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In vitro sperm storage with poultry oviductal secretions

Ana Karen Vargas Ibarra¹, Samantha Anahi Carcoba Pérez¹, Alejandro Avalos Rodríguez², Ana María Rosales Torres², Fernanda Rodríguez Hernández², Ricardo Camarillo Flores³, José Antonio Quintana López⁴, José Antonio Herrera Barragán^{2*}

¹ Metropolitan Autonomous University - X, Mexico City, Mexico; ² Department of Agricultural and Animal Production, Metropolitan Autonomous University - X, Mexico City, Mexico; ³ Metropolitan Autonomous University - I, Mexico City, Mexico; ⁴ Department of Avian Medicine and Zootechnics, College of Veterinary Medicine and Zootechnics, National Autonomous University of Mexico, Mexico City, Mexico.

| Article Info | Abstract |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| Article history: | In the hen oviduct, tubules have been identified that preserve the sperm, maintaining |
| | viability for up to 15 weeks. This study aimed to evaluate the physiological status of rooster |
| Received: 24 October 2018 | sperm when preserved in vitro with uterus vaginal junction secretions (UVJS). Males and |
| Accepted: 02 February 2019 | females of the Rhode Island breed were used. Sperm aliquots were prepared using Lake |
| Available online: 15 September 2020 | extender and Lake extender with UVJS (10.00%, 30.00%, 60.00%, and 90.00%). Subsequently, a |
| - | basic sperm evaluation was performed and sperm physiological status was determined through |
| Keywords: | the presence and distribution of Ca2+ and its acrosomal reaction capability via perivitelline layer |
| | (PVL) co-incubation. It was observed that motility was decreased in sperm preserved with UVJS |
| Acrosome | at 6 and 24 hr) compared to 40 min and fresh semen. The sperm decapacitation percentage was |
| Decapacitation | increased when preserved with UVJS at 40 min, 6 and 24 hr compared to fresh semen. The |
| Hen | acrosomal reaction was increased in sperm co-incubated with PVL, even when preserved with |
| Oviduct | UVJS. It was concluded that UVJS induced physiological changes in sperm by inducing a |
| Semen | decapacitation process, which increased sperm viability when preserved in vitro. |
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Introduction

In avian, the preservation mechanism of sperm storage tubules (SST) is not clear.^{1,2} It has been reported that, in SST, sperm can be stored with viability and fertilization capability preserved for up to 15 weeks.² Nevertheless, little is known about the cellular or biochemical mechanisms involved in sperm storage.³ The physiological condition of preserved sperm is not wellunderstood and this can be compared to sperm decapacitation status.⁴ It has been suggested that sperm in SST metabolizes endogenous fatty acids or other lipids derived from SST apical microvilli.^{1,2,5} Apical epithelial cell microvilli (MVB) in SST play a possible role in sperm survival as it has been reported that MVB provides lipids and proteins used by host sperm to prevent functions that may be associated with sperm capacitation and fertilization capacity. Furthermore, the MVB stabilizes the sperm plasmalemma and contributes to liquid transportation in SST epithelial cells.^{4,6,7} It is known that phospholipids are involved in sperm maturation and motility. In particular, high cholesterol content has been proposed to inhibit capacitation, whereby it is suggested that sperm undergo a decapacitation process, and subsequently it can capacitate to undergo the acrosome reaction (AR) associated with its fertilization capacity.^{4,5} Thus, it is possible that SST uterus vaginal junction secretions (UVJS) cause *in vitro* physiological changes in sperm by increasing decapacitation parameters to maintain viability. The present study aimed to evaluate rooster sperm physiological status when preserved *in vitro* with UVJS.

