



Effect of Erythropoietin Pre and Post-Therapy on Serum Marker Enzymes of Cardiac Damage and Inflammation in Isoproterenol Induced Myocardial Infarcted Rats

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ABSTRACT:

In the present work, the therapeutic potential of both pre and post-treatment of rhEPO (recombinant human Erythropoietin) in isoproterenol- (ISO-) induced myocardial infarction was evaluated through measurement of serum markers of myocardial infarction and inflammation. Adult male Wistar rats were divided into four groups (control, ISO induced MI, ten days rhEPO pre-treatment + ISO induction, and ISO induction + single dose rhEPO post-treatment) respectively. The therapeutic efficacy of rhEPO (5000 IU/kg b.w) i.e ten days pretreatment before ISO (75mg/kg b.w) induction, as well as the potential of a single dose of rhEPO (5000 IU/kg) post-therapy after ISO-induced myocardial damage, was investigated by measuring the serum levels of markers of cardiac injury viz., MCP-1 (Monocyte Chemoattractant Protein-1), enzyme markers such as AST (aspartate transaminase), IL6 (Interleukin -6) and LDH (Lactate dehydrogenase). Taken altogether, the research findings suggest that post-treatment of erythropoietin is more effective than pre-treatment in ameliorating the cardiac markers of MI including the inflammatory marker IL-6.

KEY WORDS: Isoproterenol; Myocardial infarction; Erythropoietin; Wistar rats; Serum cardiac markers; inflammation

1. INTRODUCTION:

Myocardial Infarction (MI), also referred to as a "Heart attack", is caused by a reduction or total suspension of blood supply to a section of the myocardium¹, which results in a limited oxygen supply². The available oxygen supply cannot meet oxygen demand, resulting in cardiac

ischemia³. As a result of the ischemia, many changes occur at the molecular, cellular, and tissue levels of the myocardium⁴. Hypoxia, death of cardiomyocytes, inflammation, ventricular dilation and adverse remodeling, tissue necrosis, interstitial fibrosis, and contractile dysfunction are some of the main features that may present themselves during the progression of MI⁵. Myocardial infarction (MI) is a major cause of mortality and morbidity which is anticipated to take around 23.3 million lives by 2030². Myocardial infarction is becoming more common in poor countries after previously being seen primarily in developed countries⁶. Isoproterenol induced animal models are commonly used to research MI. ISO is a synthetic nonselective-adrenergic agonist that is often used to cause experimental acute MI in rats. This effect is accomplished by causing myocardial oxidative stress, inflammation, and calcium overload via activation of 1-adrenergic receptors in the heart⁷. Exploring pharmaceutical strategies to treat ISO-induced cardiac anomalies could be beneficial in avoiding the onset and progression of MI⁸.

Cardiac biomarkers are useful in the diagnosis of a myocardial infarction. The ideal biomarker needs to be expressed at relatively high levels within cardiac tissue, with high clinical sensitivity and specificity that is detectable in the blood early after the onset of symptoms, such as chest pain⁹. As there are numerous cardiac biomarkers, AST was the first biomarker used in the diagnosis of MI. In myocardial infarction, AST rises 6 to 8 hours after symptom onset, peaks at 24 to 36 hours, and recovers to normal in 3 to 7 days¹⁰. LDH (Lactate dehydrogenase) is a tissue specific biomarker released during tissue damage. In myocardial infarction, LDH-1 isoenzyme remains elevated from the second day up to the 4th day. LDH-1 is found to be greater than LDH-2 in myocardial infarction, with a ratio of LDH-1/LDH-2 greater than 1. The increase in LDH persists for approximately ten days. It increases at 12 hours and peaks at 24-48 hours¹¹ and returns to normal values within 8–14 days¹². Interleukin-6 (IL-6) is another indicator of early atherosclerosis, as it plays a key role in the recruitment and activation of inflammatory cells in response to ischemia and subsequent reperfusion of injured myocardium¹³. Elevated levels of IL-6 have been detected in patients with myocardial infarction, especially during the period of reperfusion, indicating a role for IL-6 in the pathogenesis of IHD Ischemic heart disease¹⁴. Monocyte Chemoattractant Protein-1 (MCP-1) is one of the well-studied CC chemokines involved in the pathophysiology of MI. It plays a role in the early stages of atherosclerosis or in the subacute phase of MI. Another investigation had demonstrated that MCP-1 plays a significant role in the process of myocardial healing and remodeling after MI occurrence¹⁵. Elevation of MCP-1 in the circulation of patients with

atherosclerosis-associated complications implicates this CC chemokine ligand (CCL)2 in inflammatory processes, which contribute to the pathogenesis of myocardial infarction and ischemic stroke¹⁶. Our research focuses on the diagnosis of MI using serum indicators in Isoproterenol-induced and RhEPO-treated MI.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Animals

Male Wistar rats (250-300gm) were obtained from Biogen Laboratory Animal Facility, Bengaluru and maintained in polypropylene cages at $23 \pm 2^{\circ}\text{C}$ with a relative humidity of 40–60%. A natural light and dark cycle was maintained in the rooms where the animals were housed. A commercial chow pellet diet (Krishna Valley Agrotech, LLP, Sangli, Maharashtra) was provided, and filtered water *ad libitum*. The Institutional Animal Ethics Committee of Saveetha Medical College approved this study (SU/CLAR/RD/003/2022) and the experiments were performed as per the guidelines of the Committee for the Control and Supervision of Experiments on Animals (CCSEA, India).

