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Study of fly's behavior as a parameter of the impact of toxic compounds on living things

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Abstract

Various toxic compounds still often contaminate the environment and food of living things to this day. *Drosophila* is often used as a model organism to study the negative effects of exposure to toxic compounds on organisms. The purpose of this systematic literature review (SLR) is to analyze the distribution, contribution, and gap analysis of studies reporting the effect of toxic compounds on behavior in *Drosophila*. After conducting a search in the Scopus database, 57 titles that matched the entered search query were obtained. After selection and evaluation step, a total of 19 Scopus indexed articles that met the inclusion and exclusion criteria were successfully collected for analysis. The three countries that most frequently research *Drosophila* behavior are the US, China, and Nigeria. A total of 5 clusters resulted from the results of bibliometric analysis. Various behavioral studies have included developmental variables, gene expression, to the Circadian clock. Toxic compounds that are often studied generally come from the group of metal compounds. On the other hand, multigenerational studies to analyze the long-term effects of toxic compounds and the plasticity of phenotypic changes into gap analysis have been successfully identified.

1. INTRODUCTION

Research on toxicity has garnered substantial attention in the scientific community over time [1,2]. Toxicity studies aim to comprehend the adverse effects of

various substances on living organisms, providing insights into the impact of these substances on health and the environment. Various researchers still focus their research on toxicology because of the high exposure to toxic substances that still frequently

occurs in various regions [3,4]. Through studies that examine toxicity, researchers can also identify and confirm substances whose dangerous level is still unclear [5,6]. Apart from that, research in this field is also able to examine and evaluate various other compounds that are able to suppress the negative impact of toxic substances on the body.

Various toxicological studies often require model organisms to study the toxic properties of the substances being studied. Of the various organisms that exist, *Drosophila melanogaster* is one of the popular model organisms that is often involved in research on toxic substances in various countries [7,8,9]. The various characteristics of this insect are the reason for *Drosophila*'s popularity as a model organism in the field of toxicology, such as a fast life cycle, not requiring a large culture space, and culture costs that are not too expensive [10,14]. In addition, the genetic constitution of *Drosophila* is also similar to humans so that this organism is able to credibly model various human biological conditions [12]. Furthermore, due to the development of molecular biology techniques, researchers are also able to manipulate the genetic material or genetic expression of *Drosophila* [15,16,17] so that it will be easier for researchers to evaluate the impact of toxic substances in more depth.

Behavioral assays have become a staple in research when utilizing *Drosophila* as a research subject [18,19,20]. The intricate behaviors exhibited by this model organism provide unique insights into the subtle and often complex effects of toxic substances on an organism's physiology and nervous system [21,22,23]. These assays encompass various activities, ranging from locomotion [24,25] and feeding behavior [26,27] to circadian rhythms [28]. By observing behavioral responses in *Drosophila*, researchers can delve deeper into the behavioral responses induced by toxic substances, data that would

be challenging to obtain in toxicity research solely relying on traditional toxicological assays.

