



Proteomic map of the differentially expressed proteins in the skin of *Ctenopharyngodon idella* against *Aeromonas hydrophila* infection

Shandana Ali^{a,1}, Farman Ullah Dawar^{a,b,1,*}, Waheed Ullah^c, Maizom Hassan^d, Kalim Ullah^a, Zhe Zhao^{b,*}

^a Laboratory of Fisheries and Aquaculture, Department of Zoology, Kohat University of Science and Technology Kohat, 26000, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

^b Jiangsu Province Engineering Research Center for Marine Bio-resources Sustainable Utilization, College of Oceanography, Hohai University, 1 Xikang Road, Nanjing, Jiangsu, 210098, China

^c Department of Microbiology, Kohat University of Science and Technology Kohat, 26000, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

^d Institute of System Biology (INBIOSIS), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600, UKM Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

A. hydrophila

C. idella

DEPs

Immune response

Proteomic profile

Skin mucus

ABSTRACT

The skin mucus of fish is an important part of the innate immune system, which is poorly understood at the proteomic level. The study established a complete map of the proteins in the skin mucus of *Ctenopharyngodon idella* (*C. idella*) and discussed the Differentially Expressed Proteins (DEPs) after *Aeromonas hydrophila* (*A. hydrophila*) infection. Using Label Free Liquid Chromatography-Mass Spectrometry (LC-MS/MS) analysis, a total of 126 proteins were identified as differentially expressed, 89 proteins of which were upregulated, and 37 proteins were downregulated. Functional annotations of DEPs showed that the upregulated proteins in the skin mucus of the treated group were mostly associated with complement system and cytoskeleton proteins, whereas downregulated proteins were associated with metabolism. The key upregulated immune proteins were transferrin variant C, lysozyme g, annexin A11, 26S proteasome non-ATPase regulatory subunit 8, hypothetical protein ROHU_000884, 60S ribosomal L7a, calpain-2 catalytic subunit-like protein, calpain-9-like protein, complement component C9, complement C3, cathepsin S, cathepsin Z, 14 kDa apolipo, heat shock protein and intelectin, whereas, leukocyte elastase inhibitor, annexin A11, C-factor-like protein, biotinidase isoform X1 and epidermal growth factor receptor substrate 15-like were the downregulated proteins. Moreover, we for the first-time report proteins such as coactosin, lamin-B2 and kelch 12, which were never reported in fish. Our study directly pointing out the possible immunological biomarkers in the skin mucus of *C. idella* after *A. hydrophila* treatment. Each of the protein we report in this study could be used as base to establish their mechanism of action during bacterial infection that may contribute to the strategies against bacterial prevention and control in fishes.

Introduction

Bacterial diseases have limited the development and production of the global fish industry. It causes mortality particularly in farmed fish with consequent economic losses [1]. *Aeromonas hydrophila* is a common and major bacterial pathogen in many fish species of the world [2]. *Aeromonas hydrophila* causes abdominal dropsy, hemorrhagic septicemia, and skin lesions in both freshwater and marine fish, and can specifically infect members of the family Cyprinidae [3]. The exact treatments and control of bacterial infection in fish have not yet been

discovered [4]. However, different immune components have been categorized with possible roles against several bacteria [5,6]. Particularly, the roles of fish skin mucus against bacterial infections have been focused and signified [7–9].

Fish skin mucus is composed of lipids, glycoproteins, DNA, RNA and secondary metabolites [10]. It is the first biochemical barrier between the fish and its surrounding that works through skin surface against pathogenic bacteria [11]. The mucus of fish contains a wide range of antimicrobial peptides, proteins, histones, ribosomal proteins, lysozyme, peptidases, actin, complement factors, hemoglobin, lectin,

* Corresponding author.

** Co-corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: farmandawar@kust.edu.pk (F.U. Dawar), zhezhaoh@hhu.edu.cn (Z. Zhao).

¹ These authors contributed equally to this work

immunoglobulins, which contribute to the fish innate immunity [12]. In the skin mucus of *Danio rerio* (*D. rerio*) [13] and *Epinephelus coioides* (*E. coioides*) [14], immunological proteins such as complements, chemokines, and antigen processing proteins were found against bacterial infection. Recently we have shown several immunological proteins including Vitellogenin, Toll-like receptors (TLRs13), Alpha-2 Macroglobulin-like protein, Keratin-like proteins, Calpains, and heat shock proteins in the skin mucus of *Labeo rohita* against *A. hydrophila* infection [15]. However, less information is available about the molecular response of skin mucus of fish against bacterial infections and thus it needs further studies.

Ctenopharyngodon idella (*C. idella*) is an economically important and highly produced farmed freshwater species that is widely distributed in various regions of Asia [2]. Bacterial infections in *C. idella* are evidenced in times and is a threat to their population [16,17]. To understand bacterial infections, host fish mucosal immunity has been focused and explored [11,18–20], for fish mucus is rich in immunological and anti-bacterial proteins [21]. Therefore, this study analyzed the proteomic profile of the skin mucus of *C. idella* after infection with *A. hydrophila*. This comprehensive report will be used as a base for further functional studies of each newly identified protein in the skin mucus of fish. Overall, the study is an effort to understanding of mucosal immune response of fish against bacterial infection that may contribute to the strategies of prevention and control of bacterial disease in fish.

Materials and methods

Collection and maintenance of fish

Initially, all procedures used in this research were approved from the Ethical and Research Committee of Kohat University of Science and Technology (KUST) Kohat, under letter number, KUST/Ethical Committee/1447). Fish with an average weight of 949 ± 10 g were purchased from a fish farm in district Kohat and were acclimatized for two weeks in the Laboratory of Fisheries and Aquaculture, Department of Zoology, KUST. The fish were fed with commercial pellet diet for grass carp and the standard physiochemical parameter of water were maintained. For experimentation, 36 fish were distributed in six rectangular glass aquaria (each with 200 liters + 6 fish) where 3 aquaria (with 18 fish) were considered as a control and three aquaria (with 18 fish) were considered as a treated group. The feces from each aquarium were regularly removed daily and fish were examined for any clinical symptoms.

Bacterial treatment and mucus collection

Previously stored *A. hydrophila* (ON920871) [7] were cultured in Luria Bertani (LB) media overnight at 37°C , and Lethal Dose (LD_{50}) of *A. hydrophila* was determined as per our previous method [15]. Around 1.5×10^9 Colony Forming Unit (CFU) was injected intraperitoneally to each fish in treated group and an equal volume of Phosphate Buffer Saline (PBS) was injected to each fish in the control group. Skin and body lesions and hemorrhages were observed in the bacterial treated fish whereas no such symptoms of infection were observed in the fish of control group.

