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**BÁRBARA RAÍSSA FERREIRA DE LIMA**

**AVALIAÇÃO DOS EFEITOS DA LECTINA DE FOLHAS DE *Schinus terebinthifolia*  
SOBRE O TRANSTORNO DEPRESSIVO E ANSIEDADE EM CAMUNDONGOS**

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Dissertação apresentada ao Programa de Pós-graduação em Ciências Biológicas da Universidade Federal de Pernambuco, como requisito parcial para obtenção do título de Mestre em Ciências Biológicas.

Área de Concentração: Sistemas Biológicos

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Coorientadora: Profa. Dra. Michelle Melgarejo da Rosa

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À minha família, dedico este trabalho.

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“Sonhe alto. O máximo que pode acontecer  
é você realizar um sonho à altura.”

Pedro Gabriel

## RESUMO

Os transtornos de ansiedade e depressivo afetam cada vez mais uma parcela considerável da população e os índices de sucesso no tratamento são bem inferiores ao desejado. As farmacoterapias atuais incluem agonistas dos receptores benzodiazepínicos e inibidores da recaptação de monoaminas. Contudo, seu uso costuma provocar efeitos colaterais significativos, além de resistência com o uso prolongado. A lectina (proteína ligadora de carboidratos) da folha de *Schinus terebinthifolia* (SteLL) já demonstrou atividades biológicas como efeitos antimicrobianos e imunomoduladores *in vitro* e atividades antitumoral, antiangiogênica e antinociceptiva *in vivo*. No entanto, efeitos de SteLL na modulação do sistema nervoso central (SNC), especialmente quando relacionado a distúrbios neuropsicológicos, ainda não tinham sido estudados. Assim, tornou-se objetivo deste trabalho, avaliar se a lectina de folhas de *Schinus terebinthifolia* (SteLL) apresenta atividades antidepressiva e ansiolítica em camundongos. Inicialmente, investigamos os efeitos ansiolítico e antidepressivo agudos de SteLL (1, 2 e 4 mg/kg, i.p.) em camundongos Swiss. Trinta minutos após a administração, a ação ansiolítica foi avaliada usando os testes de campo aberto (TCA) e labirinto em cruz elevado (TLCE). Para avaliar sintomas de depressão, foi utilizado o teste de suspensão da cauda (TSC). As combinações SteLL + diazepam (1 mg/kg + 0,5 mg/kg) e SteLL + fluoxetina (1 mg/kg + 5 mg/kg) também foram avaliadas quanto aos efeitos ansiolítico e antidepressivo, respectivamente. A fim de investigar o envolvimento do domínio de reconhecimento de carboidratos (DRC) nos efeitos de SteLL, um grupo de animais recebeu solução da lectina previamente incubada com caseína (inibidor da propriedade ligadora de carboidratos de SteLL). Possível modulação da sinalização monoaminérgica foi avaliada através do pré-tratamento dos animais com antagonistas do adrenoceptor  $\alpha_2$  (ioimbina), do receptor de serotonina 5-HT<sub>2A/2C</sub> (quetanserina) e do receptor de dopamina D<sub>1</sub> (SCH 23390). No caso do efeito antidepressivo, também foi avaliada a interferência na sinalização do óxido nítrico (NO) por meio do pré-tratamento com aminoguanidina, inibidor da via de óxido nítrico sintase induzível (iNOS), e com L-arginina (precursor do NO). Ação antidepressiva subaguda também foi avaliada por meio do tratamento com SteLL durante 7 dias. No TCA, SteLL (todas as doses) reduziu significativamente o número de *rearings*. No TLCE, SteLL a 4 mg/kg e a combinação SteLL + diazepam aumentaram o tempo que os animais passaram nos braços abertos e reduziram o tempo nos braços fechados. Não houve alteração dessas respostas do tipo ansiolítica quando a solução de lectina e caseína foi administrada. Ação antidepressiva de SteLL, em todas as doses, e da combinação SteLL + fluoxetina foi indicada pela redução no tempo de imobilidade no TSC. Nesse caso, a ação parece ser dependente do DRC, já que a incubação prévia de SteLL com caseína bloqueou o efeito. Os efeitos de SteLL no TLCE e no TSC foram inibidos pelo pré-tratamento com ioimbina, quetanserina e SCH 23390. Aminoguanidina inibiu os efeitos de SteLL no TSC, enquanto L-arginina os potencializou. Na avaliação subaguda, o efeito anti- imobilidade do SteLL persistiu após sete dias de tratamento. Em conclusão, SteLL apresentou efeito ansiolítico por atuar sobre a sinalização monoaminérgica, enquanto



o efeito antidepressivo, além de envolver a modulação dessa via, também envolve o DRC da lectina e alterações na sinalização do óxido nítrico.

**Palavras-chave:** Lectinas; aroeira da praia; depressão; ansiedade; moniaminas; óxido nítrico.

## ABSTRACT

Anxiety and depression disorders increasingly affect a considerable portion of the population and treatment success rates are much lower than desired. Current pharmacotherapies include benzodiazepine receptor agonists and monoamine reuptake inhibitors. However, its use usually causes significant side effects, in addition to resistance with prolonged use. *Schinus terebinthifolia* leaf lectin (carbohydrate binding protein) (SteLL) has already demonstrated biological activities such as antimicrobial and immunomodulatory effects in vitro and antitumor, antiangiogenic and antinociceptive activities in vivo. However, effects of SteLL on central nervous system (CNS) modulation, especially when related to neuropsychological disorders, had not yet been studied. Initially, we investigated the acute anxiolytic and antidepressant effects of SteLL (1, 2 and 4 mg/kg, i.p.) in Swiss mice. Thirty minutes after administration, the anxiolytic action was evaluated using the open field test (ACT) and the elevated plus maze test (TLCE). To assess symptoms of depression, the tail suspension test (TST) was used. SteLL + diazepam (1 mg/kg + 0.5 mg/kg) and SteLL + fluoxetine (1 mg/kg + 5 mg/kg) combinations were also evaluated for anxiolytic and antidepressant effects, respectively. In order to investigate the involvement of the carbohydrate recognition domain (DRC) in the effects of SteLL, a group of animals received a lectin solution previously incubated with casein (inhibitor of the carbohydrate binding property of SteLL). Possible modulation of monoaminergic signaling was evaluated by pre-treating the animals with  $\alpha$ 2- adrenoceptor (yohimbine), serotonin 5-HT<sub>2A/2C</sub> (quetanserin) and dopamine D<sub>1</sub> receptor (SCH 23390) antagonists. In the case of the antidepressant effect, interference with nitric oxide (NO) signaling was also evaluated through pretreatment with aminoguanidine, an inhibitor of the inducible nitric oxide synthase (iNOS) pathway, and with L-arginine (precursor of NO). Subacute antidepressant action was also evaluated using SteLL treatment for 7 days. In TCA, SteLL (all doses) significantly reduced the number of rearings. In TLCE, SteLL at 4 mg/kg and the combination SteLL + diazepam increased the time the animals spent in the open arms and reduced the time in the closed arms. There was no change in these responses when the lectin and casein solution was administered. The antidepressant action of SteLL, at all doses, and of the SteLL + fluoxetine combination was indicated by the reduction in the immobility time in the CST. In this case, the action appears to be DRC-dependent, as previous incubation of SteLL with casein blocked the effect. The effects of SteLL on TLCE and TSC were inhibited by

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**Keywords:** Lectin; Brazilian pepper tree; depression; anxiety; monoamines; nitric oxide.

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## 1. INTRODUÇÃO

A depressão e a ansiedade são transtornos mentais que afetam quase 5% e 3,6% da população mundial, respectivamente, e esses números mostram tendência a continuar aumentando (GRACIOLI, 2020; OPAS, 2018; OMS, 2017). A depressão é uma doença mental crônica, caracterizada por alterações de humor profundo, que podem ser prolongados, como também por estado de euforia, irritabilidade, insônia ou hipersonia e pensamentos de morte e suicídio de forma recorrente (NESTLER, 2002; OPAS, 2020; WANG et al, 2017), enquanto a ansiedade caracteriza-se por uma preocupação excessiva de eventos incertos e desconhecidos (DSM-5, 2014).

Os tratamentos atuais para esses transtornos são feitos por terapias e medicamentos de uso diário, que podem trazer consequências danosas tanto neurológicas quanto comportamentais. Adicionalmente, nem todos os indivíduos conseguem ser contemplados com os tratamentos em sua totalidade, seja por não terem possibilidade de aderir à farmacoterapia (viabilidade financeira ou acesso pelo sistema público de saúde) e/ou por apresentarem significativas reações adversas pelo uso contínuo dos fármacos, como, fadiga, tremores, ganho de peso e disfunção sexual (NABAVI et al, 2015). Tais efeitos limitam as atividades de vida diária e/ou as interações sociais, levando também a impactos negativos à economia, com afastamento constante do posto de trabalho e ao sistema de saúde (MÉNARD et al., 2017; WANG et al., 2017; PLANCHEZ et al., 2019; NESTLER et al, 2002).

A necessidade de minimizar os efeitos adversos e viabilizar o tratamento de forma mais homogênea fez com que pesquisas com produtos naturais passassem a ser realizadas em busca de novos componentes que ajudem no tratamento e adesão de terapias à doenças neuropsicológicas (EDDIN et al., 2021). Os produtos naturais e as atividades biológicas que eles vêm apresentando, têm chamado grande atenção da população científica (EKIERT e SZOPA, 2020) e dentre os possíveis compostos, temos as lectinas.

As lectinas são proteínas que podem ser encontradas em vários organismos, inclusive nas plantas (EKIERT e SZOPA, 2020) e vêm se destacando por seu potencial biológico e terapêutico. Citam-se como atividades já investigadas de lectinas ações anti-inflamatórias (PATRIOTA et al., 2019a), antitumorais (PATRIOTA et al., 2019b), antinociceptivas (RAMOS et al., 2020; MARINHO et al., 2023) e neuroprotetoras (RUSSI et al., 2012). Mesmo ainda de conhecimento incipiente, a influência de lectinas na modulação molecular do sistema

nervoso central (SNC) pode levar a respostas de ajuste comportamental, neuroproteção e neuroplasticidade (ARAÚJO et al., 2020; LIN; LEVITAN, 1991).

A lectina da folha de *Schinus terebinthifolia* (SteLL) é uma proteína ligadora de quitina que apresentou ação antimicrobiana contra patógenos (GOMES et al, 2013), bem como atividade imunomoduladora sobre esplenócitos de camundongos (SANTOS et al., 2020) em modelos *in vitro*. Ramos e colaboradores (2019) revelaram ação antitumoral e analgésica contra o sarcoma 180 com o uso de SteLL, sendo também capaz de reduzir a hiperalgesia decorrente da presença do sarcoma 180 na pata, melhorando o uso dos membros pelos camundongos portadores de tumor. Essa ação antinociceptiva provavelmente está relacionada à ação antitumoral da lectina, bem como a uma ação central envolvendo a modulação de receptores opióides (RAMOS et al., 2020; MARINHO et al., 2023). Estes efeitos antinociceptivos centrais de SteLL estimulam a avaliação de possíveis outros efeitos farmacológicos no sistema nervoso que essa lectina poderia ocasionar.

Os transtornos depressivo e de ansiedade são complexos, multifatoriais e costumam estar associados a outras doenças mentais e/ou comorbidade e estas complexidades trazem dificuldades para a realização de estudos em seres humanos (WANG et al., 2017). Por isso, modelos animais tornam-se fundamentais para o aprofundamento de trabalhos e aprimoramento no conhecimento do transtorno das doenças (WANG et al., 2017; MÉNARD,C; HODES, G; RUSSO, S, 2017). Por mais desafiadores que sejam, os modelos animais com roedores, por exemplo, não conseguem representar toda a pluralidade humana, estes têm sido melhorados com o passar dos anos e aspectos cognitivos e emocionais foram minimizados e, assim, as pesquisas se tornaram mais viáveis, tanto em questões de amostras quanto em questões éticas (WANG et al., 2017).

Diante do exposto, este trabalho visou avaliar o potencial ansiolítico e antidepressivo da lectina SteLL, em roedores, bem como elucidar possíveis vias de sinalização envolvidas com os efeitos da lectina.

## 2. OBJETIVOS

### 2.1. GERAL

Avaliar se a lectina de folhas de *Schinus terebinthifolia* (SteLL) apresenta atividades antidepressiva e ansiolítica em camundongos.

### 2.2. ESPECÍFICOS

- ✓ Purificar a lectina (SteLL) de folhas *S. terebinthifolia* seguindo procedimento previamente estabelecido;
- ✓ Determinar o potencial ansiolítico agudo de SteLL (via intraperitoneal, i.p.) através dos testes do campo aberto (TCA) e do labirinto em cruz elevado (LCE).
- ✓ Avaliar o efeito do tipo antidepressivo agudo e subcrônico (7 dias) de SteLL (i.p.) no teste de suspensão pela cauda (TSC).
- ✓ Investigar a influência dos receptores adrenérgicos, serotoninérgicos, dopaminérgicos e da via NO/cGMP nos efeitos antidepressivo e ansiolítico de SteLL no TCA, LCE e teste de suspensão pela cauda (TSC).
- ✓ Avaliar os efeitos da administração combinada de SteLL + fluoxetina e SteLL + diazepam.

### 3.FUNDAMENTAÇÃO TEÓRICA

#### 3.1. SISTEMA NERVOSO CENTRAL E MONOAMINAS

O sistema nervoso central (SNC) é constituído pelo cérebro e pela medula espinhal e tem como funções analisar, coordenar e interagir com estímulos externos e internos, sendo assim, a principal estrutura de comando do corpo (PLOWMAN; SMITH, 2009; LINHARES E DO CARMO, 2022). A principal unidade funcional do sistema nervoso são os neurônios, células estruturalmente formadas por dendritos, corpo celular, núcleo celular e axônio (revestidos pela bainha de mielina – mas não todos) e que variam consideravelmente de tamanho e formato (Figura 1).

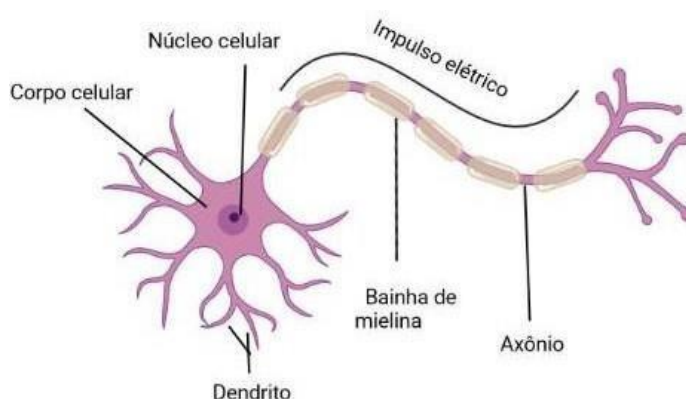


Figura 1: Neurônio e sua estrutura.

Fonte: Elaborado pela Autora

As informações são transmitidas de um neurônio a outro através do potencial de ação – impulso elétrico – que no fim gera uma resposta química, com a liberação de neurotransmissores pelos quais um neurônio se comunica com outro (Figura 2) (PANAWALA, 2017). Entre a conexão de um neurônio e outro existe um “espaço” chamado de fenda sináptica e é nesta fenda onde os neurotransmissores são liberados; posteriormente eles se ligam aos seus receptores no neurônio pós-sináptico ou no efetor e as informações são transmitidas em sua totalidade (Figura 3).

