**Influence of sex on activated partial thromboplastin time (aPTT) and prothrombin time (PT) in sheep**

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**Keywords**
Blood coagulation,
Clotting time,
Haemostasis,
Small ruminants.

**Summary**
Haemostasis is a physiological process that prevents excessive blood loss. In laboratory, the prothrombin time (PT) and the activated partial thromboplastin time (aPTT) are used to examine clotting systems. However, the influence of sex on PT and aPTT values is unknown. The present work aimed to determine the values for PT and aPTT in adult sheep and to evaluate their dependence on the sex of the animal. Blood samples were collected from 40 adults (1-6 years old) of mixed breed sheep (20 males and 20 females) via jugular venepuncture conducted using vacuum tubes containing 3.8% sodium citrate as an anticoagulant. PT and aPTT were determined by visual detection of clot formation. The mean PT and aPTT values for all sheep were 7.71 ± 0.87 s and 35.7 ± 3.57 s, respectively. The aPTT values showed a significant difference ($P = 0.0013$) between male and female samples, while the difference in PT values was not significant ($P = 0.0565$). Thus, the animal sex influences the function of the plasma blood-clotting system in sheep. In contrast with table 1 data, in particular, aPTT values are significantly higher in female sheep than in males.

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**Influenza del sesso sul tempo di tromboplastina parziale attivata (aPTT) e il tempo di protrombina (PT) negli ovini**

Parole chiave
Coagulazione del sangue,
Emostasi,
Piccoli ruminanti,
Tempo di coagulazione.

Riassunto
L’emostasi è un processo fisiologico che impedisce l’eccessiva perdita di sangue. Per esaminare i sistemi di coagulazione in laboratorio si utilizzano il tempo di protrombina (PT) e il tempo di tromboplastina parziale attivata (aPTT). Quanto il sesso influenzi i valori di PT e aPTT non è noto. Il presente lavoro ha lo scopo di determinare i valori di PT e aPTT nella pecora adulta per valutare la loro relazione con il sesso dell’animale. Sono stati raccolti campioni di sangue in 40 esemplari adulti (1-6 anni) di pecore di razza mista (20 maschi e 20 femmine) tramite venipuntura giugulare, utilizzando provette contenenti 3,8% di citrato di sodio come anticoagulante. Il tempo di protrombina e aPTT sono stati determinati rilevando la formazione del coagulo. Per tutte le pecore, i valori medi di PT e aPTT sono stati rispettivamente: 7,71 ± 0,87 s e 35,7 ± 3,57 s. I valori di aPTT mostrano una differenza significativa ($p = 0,0013$) tra i campioni prelevati dai soggetti maschi e quelli prelevati dalle femmine, mentre la differenza nei valori di PT non è risultata significativa ($p = 0,0565$). Dunque, il sesso dell’animale influenza la funzione del plasma del sistema di coagulazione del sangue negli ovini. A differenza dei dati mostrati nella tabella I, in particolare, i valori dell’aPTT sono significativamente più alti nelle pecore femmine rispetto ai maschi.
Plasma blood-clotting system is a complex cascade of enzymatic reactions. Previous studies investigated the clotting profile for several species at different physiological stages (Piccione et al. 2008, Bazzano et al. 2014). Several pathological conditions, such as haemophilia A, poisoning, and infectious diseases (Neuenschwander and Pliska 1994, Van Amstel et al. 1994, Fernández et al. 1995), can influence plasma blood-clotting system in sheep. Deficiencies of clotting factors may manifest clinically as a tendency toward spontaneous bleeding, such as epistaxis, melena, and haematuria (Gentry et al. 2008).

Clotting tests are useful for diagnosing coagulation disorders and monitoring anticoagulant therapy. Measurements of clotting parameters and platelet aggregation are performed using commercial kits within a well-defined time from blood collection (Piccione et al. 2010a, Piccione et al. 2010b). The traditional coagulation pathway is composed of the intrinsic (factors VIII, IX, XI, and XII) and extrinsic (factor VII) pathway, both of which share a common terminal pathway (thrombin and factors V and X). The main laboratory tests for clotting system are the prothrombin time (PT) and the activated partial thromboplastin time (aPTT). The PT measures the extrinsic and common terminal pathways, detecting hereditary and acquired defects in fibrinogen, thrombin, as well as factors V, VII, and X. The aPTT evaluates the intrinsic and common pathways and detects hereditary and acquired defects in prekallikrein, fibrinogen, thrombin, along to factors V, VIII, IX, X, XI, and XII (Gentry et al. 2008).

The present work aimed to determine the values for PT and aPTT in adult sheep and to evaluate whether these values vary with the sex of the sampled animals. We sampled 40 adults (1-6 years old) of mixed breed sheep (20 males and 20 females). No female sheep was pregnant or showed any sign of oestrus during the study. All animals were healthy and received water and food ad libitum. No drugs were administered for 1 month prior to the study. Ethical procedures were based on Brazilian law 1.