After 48 h, fish in each group were anesthetized with 200 mg/L tricaine methane sulfonate (MS-222) (Sigma-Aldrich; purchased from Afnan Traders, Rawalpindi, Pakistan) washed twice with dd water, and were put in a sterile tray. The lateral sides of fish were gently scraped with a sterile slide with no skin dent or debris. Skin mucus from 18 fish (6 fish per aquarium) treated with *A. hydrophila* was the treated sample and 18 fish (6 fish per aquarium) treated with PBS was the nontreated sample. Mucus samples were collected in replicates (3 samples of each treated and control group) and labeled as T-CI 1-3, and NT-CI 1-3 respectively. The sample was flash frozen in liquid nitrogen and sent to Malaysia Genome and Vaccine Institute (MGVI) Jalan Bangi, 43,000

Kajang, Selangor, Malaysia for lyophilization.

Protein extraction

For protein extraction, the preserved mucus was diluted with 1 mL of PBS and were sonicated (2×5 s) (SONICS Vibracell VCX750, USA). Then the sample was centrifuged for 30 min at $15,000 \times g$ and the supernatant was collected. A mixture of 10% w/v trichloroacetic acid (TCA) and 0.1 % DL-Dithiothreitol (DTT, Sigma, USA) was added into the sample and incubated for 2 h at -20°C . The sample was again centrifuged at $10,000 \times g$ for 30 min and cold acetone containing 0.1 % DTT was added and incubated for 1 hour at -20°C . The sample was centrifuged (4°C) at $10,000 \times g$ for 30 min, and the pellets obtained were dried for 2–3 min and suspended in rehydration buffer (9.8 M urea, 20 mM DTT).

Protein quantifications and In gel digestion

Protein concentration was determined through Bradford method [22] where the sample was initially run through SDS-PAGE (Fig.-1). For In gel digestion, $50 \mu\text{g}$ / hole protein sample was loaded to 15 % polyacrylamide gel and the aggregated protein bands were separated from the stacking gel after 15 min. The bands were further sliced into $1 \text{ mm} \times 1 \text{ mm}$ size and were placed in a clean microcentrifuge tube. To wash off the Coomassie staining, $100 \mu\text{L}$ (50 % acetonitrile (ACN)) in 50 mM ammonium bicarbonate (ABC) were added into the tube with excised gel, vortex and shake for 15 min. Further, $300 \mu\text{L}$ of 10 mM Dithiothreitol (DTT) in 100 mM ABC was added into the sample and incubated for 30 min at 60°C . After this reduction process, $300 \mu\text{L}$ of 55 mM indole acetic acid (IAA) in 100 mM ABC was added for proteins alkylation and the sample was incubated for 20 min at room temperature in the dark. The reduced and alkylated gel was washed with $1000 \mu\text{L}$ of 50 % ACN in 100 mM ABC for 20 min and vortex for 15 min and again $100 \mu\text{L}$ of 100 % CAN was added.

The overnight incubated gel was rehydrated at 37°C using $50 \mu\text{L}$ of 6 ng/ μL trypsin in 50 mM ABC along with $50 \mu\text{L}$ of 50 mM ABC. After incubation, the trypsin-digested gel was vortexed and $100 \mu\text{L}$ of 100 % ACN was added and shaken for 15 min. After adding $100 \mu\text{L}$ of 50 % ACN and shaking the sample for 15 min, the liquid was collected in the same tube. The digested samples were dried completely under speedvac and then stored at -20°C for further analysis.

Liquid chromatography mass spectrometry (LC-MS/MS)

Initially, samples were quantified by Scopes protocol [23]. The LC-MS/MS was performed by loading $1 \mu\text{g}$ of the peptide sample into the column and all samples (biological replicates) were run with a LC gradient of 120 min. Orbitrap Fusion Tribrid mass spectrometer was used for data acquisition connected to nano liquid chromatography system (Easy-nLC) 1200. Peptide samples were loaded onto EASY-spray column Acclaim pep map TM C18 100 A⁰, $50 \mu\text{m}$ id x 15 cm, $2 \mu\text{m}$ particle size at a flow rate of $5 \mu\text{L}/\text{minute}$. In Acclaim spray column, peptides were converted into liquid for 2 h in a gradient with a flow rate of $250 \text{ nL}/\text{minute}$ in solvent B (80 % ACN containing 0.1 % formic acid). The Orbitrap mass analyzer was exploited for MS acquisition in Data-Dependent Acquisition (DDA) mode with 60,000 mass resolution and scanning range was $310\text{--}1800 \text{ m/z}$. The mass window was set at 10 ppm with a 20-second dynamic exclusion period. Each MS spectra were attained using Collision-Induced Dissociation (CID) and High-Energy Collision Dissociation (HCD) methods for shattering at the MS1–2 levels, with AGC targets set at 10,000 and 400,000, respectively. For positive internal calibration, a lock mass of 445.12003 m/z was utilized.

Label-free quantification and identification

Thermo Scientific TM Proteome Discoverer Version 2.1 was used for

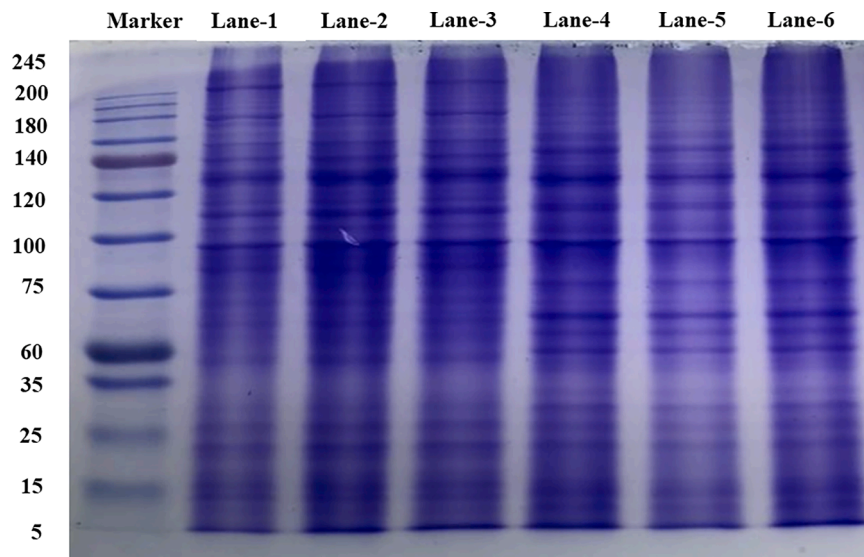


Fig. 1. SDS-PAGE showed the separation of proteins extracted from *C. idella* skin mucus with 3-biological replicates of nontreated (NT-CI 1–3) and treated (T-CI 1–3) with *A. hydrophila*: Lane 1 (NT-CI-1), Lane 2 (NT-CI-2), Lane 3 (NT-CI-3), Lane 4 (T-CI-1), Lane-5 (T-CI-2), Lane-6 (T-CI-6). Smobio Enhanced 3-color High Range Protein Marker (5–245 kDa) was used as a standard. Approximately 10 μ g protein was loaded per lane.

analysis of raw mass spectrometry data against the NCBI protein database for *C. idella* (taxonomy ID - 7959, retrieved 10/20/2022) using the National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI) integrated search engine. Orbitrap fusion mode was chosen as the device by using LFQ. Enzyme trypsin was selected as the protease and for whole analysis, 2-missed cleavages were permitted. Oxidation on methionine was selected as variable while carbamidomethylation on cysteine was chosen as the fixed modification. The reverse mode was selected as the decoy mode, and proteins were detected based merely on their unique peptide.