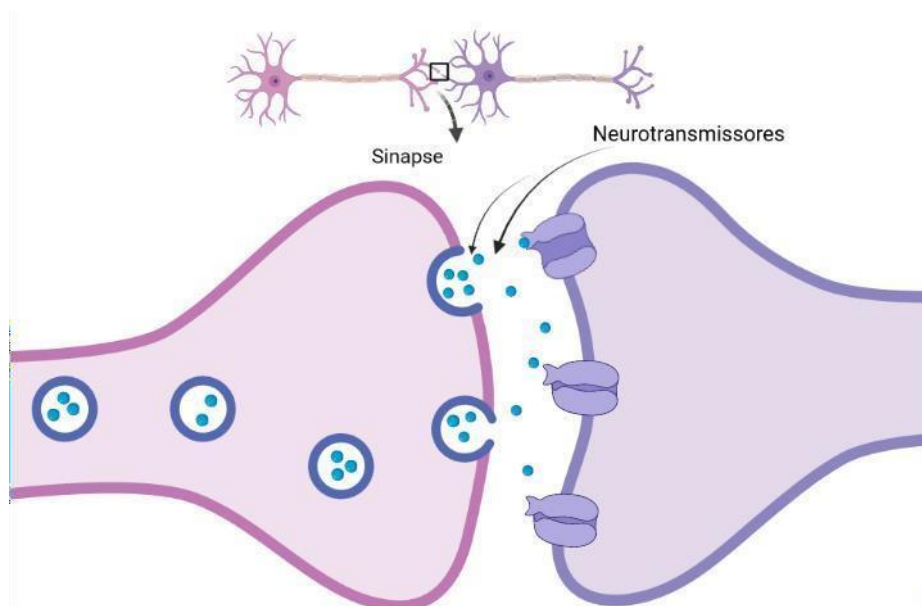


Figura 2: Sinapse química e neurotransmissores

Fonte: Elaborado pela Autora

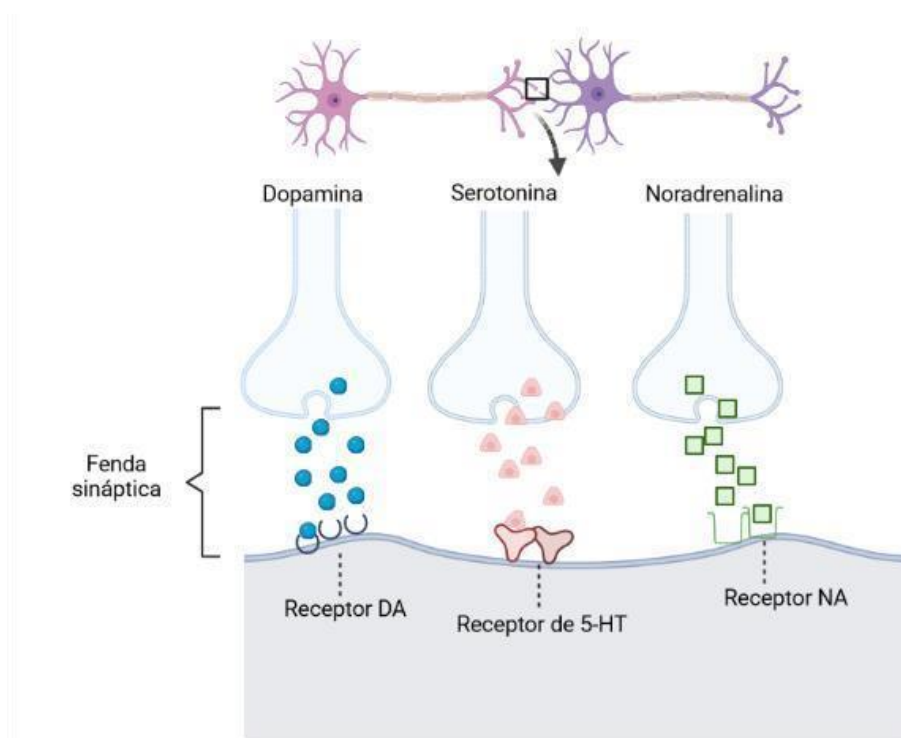


Figura 3: Monoaminas e suas liberações

Fonte: Elaborado pela Autora

Existe uma diversidade de neurotransmissores presentes no SNC, entre eles citam-se a dopamina, serotonina, noradrenalina, glutamato, GABA (Ácido gama-aminobutírico) (PANAWALA, 2017) e óxido nítrico, por exemplo (NITRIC OXIDE SOCIETY, 2023). A dopamina, serotonina e noradrenalina compõem a classe das monoaminas. A neurotransmissão monoaminérgica tem atividade regulatória na motivação, recompensa, cognição, humor, entre outros. As monoaminas são a classe de moléculas que compõem uma das teorias do surgimento dos sinais e sintomas relacionados aos transtornos de humor e têm uma participação importante no SNC (SHADRINA et al., 2018; MONTOYA et al., 2016).

Já o óxido nítrico é uma molécula de sinalização e comunicação entre células, presente em quase todos os sistemas biológicos humano e é um neurotransmissor importante que está envolvido na memória e cognição e também em distúrbios neurohumorais (NITRIC OXIDE SOCIETY, 2023).

### **3.2. TEORIA NEUROBIOLÓGICA DAS MONOAMINAS**

As monoaminas participam de várias funções moduladoras no SNC e sua importância é de grande relevância por estarem associadas à cognição, aprendizagem e estados emocionais. A dopamina (DA) é um importante neurotransmissor da classe das catecolaminas, com diversas funções no SNC, como controle motor, modulação de recompensa, modulação emocional, entre outros (LAKARD; PAVEL; LAKARD, 2021; SPERANZA et al., 2021). A noradrenalina (NA) também compõe a classe das catecolaminas e está relacionada à capacidade de desenvolvimento de aprendizagem, memória, emoção, por exemplo (HOLLAND; ROBBINS; ROWE, 2021). Já a serotonina (5-hidroxitriptamina ou 5-HT) é da classe das indolaminas e participa também de várias ações no SNC, principalmente aqueles ligados ao sono, dor, memória, humor, ansiedade e cognição (FOUQUET et al., 2019; POURHAMZEH et al., 2022).

De acordo com a teoria neurobiológica das monoaminas, DA, NA e 5-HT estariam com as suas biodisponibilidade reduzidas na fenda sináptica, favorecendo assim o surgimento da depressão e ansiedade (SHADRINA et al., 2018; MONTOYA et al., 2016). Trabalhos anteriores como o de Sur e Lee, (2022) e Montoya et al. (2016) vêm corroborando a premissa desta teoria. Adicionalmente, a maioria dos tratamentos farmacológicos disponíveis atualmente parecem ter as suas ações diretamente ligadas ao sistema monoaminérgico (LUSCHER; SHEN; SAHIR, 2010).

Foi por volta da década de 50, com a descoberta ocasional das substâncias antidepressivas iproniazida e imipramina, que Joseph Schildkraut formulou, cerca de 10 anos depois, a base para esta teoria, visto que, a atuação desses medicamentos no metabolismo das aminas biogênicas aumentava a biodisponibilidade dos neurotransmissores na fenda sináptica e assim, revolucionando os conhecimentos acerca dos transtornos de humor (SHADRINA et al., 2018; MORENO; FERNANDES; MORENO, 2018).

Adicionalmente, alguns autores vêm trazendo informações sobre o envolvimento dos neurotransmissores glutamato e GABA no desenvolvimento de distúrbios de humor. O glutamato é o principal neurotransmissor excitatório, o mais abundante e tem um papel fundamental no desenvolvimento e na função do sistema nervoso (HAO; PLESTED, 2022) e é responsável por atividades do tipo cognitiva, motora, sensorial e autonômicas; manter seus níveis em uma quantidade fisiológica é crucial para se garantir uma viabilidade neuronal (IOVINO; TREMBLAY; CIVIERO, 2020). O glutamato é o precursor metabólico do GABA, principal neurotransmissor inibitório no córtex cerebral (BROSNAN; BROSNAN, 2013). O equilíbrio entre atividade excitatória e inibitória são essenciais para uma função neuronal ideal.

O GABA efetiva suas ações pela ativação de duas classes diferentes de receptores - o receptor GABA<sub>A</sub> (ionotrópico) e os receptores GABA<sub>B</sub> (metabotrópico). O GABA<sub>A</sub> desempenha um papel importantíssimo no controle do estado ansioso com base na influência da atividade ansiolítica dos benzodiazepínicos, que atuam como moduladores alostéricos positivos – aumentando a ação afinidade e/ou eficácia, enquanto o GABA<sub>B</sub> compõe a família de receptores acoplados à proteína G e, assim como para o GABA<sub>A</sub>, alterações em seus sistemas implicam em comportamentos relacionados a depressão e a ansiedade (LUSCHER; SHEN; SAHIR, 2010). Sendo assim, um desequilíbrio da atividade excitatória/inibitória compromete o padrão fisiológico ideal e pode desencadear distúrbios neuropsicológicos (DUMAN; SANACORA; CRYSTAL, 2019).

Assim, controlar ou levar a um estado de equilíbrio os receptores, pode refletir em uma abordagem terapêutica de modulação em uma variedade de doenças neuronais sinápticas, como a depressão e a ansiedade (GROC; CHOQUET, 2020).

### **3.3. TEORIA NEUROBIOLÓGICA DA VIA ÓXIDO NÍTRICO**

O óxido nítrico (NO) é uma importante molécula sinalizadora que desempenha várias



atividades modulatórias, a exemplo de vasodilatação, neurotransmissão e resposta imune (NITRIC OXIDE SOCIETY, 2023). O NO é produzido a partir da enzima óxido nítrico sintase (NOS) pela oxidação da L-Arginina e L-citrulina (OKAMOTO et al., 2022).

A NOS se apresenta em três isoformas: a NOS neuronal (nNOS), presente principalmente no sistema nervoso, tendo sua importância voltada para a sinalização neuronal; a NOS endotelial (eNOS), comumente encontrada no endotélio com ação fundamental na vasodilatação e controle da pressão arterial; e a NOS induzível (iNOS), que é expressa quando a célula é induzida ou estimulada, comumente por citocinas pró-inflamatórias e/ou polissacarídeos (CINELLI et al., 2020).

A produção de NO dentro dos padrões fisiológicos favoráveis torna-se um aliado no combate a patógenos invasores, sendo de relevância para a resposta imune e sistema imunológico (FLORA FILHO; ZILBERSTAIN, 2000). Entretanto, uma superexpressão ou desregulação da iNOS pode levar a uma toxicidade, resultando no desenvolvimento de doenças neuropsicológicas, neurodegenerativas e desordens inflamatórias (CINELLI et al., 2020). Por ser uma via de mão-dupla (benefício x malefício) o equilíbrio é crucial para um funcionamento fisiologicamente saudável.

O estresse agudo e crônico produzem mudanças funcionais e estruturais no SNC, e a exposição ao estresse é capaz de induzir a expressão de iNOS mediado por respostas inflamatórias, o que parece estar associado a eventos depressivos (YAZIR; UTKANE; ARICIOGLU, 2012; MONTEZUMA et al., 2012). Peng e colaboradores (2012) investigaram o papel da iNOS na depressão em modelos com camundongos, a partir de uma indução de estresse por 4 semanas e constataram que houve uma mudança significativa estrutural (neurônios encolhidos com coloração escura e perda de corpos de Nissl) e comportamental (perda de interesse pela água com sacarose - anedonia) dos animais expostos ao estresse quando comparado ao grupo controle, mostrando a relação entre estresse, inflamação e comportamento depressivo.

Para avaliar se a inibição do envolvimento da via da iNOS levaria à indução de efeitos antidepressivos, Montezuma et al. (2012) investigaram, a partir do teste de nado forçado (FST), eventos comportamentais provocados pelo estresse e evidenciaram que o uso do inibidor da iNOS (aminoguanidina) fez reduzir significativamente o tempo de imobilidade do animal quando comparado ao controle, corroborando com a hipótese de envolvimento desta via nos distúrbios de humor.

### 3.4. DEPRESSÃO

A Organização Mundial de Saúde (OMS) e a Organização Pan-Americana de Saúde (OPAS) (2022) apontam que aproximadamente 300 milhões de pessoas no mundo sofrem com o transtorno depressivo, sendo este um fator de peso para incapacidade e até mortalidade. Segundo dados estatísticos também apresentados pelas instituições (2022), 1 a cada 4 pessoas nas Américas vivem com algum transtorno neuropsicológico e fazem uso de fármacos que possam viabilizar suas atividades de vida diária. Ainda segundo a OPAS (2022), a pandemia da COVID-19 contribuiu para um aumento de 25% de casos registrados de depressão em todo o mundo. No Brasil, houve um aumento em 41% nos diagnósticos médicos quando comparado o período pré-pandemia e o primeiro trimestre de 2022 (COVITEL, 2022).

O transtorno depressivo pode apresentar-se como transtorno depressivo persistente (distímia), transtorno depressivo induzido por substância/medicamento, transtorno disruptivo de desregulação do humor, transtorno depressivo devido a outra condição médica, transtorno depressivo maior (incluindo episódio depressivo maior), transtorno disfórico pré-menstrual, outro transtorno depressivo especificado e transtorno depressivo não especificado (CORYELL, 2021; DSM-5, 2014; BECK; ALFORD, 2011).

A depressão é uma doença neuropsicológica que se caracteriza com mudança de humor de caráter mais persistente, prolongado e melancólico (mínimo de 2 semanas), gerando influência negativa na afetividade, sociabilidade, autoestima e bem-estar, favorecendo a perda de interesse por aquilo que antes lhe satisfazia, além de quadros de insônia ou hipersonia, fadiga, perda de desejo sexual, alterações do peso corporal, sentimento de vazio, inutilidade e, em casos mais graves, pensamentos suicidas podem vir à tona (CORYELL, 2021; DSM-5, 2014).

A etiologia do transtorno depressivo ainda é desconhecida, mas teorias sobre suas causas rondam as pesquisas atuais que vêm buscando compreender melhor a doença e explorar abordagens terapêuticas eficazes. Dentro das hipóteses descritas temos a influência genética, principalmente com indivíduos com parentesco de primeiro grau, com risco de até 4 vezes maior em desenvolver o transtorno; a influência socioambiental parece estar relacionada também quando eventos traumáticos ou de perdas impactam de forma mais persistente e prolongada o indivíduo; e a teoria das monoaminas é descrita como possível causa para o desenvolvimento da doença (DUMAN; SANACORA; KRYSTAL, 2019; DSM-5, 2014; CORYELL, 2021). Ainda há muito o que se conhecer sobre a neuropatologia da depressão, mas a ascensão

constante denovos estudos nos ajuda cada dia a nos aproximar de melhores respostas e mais entendimento.

### **3.5. ANSIEDADE**

O ser humano apresenta um estado de ansiedade que vem a surgir diante de um evento estressor ou ameaçador e este estado está inerente à capacidade de sobrevivência (DEAN, 2016). No entanto, quando esse sentimento passa a estar presente cotidianamente, de forma exacerbada, descontrolada, diante de uma ação ou evento futuro, impactando negativamente em vários aspectos do dia a dia, essa ansiedade passa a ter níveis patológicos (DEAN, 2016).

A ansiedade pode influenciar negativamente vários segmentos das relações humanas, como no social, com distanciamento de familiares e amigos, dificuldade em manter-se ativo em suas atividades laborais; e na saúde, com repercussão na pressão arterial, em respostas a dor e ao sistema imunológico (NECHITA; NECHITA; MOTORGA, 2018). A ansiedade é uma condição limitante que gera ao indivíduo que a possui, prejuízos diretos e indiretos.

