© September 2025 | IJIRT | Volume 12 Issue 4 | ISSN: 2349-6002

Pesticide exposure and its physiological consequences in freshwater fish Channa punctatus

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***Abstract*—This study investigates the physiological consequences of organophosphates, carbamates and pyrethroids exposure in the freshwater fish Channa punctatus, a fish species commonly found in agricultural water systems. The research focuses on understanding how exposure to these pesticides affects the key physiological parameters that include respiratory rate, enzyme activity, haemoglobin content, growth and behavioural parameters of the fish. The study finds that the pesticides exposure led to significant haemoglobin alterations, suppressed enzyme activities and impaired respiration. Furthermore, the behavioural changes and growth patterns are indicative to threaten the sustainability of Channa punctatus populations in pesticide-contaminated ecosystems. These findings underscore the need for stringent regulations on pesticide use and highlight the importance of regular monitoring to protect aquatic biodiversity.**

***Index Terms*— Pesticides, Channa punctatus, physiological, biochemical, enzyme activity**

I. INTRODUCTION

The increasing use of pesticides in agriculture has raised serious concerns about their environmental impact especially in aquatic ecosystems. Pesticide exposure in freshwater environments is a significant threat to aquatic life including the fishes. Channa punctatus, a widely distributed freshwater fish species in South Asia, is well known for its resilience and ability to adapt to a variety of environmental conditions. C. punctatus, also referred to as the snakehead fish, has been used in multiple research studies to understand the toxicological effects of pesticides on aquatic organisms. Toxicological research studies have revealed that that exposure to organophosphorus pesticides such as monocrotophos, diazinon, and dimethoate can result in significant biochemical and physiological alterations in fish affecting blood plasma, enzyme activities and organ functions (Agrahari et al. 2007; Banaee, et al. 2011).

Research studies have also shown that chronic exposure to pesticides such as γ-HCH (lindane) can influence brain function, serotonin levels and cortisol production leading to impaired physiological responses in fish (Aldegunde et al., 1999). Channa punctatus due to its sensitivity to environmental stressors is an ideal candidate fish species for studying pesticide-induced toxicity. Pesticides like carbofuran and endosulfan not only affect the biochemical parameters of fish but also cause significant histopathological damage including liver and gill alterations (Begum, 2004; Banaee, 2012). Pesticides can disrupt enzymatic processes leading to oxidative stress and altering metabolic pathways essential for normal physiological functioning (Arufe et al., 2007). Moreover, these toxic substances can affect the immune system as evidenced by studies on the immunomodulatory effects of various chemicals on fish (Ahmadi et al., 2012).

The negative effects of pesticides on aquatic organisms are further compounded by their ability to bioaccumulate in the food chain affecting not only the species directly exposed to the chemicals but also those consuming them. The persistent nature of many pesticides such as diazinon, further amplifies their impact on freshwater ecosystems leading to long-term ecological imbalances (Banaee et al., 2012). The impact of pesticide exposure on fish physiology is multifaceted affecting several systems such as the respiratory, digestive, and endocrine systems and potentially leading to behavioural changes that can compromise the fish's survival (Auta et al., 2002;

Benli & Özkul, 2010). Thus, understanding the effects of pesticide exposure on C. punctatus is crucial not only for the conservation of this species but also for maintaining the ecological balance of freshwater ecosystems.

Present research aims to investigate the physiological consequences of pesticide exposure on C. punctatus by assessing various biomarkers including enzyme activity, haematological parameters and histopathological changes. By examining the toxicological impacts of commonly used pesticides on this fish species, the study will contribute to a deeper understanding of the risks posed by pesticides to aquatic life and provide insights into potential mitigation strategies for preserving freshwater biodiversity.

II. METHODOLOGY

The methodology employed in this research aimed at assessing the effects of pesticide exposure on the physiological functions of Channa punctatus in freshwater ecosystems involves several key steps. These steps include the selection of the study area, the acclimatization and exposure of the fish to various pesticides, monitoring their physiological changes and analysing the data. The methodology is designed to ensure a systematic and objective approach to studying the effects of pesticides on the fish focusing on their respiratory function, haematological parameters, enzyme activity, growth rates and behaviour.

Selection of the study area

The study was conducted in the freshwater environment of a selected water body. The study area was located in an agricultural region where pesticide use is prevalent. This made it a suitable location for studying the impact of pesticide contamination on aquatic life.