Statistical analysis

Perseus software was used for statistical and bioinformatics analysis, with an output file from Proteome discoverer. To identify DEPs, R programming language was executed for statistical assessment. The label-free quantification (LFQ) concentrations were then converted to logarithmic values and the data missing were replaced according to a standard distribution. The rows were the filter with valid values (with at least three values in one group). After that, all the missing values were overwritten using the imputation function to make normal distribution. To obtain variabilities estimation between the biological replicates of both groups, DE analysis was used by applying RStudio. For validation of peptides, the percolator® algorithm based on q-value (smaller than one percent) False Discovery Rate (FDR) was used.

Functional annotations

The DEPs selected from the data after Perseus were fictionally annotated. Initially, the DEPs were integrated into Ubuntu and the sequence for each accession number was obtained, then were submitted to Euro-galaxy and the sequence was blast. The blastp.xml files were subjected to BLAST2GO for Gene Ontology (GO). For the comparison of Gene ontology between the DEPs, Fisher's exact test and KEGG analysis were performed (P -value ≤ 0.05).

Results

Initial identification of DEPs

Using Discovery Proteome software, proteins with expression

difference (P -value ≤ 0.05) were considered significant proteins to distinguish between the nontreated and treated groups. Firstly, 1,466,484 raw spectra were identified, including 75,100 clean spectra and 7979 peptides. From 7979 peptides, 1910 proteins were identified in nontreated and 1452 proteins in treated groups.

Further, 126 proteins were identified as DEPs through Perseus analysis, of which 89 proteins were upregulated and 37 proteins were downregulated, where the downregulated proteins were found mostly in nontreated group (Table 1). Hierarchical cluster analysis (Heat map) of top 27 proteins was made for the differentiation between the DEPs of treated and nontreated groups (Fig.-2) and found significant data points with permutation-based FDR calculations. Furthermore, RStudio (DE analysis) showed the fold change between the treated and nontreated group with ≥ 1 and ≤ -1 (Table-1). Some of the upregulated proteins were overexpressed based on fold change (FC) as transferrin variant C (23-FC), calpain-2 catalytic subunit-like protein (22-FC), calpain-9-like protein (20-FC), Lysozyme g (20-FC), Annexin A11 (19-FC), 26S proteasome non-ATPase regulatory subunit 8 (18-FC), hypothetical protein ROHU_000884 (18-FC), natural killer cell enhancing factor (16-FC), type I cytoskeletal 19-like protein (17-FC) and complement component C9 (15-FC) (Table 1).

Functional annotations of DEPs

The DEPs identified from both groups were enriched with specific functions (BLAS2GO and OMICSBOX). The top GO term were cellular process, metabolic process, and response to stimulus (Fig.-3). Proteins associated with cellular process includes calcium calmodulin-dependent kinase type II subunit beta isoform X18- X19, type I cytoskeletal 19-like protein, tubulin beta-4B chain, Keratin, Myosin-9, type II cytoskeletal 8, and tropomyosin alpha-3 chain isoform X6. Some immune related and antibacterial proteins were upregulated including transferrin variant C, Lysozyme g, Annexin A11, 26S proteasome non-ATPase regulatory subunit 8, hypothetical protein ROHU_000884, 60S ribosomal L7a, calpain-2 catalytic subunit-like protein, calpain-9-like protein, complement component C9, complement C3, Cathepsin S, Cathepsin Z, 14 kDa apolipo, heat shock protein and Intelectin (Table 1), whereas, Leukocyte elastase inhibitor, Annexin A11, C-factor-like protein, biotinidase isoform X1, epidermal growth factor receptor substrate 15-like were downregulated.

^d Proteins values considered significant ($P \leq 0.05$).

^e Fold change are measured as ≥ 1 and ≤ -1 .

^f Peptide designates number of peptide sequence matched a protein.

^gThe proteins numbers are calculated: 37 (Downregulated); 89 (Upregulated) proteins.

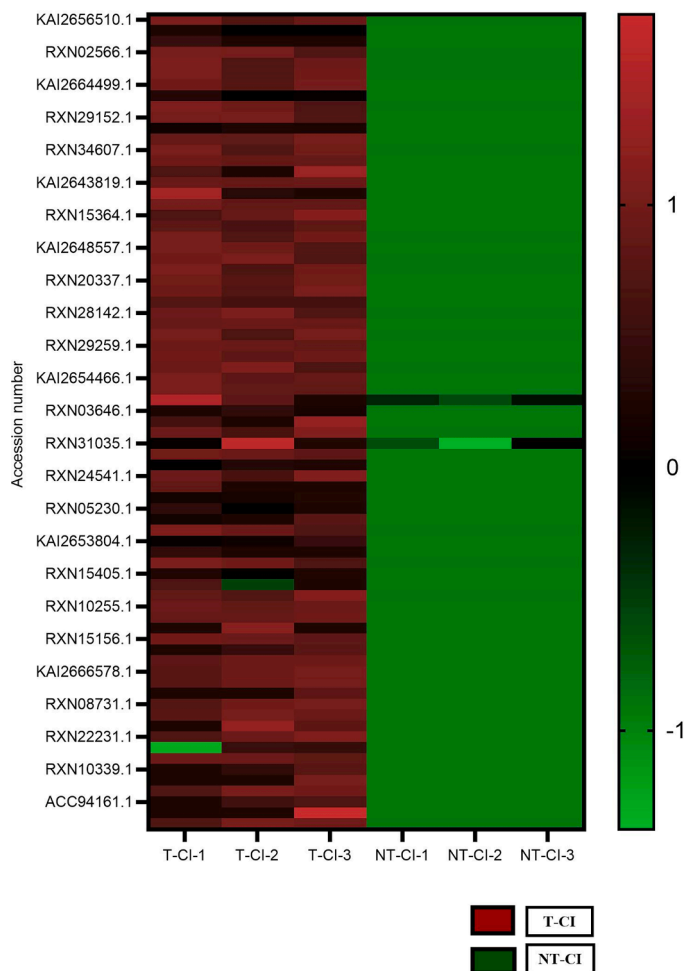


Fig. 2. Hierarchical clustering (Heat map) of significantly top 27 differentially expressed proteins (DEPs) identified between treated skin mucus (T-CI 1–3) and nontreated (N-CI 1–3) group. Lines are normalized with Z-scores of imputed values. Green color designates downregulated proteins, while red color designates upregulated proteins. Significant immune related proteins were upregulated in the treated group, while they were downregulated in the nontreated group in comparison.