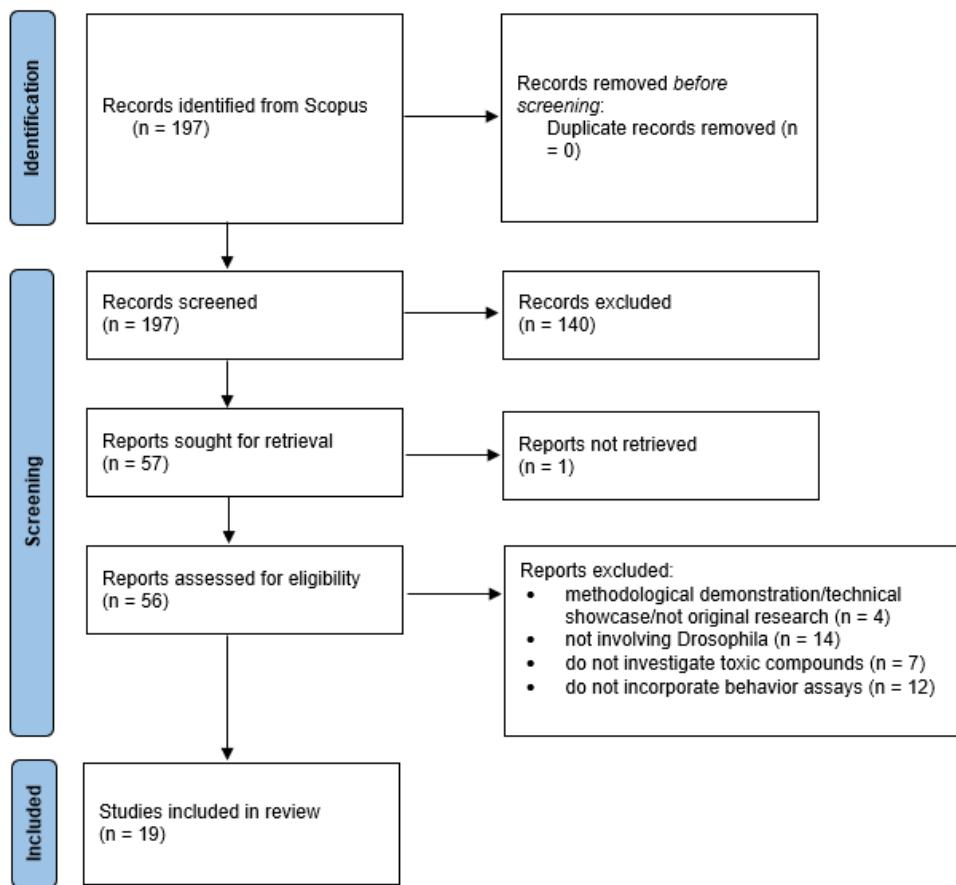
Despite numerous toxicity studies involving behavioral assays in *Drosophila*, there has been no attempt to comprehensively map and review the entirety of findings related to fly behavior across various toxicity studies. On the other hand, a systematic literature review (SLR) focused on these studies can identify significant gaps in this field. This SLR will bridge these gaps by systematically analyzing and synthesizing available reputable literature. Furthermore, this review underscores the urgency of investigating toxicology with a behavior-centric perspective, given the increasing significance of behavioral endpoints in assessing the subtle yet critical impacts of toxic compounds on organisms and ecosystems. This, in turn, contributes to more accurate risk assessments and better-informed decision-making in the realms of environmental and human health.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this systematic literature review (SLR), we adhere to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines, as depicted in Figure 1. The central research question driving this SLR is as follows: 'What diverse range of behaviors have researchers observed while investigating the toxicity using *Drosophila*?' We have chosen the Scopus database for this study, encompassing publications that incorporate *Drosophila Behavior Assays* (DCA) as one of their primary data sources. The specific search query employed is presented in Table 1, along with detailed inclusion and exclusion criteria outlined in the same table. Subsequently, our paper screening process commences, guided by the predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria as outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. Search query, inclusion criteria, and exclusion criteria used

Component	Description
Search query	TITLE-ABS-KEY ("toxic substance" OR "toxic chemical" OR "pollutant" OR "toxicant" OR "toxic agent") AND ALL ("behavior" OR "behaviour") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ("Drosophila" OR "fruit fly")
Inclusion criteria	articles that were published prior to 2023, classified as journal articles, in the final publication stage, sourced from journals, written in English, and available as open access.
Exclusion criteria	paper reviews, full papers that were inaccessible, non-original article

**Figure 1.** PRISMA steps in this SLR study

3. Results

The PRISMA process has left us with 19 papers that are eligible for systematic review. Based on the provided methods, these papers can be categorized into two broad groups: those that aim to assess the toxicity of specific substances and those that aim to test other substances to mitigate the effects

of exposure to toxic compounds. Two papers fall into the first group, while the rest belong to the second group.

The first theme to be examined as part of the data analysis in this SLR is the variety of toxic compounds under investigation. The data extraction results for this theme are presented in Table 2. A comprehensive analysis of the selected papers has revealed the remarkable diversity of toxic substances

that have been tested using behavior assays in *Drosophila*. These findings indicate the versatile application of *Drosophila* behavior assays in the field of toxicology. Among the various toxic substances, the group most frequently tested includes heavy metals such as cadmium, mercury, copper, zinc, vanadium, iron, lead, and manganese. The frequent selection of heavy metals as the

focus of studies is because this group of substances is considered environmental pollutants with significant impacts on ecosystems and public health. Furthermore, the higher prevalence of research related to mercury compared to other heavy metals may be attributed to the ongoing global issue of mercury contamination, which remains challenging to address effectively.

