

Effect of different activators on development of activated *in vitro* matured caprine oocytes

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Summary

This study was designed to compare the effectiveness of different activation treatments for activation of *in vitro* matured oocytes and their developmental potency in mCR₂aa medium so as to obtain maximum number of embryos. A total of 1090 cumulus oocyte complexes (COC's) were collected from 480 ovaries. *In vitro* matured oocytes were randomly divided into four groups. Group 1 *in vitro* matured oocytes (n=226) were exposed to 7% ethanol for 5 min followed by treatment with 2.0 mM DMAP for 4 h in mCR₂aa medium. Group 2 *in vitro* matured oocytes (n=294) were exposed to 7% ethanol for 5 min followed by treatment with 10 µg/ml CHX for 4 h in mCR₂aa medium. Group 3 *in vitro* matured oocytes (n=325) were exposed to 7% ethanol for 5 min followed by treatment with 2.0 mM DMAP and 10 µg/ml CHX for 4 h in mCR₂aa medium. Group 4 *in vitro* matured oocytes (n=108) were cultured for 4 h without any chemical treatment in mCR₂aa medium (control). The cleavage rate in groups 1, 2, 3 and 4 was 54.42%, 44.55%, 51.69% and 0.00%, respectively. The percentage of morula and blastocyst production in group 1, group 2 and group 3 was 26.01%, 29.77% and 29.76% and 2.43%, 1.52% and 1.78%, respectively. These results suggest that the activation of *in vitro* matured oocytes by 7% ethanol for 5 min followed by treatment with 2.0 mM DMAP for 4 h in mCR₂aa is most favorable for parthenogenetic caprine embryos production.

Key words: Parthenogenesis, Ethanol activation, Morula, Blastocyst, Caprine

Introduction

Methods used for parthenogenetic activation of oocytes are electrical pulse method (Kono *et al.*, 1989), ethanol (Kharche *et al.*, 2013), chemical activation (Mishra *et al.*, 2006) or by combined electrical-chemical parthenogenetic activation of oocytes (Hossenni *et al.*, 2008). There are several other methods available for the induction of parthenogenetic activation that promote an increase in intracellular free calcium concentrations by the release of calcium from cytoplasmic stores such as: calcium ionophore (Funahashi *et al.*, 1994), ethanol (Loi *et al.*, 1998), A-23187, calcium ionophore and cycloheximide alone (Nussbaum and Prather, 1995) or combined with a protein phosphorylation inhibitor, 6-dimethyl amino purine (6-DMAP) (Liu and Yang, 1999), electrical shock (Kim *et al.*, 1996), CaCl₂ (Machaty *et al.*, 1996), Ca-EDTA (Zaeand Ryoo, 2007), G protein stimulation (Machaty *et al.*, 1996), Ionomycin (Loi *et al.*, 1998), ultrasound (Sato *et al.*, 2005), strontium (Meo *et al.*, 2004) and magnetic field (Max *et al.*, 2007). Methods used for parthenogenetic activation could be divided into two groups according to the mechanism used to increase intracellular calcium. One method for obtaining free calcium is by exposure to strontium or ionomycin to release cytoplasmic calcium. A second

method is to promote influx of calcium from the extracellular medium by using an electrical stimulus or ethanol exposure (Meo *et al.*, 2004).

Currently, combined treatment of two activation stimuli are commonly used to ensure better development of reconstructed oocytes. Limited literature on activation protocols for goat oocytes is available, creating the need for effective oocyte activation protocols that can be used during nuclear transfer in goats. Therefore, in the present study attempts were made to compare different activation protocol on the development competence of parthenogenetic goat embryos. Thus, the present study was designed with the objectives to study the effect of different chemical activation protocols on cleavage rate of *in vitro* matured goat oocytes and to compare the development of parthenogenetic embryos produced from different chemical activation protocols.

Materials and Methods

Recovery of oocytes and *in vitro* maturation (IVM)

During the spring season, ovaries from goats, regardless of the stage of estrous cycle, were collected from a local abattoir located at Agra. Goats in this area are not seasonal breeders. A total of 1090 oocytes (Fig.

1A) were recovered by using follicle puncture technique. The collected oocytes were finally graded under the inverted phase contrast as per the method of Kharche *et al.* (2008). The cumulus oocyte complexes (COCs) were matured in maturation media (TCM-199 (Sigma) containing L-glutamine (100 µg/ml), sodium pyruvate (0.25 mmol), gentamycin (50 µg/ml), FSH (5 µg/ml), LH (10 µg/ml), oestradiol-17β (1 µg/ml) supplemented with 10% FBS and 3 mg/ml BSA) for 27 h in humidified 5% CO₂ at 38.5°C in CO₂ incubator. Out of a total 1090 oocytes recovered, 1036 matured (95.04%).