Anti-oxidative proteins altered against *A. hydrophila*

Biotinidase protein was downregulated (-18 FC) in the mucus of fish from treated group against *A. hydrophila* (Table 1). Biotinidase reutilizes protein bound biotin which is crucial for the metabolism of fat, protein, and carbohydrate. Biotin deficiency has been altered normal immune functions. Also, Alpha-aminoadipic semialdehyde dehydrogenase, a multifunctional enzyme, was downregulated (-19 FC).

Fisher exact test and KEGG pathways

Fisher exact test was performed to differentiate among the DEPs after GO terms analysis (Fig.-4) based on the pathways they were involved. The KEGG analysis of the DEPs showed that these pathways were generally correlated to proteasome, Histidine metabolism, calcium signaling pathways, metabolic pathways, biosynthesis of amino acids. Moreover, proteasome, Histidine metabolism and metabolic pathways,

were the significant pathways, which have important role in immune response (Fig.-5).

Discussion

Fish skin mucus is immunological barrier against invading bacteria [11,24], and has been studied at proteomic level in several fishes [13, 14]. The biochemical composition of fish skin mucus is stimulus-specific and greatly varies from species to species. Therefore, proteomic composition of skin mucus from fishes inhabiting different environments has always been unique and interesting [6,15,25]. With this background and the important functions of immunological enzymes in the innate immune system of fish [26], this study for the first established the complete proteome-sketch of skin mucus from *C. idella* against *A. hydrophila* infection.

The important immune related proteins, this study reports, are the complement proteins, which directly interact with bacteria and function in fish immunity. Complement proteins are involved in inflammatory response, phagocytosis, eliminates of immune complexes, and assist in the production of antibodies [27]. The expression of complement proteins in the gills and skin of *D. rerio* was significantly upregulated after *Citrobacter freundii* and *A. hydrophila* infections [28,29]. The present study identified complement proteins C3 and C9 which were significantly upregulated against *A. hydrophila* infection. These results showed that complement cascade in *C. Idella* may be used to establish the Membrane Attack Complex (MAC) after being treated with *A. hydrophila*. MAC is imperative outcome complex of innate immune system, which can form holes on the bacterial cell surface, which make a route for the entry of calcium ions, modify the cell membrane permeability, and leads directly to cell dissolution [30]. Thus, C9 acts as an important protein components among the Terminal Complement Complex (TCC) proteins, and plays part in the innate resistance against bacterial pathogens [31].

Cathepsins is involved in antigen processing and maturation of the major histocompatibility complex class II molecules in fish. Cathepsin L was upregulated in the kidney of Japanese Flounder after exposure to *Edwardsiella tarda* and inhibited significantly colonization of this bacteria [11,32]. While cathepsin D was upregulated in the liver of Japanese Flounder, which revealed their role in immune against *Edwardsiella tarda* [32]. We found that Cathepsins S and Cathepsins Z, which are important lysosomal cysteine protease, were upregulated in the skin mucus of treated group of *C. Idella*, indicating their possible role in maintaining homeostasis and the physiological mechanisms of immune cells. Bacterial infections modify the normal functions of cellular, molecular, and metabolic homeostasis. In our study, calcium calmodulin-dependent kinase type II subunit beta isoform X18 and beta isoform X19 were upregulated (17 and 18 FC respectively) in the skin mucus of treated *C. idella*. Calmodulin is a calcium-binding protein that contribute in the polymerization of actin filaments [33]. Extracellular Calmodulin regulates fish skin permeability to ions and water [34]. Upregulation of Calmodulin in the treated group of *C. idella* revealed its possible role in response to bacteria.

Proteasome is a protease complex that is crucial for breakdown of proteins in an ATP dependent manner and helps in regulating the lipopolysaccharide induced signal transduction [4]. Proteasome subunit beta type-5, alpha type-3 and 6, 26S proteasome non-ATPase regulatory subunits 7 and 8 were upregulated in the skin mucus of *A. hydrophila* treated group in the present study. 20S proteasome complex with subunits alpha and beta were interacted in Rainbow Trout against *Aeromonas salmonicida* infection which together hints their role against bacterial infection [35].