Table 2. Summary of extracted information for the theme of various toxic compounds

Substance Group	Tested Substance	No Paper
Heavy Metal	Cadmium	[29, 30]
	Mercury	[28],31,32,33, 34]
	Copper	[26,27]
	Zinc	[27]
	Vanadium	[35]
	Iron	[35]
	Lead	[36]
	Manganese	[24]
Organic Compound	4-Vinylcyclohexene 1,2-Monoepoxide	[37]
	4-Vinylcyclohexene Diepoxide	[37]
	Chlordane	[38]
	Caffeine	[39]
	Toluene	[40,41]
	Formaldehyde	[40]
	Dibutyl Phthalate	[42]
Polymer	Star Polycation	[25]
	Microplastics	[30]

Table 3. Summary of information extraction results for the variety of behavior assay theme

Category	Behavior Assay	Parameter
Feeding Behavior	Larva Mouth Hook Movement	number of mouth hook movements per minute [24]
	Larvae Two-Choice Assay	Gustatory Number of larvae choosing control food [39]
	Larva One-Choice Assay	Olfactory Larval movement in response to attractive odor [39]
	Larva Food Intake Assay	Reduction in larval food intake [39]
	Feeding Avoidance Assays	Concentration of marker consumed [26,39]
	Two-Color Choice Assay	Feeding Percentage of food preference [27]
Proboscis Assay	Extension Assay	Reflex the fraction of full proboscis extension [27]
	Capillary Feeder Assay	Total consumption [27,42]

Locomotion	Larva Locomotion	Body Wall Contractions per minute [24]
	Imago Locomotion	Speed [40], Acceleration [40], Duration of Stops [40], Locomotion Rate [40], Meandering [40], Number of Slips [40], Duration of Rest [40], Number of Photobeam Breaks [41,42]
	Climbing behavior	Climbing Speed [32,35,38] Climbing Height [28,30] Number of flies climbing [25,29,30,35,37,38]
Flight Behavior	Flight Assay	Landing height [33,34]
	Sleep Duration	Sleep Duration [42]
	Sleep-Walking Assay	Number of times flies cross [28]
Reproductive Behavior	Egg-Laying Assay	Egg number [27]
	Two-Choice Mating Trials	Mate preference [36]
	No-Choice Mating Trials	successful mating [36]
Developmental Behavior	Eclosion Percentage	Percentage of adults eclosed from pupa [33,34]

Table 4. Summary of data extraction for research finding's theme

Substance	Findings
Cadmium Chloride	Methanolic extracts of AL and AS significantly mitigated behavioral disruptions caused by CdCl ₂ exposure [29]
Mercuric Chloride	Extracts from ackee leaves and arils improved negative geotaxis and increased offspring emergence and acetylcholinesterase activity [31].
Methylmercury	Exposure to MeHg in male and female flies led to slower climbing, reduced eclosion and flight, and adverse effects on F1 progeny viability, locomotor activity, and sleep patterns [28,32,34].
VCM and VCD	Induced impairments in climbing behavior [37].
Caffeine	Neurons containing the Hugin neuropeptide in the <i>Drosophila</i> larval brain are essential for caffeine avoidance behavior, as their activation results in feeding cessation [39]
Chlordane	Male flies exposed to chlordane (0.1 µM and 0.01 µM) exhibited significant defects in climbing behavior, while female flies remained unaffected [38]
Copper Sulphate	Feeding avoidance of copper showed variations over time and was not notably influenced by strain sensitivity, impacting egg-laying preferences [26]
Copper and Zinc	Flies avoided high concentrations of Cu ²⁺ and Zn ²⁺ ions, impacting egg-laying preferences [27].
Vanadium and Iron	Vanadium exposure led to a decrease in climbing ability [35].
Lead	Sublethal lead exposure during development resulted in altered mate preferences in adult flies [36].
Manganese	Manganese exposure reduced body wall movements and mouth hook movement [24].

