

COMMENTARY

## EFFECTS OF ELECTROMAGNETIC RADIATIONS ON THE MALE REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM

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### ABSTRACT

Electromagnetic radiation (EMR) emitting from the natural environment, as well as from the use of industrial and everyday appliances, constantly influences the body of the animal. It is expected that the interactions between electromagnetic radiation and the living organism would depend on the amount and parameters of the transmitted energy and type of tissue exposed. Electromagnetic waves exert an influence on the male reproductive system causing spermatozoa to have decreased motility, morphometric abnormalities, increased peroxidation due to oxidative stress, histological aberrations in the testes and in some cases atrophy of the testicular tissue. This review presents from literature some of effects of electromagnetic radiations on the male reproductive system.

**Key Words: Electromagnetic Radiations, Male Reproductive System, Animals, Humans**

### INTRODUCTION

Animals and humans in modern society are exposed to an ever-increasing number of electromagnetic fields (EMFs) generated from the production and supply of electricity, television (TV) sets, personal computer (PC), radio communication, and mobile communication (Vishki et al., 2012, Wdowiak et al., 2017).

Over the years, due to rapid technological progress, radiation from man-made sources exceeded that of natural origin. There is a general concern regarding a growing number of appliances that use radiofrequency/ microwave (RF/MW) radiation. (Marjanovic et al., 2012). It is known that a living organism is a complex electrochemical system where processes of oxidation and reduction occur regularly. One of the plausible mechanisms is connected with generation of reactive oxygen species (ROS)

(Panagopoulos et al., 2007). Reactive Oxygen Species are unstable reactive molecules produced continuously in several cell types exposed to electromagnetic radiation, and are involved in intracellular signal transduction pathways, regulation of gene expression determining the anti-inflammatory response, cell growth, differentiation, proliferation and stress response (Kartashev, 1992; Simko and Mattson, 2004). On the other hand, overload of ROS concentration and antioxidant deficiency leads to cellular damage affecting the membranes, lipids, proteins, and even DNA. Several diseases are associated with adverse effects caused by reactive oxygen species such as diabetes, atherosclerosis, chronic inflammation, malignant and neurodegenerative diseases and many others (Pei et al., 2015).

Electromagnetic energy is directly proportional to its frequency, with higher frequency meaning

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greater energy. The Minimum energy capable of causing ionisation by breaking the intermolecular bonds and releasing electrons from an atom or molecule is considered to be 10 eV (Marjanovic et al., 2012). Based on their ability to cause ionisation, we can distinguish two types of electromagnetic radiation; ionising and non-ionising radiation. Non-ionising radiation includes three frequency ranges; static (0 Hz) and extremely low frequency range (<300 Hz), intermediate frequency range (300 Hz-10 MHz), and radiofrequency range including RF and microwaves (10 MHz to 300 GHz) (WHO, 1993). Very low frequency electromagnetic fields particularly are likely to produce greater damage to the body systems for several reasons. One that these frequencies are close to those of physiological range and hence any overlap of these can distort on-going biological processes. When in close contact with the body the generation of eddy currents and accompanied heating are added parameters (Kesari et al., 2013). In real life, good examples of how animals are exposed to variable levels of electromagnetic fields (radiofrequencies) are their distances from a cellular bases station, the presence of passive structures to either amplify the waves (e.g., the metallic structures) or to shield them (buildings or other obstacles), the number of transmission calls within the transmitters and their position with relationship to the orientation of the antenna. (Hyland, 2000; Balmori, 2005) Whenever a body having finite conductivity (biological body) is intercepted by EMF it induces electric fields and circulating electric currents, which in turn competes with endogenous current and voltages, thus disturbing normal physiological balance (Loscher and Kas, 1998). The depth of penetration within the body depends upon its frequency and the electric properties of the exposed portion in the body (Obukhan, 1998; Makker et al., 2009). If the current density exceeds a certain threshold value, excitation of muscles and nerves due to membrane depolarization is possible. The mode of interaction of non-ionizing radiation with biological systems can be broadly divided into two parts: extremely low frequency and

radiofrequency/microwaves (Anderson and Rowley, 2007).

