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4PURIFICATION OF AZADIRACHTIN VIA SILICA GEL COLUMN CHROMATOGRAPHY

Elda Melwita a , **Yeshitila Asteraye Tsigie** a , **Suryadi Ismadji** b &**Yi- Hsu Ju**

a

3**a Department of Chemical Engineering, National Taiwan University of Science and Technology, Taipei, Taiwan b Department of Chemical Engineering, Widya Mandala Surabaya Catholic University, Surabaya, Indonesia**

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4AZADIRACHTIN VIA SILICA GEL COLUMN CHROMATOGRAPHY Elda Melwita, 1 Yeshitila Asteraye Tsigie, 1 Suryadi Ismadji, 2 and Yi-Hsu

Ju1 1Department

3of Chemical Engineering, National Taiwan University of Science and Technology, Taipei, Taiwan 2Department of Chemical Engineering, Widya Mandala Surabaya Catholic University, Surabaya, Indonesia

& Separation efficiency for purifying azadirachtin from the mixture of neem limonoids was investigated by silica gel column chromatography in this study. The reliability of this method was confirmed by using limonoid powders A and B with initial azadirachtin purities of 18% and 7%, respectively. The silica gel chromatography employed in this study was capable of increasing the azadirachtin purity up to 4-fold with an azadirachtin recovery of approximately 50%. Powders with an azadirachtin content of approximately 50% and 28% were produced from limonoid powders A and B, respectively. Meanwhile, low separation efficiency was produced when starting material contained 50% azadirachtin. Therefore, this method is effective in increasing azadirachtin purity using starting materials with azadirachtin content below 20%. Keywords azadirachtin, column chromatography, limonoids, neem, separation efficiency, silica gel ABBREVIATION EtOAc, ethyl acetate INTRODUCTION Bioactive compounds in neem oil have been known to possess many important properties such as anti-virus, anti-bacterial, and anti-feedant. Some compounds have been investigated as potential pesticide or insec- ticide to fight numerous plants diseases.[1–5] These compounds belong to triterpenoids. The major compounds as reported in literature are azadirachtin (azadirachtin A), salanin, nimbin, 3-tigloylazadirachtol

7Address correspondence to Yi-Hsu Ju, Department of Chemical Engineering, National Taiwan University of Science and Technology, 43 Sec. 4, Keelung Road, Taipei 106-07, Taiwan. E-mail: yhju@ mail.ntust.edu.tw

(azadirachtin B), desacetylnimbin, and desacetylsalanin (azadirachtin D).[1–8] Many other compounds are present in smaller quantities in neem seeds.[9–13] The most prominent compound is azadirachtin, also named azadirachtin A to differentiate it from other azadirachtin related com- pounds, namely, compounds that are structurally related to azadirachtin. Azadirachtin and other structurally related compounds are classified as limonoids. Limonoids from neem possess medium polarity. They can be dissolved in solvents with medium to high polarity such as methanol, ethanol, diethyl ether, dichloromethane, and ethyl acetate. Meanwhile, their solubility in water is very low and they are not soluble in nonpolar solvents such as hexane and petroleum ether. Limonoids have polarities that are very close to each other due to their close similarity in structure. This character- istic produces significant difficulties in the separation of individual limonoids. Purification of azadirachtin from limonoids mixture is commonly car- ried out using column chromatography in either reverse phase or normal phase mode. Several column materials have been investigated to purify aza- dirachtin from neem sources such as silica gel, attapulgite clay, octadecylsi- lane (ODS), and phenyl. The mobile phase usually consists of a mixture of medium polarity solvent such as ethyl acetate or dichloromethane and low polarity solvent such as hexane or petroleum ether for normal phase chro- matography. For reverse phase chromatography, the mobile phase usually is a mixture of water with methanol or acetonitrile. Crude mixtures of limo- noids obtained by conventional pretreatment are usually used as the start- ing material. Combination of several column chromatography methods is required to produce a high purity azadirachtin. In most combinations, high purity (>70%) azadirachtin can be obtained after the application of HPLC method as the final step.[14–21] A simple method to produce a mixture of neem limonoids or limonoid powder has been developed by Melwita et al.[22] Further investigation is required to develop limonoid powders as the potential starting material for neem-based product. In this work, limonoid powder was employed as the starting material for column chromatography purification of azadirach- tin.

