



## ***In Silico* Screened Flavanoids of *Glycyrrhiza Glabra* Inhibit CPLA2 and SPLA2 in LPS Stimulated Macrophages**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Phospholipases hydrolyze fatty acids from the *sn*-2 position of membrane phospholipids. In addition to their normal metabolic processes, phospholipases such as cytosolic phospholipase A2 (cPLA2) and secreted phospholipase A2 (sPLA2) are well known to generate active lipid metabolites that promote inflammatory metabolic diseases such as atherosclerosis, hyperlipidemia, obesity, etc. Inhibiting the activity of cPLA2 and sPLA2 might be very important to control inflammatory reactions. Several plant based molecules are being considered which possess inhibitory activity towards these phospholipases. *Glycyrrhiza glabra*, commonly called licorice is one of those medicinal herbs which are used to treat many diseases, such as respiratory disorders, epilepsy, hyperdipsia, fever and even jaundice. Mass spectrometric analysis of the plant revealed that it contains some important flavanoids such as Glycyrrin, Isoliquiritin, Liquiritin, Formnonetien, Jaranol, Isoliquiritigenin and Glycyrrhizaisoflavone. *In silico* docking studies showed that these flavonoids interacted with both cytosolic PLA2 (cPLA2) and secretory PLA2 (sPLA2). Isoliquiritigenin was found to be more effective in binding to the active sites of cPLA2 and sPLA2 among all flavonoids tested. *In vitro*, Jaranol, Glycyrrhizaisoflavone and Isoliquiritigenin inhibited the function of cPLA2 and sPLA2 in macrophages induced by lipopolysaccharides in a concentration dependent manner, suggesting that these flavanoids possess anti-inflammatory and immunomodulatory functions. Further, they can be target drug molecules against cPLA2 and sPLA2.

**Key words:** Phospholipases, flavanoids, *Glycyrrhiza glabra*, LPS, macrophages

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Phospholipase A2 (PLA2) is a family of proteins consisting of five subtypes: cytosolic PLA2 (cPLA2), secreted PLA2, calcium-independent PLA2, acetylhydrolase platelet-activating factor (PAF), and lysosomal PLAs [1, 2]. Several research studies have focused on cPLA2 due to its preference for hydrolyzing membrane glycerophospholipids at position *sn*-2 to form arachidonic acid (AA) [3]. AA is transformed through the catalytic action of lipoxygenase or cyclooxygenase [4, 5] to active inflammatory lipid mediator eicosanoids, including leukotrienes (LTs), lipoxins, thromboxanes, and prostaglandins. The involvement of cPLA2 in the production of lipid mediators and their role in inflammation and cancer makes it a potentially significant pharmacological target. Despite its relevance, the cPLA2 down-regulation mechanisms have not yet been determined. A novel approach is required to understand the mechanisms of cPLA2 down-regulation to improve the treatment of inflammatory diseases.

Inflammation of the CNS is known to be mediated through the hydrolysis of fatty acids from the *sn*-2 position of membrane phospholipids by secretory phospholipase A2-IIA (sPLA2-IIA), leading to the generation of free arachidonic acid (AA), lysophospholipids, precursors of pro-inflammatory lipid mediators such as prostaglandins (PGs) and leukotrienes (LTs) [6, 7]. sPLA2 is also a most abundant isoform isolated from inflammatory fluids and cells, playing prominent roles in inflammatory and infectious diseases [8,9, 10,11]. The hippocampus and cerebral cortex of the ischemic and Alzheimer's Disease brains are also found to have significant amounts of sPLA2-IIA [12,13]. A crosstalk exists between the two phospholipases where sPLA2-IIA interacts with cytosolic phospholipase A2 (cPLA2) to supply AA because of its phospholipase enzymatic activity to downstream cyclooxygenase-2 (COX-2) for PGE2 biosynthesis [14]. However, the exact role of sPLA2-IIA in neuroinflammation is still unclear.