Animals are very sensitive electrochemical complexes that communicate with their environment through electrical impulses. Ionic currents and electric potential differences exist through the cellular membranes and corporal fluids (Marks and Ratke, 1995). The intrinsic electromagnetic fields from the biological structures are characterized by certain specific frequencies that can be interfered with by the electromagnetic radiation, through induction and causing modification in their biological responses (Hyland, 2000; Wdowiak et al., 2007). Animals exposed to the EMF can suffer a deterioration of health, changes in behavior (Marks et al., 1995), and changes in reproductive success (Ferne et al., 2000). Research has shown such effects on the living organisms are at molecular (Danielles et al., 1998), cellular levels (Adey, 1996) and on the DNA (Sarkar et al., 1994), Other systems affected include the nervous, cardiac, endocrine, immune, and reproductive systems (Dasdag et al., 1999). There is also modification of sleep and alteration of the cerebral electric response (Mann and Roshkle, 1999), increase of the arterial pressure, changes in the heart rhythm, and increase in the permeability of the blood brain barrier (Fritze et al., 1997).

There are numerous sources of non- ionizing EMF in our environment and these radiations interacts with human and animal bodies. Use of electronic household items and cell phones are reported to cause infertility potential in men by decreasing sperm count, motility, viability, inducing pathological changes in sperm and testes morphology (Erogul et al. 2006). The male reproductive system is said to be one of the most sensitive to electromagnetic radiation (Liu et al., 2015)

The effects of ELF-EMF on the male reproduction are receiving heightened interest because human male fertility in the 20th century was diminished; human sperm count in 1940 was

nearly two-fold compared to the sperm count in 1990 (Giwerehan et al. 1993)

The aim of this review is to identify how electromagnetic radiations potentiate their risks in the male reproductive system.

### **Effect of EMR on Reproductive Hormones**

Exposure to EMF can influence the secreting activity of the pineal gland in several animal species just like light (Rodriguez et al., 2004, Cucurachi et al., 2013). Exposure to EMFs can affect circadian secretions of melatonin in several species (Yellon, 1994). In rats exposed to a circularly polarized 50 Hz EMF for 6 weeks, the pineal and circulating melatonin levels decreased (Rodriguez et al., 2003). In fully grown Djungarian hamster, a 60 Hz EMF exposure acutely affected the pineal and circulating melatonin concentrations (Yellon, 1994; Petrides, 2000). EMF exposure directly affects the pineal gland, deteriorating the biological effect of melatonin. Melatonin regulates the pulse of gonadotropin releasing hormones in the hypothalamus, influencing follicle stimulating hormone (FSH) and luteinizing hormone (LH) (Wang et al., 2003b; Al-Akhras et al., 2006). Eventually, this can alter the production of gonadal sex steroids, resulting in changes in spermatogenesis and masculinization (Sepehrimanesh et al., 2014; Mollerlokken and Moen, 2008).

### **Effects of EMR the Morphology of the Male Spermatozoa**

The testes of higher animals need physiological temperatures 2 °C lower than normal body temperature for optimal spermatogenesis. High intensity electromagnetic frequency has heating properties that can lead to thermal effects on the testes. An increase in testicular or body temperature on exposure to EMF radiation may cause irreversible disruption of spermatogenesis (Kandeel and Swerdloff, 1988; Jung and Schill, 2000). Exposure to EMF enhances the generation of reactive oxygen species (ROS) and thus causes destructive effects on various cellular organelles like mitochondria sperm DNA (Agarwal and Prabakaran, 2005). It was stated

that tubulin dimmers in cells have a piezoelectric property (Tuszynski and Kurzynski, 2003), and this may be a target for action of magnetic field that will affect the sperm motility and spermiogenesis resulting in sperm morphological abnormalities. There are reports that electromagnetic field exposure cause nuclear condensation and marginal hyper chromatin of germinal epithelium (Sarkar and Behari, 1994; Bushra et al., 2011) and also cause different morphological aberrations such as defective head sperms and double head sperms due to influence of ultrasound (frequency 2, 4 and 8 MHz) and constant magnetic field (7T) on gametes, zygotes and embryos of the sea urchin (Drozdov et al., 2008). Magnetic field exposure interrupts the process of the gamete fusion but did not influence gametes, embryos, or embryonic development. The nature of these two stimuli is of different type (Wang et al., 2003a, Hackney et al., 2005). Ultrasound may heat up the water if is of sufficient power, by way of increase in water temperature and cavitation temperature, which may also break the cellular structure. The effect of magnetic field is connected to the response of the cortical cytoskeleton, which consists of bundles of actin microfilaments. The rearrangement of the cortical cytoskeleton occurs during the first 20 minutes after the contact of sperm with the egg (Aitken et al., 2005; Ozguner et al., 2005).

