorais, anticonvulsivante (KAUSHIK et al., 2013; SHAFKAT ALI et al., 2013; SINGH; SINGH, 2017). O interesse por compostos contendo o núcleo indólico aumentou consideravelmente na década de 1950, com a descoberta da reserpina, um dos primeiros fármacos a rapidamente modificar comportamentos animais e humanos. Outros produtos naturais e sintéticos indólicos também são estudados (CHEN; HUANG, 2005) com interesse pelos farmacóforos indólicos como novos fármacos endereçados às doenças do SNC (ORRU; RUIJTER, 2010).

Entretanto, existem substâncias sintéticas que recentemente cresceram no mercado clandestino por sua grande vantagem: não serem classificadas como ilícitas e não serem controladas pela lei, nomeadas de novas substâncias psicoativas ou “baratos legais” (do inglês, “*legal highs*”) (Hassan et al., 2017; UNODC, 2019). São vendidos na *Internet* como alternativas a drogas como anfetaminas, cocaína, ecstasy, entre outras, produzindo efeito psicoestimulante semelhante (EMCDDA, 2017a; MILIANO et al., 2018; UNODC, 2019). Boa parte dessas substâncias é composta de agentes serotoninérgicos, como as novas triptaminas, que são semelhantes à serotonina, porém, também possuem afinidade por transportadores de outras monoaminas (HASSAN et al., 2017; LIECHTI, 2015).

Outras substâncias, como as catinonas sintéticas, também possuem efeitos sobre os transportadores de monoaminas e são, em alguns casos, combinadas com outras drogas, como metanfetamina e cocaína, o que pode aumentar sua toxicidade e risco de fatalidade (KARILA et al., 2015; MARUSICH et al., 2016; UNODC, 2019). As catinonas sintéticas e outros psicoestimulantes sintéticos são frequentemente utilizadas no contexto de festas e boates, principalmente por homens que fazem sexo com homens e bissexuais, e, em maioria, estes usuários apresentam soropositividade para HIV (GIORGETTI et al., 2017). Boa parte destas drogas podem impedir o indivíduo de escolher o seu parceiro ou de consentir ao ato, aumentando chances de ocorrência de sexo sem proteção e transmissão de doenças infecciosas venéreas, além de trauma retal (BRACCHI et al., 2015; EMCDDA, 2017b).

Um grande problema das substâncias sintéticas é que as pesquisas e apreensões dessas substâncias sempre estarão um passo atrás do que o tráfico de drogas, o que limita de forma importante as informações que se consegue obter sobre essas substâncias (UNODC, 2019). Isso demonstra a necessidade de estudar-se as interações e implicações de moléculas indólicas em modelos de transtorno de uso de substâncias, considerando a velocidade com que essas drogas sintéticas são produzidas e lançadas no mercado clandestino, a toxicidade desconhecida das mesmas e os riscos de usuários adquirirem doenças infecciosas, gerando consequências de saúde e socioeconômicas. Neste sentido, pesquisar moléculas sintéticas e seus efeitos sobre o SNC é um modo de aprimorar pesquisas *in silico* possibilitando a seleção de moléculas novas mais seguras e permitindo que estas permaneçam mais tempo no processo de descobrimento de substâncias (HUGHES et al., 2011).

1.2 Avaliação pré-clínica na descoberta de moléculas promissoras

O desenvolvimento de novos fármacos com possível ação biológica é um processo complexo e demorado. A seleção de candidatos promissores pode levar de meses a anos (NUGENT; DUNCAN; COLAGIOVANNI, 2013). Já o processo completo, desde a criação da ideia até a finalização do produto, pode levar cerca 15 anos, com custos elevadíssimos, em torno de 1 bilhão de dólares (HUGHES et al., 2011). Portanto, o alvo fisiológico a ser usado como base na criação da molécula deve ser muito bem estudado, identificado e validado, pois guiará todo o processo que vem a seguir. O alvo ideal precisa permitir que a substância nova seja segura, eficaz, atender às exigências comerciais e ter características terapêuticas, mas, acima de tudo, o alvo precisa ser “drogável”, isto é, passível de ser afetado por um fármaco (HUGHES et al., 2011).

Quando uma substância nova é criada, primeiramente, é preciso ter um banco de dados suficientemente preciso sobre as bases moleculares da doença-alvo (VAN DER GREEF; MCBURNEY, 2005). Para isso, estudos em diversas áreas são necessárias, como genética, molecular, bioquímica, farmacologia, etc., o que permite que novas moléculas mais específicas e eficazes e com menor toxicidade ou aparecimento de efeitos adversos sejam criadas. No caso de a

doença-alvo possuir base de dados suficiente para isso, é definida a estrutura química a ser seguida como ponto de partida e, a partir disso, compostos são gerados por meio de metodologias sintéticas (HEFTI, 2008).

As moléculas são selecionadas por meio de testes *in silico*, ou seja, por meio de modelo computacional, com o intuito de se estabelecer a relação estrutura-atividade (REA) a partir da base de dados relacionada às estruturas similares que já foram testadas, como em algoritmos de farmacóforos, atribuindo efeito e/ou atividade biológica a cada parte única da estrutura (THOMAS, 2010). Uma triagem das características farmacocinéticas (ADMET - absorção, distribuição, metabolização, excreção e toxicidade) previstas também por um modelo computacional (HUGHES et al., 2011) têm como objetivo estabelecer a relação estrutura-atividade quantitativa (RQEA) realizado por meio de parâmetros físico-químicos (EKINS, 2016; THOMAS, 2010). Na área da química, a regra dos 5 de Lipinski (LIPINSKI et al., 2001) é um guia bastante usado para inferir solubilidade e permeabilidade por membranas celulares, que demonstra ligação direta com propriedades cruciais, como lipofilicidade, verificada pelo coeficiente de partição, conformação e distribuição eletrônica, medidas pela quantidade de doadores e aceptores de ligação de hidrogênio e peso molecular (PAULI et al., 2008).

O critério de seleção das melhores moléculas normalmente é determinado pelo menor índice de toxicidade demonstrado por meio dos experimentos *in silico* (NUGENT; DUNCAN; COLAGIOVANNI, 2013). No entanto, poucas das inúmeras moléculas que são criadas mostram potencial para seguir em frente: cerca de 4 a 7% das candidatas têm bons resultados e são aprovadas por todos os testes necessários (LOMBARDINO; LOWE, 2004). As moléculas em investigação geralmente falham nas fases finais de estudo, em torno da Fase II de ensaios clínicos, por não produzirem o efeito esperado ou por serem pouco seguras (HUGHES et al., 2011; VAN DER GREEF; MCBURNEY, 2005). Tal consequência pode ser atribuída à escolha inadequada de modelos pouco preditivos dos efeitos destas moléculas (TONHOLO et al., 2020). Assim, a escolha de testes de triagem anteriores aos testes *in vivo* deve ser minuciosa.

Não há regulamentos formais no processo de triagem e seleção de fármacos novos na área de avaliação de segurança não-clínica (STARK; STEGER-HARTMANN, 2016). O programa de triagem deve ser construído para identificar problemas importantes que as moléculas candidatas possam demonstrar, diminuindo riscos. Assim, a triagem deve conter estudos exploratórios que possuam alta taxa de atrito, ou seja, capazes de reter aquelas moléculas com características desvantajosas, possibilitando melhor separação das moléculas com maiores chances de passar adiante por mais etapas, aumentando a taxa de transferência (STARK; STEGER-HARTMANN, 2016). Estes testes podem incluir os de citotoxicidade em células alvo e não-alvo, mutagenicidade e ligação a canais de membrana. Também devem ser considerados dados de eficácia e farmacologia de segurança *in vitro* e *in vivo* em única dose, rota de administração e dosagem semelhante às usadas em humanos (HEFTI, 2008), incluindo uso de testes comportamentais gerais, verificando parâmetros de locomoção, coordenação motora, comportamentos básicos, entre outros (FDA; HHS; CDER, 2017; FIELDEN; KOLAJA, 2008; WILLIAMS; PORSOLT, 2007).

Os ensaios de triagem *in vitro* de taxa de transferência são dois tipos principais: os baseados em células e os bioquímicos. Os bioquímicos utilizam reações moleculares entre enzimas e substratos, ligação de receptores e interações entre proteínas, entre outros mais complexos (ANDRADE et al., 2016; LIU; LI; HU, 2004). Os ensaios com cultura de células, mesmo possuindo mais etapas e levando mais tempo, mostram mais vantagens em comparação aos bioquímicos, pois é possível avaliar mais parâmetros de importância na fisiopatologia de uma condição de saúde, como o crescimento celular e proliferação, citotoxicidade, transporte por membranas, metabolismo, dentre outros (ANDRADE et al., 2016; LIU; LI; HU, 2004). Por meio destes testes, é possível inferir a concentração inibitória quando ocorre a morte celular de 50% das células (CI₅₀), quando a substância é tóxica (LOPES, 2016; STEINMETZ et al., 2018).

Dentre os testes *in vitro* mais comumente usados estão os testes de vermelho neutro (REPETTO; PESO; ZURITA, 2008), brometo de 3-(4,5-

dimetiltiazol-2-il)-2,5-difeniltetrazólio (MTT), um corante amarelo, e azul de tripan (STEINMETZ et al., 2018). O vermelho neutro e o MTT são ensaios que necessitam que a célula esteja viável para que os corantes sejam incorporados, pois o primeiro requer que a célula seja capaz de manter o gradiente de pH diferente entre citoplasma e lisossomos para ser retido dentro destes (REPETTO; PESO; ZURITA, 2008); e o segundo, que as mitocôndrias estejam intactas, para que haja a conversão do MTT a formazan, que gera cor arroxeadada (RISS et al., 2004); já o azul de tripan se incorpora em células não-viáveis, que estejam com a membrana plasmática danificada, ou seja, é um teste de exclusão (AVELAR-FREITAS et al., 2014).

Quando se avalia a segurança farmacológica do SNC *in vivo*, o ICH S7A recomenda que a bateria de estudos principal deve conter algumas medidas cruciais: atividade motora, alterações no comportamento do animal, coordenação motora, respostas sensoriais e de reflexo motor e a temperatura corporal (ICH et al., 2001). O teste de Irwin (1968) e a Bateria de Observação Funcional (BOF) (MATTSSON, 1994) são os principais protocolos recomendados na aplicação de farmacologia de segurança e são considerados equivalentes, mesmo que o BOF seja considerado um teste mais apropriado para verificar neurotoxicidade (CASTAGNÉ et al., 2013; ICH et al., 2001; WILLIAMS; PORSOLT, 2007). O teste de Irwin foi inicialmente criado para camundongos, com o intuito de se observar parâmetros qualitativos neurológicos e comportamentais (BAIRD; GAUVIN; DALTON, 2013; WILLIAMS; PORSOLT, 2007). Já o BOF foi criado como alternativa para uso em ratos, ainda que seja aplicável em outras espécies também (BAIRD; GAUVIN; DALTON, 2013; GAD; GAD, 2003; GAUVIN; BAIRD, 2008). Os procedimentos envolvem, de modo resumido, posicionar o animal em uma arena ampla, na qual o animal tem espaço para se locomover e é possível observar sua aparência física e comportamentos habituais do animal, como a marcha, postura, apoio em duas patas, reações de reflexo, autolimpeza, etc. (BAIRD; GAUVIN; DALTON, 2013). Outras avaliações podem ser feitas e revelam a influência de substâncias no SNC: testes de nocicepção, de indução de sono com hipnóticos, de indução de convulsão, entre outros (CASTAGNÉ et al., 2013; WILLIAMS; PORSOLT, 2007). O objetivo é detectar qualquer sinal que possa

impedir a substância de seguir adiante no processo do desenvolvimento do fármaco. Testes suplementares podem ser aplicados, quando forem verificados indícios de efeitos na cognição, atividade cerebral ou até mesmo de potencial de abuso da substância (ICH et al., 2001; WILLIAMS; PORSOLT, 2007). Os testes que se seguem dependem basicamente dos resultados preliminares, guiando a triagem toxicológica (STARK; STEGER-HARTMANN, 2016).

