



## Reduction of VEGF Levels by *Phaleria macrocarpa* Flavonoids in an Endometriosis Mouse (*Mus musculus*) Model

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Track Record Article	Abstract
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## INTRODUCTION

Patients with endometriosis may experience severe pain, fatigue, depression, anxiety, and infertility, all of which affect their quality of life. Globally, endometriosis occurs in 10% of women and girls of reproductive age. The Age-specific Incidence (ASI) of endometriosis peaks in the 30-34 age group (WHO, 2023; Rowlands et al., 2021). The development of endometriotic tissue is associated with interactions involving the endocrine, immunological, pro-inflammatory, and pro-angiogenic systems. The pathophysiology and etiology of endometriosis remain uncertain; however, several theories have been proposed to explain the growth of endometrial tissue in abnormal locations, which involve processes such as backward menstrual flow, metaplastic alteration of coelomic tissue, and migration through lymphatic or circulatory routes (Zondervan et al., 2018; Zondervan et al., 2020). Endometriosis is also increasingly recognized as a disease with systemic inflammatory, hormonal, and angiogenic

involvement, driven by estrogen and immune cell signaling (Chung & Han, 2022; Li et al., 2021).

Vascular Endothelial Growth Factor (VEGF) is generated and secreted by mesothelial cells, which are the predominant cell type in the peritoneum. During transdifferentiation and tumorigenesis, mesothelial cells secrete VEGF into the extracellular space (Young et al., 2015). VEGF serves as a key factor in the development of endometriosis by facilitating its ability to promote angiogenesis, which supports the growth and survival of ectopic endometrial tissue. Stimulation of endometrial cells and the endometriotic environment activates intracellular signaling pathways that enhance VEGF expression. The transcription regulator, nuclear factor-kappa B (NF- $\kappa$ B) functions as a mediator of inflammatory signaling cascades and increases VEGF expression, thus promoting angiogenesis in endometriosis tissue (Bo & Wang, 2024; Yoshida et al., 2013; Lousse et al., 2008). In addition to these pathways, oxidative stress has also been implicated as a major upstream regulator of VEGF expression. Oxidative stress, as shown by excessive levels of reactive oxygen species (ROS), further contributes to this process by regulating NF- $\kappa$ B activation in immune cells (Nanda et al., 2020). Activated macrophages exposed to inflammatory stimuli also trigger NF- $\kappa$ B signaling, which induces the expression of pro-angiogenic genes (Khodarahmian et al., 2021).

Due to the common side effects associated with endometriosis treatments, herbal therapies are increasingly being used. *Phaleria macrocarpa*, also known as "mahkota dewa", is a plant native to Indonesia. Extracts of *P. macrocarpa* have shown anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, antibacterial, antifungal, anticancer, antidiabetic, and antihyperlipidemic properties. It contains flavonoids, alkaloids, terpenoids, polyphenols, saponins, resins, and lignans (Altaf et al., 2013). Flavonoids from mahkota dewa fruit can reduce lesion growth, proliferation, apoptosis, and angiogenesis. These flavonoids are beneficial in managing endometrial proliferation (Maharani et al., 2021; Mohamed Mahzir et al., 2018; Comalada et al., 2006). This research seeks to evaluate the administration of flavonoid fractions originating from *P. macrocarpa* extract influences on decreasing VEGF amounts in endometriosis-induced mice.

## METHODS

### Animals

Healthy female BALB/C mice (*Mus musculus*) aged 12 weeks, with body weights ranging from 20 to 30 grams. All thirty animals were subsequently divided into six distinct groups using a Microsoft Excel random number sequence, including a control group, an

endometriosis group, and an endometriosis group that received flavonoid derived from *P. macrocarpa* extract given at a dose of 3.75, 7.5, 15, and 30 mg/mouse/day. Each mouse was assigned a unique identification number. The group allocation corresponding to each mouse ID was placed in sequentially numbered, opaque, sealed envelopes, which were only opened immediately prior to the administration of the first treatment dose. Flavonoid isolates were provided through oral dosing by probe over a fourteen-day period. These dosing regimens were formulated with reference to previous research that reported effective ranges of flavonoids in mice and confirmed their safety without toxicity (Maharani et al., 2021).

### **Preparation of extract**

In this study, a powdered flavonoid preparation extracted from *P. macrocarpa* was used, based on a previous study (Maharani et al., 2021). Fine powder of *P. macrocarpa* (voucher specimen no. B/430/UNI1.1.8.4/TA.00.01/2020 verified by a curator at the Department of Biology, Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, Universitas Syiah Kuala, Banda Aceh) was extracted using 96% ethanol through maceration. The resulting filtrate was subsequently separated and fractionated with n-hexane and n-butanol to enrich the flavonoid content. The solvent fractions were evaporated under controlled temperature conditions to obtain a concentrated extract, which was further dried to yield flavonoid powder. The composition of the extract was confirmed by LC-HRMS analysis. The flavonoid extracted from *P. macrocarpa* was dissolved in Phosphate-Buffered Saline (PBS) before being administered to the mouse.

