

Review

## Medicinal properties of *Ficus sp.* as anti-HIV

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**ABSTRACT:**

This paper reviewed the potential of *Ficus* sp as anti-HIV. Due to the increasing incidence of drug resistance mutation among HIV patient with antiretroviral therapy, the need for new therapy is increasing. Thus, the option fell upon herbal medicine. One of those potentially acknowledged herbal medicine is *Ficus* sp which already known to have antibacterial and antioxidant properties. In this paper, we ruled out the potential mechanism of action of phytochemicals found in *Ficus* sp in inhibiting viral entry, and block HIV enzymes such as reverse transcriptase, integrase and protease.

**KEYWORDS:** *Ficus* sp., *Moraceae*, antiviral, antioxidant, antibacterial, therapeutic

## INTRODUCTION:

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Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is still considered as an infectious disease that gains much attention around the world for leading acquired immunodeficiency syndrome. This virus specifically attacks the CD4 cells (T cells) of the immune system that fight infection. HIV infects cell target in several steps including membrane attachment, receptor binding, fusion, uncoating, reverse transcription, integration, and maturation. HIV cannot be completely eradicated from an individual's body once infected<sup>1,2</sup>, however, its replication rate can be suppressed with antiretroviral therapy. HIV infects cell target in several steps including membrane attachment, receptor binding, fusion, uncoating, reverse transcription, integration, and maturation.

The first antiretroviral (ARV) approved for HIV therapy was zidovudine, known as the nucleoside analog reverse transcription (NRTI). This invention was successfully followed by other reverse transcriptase (RT) inhibitors therapy<sup>3</sup>. Currently, there are five classes of ARVs have become available. Those are licensed for inhibiting RT, NRTI and non-nucleoside analog reverse transcription (NNRTI), protease (PI), fusion (F1), receptor binding (CCR5), and integrase (INI)<sup>4</sup>. The inhibition from one of these therapies will prevent HIV to infect CD4 cells, thus reducing HIV concentration in the blood. The combination of ARV therapy therefore will help in the fastest-acting drug<sup>4</sup>. Recently the emergence of drug resistance mutations raising concern over the effectiveness of ARV in treating the patient with HIV<sup>5,6</sup>. Several studies have been shown that drug resistance mutation slowly appears in every part of Indonesia such as in Jakarta, Bali, Riau, Maumere<sup>7-10</sup>. Drug resistance mutations can appear from lifetime ARV consumption or transmitted from patients with ARV to healthy individuals known as transmitted drug resistance (TDR)<sup>11</sup>. Thus, currently, researchers are racing to invent newly developed anti-HIV.

One alternative drug development is using herbal medicine because it provides effective and more affordable results. The studies on natural products against HIV have started since the 1990s, although most of these studies are still in vitro. But traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) interventions in 12 clinical trials involving 881 patients with AIDS showed that plasma viral load in patients on TCM therapy were reduced compared to placebo, suggesting significant potential of natural products to inhibit HIV<sup>12</sup>. In this review we will focus on discussing the potential of *Ficus* sp. as anti-HIV. Our previous study using *Ficus fistulosa* extract<sup>13</sup> has been showed inhibition of HIV replication in vitro. And further studies are required to verify its active compound which act as anti-HIV and its mechanisms that inhibit HIV (viral entry inhibition or HIV enzymes inhibition).

## POTENTIAL OF *FICUS* SP. AS ANTIVIRAL AGENT:

Genus *Ficus* from the family *Moraceae* is known as fig trees which has about 850 species that can be found throughout the pantropics, extending to subtropical regions, from America, Africa to Asian-Australian regions<sup>14,15</sup>. This genus contains six subgenera based on ribosomal DNA sequences and morphology; *Pharmacosycea*, *Urostigma*, *Ficus*, *Sycidium*, *Sycoecia*, *Sycomorus*<sup>16</sup>. *Ficus* can be found in form of woody trees, shrubs, or climbers often with adventitious roots (liana), hemiepiphytes, epiphytes. *Ficus* also well known for its unique inflorescences, namely figs or syconia and its milky latex<sup>14,17</sup>. *Ficus* species has been long considered as sources of food (especially for *Ficus carica* that produces fruits), medicinal plants<sup>17-19</sup> and some of *Ficus* species use as indoor or outdoor ornamental plant<sup>14</sup>.