### **Effects of EMR on the Biochemistry of the Male Reproductive System**

Several views have been proposed to elucidate the disruption of metabolic pathways by RF-EMW. Some of these views are based on experimental evidences and some on hypothetical models (Makker et al, 2009; Ramezani et al., 2012). Isocitrate dehydrogenase, an important enzyme in the citric acid cycle, is one of the targets of non-ionizing EMF (Simko and Mattson, 2004). Nylund and Leszczynski, (2004) reported that changes in the enzyme activity leads to decreased production of adenosine triphosphate (ATP) in mammalian cells and since sperm motility depends on the active generation of ATP, such a mechanism might cause the decline in sperm

motility during exposure. This makes spermatozoa lose their cytoplasm post-spermiation, leading to the loss of their antioxidant protective mechanism and rendering them inherently vulnerable to DNA damage (Lai and Sing, 1996). They are differentiated to the point that they cannot undergo apoptosis in response to any form of severe genetic damage (Aitken, 1999). In addition, during the process of maturation, spermatozoa are separated from the Sertoli cells, their nursing cells (Kesari et al., 2013).

Cucullo et al. (2005) found that electric field may affect cellular function by changing the structure of ion channel and the integrity of the cell membrane. Regarding sperm viability, Ayrapetyan (2006) reported that EMF causes disturbances in sperm cell membrane mechanisms that govern ion passage especially to sodium and potassium and consequently the water content and sperm viability. Apoptosis and decrease in cellular numbers in the seminiferous tubules were found that may be due to the direct effect of EMF (Ribeiro et al., 2007; Faegi et al., 2015).

#### **Effects of EMR on the Blood-Testis barrier**

The blood-testis barrier is sensitive to environmental stimulation, which can affect its permeability and then result in antisperm antibody (AsAb) generation, which is a key step in male fertility. Wang et al. (2010) reported the results of male mice exposed to electromagnetic pulse (EMP) by measuring the expression of tight-junction of associated proteins (ZO-1 and Occludin), vimentin microfilaments, and mice were sham exposed or exposed to EMF at two different intensities (200 kV/m and 400 kV/m) for 200 pulses (Susa and Pavicic, 2007).

Khaki et al., (2006) reported that following exposure to EMF field, tissue showed infoldings, which were perhaps due to the loss of collagen and reticular fibrils from the inner and outer non-cellular layers. The outer non-cellular layer, which was thinner than that of the control, was stripped away from the myoid cell layer in multiple regions, giving a "blister-like" appearance (Kodama et al., 1997). The myoid

cells showed fewer polyribosomes, pinocytotic vesicles and glycogen granules (Lishko et al., 2010; Bushra et al., 2011). Most mitochondria were found to lack cristae. The connections between individual myoid cells were apparently lost. There were signs of recovery in the boundary tissue following withdrawal from EMF exposure. These results suggest that EMF exposure may cause profound changes in the boundary tissue of the seminiferous tubules. Therefore exposure to EMF may result in pathological changes that lead to subfertility and infertility (Carl et al., 2006).

#### **Relationship between EMR, Oxidative Stress and the Male Reproductive System**

Mitochondrial respiratory chain is the site for the generation of superoxide radicals [ $O_2^-$  and  $H_2O_2$ ] (Smith et al., 1996). EMF may affect the mitochondrial membranes to produce large amount of radical reactive oxygen species (ROS) (Desai et al., 2009; Pei et al., 2015). EMF may disturb ROS metabolism by enhancing the production of ROS or by decreasing the activity of antioxidant enzymes (Oksay et al., 2014). From the work of Oksay et al., (2014), it is obvious that such a change in testes that is highly dependent on oxygen to drive spermatogenesis and yet highly susceptible to the toxic effects of reactive oxygen metabolites, activities of anti-oxidant enzymes is sacrosanct for spermatogenesis. Reactive oxygen species (ROS) such as superoxide anions ( $O_2^-$ ), hydroxyl radicals ( $OH^-$ ) and hydrogen peroxide ( $H_2O_2$ ) may influence the structural integrity and function of sperm, such as motility, capacitation, and sperm-oocyte fusion (Iwasaki and Gagon, 1992; Griveau et al 1994). Spermatozoa are particularly vulnerable to oxidative stress because their plasma membrane is rich in polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFAS) and membrane bound NADPH oxidase (D'Autreaux and Toledano, 2007). Increased ROS production has been shown to correlate with reduced male fertility (Iwasaki and Gagnon 1992), to cause peroxidative damage to the sperm plasma membrane (Hughes et al 1996; Diem et al., 2005),

In conclusion evidence abound that electromagnetic radiations have deleterious effects on the male reproductive system such as increased testicular temperature impeding the process of spermatogenesis, histological aberrations in the testes and sometimes

reduction in weight of the testicular tissue. Efforts must be made to minimize contact with radiations and antioxidants must be administered regularly to counteract the effects brought about by radiations.

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