Attenuation of Oxidative Stress and Cognitive Impairment in Cadmium Exposed Wistar Rats Pre-treated with Ethanolic Turmeric Root Extract

Adaze Bijou Enogieru, Inegbedion Gabriel Osemudiamen

ABSTRACT

Background: Turmeric (Curcuma longa), belonging to the Zingiberaceae family is a widely used spice in cuisines of African Asian and other countries globally. Despite the enormous pharmacological benefits of turmeric there is very little experimental evidence to demonstrate its protective activity against cadmium-induced neurotoxicity. Accordingly this study is aimed at investigating such activity in Wistar rats and its possible mechanisms of action. Methods: Y-maze and Novel object recognition tests were utilized to evaluate memory impairments while antioxidants activity and lipid peroxidation were evaluated to outline the antioxidant mechanism of action following pre-treatment of rats with ethanolic turmeric root extract (400 mg/kg body weight), 1 hour before cadmium administration for 21 consecutive days. In addition, the histology of the cerebrum and hippocampus was investigated to determine possible anatomical alterations across experimental groups. Results: The ethanolic extract of turmeric root at the dose of (400mg/kg), significantly improved the memory of rats and protected against the impairments induced by cadmium in addition the extract significantly increased cerebral and hippocampal antioxidant enzyme activities (SOD, GPx and CAT), decreased lipid peroxidation (MDA), and protected against the degenerative changes observed in the cerebrum and hippocampus of rats treated with cadmium alone. Conclusion: Taken together these findings suggest that the ethanolic extract of turmeric root protected against the cognitive impairments induced by cadmium possibly through the attenuation of the oxidative damaging activity of cadmium.

Keywords: Turmeric, Cadmium, Antioxidant, Memory, Oxidative Damage.

INTRODUCTION

Cadmium is often considered an extremely lethal element that affects human health following long term exposure even at low concentrations [1]. The toxicity of cadmium is validated by its inclusion in the top ten chemicals of primary public health concern by the World Health Organization [2]. This has led to public anxiety and increased research activities targeted at finding therapeutic strategies capable of mitigating its adverse effects. When cadmium is absorbed into the body it is transported through the blood and binds to red blood cells and plasma proteins and is thereafter dispersed all through the organs and tissues with a half-life of about 17-30 years [3]. Extensive cadmium exposure may lead to chronic damage to the brain kidney testes lung and bone [3]. In the cells cadmium affects apoptosis cell proliferation and differentiation as well as other cellular activities [4]. Following cadmium exposure metabolism and elimination from the body are subject to the presence of antioxidants linked to the scavenging of free radicals and activity of antioxidant enzymes [4]. The pathophysiology of cadmium is mainly dependent on the induction of oxidative stress which is typified by (i) excessive generation of Reactive Oxygen Species (ROS), and Reactive Nitrogen Species (RNS), (ii) significant reduction of endogenous antioxidants and free-radical scavengers and (iii), inactivation of enzymes that aid in the detoxification of (ROS) [4].

In the body there are a moderate number of antioxidant protection machinery against free radicals and (ROS). Chelation techniques have also been utilized in the mitigation of cadmium-induced toxicity [5]. Numerous thiol-containing compounds have been exploited as treatments for heavy metal intoxications due to their ability to scavenge free radicals reinitate cellular thiol pools and form steady complexes with heavy metals [6]. However due to the possible side effects and adverse health risks linked to the chelation therapy and synthetic thiol-containing compounds in the treatment of cadmium toxicity natural exogenous antioxidants from dietary sources in form of medicinal plants have been encouraged Reports indicate that some of these medicinal plants possess more beneficial pharmacological activities than their synthetic equivalents in addition to being harmless adequate cheaper culturally acceptable and appropriate for treatment of heavy metal disorders [7]. Also, several medicinal plants such as turmeric (Curcuma longa), is a widely studied functional food belonging to the Zingiberaceae family. Since ancient times turmeric has been
used as a spice in cuisines of Africa Asia and in other countries globally. Numerous communities across the world utilize turmeric to manufacture traditional medications in the treatment of human diseases and disorders for instance it is useful in the treatment of stomach ailments hepatic disorders dyslipidaemia and arthritis. Some of the pharmacological activities of turmeric include antioxidant anti-inflammatory hypolipidemic and antimicrobial effects. Studies show that turmeric scavenges free radicals boost the activities of antioxidant enzymes and attenuates lipid peroxidation. The pharmacological benefits of turmeric have been attributed to its bioactive constituents two of the most significant constituents of turmeric is its volatile oil and curcumin. Evidence shows that curcumin plays a key role against oxidative stress in dopaminergic neuronal cells and ultimately enhances neuroprotection possibly through mediation of the BDNF/TrkB-MAPK/PI3K-CREB signalling pathway. Other neuropharmacological benefits of turmeric include its protective activity against traumatic brain injury depression anxiety Alzheimer’s disease and Parkinson’s disease.