Blood samples (2.5 mL) were collected via jugular venepuncture using vacuum tubes containing 3.8% sodium citrate as an anticoagulant. The citrated whole blood samples were centrifuged within 20 minutes after collection at 805 x g for 10 minutes at room temperature. The plasma samples were separated using plastic pipettes and transferred to plastic microtubes.

1 Law 6638 (May 8, 1979) ‘Normas para Prática Didático-Científica da Vivissecção de Animais’ and ‘Ethical Principles for Use of Experimental Animals’ from Colégio Brasileiro de Experimentação Animal (COBEA), Brazil, which are in accordance with the European Convention for the Protection of Vertebrate Animals used for Experimental and Other Scientific Purposes’ (Strasbourg, March 18, 1986).

PT and aPTT determinations were accomplished using standard kits (Larbolab, Guarulhos, San Paulo, Brazil). For the PT assay, 100 µL citrated plasma was added to a preheated (37 °C) test tube and incubated at 37 °C for 3 minutes. Then, 200 µL preheated (37 °C) PT reagent was added, the time (in seconds) from the addition of PT reagent to the detection of clot formation was measured and defined as the PT.

For the aPTT assay, 100 µL citrated plasma and 100 µL preheated (37 °C) aPTT reagent (0.007% rabbit brain phospholipids and 0.0037% ellagic acid) were mixed in a preheated (37 °C) test tube and incubated at 37 °C for 3 minutes. Thereafter, 100 µL 0.02 M calcium chloride preheated to 37 °C was added. The time (in seconds) from the addition of calcium chloride to the detection of clot formation was measured and defined as the aPTT.

Data were compared by the unpaired Mann-Whitney test. P < 0.05 was considered statistically significant. Statistical analyses were performed using BioEstat 5.3. Results are presented as means with standard errors and median values. The mean PT and aPTT for all sheep were 7.71 ± 0.14 s and 35.7 ± 0.56 s, respectively (Table I); aPTT values differ significantly (P = 0.0013) depending on the sex of the sampled animals, while the PT values did not (P = 0.0565).

Foley and colleagues report that PT and aPTT measurements in 50 healthy Samm & Border Leicester Cross ewes were 11.4-15.5 s and 19.6-40.8 s, respectively (Foley et al. 2014). Another study found that aPTT values in 47 German Black-Headed ewes were 33.00 ± 6.79 s (mean ± SD) (Wilhelmi et al. 2012). Li and colleagues also reported that the mean ± SEM of aPTT and PT in 8 healthy adult sheep (unspecified sex and breed) were 40.94 ± 3.09 s and 14.46 ± 1.52 s, respectively (Li et al. 2013). Thus, aPTT values herein are consistent with previous reports (Wilhelmi et al. 2012, Li et al. 2013, Foley et al. 2014), but PT values reported in this study are lower than those reported in the relevant literature (Li et al. 2013, Foley et al. 2014).

The evaluation of the sexual influence on coagulation in humans revealed that men presented lower prothrombin activity (Sakata et al. 2007) and higher concentrations of antithrombin and protein C (Dolan et al. 1994). In women, oral contraceptive use, pregnancy, and postpartum status increased the risk for venous thromboembolism (Chan 2010). Furthermore, men with idiopathic hypogonadotropic hypogonadism presented increased activities of factors V and X and decreased levels of antithrombin compared with healthy men (Erem et al. 2008). In dogs, the thrombin and factor V activities have been reported to be slightly higher in female dogs than in males (Mischke 1994).
Several hormones have been shown to influence blood coagulation. In pregnant sheep, progesterone levels had a significant interaction with PT during gestation and with aPTT on prenatal days, and estradiol-17β and cortisol were correlated with PT and aPTT values on prenatal days (El-Belely et al. 2000). The high serum progesterone concentrations in female sheep during the luteal phase were associated with increased fibrinogen concentration and decreased plasma antithrombin activity (Sakata et al. 2007). The administration of oestrogens to sheep increased the synthesis and activities of fibrinogen, thrombin, and factors VII, IX, and X (Albaker and Keeton 1982). Hyperprolactinaemia may also interfere with haemostasis. In fact, human patients with prolactinoma present increased levels of fibrinogen and tissue plasminogen activator inhibitor-1 and decreased levels of thrombin-activatable fibrinolysis inhibitor, possibly promoting a hypercoagulable state (Erem et al. 2010).

Based on our results, we conclude that the sex of the animal influences the function of the plasma blood-clotting system in sheep. In particular, in Table I the aPTT values in females were lower than in males.

References


Table I. Values (in seconds) for prothrombin time (PT) and activated partial thromboplastin time (aPTT) in male and female sheep.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Males (n = 20)</th>
<th>Females (n = 20)</th>
<th>Males (n = 20)</th>
<th>Females (n = 20)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean ± SEM</td>
<td>8.02 ± 0.24</td>
<td>7.40 ± 0.11</td>
<td>37.7 ± 0.91</td>
<td>33.4 ± 0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>7.77</td>
<td>7.31</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>33.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>0.0565</td>
<td>0.0013</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Both sexes</td>
<td>7.71 ± 0.14</td>
<td>35.7 ± 0.56</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

SEM = Standard error of mean; 1 unpaired Mann-Whitney test.