Segundo o relatório “Depression and Other Common Mental Disorders: Global health Estimates” (2017), elaborado e divulgado pela Organização Mundial de Saúde (OMS), estima-se que o transtorno de ansiedade (TA) atinge 3,6% da população mundial. O TA possui características como medo e apreensão, que podem vir a tornar-se transtorno de ansiedade generalizada (TAG), transtorno do pânico e fobias. Seus sintomas podem variar de acordo com o grau de intensidade – de leve à forte (OMS, 2017).

Assim como na depressão, os índices de ansiedade na população mundial pós-pandemia deram um salto significativo de 25% nos números de casos e a OPAS alerta sobre esses crescimentos tão expressivos e também reconhece que esse números podem ser ainda maiores (OPAS, 2022). Em um relatório elaborado pela OMS (2017), os distúrbios relacionados à ansiedade afetavam 9,3% da população brasileira; em 2020 esses números cresceram em 63% (MOURA; DA SILVA, 2021).

Na ansiedade, as causas de seu surgimento também não estão totalmente esclarecidas, mas a sua etiologia parece estar relacionada à exposição a eventos ambientais estressores, indução medicamentosa, por uma condição médica, por questões genéticas e também pela teoria das monoaminas (DSM-5, 2014; BARNHILL, 2020). Como na depressão, ainda é preciso expandir os conhecimentos relacionados à neuropatologia da ansiedade e a busca por mais

respostas que possam amparar profissionais de saúde e os indivíduos que são diagnosticados com a doença são imprescindíveis.

### 3.6. TRATAMENTOS

As farmacoterapias têm por objetivo a redução ou o desaparecimento dos sinais e sintomas das neuropatologias, que embora tenham mostrado seus benefícios, chegam a levar várias semanas para que a eficácia seja completa e nesse meio tempo, os efeitos adversos vão surgindo, dificultando uma adesão total ao tratamento (DAVID; GOURION, 2016).

Os antidepressivos foram descobertos por acaso, quando, no início da década de 50, pacientes com tuberculose foram tratados com um fármaco inibidor da monoaminoxidase (IMAOs), a iproniazida, e foi visto que seu uso provocava um aumento prolongado no humor dos pacientes (MORENO; FERNANDES; MORENO, 2018). Os IMAOs foram a primeira classe de antidepressivos descoberta. A melhora no humor dos usuários foi bastante promissora até que, posteriormente, os efeitos adversos, como icterícia e nefrotoxicidade foram observados (MACHADO et al., 2019), além de que uma alimentação rica em tiramina aumenta significativamente o risco de crise hipertensiva severa, com risco de óbito (FOLMER; BEZERRA NETO, 2013), levando assim a novas buscas para minimizar os efeitos.

Até a década de 80, haviam apenas duas classes de antidepressivos, também conhecidos como os antidepressivos de primeira geração, o IMAOs e os antidepressivos tricíclicos (ADTs, ex. imipramina), que apesar de melhorarem o humor dos pacientes, tinham efeitos colaterais consideráveis (MORENO; MORENO; TAVEIRA, 2014; HENTER; PARH; ZARATE, 2021). Os ADTs inibem a recaptção da serotonina e noradrenalina (SHYU et al., 2021), mas também são capazes de interagir com receptores adrenérgicos ( $\alpha_1$ ), muscarínicos (M) e histamínicos (H1). Essa interação causa uma série de impactos na função cardiovascular (arritmia, hipotensão ortostática), no efeito antimuscarínico (constipação, taquicardia) e no efeito anti-histamínico (sedação) sendo importante uma cautela maior na indicação desse segmento de fármaco (MEDAWAR; MATHEUS, 2012).

Por volta de 1988, o lançamento da fluoxetina trouxe um marco para a farmacologia da depressão e a partir de então, novas buscas por inibidores da recaptção de serotonina foram iniciadas (SSRIs) (MORENO; FERNANDES; MORENO, 2018). Suas projeções são feitas a

partir da teoria das monoaminas e é habitualmente prescrito para os transtornos de humor. Fluoxetina induz a expressão do fator neurotrófico derivado do cérebro (BDNF)/receptor quinase B (TrKB) relacionado a tropomiosina, o que pode vir a explicar, em partes, seus efeitos terapêuticos (LEVY et al., 2019) e uma redução em disfunções cognitivas (GOTTSCALK et al., 2018).

No entanto, recentes informações acerca do uso prolongado da fluoxetina e seus riscos, vêm sendo relatados e que servem de alerta para a comunidade médica quanto à manutenção no rigor das prescrições, visto que há também o uso e abuso do fármaco por adultos saudáveis (PÚSCIAN et al., 2021). Sharp e colaboradores (2019) avaliaram a exposição a fluoxetina em camundongos adolescentes por cinco dias da semana, durante 5 semanas e, posteriormente, houve a suspensão do uso por 35 dias; deficiências cognitivas na idade adulta, mesmo após um longo período de não-exposição à droga foram observadas. Os achados recentes de PÚSCIAN et al. (2021) corroboram com essas informações, e acrescentam que, o tratamento crônico repercute na plasticidade neuronal, com efeitos contraditórios no cérebro e no comportamento.

Os benzodiazepínicos são uma outra classe de fármacos usados no transtorno de humor. O clordiazepóxido (Librium) foi o primeiro benzodiazepínico descoberto por volta de 1955, pelo químico Leo Sternbach, da Hoffmann-La Roche. Passou a ser comercializado em 1960 como Librium e em 1963, após algumas mudanças na composição passou a ser chamado de Valium (diazepam). Rapidamente tornou-se popular entre a comunidade médica e a população de modo geral por, aparentemente, apresentar uma menor toxicidade e uma menor taxa de dependência em comparação com os medicamentos já existentes (WICK, 2013). No entanto, esse entusiasmo foi freado quando perceberam os reais riscos do uso indiscriminado, como dependência, déficits cognitivos e psicomotores (JANHSEN; ROSER; HOFFMANN, 2015). Seu mecanismo envolve ação sobre a sinalização GABAérgica, principalmente receptores GABA<sub>A</sub> (PATORNO et al., 2017) dificultando a excitação e a transmissão de sinais em neurônios que contêm esse receptor; pela hiperpolarização, a ativação neuronal é diminuída em vias relacionadas a ansiedade e tensão e esse mecanismo explica a sensação de relaxamento e sonolência que são induzidas; ainda, o uso de bebidas alcoólicas não é recomendado pelo aumento significativo do efeito sedativo que pode desencadear uma reação de overdose fatal (CHAPACAIS et al., 2020; HIRSCHTRITT et al., 2019).

As terapias atualmente disponibilizadas pelas indústrias farmacêuticas, contam com alguns pontos positivos, mas, seus pontos negativos – efeitos adversos, estão frequentemente

presentes e esses efeitos são muitas vezes sentidos antes mesmo que o próprio benefício proposto pelo uso do fármaco. Isso leva a uma variação de 30% a 50% de indivíduos que não são beneficiados com o tratamento (NESTLER et al, 2002; PLANCHEZ et al., 2019). Essa margem de não beneficiados pelo uso da intervenção medicamentosa, assim como as reações causadas por eles, é bastante considerável e pode levar à baixa adesão ao tratamento, o que por consequência leva à não-estabilização dos sintomas presentes na doença depressiva e/ou no transtorno de ansiedade, dificultando a real mediação por meio das drogas (PAPAKOSTAS, 2008; APAYDIN et al., 2016). Sendo assim, alternativas terapêuticas que visem minimizar esses efeitos e contribuir qualitativamente no bem-estar do indivíduo, passaram a serem buscadas.

### 3.7. USO DE PRODUTOS NATURAIS NA DEPRESSÃO E ANSIEDADE

A busca por novas alternativas terapêuticas para o tratamento de distúrbios neuropsicológicos fez com crescesse o número de estudos abordando o uso de produtos naturais (DAI et al., 2022; KÜPELI et al., 2021; YEUNG et al., 2018). Como supracitado, essas buscas apontar novas alternativas que causem menos efeitos adversos em comparação aos fármacos atualmente disponibilizados.

Em um estudo de revisão, Limanaqi et al. (2020) comentam que *Scutellaria baicalensis* (calota craniana chinesa), *Hericium erinaceus* (Juba de Leão) e *Rhodiola rosea* (Raiz dourada), além de seus potenciais ansiolíticos e antidepressivos, promovem um efeito neuroprotetor, plasticidade sináptica e neurogênese, além de neutralizar o estresse oxidativo e neuroinflamação. São capazes também de promover uma melhora na função cognitiva (estudos experimentais e clínicos).

Em uma meta-análise produzida por Ghazizadeh e colaboradores (2021), a respeito do efeito da *Melissa officinalis* L. (erva-cidreira) sobre a depressão e ansiedade, os autores identificaram que nos trabalhos anteriores abordando o uso da planta, observou-se uma melhora significativa nos padrões ansiosos e depressivos em comparação com o placebo, sem que houvessem efeitos colaterais graves. Os dados sugerem um efeito ansiolítico e antidepressivo sobre os sintomas de humor, principalmente pensando numa abordagem mais aguda.

O canabidiol é um dos principais componentes da *Cannabis sativa* e esse composto tem

chamado atenção por apresentar ações ansiolítica, antidepressiva e neuroprotetora em modelo animal, se mostrando como uma terapia potencial interessante para o tratamento dos distúrbios de humor (GARCÍA-GUTIÉRREZ et al., 2020).

Já o extrato de *Passiflora incarnata* Linneaus, administrado por via oral, suprimiu a resposta de ansiedade em pacientes com raquianestesia, sem alterar a resposta psicomotora (ASLANARGUN et al., 2012). Além disso, pacientes com transtorno de ansiedade generalizada tiveram uma melhora do quadro ansioso após receberem via oral durante seis semanas, o extrato de *Withania somnifera*, que tem propriedade GABAérgica que confere seu efeito ansiolítico, quando associado a ISSRs, se mostrando como uma potencial terapia adjuvante segura e eficaz (FULADI et al., 2021).

### 3.8. MODELOS EXPERIMENTAIS NA DEPRESSÃO E NA ANSIEDADE

Com o forte crescimento nos diagnósticos dos transtornos de humor, o uso de modelos animais para estudar a neurobiologia dos transtornos neuropsicológicos fornece uma possibilidade a mais em avançar com novas propostas terapêuticas que sejam cada vez mais eficazes, visto a limitação de amostras humanas, seja por serem escassas, pelo intervalo pós-morte, mudanças no pH do cérebro e outros (WANG et al, 2017).

Modelos animais têm sido usados para o aprofundamento de trabalhos e aprimoramento no conhecimento da depressão e ansiedade e contribuem em uma abordagem fundamental para o estudo e compreensão da estrutura, função, vias moleculares e celulares (WANG et al, 2017; MÉNARD et al., 2017). Os modelos animais com roedores, por exemplo, têm sido melhorados com o passar dos anos, nos quais aspectos cognitivos e emocionais passaram a ser mais bem avaliados, viabilizando as pesquisas em modelos de depressão e ansiedade (WANG et al, 2017). Testes como o do Campo Aberto, Labirinto em Cruz Elevada e Suspensão pela Cauda, são métodos utilizados para avaliar os parâmetros relacionados à ansiedade e depressão, respectivamente, em modelo animal de camundongos e são de fundamental importância para explorar estrutura, função, vias celulares e moleculares, além de poderem auxiliar em novas terapias e respostas aos tratamentos (WANG et al, 2017).

O teste do Campo aberto (TCA) é um preditor para ansiedade comumente utilizado para conhecimento da neurobiologia do transtorno de ansiedade e para a triagem de novos

fármacos compostos ansiolíticos em potencial (KRAEUTER; GUEST; SARANYAI, 2019a). Comportamento locomotor, atividade exploratória e comportamento do tipo ansioso (*rearing*) são observados; um aparato (Figura 4A), dividido por quadrantes, é utilizado e durante 5 minutos o desempenho dos animais é avaliado, observando se eles evitam explorar o ambiente, se ficam mais próximos às paredes e se realizam repetidamente o *rearing* (Figura 4B), sendo neste caso, animais com características do tipo ansiosa (OMIDI-ARDALI et al., 2021).

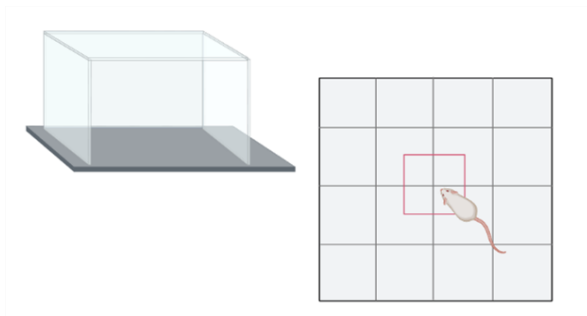


Figura 4A: aparato para realização do TCA



Figura 4B: *Rearing*

O teste do Labirinto em Cruz Elevado (LCE) é também preditor para ansiedade e ajuda na investigação de novos compostos com ações ansiolíticas. É um modelo que toma por base, a aversão que o animal tem de ambientes abertos (KRAEUTER; GUEST; SARANYAI, 2019b). O LCE é composto por um aparato que possui 4 braços (em forma de cruz), sendo, dois braços abertos e dois braços fechados (Figura 5). Os braços fechados possuem uma parede de 50 cm de altura, enquanto nos braços abertos não há essas paredes; permanecer mais nos braços abertos e explorar o ambiente são características de animais não ansiosos; já a maior permanência nos braços fechados denota medo de conhecer o ambiente, se enquadrando em características do tipo ansiosa (MORENO-SANTOS et al., 2021). O comportamento exploratório, a preferência em manter-se por mais tempo em determinados braços e a entrada nos braços são avaliados por 5 minutos (MORENO-SANTOS et al., 2021).



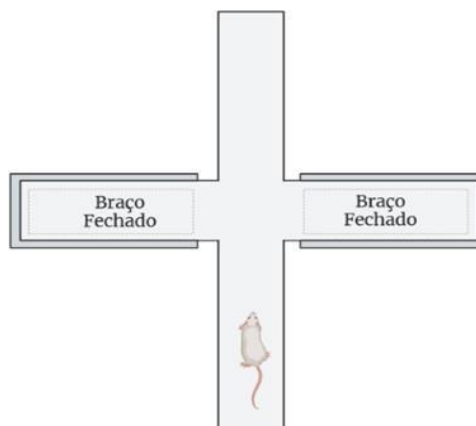


Figura 5 : aparato para realização do teste LCE

Já o teste de Suspensão pela Cauda (TSC) tem uma característica de análise para padrão depressivo (Figura 6). O comportamento do animal diante da situação estressora também é avaliada dentro de 5 min; movimentos de balanço, curvatura, movimentação de patas ou a imobilidade são constantemente avaliados; animais que não produzem ou produzem pouca movimentação diante desse evento estressor são considerados animais com característica depressiva (HAO et al., 2019). É um teste que também tem sido utilizado na análise de novas drogas antidepressivas que possam contribuir para a redução dos sinais e sintomas relacionados a depressão (CAN et al., 2012).



Figura 6: Teste de Suspensão pela Cauda

O refinamento dos testes para ansiedade e depressão vem ajudando a construir um arcabouço cada vez mais robusto acerca desses transtornos de humor, viabilizando, conseqüentemente, o conhecimento e o desenvolvimento de novas abordagens terapêuticas.