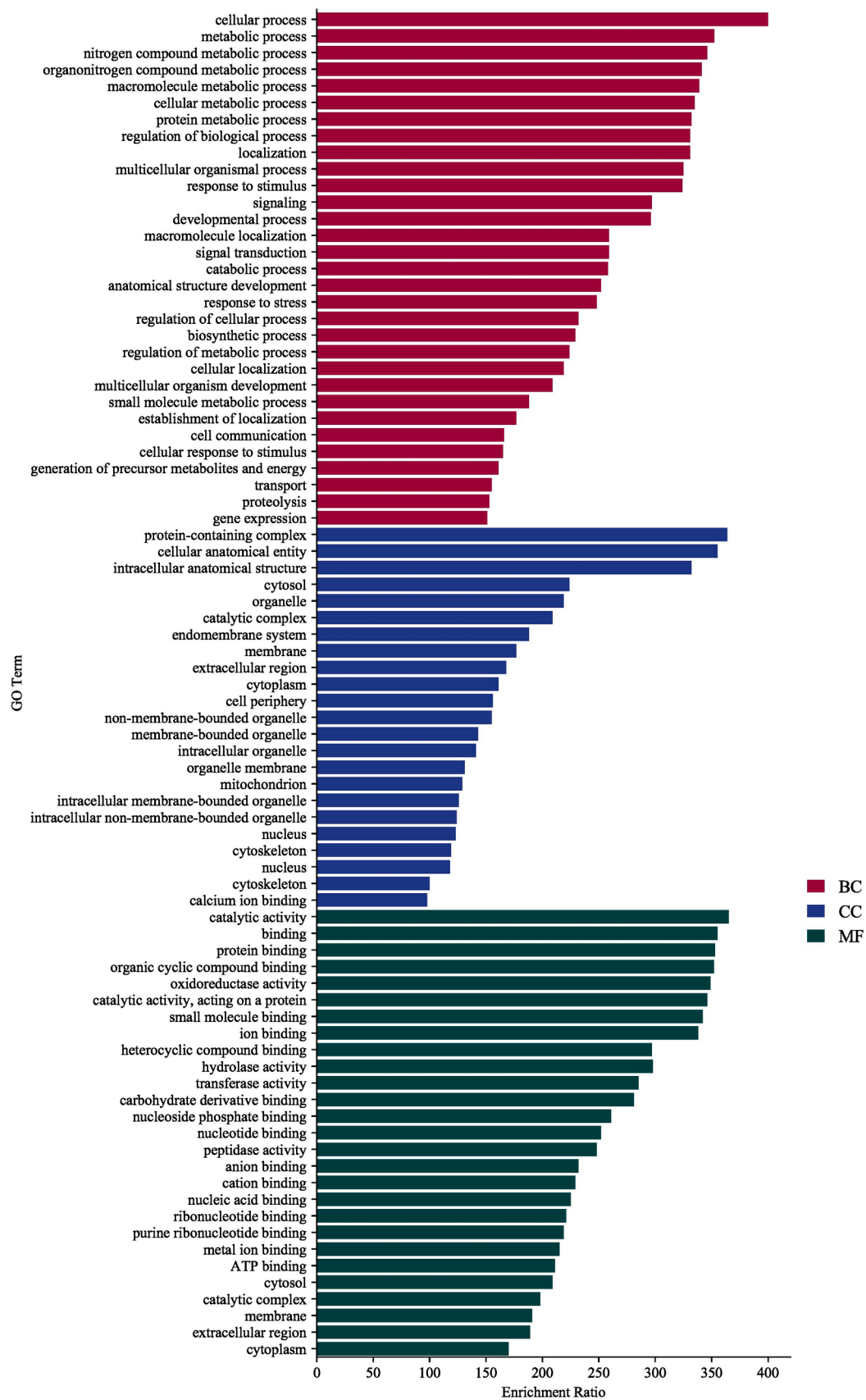


Fig. 3. Gene Ontology annotations of the DEPs in the skin mucus of *C. idella* upon exposure to *A. hydrophila*. The result is based on the BLAST2GO Pie graph 4levels ($P \leq 0.05$), which were characterized into 3 main parts. It includes GO terms (a): Biological Process, (b): Cellular Component and (c): Molecular Function.

Fisher's exact test

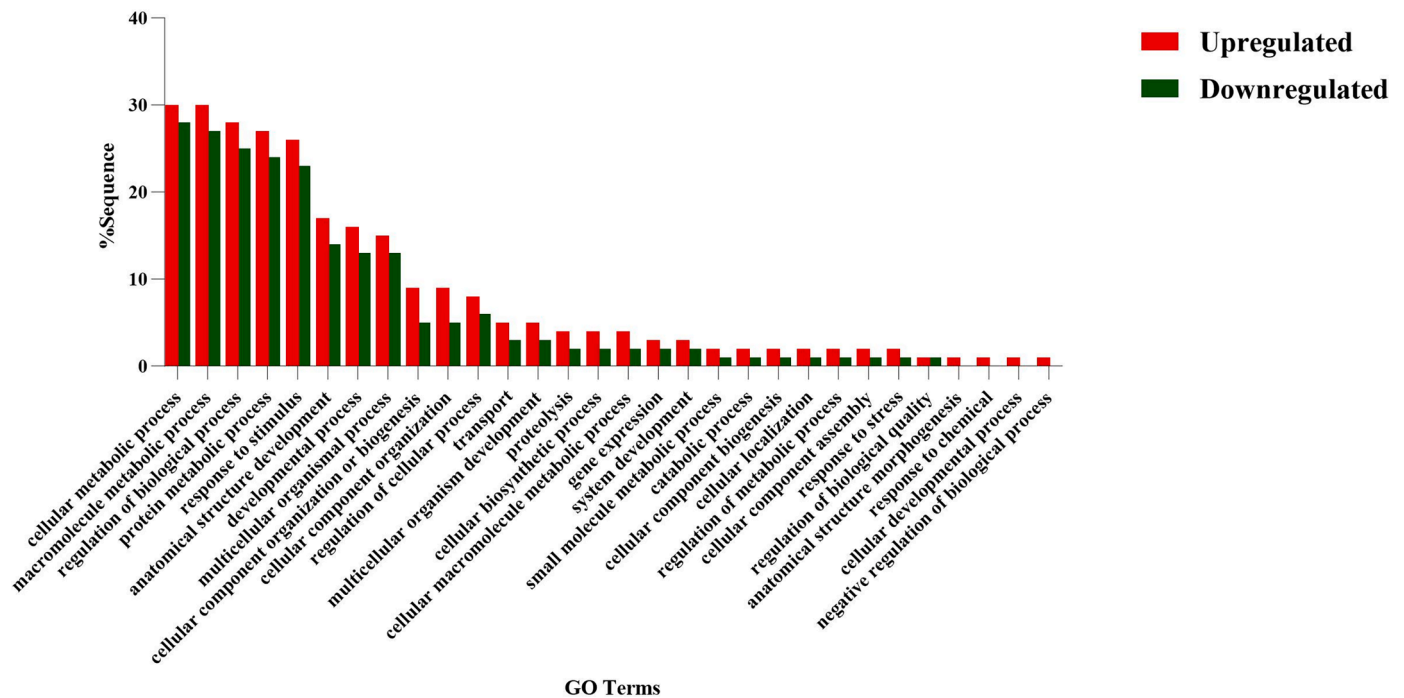


Fig. 4. Fisher Exact Test; GO terms showing significant enrichment in the treated *C. idella* (T-CI) compared with those in the nontreated *C. idella* (NT-CI) skin mucus. All levels of GO terms in biological process, molecular function and cellular component categories were compared using a two-tailed Fisher exact test (FDR < 0.05) with Blast2GO software.

Cytoskeleton related proteins were upregulated in the skin mucus of *C. Idella* including keratin, type II cytoskeletal 8, type I cytoskeletal 13 and 19-like protein, heat shock cognate 71 kDa protein, Myosin-9, tubulin beta-4B chain, 14 kDa apolipo, intelectin, which function in various cellular and in biological processes. Fish cytoskeleton related proteins function in bacterial resistance and viral infections [36,37]. Identification of modifications in the macrophage cellular proteome persuaded by calcium oxalate monohydrate, including F-actin protein and α -tubulin in increased phagocytic activity, and association of heat shock proteins and F-actin is imperative for phagosome formation [38]. Similarly, beta tubulin was found to be upregulated in skin mucus of *Gadus morhua* treated with *Vibrio anguillarum* probably due to its increased expression in the mucosal cells related with phagocytic processes [39]. Remarkably, DEPs (i-e, tubulin, actin, HSP90) were also identified in the gills of zebrafish treated with *A. hydrophila*, signifying that it possibly stimulates the phagosome pathways in local immune responses in gills. Overall, the upregulation of cytoskeleton proteins in these studies might be their involvement in the immune response of skin mucus against *A. hydrophila*.

