

## Relationships between seminal plasma composition and sperm quality parameters of the *Salmo trutta macrostigma* (Dumeril, 1858) semen: with emphasis on sperm motility

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**ABSTRACT:** The mineral and organic composition of seminal plasma, physical spermatological parameters and their physiological relationships were investigated in *Salmo trutta macrostigma*. The seminal plasma contained  $121.0 \pm 0.37$  mM/l ( $\text{Na}^+$ ),  $8.18 \pm 0.03$  mM/l ( $\text{K}^+$ ),  $7.23 \pm 0.03$  mg/dl ( $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ ),  $3.19 \pm 0.02$  mEq/l ( $\text{Mg}^{++}$ ),  $0.48 \pm 0.02$  g/dl total protein,  $6.07 \pm 0.06$  mg/dl cholesterol,  $6.24 \pm 0.08$  mg/dl triglyceride and  $9.97 \pm 0.39$  mg/dl urea. The following physical spermatological parameters were found out: sperm volume  $13.93 \pm 0.84$  ml, sperm motility  $80.37 \pm 2.36\%$ , movement duration  $81.47 \pm 4.21$  s, density  $6.02 \pm 0.46 \times 10^9$ /ml, total density  $8.85 \pm 6.12 \times 10^9$  and pH  $7.53 \pm 0.20$ . Significant positive relationships were determined between motility duration and motility ( $r = 0.83$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ) and also between spermatocrit and motility ( $r = 0.536$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). Sperm volume and total density negatively correlated with motility ( $r = -0.191$ ,  $P > 0.05$  and  $r = -0.087$ ,  $P > 0.05$ , respectively). The  $\text{Na}^+$ ,  $\text{K}^+$  and  $\text{Cl}^-$  ions correlated negatively with motility ( $r = -0.267$ ,  $P > 0.05$ ,  $r = -0.152$ ,  $P > 0.05$  and  $r = -0.461$ ,  $P > 0.05$ , respectively). On the other hand, the  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  and  $\text{Mg}^{2+}$  ions correlated positively with motility ( $r = 0.114$ ,  $P > 0.05$  and  $r = 0.040$ ,  $P > 0.05$ , respectively). A significant negative relationship was found between motility and urea ( $r = -0.515$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). These parameters should be considered when developing procedures for short-term storage or cryopreservation of the *Salmo trutta macrostigma* sperm.

**Keywords:** spermatological parameters; spermatozoa; seminal fluid; *Salmo trutta macrostigma*

*Salmo trutta macrostigma* (Dumeril, 1858) is a salmonid species occurring in inland water habitats of Southern Europe, Western Asia, Northern Africa, and Anatolia (Geldiay and Balik, 1988). It is also a critically endangered fish species in Turkish inland waters because of illegal fishing, overfishing, and other environmental changes, including hydroelectric power plants and pollution. For this reason, *Salmo trutta macrostigma* has been considered for a biological conservation program in Turkey.

Evaluation of sperm quality provides necessary information for aquaculturists to devise optimal handling and storage protocols for sperm used in artificial fertilization (Billard et al., 1995; Linhart et al., 2004). The use of high-quality gametes from captive fish brood stock is of great importance to ensure the valuable offspring production in aquaculture (Bromage, 1995; Hajirezaee et al., 2010). In order to provide controlled and successful production in aquaculture systems, the knowledge of

physical and chemical characteristics of fish semen is very important.

Motility is the most commonly used parameter to evaluate sperm quality in fish (Billard et al., 1995; Lahnsteiner and Patzner, 1998). In general, spermatozoa must be motile to achieve fertilization since low fertility rates are correlated with sperm samples that show a low percentage of motility. The sperm density has traditionally been used for the assessment of semen quality. It is an important parameter which has an impact on fertilization success and is a characteristic feature of fish species (Agarwal, 2005). The standard method of sperm cell counting using a haemocytometer opted by most of the earlier workers is time-consuming. It loses its significance when the quick estimation of sperm count in unit volume of semen samples is required at the time of artificial fertilization or semen cryopreservation. Therefore, optional methods like centrifugation of semen to determine spermatocrit have been employed to rapidly determine sperm density (Glogowski et al., 1999; Rakitin et al., 1999).

The composition of seminal plasma has a great influence on the biological quality of the semen. Determination of seminal plasma composition can help to understand the design requirements to prepare the appropriate artificial seminal plasma solutions. Such solutions can be used for the dilution of semen for short-term storage or cryopreservation (Billard and Cosson, 1992; Dreanno et al., 1998). In addition, seminal plasma is an important constituent of semen that has a vital role in sperm metabolism, function, survival and sperm motility. The ions such as  $\text{Na}^+$ ,  $\text{K}^+$  and  $\text{Cl}^-$  in the seminal plasma establish osmotic balance.