*Ficus* species excrete health benefit with their phytochemical content. Phytochemicals are secondary metabolites that are produced by plants which may give plants with specific color, odor or flavor for protection from predators and reproductions<sup>20,21</sup>. Phytochemicals compounds have been classified into six major categories based on its chemical structures. Those are polyphenols (phenolics), alkaloid, carotenoids, organosulfur compound, terpenoids, nitrogen containing compounds. Polyphenol as the largest category of phytochemicals consist of five main classes, i.e. phenolic acids, flavonoids, stilbenes, coumarins, tannins. Phytochemicals compounds, such as polyphenol (i.e. phenolic acids, flavonoids, tannins, stilbenes, coumarins), alkaloid, carotenoids, and terpenoids are known to have antiviral properties<sup>22</sup>.

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Member of *Ficus* sp. have antiviral effects against DNA-containing virus families (Herpesviridae) and RNA-containing virus families (Picornaviridae, Retroviridae, Flaviviridae) (Table 1).

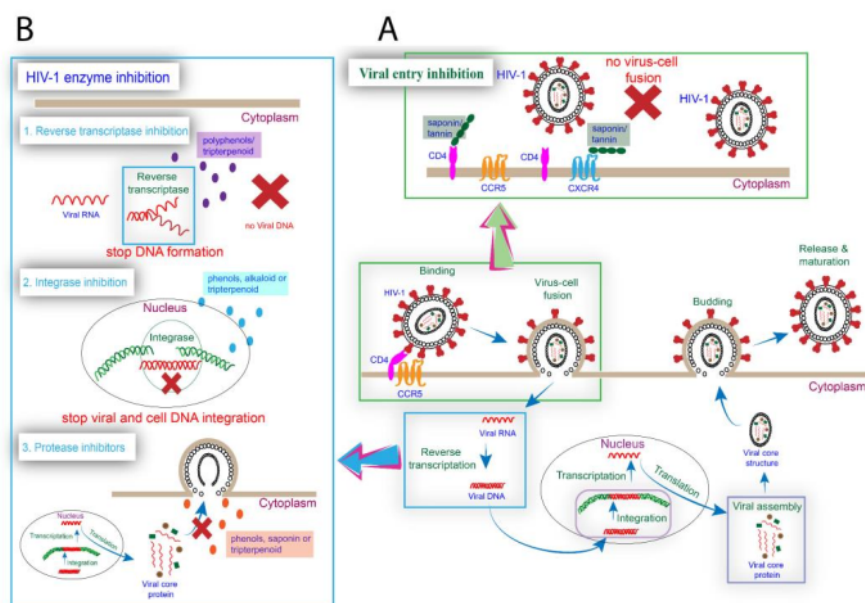
**Table 1. Active substances which have antiviral properties in the plants from Genus *Ficus*.**

Species	Part of <i>Ficus</i>	Active substance	Antiviral mechanism
<i>Ficus carica</i>	LateX	Phenol-detected compound: Caffeic Acid, 3,4-Dihydroxybenzoic acid, p-OH-Phenylacetic acid, p-Coumaric acid, Luteolin, N-arginine, and Ferulic acid <sup>23</sup> .	Inhibition <sup>20</sup> multiplication of several virus including herpes simplex type 1 (HSV-1), echovirus type 11 (ECV-11) and adenovirus (ADV) <sup>23</sup> .
<i>Ficus benjamina</i>	Leaf, Fruit	Flavone glycoside, quercetin 3-O-rutinoside, kaempferol 3-O-rutinoside and kaempferol 3-O-robinobioside <sup>24</sup> .	Multiplication inhibition of Herpes Simplex Virus-1 and 2 (HSV-1 and HSV-2), also Varicella-Zoster <sup>18</sup> (VZV) <sup>25</sup> .
<i>Ficus religiosa</i>	Bark	Methanol extract which contain saponin, flavonoids, tannins and steroids were active against <sup>18</sup> <sup>26</sup> . Saponins, carbohydrates, flavonoids and tannins (water extracts) were active for RSV <sup>26</sup> .	Antiviral against respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and human rhinovirus (HRV) <sup>26</sup> . Antiviral against Herpes Simplex Virus-2 (HSV-2) <sup>27</sup> .
<i>Ficus fistulosa</i>	Leaf	Flavonoids, t <sup>15</sup> oids and chlorophyll <sup>28</sup> .	Antiviral against Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) <sup>29</sup> .
<i>Ficus virens</i>	Leaf	Flavonoids: quercetin-3-O- $\alpha$ -D-arabinopyranoside (2), quercetin-3-O- $\beta$ -D-galactopyranoside <sup>30</sup> . Flavonoids: quercetin, quercetin-3-O- $\beta$ -D-galactopyranoside, vogelin J <sup>30</sup> .	Antiviral against Hepatitis A virus <sup>30</sup> . Antiviral against Coxsackie B4 Virus <sup>30</sup> .
<i>Ficus septica</i>	Fruit, Heartwood, Leaf and Stem	Unknown	Antiviral against Dengue Virus -1 and 2 (DENV-1 and DENV-2) <sup>31</sup> .
<i>Ficus benghalensis</i>	Leaf, aerial root	Quinic acid and stigmasterol <sup>32</sup> .	Antiviral against HIV-1 <sup>33</sup> .
<i>Ficus infectoria</i>	Leaf		Antiviral against HIV-1 <sup>33</sup>
<i>Ficus cycamorus</i>	Stem bark	Unknown	Antiviral against HIV-1 <sup>34</sup>
<i>Ficus polita</i>	Whole	Unknown <sup>33</sup>	Antiviral against reverse transcriptase enzyme of HIV-1 and HIV-2 <sup>35</sup> .
<i>Ficus glomerata</i>	Wood	Aloe-emodin; 1,3,6-trihydroxy-8-methyl-anthraquinone <sup>36</sup> .	Antiviral against integrase enzyme of HIV-1 <sup>36</sup> .