Fish procurement and their acclimation

Channa punctatus (5–7 cm in length) were procured from a local supplier. The fish were selected based on their size and health assuming that they were free from any visible diseases or injuries. After, the fish were transported to the laboratory in well-aerated water in a plastic bucket.

Now C. punctatus were kept for acclimation for a period of 14 days before the commencement of experiments. During the acclimation and experimental period, the fish were kept in aquaria with dechlorinated water at a temperature range of 26 C to 28 C. The pH of the water was maintained at 7.8 and dissolved oxygen was monitored to ensure optimal conditions for the fish. The fish were fed on small live insects, insect larvae and algae during the acclimation period. Feeding was stopped 24 hours prior to pesticide exposure to ensure that the digestive system of the fish was empty during the experiments.

III. PESTICIDE EXPOSURE

The pesticides selected for the study included organophosphate, pyrethroid, and carbamate, which are commonly used in agriculture and have known toxicity to aquatic organisms. Stock solutions of the pesticides were prepared using distilled water. The pesticide concentration (5mg/L) was randomly selected for exposure assuming that their typical environmental levels would go beyond this limit:

Each pesticide was tested in triplicate with three experimental groups and a control group with no pesticide exposure. The fish were exposed to these pesticide concentrations for 24, 48 and 72 hours.

To minimize stress, the fish were placed individually in experimental troughs containing 5 liters of dechlorinated water. The water in the experimental troughs was changed every 24 hours to avoid pesticide buildup and maintain the correct concentration of pesticides throughout the exposure period. The fish were monitored for signs of toxicity including changes in behaviour, physical appearance and any signs of distress or death.

IV. PHYSIOLOGICAL MONITORING

Throughout the study, the physiological parameters of the fish were monitored at regular intervals to assess the effects of pesticide exposure:

1. Respiratory Rate: The respiratory rate was measured by counting the number of gill movements per minute. This was done using a stopwatch to measure the frequency of gill movements during the exposure period. The respiratory rate was recorded before and after the pesticides exposures.
2. Haematological Parameters: Blood collected from the fish before and after the exposure to different

pesticides was used to determine haemoglobin content using the standard protocol.

3. Enzyme Activity: The activities of acetylcholinesterase, catalase and superoxide dismutase were measured. These enzymes are important indicators of oxidative stress and metabolic function. Tissue samples were collected and analysed for enzyme activity using standard biochemical assays.
4. Growth rate: The growth rate of the fish was measured by recording their body length and weight at the beginning of the experiment and after the exposure period. Growth measurements were taken after expiry every exposure period.
5. Behavioural observations: The behavioural responses of the fish were observed during the exposure period. Changes in swimming patterns, feeding behaviour and overall activity levels were recorded. Any abnormal behaviour such as disorientation, lethargy, or erratic swimming was noted.

V. STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

The data collected from the experiments were analysed using appropriate statistical methods. The mean and standard deviation were calculated for each parameter at each exposure time. The results were subjected to one-way ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) followed by Tukey's test to determine significant differences between the control group and the pesticide-exposed groups and also to compare the means between different groups.

Additionally, regression analysis was used to evaluate the relationship between pesticide concentration and the observed physiological changes.

Ethical considerations

The study adhered to ethical guidelines for the use of animals in research. The fish were handled humanely and all necessary precautions were taken to minimize stress and discomfort. The study was conducted with the approval of the institutional animal ethics committee.

Results and discussion

Most remarkable changes were seen in respiratory rate, haemoglobin content, enzyme activity, growth rate and behavioural parameters of the fish C. punctatus after exposure to various pesticides.

VI. RESPIRATORY FUNCTION

Table 1: Table 1 shows the change in respiratory rate of Channa punctatus after different periods of exposure to various pesticides.

Pesticide Type	Control Group Respiratory Rate (breaths/min)	Organophosphate (5 mg/L)	Pyrethroid (5 mg/L)	Carbamate (5 mg/L)
Initial Respiratory Rate (0h exposure)	30 ± 2	27 ± 3	24 ± 3	22 ± 4
After 24 Hours	32 ± 1	22 ± 2	20 ± 2	18 ± 3
After 48 Hours	33 ± 2	19 ± 1	18 ± 1	15 ± 2
After 72 Hours	34 ± 1	15 ± 3	16 ± 2	13 ± 1