Pro-inflammatory enzymes and cytokines are more desired as therapeutic targets for a range of inflammatory diseases [6]. In this respect, the 14-18 kD secreted phospholipase A2s (sPLA2s) are of interest because of their availability in blood circulation and also because most types of inflammation are associated with local and systemic elevation of sPLA2s. This is evident from patients affected by chronic inflammatory disorders such as acute pancreatitis, septic shock, severe burns, and autoimmune diseases who have elevated levels of extracellular sPLA2s in plasma [7]. Phospholipases are also found to accumulate in inflammatory fluids such as the synovial fluid of rheumatoid arthritis patients, the bronchoalveolar lavage of bronchial asthma patients and the nasal secretions of allergic rhinitis patients. More recent experimental studies indicate that sPLA2s are involved in precipitated traumatic and autoimmune neurodegeneration and are thus also a possible target for the treatment of nervous system disorders due to excess release of neurotransmitters, possibly because of high phospholipid turnover, long-term potentiation and memory processes [15]. However, increased degradation of phospholipids due to activation of PLA2 isozymes contributes to changes in membrane permeability and stimulation of enzymes involved in lipolysis under pathological conditions, leading to disruption of membrane structure [15]. Along with changes in the behaviour of membrane-bound enzymes, receptors, and ion channels, this causes malfunction of the nervous system and cognitive disorders. The results are closely linked to the activation of inflammatory cytokine-releasing microglia and astrocytes (TNF- $\alpha$ , IL-1 $\beta$ , and IL-6). These spread and worsen neuroinflammation through a variety of mechanisms, including further PLA2 upregulation, platelet-activating factor generation, and nitric oxide synthase stimulation. In the present study we screened important flavanoids of *Glycyrrhiza glabra* in-silico and based on their interaction capacity with cPLA2 and sPLA2, we have shown that Jaranol, Glycyrrhiza isoflavone, and Isoliquiritigenin are potent inhibitors for cPLA2 and sPLA2.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

### Macrophage culture

Cell culture and treatment RAW264.7 macrophages were grown in DMEM supplemented with 10% heat-inactivated FBS and 1.0% penicillin-streptomycin solution in a humidified incubator with 5.0% CO<sub>2</sub> at 37°C.

### cPLA2 activity assay and sPLA2 activity

cPLA2 activity was measured with a cPLA2 Assay Kit (Cayman Chemicals), as reported [16] using 1.5 mM arachidonoyl thio-PC as a synthetic substrate. Briefly, LPS stimulated/ macrophages homogenised in 3 mL of lysate buffer (10 mM Tris-HCl, pH 7.8, containing 1% Nonidet P-40, 0.15 M NaCl, and 1 mM EDTA), then chilled on ice for 30 min and centrifuged at 10 000 g for 15 min at 4°C. cPLA2 activity was determined in the supernatant in the presence of the iPLA2 specific inhibitor bromoenol lactone (BEL, 10  $\mu$ M) and of the sPLA2 specific inhibitor thioetheramide- PC (TE-PC, 50  $\mu$ M), which were incubated with the samples for 15 min at 25 °C prior to the assay. sPLA2 activity was measured with an sPLA2 assay kit (Cayman Chemicals), using the 1,2-dithio analog of diheptanoyl phosphatidylcholine, which serves as a substrate for most PLA2 enzymes, with the exception of cPLA2. Bee venom PLA2 was run as a positive control in the same assay to show a linear increase in the absorbance over the time range chosen. Absorbance was measured every minute after adding the substrate, for a total of 11 min. Activity was calculated for both cPLA2 and sPLA2 assays by measuring the absorbance at 414 nm, using the DTNB extinction coefficient of 10.66 per mM per cm, and reported as nmol/min/g of cytosolic protein).

### Protein preparation

The required protein 1N29 and 1CJY were retrieved from the Protein databank website[17] and removed the pre-existed ligand molecules then cleaned the geometrical structure using freely accessible ArgusLab software [18] and MolProbity to add the missing atoms and correct the miss folded regions of each protein separately.

