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3D-QSAR, homology modeling, and molecular docking studies on spiropiperidines analogues as agonists of nociceptin/orphanin FQ receptor

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ABSTRACT

The nociceptin/orphanin FQ receptor (NOP) has been implicated in a wide range of biological functions, including pain, anxiety, depression and drug abuse. Especially, its agonists have a great potential to be developed into anxiolytics. However, the crystal structure of NOP is still not available. In the present work, both structure-based and ligand-based modeling methods have been used to achieve a comprehensive understanding on 67 N-substituted spiropiperidine analogues as NOP agonists. The comparative molecular-field analysis method was performed to formulate a reasonable 3D-QSAR model (cross-validated coefficient $q^2 = 0.819$ and conventional $r^2 = 0.950$), whose robustness and predictability were further verified by leave-eight-out, Y-randomization, and external test-set validations. The excellent performance of CoMFA to the affinity differences among these compounds was attributed to the contributions of electrostatic/hydrogen-bonding and steric/hydrophobic interactions, which was supported by the Surflex-Dock and CDOCKER molecular-docking simulations based on the 3D model of NOP built by the homology modeling method. The CoMFA contour maps and the molecular docking simulations were integrated to propose a binding mode for the spiropiperidine analogues at the binding site of NOP.

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The nociceptin/orphanin FQ receptor (NOP), also known as ORL1, OP4, or LC132, is a deorphanized member of the G-protein coupled receptor (GPCR) superfamily. This receptor is distributed in the brain and periphery.¹ It shares considerable structural and localization features with other opioid receptors,² but it is classified as a non-opioid member of the opioid receptor family by the International Union of Basic and Clinical Pharmacology (IUPHAR). Its endogenous ligand, nociceptin (or orphanin FQ), which activates NOP, is a 17-amino acid neuropeptide isolated from the brain in 1995.^{3,4} The neuropeptide acts as an inhibitive agent on synaptic transmission in the CNS, and reduces responsiveness to stress. The nociceptin-NOP system has been implicated in a wide range of biological functions, including pain, mood disorders, drug abuse, cardiovascular control, and immunity.^{5–7} NOP is receiving considerable attention as a potential target for the treatment of anxiety and depression.

A number of drugs are used for the treatment of anxiety and depression. But they have some drawbacks due to their poor and/or variable efficacy, long run in to peak behavioral effect, and a wide range of side effects leading to tolerability and compliance problems.⁸ Considerable evidences indicate that nociceptin and several non-peptide NOP agonists serve as anxiolytics with fewer side effects.^{9–17}

Several different classes of NOP agonists have been reported. Among them, spiropiperidine analogues exhibit relatively higher NOP binding affinities,^{18,19} however, there is not a QSAR (quantitative structure–activity relationship) or pharmacophore model reported in their work. In the present study, comparative molecular-field analysis (CoMFA) was performed to formulate 3D-QSAR models of 67 spiropiperidine analogues¹⁹ as NOP agonists. Subsequently, a homology model was built based on the crystal structure of Beta2-Adrenergic G Protein-Coupled receptor (PDB code: 2RH1)²⁰ as a template. Finally, molecular docking simulations were performed to obtain a complete picture of the structural characteristics of the most active agonist **P67** within the putative active site of this protein. Results of the study not only support the use of spiropiperidine analogues as a potential therapeutic agent by targeting NOP, but also aid the rational design of novel and more effective NOP agonists as desired.

Sixty-seven N-substituted spiropiperidine analogues with human NOP binding affinities (K_i) determined from competition binding assays were collected from the literature.¹⁹ The 67 molecules were divided into a training set of 57 compounds and a test set of 10 compounds, as shown in Table 1. The test set covers the range of biological activities and indicates a moderate diversity in their chemical structures. The experimental pK_i values ($-\log K_i$) were used for the 3D-QSAR analysis.

The three-dimensional structures were constructed using SYBYL programming package (version 7.3.5).²¹ The MMFF94 force field and MMFF94 partial atomic charges were applied to these

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Table 1Structures, experimental,¹⁹ and CoMFA-predicted activities of spiro[3.5]nonane derivatives as nociceptin/orphanin FQ receptor (NOP) agonists