Seminal plasma composition in salmonids has been carefully studied particularly in rainbow trout and salmon (Piironen and Hyvarinen, 1983; Munikittrick and Moccia, 1987; Lahnsteiner et al., 1998; Glogowski et al., 2000). The composition of seminal plasma in other salmonid species has been examined scarcely so far (Cruea, 1969; Morisawa et al., 1979; Piironen and Hyvarinen, 1983; Hatef et al., 2007). It is well known that the composition of seminal plasma can differ even among related species.

The objectives of the present study were (a) to determine the physical spermatological parameters and (b) to determine the major mineral and organic contents of seminal plasma. Another objective was (c) to study the physiological relationships between the sperm motility and the mineral and organic

contents of seminal plasma in order to establish species-specific characteristics and expand our knowledge of *Salmo trutta macrostigma* semen.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

### Broodstock care and collection of semen

Mature males were obtained from wild-caught broodstock held at the Environment Conservation and National Parks Fish Production Station (Çamlıyayla, Mersin). Water was supplied to the station at a flow rate of 1.5 l/s. The water temperature was  $8.4 \pm 0.2^\circ\text{C}$  and broodstock were fed with a pelleted diet (45% protein). The maximal fish density was 5–6 kg/m<sup>3</sup>. Fifteen mature *Salmo trutta macrostigma* males (total weight  $2.73 \pm 0.54$  kg, total length  $42.61 \pm 1.27$  cm) were randomly selected from the broodstock for use as semen donors. The fish were not fed 48 h prior to the sperm collection. Each male was stripped once only and the total amount of expressible milt was collected individually by gently pressing the abdomen. The semen was collected directly into clean and dry glass tubes. Care was taken to avoid the contamination of semen with water, urine, blood or faecal matter. The tubes were covered and immediately transported on ice ( $4^\circ\text{C}$ ) to the laboratory for analyses.

### Evaluation of semen volume, pH and colour

Sperm was sampled into 20-ml calibrated glass tubes and the volume was expressed as ml. Sperm pH was measured using standard pH-electrodes within 30 min of sampling. Semen colour was evaluated visually following the semen collection.

### Evaluation of sperm motility

The motility of sperm in each sample was evaluated within the first hour following the semen collection. For this aim 10  $\mu\text{l}$  semen was pipetted onto a 1% (w/v) BSA-coated microscope slide. Activation was achieved by adding 25  $\mu\text{l}$  of 0.3% NaCl solution. Motility observation was carried out under a pre-focused inverted microscope (400x, Olympus CK2, Tokyo, Japan) at  $10^\circ\text{C}$ . Only forward movements of spermatozoa were assessed as motile whereas simply vibrating spermatozoa were assessed as immobile.

The percentage of motility was determined arbitrarily on a 0 to 10 point scale, 0 denoting 0% motility and 10 denoting 100% motility. Once diluted, the semen was held on ice between preparations of replicate slides. The duration of motility was determined by recording the time taken from activation to the complete cessation of activity of the last spermatozoa in that field. Sperm motility observations were done using three replicates per sample. One person conducted all the sperm motility observations in order to decrease the degree of variation.

### Evaluation of sperm density and spermatocrit

Sperm density was determined according to the haemocytometric method. The sperm was diluted at a ratio of 1:1000 with Hayem's solution (5 g  $\text{Na}_2\text{SO}_4$ , 1 g NaCl, 0.5 g  $\text{HgCl}_2$  and 200 ml bidistilled water). A droplet of the diluted milt was placed on a haemocytometer slide (depth 0.1 mm) with a coverslip and counted using light microscopy. Counting chambers were kept in moist atmosphere (to allow sperm sedimentation) for 10 min at least before cell counting. Then, the number of spermatozoa was counted in 16 cells and calculated according to Caille et al. (2006). Spermatozoa density was expressed as  $\times 10^9/\text{ml}$ .

For spermatocrit measurement, micro-haematocrit capillary tubes (75 mm length, 1 mm inner diameter and 0.1 ml capacity) were filled with semen and their both ends were sealed with haemoseal wax. The volume (length) of semen in capillaries was measured by meter scale in mm and centrifuged for 10 min at 4000 rpm (3370× g). Spermatocrit is defined as the percentage volume of white packed cells to the total volume of semen.

Measurements were done in triplicate for each sample and the average of three measurements was used in subsequent statistical analyses. Spermatocrit was measured within 1 h of the semen collection.