Biotinidase is a crucial enzyme in mammals that cleaves vitamin, biotin from the biocytin and from the dietary protein sources [40]. The deficiency of biotinidase causes hypotonia, lethargy, eczema, alopecia, lethargy, optic atrophy, ataxia, loss of hearing, and cognitive retardation and it is usually inherited in patients [41]. The role of biotinidase in the immunity of vertebrates has been evident [42]. In Zebra fish, biotinidase was upregulated at transcriptional level against Cysteamine, which is a sulfhydryl compound and causes toxicity [43]. In our study, biotinidase isoform X1 enzyme was found to be downregulated in the skin mucus of *C. Idella* in the treated group. Similarly, biotinidase was also reported downregulated in the liver of *Labeo rohita* after exposure to *A. hydrophila* [4]. In *C. idella* (skin, head and kidney) deficiency of biotin decreased the mRNA level of bactericidal compounds i-e mucin, defensin and hepcidin while elevate the ratio of pro-inflammatory cytokines i-e interferon (IFN- γ 2), tumor necrosis factor (TNF- α), and interleukin (IL-1,

6 and 8) [44]. Together all these reports speculate the role of biotinidase in immune response against bacterial infection in fish, which will surely need functional based studies on the mechanism of their action.

Transferrin is one of the essential serum proteins in fish with role in iron metabolism [45]. Transferrin is primarily produced in the liver of fish and circulate into the blood, however they also express in other tissues [46]. Transferrin binds to iron, thus prevents its production, and consequently prevent bacterial infections. Though, in stress conditions, transferrin is identified mostly as a negative acute phase protein, however transferrin can be a positive acute phase protein [47,48]. In our study, transferrin variant C was upregulated (23 FC) in the skin mucus of *C. idella* against *A. hydrophila*. Accordingly, transferrin was significantly upregulated in the skin, spleen, and blood of Rough Skin Sculpin after lipopolysaccharide exposure [49]. Transferrin was recently shown to have role in immune response of Goldfish against acute inflammation [50]. Transferrin receptor-1 was downregulated in rainbow trout against *A. salmonicida* [51]. Though, cleaved transferrin products have recently been shown to activate macrophages in inflammatory conditions. Here we assume the defensive role of transferrin in the skin mucus of fish against bacteria. However, further question the mechanism by which transferrin had dealt with iron, macrophages, and bacteria at a time. Thus, detailed studies focused on the precise role of transferrin in the skin mucus of fish and particularly during bacterial infection, are recommended.

Conclusions

This study concludes that skin mucus of *C. idella* is rich at proteomic level. The proteins discovered here were mostly immunological including transferrin variant C, lysozyme g, annexin A11, 26S proteasome non-ATPase regulatory subunit 8, hypothetical protein ROHU_000884, 60S ribosomal L7a, calpain-2 catalytic subunit-like protein, calpain-9-like protein, complement component C9, complement C3, cathepsin S, cathepsin Z, 14 kDa apolipo, heat shock protein,

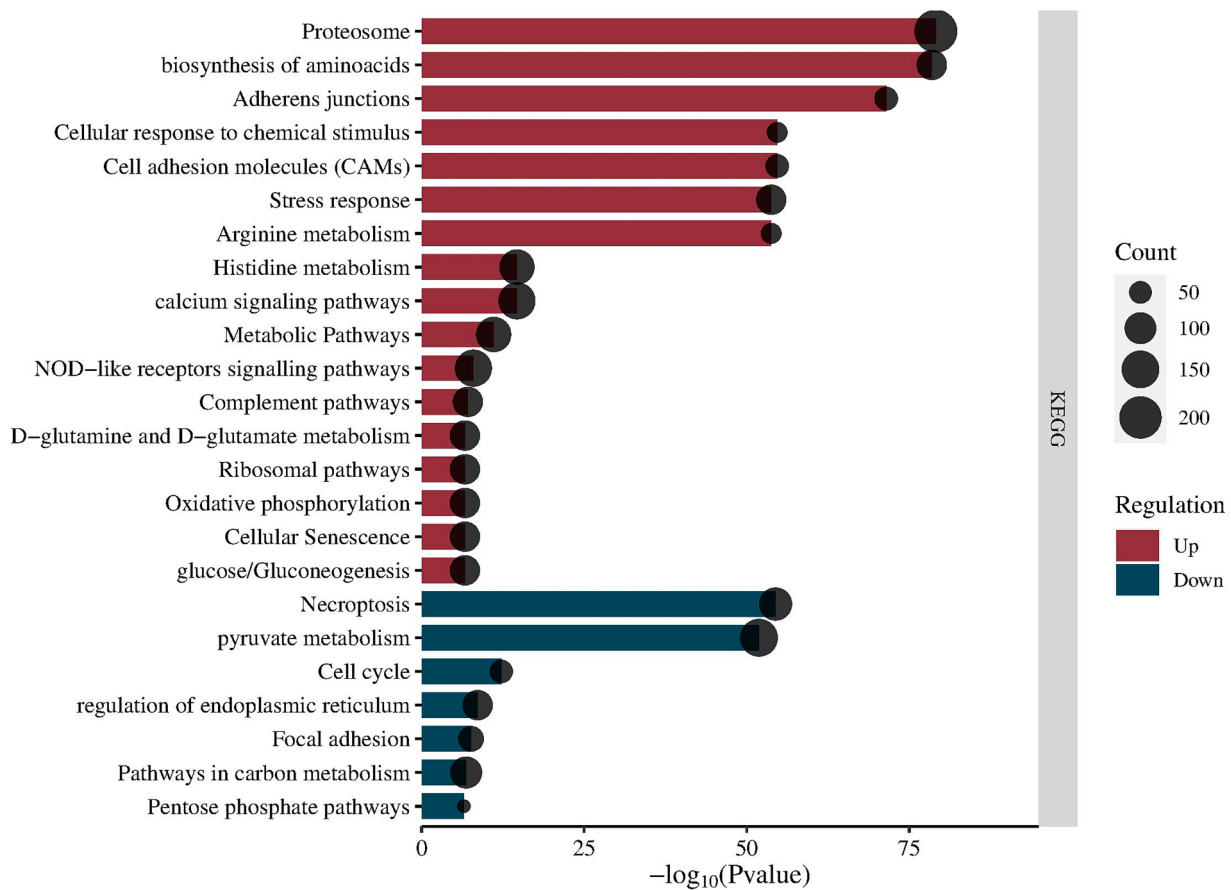


Fig. 5. KEGG Pathways; Each row represents an enriched function, and the length of the bar represents the enrich ratio, which is calculated as "input gene number". The color of the bar represents Up and down-regulated pathways.

intelectin, leukocyte elastase inhibitor, annexin A11, C-factor-like protein, biotinidase isoform X1 and epidermal growth factor receptor substrate 15-like and were expressed at differential levels against *A. hydrophila* infection. The proteins this study presented from the skin mucus of fish could be potential biomarkers and may be targeted for understanding bacterial infection and its control in fishes.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Shandana Ali: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Project administration, Software, Validation, Writing – original draft. **Farman Ullah Dawar:** Conceptualization, Resources, Supervision, Writing – review & editing. **Waheed Ullah:** Methodology. **Maizom Hassan:** Data curation, Visualization. **Kalim Ullah:** Investigation. **Zhe Zhao:** Funding acquisition, Supervision.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interests

Data availability

No data was used for the research described in the article.