Compound	R ¹	R ²	–log (K _i /nM)		
			Experimental	Predicted	Res
P09	A	H–	7.638	7.654	–0.016
P10 ^a	A	Me	7.509	7.183	0.326
P11	A	Et	7.076	7.112	–0.036
P12	A	Pr	7.469	7.242	0.227
P13	A	Bu	7.244	7.344	–0.100
P14	A	<i>i</i> -Pr	7.180	7.242	–0.062
P15	A	<i>c</i> -PrCH ₂	7.081	6.967	0.114
P16	A	<i>c</i> -BuCH ₂	7.276	7.209	0.067
P17 ^a	A	<i>c</i> -HexylCH ₂	7.051	7.154	–0.103
P18	A	Propargyl	6.631	6.800	–0.169
P19	A	Allyl	6.693	6.750	–0.057
P20	B	H–	8.167	8.067	0.100
P21	B	Bu–	7.312	7.587	–0.275
P22	B	<i>i</i> -Amyl	7.252	7.476	–0.224
P23	B	CH ₃ OC(O)CH ₂ –	7.710	7.705	0.005
P24	B	HO(CH ₂) ₂	7.733	8.052	–0.319
P25 ^a	B	MeO(CH ₂) ₂	7.585	7.826	–0.241
P26	B	NH ₂ (CH ₂) ₂ –	7.321	7.621	–0.300
P27	B	CH ₃ NH(CH ₂) ₂ –	8.393	8.274	0.119
P28	B	EtNH(CH ₂) ₂ –	8.678	8.531	0.147
P29	B	<i>i</i> -PrNH(CH ₂) ₂ –	8.593	8.376	0.217
P30	B	<i>c</i> -PentylNH(CH ₂) ₂ –	8.063	8.395	–0.332
P31	B	<i>c</i> -HexylNH(CH ₂) ₂ –	8.301	8.369	–0.068
P32	B	(CH ₃) ₂ N(CH ₂) ₂ –	8.456	8.138	0.318
P33	B	<i>c</i> -PrNH(CH ₂) ₂ –	8.432	8.420	0.012
P34 ^a	B	(<i>i</i> -Pr) ₂ N(CH ₂) ₂ –	7.917	7.802	0.115
P35	B	BuNH(CH ₂) ₂ –	8.668	8.662	0.006
P36	B	<i>i</i> -BuNH(CH ₂) ₂ –	8.561	8.698	–0.137
P37	B	BuNH(CH ₂) ₂ –	8.420	8.601	–0.181
P38	B		8.648	8.324	0.324
P39	B		8.495	8.288	0.207
P40	C	H–	8.638	8.729	–0.091
P41	C	CH ₃ NH(CH ₂) ₂ –	9.097	8.845	0.252
P42	C	EtNH(CH ₂) ₂ –	9.155	9.167	–0.012
P43 ^a	C	<i>i</i> -PrCH ₂ NH(CH ₂) ₂ –	9.155	9.041	0.114
P44	C	<i>c</i> -PrCH ₂ NH(CH ₂) ₂ –	9.301	9.470	–0.169
P45	C	<i>c</i> -BuNH(CH ₂) ₂ –	9.301	9.048	0.262
P46	C	PrNH(CH ₂) ₂ –	9.222	9.333	–0.111
P47	C	<i>i</i> -BuNH(CH ₂) ₂ –	9.301	9.371	–0.070
P48	C	BuNH(CH ₂) ₂ –	9.398	9.282	0.116
P49	C	Et ₂ N(CH ₂) ₂ –	9.000	8.992	0.008
P50	C		8.638	8.939	–0.301
P03	D	H–	8.886	8.538	0.348
P51 ^a	D	Pr–	8.268	8.132	0.136
P52	D	CH ₃ C(O)CH ₂ –	8.347	8.541	–0.194
P53	D	HO(CH ₂) ₂ –	8.770	8.602	0.098
P54	D	CH ₃ NH(CH ₂) ₂ –	8.678	8.702	–0.024
P55	D	EtNH(CH ₂) ₂ –	8.796	9.029	–0.233
P56 ^a	D	<i>i</i> -PrNH(CH ₂) ₂ –	8.854	8.970	–0.116
P57	D	<i>c</i> -PentylNH(CH ₂) ₂ –	9.046	8.965	0.081
P58	D	<i>c</i> -HexylNH(CH ₂) ₂ –	9.046	9.016	0.030
P59	D	PrNH(CH ₂) ₂ –	9.000	9.204	–0.204
P60	D	CH ₂ =CHCH ₂ NH(CH ₂) ₂ –	9.046	9.090	–0.044
P61	D	<i>c</i> -BuNH(CH ₂) ₂ –	8.824	8.910	–0.086
P62	D	<i>c</i> -PrCH ₂ NH(CH ₂) ₂ –	9.097	9.123	–0.026
P63	D	<i>i</i> -BuNH(CH ₂) ₂ –	9.301	9.237	0.064
P64 ^a	D	(<i>i</i> Pr) ₂ N–(CH ₂) ₂ –	8.174	8.634	–0.460

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