Em certos casos, modelos em roedores de predição de toxicidade podem não ser sensíveis ou específicos o suficiente para avaliação de risco em humanos, devido às reconhecidas diferenças biológicas, fisiopatológicas e farmacocinéticas entre espécies. Entretanto, a interpretação dos resultados e inferência do risco aos humanos depende importantemente do conhecimento da toxicologia e dos mecanismos de toxicidade dos compostos investigados (FIELDEN; KOLAJA, 2008). Estes conhecimentos levariam, então, à melhor seleção de testes toxicológicos e melhor discernimento dos compostos ou moléculas mais promissores.

Quando as moléculas em investigação não apresentam bons resultados, é necessário adaptá-las de acordo com as falhas encontradas, visando corrigi-las. A partir dessas modificações, novos testes devem ser postos em prática, avaliando novamente os parâmetros iniciais (HEFTI, 2008). Ou seja, cada modificação requer o recomeço dos testes de triagem para avaliar potenciais riscos não previstos pelos modelos computacionais ou por outros testes realizados com os compostos investigados de início, até que se obtenham resultados satisfatórios. Após isso, são feitos testes toxicológicos, com doses crescentes e períodos longos, geralmente equivalentes ao período que se pretende administrar em humanos, de modo a excluir os compostos mais tóxicos (FIELDEN; KOLAJA, 2008; HEFTI, 2008). Apenas após esta etapa, os mais promissores poderão seguir para pesquisa em humanos (HUGHES et al., 2011).

Quando um novo fármaco ou molécula, reconhecidamente psicotrópico ou que influencia a atividade do SNC, está sendo produzido, são necessários certos estudos comportamentais sobre diferentes aspectos. O potencial de gerar abuso e dependência é uma questão relevante para certas classes de fármacos ou moléculas. Considerando os estudos que avaliam o potencial de abuso e

transtorno de uso de substâncias (TUS) de novos fármacos, os principais modelos utilizados são o condicionamento de preferência de lugar (CPL), a discriminação de drogas e a autoadministração (FDA; HHS; CDER, 2017; WILLIAMS; PORSOLT, 2007). Estes testes serão detalhados adiante a fim de avaliar as propriedades reforçadoras das substâncias em estudo e se possuem efeitos similares ao de drogas de abuso já conhecidas (FDA; HHS; CDER, 2017).

1.3 Transtorno de uso de substâncias

O Instituto Nacional em Drogas de Abuso (*National Institute on Drugs of Abuse*, NIDA) define o conceito de adição da seguinte forma: “adição, ou uso de droga compulsivo apesar de consequências danosas, é caracterizado por uma incapacidade em parar de usar uma droga e cumprir obrigações do trabalho, sociais e familiares” (NIDA, 2018). A dependência, por outro lado, faz com que o indivíduo não consiga funcionar adequadamente sem a droga, pode ocorrer com vários tipos de drogas e até mesmo fármacos, como opioides, mas que, se administrados por longos períodos, podem causar tolerância e síndrome de abstinência quando cessado o uso (NIDA, 2018). A dependência física geralmente apresenta sintomas mais objetivos, como mudanças na temperatura corporal, enquanto que a dependência psicológica manifesta-se por meio de fissura pela droga (WILLIAMS; PORSOLT, 2007). Geralmente, tanto um quanto o outro se instalam após longos períodos de uso, que evolui e torna-se uso indevido, de maneira não aprovada culturalmente ou clinicamente, tanto de drogas quanto de fármacos, o que também pode ser caracterizado como abuso (KATZUNG, 2007; STAHL, 1998).

No entanto, o Manual Estatístico e Diagnóstico de Transtornos Mentais, Quinta Edição (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, DSM-V) não diferencia mais os termos adição e dependência em seus critérios, usando o termo “transtorno de uso de substâncias” para definir o uso de fármacos ou drogas que causam consequências físicas, psicológicas e sociais ao indivíduo. O TUS é reconhecido como um transtorno mental crônico e recidivante, conceitualizado em três estágios: 1 - a iniciação, na qual pode ocorrer intoxicação, ou uso excessivo ocasional; 2 - quando a droga é retirada, pode

surgir afeto negativo ou sintomas de abstinência, se o sistemas envolvidos já estiverem em fase de adaptações; 3 - e preocupação ou antecipação ao uso, o que também pode ser traduzido como fissura (KOOB; SIMON, 2009; KOOB; VOLKOW, 2010).

O DSM V e a Classificação Internacional de Doenças (CID-10) (APA, 2013) possuem um conjunto de itens referentes a comportamentos nos seus critérios diagnósticos do TUS, que são, entre eles: compulsão, usar a substância e dificuldade em controlar o consumo, redução de atividades sociais, sinais de tolerância, indicados pelo uso de doses mais altas, necessário para se obter o mesmo efeito de início de uso e estado de abstinência quando o uso diminui ou é cessado, o que pode ser revertido com o uso da mesma substância.

O abuso e dependência de cocaína (COC) constitui uma das maiores preocupações de saúde pública mundial (UNODC, 2014). O uso abusivo de cocaína implica em um grande problema em função das consequências do seu consumo, que vão desde prejuízos na saúde mental e física do usuário, até transtornos sócio-ocupacionais, econômicos e legais, que envolvem outras instâncias para além das individuais (ANTHONY et al., 2010; WEI; ANTHONY; LU, 2012). Recentemente, foi demonstrado que a cocaína apresenta alta carga de doença, sendo uma crescente preocupação de causa direta de morbimortalidades no mundo (BUTLER; REHM; FISCHER, 2017). Os usuários de cocaína mostram de um a oito vezes maiores taxa de mortalidade do que seus pares idade-sexo na população geral (BARRIO et al., 2013). No *World Drug Report* de 2019, é relatado que, em 2017, perto de 2,7 milhões de pessoas entre idades 15-64 eram usuários de cocaína na América do Sul. Dentre os países desta sub-região, a Argentina, o Brasil e o Chile obtiveram maior prevalência anual de uso de cocaína que a sub-região como um todo.

A ação farmacológica principal da cocaína é a potente psicoestimulação, gerada por meio do bloqueio da recaptção de monoaminas no cérebro, principalmente DA e em menor escala, 5-HT e norepinefrina (NE) (OGA; CAMARGO; BATISTUZZO, 2008). Após administração, a cocaína é rapidamente captada pelo cérebro, acumulando-se no corpo estriado, onde liga-se aos transportadores de dopamina, bloqueando-os. Os efeitos da cocaína atingem o

seu máximo quando a concentração da droga no estriado chega ao seu pico; conseqüentemente, quando a droga é depurada dessa área, os efeitos entram em declínio (VOLKOW; SWANSON, 2003).

O desenvolvimento da dependência química é determinado a partir de uma interação complexa entre a droga utilizada, características do indivíduo e o ambiente (KREEK et al., 2005; PIAZZA; LE MOAL, 1998). A dependência é causada primariamente por sensibilização induzida por drogas no sistema mesocorticolímbico que atribuem a saliência do incentivo a estímulos associados ao reforço (ROBINSON; BERRIDGE, 2008). Isso ocorre porque, como Adinoff (2004) sugere em sua revisão, “o sistema mesolímbico dopaminérgico avalia a saliência, ou valor, de um reforçador em potencial”, já que medeia a interpretação ou aprendizado de possíveis reforçadores negativos e positivos. Com o uso repetido, pistas contextuais vão sendo associadas à experiência do uso, o que provoca a incorporação de outros circuitos cerebrais, envolvidos em memória emocional, resposta ao estresse, tomada de decisão, etc., levando, então, à dependência e prováveis recaídas (ADINOFF, 2004).

Dessa forma, o sistema mesocorticolímbico dopaminérgico é reconhecido como o circuito neural mais envolvido com o TUS. As seguintes regiões são consideradas como substrato comum na adição e dependência de diversas drogas de abuso: a ATV, o núcleo accumbens (NAc) e o córtex pré-frontal (CPF), amígdala e hipocampo (BECKER; CHARTOFF, 2019; KOOB; VOLKOW, 2010).

Já é sabido que os psicoestimulantes dependem da ativação do sistema mesolímbico dopaminérgico para exercer propriedades de reforço agudo. Drogas como a cocaína e a anfetamina ativam a liberação de dopamina no NAc e na amígdala de modo agudo (KOOB; VOLKOW, 2010). O estágio de afeto negativo envolve adaptações que produzem motivação reduzida por estímulos não-droga, assim como aumentam a sensibilidade pela droga abusada (MELIS; SPIGA; DIANA, 2005). Essas adaptações ocasionam sintomas envolvidos com a diminuição da função dopaminérgica quando o indivíduo não tem acesso à droga, atuando como reforço negativo e instigando o usuário a buscar pela droga (KOOB; VOLKOW, 2010). Todos esses processos influenciam no

desenvolvimento de dependência, impedindo o usuário de controlar o consumo da droga.

Em considerando-se os sinais correspondentes que podem ser observados em animais em testes experimentais, estes podem ser resumidos em alguns principais, como a busca e o uso compulsivos da droga, sintomas de retirada, como motivação reduzida em buscar por reforços naturais e locomoção reduzida, continuação do uso mesmo com consequências negativas e restabelecimento do uso, o que seria um modelo para recaída em animais (KOOB; ARENDS; LE MOAL, 2014; KOOB; VOLKOW, 2010).

A área de neurociência comportamental vem, ao longo dos anos, buscando formas adequadas de se examinar comportamentos em animais e transpor os conhecimentos gerados aos humanos, com intuito translacional. Essas pesquisas são necessárias, pois existem doenças ou condições de saúde que não podem ser testadas diretamente em humanos, por questões éticas, como o TUS (CARTER; SHIEH, 2015; PLANETA, 2013). Para esta condição, existem alguns modelos já bem estabelecidos na área, que serão conceituados adiante.

1.4 Modelos animais em TUS

A autoadministração é o modelo padrão-ouro para se estudar TUS, o qual se baseia em condicionamento operante, uma teoria estudada por B. F. Skinner. Essa teoria tem como premissa que o indivíduo é capaz de associar um comportamento a uma consequência (SKINNER, 1938) e, se a consequência for um estímulo prazeroso ou reforçador, o comportamento associado tem maior tendência a ser repetido, enquanto que um estímulo não-prazeroso ou algo como uma punição tem maior tendência a ser evitado. No modelo de autoadministração é exigido do animal que “trabalhe” para receber uma dose da droga sendo testada (PLANETA, 2013; WILLIAMS; PORSOLT, 2007). Animais que estão realmente adictos reagem de forma parecida com humanos a certas condições impostas no protocolo: mesmo com uma punição, eles continuam exercendo respostas para receber droga, além disso, mesmo que se exija que os animais exerçam mais respostas para receber uma dose, eles aumentam o número de respostas de acordo com a exigência (ROBINSON, 2004).