Supplementary materials

Supplementary material associated with this article can be found, in the online version, at [doi:10.1016/j.fsirep.2023.100122](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fsirep.2023.100122).

References

- [1] T Lieke, T Meinelt, SH Hoseinifar, et al., Sustainable aquaculture requires environmental-friendly treatment strategies for fish diseases, *Reviews in Aquaculture* 12 (2020) 943–965.
- [2] X Song, J Zhao, Y Bo, et al., *Aeromonas hydrophila* induces intestinal inflammation in grass carp (*Ctenopharyngodon idella*): an experimental model, *Aquaculture* 434 (2014) 171–178.
- [3] Q Mu, Z Dong, W Kong, et al., Response of immunoglobulin M in gut mucosal immunity of common carp (*Cyprinus carpio*) infected with *Aeromonas hydrophila*, *Frontiers in Immunology* 13 (2022).
- [4] M.U. Nissa, N. Pinto, B. Ghosh, U. Singh, M. Goswami, S. Srivastava, Proteomic analysis of liver tissue reveals *Aeromonas hydrophila* infection mediated modulation of host metabolic pathways in *Labeo rohita*, *Journal of proteomics* 279 (2023), 104870, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jprot.2023.104870>.
- [5] FU Dawar, S Babu, H Kou, et al., The RAG2 gene of yellow catfish (*Tachysurus fulvidraco*) and its immune response against *Edwardsiella ictaluri* infection, *Developmental & Comparative Immunology* 98 (2019) 65–75.
- [6] FU Dawar, J Tu, Y Xiong, et al., Chemotactic activity of cyclophilin A in the skin mucus of yellow catfish (*Pelteobagrus fulvidraco*) and its active site for chemotaxis, *International Journal of Molecular Sciences* 17 (2016) 1422.
- [7] S Ali, MNK Khattak, W Ullah, et al., Bactericidal activities and biochemical analysis of skin mucus of Cyprinid Fish, *Journal of King Saud University-Science* (2023) 102731.
- [8] S Ali, SAUR Shah, M Rauf, et al., Bactericidal role of epidermal mucus of freshwater fish treated with *Aeromonas hydrophila*, *Journal of fish diseases* (2023).
- [9] J.P. Firmino, J. Galindo-Villegas, F.E. Reyes-López, E. Gisbert, Phytogetic Bioactive Compounds Shape Fish Mucosal Immunity, *Frontiers in immunology* 12 (2021), 695973, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fimmu.2021.695973>.
- [10] KL Shephard, Functions for fish mucus, *Reviews in fish biology* 4 (1994) 401–429.
- [11] S Dash, S Das, J Samal, et al., Epidermal mucus, a major determinant in fish health: a review, *Iranian journal of veterinary research* 19 (2018) 72.
- [12] M Reverter, N Tapissier-Bontemps, D Lecchini, et al., Biological and ecological roles of external fish mucus: a review, *Fishes* 3 (2018) 41.
- [13] AJ Lü, XC Hu, Y Wang, et al., Skin immune response in the zebrafish, *Danio rerio* (Hamilton), to *Aeromonas hydrophila* infection: a transcriptional profiling approach, *Journal of Fish Diseases* 38 (2015) 137–150.