2.2. Drugs and Chemicals

The therapeutic drug rhEPO was procured from Intas Pharmaceuticals Ltd., Ahmedabad, India. Each prefilled syringe of 1.0 mL contained 4000 IU of recombinant human Erythropoietin injection IP (RENOCEL 4000). The isoproterenol (Isolin – 2mg/mL vial) was purchased from Samarth Life Sciences Pvt Ltd., Mumbai, India. All other reagents and chemicals used in the study were of analytical grade.

2.3. Experimental Animals

The study animals were divided into four groups, and six animals were used in each group. While group 1 rats served as normal control, the group 2 rats were administered with single intraperitoneal (i.p) injection of ISO-isoproterenol (75 mg/kg b.w) on the last day of experimentation (i.e day of sacrificing animals). The group 3 rats (therapeutic drug pre-treated) received rhEPO (5000 IU/kg i.p) injections continuously once daily for 10 days. After receiving the last dose of rhEPO injection on the 10th day, a single dose of isoproterenol (75 mg/kg i.p) was injected the next day and then sacrificed after 2hr duration. On the day of sacrificing all rats (11th day), the group 4 rats received a single injection of ISO (75 mg/kg i.p) first followed by a single injection of rhEPO (5000 IU/kg i.p) as post-treatment at 2 hrs time interval. One hr after rhEPO injections, the group 4 rats were also sacrificed.

2.4. Induction of Experimental MI

2.4.1. Experimental Design

The rats were divided into the following study groups:

Group I: Normal control (No treatment);

Group II: Myocardial infarction via induction with isoproterenol (ISO) (75 mg/kg i.p)¹⁴

Group III: rhEPO (5000 IU/kg i.p) pre-treatment for 10 days + ISO (75mg/kg i.p)¹⁴

Group IV: ISO (75mg/kg i.p) + rhEPO post-treatment (5000 IU/kg i.p)¹⁴

After completion of the experimental protocol, the rats were anaesthetized using isoflurane (Raman and weil, Mumbai), and blood samples were withdrawn following retro orbital puncture using hematocrit capillary tubes. The blood was collected into vacutainers (Clot activator) and subsequently, the serum was collected by allowing the blood to clot for 15-30 min at RT followed by centrifugation at 3,500 rpm for 10 min in a cooling centrifuge (REMI CPR-24PLUS, India) and preserved for biochemical investigations (which are not included in this paper).

The animals were trans-cardially perfused with normal saline followed by a neutral buffered formalin solution. The heart tissues were carefully removed, and processed for histopathological and immunohistochemical examination.

2.5. Assay of Aspartate transaminase (AST)

To assay serum AST, the commercially available kit was used (Elab Science, USA). About 800 µl of reagent-1 (R1: TRIS (pH 7.8; 80 mmol/l): L- Aspartate (240 mmol/l), MDH (malate dehydrogenase) (≥ 600 U/l), LDH (lactate dehydrogenase) (≥ 600 U/l)) was mixed with 200 µl of reagent-2 (R2: 2-Oxaloglutarate (12 mmol/l): NADH (0.18 mmol), Pyridoxal-5-Phosphate FSGood buffer (pH 9.6; 0.7 mmol/l), Pyridoxal-5-Phosphate (0.09 mmol/l)) in a 5 ml test tube and 100 µl serum was added. It was mixed well and reading was taken using a UV-Visible spectrophotometer (Labomed, UV-2700, Los Angeles, USA) .

2.6. Determination of MCP-1 protein

MCP-1 protein levels in serum were measured using MCP-1 commercially available ELISA kit (Thermo Fischer Scientific, Massachusetts, US). About 100 µL of serum samples were incubated for 2 hours at room temperature in the wells pre-coated with primary antihuman MCP-1 antibody. After incubation, wells were washed three times, and horseradish peroxidase-conjugated polyclonal antibodies against MCP-1 were added and again incubated for 2 hours

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at room temperature. Then tetramethylbenzidine substrate was added for 30 minutes and, after that stopping reagent 2M sulfuric acid was added, the absorbance was measured at 450 nm using a microplate reader (Mindray, MR96A model).