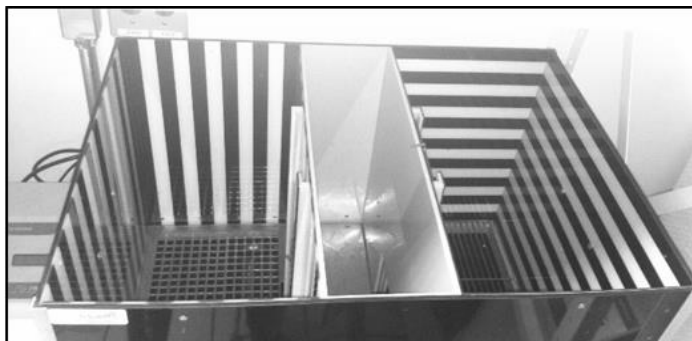
Outros modelos também podem ser usados, como a discriminação de drogas. Este procedimento é capaz de identificar as propriedades reforçadoras das drogas relativas e seu potencial de abuso (KOOB; ARENDS; LE MOAL, 2014), além de ser possível verificar a susceptibilidade de abuso de uma droga (KÖKS, 2015). A premissa deste modelo é baseada na capacidade do animal de diferenciar uma substância administrada agudamente de outra administrada repetidamente, por meio das semelhanças ou diferenças nos seus efeitos reforçadores (WILLIAMS; PORSOLT, 2007). O animal é treinado para responder pressionando uma barra para uma droga ou para uma injeção de veículo, porém, no dia do teste, recebe uma droga de ação semelhante, o que provoca uma resposta na barra da droga usada no treinamento (KOOB; ARENDS; LE MOAL, 2014).

Um dos modelos animais deste estudo, o condicionamento de preferência de lugar (CPL), é um protocolo simples e não invasivo capaz de fornecer um indicador de efeito recompensador de drogas (PRUS; JAMES; ROSECRANS, 2009). No âmbito do abuso de drogas, é reconhecido o fato de que a busca pela droga é fortemente controlada por estímulos e contextos associados aos efeitos dessa droga (SOLINAS et al., 2008). Este paradigma, mesmo não sendo padrão ouro para estudar a dependência, como a autoadministração, é válido e confiável. As drogas (ou outros estímulos reforçadores) são reforçadores positivos, capazes de produzirem preferência pelo ambiente associado à droga, estimulam o sistema de recompensa no cérebro, pelo aumento de dopamina na fenda sináptica. Reforçadores negativos produzem estados disfóricos ou aversivos em humanos, acionando outros circuitos cerebrais e produzindo aversão condicionada (KÖKS, 2015).

Para melhores esclarecimentos sobre o protocolo, segue descrição do aparato usado. O aparato usado deve possuir, no mínimo, dois compartimentos distintos, com pistas contextuais que o animal pode diferenciar facilmente, como paredes em cores ou texturas diferentes (padrões variados de listras, quadriculados, círculos, etc.), assim como o piso também pode ter texturas diferentes, para que haja melhor discriminação dos ambientes. A caixa pode possuir um ambiente neutro, com o intuito de não ser pareado com nenhum

estímulo, assim, é mais usualmente pintado em cores intermediárias, ou até mesmo transparente, e com piso liso.

Figura 3 - Fotografia de caixa de condicionamento de preferência de lugar



Fonte: Autores.

Este modelo baseia-se no condicionamento Pavloviano, ou condicionamento clássico: os efeitos reforçadores do estímulo não condicionado são pareados com certo local que possui características únicas, assim, espera-se que o indivíduo estenda os efeitos do estímulo da intervenção ao local em que esteve quando praticou a atividade reforçadora, tornando, enfim, o estímulo “condicionado” por esse lugar (PRUS; JAMES; ROSECRANS, 2009). Neste procedimento, o reforço, que pode ser uma droga de abuso (mais comumente usada neste procedimento), corresponde ao estímulo incondicionado (EI). Este é pareado a um ambiente, chamado de estímulo condicionado (EC) e outro ambiente é associado com a ausência dessa intervenção. O animal é exposto ao EI dentro do EC por repetidas vezes até associar o ambiente e suas características aos efeitos reforçadores percebidos pelo animal durante exposição ao EI (BARDO; HORTON; YATES, 2015; CARTER; SHIEH, 2015; HUSTON et al., 2013). A resposta condicionada, isto é, a procura pelo ambiente pareado com a droga, indica que, de fato, houve a associação dos dois estímulos. Isso significa que o animal atribuiu importância ao contexto do ambiente (BARDO; HORTON; YATES, 2015).

Quando é utilizado outro tipo de EI, como, por exemplo, um choque elétrico que causa dor no animal, a resposta esperada é o congelamento, demonstrando uma resposta automática de medo. Após a associação do EC ao EI, o animal

mostra a mesma resposta de congelamento mesmo quando é apresentado apenas ao EC, provando que ocorreu aversão condicionada ao lugar (CARTER; SHIEH, 2015).

O protocolo prevê, de modo mais usual, três momentos ou três fases distintas, denominadas: pré-condicionamento ou pré-teste, momento em que é definida a preferência basal do animal; condicionamento, no qual o animal é exposto ao EI; e pós-condicionamento, ou teste, momento em que a preferência final do animal é verificada. Os modos de avaliação mais comuns dessa preferência podem ser feitos por meio da comparação da preferência final com a basal no lado pareado com o EI ou fazendo a diferença dos tempos permanecidos nos dois lados para verificar em qual lado o animal permaneceu mais tempo no dia do teste. A esquematização deste protocolo está representada na Figura 4.

Figura 4 - Esquematização do protocolo de condicionamento de preferência de lugar



Fonte: Autores.

Em comparação com a autoadministração, que avalia de forma direta as características reforçadoras das drogas de abuso por meio do condicionamento operante, o CPL possui algumas vantagens e desvantagens, ainda que seja um pouco menos sensível que a autoadministração (BARDO; HORTON; YATES, 2015). Neste modelo, não é necessário o procedimento de cirurgia e introdução de cateter, o que reduz o risco de perda de animais; é possível obter controle preciso da dose que o animal recebe, assim, não há grandes variações da quantidade disponível de droga no organismo do animal, facilitando a

interpretação de interação entre substâncias; outras características são a possibilidade de medir atividade locomotora pela contagem de cruzamentos realizados entre ambientes do aparato (BARDO; HORTON; YATES, 2015). Também é possível testar recompensa por droga em condições sem a administração da droga no dia do teste, o que poderia ser mais representativo da condição de retirada da droga na clínica (NAPIER; HERROLD; DE WIT, 2013).

Dessa forma, o CPL pode ter aplicações variadas, e nem todas são aplicáveis em protocolo de autoadministração usual. Além disso, a execução do protocolo é mais rápida e simples, facilitando a sua aplicação em testagem de novas moléculas e fármacos. Com o intuito de testar o efeito de fármacos já usados na clínica com outros fins, como, por exemplo, agonistas e antagonistas de receptores 5-HT e sua influência em efeitos reforçadores de drogas, o CPL é um modelo comumente utilizado (CAPRILES; WATSON; AKIL, 2012; CARBONI et al., 1988, 1989a; CERVO; POZZI; SAMANIN, 1996; ENGLEMAN et al., 2008), bem como em estudos sobre efeitos em recaída, com fármacos variados (NAPIER; HERROLD; DE WIT, 2013).

1.5 Diferença entre sexos

Um fator relevante em testagem de moléculas novas e estudos de comportamento em modelos animais é o sexo, que tem sido cada vez mais apontado como uma variável biológica em vários aspectos e condições de saúde (CLAYTON, 2018; HEBERDEN, 2017; RAWLIK; CANELA-XANDRI; TENESA, 2016). Por muitos anos, estudos com animais pouco levavam em consideração as diferenças que poderiam existir entre sexos, priorizando a diminuição de custos e de tempo e usando somente machos em experimentação pré-clínica (BECKER; CHARTOFF, 2019). Atualmente, é determinação das agências internacionais de pesquisa que sejam estudados em indivíduos de ambos os sexos. O *National Institute of Health* (NIH) lançou nova diretriz em 2016 estimulando a comparação entre sexos em estudos pré-clínicos, denotando o sexo como uma variável biológica (*sex as a biological variable* - SABV) importante a ser estudada, mesmo que não obrigatória, sendo considerada então um fator que mostra rigor e

transparência em estudos que o incluem (BECKER; CHARTOFF, 2019; CLAYTON, 2018).

Como mencionado anteriormente, existem várias características biológicas que são moduladas por hormônios gonadais ou que demonstram dualidade sexual. Fêmeas intactas geralmente mostram maior atividade locomotora em testes de campo aberto e roda de exercício (VAN HAAREN; VAN HEST; HEINSBROEK, 1990) e também mostram locomoção mais rápida em teste de aprendizado espacial usando campo aberto (LIPATOVA et al., 2018). Estudos relacionando a influência do estrógeno no aprendizado e na memória indicam que este hormônio possui efeito de modo diferencial em sistemas de memória distintos (KOROL; PISANI, 2015), assim como parecem existir influências do estradiol na neurogênese (HEBERDEN, 2017) e diferenças sexuais sobre funções cognitivas e estruturas cerebrais (LI; SINGH, 2014). Uma coorte com dados no Reino Unido analisou 19 características diferentes, relacionando interações de gene pelo sexo, e encontrou que 13 destas possuem diferenças genéticas entre os sexos (RAWLIK; CANELA-XANDRI; TENESA, 2016).

A relevância específica do excessivo uso de drogas pelas mulheres agrega importância na pesquisa pré-clínica focada na comparação de sexos. Homens exibem taxas mais altas de uso de drogas, abuso e dependência em amostras de pacientes que buscam tratamento (COMPTON et al., 2007; GRUCZA et al., 2008; KESSLER et al., 2005). No entanto, levantamentos epidemiológicos recentes sugerem que essa diferença tem diminuído nos últimos anos (GRUCZA et al., 2008; WAGNER; ANTHONY, 2007).

As pesquisas do início da década de 80, por exemplo, estimavam a proporção homem/mulher de transtornos relacionados ao uso de drogas como sendo de 5:1 (HELZER; BURNAM; MCEVOY, 1991), já pesquisas mais recentes apontam uma proporção de aproximadamente 3:1 (HASIN et al., 2007). Entre os jovens estudantes do Brasil, o consumo de drogas ilícitas entre as mulheres era semelhante ao dos homens (ANDRADE; DUARTE; DE OLIVEIRA, 2010; BRASIL, 2006), e em jovens de 12 a 25 anos dos EUA, não se mostraram diferenças em porcentagens de usuários dependentes ou que abusavam de drogas ilícitas, desde 2002 (COTTO et al., 2010). Nas Américas do Sul e Central, porém, o uso

não médico de estimulantes farmacêuticos derivados da anfetamina como anorexígenos, metilfenidato e a própria anfetamina, fármacos que não estão disponíveis no Brasil para venda, ou seja, ilícitos, vêm crescendo em uso entre mulheres e são as mais usadas dentre essa categoria de medicamentos para fins diferentes do que são designados (UNODC, 2019).