Materials and Methods

Poultry. To obtain semen and uterus vaginal junction secretions, five males and five females Rhode Island breed were used. The birds were 32 weeks old and clinically healthy. Food was provided according to the National Research Council and water was available *ad libitum.*⁸ Birds were maintained with a photoperiod of 14 hr light and 10 hr darkness. All animal welfare commissioned norms were met (NOM-062-ZOO-1999).⁹

*Correspondence:

José Antonio Herrera Barragán. DVM, PhD

Department of Agricultural and Animal Production, Metropolitan Autonomous University - X, Mexico City, Mexico **E-mail**: jherrerab@correo.xoc.uam.mx



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Semen collection and uterus vaginal junction secretions. Ejaculation was performed using the dorsoventral massage technique.¹⁰ Semen was collected as a 1:3 solution with Lake extender (sodium glutamate 0.46 M, sodium acetate 1.86 M, fructose 22.20 M, potassium acetate 25.47 M, pH: 7.00 and osmolarity of 7.10).¹¹ All reagents used were obtained from Sigma Aldrich, St. Louis, USA. UVJS was obtained using a probe to perform an internal wash of the uterus vaginal junction with 3.00 mL of Lake extender. On average, 2.00 mL of UVJS was collected in a Falcon tube and stored at 5.00 °C.²

In vitro spermatic conservation. Five rooster seminal pool aliquots with a total of 100×10^6 sperm in 500 µL of Lake extender were preserved at 5.00 °C under the following conditions: In the control sample, semen was preserved in Lake extender to preserve sperm viability. In the treatment samples, semen was preserved with 10.00%, 30.00%, 60.00%, and 90.00% UVJS to induce sperm decapacitation conditions. The ability to undergo the AR was determined by comparing the parameters before and after co-incubation of each aliquot with the perivitelline layer (PVL) as a natural inducer of this process.³ Twenty-five evaluations were performed for each aliquot with fresh semen and this was performed after 40 min (capacitation time) and later at 6 and 24 hr which are acceptable times for fresh semen to be used in artificial insemination.12,13

Basic sperm evaluation. This was performed on all aliquots under different conditions and time points. The percentage of sperm with straight progressive motility in 10.00 μ L semen aliquots was estimated by microscopy (BX51; Olympus, Tokyo, Japan) with a 40× objective.^{12,14} Additionally, the sperm in 10.00 μ L aliquots were stained with Eosin-Nigrosin and 100 sperm from each sample were analyzed using the optical microscope with a 100× objective to determine the percentage of live sperm.¹⁴

Capacitated, decapacitated, and acrosome reaction sperm. The pattern of capacitation, decapacitation, and AR in sperm was determined for all the aliquots,¹⁴ using 5×10⁶ sperm incubated with 0.90 M chlortetracycline (CTC) in the dark at 38. 00 °C.^{15, 16} For all conditions, aliquots were adjusted to 50.00 µL with Lake extender with or without PVL (20.00 µg) obtained from a fresh hen egg after removing the vitello by washing with Lake extender and incubated for 30 min. Later, 25.00 µL of CTC was added and the mixture was incubated for 10 min.¹⁷ After the incubation period, in all experiments. slides were prepared to observe the samples under the fluorescence microscope with a 100× objective (488 nm excitation and >560 nm emission). Image analysis was performed using Image-Pro Plus software (version 6.2.1; Media Cybernetics, Silver Spring, USA). Two hundred sperm per preparation were counted to determine the proportion of sperm that underwent capacitation, decapacitation, and AR.16

Statistical analysis. A Shapiro-Wilk test was done to assess data normality. In each evaluation, percentages were expressed as mean ±SD. ANOVA with the Tukey posthoc test was done to determine the differences between means. When data were not normally distributed, Kruskal Wallis test was done. All statistical tests were done with a significance level of *p* < 0.05. All tests were performed with PAST Paleontological Statistics (version 3.18, National University of Ireland, Galway, Ireland).

Results

Basic sperm evaluation. Sperm motility was different when comparing between preservation time points or the UVJS supplementation percentage used (Table 1). When evaluating sperm motility for each preservation time point (0 min, 40 min, and 6, or 24 hr), no statistically significant differences were observed (p > 0.05) between the UVIS supplementation percentages. When comparing different preservation time points, it was found that at 6 hr the sperm motility percentage was decreased (p < 0.05) in every aliquot regardless of the UVIS percentage applied. The sperm motility percentage was decreased (p < 0.05) in aliquots preserved for 24 hr with 30.00%, 60.00% and 90.00% UVIS. Regarding sperm viability similar behavior was observed among aliquots preserved without supplementation and those with 30.00% and 60.00% UVIS as well as between those with 10.00% and 90.00% UVIS (Table 2). The live sperm percentage was not different (p >0.05) between aliquots with different UVJS percentages at each preservation time point (0 min, 40 min, 6 hr, and 24 hr). Nevertheless, when comparing different preservation time points, it was observed that in aliquots without supplementation and those with 30.00% and 60.00% UVJS, the live sperm percentage was lower at 40 min and higher at 24 hr. In aliquots with 10.00% and 90.00% UVIS, the live sperm percentages were similar (p > 0.05) at all preservation time points.