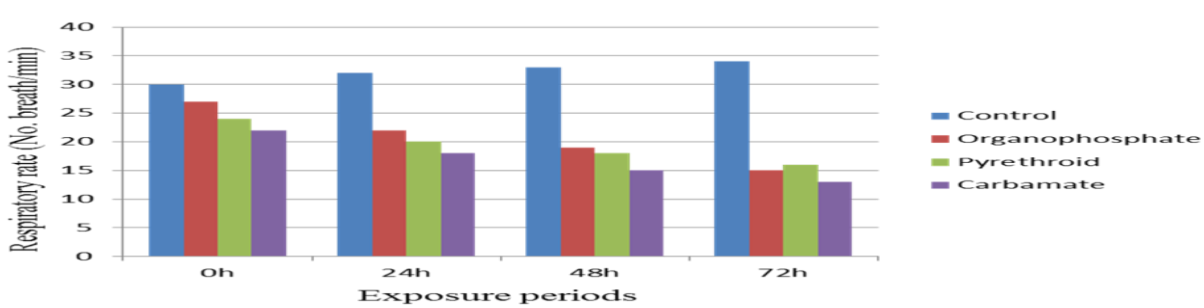

Figure 1. Figure 1 shows the change in respiratory rate of Channa punctatus after different periods of exposure to various pesticides

The respiratory rate of C. punctatus showed a notable decline when exposed to the pesticides. The control group maintained a steady respiratory rate of around 30 breaths per minute throughout the study period. However, exposure to organophosphate, pyrethroid, and carbamate pesticides significantly reduced the fish's respiratory rate especially over a period of 48 and 72 hours. Carbamate exposure led to the most severe decline in respiratory rate, which indicates a potential disruption in the fish's oxygen uptake capacity possibly due to gill damage or neurological impairment induced by pesticide toxicity. The decrease in respiratory rate may perhaps be due to the action of these pesticides on medulla oblongata of the fish brain. Pesticides are further known to disrupt the gills and oxidative metabolism leading to decreased respiratory activity of the fish.

According to Albanis et al. (1998) pesticides affect various biochemical pathways including enzyme inhibition and disruption of cellular signalling. These molecular alterations lead to impaired cellular functions and compromised organ systems in fish. The effects on enzyme activities particularly those involved in detoxification and metabolism have been extensively studied in aquatic organisms exposed to pesticides (Banaee, 2012; Behrens & Segner, 2001).

VII. HAEMOGLOBIN CONTENT

Table 2: Table 2 shows the haemoglobin content in Channa punctatus after different hours of pesticides exposure. Note significant decrease in haemoglobin level after 72 hours of pesticides exposure.

Pesticide Type	Control Group haemoglobin (g/dL)	Organophosphate (5 mg/L)	Pyrethroid (5 mg/L)	Carbamate (5 mg/L)
Initial haemoglobin	12.5 ± 0.5	11.8 ± 0.6	10.7 ± 0.5	9.9 ± 0.7
After 24 Hours	12.7 ± 0.4	10.5 ± 0.5	9.8 ± 0.6	8.5 ± 0.6
After 48 Hours	12.9 ± 0.3	9.7 ± 0.5	9.0 ± 0.4	7.2 ± 0.5
After 72 Hours	13.1 ± 0.4	8.3 ± 0.4	8.0 ± 0.5	6.8 ± 0.4