Despite the enormous beneficial properties of turmeric there is very little experimental evidence to demonstrate its protective activity against cadmium-induced neurotoxicity. Accordingly this study is aimed at investigating such activity in Wistar rats hence findings from this study will provide the first research evidence of the neuroprotective activity of turmeric in cadmium-exposed Wistar rats.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Plant material

The roots of turmeric (Curcuma longa), were bought from a nearby market in Benin City specifically in the market of Uslu It was identified and authenticated at the Department of Plant Biology and Biotechnology University of Benin Edo State and a voucher specimen was deposited with the number (UBH-C397).

Animals

Adult Wistar rats weighing between (130g-180g), obtained from the breeding colony of the Department of Anatomy were used for the experiments. Animals were freely allowed to water and top feeds growers mash (manufactured by Premier feed mills Co Ltd 1 Eagle Flour Road Lagos/Ibadan expressway Toll point Ibadan Oyo State Nigeria). Acclimatization lasted for 14-days and animals received humane care following the principle of humane care and the use of laboratory animals This study was reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the College of Medical Sciences University of Benin with the number (CMS[REC]2021|171).

Preparation of the Ethanolic Extract

The roots of turmeric (Curcuma longa), were washed chopped into bits air-dried under ambient temperature without exposure to sunlight and pulverized (1kg), of the plant material was soaked in 3 litres of absolute ethanol and thoroughly extracted for 72 hours by maceration and recurrent stirring before filtering using hydrophilic cotton and Whatman filtered paper. The obtained filtrate was subsequently evaporated at a vacuum at 40°C under a pressure of (175), mbar with a rotary evaporator (SM-52 CS-1, Sedgefield Medical England), and freeze-dried to dryness with a freeze dryer (LJG-10 Searches United Kingdom). The ethanolic extract was stored at 4°C until needed for further experiments.

Phytochemical Screening

The qualitative assessment of the chemical composition of the roots of turmeric (Curcuma longa), was done using standard methods. Compounds such as alkaloids saponins steroids tannins anthocyanin phenols flavonoids carbohydrates phlorotannins terpenes and cardiac glycosides were tested. This study was carried out according to a previously described method with little modification. Briefly three groups (A1), (B1), and (C1), containing three rats each were administered with single doses of (10), 100 and (1000mg/kg), bodyweight of ethanolic turmeric root extract respectively. The rats were observed for 72 hours to monitor behavioural changes and possible mortality. Following the expiration of 72 hours three new groups (A2), (B2), and (C2), containing two rats each were administered with single doses of (1600), (2900), and (5000mg/kg), bodyweight of ethanolic turmeric root extract respectively. The rats were also observed for 72 hours for possible behavioural changes and mortality.

Chemicals and Reagents

Normal saline was manufactured by Unique Pharmaceuticals Sango-Ota Nigeria and Cadmium (Cd 99% purity), by Lobe Chemise Pvt. Ltd Mumbai India. Other reagents were all of the analytical grades.

Grouping and Treatment Schedule

Rats were randomly assigned into four different groups of six rats each. The experimental design was as follows:

- Group 1 (Control): received distilled water only for 3 weeks
- Group 2 (Cd): received Cadmium (5 mg/kg body wt.), for 3 weeks
- Group 3 (Cd+Tu): received (200mg/kg body wt.), of ethanolic turmeric root extract + Cadmium (5mg/kg body wt.), for 3 weeks
- Group 4 (Tu): received (200mg/kg), body wt. of ethanolic turmeric root extract for 3 weeks

Rats were pre-treated with turmeric one hour before administration of Cadmium

After 3 weeks the rats were subjected to the novel object recognition and Y-maze tests. Following the neurobehavioral tests biochemical evaluation of antioxidants activity and histopathological assessment of the cerebrum and hippocampus were carried out.