### 3.9. LECTINAS

As lectinas são proteínas de origem não imune e apresentam uma importante característica que é a capacidade de ligação a carboidratos, de maneira específica e reversível

sem que modifique a estrutura covalente do ligante. Essa capacidade de ligação pode dar-se pelas forças de Van der Waals, interações hidrofóbicas e ligações de hidrogênio, tornando-as assim moléculas singulares e plurais ao mesmo tempo (CHEN et al., 2021; SANTOS et al., 2014). Possuem ao menos um domínio de reconhecimento a carboidrato (DRC) e estão envolvidas em várias funções biológicas, como adesão celular e fagocitose (RUBEENA et al., 2019).

As lectinas estão amplamente distribuídas pela natureza, podendo ser encontradas em plantas, organismos de origem animal e até mesmo microorganismos (CHEN et al., 2021). Nos vegetais, as lectinas podem ser encontradas nas folhas, caules, raízes, sementes, flores e são classificadas de acordo com sua estrutura geral como, merolectinas, hololectinas, quimerolectinas e superlectinas (Figura 4) (TSANEVA; VAN DAMME, 2020; SANTOS et al., 2014).

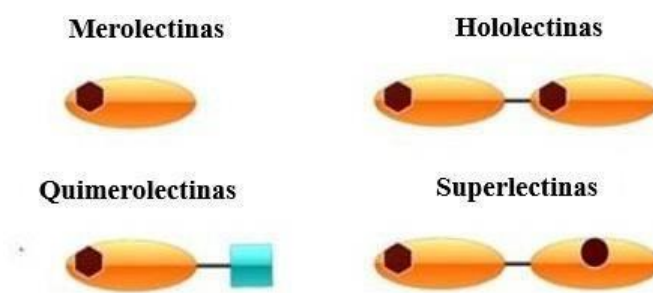


Figura 7: Estrutura geral das lectinas.

Hexágono: domínio de ligação a carboidratos; Quadrado: atividade enzimática; Círculo: reconhecimento de açúcares não relacionados.

Fone: Modificado de TSANEVA; VAN DAMME, 2020

As merolectinas possuem apenas um domínio de ligação a carboidratos, enquanto que as hololectinas possuem dois ou mais domínios de lectina; já as quimerolectinas consistem em um ou mais domínios de ligação a carboidratos, no entanto, ao menos um domínio deverá atuar independente ao domínio de ligação a carboidrato, como apresentar uma atividade enzimática, por exemplo, enquanto que as superlectinas, além de possuírem vários domínios com várias capacidades de ligação a carboidratos (hexágono vermelho na imagem), reconhecem açúcares estruturalmente não relacionados (TSANEVA; VAN DAMME, 2020; VAN DAMME et al., 1998).

A presença de lectinas pode ser observada a partir do ensaio de Atividade Hemaglutinante (HA), que consiste em investigar a interação da lectina com os carboidratos

presentes na superfície dos eritrócitos. Essa interação provocará o surgimento de uma malha, uma rede de conexão. A não observação dessa malha indicará inexistência dessa (SANO; OGAWA, 2014).

A literatura tem descrito várias ações biológicas presentes em lectinas vegetais, e desde o primeiro relato protagonizado por Hermann Stillmark em 1888 sobre elas, os estudos abordando-as vivem em diária ascensão, e resultados promissores acerca dessas proteínas vêm mostrando suas ações anti-inflamatórias (PATRIOTA et al., 2019a), antitumorais (PATRIOTA et al., 2019b), antivirais (LEE, 2019), antiinfeciosas (LIMA et al., 2019), antinociceptivas (RAMOS et al., 2020) e neuroprotetoras (RUSSI et al., 2012) em doses com baixa ou nenhuma repercussão adversa. A influência de lectinas na modulação molecular do sistema nervoso central (SNC) pode levar a respostas de ajuste comportamental, neuroproteção e neuroplasticidade (ARAÚJO et al., 2020; LIN; LEVITAN, 1991).

A ConA (concanavalina A - lectina extraída de *Canavalia ensiformis*), apresentou efeitos que podem auxiliar no tratamento de transtornos/doenças que promovam mudanças comportamentais e até cognitivas, como a depressão e ansiedade (ARAÚJO et al., 2020b). A ConBr (lectina de *Canavalia brasiliensis*) apresentou uma capacidade neuroprotetora em modelo *in vivo* contra convulsões induzidas por ácido quinolínico (RUSSI et al., 2012). Em modelos *in vitro*, ConBr (JAQUES et al., 2013), FTL (lectina de *Artocarpus incisamentes*) e BBL (lectina de *Bauhinia bauhinioides*) também demonstraram um potencial neuroprotetor (RUSSI et al., 2012).

### **3.10. *Schinus terebinthifolia* Raddi**

Segundo o IBGE (2022), a flora brasileira é uma das mais relevantes do mundo, por possuir uma enorme biodiversidade constituída por cerca de 46.000 espécies de vegetais conhecidas. Essa grande biodiversidade é explorada há muitos anos, principalmente para usos medicinais, por exemplo, em tratamentos de distúrbios gastrointestinais, respiratórios, dermatites, feridas, infecções, além de muitas outras (GARLET, 2019). Essas propriedades resultaram em buscas para melhorar o entendimento destes usos, incluindo seus mecanismos de ação, benefícios e malefícios, fazendo então com que as pesquisas com os produtos naturais sejam intensificadas e ganhem cada vez mais espaço no âmbito científico (GILBERT; FAVORETO, 2011; ROSAS; CORREA; HENRIQUES, 2019).

*Schinus terebinthifolia* Raddi (Anacardiaceae), também conhecida como ‘‘aroeira- da- praia’’, ‘‘aroeira-vermelha’’ ou ‘‘pimenta-rosa’’, é comumente encontrada pela extensão do litoral brasileiro e tem seu uso bastante difundido no que diz respeito ao tratamento de infecções, edemas, úlceras e como cicatrizante na medicina popular (GILBERT; FAVORETO, 2011; CORDEIRO, 2022). Pode chegar a atingir até 10m de altura, com ramos bastantes ramificados (Figura 5A), com suas folhas pecioladas apresentando de 5 a 11 folíolos sésseis (Figura 5B) e com seus frutos (Figura 5C) que, além de darem o nome popular a planta, são utilizados em preparo de alimentos tanto no Brasil quanto no exterior (UNIRIO, 2023). A lectina da folha de *S. terebinthifolia* é conhecida por SteLL; foi purificada e caracterizada por Gomes *et al.* (2013), é um polipeptídeo glicosilado de 14,0 kDa com capacidade de ligar-se à quitina e que apresenta uma estabilidade considerável quanto a variações de temperatura e pH (GOMES *et al.*, 2013; RAMOS *et al.*, 2020).

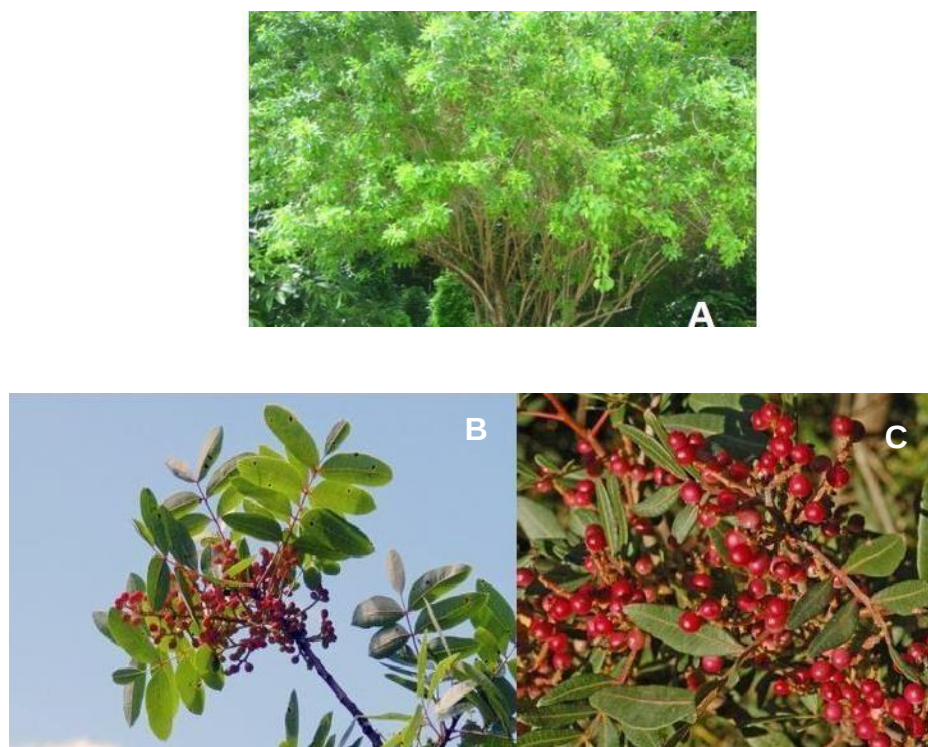


Figura 8: *Schinus terebinthifolia* Raddi (Anacardiaceae).

(A): *S. terebinthifolia* Raddi; (B) Folhas; (C) Frutos

Fonte: Thamara Procópio (A); UNIRIO, 2023 (B e C)

Em ensaios *in vitro*, SteLL apresentou atividade antimicrobiana (GOMES *et al.*, 2013), bem como atividade imunomoduladora sobre esplenócitos de camundongos (SANTOS

et al., 2020). Em outro estudo, o tratamento com SteLL apresentou ação anti-infecciosa sobre *Staphylococcus aureus*, bactéria oportunista facilmente encontrada em ambiente hospitalar (LIMA et al., 2019), como também foi capaz de reduzir significativamente sarcoma 180 em camundongos por reduzir a angiogênese e induzir apoptose (RAMOS et al., 2019). Santos et al., (2022) confirmaram a atividade antiangiogênica de SteLL a partir da interferência na formação de novas redes vasculares na membrana do saco vitelino de embriões de *Coturnix japonica*. SteLL também foi capaz de reduzir a hiperalgesia na pata de camundongos portadores do sarcoma-180, levando a uma melhora no uso do membro dos animais portadores de tumor. Essa ação antinociceptiva provavelmente está relacionada à ação antitumoral da lectina, bem como a uma ação central envolvendo a modulação de receptores opióides (RAMOS et al., 2020). Recentemente, Marinho et al. (2023), usando modelo de nocicepção periférica e central em roedores, constataram a ação analgésica da SteLL, tanto central como periférica, com modulação dos receptoresopióides, sem alterar a função locomotora dos animais.

Ainda não existiam na literatura, estudos que investigassem a ação de SteLL na avaliação de atividadeantidepressiva e ansiolítica. Entretanto, o efeito antinociceptivo central verificado com a administração da lectina, bem como seus efeitos anti-inflamatórios estimularam investigar a capacidade de SteLL em modular funções neurológicas. Na realidade atual, no qual, diagnóstico da depressão e ansiedade, estão em constante crescimento, principalmente agora com o impacto da pandemia da COVID-19, encontrar novas abordagens que contribuam com os tratamentos atuais a doenças psicológicas podem auxiliam na melhor qualidade de vida de pacientes (FINSTERER et al., 2022; OPAS, 2022). E o uso de modelos animais têm sido uma ferramenta importante nas buscas dessas novas possibilidades.

## 4.RESULTADOS

Os resultados dessa dissertação são apresentados na forma de artigos.

**4.1.** A atividade ansiolítica da lectina da folha de *Schinus terebinthifolia* (SteLL) é dependente da sinalização monoaminérgica, embora seja dependente do domínio de ligação a carboidratos.

Artigo publicado no periódico *Pharmaceuticals*: <https://doi.org/10.3390/ph15111364>





## Article

# The Anxiolytic Activity of *Schinus terebinthifolia* Leaf Lectin (SteLL) Is Dependent on Monoaminergic Signaling although Independent of the Carbohydrate-Binding Domain of the Lectin

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**Abstract:** The potential of plant lectins (carbohydrate-binding proteins) for the treatment of neurological disorders such as anxiety and depression has started to be reported in the last few years. *Schinus terebinthifolia* leaves contain a lectin called SteLL, which has displayed antimicrobial, immunomodulatory, antitumor, and analgesic activities. However, the effects of SteLL on the Central Nervous System (CNS) have not yet been determined. In this study, we investigated the in vivo anxiolytic effect of SteLL in mice using the open field (OF) and elevated plus maze (EPM) tests. In the OF, SteLL (1, 2, and 4 mg/kg, i.p.) did not interfere with the number of crossings but significantly reduced the number of rearings. In the EPM, SteLL 4 mg/kg and the combination SteLL (1 mg/kg) plus diazepam (1 mg/kg) significantly increased the time spent in the open arms while reducing the time spent in the closed arms. The anxiolytic effect of SteLL did not seem to be dependent on the carbohydrate-binding domain of the lectin. Nevertheless, the SteLL effect in the EPM was reversed by the pretreatment with the pharmacological antagonists of the  $\alpha$ 2-adrenoceptor, 5-HT<sub>2A/2C</sub> serotonin receptor, and the D1 dopamine receptor. Overall, our results suggest that the anxiolytic effect of SteLL is dependent on the monoaminergic signaling cascade.

**Keywords:** anxiety; elevated plus maze; lectin; mice models; open field

## 1. Introduction

Anxiety-like disorders roughly affect more than 33% of the population, and the vast majority do not receive treatment [1]. The commonly prescribed pharmacotherapy for anxiety includes agonists of benzodiazepine receptors and inhibitors of the reuptake of serotonin, dopamine, and noradrenaline. Patients that have therapeutic opportunities have been treated with synthetic drugs that commonly elicit several side effects and lead to resistance due to their long-term use; in addition, anxiety-associated disability presents a relatively high economic cost to society. In view of this, there is an ongoing search for more sustainable, safe, and profitable drugs to treat anxiety disorders [2]. One alternative that has been gaining ground is the use of natural products.

Some natural products possess several biological and pharmacological properties that resemble the anxiolytic effect of commercialized substances. For instance, *Passiflora incarnata* Linnaeus extract, administered orally, suppressed the anxiety response in patients with spinal anesthesia, without altering the psychomotor response [3]. Additionally, a reduction in the symptoms in patients with generalized anxiety disorder was found with oral administration of the extract of *Withania somnifera* root combined with serotonin reuptake inhibitors for six weeks [4].



Lectins are proteins that have shown various biological and pharmacological potentials. These proteins present at least one carbohydrate-binding domain in their structure, which allows specific and reversible binding to carbohydrates [5–7]. There is not much knowledge about the effects of lectins on the Central Nervous System (CNS). Nonetheless, Russi et al. [8] showed a neuroprotective role of the lectin from *Canavalia brasiliensis* (ConBr), injected intracerebroventricularly in mice, against quinolinic acid-induced hippocampal seizures. The lectin also blocked the neurotoxicity induced by glutamate in vitro. Jacques et al. [9] confirmed the results obtained by Russi et al. [8] and demonstrated that ConBr reversed glutamate neurotoxicity via the PI3K/Akt-dependent pathway in a model of ex vivo hippocampal slices. The central administration of ConBr has also been shown to decrease the immobility time of mice in the forced swimming test, and this effect was dependent on the protein structure integrity and on the adrenergic, serotonergic, and dopaminergic systems.

*Schinus terebinthifolia* leaf lectin (SteLL) is a glycosylated protein extracted from *S. terebinthifolia* leaf with the ability to bind chitin. The lectin has a native molecular mass of ca. 12.4 kDa [10], isoelectric point 5.7 [11], and considerable stability in terms of temperature and pH variations [11,12]. SteLL has shown biological activities such as anti-infectious [13], antimicrobial [12], and immunomodulatory [10] effects in vitro. SteLL has also demonstrated in vivo antitumor [14] and antiangiogenic [15] activities. Ramos and colleagues [16] reported an antinociceptive effect of SteLL via opioid receptors in a model of hyperalgesia in sarcoma 180-bearing mice. Recently, Marinho et al. [17] demonstrated that SteLL has peripheral and central antinociceptive action and that  $\delta$  opioid receptors are involved in the antinociceptive action of SteLL against inflammatory pain. Despite this, no further data have been reported on the effect of SteLL in CNS modulation, especially concerning psychological disorders.