2.7. Determination of IL-6

IL-6 levels were assayed using a commercially available enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA) kit (Thermo Fischer Scientific, Massachusetts, US). This assay uses monoclonal anti-IL-6 antibodies, bound to microtiter plates. Unbound protein is removed by washing, and a polyclonal anti-IL-6 antibody conjugated to horseradish peroxidase is added, with any excess conjugated antibody removed by further washing. The IL-6 bound is quantified by the addition of substrate solution hydrogen peroxide and tetramethylbenzidine. The reaction is stopped after 20 minutes of incubation by adding 2M sulphuric acid at room temperature, and the color intensity is quantified by using a microtiter plate reader (Mindray, MR96A model) at a wavelength of 450 nm.

2.8. Assay of LDH

The levels of LDH in serum were measured using an LDH ELISA assay kit (R&D Systems, Minneapolis, USA), according to the manufacturer's instructions. The serum were then incubated with the reagents included in the kits. Finally, the absorbance values were measured using a microplate reader (Mindray, MR96A model) at 450 nm. All experiments were performed independently at least 3 times and the LDH level was expressed as U/l.

2.9. Statistical analysis

The data were expressed as mean, standard deviation and standard error. The mean values were compared by one way analysis of variance and once it was found statistically significant, multiple comparison test was done by Bonferroni 't' test. A probability of 0.05 and less was considered statistically significant. SigmaPlot 14.5 version (Systat Software Inc., San Jose, USA) was used for statistical analysis and for graph plotting.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Assessment of serum markers of myocardial injury

The results of serum markers viz., AST, MCP-1, IL-6 and LDH are depicted in Figures 1 to 4 respectively. The mean, standard deviation and standard error of the various markers (AST, MCP-1, IL-6, and LDH) are given in Table 1.

The mean values of serum AST levels in control, isoproterenol, pre-administration of erythropoietin (10 days) + isoproterenol, and isoproterenol followed by erythropoietin administration (2 hrs after ISO) are 124.67, 170.80, 132.26 and 111.43 respectively. Compared to the control group, the isoproterenol group and pre-administration of erythropoietin + isoproterenol groups showed 1.37 and 1.06 fold increase in the enzyme levels ($P < 0.001$ and $P = 1.0$ respectively). The isoproterenol followed by the erythropoietin administration group showed a 0.89 fold decrease ($P = 0.385$) in AST levels compared with the control. This shows that both pre and post-administration of EPO have a beneficial effect in reducing the AST levels. However, a better effect was seen in the EPO post-treatment group.

The mean values of serum MCP-1 levels (pg/mL) in control, isoproterenol, pre-administration of erythropoietin (10 days) + isoproterenol, and isoproterenol followed by erythropoietin administration (2 hrs after ISO) are 10.5, 25.86, 20.96 and 12.00 respectively. Compared to the control group, the isoproterenol group pre-administration of erythropoietin + isoproterenol group showed 2.46 and 1.99 fold increase in the MCP-1 levels ($P < 0.001$ and 0.001 , respectively). The isoproterenol followed by erythropoietin post-administration group showed no significant change (1.14 fold increase) in comparison with the control group ($P = 1.02$). This shows that erythropoietin post-treatment has a significant beneficial effect as compared with pre-treatment.

The mean values of serum IL-6 levels (pg/mL) in control, isoproterenol, pre-administration of erythropoietin (10 days) + isoproterenol, and isoproterenol followed by erythropoietin administration (2 hrs after ISO) are 23.93, 61.63, 55.63 and 30.23 respectively. Compared to the control group, the isoproterenol group and pre-administration of erythropoietin + isoproterenol group showed a 2.57 and 2.32 fold increase in the IL-6 levels ($P < 0.01$ and 0.01 , respectively). The isoproterenol followed by erythropoietin post-administration group showed no significant change (1.26 fold increase) in comparison with the control group ($P = 1.0$). This shows that erythropoietin post-treatment has a significant beneficial effect as compared with pre-treatment.

The mean values of serum LDH levels (U/mL) in control, isoproterenol, pre-administration of erythropoietin (10 days) + isoproterenol, and isoproterenol followed by erythropoietin post administration (2 hrs after ISO) are 66.90, 207.6, 160.5 and 73.4 respectively. Compared to the control group, the isoproterenol group, pre-administration of erythropoietin + isoproterenol group and the isoproterenol followed by erythropoietin post-administration group showed 3.1, 2.39, and 1.09 fold increase in the levels of LDH levels ($P < 0.001$, 0.05 and $P=1$ respectively).

This shows that post-treatment with rhEPO has rendered a better protective effect than the pre-administration of erythropoietin.