### **Endometriosis induction and peritoneal fluid isolation**

The induction to establish the endometriosis mouse model and isolation of peritoneal samples were conducted in accordance with the methods described in a prior investigation (Sutrisno et al., 2019). Female mice that fulfilled the criteria were acclimatized for 7 days before induction. On day 1, mice in the endometriosis group and treatment groups received intramuscular cyclosporin A at a dose of 0.2 mL to induce immunodeficiency, followed by intraperitoneal injection of adenomyosis tissue supernatant at 0.1 mL. Ethinyl estradiol at a dose of 0.1 mL was administered intramuscularly on days 1 and 5 to support lesion development. On day 15, a subset of mice was sacrificed to confirm endometriotic lesions, peritoneal hypervascularization, and estrogen receptor  $\beta$  (ER $\beta$ ) expression by macroscopic evaluation and IHC.

Mice were euthanized by chloroform inhalation, and the abdominal cavity was opened through a midline incision. Peritoneal fluid was obtained by PBS injection and aspiration, while

peritoneal tissue was excised, washed with PBS, and preserved in 10% alcohol. Carcasses were buried to prevent environmental contamination.

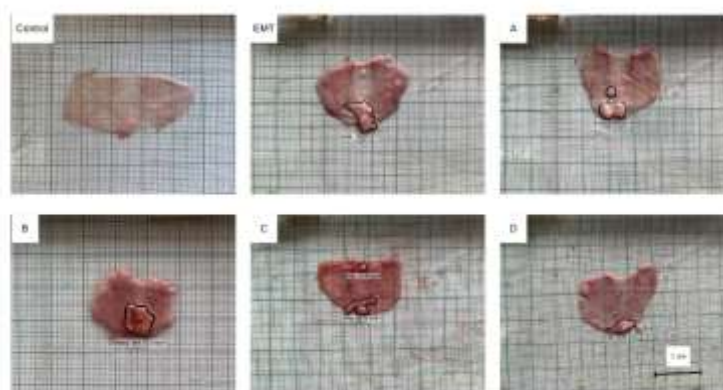
### VEGF measurement

Prior to biomarker assessment, the peritoneal fluid samples were preserved at  $-20^{\circ}\text{C}$ . The quantification of VEGF levels was conducted using the Enzyme-Linked Immunosorbent Assay (ELISA) from the Mouse VEGF ELISA kit (BT Lab, China, catalog number E1184Mo).

### Data Analysis

The dataset was first evaluated for normality using the Shapiro-Wilk test and homogeneity through Levene's test, with the decision criterion determined by the p-value ( $p > 0.05$ ). To compare differences among the treatment groups, a one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was applied, followed by a post hoc LSD test ( $p < 0.05$ ). This research obtained ethical authorization from the Health Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Medicine of Brawijaya University, number 37/EC/KEPK-S2/02/2025.

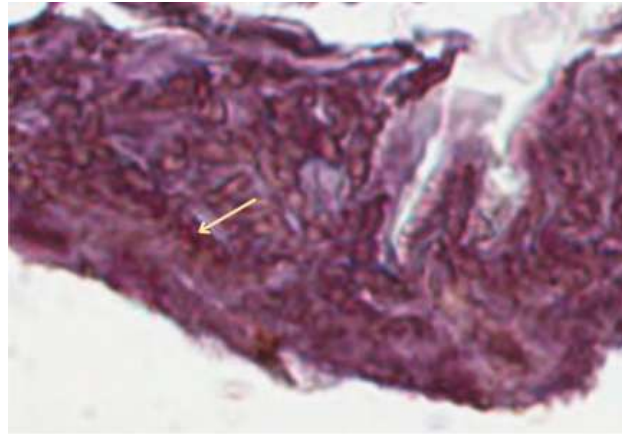
## RESULT



**Figure 1. Endometriosis lesion**

*Control: without treatment; EMT: endometriosis mouse model without treatment; A: endometriosis mouse model given *P. macrocarpa* flavonoid extract at a dose of 3.75 mg/mouse/day; B: endometriosis mouse model given *P. macrocarpa* flavonoid extract at a dose of 7.5 mg/mouse/day; C: endometriosis mouse model given *P. macrocarpa* flavonoid extract at a dose of 15 mg/mouse/day; D: endometriosis mouse model given *P. macrocarpa* flavonoid extract at a dose of 30 mg/mouse/day. The black outline indicates the presence of endometriosis lesions.*

The figure above shows aberrant endometrial deposits arising throughout the peritoneal cavity of each group. The control group mouse showed no visible lesions, while the EMT group mouse showed the most extensive lesions. The treatment groups showed lesions of varying extent according to each treatment.