De acordo com Kerr-Corrêa et al (2007), o uso de drogas entre as mulheres segue a tendência de comportamento atual com relação ao gênero, no qual elas estão se tornando menos conservadoras e tradicionais em seus papéis, aproximando-se do papel social do homem. No entanto, ainda que as diferenças socioculturais venham diminuindo, assim como as diferenças nos números absolutos de usuários homens e mulheres, as diferenças biológicas e de padrão de uso vêm se tornando mais aparentes.

A droga que possui maior tendência a gerar TUS entre adolescentes do sexo masculino é a maconha, e entre jovens homens, são o álcool e a maconha, principalmente. Já em adolescentes e jovens mulheres, a tendência é maior para cocaína e drogas psicoterapêuticas (COTTO et al., 2010). As razões pelas quais mulheres sentem motivação por usar drogas de abuso reflete o seu padrão de uso: amenizar sintomas negativos de transtornos mentais e estresse, enquanto que os homens buscam sensação prazerosa que as drogas causam (COTTO et al., 2010; MITCHELL; POTENZA, 2015). Corroborando este dado, sabe-se que mulheres são mais suscetíveis aos efeitos da cocaína e, uma vez dependentes, têm maior dificuldade em parar o uso, sendo a probabilidade de recaída maior (LYNCH; ROTH; CARROLL, 2002).

Estudos de neuroimagem mostram que, nestas situações, mulheres têm uma maior ativação do córtex orbitofrontal - uma região do córtex pré-frontal envolvida com a tomada de decisões - do que usuários do sexo masculino (ADINOFF et al., 2006). Independentemente dos níveis de circulação dos hormônios gonadais, fêmeas sempre adquirem comportamento de autoadministração à cocaína mais rapidamente e autoadministram mais cocaína quando comparadas aos machos (CAMPBELL; MORGAN; CARROLL, 2002; HU et al., 2004). Uma revisão recente argumenta que, em animais, vem se estabelecendo que o estradiol regula o sistema dopaminérgico mesotelencefálico

de modo a aumentar sua atividade (YOEST; QUIGLEY; BECKER, 2018). Isso pode ser explicado pela presença de receptores de estradiol em áreas cruciais do sistema mencionado acima, como ATV, amígdala, CPF, hipocampo e NAc (BECKER; CHARTOFF, 2019).

Outras formas de controle desse sistema também foram evidenciadas por meio dos hormônios gonadais, e uma delas é o papel relevante no metabolismo da dopamina. Foi demonstrado que o receptor de andrógeno pode regular a transcrição do gene da tirosina hidroxilase (JEONG et al., 2006) e que a administração de estradiol em ratas ovariectomizadas foi capaz de aumentar os níveis da enzima em neurônios dopaminérgicos (SEROVA et al., 2004), e de fato, em estudos de imunoreatividade foi encontrado que receptores de estrógeno e de andrógeno se situam em neurônios dopaminérgicos do mesencéfalo em ratos (CREUTZ; KRITZER, 2002; KRITZER, 1997). Além disso, o sistema serotoninérgico também apresenta diferenças entre os sexos. Fêmeas mostram maiores níveis de serotonina e seu metabólito, o ácido 5-hidroxiindolacético no cérebro (CARLSSON et al., 1985; CARLSSON; CARLSSON, 1988) e a deleção do receptor 5-HT₃ demonstrou regulação de comportamentos tipo depressivos e ansiosos de modo diferente em machos e fêmeas (BHATNAGAR et al., 2004).

Além disso, evidências mostram que o estrógeno modula os níveis de ácido ribonucleico mensageiro das duas enzimas responsáveis pela síntese de ácido gama-aminobutírico (GABA), a glutamato descarboxilase (GAD) 65 e GAD67, no cérebro de ratas (FREESE et al., 2012; MCCARTHY et al., 1995). Um estudo feito em nosso laboratório demonstrou um aumento na expressão de RNAm de GAD67 em CPF de ratas ovariectomizadas e não ovariectomizadas após tratamento repetido com cocaína (SOUZA et al., 2009). O estradiol mostra efeito no estriado de fêmeas adultas, atenuando liberação de GABA, por meio de receptores de estradiol localizados em neurônios gabaérgicos, assim como uma associação dos receptores de estradiol a receptores metabotrópicos de glutamato, o que leva à modulação e aumento da dopamina de modo indireto (BECKER; CHARTOFF, 2019; HU et al., 2006).

2 JUSTIFICATIVA

Dentro da pesquisa de novas moléculas com potencial uso em humanos, é sempre necessário avaliar se existe possibilidade destas causarem alguma toxicidade ao cérebro, priorizando a saúde mental e neurológica dos indivíduos. Quando isso é rompido de alguma forma, pode causar grandes consequências em vários âmbitos da vida de quem pode ser exposto a estas substâncias (ICH et al., 2001). Ou seja, as estratégias de observação de comportamentos devem permitir a detecção de potenciais efeitos sobre a função do SNC que possam ser deletérios em humanos (BAIRD; GAUVIN; DALTON, 2013).

Dessa forma, quando se pesquisa novas substâncias na área da farmacologia, o uso de modelos animais que permitam a investigação de vários aspectos do comportamento se torna necessário. A pesquisa em células e tecidos isoladamente é relevante, mas tem suas limitações, pois fornece apenas dados pontuais sobre o efeito naquele tecido em específico (MOREL et al., 2004). Testes *in vivo* exploratórios que avaliem a segurança das substâncias, no entanto, ainda são o estado da arte, que fornecem as melhores previsões para testes posteriores (STARK; STEGER-HARTMANN, 2016). Esses testes são imprescindíveis, pois o comportamento é resultante de múltiplos mecanismos interiores e exteriores a um ser vivo, alguns ainda não bem esclarecidos. Assim, é crucial estudar a função do SNC em um animal consciente, capaz de se mover livremente (CASTAGNÉ et al., 2013).

O abuso e o transtorno de uso de cocaína e seus derivados constitui uma das maiores preocupações de saúde pública mundial (UNODC, 2014). O uso abusivo deste psicoestimulante implica em um grande problema em função das consequências do seu consumo, que vão desde prejuízos na saúde mental e física do usuário, até transtornos sócio-ocupacionais, econômicos e legais, que envolvem outras instâncias para além das individuais (ANTHONY et al., 2010; WEI; ANTHONY; LU, 2012). O Brasil é maior mercado de cocaína e crack da América do Sul, fazendo a distribuição de cocaína de países vizinhos para vários outros países, como a África, Austrália, etc. (UNODC, 2019).

Além disso, as diferenças biológicas entre sexos é algo que, no passado, era pouco explorado em estudos experimentais pré-clínicos, porém, evidências

vem demonstrando que estas diferenças existem (CLAYTON, 2018; HEBERDEN, 2017; RAWLIK; CANELA-XANDRI; TENESA, 2016) e que explorá-las é algo que mostra a preocupação dos pesquisadores com o rigor e reprodutibilidade dos estudos (BECKER; CHARTOFF, 2019). Estudos clínicos mostram que mulheres progredem da oportunidade do uso para abuso da droga mais rápido que homens e podem ser mais vulneráveis a efeitos adversos decorrentes do uso de drogas, principalmente pela interação hormonal (CARROLL et al., 2004). Em roedores, está bem estabelecido que a ação hormonal influencia nos efeitos da cocaína e sinalização dopaminérgica (BECKER; CHARTOFF, 2019; SOUZA et al., 2014; YOEST; QUIGLEY; BECKER, 2018).

A hipótese conceitual que se desenvolve acerca da necessidade de investigar se substâncias que possuem um núcleo indólico poderiam apresentar potencial de produzir dependência química. Ainda, é relevante investigar se moléculas indólicas poderiam interferir no condicionamento de preferência de lugar realizado com uma droga psicoestimulante bem estabelecida, como a cocaína, considerando que indivíduos usuários crônicos de cocaína possuem prejuízos significativos no SNC e no organismo. Por outro lado, existem estudos mostrando o efeito de agonistas e antagonistas de 5-HT sobre modelos animais de abuso de drogas, assim, é relevante investigar se estas moléculas poderiam apresentar efeito antiaditivo, visto que não existe tratamento farmacológico aprovado ao transtorno de uso de cocaína (KAMPMAN, 2019). Além disso, diante da vulnerabilidade das fêmeas em relação ao uso de psicoestimulantes, este estudo se propõe a investigar a potencial ação sobre o SNC de duas moléculas que com núcleo indólico em ratos machos e fêmeas.

Por fim, acredita-se ser de suma importância investigar novas moléculas contendo núcleos indólicos funcionalizados como alternativa interessante e inovadora às drogas usualmente testadas. Cabe ressaltar que uma série de moléculas desta classe já foram planejadas, sintetizadas e testadas quanto a parâmetros de toxicidade *in silico* e *in vitro* pelo grupo de Química Medicinal da UFCSPA. Estas moléculas apresentam arquitetura molecular extremamente versátil, com grande similaridade aos modelos de ligantes 5-HT.

3 OBJETIVOS

3.1 Objetivo Geral

O objetivo geral é avaliar os potenciais efeitos de moléculas com núcleos indólicos funcionalizados que atuem sobre receptores 5-HT por meio de testes de locomoção e comportamentos tipo ansiedade, além de investigar o potencial efeito sobre a preferência de lugar por cocaína em ratos machos e fêmeas.

3.2 Objetivos Específicos

Descrever as características e propriedades físico-químicas por metodologias *in silico* das moléculas indólicas SM7 e SM12, usando as ferramentas DataWarrior, FAF-Drugs e pkCSM.

Avaliar efeitos sobre a viabilidade celular das duas moléculas indólicas em ensaio *in vitro* com células C6 de glioma e determinar a CI_{50} ;

Verificar a potencial segurança das moléculas indólicas em ratos machos e fêmeas e possíveis diferenças sexuais;

Investigar efeitos das moléculas indólicas sobre teste comportamental em campo aberto;

Verificar os efeitos das moléculas indólicas sobre comportamentos de condicionamento de preferência de lugar em associação à cocaína em ratos machos e fêmeas;

Verificar a influência da cocaína sobre seus efeitos na locomoção, inferida pelo número de entradas no dia do pós-condicionamento, das moléculas indólicas em ratos machos e fêmeas submetidos a protocolo de condicionamento de preferência de lugar, comparando animais expostos à cocaína ou apenas ao veículo;

Descrever a distribuição do ciclo estral das fêmeas nos dias de pós-condicionamento e campo aberto.