Since the data on *Ficus sp.* as anti-HIV is somewhat scarce, we would like first to know which kind of phytochemical responsible for inhibiting HIV.

## PHYTOCHEMICAL COMPOUNDS AS ANTI-HIV

Several plants have been<sup>5</sup> own to owned phytochemicals which inhibit HIV-1. HIV-1 inhibition can occur<sup>14</sup> arly from viral entry, inhibit HIV-1 enzymes (reverse transcriptase, protease and integrase) and also inhibit HIV-1 maturation<sup>37</sup>. In this review we will focus on viral entry and HIV-1 enzyme inhibition. In this review, we would like to list several phytochemicals found in other herbal medicine and compare it with those phytochemicals found in *Ficus sp.*, which act as viral entry inhibition and HIV enzymes inhibition. Several key phytochemicals shown to have affect in inhibiting HIV in several stage of its life cycle (Figure 1). Finally, in the last part of this chapter, we will discuss several phytochemicals found in *Ficus sp.*, its potential as anti-HIV and several shortcomings that hinder anti-HIV research.



**Figure 1. Proposed potential inhibition of HIV infection stage by phytochemicals of *Ficus* sp. (A) Viral entry inhibition. Phytochemicals of *Ficus* sp. bind to CD4 cells or the CXCR4 protein, blocking the attachment of the HIV virus to host cell. Thus, HIV virus cannot enter and infect host cell; (B) HIV enzyme inhibition. Phytochemicals of *Ficus* sp. suppress the activity of HIV enzyme (reverse transcriptase, integrase, protease) preventing DNA formation for new virus, stopping viral and host cell DNA integration, and inhibiting virion maturation, respectively.**

### Saponin, Tannin and Quinic acid as viral entry inhibitors

Inhibition can take place even before HIV-1 enter CD4 cells. HIV-1 entry include multiple steps with viral envelope gp120 and gp41 mediate attachment, and binding to CD4 receptors and its co-receptor binding (CXCR4 and CCR5)<sup>38,39</sup>. The viral entry inhibition usually targeted CD4 binding, coreceptor binding and blocking gp41 conformational changes which allow viral fusion<sup>39</sup>.

Saponin fraction from *Psidium guajava* leaf could impede HIV-1 mediated cell fusion by obstructing HIV-1 gp41 six helical bundle formation<sup>40</sup>. Other type of saponin found in *Tieghemella heckelii* fruits namely arginine, and tieghemelin strongly inhibit HIV entry in a cell fusion assay<sup>41</sup>. Tannins especially gallotannin extracted from *P. amarus* also showed interference with gp120, thus it impaired gp120-CD4 binding. Purified gallotannin (Geraniin and Corilagin) having high potency in inhibit gp120-CD4 binding<sup>42</sup>. The methanol extract of aerial parts of *Helichrysum populifolium* showed inhibition in HeLa-SXR5 cells (which expressed CXCR4 and CCR5 chemokine receptors). The active compound found in this extract were from caffeoylquinic acid derivatives include 3,4-dicaffeoylquinic acid, 3,5-dicaffeoylquinic acid and 4,5-dicaffeoylquinic acid as well as two tricaffeoylquinic acid derivatives, i.e., 1,3,5-tricaffeoylquinic acid and either 5-malonyl-1,3,4-tricaffeoylquinic or 3-malonyl-1,4,5-tricaffeoylquinic acid<sup>43</sup>.