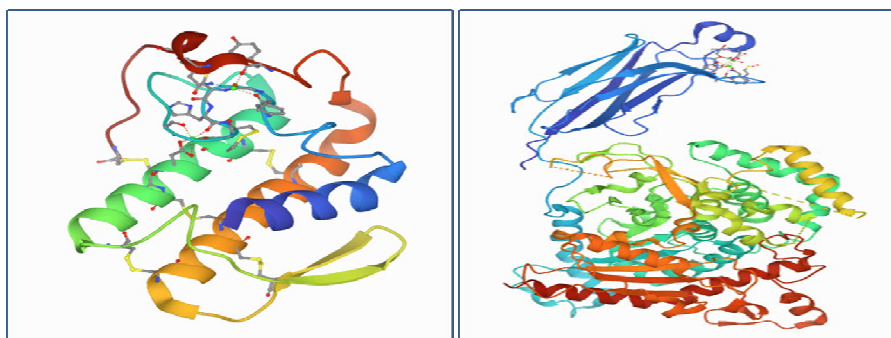
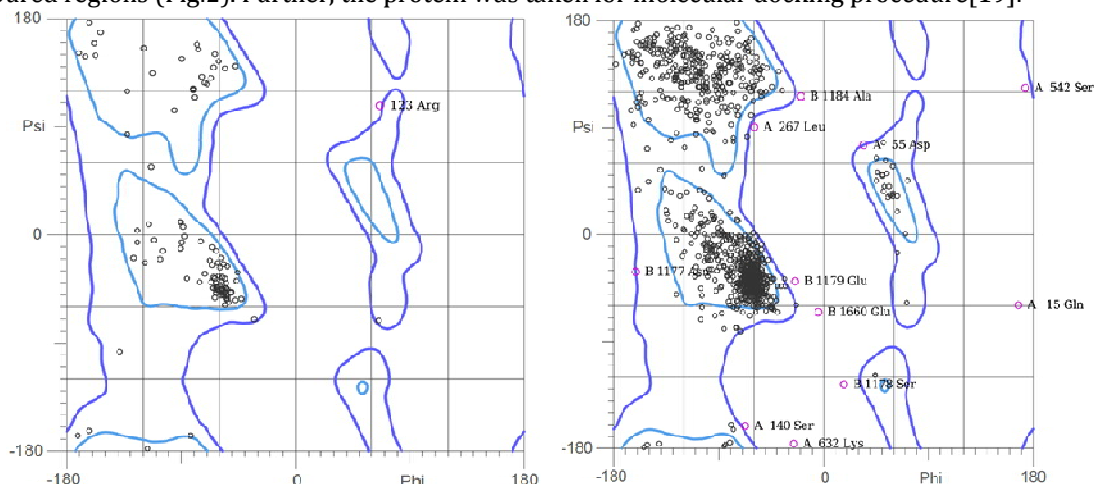


Fig.1. 3D structure of 1N29 and 1CJY proteins

### Protein validation

The protein structures obtained were validated using the clashscore (Table 1) and Ramachandran Favoured regions (Fig.2). Further, the protein was taken for molecular docking procedure[19].



**Fig.2: Structural analysis of 1CJY and 1N29 protein using Ramachandran plot, plotted using MolProbity.**

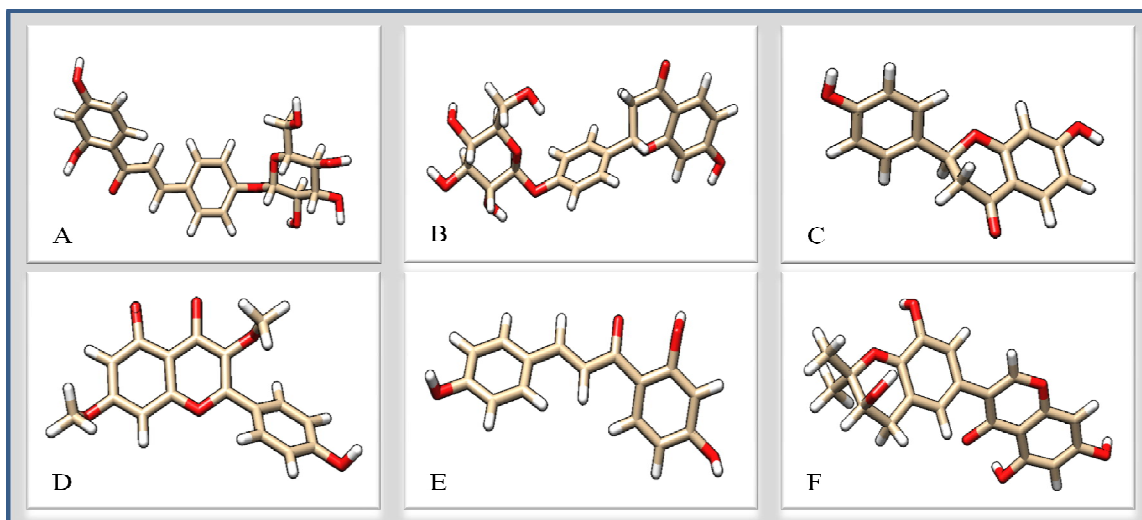
- (a) 92.6% (113/122) of all residues were in favored (98%) regions.
- (b) 91.1% (1118/1227) of all residues were in favored (98%) regions.
- 98.3% (1206/1227) of all residues were in allowed (>99.8%) regions.
- 98.4% (120/122) of all residues were in allowed (>99.8%) regions.