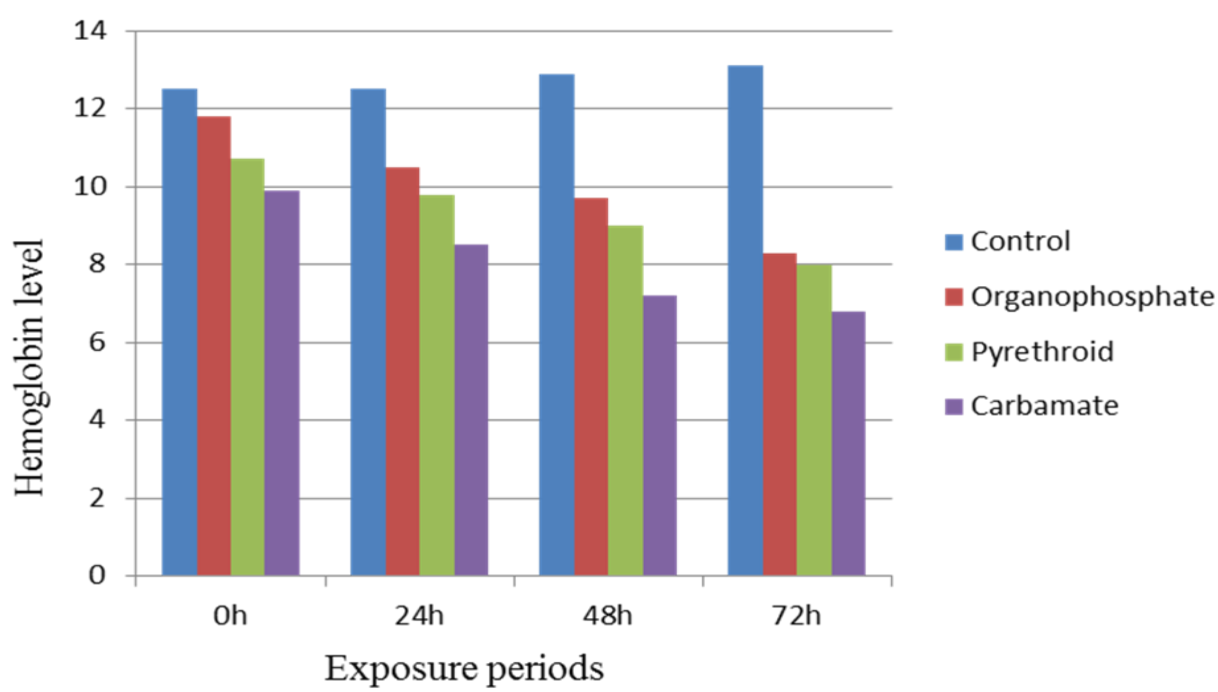

Figure 2. Figure 2 shows the haemoglobin content in Channa punctatus after different hours of pesticides exposure

Exposure to all types of pesticides resulted in a decrease in haemoglobin levels in Channa punctatus. The control group maintained stable haemoglobin levels, but those exposed to organophosphate, pyrethroid, and carbamate pesticides showed significant reductions over time. The most significant decrease in haemoglobin levels was observed in the carbamate-exposed group, which indicates a potential suppression of erythropoiesis (red blood cell production) or increased red blood cell destruction. This can negatively affect the oxygen-carrying capacity of the blood, which, combined with the respiratory issues observed, could further compromise the fish's overall health.

Research studies by Agrahari et al. (2007) highlighted the biochemical changes induced by monocrotophos, an organophosphorus pesticide, in the blood plasma of Channa punctatus. Their findings demonstrated alterations in enzyme activities, which are critical for maintaining the physiological balance of the fish. This study set the stage for further research into the sub-lethal effects of pesticides on the health of aquatic organisms. Similarly, Anees (1978) examined the haematological abnormalities in Channa punctatus exposed to sub-lethal and chronic levels of three organophosphorus insecticides. His research indicated significant changes in blood parameters, which could serve as early indicators of pesticide-induced stress in fish.

VIII. BEHAVIOURAL CHANGES

Table 3: Table 3 shows the behavioural changes in Channa punctatus after different hours of pesticides exposure. Note complete cessation of C. punctatus activity after 72 hours exposure to carbamate.

Pesticide Type	Control Group Behaviour	Organophosphate (5 mg/L)	Pyrethroid (5 mg/L)	Carbamate (5 mg/L)
Normal Behaviour	Active swimming and feeding	Reduced activity, erratic swimming	Disoriented, reduced movement	Lethargic, no feeding
After 24 Hours	Normal behaviour	Slow swimming, occasional darting	Restless, brief periods of immobility	Slow and irregular movements
After 48 Hours	Normal behaviour	Very slow movement, brief periods of immobility	Disorientation, avoiding light	No swimming, lethargic
After 72 Hours	Normal behaviour	Minimal movement, resting on the bottom	Disoriented, staying close to substrate	Complete lack of movement, no interaction with surroundings

The behavioural responses of Channa punctatus to pesticide exposure were observed to deteriorate progressively over time. While the control group exhibited normal swimming and feeding behaviours, pesticide exposure led to significant disruptions. The organophosphate group exhibited slow swimming and erratic darting movements, indicative of neurological disruptions. The pyrethroid group showed increased restlessness and disorientation, while carbamate exposure resulted in lethargy and the cessation of feeding. These behavioural changes suggest that pesticides may interfere with the nervous system of Channa punctatus, leading to reduced physical activity, feeding, and overall health.