16Silica gel was selected as the column stationary phase. Silica gel

chroma- tography itself is a common method in azadirachtin purification. However, information regarding separation efficiency of azadirachtin using silica gel chromatography has been insufficiently reported. Considering the impor- tant role of silica gel chromatography in azadirachtin purification, this work aimed to provide more concise information on separation efficiency of this method.

16**Parameters such as** the **ratio of** silica gel **to sample and**

the mobile phase composition that affect separation efficiency were systematically investigated. 2464 E. Melwita et al. EXPERIMENTAL Materials and Reagents All solvents used were of analytical grade. Silica gel for column chromato- graphy was procured from Silicycle (Quebec, Canada) with the following characteristics: particle size, 60–200 mm; specific surface area, 500 m2=g;

8**pore size, 60 Å; pH 7;** and **water content, 6%.**

The

11**gel was activated by** drying **in an oven at 150 C for 1** hr **to**

remove the adsorbed water. Water for chromato- graphic analysis was purified using a Nanopure purification system (Barn- stead, USA). HPLC grade methanol, ethyl acetate, hexane, and toluene were purchased from Acros (USA). Standards of azadirachtin and salanin were obtained from Sigma Chemicals Co. (USA) and ChromaDex (USA), respectively. Limonoids powders with azadirachtin contents of 18% (A) and 7% (B) were prepared according to the method by Melwita et al.[22] Column Chromatography Column chromatography was performed in a glass column (L i.d. 30 cm 1.5 cm).

8**Slurry of silica gel was** loaded **into the column**

at a predeter- mined silica gel to limonoid powder ratio.

8**The column was** washed **with** the **mobile phase**

prior to sample loading. Isocratic solvent system consists of ethyl acetate-hexane was employed in chromatography process. The sample (200 mg limonoid powder) was dissolved in the mobile phase solvent and loaded into the column. The mobile phase was run through the column by gravity. Fractions of 10 mL each were collected. Each fraction was analyzed for its azadirachtin content using TLC, and fractions containing azadirachtin were pooled together. Into these fractions, hexane was added at a hexane to fraction ratio of 12 (v=v) to induce precipitation. The precipitate was sepa- rated using filter paper (Advantec no. 2) and then dried in an oven at 40 C for 30 min. A white powder was obtained as the final product. Data calcula- tions were performed according to the following formulas: Azadirachtin fractions ð%Þ ¼ Limonoids powder ðg Þ 100% Azadirachtin fractions ðg Þ Azadirachtin purity ð%Þ ¼ Azadirachtin ðg Þ Azadirachtin fractions ðg Þ 100% Azadirachtin recovery ð%Þ ¼ Azadirachtin content in azadirachtin fractions ðg Þ Azadirachtin content in limonoids powder ðg Þ 100% ð1Þ ð2Þ ð3Þ Azadirachtin Analysis Azadirachtin content was analyzed according to the method of Melwita et al.[22] Analysis was performed using a Jasco HPLC PU-2089 (USA) with an UV-Vis detector (model UV-2077 Plus) equipped with a 20 mL Rheodyne injector. A Luna

14**C18(2) column 250 mm 4.6 mm** (Phenomenex, USA) containing **5**

mm particles was used as the stationary phase. Isocratic chroma- tography was performed using Methanol=Water (50:50 v=v) at

14**1 mL=min.** Eluent **was monitored at** 215 **nm. A** standard solution **of**

azadirachtin (1000 ppm)