Meanwhile *in vitro* analysis using *Ficus polita* extract can inhibit cell fusion in early cytopathic effect in MOLT4 cell co-cultured with MOLT4/HIV<sup>28</sup>. Other studies in *Ficus benghalensis* also showed it contained quinic acid which act against HIV-1 RT and Integrase enzyme also inhibit gp120 binding to CD4<sup>32,44</sup>. Thus, based on these studies there is possibility that *Ficus* sp can act as antiviral through viral entry inhibitors.

### Polyphenols, Triterpenoid as HIV-1 reverse transcriptase inhibitors

The reverse transcriptase enzyme is crucial in converting viral RNA into DNA<sup>45</sup>. Thus, inhibiting this enzyme should inhibit RNA-DNA conversion. The mechanism of action from several herbal plants act as RT inhibitors can be divided into two mechanism, mimics nucleoside analogues and pleiotropic effects. Non-nucleoside binds to HIV-1 RT and block RT action by an allosteric mechanism of action<sup>46,47</sup>. While in review by Chinsebu in 2019, they



listed several phytochemicals that actively act against HIV-1 RT are proteins, coumarins, alkaloid, xanthenes, flavonoids, polyphenols, terpenoids, polysaccharides. But in *Ficus polita* studies, the active compound corresponds to anti-HIV is still not known. So, it needs further fractionation to rule out an active compound act against HIV.

The crude extract from *Treculia acuminata* Baill, *Treculia Africana* Decne. Ex Trecul, *Treculia obovoidea* N.E. Br and *Morus nigra* Thunb were used to assess its anti-HIV potential. The extract was obtained from twigs and leaves from three species of family Moraceae. The investigated extract was showed anti-reverse transcriptase activity with concentration 200µg/ml with highest value were noted from *T. obovoidea* (87.34%), *T. Africana* (86.72%) and *T. acuminata* (72.51%)<sup>48</sup>. The phytochemical which showed as anti RT enzyme were triterpenes, coumarins saponin, phenols and flavonoids<sup>48</sup>, gallic acid, quercetin and linoleic, palmitic, oleic acids and kuwanon-L<sup>49,50</sup>. While research in silico approach also found ten compounds were suitable for inhibiting HIV-1 reverse transcriptase inhibitor such as mulberirin, plucheoside A, vitexilactone, brucine N-oxide, cyanidin e-arabinoside, alpha-mangostin, guaijaverin, erycristalgallin, morusin and sanggenol N<sup>51</sup>. Punicalin and puniacortein C also inhibit HIV replication. Tannin from *T. catappa* also shown to inhibit RT though mechanism of inhibition is remain unknown<sup>52,53</sup>.

#### Flavonoid, Phenols, Alkaloid and Triterpenoid as HIV-1 integrase inhibitor

Integrase enzyme has been attracted as therapeutical target for anti-HIV, since it has no homologue in human body. Integrase enzyme act as catalysator for viral DNA integration into human genome<sup>54</sup>. The ethanol extract of *Mimusops elengi* leaves showing inhibition against HIV-1 integrase enzyme. Further assay using anti-HIV1 assay guided purification of crude ethanol extract showed a mixture of epigallocatechin and gallic acid from catechin class of phytochemical (flavonoid) as potential anti integrase<sup>55</sup>. Other gallic acid isolated from *Nelumbo nucifera* Gaertn also showed anti-HIV-1 integrase<sup>56</sup>. Four catechins known to interfere the interaction with DNA virus thus it reduces the integrase activity. Those four catechins are gallic acid, epigallocatechin gallate, gallic acid gallate and epigallocatechin gallate<sup>56,57</sup>.

From phenolic compound known as ferulic acid and alkaloid kind of phytochemicals, tryptamine showed anti-HIV-1 integrase enzyme<sup>58</sup>. Lupeol, active compound of *Betula alnoides* as one kind of triterpenoid also showed potent inhibition against HIV-1 integrase<sup>59</sup>. Lupeol will interact with Asp64, His67 and Lys159. Asp64 is responsible for 3' processing While His67 and Lys159 participate in strand-transfer reaction of integration process<sup>59</sup>. *Ficus glomerata* also showed anti-HIV-1 integrase since it contained aloes emodin and 1,3,6-trihydroxy-8-methyl-anthraquinone from phenolic compound<sup>29</sup>.

