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MINI REVIEW

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Phytochemical profile, pharmacological activities, and toxicological concerns of mandragora species: A mini review

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ABSTRACT

The convergence of nanotechnology and plant science has led to a transformative shift in precision agriculture and real-time plant health monitoring. This comprehensive review explores the forefront of plant nanosensors and smart materials, which hold significant potential for early disease detection, environmental stress assessment, and overall plant welfare. Researchers have enabled unprecedented insights into plant physiology, pathogen interactions, and environmental responses, by leveraging highly sensitive, selective, and non-invasive nanosensor platforms. Key advances in sensor miniaturization, biocompatibility, and data accuracy are driving the implementation of these technologies within the agricultural sector. This review synthesizes current technological breakthroughs and research applications, thoroughly examining various nanosensor types including optical, electrochemical, and magnetic sensors—and their integration with smart materials.

KEYWORDS

Mandragora species; Tropane alkaloids; Phytochemical analysis; Pharmacological activities; Toxicological evaluation

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Introduction

The genus Mandragora (Solanaceae), comprising species such as *Mandragora officinarum* and *Mandragora autumnalis*, is indigenous to the Mediterranean region and western Asia. These perennial herbaceous plants have a long history of use in folklore and medicine, particularly among ancient Greek, Roman, and medieval European cultures. Historically associated with anesthesia, fertility enhancement, and spiritual rituals, the mandrake root remains a subject of fascination due to its anthropomorphic shape and psychoactive effects [1]. Contemporary research has shifted focus from traditional applications to systematic scientific evaluation of its phytoconstituents and therapeutic potential. The increasing interest in ethnopharmacology and drug discovery from plant sources has propelled the scientific community to re-evaluate ancient medicinal plants like Mandragora. With the development of modern analytical tools, it is now possible to isolate, identify, and characterize novel bioactive compounds more accurately [2]. Additionally, the convergence of traditional knowledge and modern biomedical research offers new pathways for investigating the pharmacodynamics, therapeutic roles, and potential risks of such plants. In this context, Mandragora serves as a promising yet challenging candidate due to its dual profile of medicinal efficacy and potent toxicity. This review synthesizes current knowledge on the phytochemistry, biological activity, and safety profile of Mandragora species [3].

Phytochemical Composition of Mandragora Species

The pharmacological activity of Mandragora species is largely attributed to its diverse and complex phytochemical makeup. Modern analytical approaches, including gas chromatography-mass spectrometry (GC-MS) and liquid chromatography-mass spectrometry (LC-MS), have allowed for the precise identification of numerous secondary metabolites. These compounds include tropane alkaloids, flavonoids, phenolic acids, terpenoids, sterols, and essential oils. Each class of compounds contributes uniquely to the medicinal and toxicological characteristics of the plant [4].

Tropane alkaloids

Tropane alkaloids are the most well-characterized constituents of Mandragora. Atropine, scopolamine, and hyoscyamine exhibit strong anticholinergic activity, acting primarily as muscarinic acetylcholine receptor antagonists. These compounds influence cognition, induce mydriasis, and produce analgesic and sedative effects. Other alkaloids such as apoatropine and cuscohygrine have also been detected but require further pharmacological investigation [5]. Studies utilizing chromatographic and spectrometric methods, including LC-MS and GC-MS, have enabled detailed metabolic profiling of these alkaloids, revealing interspecies and organ-specific variations in concentration [6].

Flavonoids and phenolic acids

Flavonoids and phenolic compounds in Mandragora contribute to its antioxidant and anti-inflammatory actions. Identified flavonoids include quercetin, kaempferol, and rutin, which are known for their free radical scavenging properties and modulation of inflammatory pathways [7]. Phenolic acids, such as ferulic acid and chlorogenic acid, further enhance these effects. These polyphenols are primarily concentrated in the leaves and roots and play a role in protecting cells from oxidative damage, thereby offering neuroprotective and cardiovascular benefits [8].

Terpenoids, sterols and essential oils

Secondary metabolites such as terpenoids and sterols exhibit antimicrobial, cytotoxic, and lipid-regulating effects.

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β-Sitosterol, a plant sterol found in Mandragora, is implicated in cholesterol modulation and prostate health [9]. Essential oils comprising monoterpenes and sesquiterpenes contribute to the plant's characteristic aroma and may possess additional antimicrobial and anxiolytic properties. Despite limited studies, the diverse phytochemical spectrum supports the multifaceted pharmacological profile of Mandragora species [10].

Pharmacological Potential

Mandragora spp. have attracted significant pharmacological interest due to the wide range of physiological effects produced by their diverse secondary metabolites. These compounds interact with various biochemical pathways, resulting in neuropharmacological, antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory, and analgesic effects [11]. The presence of tropane alkaloids allows modulation of the central and peripheral nervous systems, while polyphenols and terpenoids contribute to immunomodulatory and cytoprotective effects. The plant's potential to act on multiple targets makes it a valuable source of pharmacologically active compounds that could be explored for treating complex diseases [12].