Research has shown that chronic exposure to pesticides like γ-HCH (lindane) can disrupt the serotonergic and GABAergic systems in fish, leading to alterations in brain chemistry. Aldegunde et al. (1999) observed such disruptions in rainbow trout (Oncorhynchus mykiss) and suggested that pesticides could have long-lasting effects on the neurological function of aquatic organisms. The effects of pesticides on fish behaviour, including changes in feeding, swimming, and predator avoidance, have also been well documented. Auta et al. (2002) explored the short-term effects of dimethoate on the behaviour of juvenile fish species, including Channa punctatus, and found significant behavioural alterations that were linked to toxicity.

IX. ENZYME ACTIVITY

Table 4: Table 4 shows the enzyme activity in Channa punctatus after different hours of pesticides exposure.

Pesticide Type	Control Group Enzyme Activity (μmol/mg/hr)	Organophosphate (5 mg/L)	Pyrethroid (5 mg/L)	Carbamate (5 mg/L)
Initial Activity	8.5 ± 0.3	8.2 ± 0.2	7.5 ± 0.3	7.3 ± 0.4
After 24 Hours	8.7 ± 0.2	6.5 ± 0.3	6.3 ± 0.2	6.0 ± 0.3
After 48 Hours	8.9 ± 0.1	5.8 ± 0.2	5.5 ± 0.3	5.0 ± 0.3
After 72 Hours	9.0 ± 0.3	5.0 ± 0.2	4.8 ± 0.4	4.2 ± 0.3

Enzyme activity, which is crucial for detoxification and metabolic processes, decreased significantly in Channa punctatus exposed to pesticides. The control group showed stable enzyme activity, while exposure to pesticides resulted in progressive reductions over time. The organophosphate group showed the most pronounced reduction in enzyme activity, indicating that these chemicals severely impair the fish's ability to detoxify and metabolize harmful substances. The pyrethroid and carbamate groups also exhibited reduced enzyme activity, further supporting the conclusion that pesticide exposure disrupts metabolic and enzymatic functions.

X. GROWTH RATE

Table 5: Table 5 shows the growth rate of Channa punctatus after different hours of pesticides exposure.

Pesticide Type	Control Group Growth (cm/day)	Organophosphate (5 mg/L)	Pyrethroid (5 mg/L)	Carbamate (5 mg/L)
Initial Growth	0.4 ± 0.1	0.3 ± 0.1	0.3 ± 0.2	0.2 ± 0.2
After 24 Hours	0.4 ± 0.1	0.2 ± 0.1	0.2 ± 0.2	0.1 ± 0.1
After 48 Hours	0.4 ± 0.1	0.1 ± 0.1	0.1 ± 0.1	0.05 ± 0.1
After 72 Hours	0.4 ± 0.1	0.05 ± 0.1	0.05 ± 0.1	0.03 ± 0.1

The growth rate of Channa punctatus was significantly reduced after exposure to pesticides. The control group showed stable growth rates throughout the experimental period. However, pesticide exposure, particularly to organophosphates, led to drastic reductions in growth, with the organophosphate-exposed group exhibiting the lowest growth rate. Pyrethroid and carbamate exposure also resulted in slower growth compared to the control group, which suggests that pesticides not only affect the metabolic and respiratory functions but also hinder normal growth and development.

The findings of this study demonstrate that pesticide exposure has severe physiological consequences for Channa punctatus. Significant reductions in respiratory function, enzyme activity, haematological health, and growth rates were observed. Behavioural disruptions were also evident, with fish exhibiting signs of neurological impairment. These results highlight the ecological risks posed by pesticide contamination in freshwater ecosystems, emphasizing the need for sustainable pesticide management and the protection of aquatic life.

XI. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the exposure of Channa punctatus to various pesticides has been shown to cause significant physiological consequences affecting multiple biological systems such as the nervous, immune and endocrine systems. These alterations lead to behavioural changes, immunosuppression and reproductive impairments which have serious implications for the health and sustainability of aquatic populations. The findings underscore the necessity for further research into the long-term effects of pesticide exposure on freshwater species and emphasize the urgent need for stricter regulatory measures to control pesticide use, aiming to protect aquatic ecosystems and the biodiversity they support. Effective management strategies, including the promotion of sustainable agricultural practices and the implementation of regular monitoring programs, are essential to mitigate the detrimental impact of pesticides on freshwater organisms like Channa punctatus.

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