Sperm physiological status. The decapacitated sperm percentage in aliquots preserved with Lake extender showed a 30.00% decrease compared to those preserved and supplemented with different UVJS percentages at 0 and 24 hr, showing statistically significant differences (p < 0.05). On the contrary, when semen was co-incubated with PVL the decapacitation percentages were ranged between 11.00% and 17.00% without statistically significant differences (p > 0.05), except at 0 hr when the decapacitation percentage was 32.00%.

The capacitated sperm percentage in semen preserved with Lake extender was ranged between 30.00% - 40.00% showing no statistically significant differences (p > 0.05) among the aliquots. The capacitated sperm percentage was slightly lower in semen co-incubated with PVL with a range between 25.00% - 35.00% showing no statistically significant differences (p > 0.05) among the aliquots.

| UVJS (%) | Preserving time | | | | |
|---------------|---|-----------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|--|
| | 0 min | 40 min | 6 hr | 24 hr | |
| 0 | 72.00 ± 1.20^{a} | 67.00 ± 4.60^{a} | 41.00 ± 7.10 ^b | 31.00 ± 5.50 ^b | |
| 10.00 | 71.00 ± 1.87^{a} | 55.00 ± 7.07^{a} | 46.00 ± 8.27^{ab} | 26.00 ± 7.31 ^b | |
| 30.00 | 69.00 ± 1.00^{a} | 55.00 ± 5.24^{ab} | 44.00 ± 5.09^{b} | 23.00 ± 5.14 ^c | |
| 60.00 | 72.00 ± 2.00^{a} | 67.00 ± 3.39^{a} | 50.00 ± 5.47^{b} | 26.00 ± 4.00° | |
| 90.00 | 69.00 ± 3.31^{a} | 56.00 ± 4.00^{ab} | 41.00 ± 6.40^{b} | 20.00 ± 3.16 ^c | |
| 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 | 1 | | | | |

Table 1. Percentages of motility in sperm preserved in Lake extender supplemented with uterus vaginal junction secretions (UVJS).

^{abc} Different letters indicate statistical differences in each row at p < 0.05.

 Table 2. Percentages of alive sperm preserved in Lake extender supplemented with uterus vaginal junction secretions (UVJS).

| UVJS (%) | Preserving time | | | | |
|----------|----------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|--|
| | 0 min | 40 min | 6 hr | 24 hr | |
| 0 | 98.60 ± 0.74^{a} | 96.00 ± 0.94^{ab} | 94.20 ± 1.35 ^b | 94.40 ± 0.67^{b} | |
| 10.00 | 97.40 ± 0.67^{a} | 96.00 ± 0.63^{a} | 93.80 ± 1.31^{a} | 94.80 ± 1.24^{a} | |
| 30.00 | 98.20 ± 0.66^{a} | 97.00 ± 0.70^{ab} | $94.00 \pm 0.70^{\rm bc}$ | 91.60 ± 1.20° | |
| 60.00 | 97.60 ± 0.81^{a} | 95.80 ± 0.73^{ab} | 89.40 ± 4.62^{b} | 92.00 ± 1.70^{b} | |
| 90.00 | 97.40 ± 1.20^{a} | 91.0 0± 3.46 ^a | 93.40 ± 1.72^{a} | 94.60 ± 1.43^{a} | |
| | | | | | |

^{abc} Different letters indicate statistical differences in each row at p < 0.05.

In sperm preserved with Lake extender, an obvious trend of increased sperm with AR ability was observed as a function of time and regardless of UVJS supplementation. The percentages were lower than 7.00% in fresh semen and after 24 hr the percentages were higher than 37.00%, showing statistically significant differences between them (p < 0.05).

On the contrary, semen co-incubated with PVL showed approximately 55.00% of sperm with AR in similar percentages (p > 0.05) at 40 min, 6 hr, and 24 hr. Semen without UVJS supplementation showed 37.00% of sperm with AR at 0 hr, while aliquots co-incubated with PVL were at 50.00% (Fig. 1), with statistically significant differences (p < 0.05).