Neurobehavioral tests

Novel object recognition (NOR) test

This test, commonly utilized to evaluate short-term and long-term memory in rodents was carried out as previously described. Briefly on the 21st day of the experiment each rat explored the apparatus for 2 minutes while on day 22 (test day), two sessions (T1 and T2), of 3 minutes each was allowed In (T1), (trial), two similar objects (FO1 and FO2), were placed at opposite corners of the apparatus. Thereafter rats were left to individually explore both identical objects. At the end of (T1), rats were returned to their cages and a 1-hour interval was given before (T2). In (T2), real test a new object (NO), was used to replace (FO2), and each rat was left to explore (FO1), and (NO), Thereafter the total time spent in exploring (FO1), and (FO2), in (T1), and that spent in exploring (FO1), and (NO), in (T2), was recorded.

The discrimination index (DI) was calculated as follows

\[
\text{DI} = \frac{A_{\text{test}} - A_{\text{term}}}{A_{\text{term}}}
\]

Time with Novel object (NO) – time with the familiar object (FO1)

Time with Novel object (NO) + time with the familiar object (FO1)
which are symmetrically separated at 120° with an equilateral triangular central area. Experimental rats placed at the end of one arm, were allowed to move freely through the maze for 5 minutes following which each session was stopped. An arm entry (a measure of general activity), was recorded as positive when a rat’s hind paw was completely within the arm while spontaneous alternation behaviour was recorded as three successive entries in three different arms (i.e. A, B, C or A, B, C, etc.). The percentage alternation was calculated as Total alternation number Total number of entries minus (2x100). After each session, the maze was cleaned with (10%), ethanol to remove the residual odour.

Biochemical Evaluation

The cerebral and hippocampus were homogenized in ice-cold (20 mM), (Tris-HCl), buffer (pH 7.4), and the homogenates were thereafter centrifuged at (10,000g), for 10 min at 4°C [25]. The supernatants were collected and evaluated for Superoxide Dismutase [26], Catalase [27], Malondialdehyde [28], and Glutathione Peroxidase (GPx) [29].

Histological Examination

After 72 hours of storage in Blouin’s fluid the cerebral and hippocampus were processed through the paraffin wax embedding method as previously reported [30]. The Haematoxylin and Eosin staining method described by Drury and Wallington was also carried out [30]. Thereafter sections were observed under a (LABO®), trinocular microscope (Labo Microsystems GmbH, Germany), with an Omax (9.0MP), (USB), Digital Microscope Camera (Korea).

Statistical Analysis

Analysis of data was performed using GraphPad Prism Software (V7), (www.graphpad.com/scientific-software/prism/), Values were presented as mean ± standard error of mean. Statistical significance (p<0.05), was determined by one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), followed by the Tukey multiple comparisons.

RESULTS

Phytochemical screening

The qualitative phytochemical analysis revealed that the root of turmeric contains alkaloids, saponins, steroids, tannins, anthocyanins, phenols, flavonoids, carbohydrates, phlorotannins, terpenes, and cardiac glycosides. This indicates that the ethanolic extract of turmeric root is rich in phytoconstituents (Table 1).

Table 1: Phytochemical analysis of the root of turmeric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phytochemicals</th>
<th>Results</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alkaloids</td>
<td>+</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saponins</td>
<td>+</td>
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<tr>
<td>Steroids</td>
<td>+</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tannins</td>
<td>+</td>
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<td>Anthocyanin</td>
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<td>Phenols</td>
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<td>Flavonoids</td>
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<td>Carbohydrates</td>
<td>+</td>
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<td>Phlorotannins</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>Terpenes</td>
<td>+</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cardiac glycosides</td>
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Turmeric root extract; (+): Present; (−): Absent

Acute Toxicity

No behavioural changes abnormality or mortality was observed across experimental groups following administration of ethanolic turmeric root extract at doses from (10 to 5000mg/kg), bodyweight. There were no noticeable behavioural differences across experimental groups.