Activation of oocytes

A total of 1036 *in vitro* matured oocytes (Fig. 1B) were collected, out of which 953 *in vitro* matured oocytes were selected and randomly divided into the following treatment groups:

Group 1 comprised *in vitro* matured oocytes (n=226) after 27 h of *in vitro* maturation, activated with 7% ethanol for 5 min followed by treatment with 2.0 mM DMAP for 4 h in mCR₂aa.

Group 2 comprised *in vitro* matured oocytes (n=294) after 27 h of *in vitro* maturation, activated with 7% ethanol for 5 min followed by treatment with 10 µg/ml CHX for 4 h in mCR₂aa.

Group 3 comprised *in vitro* matured oocytes (n=325) after 27 h of *in vitro* maturation, activated with 7% ethanol for 5 min followed by treatment with 2.0 mM DMAP and 10 µg/ml CHX for 4 h in mCR₂aa.

Group 4 comprised *in vitro* matured oocytes (n=108) after 27 h of *in vitro* maturation, cultured without any chemical activation treatment for 48 h in mCR₂aa.

After parthenogenetic activation of oocytes for 4 h, activated oocytes were washed in embryo development medium (mCR₂aa) and transferred in 100 µl embryo culture drops placed in a CO₂ incubator at 38.5°C and 5% CO₂ in a humidified atmosphere.

The maturation stage of oocytes was calculated as a percentage. Cleavage rates between the different treatment groups were compared using the Chi-square test. The level of significance was recorded at the 5% level of confidence (Snedecor and Cochran, 1989).

Results

Recovery of oocytes and *in vitro* maturation

From 480 ovaries, a total of 1090 oocytes were recovered by puncture technique, resulting in an average recovery of 2.27 oocytes per ovary. After 27 h, maturation rate was recorded on the basis of morphological cumulus expansion of oocytes. The maturation rate was found to be 95.04%.

Parthenogenetic activation of *in vitro* matured oocytes

The cleavage rate of chemically activated *in vitro* matured goat oocytes in group 1 (activation with ethanol + DMAP), group 2 (activation with ethanol + CHX), group 3 (activation with ethanol + DMAP + CHX) and group 4 (no activation), were 54.42%, 44.55%, 51.69% and 0.00%, respectively. Statistically (Chi-square) no significant difference was observed in cleavage rate between group 2 and 3 and group 1 and 3. In group 1 significantly higher (P<0.05) cleavage rate was observed compared to group 2 and group 4 (Table 1).

Developmental potential of parthenogenetic embryos

In control (group 4) no cleavage was observed. Therefore, embryo development was not studied in group 4. The embryo development among ethanol + DMAP (group 1), ethanol + CHX (group 2) and ethanol + DMAP + CHX (group 3) was compared. In group 1 (ethanol + DMAP), the percentage of 2 cell, 4 cell, 8 cell, morula and blastocyst was 23.57%, 24.39%, 23.57%, 26.01% and 2.43%, respectively. In group 2 (ethanol + CHX), the percentage of 2 cell, 4 cell, 8 cell, morula and blastocyst was 7.63%, 17.55%, 43.51%, 29.77% and 1.52%, respectively. In group 3 (ethanol + DMAP + CHX), the percentage of 2 cell, 4 cell, 8 cell, morula and blastocyst was 9.5%, 13.09%, 45.63%, 29.76% and 1.78%, respectively. In group 1 (ethanol + DMAP) maximum blastocyst production was observed with 2.34%. The relevant data for embryo development (Figs. 1C-F) in mCR₂aa medium are shown in Table 2.

Discussion

In our experiment, a total of 480 ovaries were used for oocyte recovery by follicle puncture technique. Total oocyte recovery calculated was 2.27. Almost similar levels of oocytes were recovered by Das *et al.* (1996) in buffalo and Kharche *et al.* (2007, 2008, 2011) in goats. The variation in oocytes recovery could be due to many factors like age of donor, effect of follicle size or may be due to the estrous cycle stage. We obtained ovaries from slaughtered goats from a slaughter house, so we did not consider these factors.