Figure 1

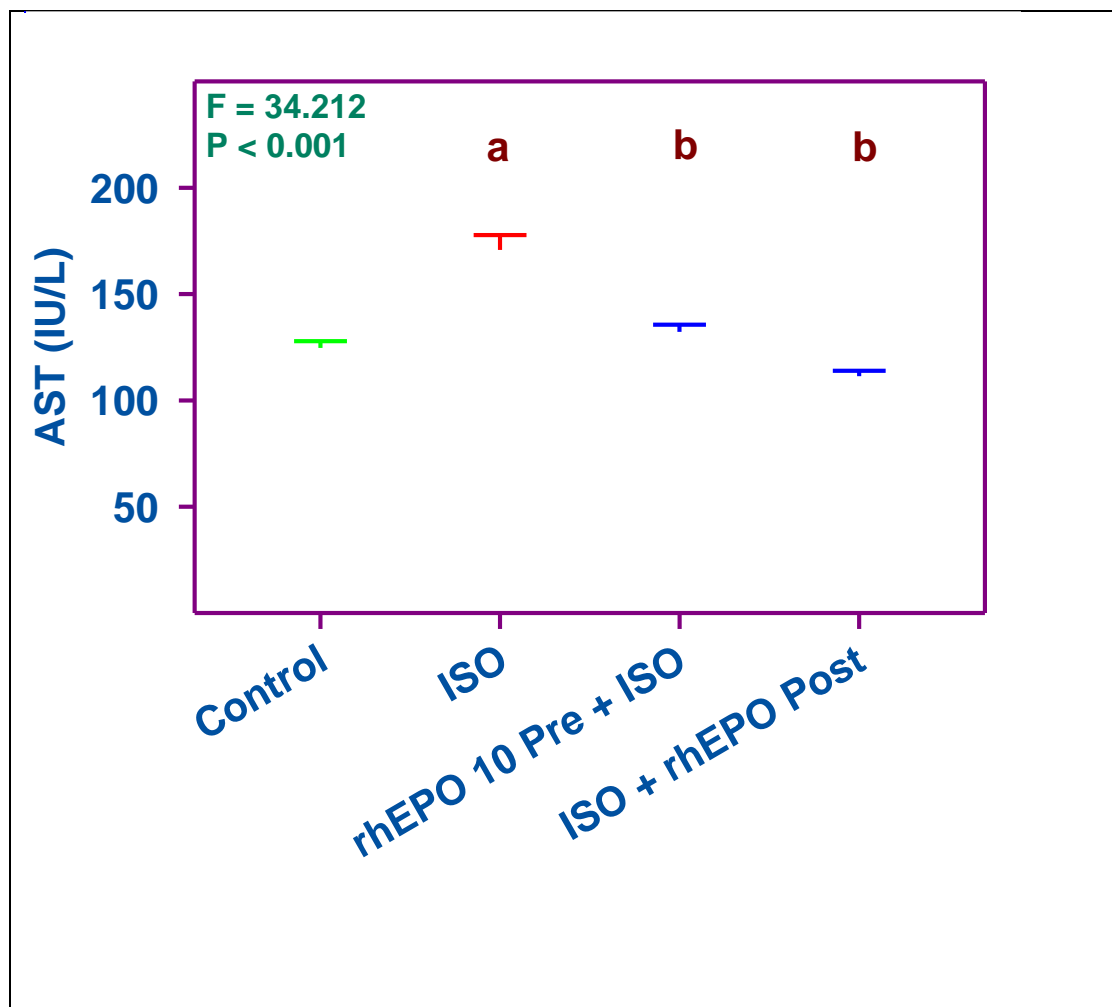


Figure 1: Comparative effect of erythropoietin (rhEPO) pre-treatment and post-treatment on isoproterenol (ISO) induced changes in AST levels in Wistar rats.

Values are mean \pm SE (n = 5 each)

Pre = 10 days pre-treatment with erythropoietin followed by isoproterenol on the next day.

Post = Isoproterenol followed by erythropoietin treatment after 1 hr.

The 'F' and 'P' values are by one way ANOVA with Bonferroni 't' test for multiple comparison.

^aSignificantly different from control.

^bSignificantly different from isoproterenol.

^cSignificantly different from erythropoietin pre-treatment + isoproterenol.

Figure 2:

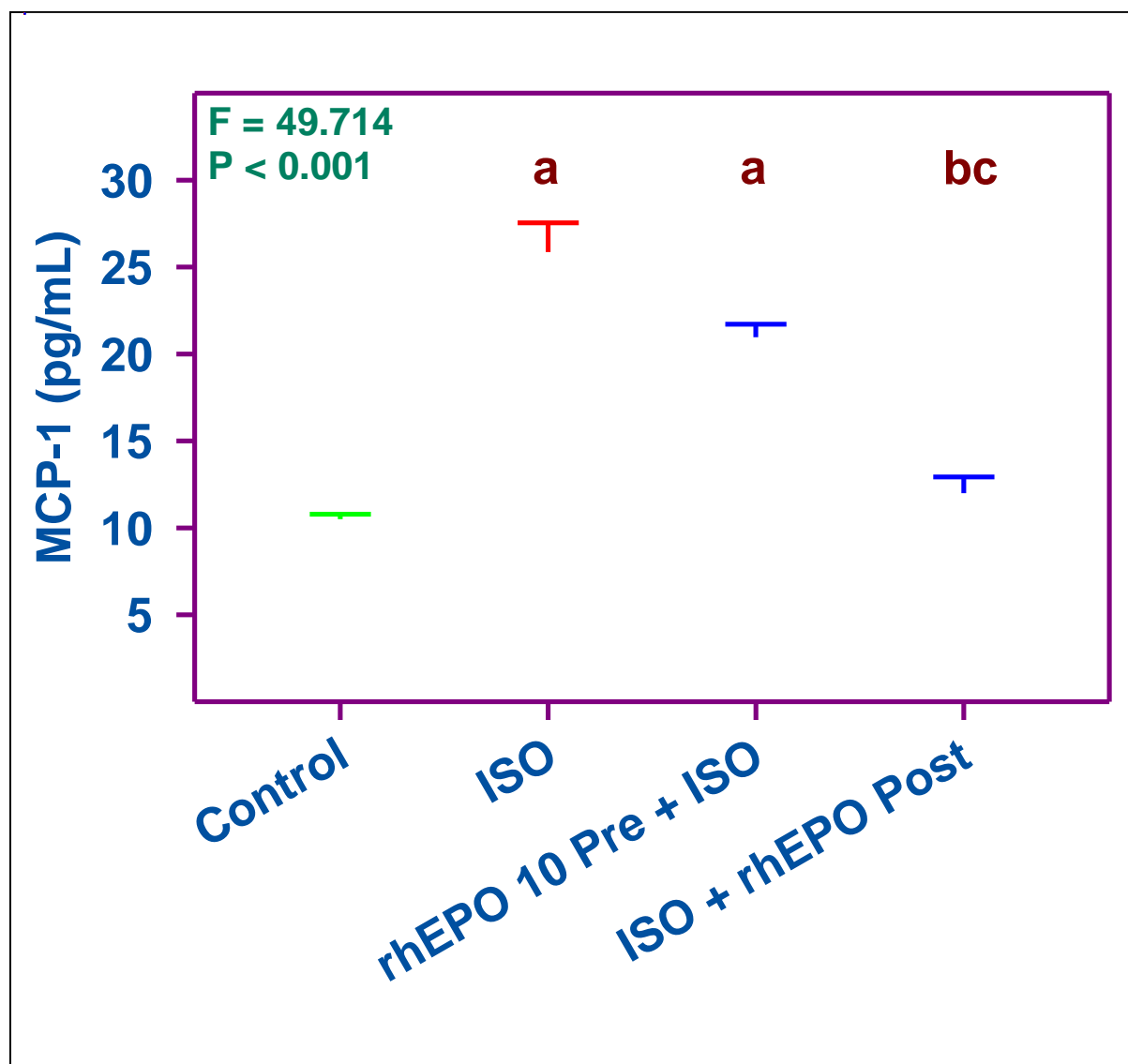


Figure 2: Comparative effect of erythropoietin (rhEPO) pre-treatment and post-treatment on isoproterenol (ISO) induced changes in MCP-1 levels in Wistar rats.

Values are mean \pm SE (n = 5 each)

Pre = 10 days pre-treatment with erythropoietin followed by isoproterenol on the next day.

Post = Isoproterenol followed by erythropoietin treatment after 1 hr.

The 'F' and 'P' values are by one way ANOVA with Bonferroni 't' test for multiple comparison.

^aSignificantly different from control.

^bSignificantly different from isoproterenol.

^cSignificantly different from erythropoietin pre-treatment + isoproterenol.

Figure 3:

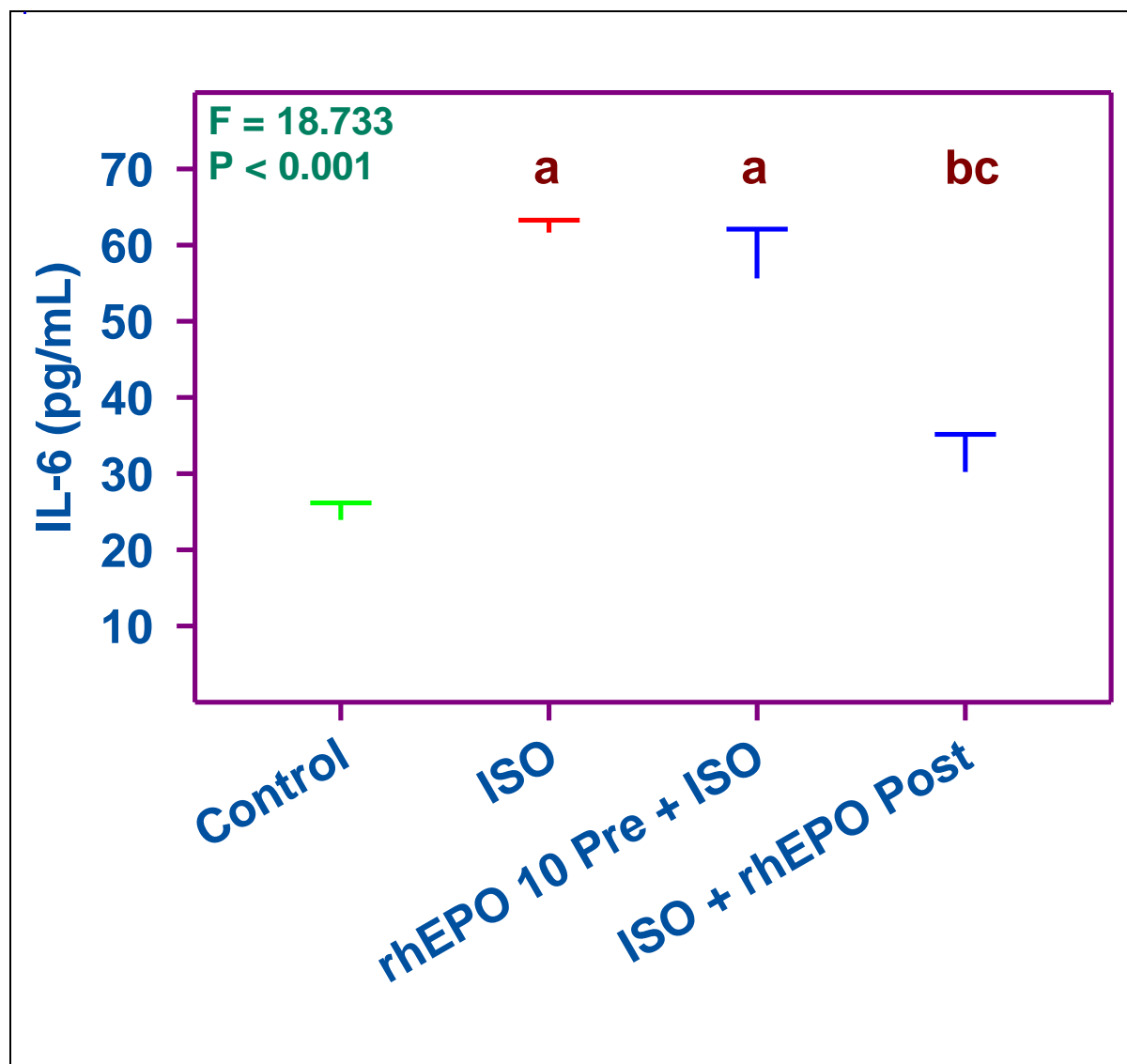


Figure 3: Comparative effect of erythropoietin (rhEPO) pre-treatment and post-treatment on isoproterenol (ISO) induced changes in IL-6 levels in Wistar rats.

Values are mean \pm SE (n = 5 each)

Pre = 10 days pre-treatment with erythropoietin followed by isoproterenol on the next day.

Post = Isoproterenol followed by erythropoietin treatment after 1 hr.

The 'F' and 'P' values are by one way ANOVA with Bonferroni 't' test for multiple comparison.

^aSignificantly different from control.

^bSignificantly different from isoproterenol.

^cSignificantly different from erythropoietin pre-treatment + isoproterenol.