Microplastics and Cadmium	Microplastics exposure inhibited locomotor-behavioral function in adult flies [30].
Star Polycation	Larval exposure to star polycation adversely affected climbing ability [25].
Dibutyl Phthalate	DBP disrupted feeding behavior, inducing a hyperphagic response, and affected activity and sleep in <i>Drosophila</i> [42].
Toluene and Formaldehyde	Exposure to toluene or formaldehyde led to significant and varied behavioral alterations in <i>Drosophila</i> [40,41]

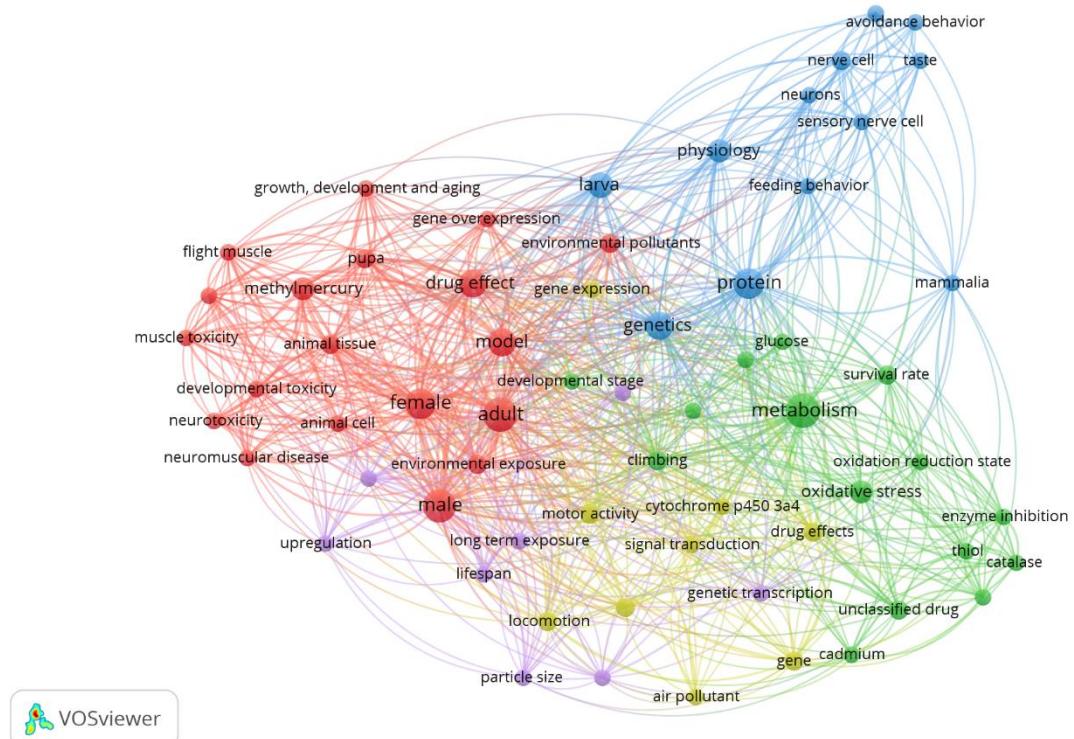


Figure 2. Results of co-occurrence analysis of index keywords

In addition to heavy metals, several other studies have also examined the toxicity of organic compounds, including 4-vinylcyclohexene monoepoxide (VCM) [37], 4-vinylcyclohexene diepoxide (VCD) [37], chlordane [38], caffeine [39], toluene [40,41], formaldehyde [40], and dibutyl phthalate [42]. These organic compounds may originate from industrial processes, pollution, or common consumer products. Testing with *Drosophila* can reveal the potential toxicity of these organic compounds. Furthermore, the assessment of polymers, especially

microplastics [30], reflects global concerns regarding the increasing plastic pollution in the environment [43,44]. Microplastics are small plastic particles that have contaminated aquatic [45] and terrestrial ecosystems [46].

The second theme in this SLR pertains to the variety of behavior assays employed in toxicological studies involving *Drosophila*. The extraction results for this second theme are presented in Table 3. This theme plays a crucial role in understanding the methodologies employed by different researchers and assessing the

comprehensiveness of their toxicological assessments using *Drosophila* as a model organism. Based on the results of data extraction, various behavioral assays have been used by researchers.