12**was prepared by dissolving** 0.5 **mg of** azadirachtin **in** 5 **mL** HPLC grade **methanol.** This **standard solution was**

diluted to prepare 10–50 ppm azadirachtin standards for the preparation of calibration curve. Samples were filtered through a 0.2 mm filter (Whatman) before injection. TLC was performed on a silica gel plate (Merck, Germany) according the method of Jarvis et al.[18] The mobile phase used was toluene=methanol (4:1, v=v). After layer development, the plate was dried and dipped in a vanillin solution. The plate was heated with a hot air blower until the colored spots appeared. Azadirachtin was visualized as a green spot and other limonoids appeared as violet spots. Morphology Examination Scanning electron microscopy (FESEM JEOL

JEM 2100F, USA) was used to examine the morphology of powder particles. The samples were prepared on the specimen stubs with two-sided carbon tape and gold coated prior to the imaging process. Particle Size Measurement Particle sizes of powders were measured by the laser diffraction method. The measurements were carried out using a Malvern Zetasizer Nano S90 (Malvern Instruments Ltd, UK) according to the practice guide of particle size characterization published by Jillavenkatesa et al.[23] The sample was dispersed in deionized water with the aid of an ultrasonic probe (Transonic 780=H, Elma) for 5 min. After that, the sample was filtered with a filter paper (Advantec no. 5C). Approximately 1 mL filtrate was put into the sample cell and placed in the measurement chamber. Thermogravimetric (TGA) Analysis TGA analysis was performed using Diamond TG=DTA (PerkinElmer, USA). Approximately 5–6 mg sample was placed in a platinum pan. The sample was heated to 800 C

15**at 10 C=min.** Air **was used as the** heating **gas at a flow rate of 20 mL=min.**

2466 E. Melwita et al. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION Effect of Chromatographic Parameters on Separation Efficiency In this work, separation efficiency of silica gel column chromatography is represented by azadirachtin purity and azadirachtin recovery. Two variables, that is, ratio of silica gel to sample and solvent composition, were investi- gated to produce optimum separation (Table 1). Apparently, the effects of varying parameters on separation efficiency are not very significant. Azadirachtin purity around 50% can be obtained at almost all combinations of parameters. Azadirachtin recoveries obtained are also not significantly different.

5**Normally, separation efficiency will improve by increasing** adsorbent to sample **ratio** due **to**

higher surface area available for interactions. However, this phenomenon was not observed distinctly in this chromatographic sys- tem. The reason may be due to compound characteristics. Limonoids' pola- rities are known to be very close to each other. Therefore,

5**their separations are inherently difficult. In addition,** limonoids **can make strong interactions** with **silica gel due to the existence of polar functional groups.**

Increasing sil- ica gel ratio will increase limonoids' adsorption

5**on silica gel and** reduce **their contents in the eluent.**

Among the major limonoids, nimbin and salanin were eluted earlier than azadirachtin. This indicates the weaker affinity of these compounds to silica gel compared to that of azadirachtin. Among limonoids, azadirachtin B and azadirachtin H have the closest similarity to azadirachtin. As can be seen in Figure 1a, these three compounds appear closely in HPLC chromatogram. At a silica gel to sample ratio of 50 (Figure 1b), the chroma- togram still shows these three compounds. However, as the ratio increases to 100 (Figure 1c), only azadirachtin appears in the chromatogram. Varying solvent polarity only resulted in slightly different separation efficiency. The lower polarity solvent

6**EtOAc=hexane (2:1, v=v)**

was not TABLE 1 Effect of Parameters on Chromatographic Separation Solvent Composition (v=v)a Parameters