In this study, we evaluated the effects of the SteLL on mice models of anxiety (open field test and elevated plus maze assay) and explored whether monoaminergic signaling and the carbohydrate-binding domain of the lectin played a role in the anxiolytic efficacy of this lectin.

## 2. Results

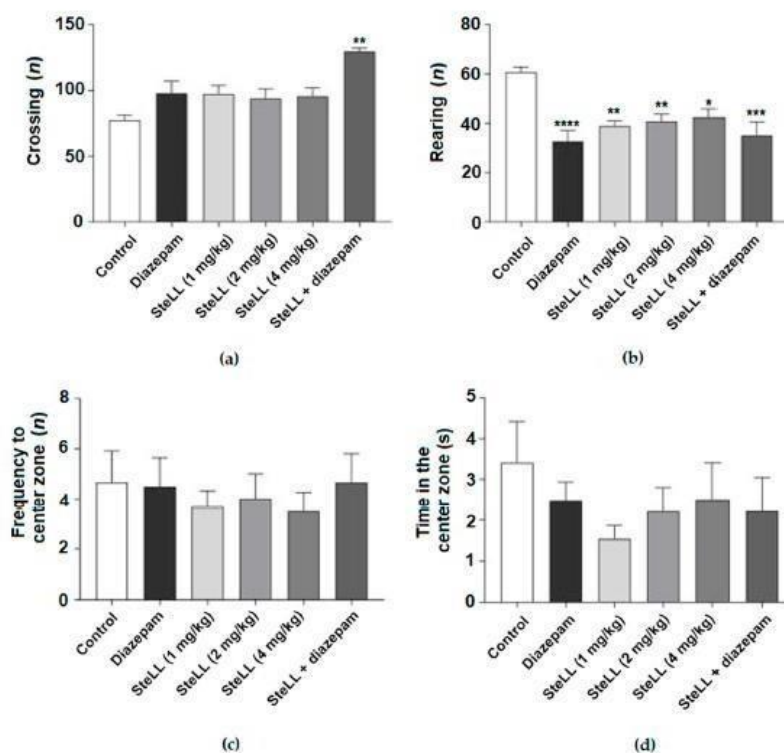
### 2.1. SteLL Revealed an Anxiolytic Effect on the Open Field (OFT) and on the Elevated Plus Maze Test (EPM)

To evaluate the locomotive, exploratory, and anxious behavior, the animals were submitted to the OFT [18]. Figure 1A shows that the treatment of mice with SteLL (1, 2 e 4 mg/kg) did not cause significant changes in the number of crossings compared to the control. However, the treatment with the combination of SteLL (1 mg/kg) plus diazepam (0.5 mg/kg) displayed a significantly increased number of crossings when compared to the control (Figure 1A;  $F = 5.147$ ,  $p = 0.0018$ ). All groups significantly decreased the number of rearings compared to the control (Figure 1B;  $F = 7.698$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ). Neither SteLL nor diazepam interfered with the frequency of entries (Figure 1C;  $F = 0.2567$ ,  $p = 0.9330$ ) and the time spent in the center zone of the apparatus (Figure 1D;  $F = 0.7328$ ,  $p = 0.6048$ ).

Anxiolytic-like behavior was evaluated using the EPM task [19]. Figure 2 shows the data on the evaluation of whether SteLL also promoted an anxiolytic effect in the EPM test. The treatments of mice with the highest dose of SteLL (4 mg/kg), diazepam (1 mg/kg), and SteLL (1 mg/kg) plus diazepam (0.5 mg/kg) significantly increased the time spent in the open arms compared to the control (Figure 2A;  $F = 10.42$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ). Diazepam alone increased the number of entries into the open arms compared to the control (Figure 2B;  $F = 12.83$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ). In addition, when analyzing the time spent by mice in the closed arm of the EPM, the data for diazepam (1 mg/kg), SteLL (4 mg/kg), and SteLL (1 mg/kg) plus diazepam (0.5 mg/kg) significantly differed from the control (Figure 2C;  $F = 8.109$ ,  $p = 0.0001$ ). Regarding the number of entries into the closed arms, a significant reduction was observed for treatments with SteLL at doses of 1 and 4 mg/kg compared to the control



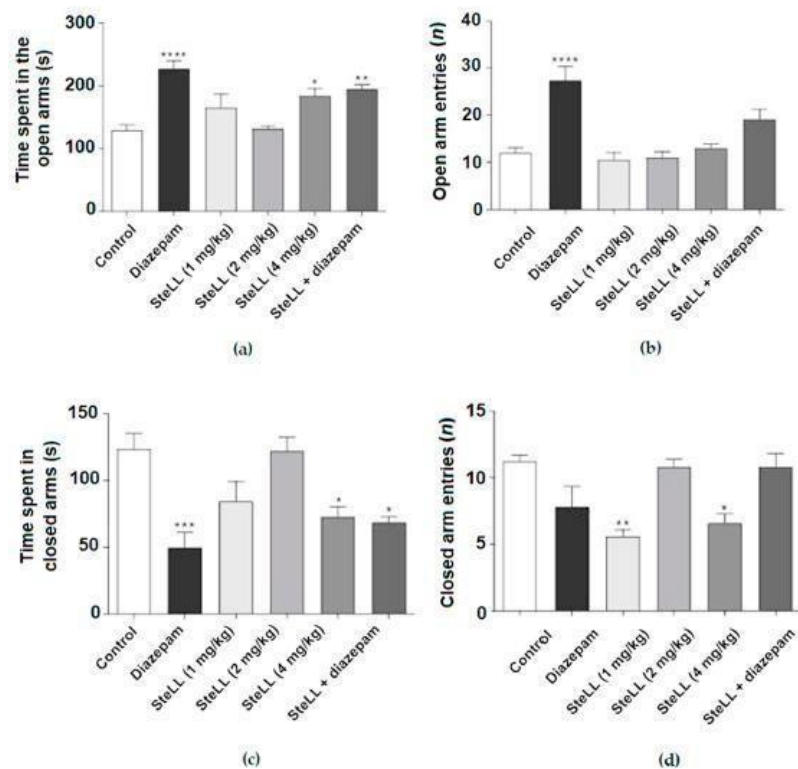
(Figure 2D;  $F = 7.491$ ,  $p = 0.0002$ ). Overall, the effect of SteLL was similar to the one observed in the group treated with the diazepam as positive control.



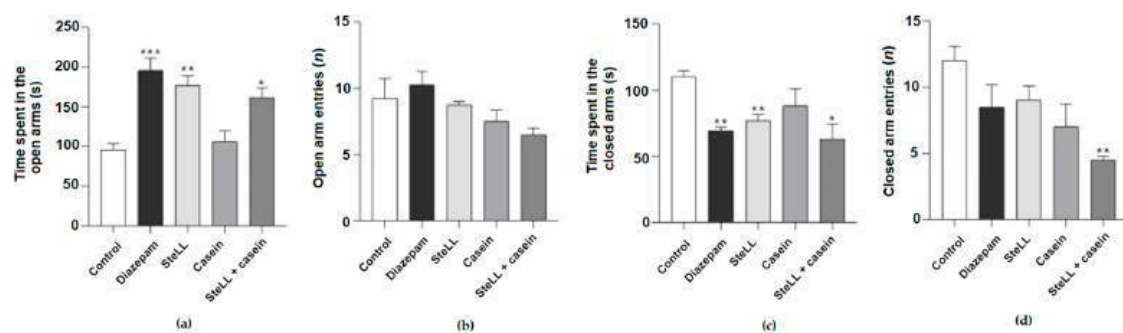
**Figure 1.** Effects of SteLL (1, 2, and 4 mg/kg) i.p. treatment in the open field test. Diazepam (1 mg/kg) was used as a positive control. Diazepam (0.5 mg/kg) plus SteLL (1 mg/kg) was used to evaluate the synergic effect of both compounds combined. (a) Total number of crossings. (b) Total number of rearings. (c) Frequency of the mice entering the center zone. (d) The overall duration of time mice spent in the center of the apparatus. Significant differences compared with the control group: (\*)  $p < 0.05$ ; (\*\*)  $p < 0.001$ ; (\*\*\*)  $p < 0.0001$ ; (\*\*\*\*)  $p < 0.00001$ .

## 2.2. The Anxiolytic Effect of SteLL Did Not Depend on the Carbohydrate-Recognition Domain (CRD) of the Lectin

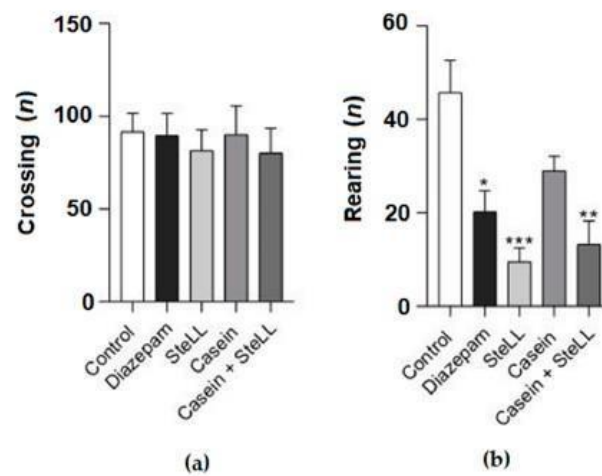
In another set of experiments, we evaluated whether the blockage of the CRD of SteLL with casein would revert the anxiolytic efficacy of the lectin. Nevertheless, the blockage with casein did not interfere with the time that animals spent in the open or closed arms (Figure 3A,C, respectively) nor in the number of entries into the open arms (Figure 3B) compared to the unblocked lectin, although the combined therapy (SteLL 1mg/kg and Diazepam 0.5 mg/kg) decreased the number of entries into the closed arms compared to the control (Figure 3D,  $F = 4.638$ ,  $p = 0.0123$ ). Furthermore, the blockage with casein also did not modify the effect of lectin on the crossing or rearing responses of animals in the OFT: SteLL (4 mg/kg) and diazepam (1 mg/kg) decreased the number of rearings compared to the control as much as the group administrated with SteLL 4 mg/kg blocked with casein (Figure 4B;  $F = 9.444$ ,  $p = 0.0005$ ).



**Figure 2.** Effects of SteLL (1, 2, and 4 mg/kg) i.p. treatment on the elevated plus maze test. Diazepam (1 mg/kg) was used as a positive control. Diazepam (0.5 mg/kg) plus SteLL (1 mg/kg) was used to evaluate the synergic effect of both compounds combined. (a) Total time that mice spent in open arms. (b) The number of entries into the open arms. (c) Total time spent in closed arms. (d) The number of entries into the closed arms. Significant differences compared with the control group: (\*)  $p < 0.05$ ; (\*\*)  $p < 0.001$ ; (\*\*\*)  $p < 0.0001$ ; (\*\*\*\*)  $p < 0.00001$ .



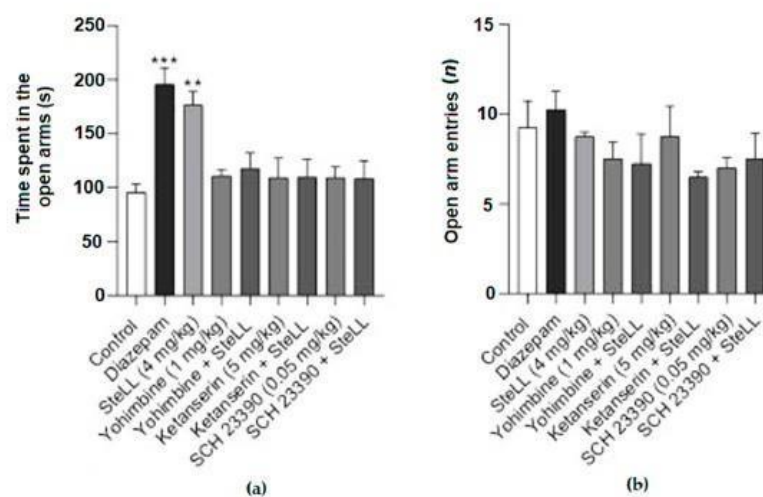
**Figure 3.** The incubation of the lectin with casein did not revert the anxiolytic effect of SteLL (4 mg/kg) in the elevated plus maze test. (a) Total time that mice spent in open arms. (b) The number of entries into the open arms. (c) Total time spent in closed arms. (d) The number of entries into the closed arms. (\*)  $p < 0.05$ ; (\*\*)  $p < 0.001$ ; (\*\*\*)  $p < 0.0001$  compared to control.



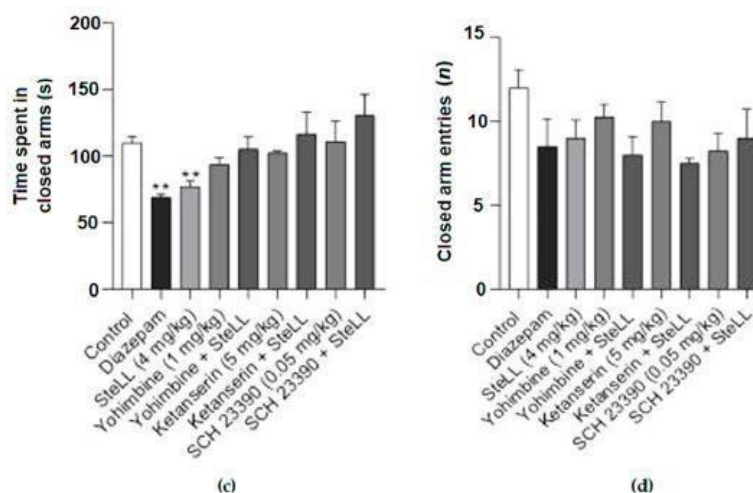
**Figure 4.** The incubation of the lectin with casein did not revert the anxiolytic effect of SteLL (4 mg/kg) in the open field test. (a) Total number of crossings. (b) Total number of rearings. (\*)  $p < 0.05$ ; (\*\*)  $p < 0.001$ ; (\*\*\*)  $p < 0.0001$  compared to control.