Neuropharmacological effects

Tropane alkaloids from Mandragora demonstrate potential in neurological therapeutics. Scopolamine, in particular, has been studied for its effects on memory and cognition, serving as both a model for inducing cognitive deficits and a candidate for treating motion sickness and Parkinsonian tremors. Preclinical data suggest these alkaloids may ameliorate symptoms of neurodegenerative diseases, though neurotoxicity remains a critical challenge [13]. The anticholinergic properties of tropane alkaloids allow them to modulate central nervous system activity, offering potential benefits in conditions such as Alzheimer’s disease and epilepsy. Experimental studies have shown that low doses may enhance neurotransmitter balance and reduce neural inflammation. However, due to their narrow therapeutic margin, precise dosing and delivery systems are essential to minimize adverse effects [14].

Antimicrobial properties

Extracts of Mandragora have exhibited activity against Gram-positive and Gram-negative bacteria, as well as fungi such as Candida albicans. The antimicrobial effect is attributed to the synergistic action of alkaloids, flavonoids, and essential oils disrupting microbial membranes and inhibiting quorum-sensing mechanisms. These findings indicate potential for the development of new phytotherapeutic agents targeting drug-resistant pathogens [15]. Studies have demonstrated that Mandragora extracts possess antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties, which may enhance their overall therapeutic efficacy. The presence of bioactive compounds such as scopolamine, atropine, and hyoscyamine contributes to their broad-spectrum antimicrobial potential. These characteristics make Mandragora a promising candidate for the development of novel, plant-based formulations aimed at combating multidrug-resistant infections [16].

Anti-inflammatory and analgesic activity

Phenolic compounds in Mandragora inhibit key pro-inflammatory mediators such as TNF-α and IL-6, while modulating NF-κB signaling pathways. Alkaloids also contribute to analgesia by interacting with cholinergic and dopaminergic receptors. Animal studies have demonstrated reduced inflammation and pain following administration of standardized extracts. These properties support the therapeutic application of Mandragora in managing chronic inflammatory and pain disorders [17]. The flavonoids in Mandragora demonstrate significant antioxidant activity, which helps reduce oxidative stress and contributes to the attenuation of inflammatory processes. The synergistic effects of phenolic compounds, alkaloids, and flavonoids enhance the plant’s ability to regulate immune responses and reduce tissue damage [18]. Initial toxicological studies in animal models indicate that standardized extracts are generally safe and well tolerated at therapeutic doses. These findings highlight the potential of Mandragora as a supportive agent in the management of chronic inflammatory conditions and pain syndromes, particularly in the context of integrative and phytotherapeutic approaches [19].

Toxicological Considerations and Safety Profile

Despite its medicinal benefits, Mandragora is classified as a toxic plant due to the high concentration of tropane alkaloids. Accidental ingestion can result in anticholinergic syndrome, characterized by dry mouth, hallucinations, tachycardia, and, in severe cases, respiratory failure or death [20]. Documented cases of poisoning highlight the need for controlled dosages and medical supervision. Toxicological studies suggest that the LD_{50} of atropine in rodents ranges from 453 to 620 mg/kg, indicating a narrow therapeutic index. The development of standardized extracts with defined alkaloid content is essential to mitigate risks and improve safety. Regulatory frameworks must be established to guide the therapeutic use of Mandragora-based products [21]. In addition to toxicity concerns, the therapeutic potential of Mandragora remains underexplored due to limited clinical data and variability in phytochemical profiles. Ethnobotanical evidence indicates its historical use in pain relief, sedation, and treatment of gastrointestinal disorders [22]. However, inconsistent dosages and preparation methods across traditional systems pose challenges for modern pharmacological standardization. Advanced techniques such as HPLC and mass spectrometry are essential for ensuring batch-to-batch consistency in pharmaceutical formulations [23]. Furthermore, biotechnological interventions like tissue culture and metabolic engineering could help in producing safer, standardized alkaloid profiles. Collaborative research and international guidelines are crucial for integrating Mandragora safely into evidence-based medicine [24].

Conclusions

Mandragora species possess a complex phytochemical architecture enriched with alkaloids, flavonoids, terpenoids, and sterols that collectively offer neuroprotective, antimicrobial, and anti-inflammatory effects. However, the inherent toxicity associated with tropane alkaloids limits their therapeutic application without rigorous safety evaluations. Future research should focus on isolating individual bioactive compounds, elucidating their mechanisms of action, and developing safe, standardized formulations. To realize its therapeutic potential, it is essential to bridge the gap between

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traditional use and clinical validation. Interdisciplinary research involving pharmacology, toxicology, and ethnobotany could unlock novel uses while ensuring patient safety. Establishing guidelines for proper dosage, administration, and quality control will be crucial steps toward integrating Mandragora into evidence-based medicinal practice. With the right safeguards, Mandragora could serve as a valuable resource in the search for new therapeutic agents.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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