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Toxicological assessment of synthetic indole molecules in male and female rats

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Abstract: Indole molecules are one of the broadest types of molecules with great biological relevance, as serotonin is an indolamine. The relationship of the serotonergic system has been demonstrated for many physiological processes, meaning that molecules targeting this system could possess potential to improve or aggravate health conditions. The combined use of new serotonergic targeting substances and psychostimulants have been raising concern, as little is known about its toxicity in the human body. Considering this, two indole molecules (SM7 and SM12) have been tested in male and female rats, regarding their potential to affect locomotor activity and place preference behaviors in association with cocaine, and their cytotoxicity profile. Neither of the two molecules has shown effects on locomotion or defecation, however, rearing counts were greater for

vehicle (VEH) group when comparing to SM7 group (Means: VEH = 27.5; SM7 = 22.5; $p = 0.047$), as well as cocaine exposed to cocaine-naïve males (Means: COC = 26.7; COC-Naïve = 22.3; $p = 0.013$). None of the molecules showed to potentiate or reduce cocaine's reinforcing properties, although the number of entries in conditioned place preference (CPP) was higher for SM12 females than for females who received vehicle (Means: SM12 = 218.5; VEH = 150.6; $p = 0.038$). The cytotoxicity profile has revealed reduced viability for SM12 in higher concentrations when compared to NC group (Medians: NC = 1.014; 200 mM = 0.727; 400 mM = 0.576; $p = <0.001$). These results indicate there is little evidence of a toxicity of SM7 and SM12 to the central nervous system (CNS), although there seems to be an influence on emotionality, considering rearing counts for SM7 cocaine exposed males, which could indicate a cumulative effect of this molecule in males. SM12 increased the number of entries in females, which is similar to other results, showing the modulation of serotonergic system can change locomotion parameters in females. Overall, SM12 demonstrated more cytotoxicity and toxicity to the CNS. Additional studies should be performed to evaluate if this molecule could influence other aspects of behavior *in vivo*.

Keywords

Cytotoxicity; serotonergic molecules; Conditioning preference place; cocaine; *in silico*

1. Introduction

Indoles are constituted of a pyrrole ring fused to a benzene ring (Kaushik et al., 2013; Shafakat Ali et al., 2013), and are probably the broadest type of clinically relevant heterocyclic compounds, which could explain its wide use as medicines or for recreational intake through history, both as natural and as synthetic substances (Kaushik et al., 2013). On the other side, new psychoactive substances (NPS) targeting the serotonergic system emerged as substitutes of established stimulants; its abuse has been increasing in the last years, in the context of “chemsex” parties, to enhance performance and reduce inhibition (EMCDDA, 2017; UNODC, 2019) and its trade market has been expanding (UNODC, 2014).

Much has been done to clarify the mechanism of the pharmacological actions of indole molecules with potential clinical effects and the toxicity of the synthetic serotonergic molecules. Even though substantial progress has been made, we still do not know which molecular characteristics favor beneficial and toxic effects, how indole substances work and how risky the use and abuse of these substances are, regarding the

relationship between the serotonergic system with the dopaminergic (DA) mesolimbic pathway (Alex and Pehek, 2007).

As vulnerability to develop a substance use disorder is influenced by interactions between hormonal, genetic and environmental factors (Kreek et al., 2005; Piazza and Le Moal, 1998), gonadal hormones have a crucial role as a risk factor for the development of drug abuse (Becker and Chartoff, 2019; Souza et al., 2014). There seems to exist modulating effects of hormones upon the reward system in different areas of the brain and upon different neurotransmitters (Freese et al., 2012; Souza et al., 2009, 2014; Yoest et al., 2018).

Therefore, we propose to perform an exploratory study of the potential behavioral effects and the cytotoxicity profile of two indole molecules using two animal models, in male and female young adult rats, besides the *in silico* and *in vitro* toxicological profile of the new molecules.

2. Methods

2.1 Drugs

Three different treatment groups were designated after the CPP: vehicle (VEH) (DMSO 80% + saline 20%); indolic molecules SM7 and SM12 (10 mg/mL in DMSO vehicle). DMSO was used as a solubilizing agent for the SM molecules used in this experiment, as their hydrophilicity is low. The chemical structure of these molecules is constituted of alkenylindoles synthesized by heterohydroarylation of alkynes and arenes. SM molecules synthesis and *in silico* testing were performed by the Medicinal Chemistry Laboratory (supervised by MG) and *in vitro* testing was performed by the Genetic Toxicology Laboratory (supervised by DM). The least toxic molecules were chosen for their best results for absorption, distribution, metabolism and excretion, as well as toxicity (ADMET).

An initial pilot experiment was performed for phenotypic observation of behaviors of animals under the influence of the new SM molecules to determine the most probable effective dose without inducing writhing or serotonin syndrome in rats. When the initial dose used (40 mg/kg) showed strong writhing and tremors, a lesser amount was used (10 mg/kg), showing very few and shortly observed adverse effects.

For the CPP, cocaine hydrochloride (Merck®, Germany) was dissolved in saline (0,9%) to a concentration of 15 mg/mL. Saline (SAL) (NaCl 0.9%) was used as vehicle for the non-drug days of the place conditioning and also for the cocaine-naive animals. This additional set of cocaine-naive male and female rats was used as general controls for the SM drugs. The cocaine-naive animals received saline only in conditioning.

All solutions mentioned above were kept at room temperature (22 ± 2 °C) during the experiments and were injected intraperitoneally (i.p.) in a volume of 1 mL/kg.

2.2 Cell culture and *in vitro* assay

A neutral red *in vitro* assay was performed to assess SM molecules potential cytotoxicity. C6 rat glioma cell line was received from American Type Culture Collection (ATCC, Rockville, Maryland, USA). This cell culture procedure is thoroughly described elsewhere (Steinmetz et al., 2018). Cell viability assay was performed with an adapted neutral red uptake assay from Borenfreund and Puerner (1985) (Henn et al., 2019). Cells were seeded in complete media and grown for 24 h, then treated with SM7 and SM12 at 1, 10, 50, 100, 200 and 400 mM. Negative control (NC) corresponds to exposure to culture medium only and 10% DMSO was used for comparisons with vehicle. After this procedure, the absorbance was measured at 540 nm using a microtiter plate reader, considering NC as reference (100% viability). Each result for SM molecules was calculated as a proportion of NC mean and expressed in percentage.

2.3 Animals

Wistar albino rats (males = 60; females = 60) were received on postnatal day (PND) 21. All animals were provided from Universidade Federal de Ciências da Saúde de Porto Alegre (UFCSPA) vivarium's and maintained in 22 ± 2 °C temperature and controlled humidity, on a 12 h light/dark cycle (lights on at 6h A.M.) and *ad libitum* access to food and water. Animals were housed in standard environment, 2-3 rats of the same sex per cage, constituted of polypropylene bottom and sides (40 x 33 x 17 cm), with wood chip bedding, with metal rod top, from where animals had access to food and the water sipper bottle. All procedures complied with the following guidelines: International Council for Laboratory Animal Science (ICLAS) and NIH Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory

Animals (2011) and were approved by Ethics Committee from our university (Protocol N° #233/18).

2.3.1 Vaginal smear

All female rats were assessed for their estrous cycle through vaginal smearing. This procedure was performed as described elsewhere (Marcondes et al., 2002). Smears were collected every day, at the same time, from PND 35 on. In short, a drop of saline (0.9%) was inserted on the vaginal cavity of females with the use of a plastic pipette. The vaginal fluid was dispensed on a clean slide and cover slip and visualized fresh with 10 and 40 x objective lenses. Four phases can be identified through the different cells that are present on the vaginal cavity: diestrus, metestrus, proestrus, and estrus, as already described before (Vilela et al., 2007).

2.4 Apparatus

The CPP apparatus used for this procedure was a plexiglass chamber (Insight®, Brazil), (40 x 60 x 38 cm) with three compartments: a neutral, gray compartment in the center (40 x 14 x 38 cm), with an aluminum plate as flooring, connecting the other two conditioning compartments (40 x 23 x 38 cm) through guillotine doors. The walls of these chambers had monochromatic stripes, which were vertical on one side and horizontal on the other, and distinct floorings, made of cross-grid plate on one side and parallel bars on the other. Each conditioning compartment had 4 infrared photobeams crossing it, whereas the neutral compartment had 2 photobeams, by which the Place Preference software (Insight®) counts time spent by the animal on each compartment. It also counts numbers of entries in each compartment (Freese et al., 2018).

The open-field apparatus is made of clear circular plexiglass, surrounded in kraft paper, 90 cm diameter and rounded walls (36 cm high). The base is marked with a grid and square crossings and is divided in 25 quadrants, 9 which are considered central and 16 peripherals. Animals in the open-field were filmed, for ethological analysis of behaviors.

Both apparatus were cleaned with ethanol 70% solution after every animal testing session. The next session was started shortly after the ethanol solution had dried down.

2.5 Experimental Procedures

The protocol used for this study is a classical unbiased CPP test to assess reinforcing levels of cocaine (COC) against a vehicle injection, which was SAL (Cervo et al., 1996; Ettenberg and Bernardi, 2007). All steps of this procedure were performed between 13 - 17h P.M.

Pre-testing (day 1): A rat was placed on the neutral compartment of the CPP apparatus with the guillotine doors open and allowed to roam through all three compartments freely for 15 min, with a habituation period of 5 min. Later, it was assessed if it preferred any of the conditioning compartments. The place where it spent a longer period of time was designated as the preferred side and numerator in CPP score.

Conditioning (days 2-9): The animal was confined to one conditioning compartment (assigned randomly for COC or for saline) for 30 min immediately after the solutions administration, alternating days for COC or saline for 8 days. COC was injected i.p. in one day and saline i.p. on the following day for 4 cycles. For the cocaine-naive animals, the random assignment of a compartment to cocaine was also performed, however, the animals received saline instead; therefore, these animals were kept without receiving any dose of cocaine, receiving saline i.p. during the 8 days of conditioning.

Testing (day 12): After a 2 days break, new drugs treatments were assigned randomly and administered on testing day between 8 - 10h A.M., 5h before testing, to assess the behavioral effects of the new agents on cocaine preference. The test was performed in the same manner as the pretest day. The time the animals spent in the paired and unpaired compartments was measured.

Three complementary scores for place preference were calculated (Score 1 = time spent in testing - time spent in pre-testing for the drug-paired side (Ettenberg and Bernardi, 2007); Score 2 = time spent in most preferred chamber/ (drug-paired chamber + saline-paired chamber)x100 (Pandolfo et al., 2009); Score 3 = time spent in drug-paired side - time spent in saline-paired side in testing day (Cervo et al., 1996)). Number of entries given by the Place Preference software was summed for all three compartments during Testing. OF rearing, time spent in the center and fecal boli were directly extracted from its respective software measures. Locomotion was measured as: total locomotion in the center plus in the periphery.

2.5.1 Open-field Test

The next day after Testing, the rats were placed in the center of the circular open-field and video-recordings lasted for 5 minutes. The open field was cleaned with ethanol 70% between each animals' session.

2.6 Ethological analysis

All filmed data for the OF was analyzed with the Behavsoft® software (register: BR 294091919042-3) as mentioned elsewhere (Costa et al., 2015). In the OF, locomotion was considered only when the animal has crossed the line between quadrants, placing all four paws inside a quadrant; rearing was considered when the animal had both forelegs not touching the ground. The software allows for measurements of frequency and duration in seconds of the observed behaviors for each individual observation. Observers were blinded for treatment groups.

2.7 Statistical analysis

All statistical analysis was carried out with Sigma Plot v11 (Stystat Software, CA, USA) software and IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows 22.0 (Armonk, NY, USA). Results of CPP data for every score and the SM treatments were analyzed using a two-way (Indole Molecules x Conditioning solution) analysis of variance (ANOVA) followed by Tukey *post hoc* test. Normality was assessed with the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. When normality failed, a Kruskal-Wallis one-way ANOVA was performed, followed by Dunn's test. Differences were considered statistically significant when p value ≤ 0.05 .