### 2.3. The Anxiolytic Effect of SteLL in the EPM Is Dependent on Monoaminergic Pathways

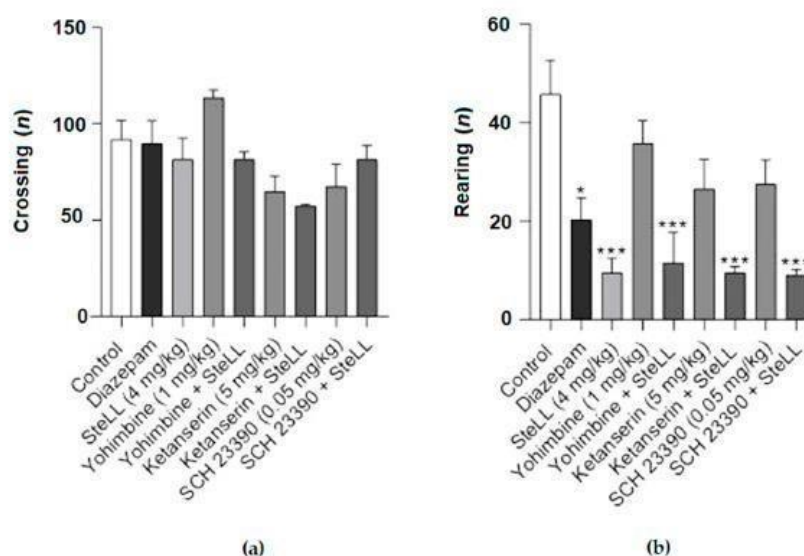
To investigate whether the anxiolytic-like effect of SteLL in the OFT and EPM was dependent on monoaminergic pathways, the following antagonists were administered 15 min before the SteLL treatment: the nonselective antagonist of the  $\alpha 2$ -adrenoceptor (yohimbine), the 5-HT<sub>2A/2C</sub> serotonin receptor antagonist (ketanserin), or the D1 dopamine receptor antagonist (SCH 23390). Pretreatment with yohimbine, ketanserin, and SCH 23390 significantly blocked the effect of SteLL (4 mg/kg) on the time spent in the open (Figure 5A;  $F = 6.608$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ) and closed arms (Figure 5C;  $F = 3.590$ ,  $p = 0.0058$ ) on the EPM. The number of entries into the open (Figure 5B;  $F = 1.089$ ,  $p = 0.4003$ ) or closed arms (Figure 5D;  $F = 1.407$ ,  $p = 0.2383$ ) did not significantly change among the groups. In addition, the treatment with antagonists did not affect the efficacy of SteLL in the reduction in the rearing responses on OFT (Figure 6B;  $F = 7.851$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ). No treatment altered the number of crossings (Figure 6A;  $F = 3.92$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ).



**Figure 5.** Cont.



**Figure 5.** The anxiolytic-like effect of SteLL in the EPM was dependent on monoaminergic signaling. The pretreatment with the nonselective antagonist of the  $\alpha$ 2-adrenoceptor yohimbine 1 mg/kg, the 5-HT<sub>2A/2C</sub> serotonin receptor antagonist ketanserin 5 mg/kg, and the D1 dopamine receptor antagonist SCH 23390 0.05 mg/kg inhibited the effect of SteLL (4 mg/kg) on the time spent in the open (a) and closed (c) arms. No changes were observed in the number of entries in open (b) and closed (d) arms. The antagonists were administrated 15 min before SteLL administration. The experiments were conducted 15 min after SteLL administration. (\*\*)  $p < 0.001$ ; (\*\*\*)  $p < 0.0001$  compared to control.



**Figure 6.** The blockage of the monoaminergic signaling did not alter the rearing responses of SteLL administration (4 mg/kg) on the OFT. The nonselective antagonist of the  $\alpha$ 2-adrenoceptor yohimbine 1 mg/kg, the 5-HT<sub>2A/2C</sub> serotonin receptor antagonist ketanserin 5 mg/kg, and the D1 dopamine receptor antagonist SCH 23390 0.05 mg/kg were evaluated. (a) There were no significant changes in the numbers of crossing among the groups. (b) SteLL 4 mg/kg decreased the number of rearings compared to the control even in animals pretreated with the antagonists. (\*)  $p < 0.05$ ; (\*\*)  $p < 0.001$ ; (\*\*\*)  $p < 0.0001$  compared to control.



### 3. Discussion

In this study, the anxiolytic-like effects of lectin extracted from *Schinus terebinthifolia* leaf have been shown in the OFT and EPM tests. In addition, the data revealed that the anxiolytic effect of SteLL was dependent on the monoaminergic signaling in the EPM.

Disturbances in the monoaminergic signaling have been stated as the major force of anxiety disorders [20–25]. The use of inhibitors of monoamines reuptake has been the main treatment for anxiety, although ineffective in many patients [20,25,26]. Here, we revealed that SteLL anxiolytic-like activity in the EPM was reverted by yohimbine, ketanserin, and SCH 23390, suggesting the modulatory effects via the  $\alpha$ 2-adrenoceptor, serotonin receptor, and the D1 dopamine receptor; however, this signaling seemed not to be involved in the responses in the OFT. The EPM and the OFT are tests widely considered for measuring anxiety-like behavior in mice; nonetheless, these methodologies measure different parameters of drug-induced anxiolytic activity [27]. For instance, the EPM is based on the natural aversion of mice to open and elevated areas, whereas the OFT is based on the alterations in the exploratory behavior of animals [28,29]. In the first, an anxious behavior has its expression in the time that an animal spends in enclosed arms, while in the second the anxious behavior is mainly interpreted by the improvement in the rearing responses [30,31]. Therefore, our results suggested that the monoaminergic system involvement in SteLL efficacy was related to the aversion to light/open spaces rather than alterations in the general exploratory activity of the mice.

The interaction between the carbohydrate residues in biological membranes and lectins can modulate cell responses. For instance, Souza et al. [13] suggested that the binding of SteLL to *N*-acetylglucosamine is crucial to the lectin bacteriostatic activity. According to the literature, the interaction between carbohydrate residues and lectins can modulate cell communication and CNS neurological function [9,32–34]. Galectins (Gal) are endogenous lectins that belong to a family of pro- and/or anti-inflammatory endogenous  $\beta$ -glycan-binding proteins, and the implications of Gal-1, 3, 4, 8, and 9 in psychological and neurological diseases have been revealed [35–38]. SteLL was incubated with casein, a glycoprotein that binds its carbohydrate-binding domain, but the blockage of the CRD did not interfere with the anxiolytic efficacy of the lectin. Even though the blockage with casein reverted the number of entries into the closed arm of EPM, this isolated result does not suggest a function dependent on the lectin CRD. This is different from the result found by Marinho et al. [17], who reported that the blockage with casein inhibited the antinociceptive activity of SteLL. The results do not reject the interactions of SteLL with CNS glycans but only show that there was no need for an empty CRD for SteLL to perform the effects observed in the present work. Recently, Bezerra et al. [39] revealed that the lectin isolated from *Cratylia mollis* seed (Cramoll 1,2,3) sustained a pesticide activity against the termite *Nasutitermes corniger* and mite *Tetranychus bastosi* independent of the carbohydrate-binding ability of the lectin.

The screening for new agents to treat anxiety disorders has been constant and yet has not been significantly successful. The screening will continue, and natural products promise to speed up the process based on their economic necessity, natural availability, and being safer alternatives. SteLL plays a flourishing role as an anxiolytic agent whose efficacy is dependent on monoaminergic signaling. Further studies must explore other signaling molecules involved in SteLL neuromodulation.

### 4. Materials and Methods

#### 4.1. Animals

Male Swiss mice weighing 25–30 g, 4–5 weeks old ( $n = 72$ ), were maintained at room temperature (22–27 °C) with free access to water and food, under a 12:12 h light–dark cycle (lights on at 7 am). All manipulations were conducted in the light phase between 9 am and 5 pm. The procedures in this study were performed according to the National Institutes of Health Guide for Care and Use of Laboratory Animals [40] and were approved by the local

Ethics Committee for Animal Use (protocol no. 0010/2021) of the Federal University of Pernambuco (UFPE). All efforts were made to minimize animal suffering.

#### 4.2. Purification of Lectin

Leaves of *S. terebinthifolia* were collected on the campus of UFPE in Recife, Pernambuco, according to authorization number 72024 (SISBIO) of the Chico Mendes Institute for Biodiversity Conservation (ICMBio). This research was recorded (A37C1E4) in the National System for the Management of Genetic Heritage and Associated Traditional Knowledge (SisGen). SteLL was isolated according to Gomes et al. [12]. Briefly, the flour from the dried leaves was homogenized for 16 h with 0.15 M NaCl in the proportion of 10% (w/v). After the centrifugation process (15 min, 3,500 g, 4 °C), the extract was loaded onto a chitin (Sigma-Aldrich, St. Louis, MO, USA) column equilibrated with 0.15 M NaCl. The adsorbed proteins (SteLL) were eluted with 1.0 M acetic acid and dialyzed against distilled water for 6 h. The protein concentration was determined according to Lowry et al. [41] using the bovine serum albumin standard curve (31.25–500 µg/mL). The carbohydrate-binding ability of the SteLL samples was determined through a hemagglutinating activity assay as described by Procópio et al. [42].

#### 4.3. Drugs and Treatment

To evaluate the anxiolytic efficacy of SteLL, mice received intraperitoneally the lectin at 1, 2, or 4 mg/kg (in phosphate-buffered saline, PBS;  $n = 6$  per group) or only the vehicle PBS (control;  $n = 6$ ) 30 min before the open field (OF) and elevated plus maze (EPM) tests. Lectin doses were defined based on Ramos et al. [16], who found antinociceptive action of SteLL at 1 and 2 mg/kg. Diazepam (1 mg/kg i.p.) was used as a positive control ( $n = 6$ ).

To determine the monoaminergic signaling involvement in SteLL anxiolytic activity, the nonselective antagonist of the  $\alpha 2$ -adrenoceptor (yohimbine; 1 mg/kg), the 5-HT<sub>2A/2C</sub> serotonin receptor antagonist (ketanserin; 5 mg/kg), or the D1 dopamine receptor antagonist (SCH 23390; 0.05 mg/kg) were administered i.p. 15 min before SteLL (4 mg/kg) administration. Six animals were assigned to each group. The choice and the doses of the antagonists were based on Araujo et al. [43], and the drugs were also dissolved in PBS. All drugs were obtained from Sigma-Aldrich and were prepared fresh on the day of testing. After administration, the animals were evaluated in the EPM and OF tests.

In addition, a combination of SteLL at 1 mg/kg and a subeffective dose of diazepam (0.5 mg/kg) was administered 15 min before EPM and OF tests to assess the efficacy of combined therapy ( $n = 6$ ).

#### 4.4. The Effect of the Carbohydrate-Recognizing Domain (CRD) on the Anxiolytic Effect of the Lectin

To determine whether the effect of the lectin was dependent on the CRD of the lectin, the CRD was blocked by dissolving the lectin (4 mg/kg) in a PBS buffer containing 0.5 mg/kg of casein (a glycoprotein that inhibits SteLL hemagglutinating activity), and the solution (SteLL + casein) was kept at 37 °C for 30 min before being administered to the animals ( $n = 6$ ). The control group received only casein ( $n = 6$ ). The OF and EPM were then performed 30 min after treatments.

#### 4.5. Open Field (OF) Test

The OF apparatus consisted of a wooden box measuring 40 × 60 × 50 cm [18]. The floor of the arena was divided into twelve equal squares. The number of squares crossed with all paws (crossing) and the number of times the animal was supported only on its hind legs (rearing) were counted in a 5-min session [44]. Each animal was placed individually and carefully on the apparatus. The apparatus was sanitized between each animal so that there was no interference of smells. The anxiolytic activity was recognized through the alteration in the rearing responses of mice and the alterations in the number of crossings [45].



#### 4.6. Elevated Plus Maze (EPM) Test

Anxiolytic-like behavior was evaluated using the EPM task as previously described [19]. The EPM consisted of two opposite open arms ( $50 \times 10$  cm), crossed with two closed walls of the same dimensions, with 40 cm high walls. The arms were connected with a central square of  $10 \times 10$  cm and the entire maze was placed 50 cm above the ground. The animals were placed on the central platform of the maze in front of an open arm. The animal had 5 min to explore the apparatus, and the time spent and the number of entries into open and closed arms were recorded [46]. Each animal was placed individually and carefully in the center, facing the open arm. The apparatus was thoroughly cleaned with 30% ethanol between each session. An increase in the time spent in the closed arms by mice was interpreted as anxiolytic behavior.

#### 4.7. Statistical Analysis

Comparisons between the experimental and control groups were performed by one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) followed by the Bonferroni test. A value of  $p < 0.05$  was considered significant. All statistical procedures were carried out using PRISMA Statistic software version 8.0.

### 5. Conclusions

Overall, our results indicate that SteLL plays a flourishing role as an anxiolytic agent whose efficacy is dependent on monoaminergic signaling but not on the lectin CRD. Further studies must explore other signaling molecules involved in SteLL neuromodulation as well as the effects of this lectin on the psychological disorders.

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**Institutional Review Board Statement:** The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and approved by the Ethics Committee of the Federal University of Pernambuco (protocol code 0010/2021, 6 May 2021).

**Informed Consent Statement:** Not applicable.

**Data Availability Statement:** Data is contained within the article.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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4.2 A lectina da folha de *Schinus terebinthifolia* (SteLL) reduz a imobilidade de camundongos no teste de suspensão da cauda dependente da sinalização monoaminérgica e do óxido nítrico

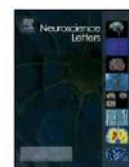
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## Research article

# The lectin from *Schinus terebinthifolia* leaf (SteLL) reduces immobility of mice on the tail suspension test dependent on the monoaminergic and nitric oxide signaling

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## ABSTRACT

Depression underlies a common psychiatric disorder that has been rising in the diagnosis of long-term disabilities worldwide. Natural products have been studied as an antidepressant and anxiolytic agents aiming to make available new options for the daily basis treatment of those psychological disorders. SteLL is a lectin extracted from *Schinus terebinthifolia* leaf that has been revealed as an antimicrobial, immunomodulatory, antitumor, and antinociceptive agent. Nonetheless, the efficacy of SteLL in the treatment of depression has not yet been explored. In view of this, the aim of this study was to investigate the effect of SteLL in an acute protocol for symptoms of depression using the tail suspension test (TST) to assess despair. Administration of SteLL (1, 2 e 4 mg/kg) significantly diminished the immobility time of animals in the TST and this anti-immobility action was dependent on the carbohydrate-recognizing domain (CRD) since the prior incubation with casein (an inhibitor of SteLL carbohydrate-binding property) blocked the effect. SteLL effect was also reversed by pre-treatment with pharmacological antagonists of  $\alpha$ 2-adrenoceptor, 5-HT<sub>2A/2C</sub> serotonin receptor, and D1 dopamine receptor as well as by a selective inhibitor of iNOS (aminoguanidine). L-arginine, a precursor of NO, potentiated SteLL anti-immobility effect. In a subacute evaluation, the anti-immobility effect of SteLL persisted after seven days of treatment. Our findings suggest a role of SteLL in the modulation of depression mostly through monoaminergic and nitric oxide signaling.

## 1. Introduction

Depression is a severe psychiatric condition with a short lifetime prevalence worldwide and is the leading cause of disability and one of the foremost economic burdens [1,2]. Despite the fact that psychological diseases pertain to a vast field of research and pharmaceutical investments, the treatment is partially inefficient due to patients' inaccurate response to all available therapies [3,4]. In addition, more than 75 % of people in low- and middle-income countries do not have the opportunity for reasonable therapy [5]. The medical approach has its ground, but not only, in the enhancement of monoaminergic (dopamine, serotonin, and noradrenaline) expression [6].

Natural products have increasingly become popular and scientifically accepted for the daily treatment of depression [7–11]. Herbal products have historically delivered more effective cost-benefit outcomes with fewer unwanted side effects. Further, the combination of natural products with available commercialized medications has revealed a superior therapeutic value compared with single products [10, 12].

Lectins are proteins with at least one non-catalytic domain, which interacts with carbohydrates, including cell surface glycoconjugates, being able to modulate a variety of processes. Lectins have demonstrated intricate activity in the central nervous system (CNS) as neuro-protectors, playing a role in the neuroplasticity mechanisms [13,14]

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and emotional disorders [9,15–17], eliciting future alternatives for the treatment of these conditions.