Effect of Treatment in the Novel Object Recognition Test

Findings show that control rats and turmeric alone treated rats took a longer time to explore the familiar and novel object (Figure 1). However, rats treated with cadmium alone had significantly lesser (p<0.05), time of exploration than that of control and turmeric pre-treated rats signifying an impairment of the memory process (Figure 2). Pre-treatment of rats by turmeric (400mg/kg), protected against the impairments induced by cadmium this is demonstrated by a significant increase (p<0.05), in the total exploratory time of the rats in this task as compared to the cadmium alone group (Figure 3). For the discrimination index, results show a significant reduction (p<0.05), in the ability to discriminate between the novel and familiar objects following treatment with cadmium alone as compared to control. Post hoc comparisons indicated that rats pre-treated with (400mg/kg), of ethanolic turmeric root extract discriminated significantly better and higher than rats treated with cadmium alone (Figure 4).

Figure 1. Effect of Turmeric (Tu), and cadmium (Cd), on the mean exploration times in (T1), (trial test), of the familiar object 1 (FO1), vs familiar object 2 (FO2), in the novel object recognition test

Figure 2. Effect of Turmeric (Tu), and cadmium (Cd), on the mean exploration times in (T2), (real test), of the familiar object 1 (FO1), vs novel object (NO), in the novel object recognition test. Bars represent the mean ± SEM (p<0.05), compared with the control group (p<0.05), compared with the Cd-alone group.
Figure 3. Effect of Turmeric (Tu), and cadmium (Cd), on the total exploration times of (T1), (trial test), and (T2), (real test), in the novel object recognition test Bars represent the mean ± SEM (p<0.05), compared with the control group (p< 0.05), compared with the Cd-alone group.

Figure 4. Effect of Turmeric (Tu), and cadmium (Cd), on discrimination index (DI), in the novel object recognition test. Bars represent the mean ± SEM (p<0.05), compared with the control group (p< 0.05), compared with the Cd-alone group.

Effects of Treatment in the Y-Maze Test

In the Y-maze test findings show that cadmium significantly decreased (p<0.05), spontaneous alternation behaviour in rats after twenty-one days’ administration when compared to control (Figure 5). Conversely pre-treatment of rats with ethanolic turmeric root extract significantly increased (p<0.05), spontaneous alternation behaviour in rats with cognitive deficit induced by cadmium Treatment of rats with ethanolic turmeric root extract alone did not affect spontaneous alternation and was not significantly different from control.

Figure 5. Effect of Turmeric (Tu), and cadmium (Cd), on spontaneous alternation (SA), percentage in the Y-maze test. Bars represent the mean ± SEM (p<0.05), compared with the control group (p<0.05), compared with the Cd-alone group.

Effect of Treatment on Cerebral Antioxidant Activity and Lipid Peroxidation

Following treatment with cadmium alone cerebral (SOD), (CAT and GPx), activities decreased significantly (p<0.05), when compared with that of control (Figure 7). Also, hippocampal (MDA), activity was significantly increased (p<0.05), in cadmium alone treated rats when compared with control Conversely pre-treatment of rats with ethanolic turmeric root extract significantly increased (p<0.05), hippocampal (SOD), (CAT and GPx), activities in rats when compared to rats treated with cadmium alone There was no significant difference (p>0.05), between control and rats treated with ethanolic turmeric root extract alone.

Effect of Treatment on Hippocampal Antioxidant Activity and Lipid Peroxidation

Following treatment with cadmium alone hippocampal (SOD), (CAT and GPX), activities decreased significantly (p<0.05), when compared with that of control (Figure 6). Also, hippocampal (MDA), activity was significantly increased (p<0.05), in cadmium alone treated rats when compared with control Conversely pre-treatment of rats with ethanolic turmeric root extract significantly increased (p<0.05), hippocampal (SOD), (CAT and GPx), activities in rats when compared to rats treated with cadmium alone There was no significant difference (p>0.05), between control and rats treated with ethanolic turmeric root extract alone.