3. Results

3.1 *In silico* parameters

Results for *in silico* testing are displayed for each platform as follows: DataWarrior (Table 1), FAF-Drugs (Table 2) and pkCSM (Table 3). For both molecules, the *in silico* examinations demonstrated some interesting results: DataWarrior results showed no mutagenic, tumorigenic, reproductive effective or irritant properties.

Table 1. SM-like substances ADMET properties from *DataWarrior*

<i>Parameters</i>	<i>SM12</i>	<i>SM7</i>
Total Molweight	277.32	291.35
cLogP	24.9	26.23
Mutagenic	None	None
Tumorigenic	None	None
Reproductive Effective	None	None
Irritant	None	None

FAF-Drugs did not point a violation Rule of 5 (Lipinski et al., 2001), as well as no phospholipidosis, a usual issue with cationic amphiphilic drugs characterized by intracellular accumulation of phospholipids (Stark and Steger-Hartmann, 2016), while the oral bioavailability was pointed as good (Egan et al., 2000; Veber et al., 2002).

Table 2. SM-like substances ADMET properties from *FAF-Drugs*

<i>Parameters</i>	<i>SM12</i>	<i>SM7</i>
logP	4,21	4,16
Lipinski Violation	0	0
Solubility (mg/L)	3932,05	4001,85
Solubility Forecast Index	Reduced Solubility	Reduced Solubility
Oral Bioavailability (Veber et al., 2002)	Good	Good
Oral Bioavailability (Egan et al., 2000)	Good	Good
Phospholipidosis	NonInducer	NonInducer
Result	Accepted	Accepted

pkCSM indicated both molecules as CYP1A2, CYP2C19, and CYP2C9 inhibitors, as well as potentially hepatotoxic, although in silico predictions for hepatotoxicity do not show very high accuracies (Fourches et al., 2010), Total clearance of the molecules SM7 and SM12 seems to be similar to creatinine clearance, and SM-like molecules were not indicated as renal organic cation transporter 2 (OCT2) substrate. Only SM7 seemed to have an inhibitory effect in hERG II, but none were pointed as hERG I inhibitors. ERG1

channels are the only ones which occur in the heart (Shi et al., 1997), which could indicate both molecules are not cardiotoxic. The AMES test is a well-used bacterial assay which assesses a substance propensity to have mutagenic properties (Mortelmans and Zeiger, 2000). Our results showed positive for AMES toxicity test.

Table 3. SM-like substances ADMET properties from *pkCSM*

<i>Parameters</i>	<i>SM12</i>	<i>SM7</i>	<i>Parameters</i>	<i>SM12</i>	<i>SM7</i>
Caco2 permeability	1,21	1,49	Total Clearance	0,96	1,06
Intestinal absorption (human)	93,5	99	Renal OCT2 substrate	No	No
Skin Permeability	-2,76	-2,61	AMES toxicity	Yes	Yes
VDss (human)	-0,14	0,04	Max. tolerated dose (human)	1,07	0,28
BBB permeability	0,35	0,47	hERG I inhibitor	No	No
CNS permeability	-1,45	-1,41	hERG II inhibitor	No	Yes
CYP2D6 substrate	No	No	Oral Rat Acute Toxicity (LD₅₀)	1,94	2,14
CYP3A4 substrate	No	Yes	Oral Rat Chronic Toxicity (LOAEL)	2,27	1,56
CYP1A2 inhibitor	Yes	Yes	Hepatotoxicity	Yes	Yes
CYP2C19 inhibitor	Yes	Yes	Skin Sensitisation	No	No
CYP2C9 inhibitor	Yes	Yes	<i>T. pyriformis</i> toxicity	1,12	0,55
CYP2D6 inhibitor	No	No	Minnow toxicity	0,37	-1,87
CYP3A4 inhibitor	No	No			

3.2 *In vitro* cell viability

There was detected statistically significant decrease of *in vitro* C6 rat glioma cell line survival with the concentrations of 200 and 400 mM of SM12 in comparison to NC (Kruskal-Wallis one-way ANOVA: $P < 0,05$). No differences were found when comparing NC and DMSO with SM7 concentrations. Results are represented in Figure 1.

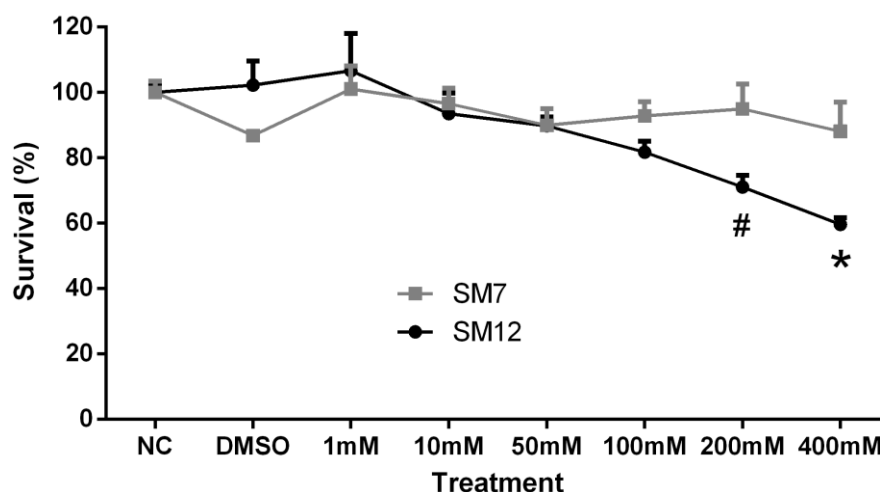


Fig. 1.

SM-like molecules effects on *in vitro* C6 rat glioma cell line survival. NC: negative control. DMSO: vehicle treatment. SM7 did not show significant differences in cell survival in any of the concentrations used. * $P < 0.001$ SM12 400 mM vs. NC. # $P < 0.001$ SM12 200 mM vs. NC. Kruskal-Wallis One-way ANOVA followed by Tukey *post hoc* test.

3.3 Open Field Test

As may be seen in Figure 2A to 2H the SM7 and SM12 molecules did not change significantly most of the behaviors of male and female animals observed in the open field test. The two-way ANOVA showed statistically significant increase of the time spent in the center of the OF by the COC group irrespective of sex or SM molecule (Conditioning solution x Sex) ($p = 0.031$). In males, COC group had increased rearing when compared to COC-NAIVE group ($F_{(1,52)} = 6.659$; $P = 0.013$). SM7 molecule slightly decreased rearing when compared to VEH ($F_{(2,51)} = 3.347$; $P = 0.047$) in males in both COC and COC-Naïve groups. However, total locomotion did not show statistically significant differences between the overall groups ($P = 0.822$) (Conditioning solution x Indole Molecules) in males and females. Females had nonsignificant differences regarding any of the measures (Conditioning solution x Indole Molecules): rearing ($P = 0.567$); time spent in the center ($P = 0.872$). There were no significant differences shown for comparisons between Indole molecules x Sex ($P > 0.05$ for all measures).

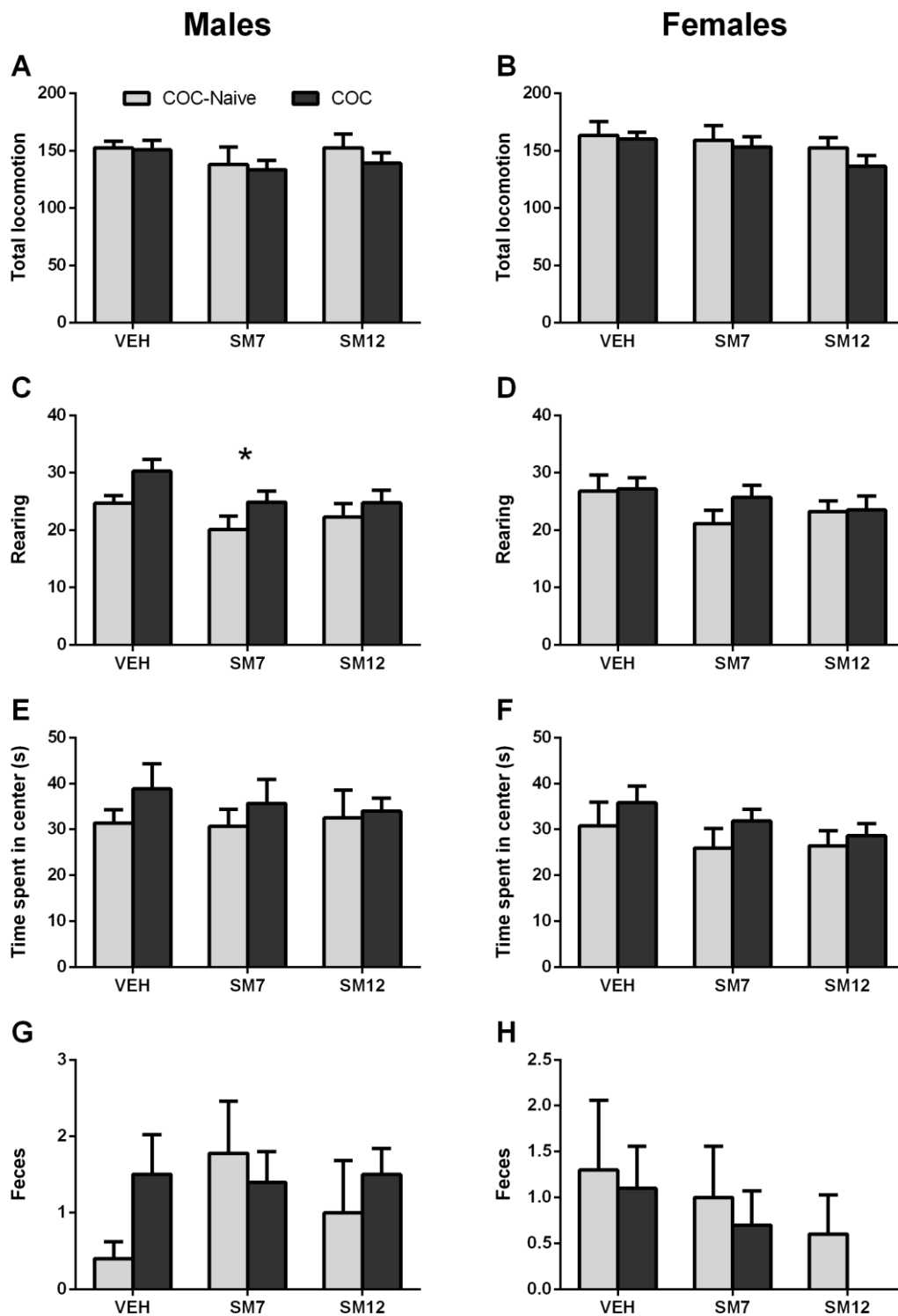


Fig. 2.

OF parameters. Total locomotion (2A, 2B): sum of center and peripheral frequencies; Rearing frequencies (2C, 2D); Time spent in center (2E, 2F) expressed in seconds \pm SEM. Two-way ANOVA followed by Tukey post hoc test. Data are presented as mean \pm SEM. *

$P = 0.047$ VEH vs. SM7 groups. $P = 0.013$ COC vs. COC-Naïve groups for rearing counts. No differences were found between SM-like molecules or conditioning solution for females in CPP procedure groups. $n=9-10$ rats.