**Figure 2. Immunohistochemistry of ERβ expression**

*The image of peritoneal tissue in endometriosis lesions shows ERβ expression in the cytoplasm of stromal cells, indicated by brown staining and marked with an arrow symbol. The observation was performed using ImageScope software from Aperio CS2 slide scanning results at 400x magnification.*

Figure 2 shows ERβ expression in the cytoplasm of stromal cells in the peritoneal tissue of a mouse as a confirmation of the successful establishment of the mouse model of endometriosis that was randomly selected from the EMT group.

**Table 1. Normality and homogeneity test**

Groups	N	p-value Shapiro-Wilk	Data distribution	p-value Levene test	Data homogeneity
Control	5	0.928	Normal	0.162	Homogenous
Endometriosis	5	0.955	Normal		
3.75 mg/mouse/day	5	0.847	Normal		
7.5 mg/mouse/day	5	0.154	Normal		
15 mg/mouse/day	5	0.453	Normal		
30 mg/mouse/day	5	0.427	Normal		

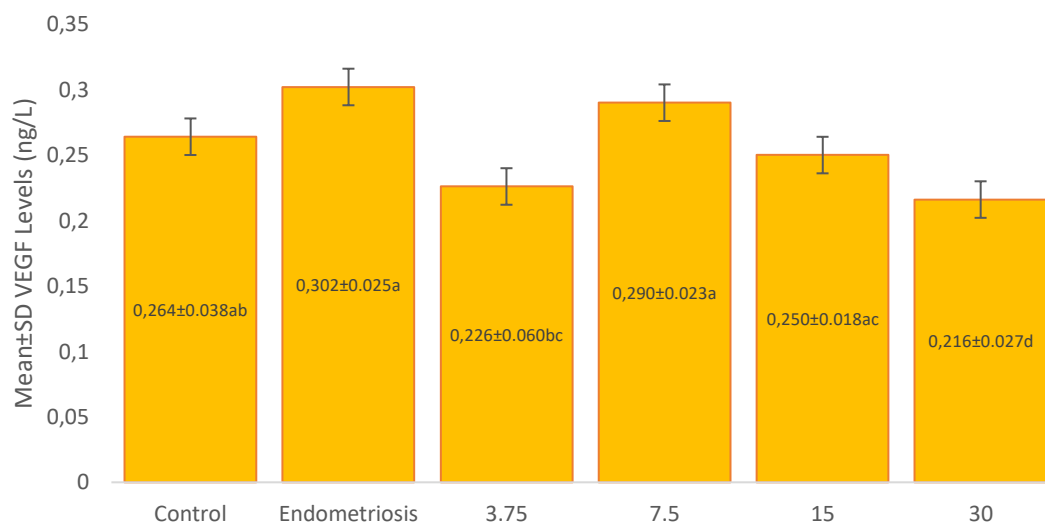
Based on the normality test using Shapiro-Wilk, the VEGF level data in each group showed a  $p > 0.05$ , revealing that the dataset conformed to the expected parametric assumptions. The homogeneity of variance test using Levene's test also resulted in a p-value of 0.162, indicating the values obtained were homogenous. These results confirm that the assumptions for parametric testing were satisfied; therefore, a one-way ANOVA test was performed afterward.

**Table 2. One-way ANOVA**

Groups	N	Mean±SD	p-value
Control	5	0.264±0.0384ab	0.004
Endometriosis	5	0.302±0.0258a	
3.75 mg/mouse/day	5	0.226±0.0602bc	
7.5 mg/mouse/day	5	0.290±0.0234a	
15 mg/mouse/day	5	0.250±0.0187ac	
30 mg/mouse/day	5	0.216±0.0270d	

The result showed that the endometriosis mouse model without administration of flavonoid from *P. macrocarpa* had the highest mean VEGF level compared to the other groups

( $0.302 \pm 0.0258$  ng/L). All treatment cohorts reflected a measurable reduction in mean VEGF levels relative to the endometriosis group. One-way ANOVA analysis revealed a statistically robust divergence in VEGF levels among the groups receiving flavonoid from *P. macrocarpa* ( $p\text{-value}=0.004$ ).