Figure 4

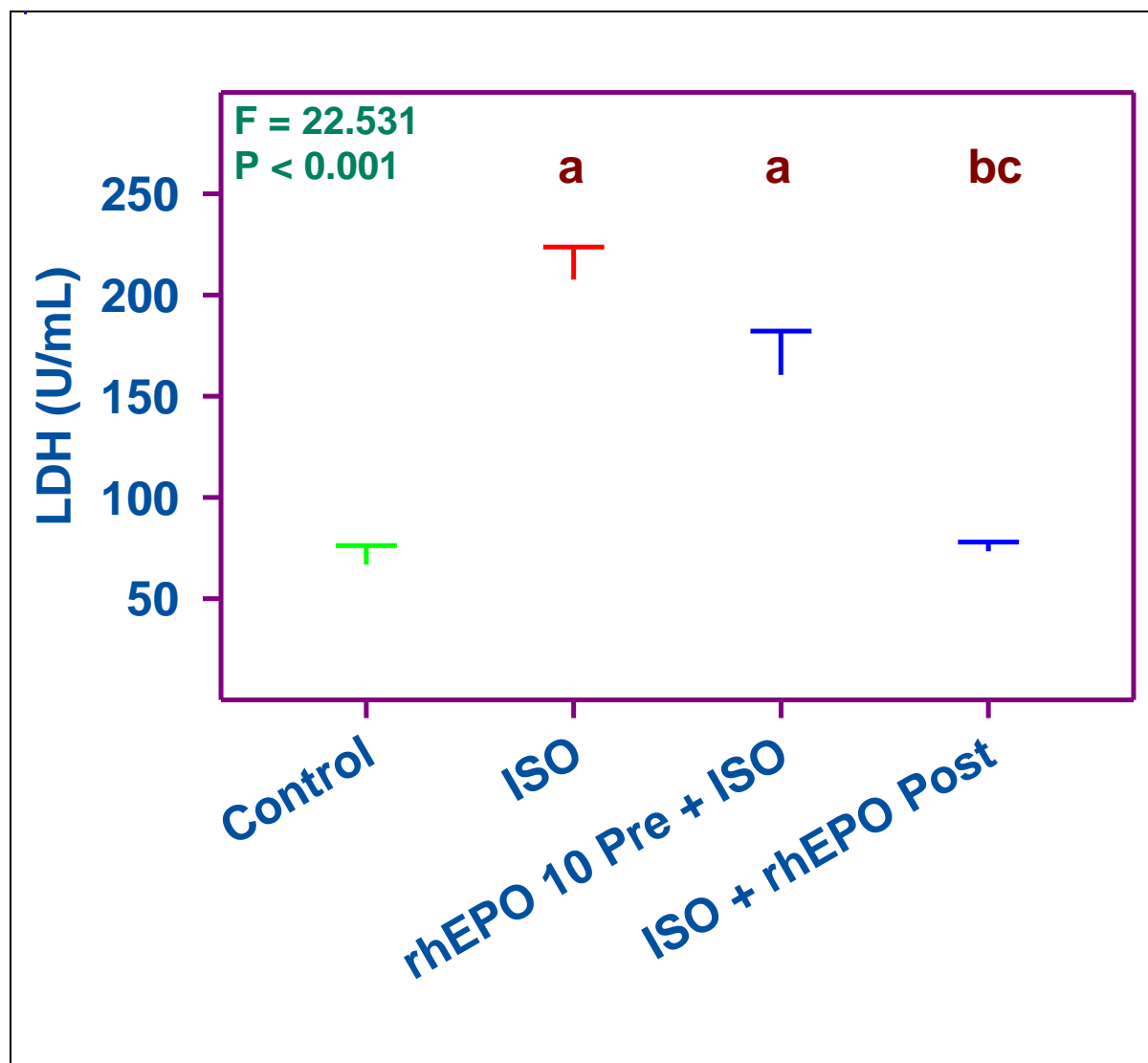


Figure 4: Comparative effect of erythropoietin (rhEPO) pre-treatment and post-treatment on isoproterenol (ISO) induced changes in LDH levels in Wistar rats.

Values are mean \pm SE (n = 5 each)

Pre = 10 days pre-treatment with erythropoietin followed by isoproterenol on the next day.

Post = Isoproterenol followed by erythropoietin treatment after 1 hr.

The 'F' and 'P' values are by one way ANOVA with Bonferroni 't' test for multiple comparison.

^aSignificantly different from control.

^bSignificantly different from isoproterenol.

^cSignificantly different from erythropoietin pre-treatment + isoproterenol.

Table 1:

| Table 1: Comparative effect of erythropoietin (rhEPO) pre-treatment and post-treatment on isoproterenol (ISO) induced changes in Wistar rats. | | | | | | |
|--|-----------|--------------------|---------|--------|--------|-------------------------|
| S.No. | Parameter | Groups | Mean | SD | SE | Statistics |
| 1 | AST | Control | 124.667 | 5.550 | 3.204 | F = 34.212 P < 0.001 |
| | | ISO | 170.800 | 12.050 | 6.957 | |
| | | rhEPO 10 Pre + ISO | 132.267 | 5.771 | 3.332 | |
| | | ISO + rhEPO Post | 111.433 | 4.336 | 2.504 | |
| 2 | MCP-1 | Control | 10.50 | 0.5 | 0.289 | F = 49.714 P < 0.001 |
| | | ISO | 25.867 | 2.909 | 1.680 | |
| | | rhEPO 10 Pre + ISO | 20.967 | 1.290 | 0.745 | |
| | | ISO + rhEPO Post | 12 | 1.609 | 0.929 | |
| 3 | IL-6 | Control | 23.933 | 3.850 | 2.223 | F = 18.733 P < 0.001 |
| | | ISO | 61.633 | 2.836 | 1.637 | |
| | | rhEPO 10 Pre + ISO | 55.633 | 11.169 | 6.448 | |
| | | ISO + rhEPO Post | 30.233 | 8.545 | 4.933 | |
| 4 | LDH | Control | 66.90 | 16.146 | 9.322 | F = 22.531 P < 0.001 |
| | | ISO | 207.6 | 27.861 | 16.086 | |
| | | rhEPO 10 Pre + ISO | 160.5 | 37.458 | 21.627 | |
| | | ISO + rhEPO Post | 73.4 | 7.987 | 4.611 | |

n = 5 each

Pre = 10 days pre-treatment with erythropoietin followed by isoproterenol on the next day.

Post = Isoproterenol followed by erythropoietin treatment after 1 hr.

The 'F' and 'P' values are by one way ANOVA with Bonferroni 't' test for multiple comparison.

The significance from control and ISO groups are given in Figure 1, 2 and 3.

4. DISCUSSION

The inflammatory responses triggered during Myocardial infarction (MI) lead to the recruitment of leukocytes apart from causing damage to the myocardium, healing, and scar formation¹⁷⁻¹⁹. Chemokines are capable of regulating the leukocyte trafficking (migration and activation) and mediating the inflammatory processes; being expressed by several non-hematopoietic cells including endothelial cells, smooth muscle cells, and cardiomyocytes, the functions of chemokines are very extensive. Chemokines role in the pathophysiology of MI has been established through several experimental and clinical studies. Of several chemokines, the role of CC chemokine – monocyte chemoattractant protein-1 (MCP-1/CCL2) in the pathophysiology of MI is well indicated.