3.4 Cocaine-conditioned Place Preference

The two-way ANOVA showed no statistically significant differences in males for Score 1 for Indole Molecules x Conditioning solution (COC or COC-Naïve) ($P = 0.694$), Score 2 ($P = 0.496$) or Score 3 ($P = 0.481$). In females, there was also no statistical difference found for Indole Molecules x Conditioning solution for Score 1 ($P = 0.489$), Score 2 ($P = 0.295$) or Score 3 ($P = 0.295$). Results for place preference does not point to any significant increase of cocaine CPP or any CPP pairing with the SM molecules, as represented in Figure 3A to 3F.

A two-way ANOVA followed by Tukey *post hoc* test of total number of entries in each chamber during testing pointed out a significant statistical difference for females (Indole Molecules x Conditioning solution) between SM12 and VEH ($F_{(2,50)} = 3.507$; $P = 0.038$), with SM12 showing greater number of entries than VEH, although there was no interaction seen between treatments and sexes. Males did not show significant statistical differences in total number of entries for Indole Molecules x Conditioning solution ($P = 0.684$). Results for the number of entries are represented in Figures 4A and 4B.

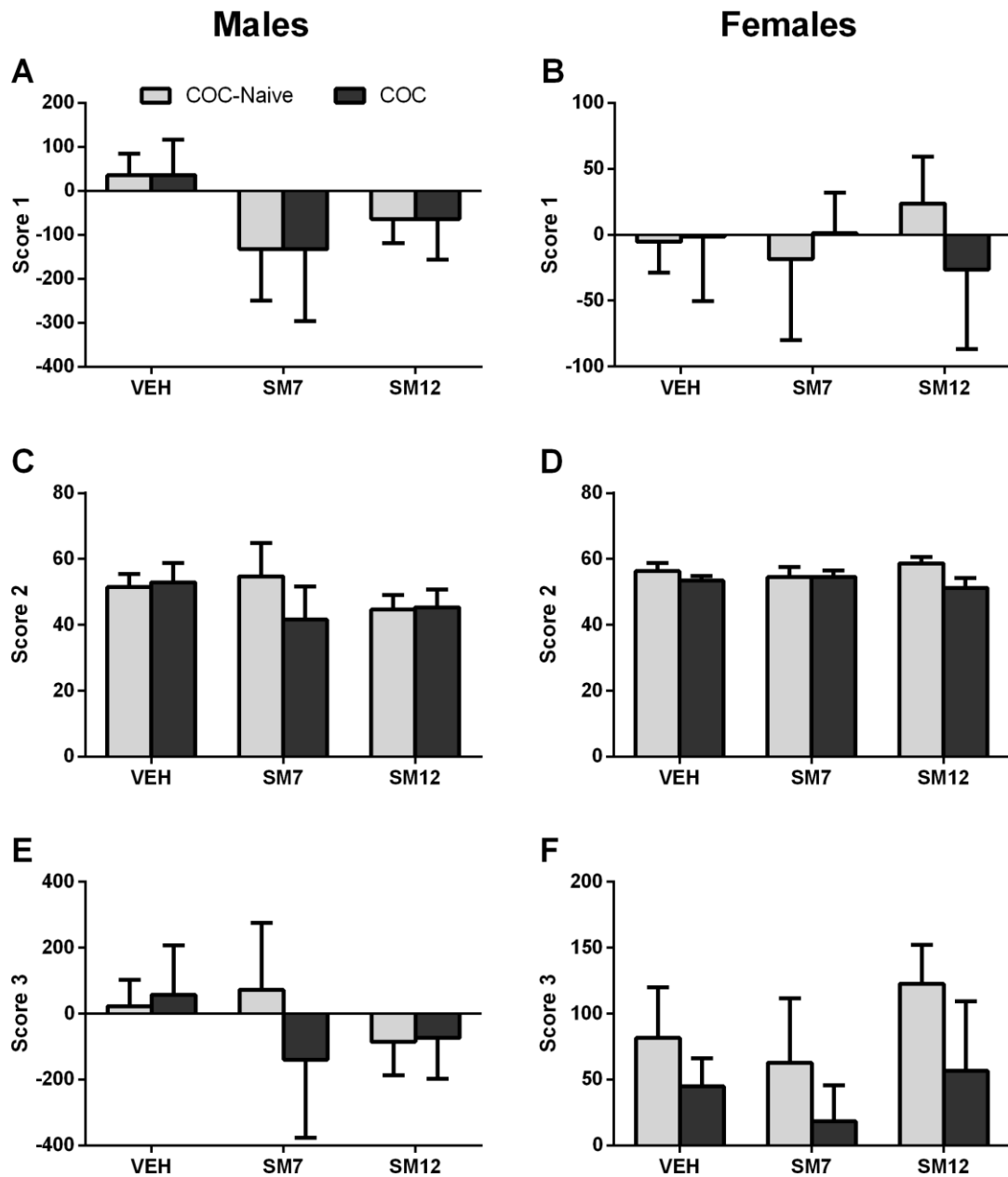


Fig. 3.

Scores 1, 2 and 3 for cocaine-naive and cocaine -CPP procedure. Score 1 (3A, 3B): difference between testing and pretesting. Score 2 (3C, 3D): percentage of drug-paired side/drug-paired + saline-paired side. Score 3 (3E, 3F): difference between drug-paired and saline-paired side. No significant differences were found for any of the scores or SM-like molecules. Data are presented as mean \pm SEM. n=9-10 rats.

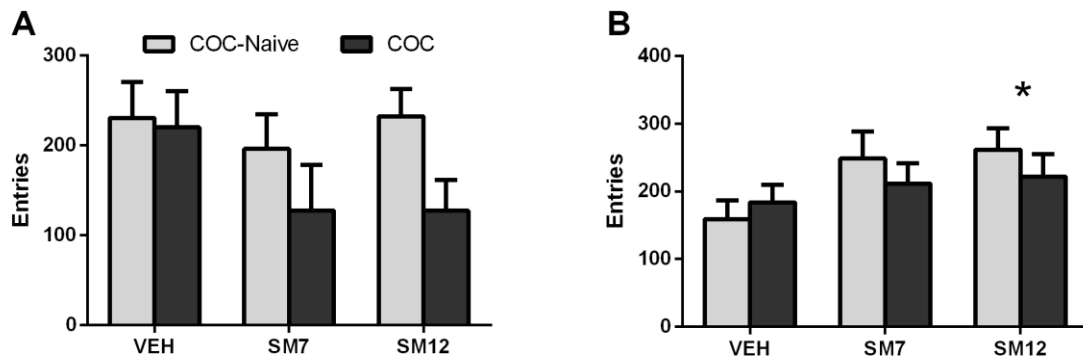


Fig. 4.

Total number of entries during Testing. Columns represent the sum of all entries on every compartment. * $P = 0.038$ SS12 group vs. VEH group. Data are presented as mean \pm SEM. $n=9-10$ rats.

3.5 Estrus Cycle

Estrus cycle distribution showed greater percentage for diestrus during Testing (45%) and on OF testing day (39%) for both COC-NAIVE and COC females, followed by estrus in Testing (22%) and metestrus in OF (28%). Other phases showed percentages lower than 20% for both days. SM7 and SM12 did not significantly disturb the estrous cycle of the females in this study. Results for estrus cycle distribution are represented in Figures 5A and 5B.

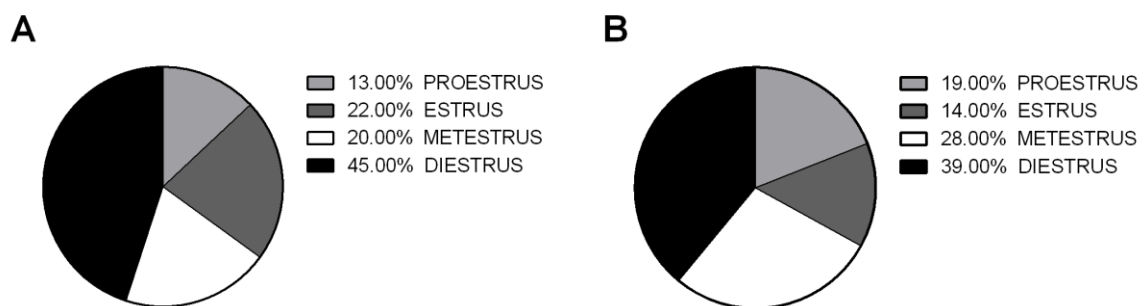


Fig. 5.

Estrus cycle distribution in Testing and OF. Distribution in Testing (5A) and OF test (5B). Proestrus: light gray slice. Estrus: dark gray slice. Metestrus: white grid slice. Diestrus: black slice.

4. Discussion

Our results show that both the SM7 and SM12 molecules are quite safe to be used as oral agents for future studies in both males and females, considering the *in silico*, the *in vitro*, the behavioral effects and the estrous cycle results in females. Some caution will have to be made regarding possible hepatotoxic and nephrotoxic interactions with other agents, regarding the results from Table 3, which could be indicating that these molecules may interfere in metabolization of diverse drugs and in drug interactions (Koe et al., 2013; Salminen et al., 2015). Clearance of SM molecules was indicated as similar to creatinine clearance. Creatinine clearance is normal around 1 mg/dL (Shahbaz and Gupta, 2019), while renal OCT2 is an organic cation transporter which, when inhibited, can impair the clearance of drugs and contribute to drug-drug interactions (Hacker et al., 2015). hERG gene or KCNH₂ gives origin to a potassium channel alpha subunit. The hERG channel is a voltage gated potassium channel usually involved in action potential repolarization and its reduced function can lead to action potential prolongation (Priest et al., 2008). Ibogaine, a naturally occurring indole extensively researched for its anti-addictive properties, has shown effects on hERG channels, prolonging the QT interval (Koenig et al., 2013). Only SM7 seemed to have an inhibition effect in hERG II, but none were pointed as hERG I inhibitors. Our results showed positive for AMES toxicity test, which indicates these molecules could have a mutagenic effect. One should consider that the potential toxicity of organic compounds in aquatic life are evaluated by two basic tests, the *T. pyriformis* and the fathead minnow toxicity tests (Nendza, 2010), which seemed low for both tests. In future studies the mutagenic effects of these agents need to be extensively evaluated through *in vivo* testing.

In vitro effects in C6 glioma cells displayed different patterns for SM7 and SM12. SM12 decreased cell survival in the higher range of concentration and SM7 showed no cytotoxicity in the concentration range tested, although there is a downward at 50 mM in the curve, which could explain its IC₅₀ of 37.07 mM being lower than SM12 IC₅₀ (102.07 mM). DMSO, at 10%, did not show any difference from treatments or NC, although Figure 1 shows a slight decrease in cell viability for DMSO in SM7 curve, while SM12 curve did not show the same result, corroborating other studies (Malinin and Perry, 1967). Modulation of CNS function was observed before by DMSO in an Alzheimer's disease model (PENAZZI et al., 2017), showing enhanced spatial memory accuracy. A

comparison group not exposed to DMSO should be included in future studies to determine if this substance could be interfering in results. Overall, in future studies one should be aware that the doses used should produce lower *in vivo* blood and tissue concentrations of SM7 and SM12 than the ones seen to induce toxic effects

Additionally, we showed that *in vivo* administration of indole molecules SM7 and SM12, at the dose of 10 mg/kg, did not demonstrate major toxicity or adverse effects in locomotor activity, if we consider the results on the OF test and number of entries in CPP chambers. The OF test is a good measure for motor function and anxiety-like behaviors (Costa et al., 2015; Sturman et al., 2018). Drugs that had been demonstrating cytotoxicity and brain damage as ethanol (Costa et al., 2015), cocaine (Valzachi et al., 2013), amphetamine (Ott and Mandel, 1995), ibogaine (Marton et al., 2019), ketamine (McGowan et al., 2017), as well as stress (Sturman et al., 2018) are able to change behaviors measured in this test. Also, the majority of drugs of abuse elicit DA outflow, causing hyperactivity (Ott and Mandel, 1995), but this was not observed after the administration of SM7 and SM12 even in COC primed rats.