Effect of Treatment on The Histology of the Cerebrum and Hippocampus

(Figures 8 and 9), show the histology of the cerebrum and hippocampus of rats in the experimental groups following appropriate treatments (Figure 8). A shows the normal histology of the cerebral cortex revealing six layers from external to internal with pyramidal and granular neuronal cells (Figure 9). A shows the normal histology of the hippocampus showing the cortex narrowed into a single layer of densely packed pyramidal neurons the corn ammonis (CA), region (CA1). The histology of the cerebrum of the cadmium alone group (Figure 8B), revealed severe histological alterations in the layers of the cortex as compared to the control group Some areas appear more cellular particularly in the outer pyramidal layer while others were less crowded with cells particularly in the inner granular layer Also
degenerating pyramidal cells and vacuolation was observed particularly in the outer pyramidal and inner granular layer. The hippocampus showed the (CA1), region with histological alterations to its structure (Figure 9B). This is demonstrated by severe vacuolation pyknotic nuclei and degenerating pyramidal cells and neurons. In the pre-treated group of rats the cerebral cortex and hippocampus displayed improved cortical architecture with pyramidal and granule cells similar to that of control and no vacuolation in the cerebral and hippocampal tissue (Figure 8C & 9C). There were no observed histological differences between the cerebrum and hippocampus of rats treated with ethanolic turmeric root extract alone and control (Figure 8D & 9D).

Figure 8: Photomicrograph showing the histology of the cerebral cortex of rats in the experimental groups (A), Control Notice the molecular layer (1), outer granular layer (2), outer pyramidal layer (3), inner granular layer (4), inner pyramidal layer (5) and the multiform layer (6). (B), Cd-induced group Transverse section showing disorganized and fewer cells in the pyramidal and inner granular layer degenerating pyramidal cells (black arrows) (C). (400mg/kg), Tu * Cd (D). (400mg/kg), Tu (H&E 100X), Scale bar (100 µm)

Figure 9: Photomicrograph showing the histology of the hippocampus of rats in the experimental groups (A), Control (B), Cd-induced group Sections showing altered morphology with vacuolated tissue architecture (black arrows), and pyknotic nuclei (yellow arrows), and fewer cells observed in the (CA1), region (C0), Cd* (400mg/kg), Tu (D), (400mg/kg), Tu (H&E x400), Scale bar (25µm)

DISCUSSION
In this study we report that pre-treatment with ethanolic turmeric root extract protected against impaired learning and memory behaviours induced by cadmium in adult Wistar rats. Specifically, the phytochemical screening showed that the ethanolic extract of turmeric root contains alkaloids saponins steroids tannins anthocyanin phenols flavonoids carbohydrates phlorotannins terpenes and cardiac glycosides. This finding is in agreement with previous reports on the phytochemical composition of the plant. [31,32] Accumulating evidence shows that the pharmacological action of plants is based on its phytochemical constituent and the presence of important phytochemicals in this extract (particularly alkaloids flavonoids phenols and saponins), demonstrates its pharmacological benefit and relevance for medicine and therapy. Phenol’s flavonoids and saponins have been previously reported to have antioxidant and neuroprotective properties. [33,34]. The toxicological study showed that no mortality was recorded at the (5000mg/kg), limit dose thus signifying that the (LD₅₀), is greater than (5000mg/kg), and that the extract is not toxic the non-toxic nature of the plant is further vindicated by reports of the use of turmeric as a food plant with a high safety margin. This is in agreement with previous findings demonstrating that the (LD₅₀), of turmeric is greater than (5000mg/kg) [35,36].