Based on Table 3, various behaviors reported to have been observed in toxicology research are feeding, locomotion, flight, sleep, reproductive, and developmental behavior. Of the various behaviors, feeding behavior showed the most diverse assays [24], [26], [27], [39], [42]. Various data can also be collected, from total consumption [27], [42], food preferences [27], to the number of hook movements in the mouths of *Drosophila* larvae [24]. These various eating behaviors can provide information regarding *Drosophila*'s ability to deal with foods that contain toxic substances. These assays are also able to reveal changes in nutritional intake and metabolic processes in flies. Much like other organisms, *Drosophila* exhibits intricate feeding responses influenced by factors like taste, olfaction, nutrient requirements, and circadian rhythms. Researchers frequently customize feeding assays to explore specific dimensions of these behaviors, resulting in a diverse array of tests designed to evaluate various aspects of feeding, including gustatory preferences, olfactory responses, food intake rates, and more.

On the other hand, locomotion behavior is the behavior most often involved by researchers, where climbing behavior is the locomotion behavior most often found in the papers reviewed [25, 28, 29, 30], [32, 35, 37, 38]. Various parameters can be collected from this behavior assay, from the number of flies that successfully climb [25, 29, 30, 35, 37, 38], movement speed [32, 35, 38], to the number of body contractions [24]. Through this assay, researchers can study the impact of various toxic compounds on the fly's neuromuscular system. On the other hand, flight assays illuminate the intricacies of an organism's motor functions. Monitoring sleep behavior can uncover disruptions in circadian rhythms

or neurological functions, and reproductive behavior assessments highlight toxicity's influence on fertility, mate preferences, and reproductive success. Furthermore, studies of developmental behavior, such as eclosion assays, are pivotal in evaluating long-term effects on growth and metamorphosis. By incorporating these behavioral parameters into toxicological studies using *Drosophila*, researchers can gain comprehensive insights into the multifaceted impacts of toxicants on an organism's life.

Moreover, the wide array of feeding assays underscores the invaluable role of *Drosophila* as a model organism in toxicology [24, 26, 27, 39, 42]. Furthermore, technological advancements and the emergence of innovative methodologies have broadened the horizons of feeding assays. Researchers can now harness sophisticated imaging and tracking methods, optogenetics, and genetically modified flies to augment the accuracy and comprehensiveness of their analyses of feeding behavior. These methodological breakthroughs have spurred the proliferation of various feeding assay variants, each providing distinct advantages tailored to specific experimental designs.

On the contrary, climbing behavior assays find frequent application in toxicological studies involving *Drosophila* for several compelling reasons. Firstly, climbing behavior assessments provide a relatively straightforward and robust method for quantifying locomotor performance in these organisms. Evaluating *Drosophila*'s climbing behavior, often measured as the number of flies reaching a specific height within a designated time frame, yields a quantitative and easily interpretable outcome. This simplicity renders climbing assays particularly attractive for toxicological investigations, where the objective often revolves around discerning clear and measurable effects of toxic compounds. Secondly, climbing behavior assays exhibit high sensitivity to a broad spectrum of toxicants, making them versatile tools for toxicity screening. Toxic

substances can impact various physiological systems, including neuromuscular function, and these impairments are frequently manifested in the flies' climbing abilities. Consequently, climbing assays can detect subtle toxic effects that might remain unnoticed when using other, less sensitive behavioral assays.

Furthermore, climbing assays are adaptable to high-throughput experimentation, enabling researchers to simultaneously test numerous samples. This scalability proves advantageous when screening extensive libraries of chemicals or conducting dose-response studies to ascertain toxicity thresholds. Moreover, climbing behavior assessments can be conducted without the need for specialized equipment, thereby reducing the overall cost and resource demands associated with toxicological studies. This accessibility encourages a broader spectrum of researchers to incorporate climbing assays into their experimental protocols. Additionally, climbing assays facilitate the assessment of both acute and chronic toxic effects. Researchers can employ short-term assays to evaluate immediate toxicity and conduct longer-term investigations to examine cumulative or delayed impacts on locomotion. This flexibility proves invaluable when scrutinizing the diverse array of toxic compounds and their varied effects on *Drosophila* behavior.