**Table 1: Clashscore structural analysis of proteins**

Sl. No.	Target protein	Ramachandran Favoured region	Ramachandran outliers	Clashscore (Clashscore is the number of serious steric overlaps (> 0.4 Å) per 1000 atoms)
1	1N29	92.62%	1.64%	17.34
2	1CJY	91.12%	1.71%	18.55

### Ligand preparation and validation

Ligands, Isoliquiritin, Liqueitin and Formononetin were downloaded from the PubChem database in sdf format since the molecular docking requires ligands in pdb format, downloaded drugs were converted to pdb format using open accessible tool called Open Bable GUI[20]. The geometry cleaning was done by the ArgusLab software for converted pdb files to achieve the proper 3D structure and orientation.



**Fig.3.3D structure of ligands A) Isoliquiritin, B) Liqueitin, C) Formononetin D) Jaranol, E) Isoliquiritigenin and F) Glycyrrhizaisoflavone A.**

## Molecular Docking (MD)

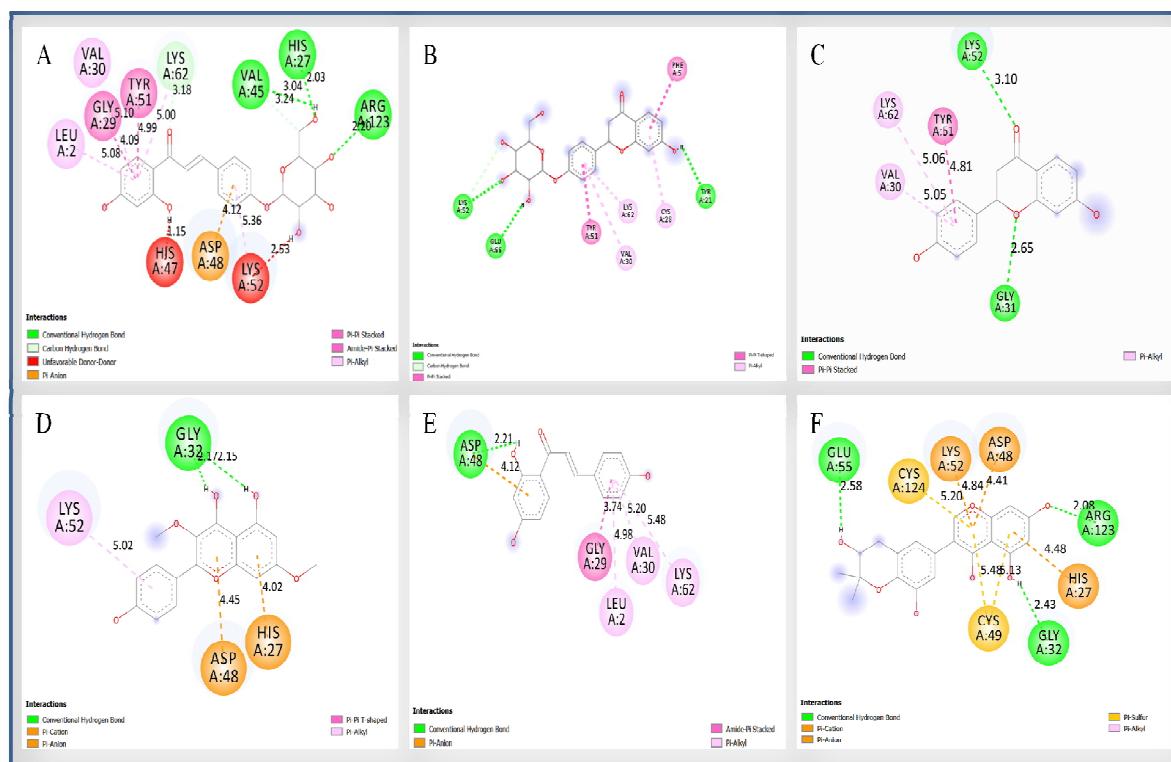
Molecular docking interaction studies were done between the selected proteins and ligands to check if they can interact with each other forming bonded and non-bonded interactions. MD studies for the screened proteins and ligands were successfully performed using PyRx software [21].