In this study two standard memory tests Y-maze and novel object recognition were utilized to assess the protective effect of the ethanolic extract of turmeric root against cadmium-induced neurotoxicity in rats. The primary output from the Y-maze analysis is the percentage of spontaneous alternation behaviour. This is often considered as a measure of short-term spatial memory in rodents which requires them to remember the arm most recently entered in a bid to alternate the choice of next arm entry. [42], thus spontaneous alternation behaviour was established from consecutive entries into three different arms. Furthermore, cadmium administration has been reported to impair spontaneous alternation behaviour in mice. [37,38]. Our results show that spontaneous alternation behaviour in cadmium alone treated rats was significantly lower than in control rats. Conversely, rats pre-treated with ethanolic turmeric root extract had significantly higher percentages of spontaneous alternation behaviour when compared to rats treated with cadmium alone thus protecting against the cognitive deficit induced by cadmium in the Y-maze task. The novel object recognition test has been widely explored in neuroscience studies of neurobehavioral cognition memory and brain function in rodents. [24-39]. Our findings show that exploration of the novel object was significantly reduced in rats treated with cadmium alone when compared to control in this test an exploratory and memory retention ability is required of the experimental rats such that each rat must sufficiently explore the familiar object during the trial phase to differentiate between it and a novel object during the real test phase. [24]. Findings from this study show that rats treated with cadmium alone displayed lower total exploration time during the real test than control rats. The discrimination index was observed to be significantly reduced in the group of rats treated with cadmium alone when compared to control suggesting an impairment of the learning and recognition process. This is in agreement with previous neurobehavioral reports demonstrating that cadmium treated rats display significantly reduced exploratory behaviour and discrimination index in the novel object recognition test [40,41].

Following pre-treatment of rats with ethanolic turmeric root extract a significant increase was observed in the exploration and discrimination index of the rats when compared to those treated with cadmium alone thus indicating that the extract protects against memory impairments and cognitive dysfunction in rats treated with cadmium. Memory disorders induced by cadmium are linked to elevated oxidative stress in the brain. [42,43]. Reports indicate that cadmium induces its neurotoxicity via the reduction of enzymatic antioxidants and an ensuing elevation in lipid peroxidation. Also thiol status modulation ion transport changes and (DNA), damage are other reported mechanisms. [44]. During the induction of oxidative stress lipid peroxidation is reported to be a key player with an important role in the toxicity of several heavy metals. [45,46]. This agrees with the findings from this study showing that cadmium increased the (MDA), level an oxidative product of lipid peroxidation in the brain. In a bid to counteract the harmful effects of reactive oxygen species and free radical’s cells are fortified with potent antioxidant defence mechanisms. Findings from this study reveal that the cadmium-induced increase in lipid peroxidation corresponded with a significant decrease in the activities of the cellular enzymatic antioxidants (SOD), (CAT and GPx), This is in agreement with several reports showing that cadmium deactivates several enzymes and proteins involved in the regulation and attenuation of stress. [47,48]. However, pre-treatment of rats with ethanolic turmeric root extract protected against the dysregulation of the antioxidant enzymes activity and induction of lipid peroxidation. This may be due to the extract’s free radical scavenging anti-oxidative metal chelating and anti-lipid peroxidative properties as previously reported [49,50].
Several reports show that cadmium exposure induces severe histological changes in the brain [35,32]. From this study administration of cadmium alone to rats induced alterations to the cerebral cortex particularly the outer pyramidal and inner granular layers as well as the pyramidal cells and neurons of the hippocampus The disparity and loss of cellularity in the inner granular layer of the cerebral cortex degenerating pyramidal neurons and cells as well as vacuolation of the (CA1), region of the hippocampus are considered as hallmarks of cytoskeletal disorganization [33]. Vacuolation is often attributable to cellular shrinkage and withdrawal of their processes thereby leaving peri-cellular spaces [34]. In agreement with our study structural changes to the neurons and cells of the cerebral cortex and hippocampus are known to cause deficits in learning, memory and cognition [31,32-35]. The degenerative changes to the cerebral and hippocampal structures may be linked to the vulnerability of rats to cadmium toxicity and its ability to induce oxidative damage [37]. Pre-treatment of rats with ethanolic turmeric root extract protected against the histological alterations in the cerebrum and hippocampus of rats exposed to cadmium alone thus demonstrating its potent protective activity.

CONCLUSION

The qualitative phytochemical screening of ethanolic turmeric root extract showed that it contained various important phytochemicals. The presence of these phytochemicals in the plant its ability to regulate antioxidant enzymes activity and inhibit lipid peroxidation are possible explanations for the neuroprotective activity demonstrated in this study. It is therefore suggested and recommended that regular intake of turmeric in diet could be neuroprotective and that this plant could be developed as a neuroprotective agent useful against cadmium toxicity and other related disorders.

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Conflict of Interest

None declared.

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