Stell is a lectin from leaves of *Schinus terebinthifolia* (Anacardiaceae), a tree also known as "aroeira-da-praia", "aroeira-vermelha" or "pimenta-rosa". The Stell purification procedure was defined by Gomes et al. [18]. Until now, the characterization studies of Stell revealed that it is a chitin-binding lectin with a native molecular mass of 12.4 kDa, isoelectric point (pI) of 5.7, and sequence similarities with ATP synthase and F1-ATPase from plants [19,20]. In electrophoresis under denaturing conditions (SDS-PAGE), Stell appears as a single polypeptide band of ca. 14 kDa [18,21], suggesting that it is a monomeric lectin. The carbohydrate-binding domain of Stell is able of recognizing oligosaccharide moieties of the glycoproteins fetuin, ovalbumin, and casein, as well as glycans present at the surface of *Cryptococcus* cells [19,22].

*In vitro* assays, Stell has displayed antimicrobial activity against human pathogens [18] as well as anti-infective action against *Staphylococcus aureus* [23]. Stell also displayed immunomodulatory activity on mouse splenocytes [20]. The treatment with Stell in animals has revealed a reduction in the development of sarcoma 180, with the suggestion of an antiangiogenic effect [21]. Santos et al. [24] confirmed the antiangiogenic action of Stell using an *in vivo* model of the yolk sac membrane of *Coturnix japonica* embryos. Finally, Stell showed antinociceptive activity mediated by delta-opioid receptors [22]. This central antinociceptive effect of Stell has raised the interest to explore the role of this lectin in neurological conditions. Recently, it was reported that Stell displayed an anxiolytic-like effect in mice dependent on monoaminergic signaling [25].

As a fact, depression treatment does not have optimal and affordable coastwise and does not show benefits for the majority of patients. Thus, in this study, we evaluate the role of Stell in depression using acute and subacute treatments and the tail suspension test (TST). Furthermore, we investigated whether the lectin effect involves monoaminergic and nitric oxide pathways.

## 2. Materials and methods

### 2.1. Animals

The animals were provided by the bioterium of the Instituto Cezo Asami (ILKA) of the Universidade Federal de Pernambuco (UFPE). Male Swiss mice weighing 25–35 g, from 4 to 5 weeks, were maintained at room temperature (22–27 °C) with free access to water and food, under a 12:12 h light–dark cycle (lights on at 7 am). All manipulations were conducted in the light phase between 9 am and 5 pm. The procedures were approved (no. 0015/2021) by the local Ethics Committee for Animal Use of UFPE.

### 2.2. Purification of lectin

Leaves of *S. terebinthifolia* were collected on the campus of the UFPE in Recife, Brazil, according to authorization no. 72,024 (SISBIO) of the Instituto Chico Mendes de Conservação da Biodiversidade (ICMBio) of the Brazilian Ministry of the Environment. This research was entered (A37C1E4) in the Sistema Nacional de Gestão do Patrimônio Genético e do Conhecimento Tradicional Associado (SisGen). Taxonomic identification was performed in the herbarium of the Instituto Agronômico de Pernambuco (Recife, Brazil), where a voucher specimen (no. 73,431) is archived. Stell was isolated according to Gomes et al. [18]. The leaves were dried at 28 °C for 3 days and then grounded in a multiprocessor until the flour was obtained. The flour was homogenized (16 h, 4 °C) with 0.15 M NaCl in the proportion of 10 % (w/v). The extract was obtained after centrifugation (15 min, 3,500 g, 4 °C) and loaded onto a chitin column equilibrated with 0.15 M NaCl. The adsorbed proteins (Stell) were eluted with 1.0 M acetic acid and dialyzed against dis-

tilled water for 6 h. The homogeneity of Stell was assessed by polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis (PAGE) (12 % w/v) in the presence of sodium dodecyl sulfate (SDS) according to Laemmli [26]. The quantitative determination of proteins was performed according to Lowry et al. [27] using the bovine serum albumin standard curve (31.25–500 µg/mL).

### 2.3. Hemagglutinating activity (HA) assay

The carbohydrate-binding capacity of the lectin was identified by the hemagglutinating activity (HA) assay [19]. The HA was recorded as the reciprocal value of the highest sample dilution that promoted full agglutination of erythrocytes. In order to choose the best carbohydrate to be used to block the carbohydrate-recognizing domain (CRD) of Stell, the HA assay was performed using lectin sample previously incubated with the glycoprotein (0.5 mg/mL) casein, which was previously demonstrated to be an inhibitor of Stell HA.

### 2.4. Determination of the influence of the carbohydrate-binding domain of the lectin

To determine whether the effect of the lectin is dependent on the CRD, the lectin (4 mg/kg) was dissolved in PBS buffer containing 0.5 mg/mL of casein, and the solution (Stell + casein) was kept at 37 °C for 30 min before the experiments. The groups were divided in: PBS, casein, Stell 4 mg/kg, Stell pre-incubated with casein. The drugs were administered 30 min before the test.

### 2.5. Acute treatment

Stell was administered to mice by the intraperitoneal (i.p.) route in three different doses: 1, 2, and 4 mg/kg. The doses of Stell used were based on Lima et al. [25]. Stell was diluted with PBS (phosphate-buffered saline). The control group was treated with the vehicle (PBS). Thirty minutes after the Stell injection, the animals were submitted to the TST to test immobility and to the open field to test disorders of movement, as described below. Fluoxetine (10 mg/kg) was chosen as a positive control. In order to evaluate a possible effect between Stell (1 mg/kg) and a sub-effective dose of fluoxetine (5 mg/kg), fluoxetine was co-administered with Stell 30 min before the TST. The doses of the drugs used in this study were selected on the basis of literature data [15,28].

To assess whether the activity of Stell was dependent on monoaminergic or nitric oxide signaling, we administered (i.p.) the following pharmacological inhibitors of the respective receptors/pathways 15 min before Stell administration: a non-selective antagonist of  $\alpha$ 2-adrenoceptor (yohimbine; 1 mg/kg), a 5-HT2A/2C serotonin receptor antagonist (ketanserin; 5 mg/kg), a D1 dopamine receptor antagonist (SCH 23390; 0.05 mg/kg), a non-selective inhibitor of nitric oxide synthase (L-NAME; 10 mg/kg), an inhibitor of iNOS (aminoguanidine; 50 mg/kg) and a precursor of NO (L-arginine; 750 mg/kg). The drugs were dissolved in PBS. All drugs were obtained from Sigma-Aldrich and were prepared fresh on the day of testing.

### 2.6. Evaluation of the subacute antidepressant effect of lectin

To test the subacute antidepressant effect of Stell, animals (n = 6/group) received lectin (4 mg/kg) or vehicle (PBS) or fluoxetine (10 mg/kg) intraperitoneally for 7 days once a day. The TST was performed on the first and last day of treatment.

### 2.7. Tail suspension test (TST)

The TST is a predictive test commonly used methodology for measuring the effects of drugs on depression-like symptoms in animal mod-



els. The test is observational and evaluates moments of alternation of the animal. The animals are suspended by the tail and secured with adhesive tape, 30 cm above the ground [29]. Each group consisted of six animals ( $n = 6$ ). The immobility of experimental animals was measured for 5 min and the following parameters were quantified: immobility time (defined as being hung by the tail without engaging in any active behavior), latency for the first immobility, number of immobility events, and agitation time.

### 2.8. Open field

To evaluate the effects of SteLL on the locomotive and exploratory behavior, the animals were allocated to an open-field test [30]. The apparatus consists of a wooden box measuring  $40 \times 60 \times 50$  cm. The floor of the arena was divided into 12 equal squares. The number of squares crossed with all paws (crossing) was counted in a 5-min session [31]. Each group consisted of six animals ( $n = 6$ ) and they were placed individually and carefully on the apparatus. The apparatus was sanitized between each animal so that there was no interference of smells.

### 2.9. Statistical analysis

Comparisons between experimental and control groups were performed by one-way ANOVA followed by Bonferroni's multiple comparisons tests. A value of  $p < 0.05$  was considered significant. All statistical procedures were carried out using PRISMA Statistic software version 3.0. Data were expressed as a mean of replicates  $\pm$  SEM.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Purification of SteLL

The SDS-PAGE revealed a single polypeptide band of ca. 14 kDa in the SteLL samples used in the present work (Fig. 1A). SteLL showed a hemagglutinating activity of 32, which was abolished when this lectin was previously incubated with casein (Fig. 1B).

### 3.2. Single SteLL treatment decreased the immobility of mice in the TST

The results depicted in Fig. 2 show the effect of the single treatment of mice with SteLL i.p. in the immobility time in the TST. One-way

ANOVA revealed a significant effect of the treatment ( $F = 6.155p < 0.0005$ ). Post hoc analyses indicated that the treatment of mice with SteLL (1, 2 e 4 mg/kg) and combined therapy with SteLL (1 mg/kg) and a sub-effective dose of fluoxetine (5 mg/kg) produced a significant reduction in the immobility time in the TST (Fig. 2A) and enhanced agitation time compared to control (Fig. 2D). There was no difference in the immobility latency (Fig. 2B) or in the number of times the animals were immobile (Fig. 2C) among the groups. The administration of SteLL did not alter the locomotor activity of mice in the open-field test (Fig. 3). In line with this view, the results suggest the efficacy of SteLL to minimize depressive distress. In general, the administration of SteLL did not produce signs of toxicity in mice (convulsion, stereotyped behavior, or ataxia, for example).

### 3.3. The anti-immobility effect of SteLL is dependent on the carbohydrate-recognizing domain (CRD)

Casein neutralized the hemagglutinating activity of SteLL (Fig. 1B) and studies performed in our laboratory showed that this glycoprotein did not affect the locomotor activity of mice in the open field test (data not shown).

Fig. 4 lodged that the previous lectin incubation with casein blocked the anti-immobility effect in the TST produced by SteLL (4 mg/kg). One-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect of the treatment ( $F = 9.66p < 0.001$ ). Post hoc analyses indicated that the time of immobility in the SteLL-treated group (4 mg/kg) was statistically different from the control while no difference was found in the group treated with the lectin pre-incubated with casein.

### 3.4. The anti-immobility effect of SteLL is dependent on monoaminergic and nitric oxide pathways

In order to investigate whether the antidepressant-like effect of SteLL in the TST was associated with monoaminergic and nitric oxide pathways, mice were pre-treated with different drugs before lectin administration. All these drugs did not affect the locomotor activity of mice in the open field test, as demonstrated in an investigation conducted by our group (data not shown).

The pretreatment of mice with yohimbine ( $F = 12.55, p < 0.0001$ ) (Fig. 5A), 5-HT<sub>2A/2C</sub> (Fig. 5B) ( $F = 7.41, < 0.0004$ ), SCH (Fig. 5C) ( $F = 5.42, p < 0.0028$ ), and aminoguanidine (Fig. 5E) ( $F = 6.57, p < 0.0009$ ) prevented the effect of SteLL (4 mg/kg) in the TST. On the other hand, L-NAME (Fig. 5D) did not modify the effect of SteLL in the test. Moreover, L-arginine, potentiated the effect of SteLL in the TST (Fig. 4F) ( $F = 15.01, p < 0.0001$ ).

### 3.5. Subacute anti-immobility effect of SteLL

The results show that the reduction in the total immobility time promoted by SteLL and SteLL plus fluoxetine persisted after seven days of treatment compared to the control (Fig. 6A and B) (day 0:  $F = 1.91, p < 0.0001$ ; day 7:  $F = 7.44, p < 0.0001$ ). No differences were found regarding the number of immobility events or the latency for the first immobility among groups (Fig. 6C and D). Finally, the agitation time was enhanced in all groups compared to the control (Fig. 6G and H) (day 0:  $F = 10.40, p < 0.0001$ ; day 7:  $F = 7.44, p < 0.0001$ ).

## 4. Discussion

Depression is a psychological multifactorial disease with a robust prevalence and economic burden worldwide. However, the therapy elicits only mild efficacy with roughly 30 % of responsiveness among patients and also induces a myriad of side effects [32–35]. In line with this view, the attention given to the use of natural products to treat psychological disorders has been gaining ground in the last decades. Lima

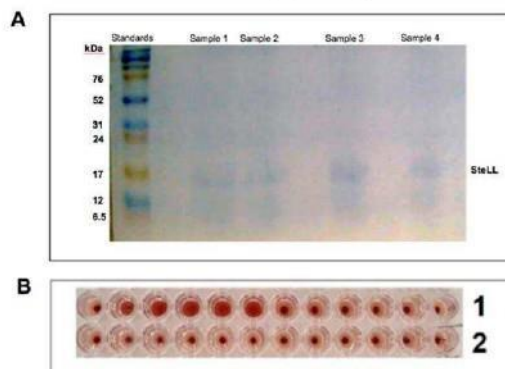


Fig. 1. Evaluation of *Schinus terebinthifolia* leaf lectin (SteLL) homogeneity and carbohydrate-binding ability. (A) SDS-PAGE of SteLL samples used in the present work, revealing a single polypeptide band of ca. 14 kDa. (B) The hemagglutinating activity of SteLL (1) was neutralized when the lectin was previously incubated with casein (2) before the addition of rabbit erythrocytes.

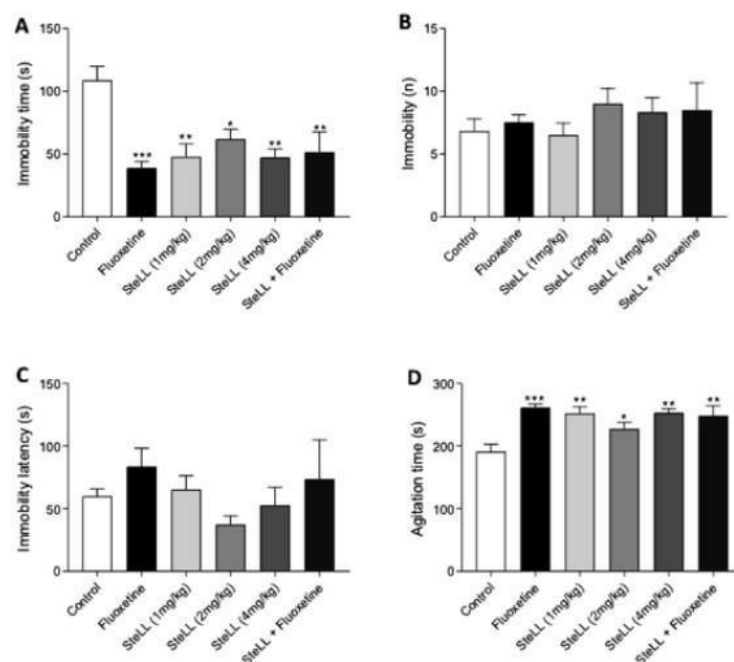


Fig. 2. Effects of SteLL (1, 2, and 4 mg/kg) i.p. treatment on immobility time of animals measured in the TST. Fluoxetine (10 mg/kg) was used as a positive control. A significant effect was observed with all the tested doses of lectin and with combined therapy with a sub-effective dose of fluoxetine (5 mg/kg) administered with the smaller dose of SteLL (1 mg/kg). A represents the total immobility time of mice in the TST; B the number of immobility events; C the latency of first immobility; D the overall time of mice agitation. The experiments were conducted 30 min after SteLL or fluoxetine or PBS administration. The statistical analysis included ANOVA followed by the Bonferroni post hoc test. \* =  $p < 0.05$ , \*\* =  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* =  $p < 0.0001$  compared to control.

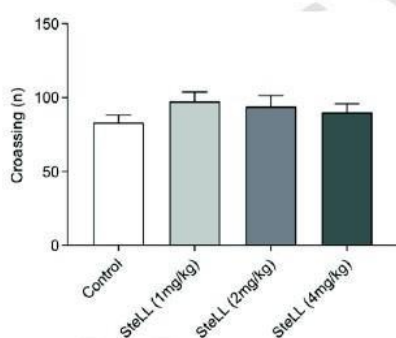


Fig. 3. Effects of SteLL (1, 2, and 4 mg/kg) i.p. treatment on the number of crossings in the open field test. No differences were observed between the groups.