## RESULTS

### Molecular docking:

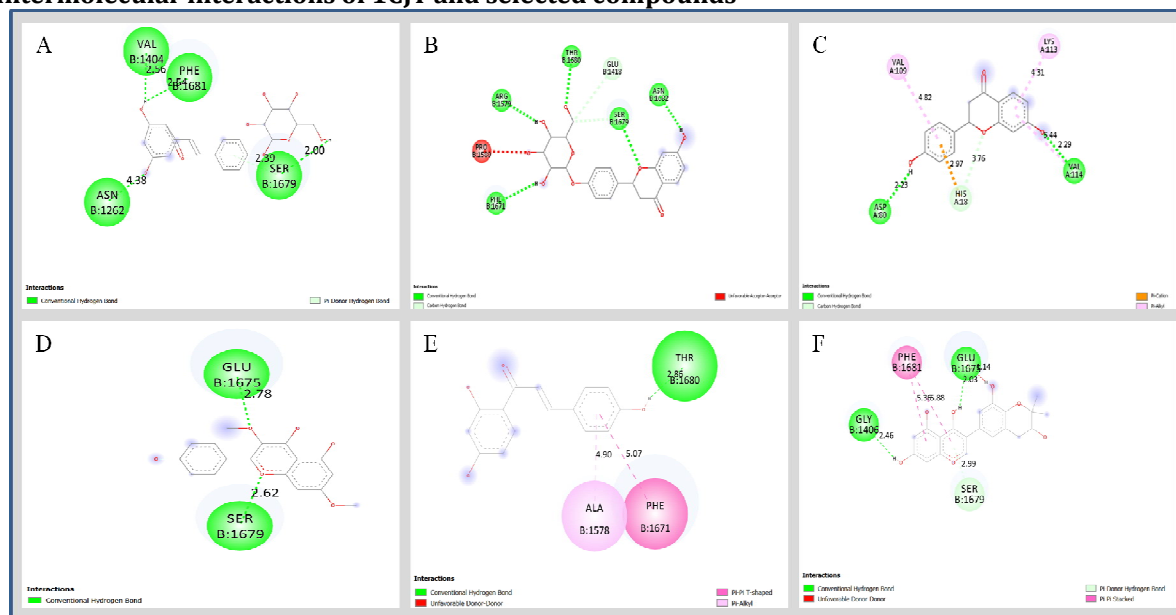
The molecular docking results obtained by PyRx were observed for the intermolecular interactions using Discovery studio visualizer software. The docked proteins and ligands have achieved the significant result and parameters of acceptable counts. Based on docking and molecular interaction, binding energy, distance between the target proteins 1CJY, 1N29 and selected ligands, it can be inferred that the ligands are capable to exhibit modulatory functions in-silico. The flavonoids Glycyrrin, Isoliquiritin, liquiritin, formnonetin, Jaranol, Glycyrrhizaisoflavone A and Isoliquiritigenin were subjected to molecular docking with the target proteins 1N29 and 1CJY. All the molecules interact with sPLA2 and cPLA2 proteins with different bonds. Glycyrrhiza isoflavone A (Fig.3) and Jaranol (Fig.5) interacted with sPLA2 more efficiently with a binding affinity of 6.5 (Table 2).

### Intermolecular interactions of 1N29 and selected compounds



**Fig.4: Intermolecular interaction of 1N29 and (a) Isoliquiritin (b) Liquiritin (c) Formononetin (d) Jaranol (e) Isoliquiritigenin and (f) Glycyrrhizaisoflavone A.**

## Intermolecular interactions of 1CJY and selected compounds



**Fig.5: Intermolecular interaction of 1CJY and (a) Isoliquiritin (b) Liquiritin (c) Formononetin (d) Jaranol (e) Isoliquiritigenin and (f) Glycyrrhizaisoflavone A.**