6**EtOAc=Hexane (2:1) EtOAc=Hexane** (3 **:1)**

Azadirachtin fractions (%) Azadirachtin purity (%) Azadirachtin recovery (%) 17.40 0.64b 11.27 0.25c 51.74 2.31 54.75 2.45 50.06 4.06 34.28 2.10 40.95 13.25 30.13 53.86 68.55 39.63 0.64 0.25 2.31 2.06 4.06 0.46 aMean SD, data replication at least in duplicate. bRatio of silica gel to sample of 50. cRatio of silica gel to sample of 100. FIGURE 1 HPLC chromatogram of: (a) Limonoids powder, (b) Azadirachtin fractions at ratio silica gel to sample of 50, and (C) Azadirachtin fractions at a ratio of silica gel to sample of 100. capable of significantly improving azadirachtin separation than EtOAc= hexane (3:1, v=v). This illustrates the difficulty in separating azadirachtin from other limonoids due to their small differences in polarity. The advan- tage of using

6**EtOAc=hexane (2:1, v=v)** over **EtOAc=hexane** (3 **:1, v=v)**

is that by using the higher amount of hexane, azadirachtin can be separated from the solvent via precipitation. This step is crucial to avoid heating to remove solvent, which will cause degradation of the thermally unstable azadirachtin. A higher ratio of hexane to EtOAc is beneficial for the precipitation of azadirachtin from EtOAc. Therefore,

9**EtOAc=hexane (2:1, v=v)** is more suitable **as the mobile phase.**

A second chromatography was employed using limonoid powders obtained from the first

17**silica gel column chromatography, with an** azadirach- tin content **of**

about 50%, as the starting material in order to increase the azadirachtin purity further. After investigating the

11**effects of silica gel to** limonoid powder **ratio and** mobile phase composition **on**

the azadirachtin purity and recovery in the product, it was found that the second silica gel column chromatography failed to significantly improve the purity and recovery of azadirachtin in the product (data not shown). Results of chromatography separation indicated that increasing azadirachtin content in sample (limonoids powder) resulted in decreasing separation efficiency. This phenomenon may be caused by the difference in compositions of impurities in samples used in silica gel column chroma- tography. At low azadirachtin purity (below 20%), the sample still contains significant amount of impurities such as salanin which possess large differ- ences in polarity from azadirachtin as shown in Figure 1a. Such impurities can be separated from azadirachtin easily. Thus, azadirachtin content can be raised considerably by using silica gel column chromatography when the initial azadirachtin content in the sample is below 20%. In samples with initial azadirachtin content considerably higher than 20%, the major impu- rities in the sample (such as azadirachtin H and azadirachtin N shown in Figure 1b) have polarities close to that of azadirachtin. When a sample with high azadirachtin content was used, it was very difficult to separate such impurities from azadirachtin by silica gel column chromatography. Hence, poor separation efficiency was obtained. Characteristic of Chromatography Product Fractions produced in the first step chromatography were characterized to determine the chemical and physical properties of compounds in those fractions that contain around 50% azadirachtin. Azadirachtin and other limonoids in the fractions were precipitated from solvents using hexane. The white powder obtained from the precipitation process was character- ized using HPLC to determine its chemical characteristics. Morphology examinations were carried out using SEM and laser diffraction and thermal properties were examined using TGA. HPLC analysis of azadirachtin fractions (Figure 1c) shows the presence of azadirachtin as a single peak. Other compounds cannot be detected within the range of UV wavelength 215–280 nm employed in HPLC analysis. Precipitation of azadirachtin and other limonoids produced fine powders with irregular particle shapes (Figure 2). The average volume diameter of particles is 280 nm as measured by laser diffraction. TGA curve of azadirachtin fractions (Figure 3) shows that the maximum degradation temperature of compounds in the fraction is around 600 C. The majority of compounds begin to degrade at 300 C as indicated by the highest degradation peak. The second degradation peak can be observed at around 500 C. Considering the fact that azadirachtin content in the powder is around 50%, apparently, azadirachtin belongs to the group of FIGURE 2 MORPHOLOGY of azadirachtin fractions. compounds degraded at around 300 C. Thermal properties of other limonoids are unknown. However, close similarity in the structures of limo- noids suggests that they may also degrade at temperatures close to that of azadirachtin. Compounds that degraded at around 500 C probably consist of other terpenoids. Comparison of Chromatographic Purification of Azadirachtin Comparison of separation efficiency in chromatographic purification of azadirachtin is a difficult task. Most literatures did not report the efficiency of their chromatographic method comprehensively. Therefore, the separ- ation efficiency of this work was compared only with results in literatures that provided detailed separation efficiency (Table 2). This chromato- graphic method can produce a similar separation efficiency compared to FIGURE 3 TGA curve of azadirachtin fractions. Downloaded by [UQ Library] at 15:22 21 November 2011 2470 TABLE 2 Comparison of Chromatographic Purification of Azadirachtin Initial Stationary Azadirachtin Ref Phase Mobile phase Chromatography Mode Purity (%) Azadirachtin Purity (%) Azadirachtin Recovery (%) [16] Silica gel EtOAc=Hexane (3:1, v=v) Vacuum liquid chromatography Not reported Not reported Not reported [17] Silica gel Chloroform=Methyl cyanide (3:1, v=v) Flash chromatography Not reported Not reported Not reported [17] ODS Methanol=water (60:40, v=v) Preparative HPLC Not reported Pure Not reported [18] Attapulgite clay Petroleum ether=EtOAc (gradient Flash chromatography Not reported Not reported Not reported elution from 7:3 to 2:8, v=v) [18] Attapulgite clay Petroleum ether=EtOAc (5:5, v=v) Flash chromatography Not reported Pure Not reported [19] [19] [19] [21] Silica gel ODS Silica gel Phenyl C18 Diethyl ether-methanol (49:1, v=v) Methanol=water (3:2, v=v) Isopropanol-hexane (1:3, v=v) Acetonitrile-water (3:7,