The final theme extracted in this SLR pertains to the variety of findings from toxicological tests. Some findings indicate negative impacts on *Drosophila* behavior, such as a decrease in climbing ability, disruptions in feeding behavior, reduced activity, and alterations in sleep patterns (Table 4). Conversely, there are also findings

including health aspects, behavioural patterns, and the level of exposure to toxic substances in daily life [47], [48]. Second, if you look at living creatures in general, the metabolic processes and genetic constitution of males and females in many organisms are

suggesting that certain candidate drugs, such as leaf extracts and ackee arils, can enhance *Drosophila* behavior, such as improved climbing ability and increased offspring survival. Furthermore, some findings highlight gender-specific responses, as seen in exposure to mercury, which resulted in a decline in climbing ability in both male and female flies.

Behavioral tests, particularly those involving animal models like *Drosophila melanogaster*, have proven to be robust parameters in the field of toxicology. Behavioral assays enable the observation of an organism's holistic response to a substance. *Drosophila* often exhibit high sensitivity to harmful substances, even at low exposure levels. This allows for the early detection of potential toxicity of a substance before it reaches levels that could harm humans or the environment. *Drosophila* behavioral assays can also be conducted relatively quickly and efficiently compared to other toxicological tests that may require more time and resources. This enables faster research on the toxicity of new or potential substances.

In addition to the SLR analysis, this study includes a bibliometric analysis. By using co-occurrence analysis of the index keywords from all the reviewed papers (Figure 2), keywords such as "adult," "male," "metabolism," "female," and "protein" have the highest occurrence values. The frequent appearance of gender-related keywords, such as "male" and "female," in studies examining the toxicity of various substances in *Drosophila* behaviour assays can be attributed to several factors. First, if we look at humans, gender is an important demographic effect that can influence various aspects, different, which has the potential to influence the body's response to toxic substances [49], [50]. Differences in the body's response can be caused by differences in hormone levels, detoxification processes, and differences in levels of vulnerability to oxidative stress [51].

Furthermore, the high occurrence value of the adult category can be attributed to the research methods involved in the studies reviewed. The majority of reported behaviour assays involve the imago phase of the fly rather than the larval phase. Then, the high occurrence values of the words metabolism and protein indicate that exposure to toxic compounds is susceptible to changes in the organism's metabolism [52–54]. These metabolic changes may affect gene expression levels in exposed organisms [55]. These changes in metabolism and protein production levels could be the basis underlying changes in various behavioral parameters observed by researchers. In summary, these keywords collectively emphasize the fundamental aspects of toxicological inquiries related to *Drosophila* behavior assays, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of how toxins impact adult flies, disturb metabolic processes, and modulate protein function. This knowledge not only contributes to our understanding of toxicant-induced behavioral changes in *Drosophila* but also provides valuable insights that can extend to broader ecological and health-related contexts.

4. CONCLUSION

In this SLR, the identification of three key themes emerges from various studies related to the behavior of *Drosophila melanogaster* in the context of toxicological assessments. Firstly, a diverse range of substances tested encompasses various types of toxic compounds, from heavy metals to organic compounds, highlighting the versatility of the *Drosophila* model in evaluating toxicity. Secondly, the variety of behavioral testing methods employed, including feeding, locomotion, flight, sleep, reproductive, and developmental assays, demonstrates the multitude of behavioral dimensions that can be examined in toxicological research. Lastly, there are several intriguing findings related to the effects of various substances on *Drosophila* behavior, such as alterations in sleep patterns, feeding activity, and climbing ability.

Recommendations stemming from these findings suggest that *Drosophila* behavior assays should be more widely employed in the context of toxicological assessments. Some substances or compounds have been frequently tested and exhibit clear impacts on fly behavior, making them suitable benchmark parameters for evaluating the toxicity of other substances with less apparent toxic effects. This can facilitate further research in identifying the potential toxic effects of various substances. The SLR results also indicate that there is still room for more in-depth research into the potential therapeutic effects of specific treatments or extracts in mitigating the negative impacts of hazardous substances. This points towards the possibility of developing improved therapies or preventive approaches related to toxicity.

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