**Table 2: Molecular docking results the selected proteins with ligands**

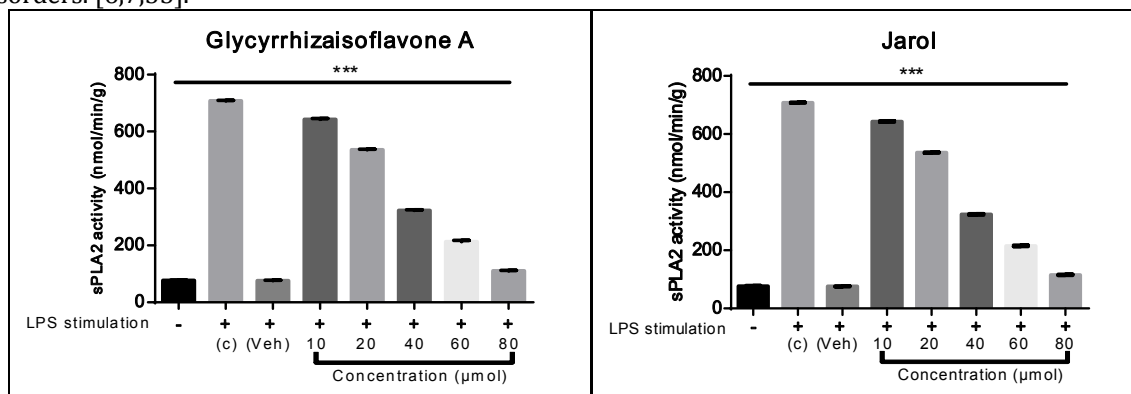
Target	Ligands	Residues	Binding Affinity	Interaction Distance
1N29 (sPLA2)	Glycyrin	GLY32 ASP48	-7	2.23 Å 3.22Å
	Glycyrrhizaisoflavone A	GLU55 GLY32 ARG123	-6.5	2.58 Å 2.08 Å 2.43 Å
	Isoliquiritigenin	ASP48	-7.5	2.21 Å
	Isoliquiritin	VAL45 LYS62 HIS27 ARG123	-8.7	3.24 Å 3.18 Å 2.03 Å 2.20 Å
	Jaranol	GLY32	-6.5	2.17 Å, 2.15 Å
	Liquiritin	LYS 52 GLU55 LYS 52 CYS28 VAL30	-7.8	3.32 Å 2.44 Å 4.71 Å 5.10 Å 5.21 Å
	Formononetin	GLY32 VAL 30 LYS62 TYR51	-7.1	2.99 Å 2.65 Å 5.07 Å 480 Å
1CJY (cPLA2)	Isoliquiritigenin	THR1680	-5.9	2.86 Å
	Isoliquiritin	ASN1262 VAL1404 PHE1681 SER1679	-8.2	4.38 Å 2.56 Å 2.54 Å 2.00 Å
	Jaranol	GLU1675 SER1679	-6.2	2.78 Å 2.62Å
	Liquiritin	PHE167 ARG 1579 PRO 1580 GLU 1418 THR 1680 SER 1679 ASN 1682	-7.2	2.79 Å 2.13 Å 2.89 Å 3.53 Å 2.37 Å 1.89 Å
	Formononetin	LYS 113 VAL114 HIS18 ASP80	-7.1	2.39 Å 2.53 Å 3.81 Å 2.58 Å



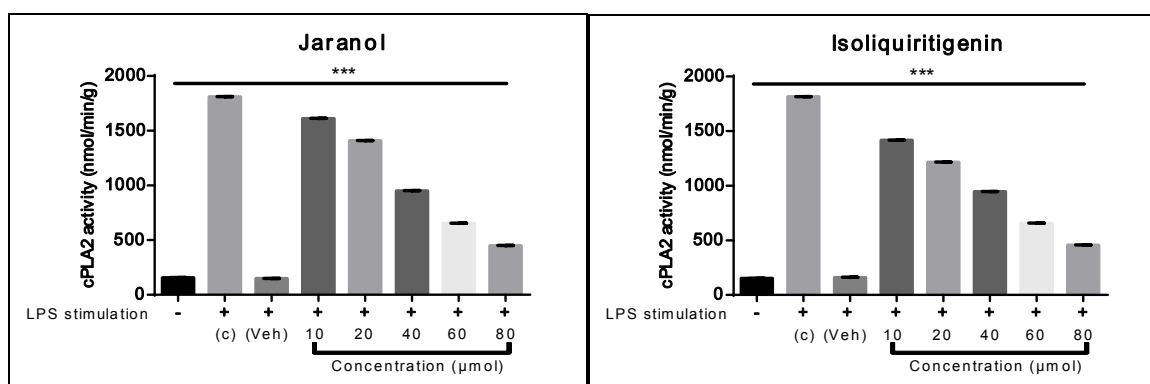
### cPLA2 and sPLA2 activity in LPS stimulated Macrophages