Fig. 1. Physiological status of sperm preserved in different conditions. ^{abc} Different letters indicate statistical differences at *p* < 0.05.

Discussion

Semen preserved with UVIS showed a lower sperm motility percentage compared to semen preserved with Lake extender without UVIS. This demonstrated the in vitro effect of UVJS in terms of decreasing sperm motility as was observed to happen in vivo in sperm storage tubules of uterus vaginal junction.^{2,4} It is known that sperm stored in SST cannot move, thus, it is believed that UVJS induces quiescence, i.e. sperm are inactive as a result of a decrease in ATP consumption. The mechanism by which sperm reach the SST is unknown, however, it likely requires vigorous sperm motility. Nevertheless, once sperm entered the SST, they become inactive due to unknown mechanisms and are stored until fertilisation.¹⁸ This agrees with the present study as sperm preserved in Lake extender demonstrated decreased motility (from 72.00% to 20.00%), likely influenced by the lipid supply from SST. Endogenous large chain fatty acids stimulate sperm motility inside the vagina, while exogenous large chain fatty acids support it inside SST lumen. The released fatty acids have been identified as oleic and linoleic acids which are absorbed and metabolized by the sperm to increase their viability.¹⁹ The effect of eggshell proteins has been demonstrated during storage to maintain sperm viability in SST.20

The live sperm percentages were decreased as a function of time, nevertheless, this was maintained above 90.00% in sperm preserved in Lake extender and supplemented with different levels of UVJS. This agrees with a study performed on the sperm storage mechanism, in which UVJS was prepared and sperm were incubated with and without UVJS. When UVJS extracts were added to sperm, the *in vitro* life span was extended.²¹

The parameters assessed in this study showed that sperm could inhibit the movement of hyperactivation by adding decapacitating substances in vitro (present in UVJS) or on the contrary by inducing movement or hyperactivation as a consequence of in vitro capacitation. It has been reported that movement inhibition or hyperactivation in other species occur during sperm maturation in the male reproductive tract. Storage structures such as the epididymis have been identified in which sperm decapacitation has been found to be regulated by physiological substrates (lipids, glucose, lactate and glycerol) and autoregulatory mechanisms as low oxygen tension, low osmotic pressure and low extracellular concentrations of H⁺, Ca²⁺, Na⁺ and HCO^{3-,22} In birds, it is known⁴ that SST microvilli provide physiological substrates and exogenous macromolecules to inhibit sperm functions in a reversible way associated with fertilization that this process may involve decapacitation.

It has been suggested that sperm in SST is under the reversible suppression of physiological activity, motility, and AR capability. Our study demonstrated that UVJS could inhibit sperm capacitation *in vitro* in response to a natural inductor like PVL. These decapacitated sperm can capacitate and reach acceptable AR parameters. According to *in vitro* AR parameters, it was demonstrated that AR parameters in Lake extender supplemented with UVJS were inversely proportional to decapacitated sperm parameters and that viability was shown after co-incubation with PVL. This increased AR percentages, superior to those observed in sperm preserved in Lake extender and homogeneously in every aliquot preserved with UVJS and co-incubated with PVL. This suggested that sperm inside SST were decapacitated and could achieve capacitated status once they left the SST and entered the uterus, associated with a high cholesterol content on the membrane.³

Oligosaccharides isolated from hen PVL glycoproteins can induce AR in rooster sperm. It has been suggested that the induction factor for AR is probably an oligosaccharide bound to nitrogen in N-acetyl-glucosamine, sialic acid, mannose, and glucose as part of the gamete recognition glycoproteins.¹⁸ Additionally, it has been reported that progesterone and other substances as simple saline containing Ca^{2+} can induce AR.¹⁵

Based on our results, we demonstrated that it was possible to induce sperm decapacitation *in vitro* using UVJS, thereby maintaining sperm viability. This could be demonstrated through AR after *in vitro* induction with PVL. This study provided information on sperm physiological status during *in vitro* preservation, which could be associated with uterus vaginal junction processes. Further research on avian sperm cellular mechanisms might provide vital information and contribute to more efficient conservation during sperm preservation.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

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