- [14] Y Hu, A Li, Y Xu, et al., Transcriptomic variation of locally-infected skin of *Epinephelus coioides* reveals the mucosal immune mechanism against *Cryptocaryon irritans*, *Fish and shellfish immunology* 66 (2017) 398–410.
- [15] S Ali, W Ullah, AFS Kamarulzaman, et al., Proteomic Profile of Epidermal Mucus from *Labeo rohita* Reveals Differentially Abundant Proteins after *Aeromonas hydrophila* Infection, *Fish Shellfish Immunology Reports* (2023), 100115.
- [16] B Cudmore, NE Mandrak, Biological synopsis of grass carp (*Ctenopharyngodon idella*), Canadian manuscript report of fisheries and Aquatic Sciences 2705 (2004) 1–44.
- [17] B Maiti, S Dubey, HM Munang'Andu, et al., Application of outer membrane protein-based vaccines against major bacterial fish pathogens in India, *Frontiers in immunology* 11 (2020) 1362.
- [18] G Di, H Li, C Zhang, et al., Label-free proteomic analysis of intestinal mucosa proteins in common carp (*Cyprinus carpio*) infected with *Aeromonas hydrophila*, *Fish and shellfish immunology* 66 (2017) 11–25.
- [19] Hu, X., Bai, J., Liu, R., & Lv, A. (2022). Comprehensive transcriptomics and proteomics analysis of *Carassius auratus* gills in response to *Aeromonas hydrophila*. *Fish and shellfish immunology reports*, 4, 100077. [10.1016/j.fsirep.2022.100077](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fsirep.2022.100077).
- [20] D. Xu, L. Song, H. Wang, X. Xu, T. Wang, L. Lu, Proteomic analysis of cellular protein expression profiles in response to grass carp reovirus infection, *Fish & shellfish immunology* 44 (2) (2015) 515–524, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fsi.2015.03.010>.
- [21] I Sanahuja, A Ibarz, Skin mucus proteome of gilthead sea bream: a non-invasive method to screen for welfare indicators, *Fish and shellfish immunology* 46 (2015) 426–435.
- [22] F. He, Bradford protein assay, Bio-protocol (2011) e45. -e45.
- [23] R. Scopes, Measurement of protein by spectrophotometry at 205 nm, *Analytical biochemistry* 59 (1974) 277–282.
- [24] J Fan, Q Shan, J Wang, et al., Comparative pharmacokinetics of enrofloxacin in healthy and *Aeromonas hydrophila*-infected crucian carp (*Carassius auratus gibelio*), *Journal of Veterinary Pharmacology and Therapeutics* 40 (2017) 580–582.
- [25] ALB Canellas, WF Costa, J Freitas-Silva, et al., In sickness and in health: Insights into the application of omics in aquaculture settings under a microbiological perspective, *Aquaculture* (2022), 738132.
- [26] Á Fernández-Montero, S Torrecillas, D Montero, et al., Proteomic profile and protease activity in the skin mucus of greater amberjack (*Seriola dumerili*) infected with the ectoparasite *Neobenedenia girellae*—an immunological approach, *Fish and shellfish immunology* 110 (2021) 100–115.
- [27] H Boshra, J Li, J Sunyer, Recent advances on the complement system of teleost fish, *Fish and shellfish immunology* 20 (2006) 239–262.
- [28] A. Lü, X. Hu, Y. Wang, X. Shen, X. Li, A. Zhu, J. Tian, Q. Ming, Z. Feng, iTRAQ analysis of gill proteins from the zebrafish (*Danio rerio*) infected with *Aeromonas hydrophila*, *Fish & shellfish immunology* 36 (1) (2014) 229–239, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fsi.2013.11.007>.
- [29] A Lü, X Hu, J Xue, et al., Gene expression profiling in the skin of zebrafish infected with *Citrobacter freundii*, *Fish and shellfish immunology* 32 (2012) 273–283.
- [30] LJ Barkai, E Sipter, D Csuka, et al., Decreased ficolin-3-mediated complement lectin pathway activation and alternative pathway amplification during bacterial infections in patients with type 2 diabetes mellitus, *Frontiers in immunology* 10 (2019) 509.
- [31] MCH Holland, JD. Lambris, The complement system in teleosts, *Fish and shellfish immunology* 12 (2002) 399–420.
- [32] L Wang, C Shao, W Xu, et al., Proteome profiling reveals immune responses in Japanese flounder (*Paralichthys olivaceus*) infected with *Edwardsiella tarda* by iTRAQ analysis, *Fish and shellfish immunology* 66 (2017) 325–333.
- [33] N. Pinto, Stress and immune relevant proteins in lumpsucker (*Cyclopterus lumpus* L.) skin-establishing basic knowledge, Nord universitet, 2017.
- [34] G Zacccone, S Fasulo, L Ainis, et al., Localization of calmodulin positive immunoreactivity in the surface epidermis of the brown trout, *Salmo trutta*, *Histochemistry* 91 (1989) 13–16.
- [35] M Long, J Zhao, T Li, et al., Transcriptomic and proteomic analyses of splenic immune mechanisms of rainbow trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) infected by *Aeromonas salmonicida* subsp. *salmonicida*, *Journal of proteomics* 122 (2015) 41–54.
- [36] A Lü, X Hu, Y Wang, et al., Proteomic analysis of differential protein expression in the skin of zebrafish [*Danio rerio* (Hamilton, 1822)] infected with *Aeromonas hydrophila*, *Journal of Applied Ichthyology* 30 (2014) 28–34.
- [37] P Zhang, C Li, Y Li, et al., Proteomic identification of differentially expressed proteins in sea cucumber *Apostichopus japonicus* coelomocytes after *Vibrio splendidus* infection, *Developmental & Comparative Immunology* 44 (2014) 370–377.
- [38] N Singtho, R Kanlaya, A Nilnumkhum, et al., Roles of macrophage exosomes in immune response to calcium oxalate monohydrate crystals, *Frontiers in Immunology* 9 (2018) 316.
- [39] B. Rajan, J. Lokesh, V. Kiron, M.F. Brinchmann, Differentially expressed proteins in the skin mucus of Atlantic cod (*Gadus morhua*) upon natural infection with *Vibrio anguillarum*, *BMC veterinary research* 9 (2013) 103, <https://doi.org/10.1186/1746-6148-9-103>.
- [40] B. Wolf, R.E. Grier, R.J. Allen, S.I. Goodman, C.L. Kien, Biotinidase deficiency: the enzymatic defect in late-onset multiple carboxylase deficiency, *Clinica chimica acta; international journal of clinical chemistry* 131 (3) (1983) 273–281, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0009-8981\(83\)90096-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/0009-8981(83)90096-7).
- [41] A. Akgun, A. Sen, H. Onal, Clinical, biochemical and genotypical characteristics in biotinidase deficiency, *Journal of pediatric endocrinology & metabolism: JPEM* 34 (11) (2021) 1425–1433, <https://doi.org/10.1515/jpem-2021-0242>.
- [42] K. Pindolia, H. Li, C. Cardwell, B. Wolf, Characterization and functional analysis of cellular immunity in mice with biotinidase deficiency, *Molecular genetics and metabolism* 112 (1) (2014) 49–56, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ymgme.2014.02.008>.
- [43] C Chen, Y Zuo, H Hu, et al., Hepatic lipid metabolism disorders and immunotoxicity induced by cysteamine in early developmental stages of zebrafish, *Toxicology* 493 (2023), 153555.
- [44] P He, W-D Jiang, X-A Liu, et al., Dietary biotin deficiency decreased growth performance and impaired the immune function of the head kidney, spleen and skin in on-growing grass carp (*Ctenopharyngodon idella*), *Fish and Shellfish Immunology* 97 (2020) 216–234.
- [45] Neves JV, Wilson JM, Rodrigues PNJD, et al. (2009) Transferrin and ferritin response to bacterial infection: the role of the liver and brain in fish. 33: 848-857.
- [46] LA Lambert, H Perri, PJ Halbrooks, et al., Evolution of the transferrin family: conservation of residues associated with iron and anion binding, *Comparative Biochemistry and Physiology Part B: Biochemistry and Molecular Biology* 142 (2005) 129–141.
- [47] CJ Bayne, L Gerwick, The acute phase response and innate immunity of fish, *Developmental and Comparative Immunology* 25 (2001) 725–743.
- [48] JL Congleton, EC Wagner, Acute-phase hypoferrinemic response to lipopolysaccharide in rainbow trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*), *Comparative Biochemistry and Physiology Part A: Physiology* 98 (1991) 195–200.
- [49] Y. Liu, S. Yu, Y. Chai, Q. Zhu, Transferrin gene expression in response to LPS challenge and heavy metal exposure in roughskin sculpin (*Trachidermus fasciatus*), *Fish & shellfish immunology* 32 (1) (2012) 223–229, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fsi.2011.10.023>.
- [50] M Trites, D Barreda, Contributions of transferrin to acute inflammation in the goldfish, *C. auratus*, *Developmental and Comparative Immunology* 67 (2017) 300–309.
- [51] DR Causey, MA Pohl, DA Stead, et al., High-throughput proteomic profiling of the fish liver following bacterial infection, *Journal of BMC genomics* 19 (2018) 1–17.