Pro-inflammatory enzymes and cytokines are increasingly attractive as therapeutic targets for a variety of inflammatory diseases and the inflammatory component of neurodegenerative disorders. The 14–18 kD secreted phospholipase A2s (sPLA2s) are of interest in this regard because of their accessibility in the circulation and because the local and systemic elevation of sPLA2s is associated with most forms of inflammation. The secreted isoforms are part of a growing family of PLA2 enzymes whose activity leads to the production of several potent mediators of inflammation. In the present investigation, LPS stimulated macrophages cPLA2 and sPLA2 activity was assessed in the presence and absence of flavonoids Jarnol, Glycyrrhizaisoflavone, Isoliquiritigenin. All these flavonoids inhibited cPLA2 and sPLA2 in stimulated macrophages. Jarnol, Glycyrrhizaisoflavone inhibited sPLA2 in a concentration-dependent manner (Fig.6). Pro-inflammatory enzymes and cytokines are increasingly attractive as therapeutic targets for a variety of inflammatory diseases and for the inflammatory component of neurodegenerative disorders. The 14–18 kD secreted phospholipase A2s (sPLA2s) are of interest in this regard because of their accessibility in the circulation and because local and systemic elevation of sPLA2s are associated with most forms of inflammation [1-5]. The secreted isoforms are part of a growing family of PLA2 enzymes whose activity leads to the production of several potent mediators of inflammation. In the present investigation LPS stimulated macrophages cPLA2 and sPLA2 activity was assessed in presence and absence of flavonoids Jarnol, Glycyrrhizaisoflavone and Isoliquiritigenin. All these flavonoids inhibited cPLA2 and sPLA2 in stimulated macrophages. Jarnol, Glycyrrhizaisoflavone inhibited sPLA2 in concentration dependent manner (Fig.6). Jarnol and Isoliquiritigenin inhibited cPLA2 activity in concentration dependent manner (Fig.7). Both the phospholipases were found to be inhibited almost in a similar manner.

More recent experimental studies suggest sPLA2s are involved in traumatic and autoimmune precipitated neurodegeneration, and thus these enzymes are also a potential target for treatment of nervous system disorders. [6,7,33].



**Fig.6: sPLA2 Activity in presence and absence of Glycyrrhiza isoflavone A and Jarnol.** sPLA2 activity was measured using diheptanoylthio-PC as a synthetic substrate. Results are means  $\pm$  SEM of 10–14 independent samples, each assayed in triplicate \* $p < 0.005$



**Fig.7: cPLA2 Activity in presence and absence of Jarnol and Isoliquiritigenin:** cPLA2 activity was measured using arachidonoyl thio-PC as a synthetic substrate with a cPLA2 assay kit. The contributions of cPLA2 and sPLA2 were inhibited by pre-incubating the samples with 10 IM BEL and 50 IM TE-PC.

## DISCUSSION

Activation of astrocytes or microglia by certain inflammatory mediators lead to neuroinflammation in central nervous system (CNS) which is associated with disorders, including brain infections, inflammation, ischemia, trauma, stroke and degenerative diseases, such as Alzheimer disease (AD), Parkinson's disease (PD) and axonal degeneration in multiple sclerosis (MS) [22]. The process of inflammation is generally associated with upregulation of cytokines, chemokines, reactive nitrogen species [23, 24] and prostaglandins (PGs) [25]. These prostaglandins along with leukotrienes act as pro-inflammatory lipid mediators which are produced due to the action of secretory phospholipase A<sub>2</sub>-IIA (sPLA<sub>2</sub>-IIA) which is known as a mediator to hydrolyze fatty acids from the *sn*-2 position of membrane phospholipids, resulting in the generation of free arachidonic acid (AA) and lysophospholipids [26]. sPLA<sub>2</sub> [27, 28], originally isolated from inflammatory fluids and cells are identified to play a prominent role in inflammation and infectious diseases [29, 30]. sPLA<sub>2</sub> is generally localized in the hippocampus and cerebral cortex in brains of ischemia and AD [31, 32]. Interestingly, sPLA<sub>2</sub> interacts with cytosolic phospholipase A<sub>2</sub> (cPLA<sub>2</sub>) due to its phospholipase enzymatic activity, to supply AA for other biosynthetic pathways [33].