Several lines of research suggest that MI is accompanied by inflammatory responses leading to the recruitment of leukocytes which initiates myocardial damage, healing, and scar formation²⁰. If the leukocytes are found to be recruited to the site of the infarcted myocardium, there will be the release of cytokines and proteinases that may elevate the inflammation reaction and left ventricular remodeling. Evidence support that chemokine cells are capable of secreting enormous levels of angiogenic factors viz., vascular endothelial growth factor (VEGF) which helps induce angiogenesis in the infarcted heart. The key role of MCP-1 is to recruit monocytes to the infarcted area as well as at the site of inflammation²¹, thereby imparting its key role in the early stages of atherosclerosis or perhaps in the subacute phase of MI. As MCP-1 plays a significant role in MI during the process of myocardial healing as well as cardiac remodeling²²⁻²⁴. It is important to study this molecule in cardiac damage and repair.

In contention with our present results, increased serum MCP-1 levels have been reported in ISO induced MI in rats²⁵, suggesting augmentation of the inflammatory process. Elevated cardiac markers/enzymes such as MCP-1, LDH and AST were noticed in the heart tissues of

ISO induced MI rats that were reverted to near normal levels after Baobab fruit pulp (*Adansonia digitata*) therapy²⁶. Indeed, during a 10-month follow-up in a large study involving patients with acute coronary syndromes, elevated serum MCP-1 levels were shown to be associated with an increased risk of death or MI²⁷.

Interleukin-6 (IL-6) is a pleiotropic cytokine in the initiation of the acute-phase reaction that accompanies myocardial infarction²⁸. It has been associated with a broad range of humoral and cellular immune response driving inflammation, host defense, and tissue injury. In patients suffering from acute myocardial infarction (AMI), serum levels of both IL-6 levels and creatine kinase (CK) activity reached a peak in all the patients²⁹. The study revealed that there was a good correlation between IL-6 levels and peak serum C-reactive protein (CRP) levels. since IL-6 is synthesized in the myocardium, serum IL-6 levels become elevated in AMI, suggesting that IL-6 could be involved in the pathogenesis of AMI.

Elevated IL-6 and LDH levels have been reported in ISO induced rodent models of MI in serum and heart tissue samples³⁰⁻³³. According to Ridker et al 2000²⁸, Interleukin-6 (IL-6) plays a critical role in the events of inflammation and tissue injury. It was indicated that the increased risk of MI in subjects increased with increasing quartiles of baseline IL-6 concentration. In fact, men who were in the highest quartile showed a 2.3 times higher risk of MI than those in the lowest quartile.

Based on Kucharz and Wilk's (2000)³⁴ findings, elevated serum IL-6 was observed in patients with myocardial infarction, and this hike in IL-6 level was correlated to the mass of the myocardial damage. The role of LDH and proinflammatory cytokines such as IL-6 have been well studied in the ISO model of MI including the testing of therapeutic agents that attenuated LDH and IL-6 levels³⁵⁻³⁸. Several natural and synthetic drugs that attenuated serum/heart IL-6 and LDH levels in ISO induced MI models are also well evident³⁹⁻⁴¹. In the present study of ISO induced MI in rats, rhEPO post-treatment (single dose) rendered better therapeutic efficacy in bringing down the levels of serum IL-6 levels as compared with 10 days pre-treatment with rhEPO before ISO induction. A study finding denotes that signaling mechanisms associated with erythropoietin preconditioning and cardioprotection functions involves NFkB activation followed by the opening of K(ATP) channels including attenuation of lactate dehydrogenase (LDH) levels⁴². To the best of our knowledge, we lack studies on the measurement of serum levels of cardiac marker enzymes viz., MCP-1, LDH, IL-6, and AST to validate the therapeutic potential of EPO in ISO induced MI. From the present findings, we generate evidence to

support that EPO pre and post-therapy had an impact on the altered serum cardiac markers of MI thereby promoting cardiac repair and myocardial protection. According to Shahzad et al (2019)⁴³, the pre-treatment of test drug Syringic acid protected the rats from isoproterenol-induced cardiotoxicity by amelioration of serum level of marker enzymes (LDH, AST) and pro-inflammatory cytokines (IL-6 and TNF-alpha) respectively.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In the present study, the efficacy of both pre and post-therapy of rhEPO was tested in an isoproterenol-induced model of myocardial infarction in rats through evaluation of inflammatory and cardiac serum markers of MI. The altered cardiac markers due to MI-mediated cardiac damage were significantly attenuated by both EPO pre and post-therapy. However, the post-treatment with EPO following MI rendered better therapeutic efficacy than ten days pre-treatment with EPO in reversing the serum markers of myocardial infarction.

6. FUNDING ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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7. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no competing interests.

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