#### Saponin, Triterpenoid and Phenols as HIV-1 protease inhibitors

Protease enzyme is required for maturation and infectivity of HIV<sup>61</sup>. The chloroform extract from *Bosenbergia pandurata* rhizome showed inhibition against HIV-1 protease enzyme. While methanol extract of *Bosenbergia pandurata* rhizome, *Alpinia galanga* rhizome also showed potent protease inhibition at 100ug/ml concentration<sup>62</sup>. The responsible anti-HIV protease found in *Acacia pennata* were new saponin compound<sup>12</sup> which separated and purified with column chromatography method. This new saponin compound is known as 21β-O-[(2E)-6-hydroxyl-2,6-dimethyl-2,7-octadienyl]pitheduloside G showed anti-HIV-1 PR activity<sup>61</sup>. Several triterpenoids also showed a potential for PR inhibition such as oleanolic acid, ursolic acid, uvaol, maslinic acid and 2α and 19α-dihydroxy-3-oxo-12-ursen-28oic acid<sup>63-65</sup>. Triacylglycerol, oleic acid and ergosterol could block HIV-1 PR<sup>66</sup>. From phenols phytochemicals, epigallocatechin gallate exhibit anti-HIV-1 PR<sup>67</sup>. However, further studies are still needed to check the possibility whether the phenols, saponin or triterpenoid contained in *Ficus sp* can be used as anti-HIV through HIV-1 protease inhibitors route.

#### LIMITATION IN ANTI-VIRAL RESEARCH

The promising potential of anti-viral properties in plants as general not only from *Ficus sp*. unfortunately has been restricted by the imperfection of the existing screening tests before being developed as antiviral drug. Traditional in vitro techniques of analyzing anti-viral includes plaque inhibition assay, plaque reduction assay, inhibition of virus-induced cytopathic effect, end point titer determination assay, virus yield reduction assay, reduction or inhibition of the synthesis of virus-specific polypeptides, immunological assays detecting viral antigens, and viral enzyme inhibition-based assays<sup>68,69</sup>. The aforementioned methods have been used successfully in screening large number of diverse anti-viral agents. However, these methods also have some drawbacks related to safety, long assay period,

impractical, experimental-biased read-out and high cost. More importantly, the available methods are unable to differentiate between mere toxic effects of agents on host cells or its selective antiviral effects. In the recent years, indeed cell-based assays have been favorable methods to evaluate antiviral properties, as it is able to monitor specific viral proteins and intracellularly screen for potent viral inhibitor with desired pharmacological properties. Nevertheless, this assay still can't be used to differentiate antiviral activity from the complexity of chemical processes in the cell<sup>67,68</sup>. Therefore, high throughput assays with more specificity are needed to screen medicinal plants with potential antiviral activities<sup>70,71</sup>.

Another shortcoming in antiviral development is because it's strictly dependent on cellular metabolic process, virus only have limited number of enzyme systems that can potentially serve as inhibition target. Antiviral also expected to irreversibly block viral synthesis so that it will block cell suicide due to viral infection. Thus, normal cell synthesis can be restored<sup>72</sup>. It is favorable needed that antiviral has pharmacodynamic properties and not immunosuppressive. Then finally the best scenario will be that antiviral will check the infection while immune system will destroy the last virus particles<sup>73</sup>.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this review paper, we listed the phytochemical compounds that are effective as anti-HIV by disrupting HIV life cycle through viral entry and HIV enzymes inhibition. Those phytochemical compounds also can be found in some of *Ficus sp.* which is discussed here. However, only few of them have shown as an antiviral against HIV. Other species from *Ficus sp.* which contain anti-HIV phytochemical, needs further studies to prove their potential as anti-HIV agent. High throughput assays with more specificity, such as a vector-based assay technique is needed to tackle the disadvantages come along with traditional antiviral compounds testing. Another drawback hindering the study of antiviral is the focus of this research should also include the possibility that the compounds have pharmacodynamic properties which allows permanent blocking of viral synthesis while immune system will destroy the last virus particles.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST:

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:

The author wanted to thank all colleague in Institute of Tropical Disease Universitas Airlangga for their suggestion in writing this article.

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