Rosmarinic acid, tetrahydrocurcumin, dihydrocurcumin and hexahydrocurcumin showed better binding than curcumin [34], synthetic Pyrazolo[3,4-d] pyrimidines derivatives also were shown to have sPLA<sub>2</sub> binding efficacy [35]. The naturally occurring phenolic compound derivatives such as rosmarinic acid 3'-O-beta-glucoside, 4-nerolidylcatechol, rosmarinic acid methyl ester, quercetin 3-O-malonylglucoside, quercetin pentaacetate, and rosmarinic acid have shown better interaction with sPLA<sub>2</sub>. The plant-derived phenolic compound such as catechin forms strong interactions with PLA<sub>2</sub> [36], betulinic acid, a constituent of *Coryphatalia* (Roxb.) exhibited better interaction and pharmacokinetic properties [37], bromelain-phytochemical complex inhibitors via a combination of in silico and in vitro methods. Bromelain-amenthoflavone displays antagonistic effects on PLA<sub>2</sub>. Bromelain-asiaticoside and bromelain-diosgenin displayed synergistic effects with sPLA<sub>2</sub> [38].

Similar effects have shown by the bilobetin and ginkgetin can inhibit the sPLA<sub>2</sub> and subsequently inhibit the production of TNF alpha and iNOs[39]. The compound SB203347 and Scalarial have reported being potent sPLA<sub>2</sub> inhibitors [40]. Jaranol and Isoliquiritigenin inhibited cPLA<sub>2</sub> activity in a concentration-dependent manner. Both inhibit almost in a similar manner. Several investigators have demonstrated cPLA<sub>2</sub> inhibitors, i.e. ASB14780 potent cPLA<sub>2</sub> inhibitors [41]. The thiazolyl ketones as inhibitors of cPLA<sub>2</sub> and demonstrated the in vivo anti-inflammatory activity of inhibitor GK470[42], pyrrophenone[43]. The potent cPLA<sub>2</sub> inhibitors 2-Oxoester have exhibited the potent cPLA<sub>2</sub> inhibitory activity [44]. Apart from this ginkgo biloba extract has been shown to inhibit the cPLA<sub>2</sub> activity [45]. The phenolic content found more in the medicinal plant known to have a beneficial effect on inflammation by blocking the cPLA<sub>2</sub> [46]. The arachidonic acid (AA) analogs also shown to inhibit the cPLA<sub>2</sub> [47], and capable of reducing reactive oxygen species (ROS) and nitric oxide (NO) production in stimulated microglial cells. Some biomolecules quinacrine and chloroquine, arachidonyl trifluoromethyl ketone, bromoenol lactone, cytidine 5-diphosphoamines, and vitamin E, inhibit phospholipase A<sub>2</sub> activity [48], cubebin [49], Benzyl 4-nitrobenzenecarbodithioate[50].

## Conclusion

Cytosolic phospholipase A<sub>2</sub> (cPLA<sub>2</sub>) and secreted phospholipase A<sub>2</sub> (sPLA<sub>2</sub>) are well known to promote inflammatory metabolic diseases such as atherosclerosis, hyperlipidemia, obesity, etc., through generation of active lipid metabolites. Inhibiting the activity of cPLA<sub>2</sub> and sPLA<sub>2</sub> might be very important to control inflammatory reactions. We selected *Glycyrrhiza glabra* which is known to be used in foods and medicinal remedies for thousands of years. The plant contains a number of flavanoids which carry great potential to treat diseases. Flavanoids which could interact with cPLAs and sPLA<sub>2</sub> were screened through in-silico approach. Jaranol, Glycyrrhizaisoflavone A and Isoliquiritigenin were found to interact with higher affinity when compared to other flavanoids. Observing the molecular docking and molecular interaction, binding energy, and distance between the target proteins 1N29, 1CJY and selected ligands, it is found that the ligands are capable to exhibit the modulatory functions. Further, these flavanoids were tested in vitro on cells stimulated with LPS and the results revealed that these flavanoids inhibited the activity of cPLA<sub>2</sub> and sPLA<sub>2</sub> in a concentration dependent manner.

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