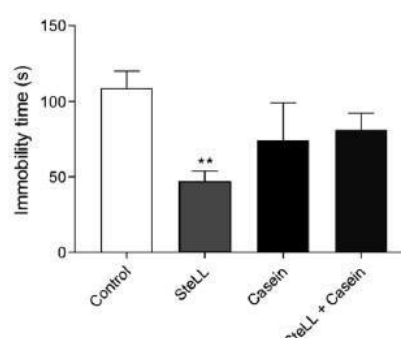


Fig. 4. The anti-immobility effect of SteLL is dependent on the carbohydrate-recognizing domain. Results are expressed as means  $\pm$  SEM ( $n = 6$ ). \*\* $p < 0.01$  indicates a significant difference between treatments compared to control according to ANOVA followed by Bonferroni's test.

et al. [25] reported that the lectin extracted from *Schinus terebinthifolia* leaf has an anxiolytic-like effect and, in the present study, the antidepressant effects of SteLL have been suggested.

The homogeneity of SteLL samples was confirmed by SDS-PAGE, which showed a profile similar to previously reported [18,19,21]. As aforementioned in 'Introduction', SteLL appears as a single polypeptide band of ca. 14 kDa in SDS-PAGE, and this method has been routinely employed by us to check the SteLL isolation. This is ratified by previous data that confirmed that this lectin has a native molecular mass of ca. 12.4 kDa in gel filtration chromatography [20] and appears as a single 14-kDa spot with pI 5.7 in 2D-electrophoresis [19], indicating that the

polypeptide band seen in SDS-PAGE has the same weight of the native form (and do not correspond to dissociated subunits) and that there is no mixture of isoforms.

Several cell receptors found in the central nervous system are glycosylated, including those involved in monoaminergic signaling. For example, the 5-HT<sub>2A/2C</sub> receptor contains five potential *N*-linked glycosylation sites on the extracellular N terminus [36];  $\alpha$ 2-adrenoreceptor presents extracellular amino-terminal segment with sites for asparagine-linked glycosylation [37]; and D1 receptors contain oligomannose- and complex-type glycans [38]. In addition, Lima et al. [25] re-



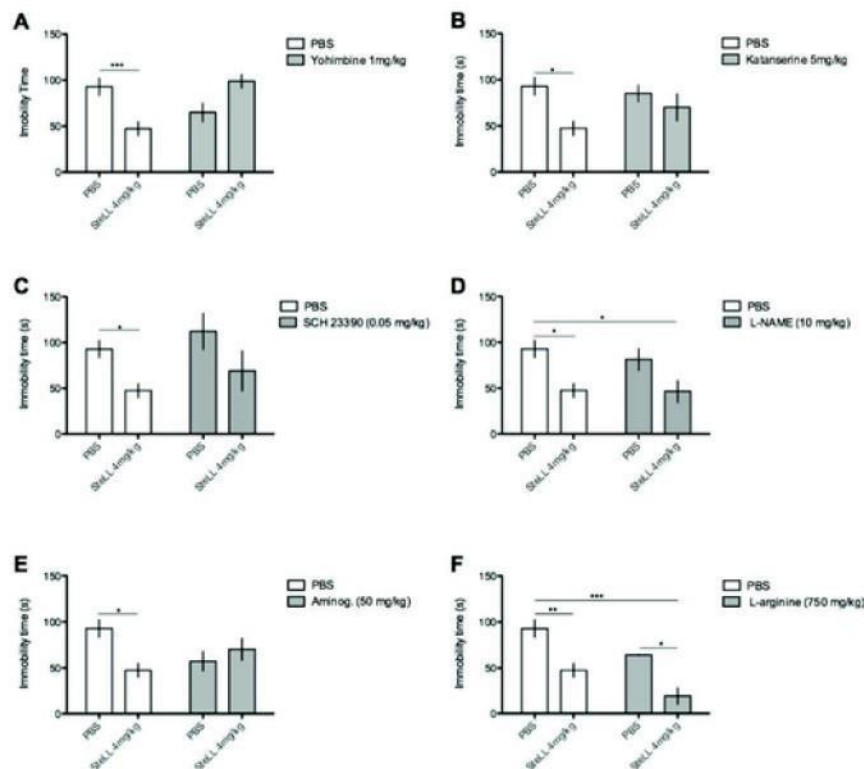


Fig. 5. The antidepressant-like effect of SteLL in the TST is associated with monoaminergic and oxid nitric pathways. The pre-treatment with the non-selective antagonist of  $\alpha_2$ -adrenoceptor (yohimbine; 1 mg/kg) (5A), the 5-HT<sub>2A/2C</sub> serotonin receptor antagonist (ketanserin; 5 mg/kg) (5B), the D1 dopamine receptor antagonist (SCH 23390; 0.05 mg/kg) (5C), an inhibitor of iNOS (aminoguanidine; 50 mg/kg) (5E) prevented the anti-immobility effect of the SteLL (4 mg/kg) in the TST, but the effect was not prevented by the non-selective inhibitor of nitric oxide synthase (L-NAME; 10 mg/kg) (5D). The precursor of NO (L-arginine; 750 mg/kg) (5F) potentiated SteLL anti-immobility effect. The antagonists or PBS (grey bar) were administrated 15 min before SteLL or PBS administration (white bar). The experiments were conducted 30 min after SteLL or fluoxetine or PBS administration. The statistical analysis included Two-way ANOVA followed by Turkey's post hoc test. \* =  $p < 0.05$ , \*\* =  $p < 0.01$ . \*\*\* $p < 0.0001$  compared to control.

ported that antagonists of monoamine receptors inhibited the anxiolytic-like effect of SteLL in the elevated plus maze test. Therefore, we hypothesized that SteLL could also interact with such signaling to exert the observed antidepressant action. Indeed, the anti-immobility effect produced by SteLL was dependent on monoaminergic pathways since pre-treatment with yohimbine, ketanserin, and SCH 23390 prevented SteLL effect on immobility in the TST. In concordance, the involvement of the monoaminergic pathway in the anti-depressant role of lectins has been stated before [17]. Our results encourage further studies describing how the lectin structure-activity relationship modulates monoaminergic signaling.

The TST persists as one of the most used tools for screening antidepressants. It is quite sensitive and classical antidepressive agents have been shown a lack motivation to escape the aversive situation (immobility) when administered acutely and chronically [39,40]. The reduction in the immobility time in the TST elicited by SteLL was not accompanied by changes in the locomotory activity assessed in the open-field test.

Two trials of thoughts enlighten the involvement of the serotonergic system in the antidepressant-like action of SteLL. Firstly, the pre-treatment with ketanserin prevented the anti-immobility effect of SteLL

in the TST. Secondly, the results confirm an effect on immobility time in mice treated with combined therapy of a small dose of SteLL (1 mg/kg) and a small sub-effective dose of fluoxetine (5 mg/kg), a serotonin reuptake inhibitor, vastly used for the treatment of depression. The effect of natural compounds with a sub-effective dose of clinically used antidepressive has been suggested not only to facilitate the pharmacological properties of compounds [41] but also for the development of fast onset of new substances that potentially may treat psychological-like disorders [42]. Nevertheless, further studies must address the pharmacological properties of the combined treatment as much as evaluate whether the efficacy of the therapy is limited to the experimental paradigm used here.

Deregulation of the NO system in stress-related disorders has been addressed in the literature [43]. Nitric oxide synthase (NOS) inhibitors have been disclosed with an antidepressant-like effect profile [44]. To add to that, the inhibition of inducible NOS (iNOS) decreases inflammatory cytokines and oxidative stress while inducing neuroprotection [45, 46]. Even though studies have been associating the production of NO with the development of depression, some others suggest that NO may potentiate the activity of antidepressants [47]. In the present study, we have shown that the inhibitor of iNOS (aminoguanidine) prevented the



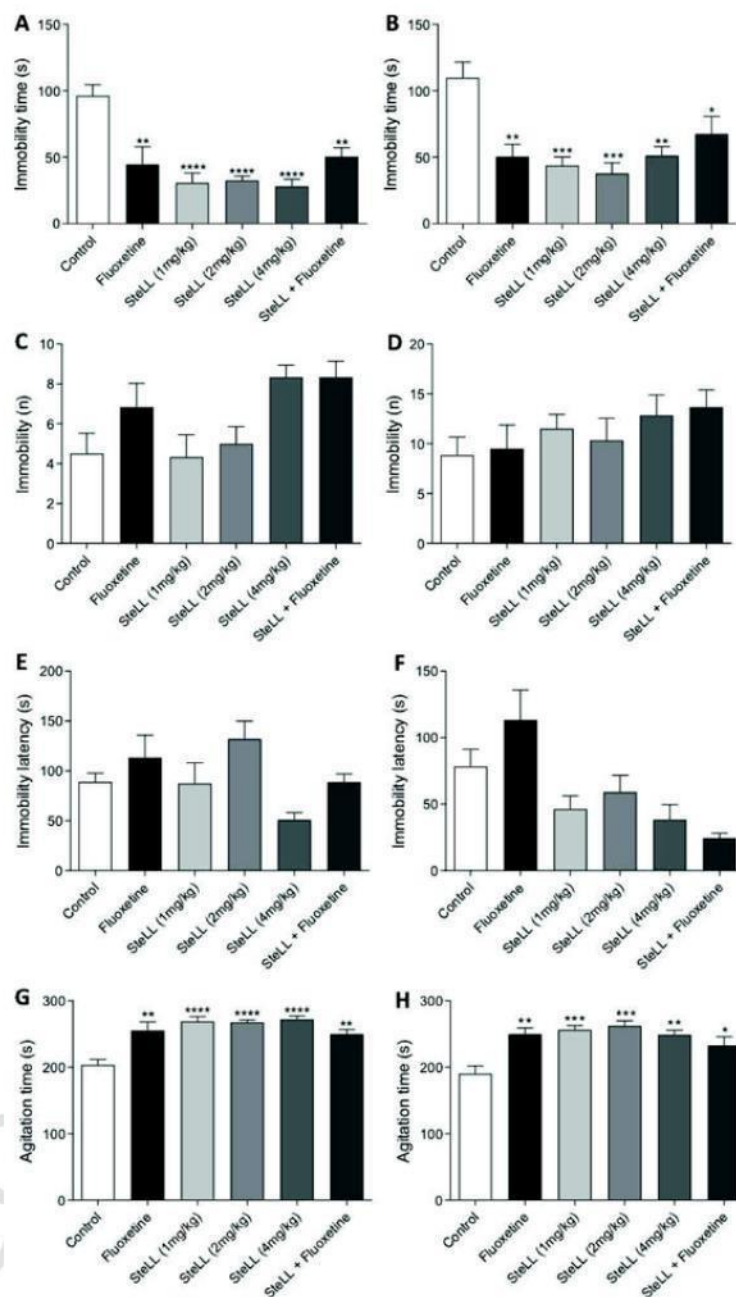


Fig. 6. Subacute effects of *M. oleifera* seed water-soluble lectin SteLL in mice evaluated on the tail suspension test (TST). Mice were treated intraperitoneally with PBS (control), fluoxetine (10 mg/kg), SteLL (1, 2, and 4 mg/kg), and SteLL (1 mg/kg) + fluoxetine (5 mg/kg) for seven days. The test was performed on the first (A, C, E, G) and the last day (B, D, F, H). Results are expressed as means  $\pm$  SEM (n = 6). \*P < 0.05, \*\*P < 0.01, \*\*\*P < 0.001 indicate significant differences between treatments compared to control according to ANOVA followed by Bonferroni's test.

lectin anti-immobility effect in the TST and that the effect was potentiated by the precursor of NO (L-arginine). On one hand, SteLL has been shown to induce the bactericidal action of macrophages towards *S. aureus*, increasing NO levels and other cytokines such as IL-6, IL-10, IL-17A, and TNF- $\alpha$  [23]. On the other hand, in a culture of splenocytes treated with SteLL, the immunological effect of the lectin induced a slight decrease in the levels of NO [20]. Here, we suggested that the anti-immobility effect of SteLL was also dependent on the NO expression, however, it appears to be selective to iNOS expression, an isoform induced by the release of inflammatory cytokines [48,49]. Since the anti-immobility effect of SteLL was not prevented by the non-selective inhibitor L-NAME. Accordingly to Lima et al. [23], the administration of SteLL may enhance inflammatory molecules and NO due to enhanced iNOS expression. Nevertheless, the exact mechanism underlying this effect still lies far ahead. One future point would be to evaluate whether SteLL modifies the expression of the enzyme itself, tissue specificity, and which signaling downstream of NO expression is influenced by SteLL. Of note, some antidepressants that inhibit the enzymatic activity of NOS have already been evaluated in animals and humans [50].

In another set of experiments, we evaluated whether SteLL CRD would be involved in the antidepressant effects. The carbohydrate-binding specificity of SteLL was previously determined: this lectin binds to chitin and is able of recognizing glycan moieties present in the glycoproteins fetuin, ovalbumin, and casein; however, it did not have the HA inhibited by the free monosaccharide glucose and N-acetylglucosamine [18,19,22]. According to Silva et al. [19], fetuin, ovalbumin, and casein showed similar inhibitory effects on the HA of SteLL as well as on the labeling of *Cryptococcus* cells by conjugates composed of SteLL and quantum dots. Thus, we choose one of them, which was casein, for the experiments performed in the present work. The data confirmed that casein is a glycoprotein that binds and inhibits SteLL HA. The blockage of CRD with casein prevented SteLL anti-immobility activity. Therefore, these results suggested that the action of SteLL was dependent on an unoccupied CRD. Likewise, Marinho et al. [22] also found that the antinociceptive action of SteLL in neurogenic and inflammatory pain was dependent on the CRD since the effect was inhibited when the lectin was previously incubated with ovalbumin. As claimed above, further studies, including the definition of SteLL CRD structure, must be conducted in order to evaluate whether the effect of SteLL was through direct interaction with the glycosylated moieties of monoaminergic and nitergic receptors.

Interestingly, Lima et al. [25] found that the anxiolytic-like effect of SteLL was not prevented when casein-blocked lectin was administered to mice. This suggests that, although both anxiolytic-like and antidepressant actions of SteLL are linked to modulation of monoaminergic signaling, the structure-activity basis of these effects are different as well as there can be other and distinct actors involved in these activities.

## 5. Conclusion

In the present study, the anti-depressive-like effects of the SteLL were revealed. The effect was dependent on monoaminergic and nitric oxide signaling. Furthermore, the results indicate that the CRD of the lectin is required for the anti-immobility activity. Finally, the efficacy of SteLL remained for at least seven days of sub-acute treatment. To extend our data, further studies must explore the efficacy of SteLL in different models of depression as much as evaluate whether the biological activity of SteLL is similar to clinical antidepressants prescribed worldwide.

## Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

## Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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## 5. CONCLUSÕES

- A lectina SteLL exerce atividade do tipo ansiolítica observada a partir do teste de campo aberto e do teste do labirinto em cruz elevada.
- SteLL exerce atividade do tipo antidepressiva observada a partir do teste de suspensão pela cauda, tanto de forma aguda como subaguda.
- O efeito do tipo antidepressivo, mas não o ansiolítico, é dependente do sítio de ligação a carboidratos da lectina.
- Efeito de SteLL é dependente da via monoaminérgica, tanto para sua ação antidepressiva, quanto para seu efeito ansiolítico.
- O efeito do tipo antidepressivo de SteLL é também dependente da via de NO.

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