12**v=v) Methanol=water (60:40, v=v)**

Flash chromatography Flash chromatography Preparative HPLC Preparative HPLC Preparative HPLC Not reported 7.3 7.3 26 70 9.14 26 70 >99 90 95 61 60 29 88.62 This work Silica gel This work Silica gel This work Silica gel EtOAc=hexane (2:1,

6**v=v=) EtOAc=hexane (2:1, v=v=) EtOAc=hexane** (1 **:1, v=v=)**

Gravity flow chromatography Gravity flow chromatography Gravity flow chromatography 7 18 50 28 50 55 61 50 92 [19] flash chromatography method using ODS column.[19] Azadirachtin purity can be increased around 4-fold of its initial content with a recovery of around 60%. This method was more advantageous because it uses ethyl acetate and hexane as solvents. Azadirachtin can be precipitated easily from solvents. On the other hand, a mixture of methanol and water was used as the mobile phase for chromatographic separation using ODS column. Separation of aza- dirachtin from this mixture was more difficult due to the presence of water. Thus far, high purity azadirachtin (>70%) can be produced only by an HPLC method. Silica gel, phenyl or C18 can be used as the stationary phase. A chromatographic system as employed by Deota et al.[21] gave the best result. Azadirachtin

17**with high purity and recovery can be obtained**

using starting material with low azadirachtin content. Apparently, C18 can give better separation of limonoids compared to other stationary phases. How- ever, reverse phase chromatography requires the use of mobile phases which consist of protic solvents such as methanol and water. Azadirachtin is known to be unstable in these solvents.[24] From this point of view, normal phase chromatography has advantages. Further studies are needed to improve the separation efficiency of this method to the value that is comparable to that of the reverse phase chromatography using C18. CONCLUSION Gravity flow silica gel column

9**chromatography using EtOAc=hexane (2:1, v=v) as the mobile phase**

can increase azadirachtin purity 3- to 4-fold with a recovery of around 50%. The first step chromatography using limonoid powder A (azadirachtin content 18%) and limonoid powder B (azadirachtin content 7%) can produced enriched limonoid powders with azadirachtin content around 50% and 28%, respectively. Further purifi- cation of these products via a second step chromatography was not capable of increasing azadirachtin purity significantly. Close polarities of neem limo- noids are believed to be the reason for the difficulty in their separation using this chromatography system. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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