Compounds targeting the serotonergic system can often cause serotonergic syndrome, as can be seen with amphetamines, SSRIs and other drugs which increase 5-HT levels on the synaptic cleft, causing symptoms like tremors, anxiety, convulsions, rigidity, among others (Volpi-Abadie et al., 2013). Nevertheless, this kind of effects were not observed in our study. The serotonergic system is also involved in intestinal peristalsis (Filip et al., 2005) which did not appear to be a target as we did not see changes in defecation on the open field test or during handling of the animals.

Cocaine and other psychostimulants are known to be anxiogenic (Perrine et al., 2008; Valzachi et al., 2013) and there is demonstration of increased rearing days after the last dose of cocaine (Costall et al., 1989), which could be showing an anxiolytic effect due to neuroplasticity. In our case, cocaine exposed males showed higher rearing counts compared to cocaine-naive males and the SM 7 and SM12 molecules did not interfere with the cocaine aftereffect, showing that they do not prolong cocaine's effects.

Using a classic unbiased cocaine-CPP procedure, we have not observed an augmentation in time spent in the cocaine exposed compared to the cocaine-naive males nor females. In fact, we found the opposite for males. Even though recent studies in our laboratory have shown conditioning of males (Freese et al., 2018) and females (Heidrich,

2017) using the same reinforcing dose of 15 mg/kg in biased and unbiased protocols, the findings of the present study have not corroborated these and other reports showing conditioning in unbiased (Cervo et al., 1996) and biased protocols (dela Cruz et al., 2009; Prast et al., 2014). This dose used could be considered a high dose of cocaine, which is able to generate conditioning (Prast et al., 2014). The CPP protocol used here predicts a pause of two days between the last saline-paired day of conditioning and testing phase, aiming to avoid a memory bias. When testing was performed, cocaine administration has been concluded for three days, which could be leading to withdrawal symptoms, characterized by negative affect, which results in the emergence of opposite responses shown in a more initial phase of drug exposure (Köks, 2015). Cocaine withdrawal initial phase can perdure around 4 days (Filip et al., 2005), reaching its peak at the third day (Miczek and Barros, 1996). Withdrawal symptoms have shown to cause conditioned place aversion in rats and mice (Felszeghy et al., 2007; Prus et al., 2009). It is most probably caused by the reduction of dopamine activity as an outcome of neuroadaptations due to chronic exposure to the drug, resulting in symptoms of dysphoria when drug exposure is discontinued (Koob and Volkow, 2010), which can be aversive to animals. Also, it has been demonstrated that 5-HT levels are reduced in the nucleus accumbens during withdrawal (Dworkin et al., 1995; Parsons et al., 1998) and that administration of 5-HT increasing agents can restore DA levels (Hållbus et al., 1997) and could relieve withdrawal symptoms without inducing relapse, as normalizing the DA system could restore interest to other natural rewards (Filip et al., 2005). Not seeing a cocaine effect on this study allowed for the opportunity to ascertain that SM7 and SM12 do not increase the discrimination properties of cocaine in both male and female rats, at the same time it clearly shows that the new indole molecules do not induce preference by the male or female rats.

For females rats, on the other hand, total number of entries was higher for the SM12 group in general when compared to the VEH group. Number of entries or numbers of crossings in CPP chamber can be used as a measure of horizontal locomotor activity (Bardo et al., 2015). The subacute administration of a single dose of SM12 seems to induce a rise in horizontal locomotor activity. It does not seem to be an influence of a state of cocaine withdrawal, as cocaine-exposed females demonstrated slightly smaller number of entries, a pattern that is repeated for total locomotion in the OF, although there is no

statistical difference. This might be representing an effect of serotonergic activity, as it has been reported that administration of fluoxetine and escitalopram can induce increases in locomotor activity (Prinssen et al., 2006) and that serotonergic stimulation can elicit locomotion (Sławińska et al., 2014). However, this effect seems to be transient, as SM12 apparently shows a slight decrease in the OF parameters for females only, as males demonstrated different patterns for these parameters. There could be a possibility that this molecule has differential effects in males and females. There seems to be differences in the serotonergic system among sexes as well as the DA system, as seen in knockout female mice for 5-HT_{1B} receptor, showing reduced immobility (Jones and Lucki, 2005). Deletion of 5-HT₃ receptors also seems related to depression like behaviors in females (Bhatnagar et al., 2004). Also, it appears to be that females have greater levels of 5-HT and its metabolite, 5-hydroxyindoleacetic acid, in the whole brain (Carlsson et al., 1985; Carlsson and Carlsson, 1988).

5. Conclusions

This exploratory study with two new indole molecules validates the low toxicity of them regarding the CNS and behavioral changes and present some results of systemic pharmacology and toxicology that point to a preliminary safety with the use of low dosage. Another positive feature observed is that these molecules did not seem to potentiate cocaine's effects, as well as do not seem to induce preference by themselves. Future studies can be conducted to determine if there are other possible behavioral utilities that the molecules might have in different behavioral tests. Also, taking into account these molecules could have potential teratology and mutagenic effects, which should be confirmed through additional toxicological experiments.

Acknowledgment

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6 CONCLUSÃO

O estudo apresentado aqui, utilizando-se de metodologias *in silico*, *in vitro* e *in vivo*, foi capaz de demonstrar que as moléculas indólicas desenvolvidas e testadas demonstram resultados preliminares promissores de segurança. As duas moléculas, SM7 e SM12, não demonstraram efeito prejudicial grave ou até mesmo moderado sobre o SNC, pois não foi observada mudança drástica de comportamentos mais básicos do animal, como locomoção motora e emocionalidade, assim como isso não foi observado em comportamento de maior complexidade, considerando os resultados sobre a preferência de lugar, que envolve funções cognitivas de maior exigência da capacidade mental do animal. Estas moléculas também não aparentam possuir mecanismos de interação com um potente psicoestimulante, a cocaína, que sabidamente possui relações com o sistema serotoninérgico, o que demonstra que muito possivelmente não possuem potencial de abuso.

Outro fato interessante observado aqui é que parece não haver influência sobre os hormônios sexuais destas moléculas, ainda que tenham sido administradas poucas doses. Não obstante, a SM12 demonstrou efeito na locomoção horizontal das fêmeas, o que poderia estar relacionado a efeito sobre o sistema serotoninérgico, que parece estar associado a mudanças na atividade locomotora de fêmeas.

Considerando os resultados *in silico* e os testes *in vitro*, seria válido avaliar parâmetros de citotoxicidade sobre outros sistemas e órgãos, como hepatócitos e células cardíacas, e verificar parâmetros farmacocinéticos, como taxa de metabolização e solubilidade no plasma, curva dose-resposta e a possibilidade de efeitos cumulativos ao longo do tempo, o que seria mais apropriado verificar em estudos *in vivo* de toxicidade crônica, utilizando também de crescentes dosagens, a fim de se estabelecer sua dose possivelmente letal.

A descoberta de moléculas novas é um desafio constante que exige minucioso planejamento, dedicação e tempo. No entanto, considerando que a descoberta de novos processos e mecanismos em condições de saúde são constantemente estudados e elucidados, a relevância da testagem de substâncias novas ou diferentes aplicações se torna iminente. Não obstante, o

uso e consumo abusivo de substâncias psicoativas não controladas é outro grande problema ainda hoje a ser resolvido, pelas grandes consequências que este uso indevido gera ao indivíduo e aos sujeitos ao seu redor, que podem ser agravadas na presença de poliuso de drogas de diferentes classes, gerando interações entre drogas ou maior toxicidade ao usuário. Isto gera consequências ao ser humano que não são bem descritas ainda, já que é uma árdua incumbência obter dados sobre padrões de uso, interações ou mecanismos envolvidos com o uso de substâncias não bem elucidadas, mas que são usadas de modo recreacional, mesmo assim, por seus efeitos recompensadores. Isso não foi observado por este estudo, significando que estas moléculas não possuem influências no sistema de recompensa, assim como não foram observados efeitos tóxicos. As moléculas de núcleo indólico, por sua ampla aplicação biológica em áreas diversificadas, além de fácil criação de derivativos por possuírem amplo espectro de opções de modificações, tendem a ser opções bastante exploradas em testagem de moléculas novas. Neste sentido, mais estudos deveriam ser pensados, com o intuito de averiguar diferentes aplicações e utilidades às moléculas testadas neste estudo.

ANEXO I



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A Comissão de Ética no Uso de Animais, analisou o Projeto:

Projeto: 233/18

Pesquisador Responsável:

Helena Tannhauser Barros

Título: Tratamento farmacológico da dependência química: Efeitos de compostos indólicos seletivos para receptores 5-HT na busca pelo efeito da cocaína em ratos machos e fêmeas.

Este Projeto foi aprovado em seus aspectos éticos e metodológicos em 14/11/2018. Toda e qualquer alteração do projeto, assim como eventos adversos graves, deverão ser comunicados a esta CEUA.

Porto Alegre, 06 de janeiro de 2020

Fernanda Bastos de Mello
Coordenadora da CEUA

ANEXO II



NEUROTOXICOLOGY AND TERATOLOGY

Affiliated with the [The Developmental Neurotoxicology Society](#), formerly known as The Neurobehavioral Teratology Society.

AUTHOR INFORMATION PACK

TABLE OF CONTENTS

•	Description	p.1
•	Audience	p.1
•	Impact Factor	p.1
•	Abstracting and Indexing	p.2
•	Editorial Board	p.2
•	Guide for Authors	p.4



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DESCRIPTION

Neurotoxicology and Teratology provides a forum for publishing new information regarding the effects of chemical and physical agents on the developing, adult or aging **nervous system**. In this context, the fields of **neurotoxicology** and **teratology** include studies of **agent-induced** alterations of nervous system function, with a focus on behavioral outcomes and their underlying physiological and neurochemical **mechanisms**. The Journal publishes original, peer-reviewed Research Reports of experimental, clinical, and epidemiological studies that address the neurotoxicity and/or functional teratology of **pesticides, solvents, heavy metals, nanomaterials, organometals, industrial compounds, mixtures, drugs** of abuse, **pharmaceuticals**, animal and plant **toxins, atmospheric reaction products**, and **physical agents** such as radiation and noise. These reports include traditional mammalian neurotoxicology experiments, human studies, studies using non-mammalian animal models, and mechanistic studies *in vivo* or *in vitro*. Special Issues, Reviews, Commentaries, Meeting Reports, and Symposium Papers provide timely updates on areas that have reached a critical point of synthesis, on aspects of a scientific field undergoing rapid change, or on areas that present special methodological or interpretive problems. Theoretical Articles address concepts and potential mechanisms underlying actions of agents of interest in the nervous system. The Journal also publishes Brief Communications that concisely describe a new method, technique, apparatus, or experimental result.

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