In our experiment, 95.0% oocytes showed maturation. Our results are superior to many workers (Kharche *et al.*, 2007; Yadav *et al.*, 2007; Singh *et al.*, 2009) in goat. Maturation rate observed in the present study is similar to Younis *et al.* (1991) in goat and Mishra *et al.* (2006) in buffalo. This variation observed

Table 1: Cleavage rate of *in vitro* matured goat oocytes activated by different activating agents in mCR₂aa medium

S. No.	Group	No. of oocytes taken for activation	No. of oocytes Cleaved	Cleavage rate (%)
1	Group 1 (ethanol + DMAP)	226	123 ^b	54.42
2	Group 2 (ethanol + CHX)	294	131 ^c	44.55
3	Group 3 (ethanol + DMAP + CHX)	325	168 ^{bcd}	51.69
4	Group 4 (control)	108	0.00 ^a	0.00

Values in a column with different superscripts are significantly different (P<0.05)

Table 2: Effect of different inhibitors on development of activated *in vitro* matured goat oocytes

S. No.	Group	No. of cleaved oocytes (%)	2 cell (%)	4 cell (%)	8 cell (%)	Morula (%)	Blastocyst (%)
1	Group 1 (ethanol + DMAP)	123 (54.42)	29 ^a (23.57)	30 ^a (24.39)	29 ^a (23.57)	32 ^a (26.01)	3 ^a (2.43)
2	Group 2 (ethanol + CHX)	131 (44.55)	10 ^b (7.63)	23 ^b (17.55)	57 ^b (43.51)	39 ^b (29.77)	2 ^b (1.52)
3	Group 3 (ethanol + DMAP + CHX)	168 (51.69)	16 ^{bc} (9.5)	22 ^b (13.09)	77 ^{bc} (45.63)	50 ^b (29.76)	3 ^b (1.78)

Values in a column with different superscripts are significantly different ($P < 0.05$)

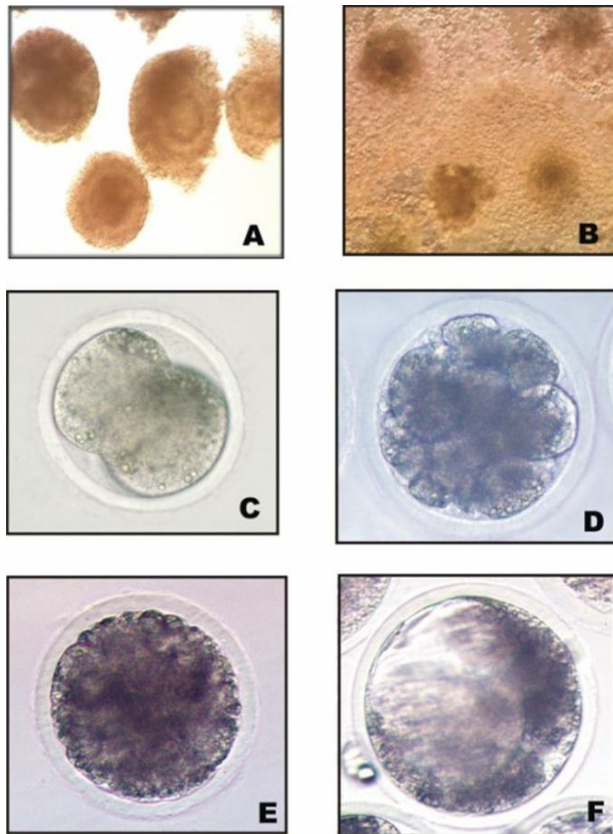


Fig. 1: Different stages of oocytes and embryos. (A) Immature oocytes, (B) Mature oocytes, (C) 2-Cell embryo, (D) 8-Cell embryo, (E) Morula, and (F) Blastocyst

in maturation rate could be due to many reasons as maturation rate is influenced by many factors like presence of follicular cells, protein supplementation, hormones, antioxidants and growth factors in maturation media (Khariche *et al.*, 2011). The reasons for good maturation rate in our experiment were hormones that were added in maturation media (FSH (5 µg/ml) and LH (10 µg/ml)). However, it is also observed that slaughterhouse oocytes cultured in simplified medium matured significantly faster than laproscopic ovum pick up oocytes at 18 and 22 h (Souza-Fabjan *et al.*, 2014).

In this experiment, the cleavage rate following different activation treatments with ethanol + DMAP (54.42%), ethanol + CHX (44.55%) and (51.69%) was significantly higher than the respective control (group 4, no activation (0.00%)). The cleavage rate between the various chemical activation treatments was also significantly different from each other except that no significant difference was observed between group 1 and group 3, and group 2 and group 3. However, the cleavage rate was significantly higher ($P < 0.05$) in group 1

(54.42%) than that of other groups. These results demonstrate the possibility of chemical activation of *in vitro* matured goat oocytes, leading to cleavage and embryo development. A significant improvement in cleavage rate was observed in group 1 (Ethanol + DMAP), suggesting that the *in vitro* matured goat oocytes had acquired more cleavage potential after ethanol + DMAP activation treatment. The activation methods used in this trial have been proven to be effective for activation of bovine oocytes (Mishra *et al.*, 2008).