**Figure 3. VEGF levels in peritoneal fluid**

*Control is a healthy group, an endometriosis group without treatment, and the endometriosis groups are administered with flavonoid of *P. macrocarpa* (3.75, 7.5, 15, and 30 mg/mouse/day).  $p\text{-value} < 0.05$  is significantly different. If there are different letter notations, it denotes a statistically significant difference.*

The administration of *P. macrocarpa* flavonoid extract demonstrated a dose-dependent reduction in VEGF levels, although the pattern was not perfectly linear, with a slight increase at doses of 7.5 mg/mouse/day before decreasing at higher doses. The LSD post hoc analysis revealed that the endometriosis group had significantly higher VEGF levels compared to the control and treatment groups at 3.75, 15, and 30 mg/mouse/day ( $p < 0.05$ ), but not different from the dose of 7.5 mg/mouse/day. Based on the analysis result, administration of flavonoid at doses of 30 mg/mouse/day in the group showed results most similar to mean ± SD, which is  $0.216 \pm 0.027$  ng/L, and this was not significantly different compared to the control group.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that the highest VEGF levels were observed in the endometriosis mouse model that did not receive the flavonoid of *P. macrocarpa* extract. The elevation in VEGF levels observed in this experiment aligns with previous research, which reported that the peritoneal environment in endometriosis is characterized by activation that ultimately enhances VEGF expression and promotes neovascularization. Such a process not

only enables the persistence of endometriotic lesions but also contributes to their progression toward a more invasive phenotype (Zondervan et al., 2020; Liang et al., 2018).

All treatment clusters demonstrated a reduction in mean VEGF levels compared to the endometriosis group. One-way ANOVA analysis revealed a statistically significant difference in VEGF concentration among intervention sets with flavonoid of *P. macrocarpa* ( $p$ -value=0.004). These findings are consistent with in vitro studies using RL95-2 cell cultures, which found that the methanol extract of *P. macrocarpa* reduced VEGF levels through inhibition of HIF-1 $\alpha$  transcriptional activity (Tandrasasmita et al., 2015). Similarly, an earlier examination reported that administration of flavonoids from *P. macrocarpa* extract significantly decreased VEGF levels (Sutrisno et al., 2023). In line with these results, a scientific inquiry by Sutrisno & Maharani (2024) showed that genistein, a flavonoid compound, was effective in reducing VEGF expression in an endometriosis mouse model with an optimal dose of 3.25 mg. Another flavonoid substance, luteolin, was also shown to induce apoptosis of endometriosis cells and modulate macrophages that can secrete VEGF (Woo et al., 2021).

As phytoestrogens, flavonoids possess a core structural element essential for estrogenic activity (Ilhan et al., 2019). Flavonoids are known to inhibit various biological processes, including angiogenesis, cell proliferation, inflammation, oxidative stress, and microbial activity (Rossi et al., 2013; Mustafida et al., 2014; Maharani et al., 2021; Xi et al., 2022). One of the flavonoid compounds, genistein, has demonstrated anti-inflammatory properties by reducing TNF- $\alpha$  levels and inhibiting NF- $\kappa$ B activity, thereby suppressing the expression of genes involved in endometriosis progression via angiogenic pathways. Genistein inhibits angiogenesis by reducing the accumulation of HIF-1 $\alpha$ , a transcriptional factor critical in VEGF regulation (Sutrisno et al., 2015; Hämäläinen et al., 2007). Furthermore, flavonoids can suppress NF- $\kappa$ B secretion and significantly downregulate VEGF expression at both mRNA and protein levels (Mirossay et al., 2018).

VEGF levels exhibited a fluctuating pattern, indicating that their response to *P. macrocarpa* flavonoid extract is not strictly dose-dependent. This may reflect the biphasic effects of flavonoids on angiogenic pathways and their Selective Estrogen Receptor Modulators (SERMs) properties, which can stimulate or inhibit estrogen receptors depending on tissue and dose (Xi et al., 2022; Huang et al., 2010). Flavonoids may modulate VEGF via antioxidant activity by reducing ROS and inhibiting HIF-1 $\alpha$ , or in the case of kaempferol and quercetin, by activating VEGF signaling through VEGFR2 (Wei & Zhang, 2024; Hu et al., 2020).



This study utilized *P. macrocarpa* flavonoid extract as an active compound, making it unclear which specific flavonoid subgroups were primarily responsible for the observed reductions in VEGF levels. The potential biphasic effect of the extract on VEGF in the peritoneal fluid of the endometriosis mouse model was not explored. Therefore, further studies are needed to identify the specific flavonoid subgroups responsible for these effects and to investigate the potential dose-dependent biphasic responses that regulate VEGF expression in endometriosis.

## CONCLUSION

Flavonoid of *P. macrocarpa* at a dose of 30 mg/mouse/day was the most effective in decreasing the VEGF levels as an angiogenesis factor in the peritoneal fluids that might play a role in the proliferation of endometriotic tissue. Further empirical inquiry is warranted to delineate the flavonoid subclasses implicated in endometriosis progression and to characterize the biphasic modulatory effects of *P. macrocarpa*-derived flavonoid constituents on VEGF amounts in the peritoneal fluid of the endometriosis mouse model.

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