When we compared cleavage rate following different activation treatments with other workers we found that our results regarding cleavage rate are higher than Kumar *et al.* (2014) with Ca + CHX + DMAP (43.2%). Our results of cleavage rate are in agreement with Onger *et al.* (2000). He reported cleavage of 57.8% and 58.0% with ionomycin and ethanol, respectively in *in vitro* matured goat oocytes. Furthermore, our results regarding cleavage rate are lower than Tanaka *et al.* (1997) with ethanol (78.0%), Gasparrini *et al.* (2004) with ethanol + DMAP (71.4%), Hosseini *et al.* (2008) with Ca ionophore (85.5%) and Bevacqua *et al.* (2010) with ionomycin + DMAP (71.2%) in *in vitro* matured bovine oocytes and Jena *et al.* (2012) with Ca ionophore + DMAP (75.7% (RVCL), 72.0% (mSOF) and 57.1% (EDM)) in goat oocytes. It is suggested that the difference in the cleavage rate might be due to difference in the species, culture media and activation treatments used for parthenogenetic activation.

In present study, all chemical activation treatments in mCR_{2aa} media were able to sustain embryo development up to the blastocyst stage. A significant difference was found in 2 cell embryos of group 1 and group 2 (23.57% vs 7.63%) and group 1 and group 3 (23.57% vs 9.5%). However, no significant difference was observed in 2-cell embryos of group 2 and group 3 (7.63% vs 9.5%). In 4 cell embryos, no significant difference was found among the groups (24.39%, 17.55% and 13.09%, respectively). In 8 cell embryos, a significant difference was found in group 1 and group 2 (23.57% vs 43.51%) and of group 1 and group 3 (23.57% vs 45.63%). However, no significant difference was observed in 8 cell embryos of group 2 and group 3 (43.51% vs 45.63%). Also, no significant difference was found in morula production (26.01%, 29.77% and 29.76%, respectively) and blastocyst production (2.43%, 1.52% and 1.78%, respectively) among all the groups. Similarly, the development of blastocysts in group 1 with ethanol + DMAP (2.43%) was higher than group 2 with ethanol + CHX (1.52%) and group 3 with ethanol + DMAP + CHX (1.78%). It might be due to less number of embryos were arrested in 2 cell stage in group 1.

In our experiments the embryo development in terms of morula production following different activation treatments is superior to ethanol + DMAP (6.5%) and ionomycin + DMAP (8.3%) in hSOF media (Gasparrini *et al.*, 2004) and ionomycin + DMAP (21.2%) and ionomycin + ethanol (20.5%) in SOF media (Bevacqua *et al.*, 2010) in buffalo. However, in morula production our results are not in agreement with that of Mishra *et al.* (2008), following activation treatment in mSOF media with ethanol + DMAP (26.4%), ethanol + CHX (35.7%) and ethanol + DMAP + CHX (50.9%) in bubaline oocytes.

Furthermore, when we compared the embryo development in terms of blastocyst production following different activation treatments with other workers we found that our results are superior to Abdalla *et al.* (2009), who observed blastocyst production of 1% in goat with two different activation treatments of ionomycin + CHX and ionomycin + DMAP in TCM-199. However, compared to our observations, higher blastocyst production was found in goat by De *et al.* (2011) with Ca ionophore (21.6%) and electrical pulse (23.11%). Furthermore, our results of blastocyst production are not comparable with ethanol + DMAP (49.8%) and ionomycin + DMAP (50.1%) in G1.2 and G2.2 media (Ongeri *et al.*, 2001) and ethanol + DMAP (8.8%) and ionomycin + DMAP (7.9%) in hSOF media (Gasparrini *et al.*, 2004) in buffalo which could be due to the additional effect produced by ionomycin. Our results of blastocyst production are not comparable with ionomycin + DMAP (14.5%) in SOFaa media, ethanol + DMAP (9.4%), ethanol + CHX (4.8%) and ethanol + DMAP + CHX (30.9%) in mSOF media (Mishra *et al.*, 2008), ethanol + DMAP (25.1%) in CR₁aa media (Hou *et al.*, 2009) and ionomycin + DMAP (18.7%) in SOF media (Bevacqua *et al.*, 2010) in bovine. It is suggested that the difference in the blastocyst production might be due to difference in the species, activation treatments and various media used for embryo development.

The results indicated that parthenogenetic activation of caprine oocytes in mCR₂aa media can be effectively done by ethanol + DMAP, ethanol + CHX and ethanol + DMAP + CHX combinations, which may enhance better development of parthenogenetic embryos. Considering the fact that the cleavage rate and subsequent development of blastocysts following chemical activation in ethanol + DMAP (54.42% and 2.43%, respectively) was numerically higher, our study indicates that goat oocytes had better inherent developmental competence following ethanol + DMAP chemical activation.

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