### Evaluation of seminal plasma composition

Seminal plasma was collected after centrifugation (Heraeus, Labofuge 200, Germany) of the semen at 3370× g for 10 min. Seminal plasma was centrifuged twice to avoid possible contamination with spermatozoa and stored in Eppendorf (Wiesbaden, Germany) vials at  $-20^\circ\text{C}$  until the beginning of analysis. Levels of major cations ( $\text{Na}^+$ ,  $\text{K}^+$ ,  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ ,  $\text{Mg}^{2+}$  and  $\text{Cl}^-$ ) and metabolites (glucose, protein, cholesterol, triglyceride, and urea) were determined using an Abbott-Aeroset autoanalyser (Chicago, USA) and original kits.

### Statistical analysis

Correlations between physical spermatological parameters and seminal plasma composition were estimated using Pearson's correlation test. Results are presented as means  $\pm$  SEM. Statistical analyses were performed with the SPSS 10 for Windows statistical software package.

## RESULTS

### Spermatological parameters

Spermatological parameters of the collected sperm were found rather variable and they are shown in Table 1. The sperm motility ranged be-

Table 1. Spermatological parameters of *Salmo trutta macrostigma* ( $n = 15$ )

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SEM
Volume (ml)	8	19	13.93	0.84
Motility (%)	60	95	80.37	2.36
Movement duration (s)	47	105	81.47	4.21
Density ( $\times 10^9/\text{ml}$ )	3.24	8.60	6.02	0.46
Total density ( $\times 10^9$ )	45.30	137.60	80.85	6.12
Spermatocrit (%)	24	72	55.6	3.80
pH	6	9	7.53	0.20

tween 60% and 95% and the mean was  $80.37 \pm 2.36\%$ . Sperm motility durations were determined ranging from 47 s to 105 s with an average of  $81.47 \pm 4.21$  s. Motility duration and motility significantly correlated with each other ( $r = 0.830$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ). Sperm motility and urea were negatively correlated ( $r = -0.515$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). The sperm volume collected for each male ranged between 8.0 and 19.0 ml and the mean was  $13.93 \pm 0.84$  ml. Sperm volume showed a negative allometry with sperm density ( $r = -0.555$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ).

On the other hand, sperm density correlated positively with total sperm density ( $r = 0.601$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). Spermatocrit value was determined to range from 24 to 72% with an average of  $55.6 \pm 3.80\%$ . Spermatocrit value positively correlated with density ( $r = 0.661$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ), motility ( $r = 0.536$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ) and cholesterol ( $r = 0.545$ ). On the other hand, spermatocrit value negatively correlated with volume ( $r = -0.584$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ) and chlorine ( $r = -0.623$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). It was observed that the spermatocrit value decreased as the viscosity (thickness) of the semen was reduced. The sperm was found to be viscous in consistency and creamy white in colour in all samples.

### Seminal plasma composition and spermatocrit

The composition of seminal plasma ions and metabolites is shown in Table 2.

The ionic content of seminal plasma was found rather variable. The  $\text{Na}^+$  ion correlated positively ( $r = 0.705$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ) with  $\text{K}^+$  ion. The  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  ion cor-

related negatively with total sperm density and urea ( $r = -0.615$ ,  $P < 0.05$  and  $r = -0.633$ ,  $P < 0.05$ , respectively). Similarly,  $\text{K}^+$  and  $\text{Cl}^-$  ions were negatively correlated with cholesterol ( $r = -0.590$ ,  $P < 0.05$  and  $r = -0.600$ ,  $P < 0.05$ , respectively). On the other hand,  $\text{Cl}^-$  ion was positively correlated with urea ( $r = 0.524$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). Also, pH was significantly positively correlated with total protein ( $r = 0.587$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). The relationships between biochemical and physical spermatological parameters are shown in Table 3.

The  $\text{Na}^+$  and  $\text{K}^+$  ions correlated negatively with sperm motility ( $r = -0.267$ ,  $P < 0.05$  and  $r = -0.152$ ,  $P < 0.05$ , respectively) (Figure 1a and b). Also, a negative allometry was found between sperm motility and  $\text{Cl}^-$  ( $r = -0.461$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ) (Figure 1e). On the other hand,  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  and  $\text{Mg}^{2+}$  ions correlated positively with sperm motility ( $r = 0.114$ ,  $P > 0.05$  and  $r = 0.040$ ,  $P > 0.05$ ) (Figure 1c and d). Sperm motility positively correlated with protein, triglyceride and cholesterol ( $r = 0.053$ ,  $P > 0.05$ ,  $r = 0.040$ ,  $P > 0.05$  and  $r = 0.318$ ,  $P > 0.05$ ) (Figure 1f–h). But, motility negatively correlated with urea ( $r = -0.515$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ) (Figure 1i).

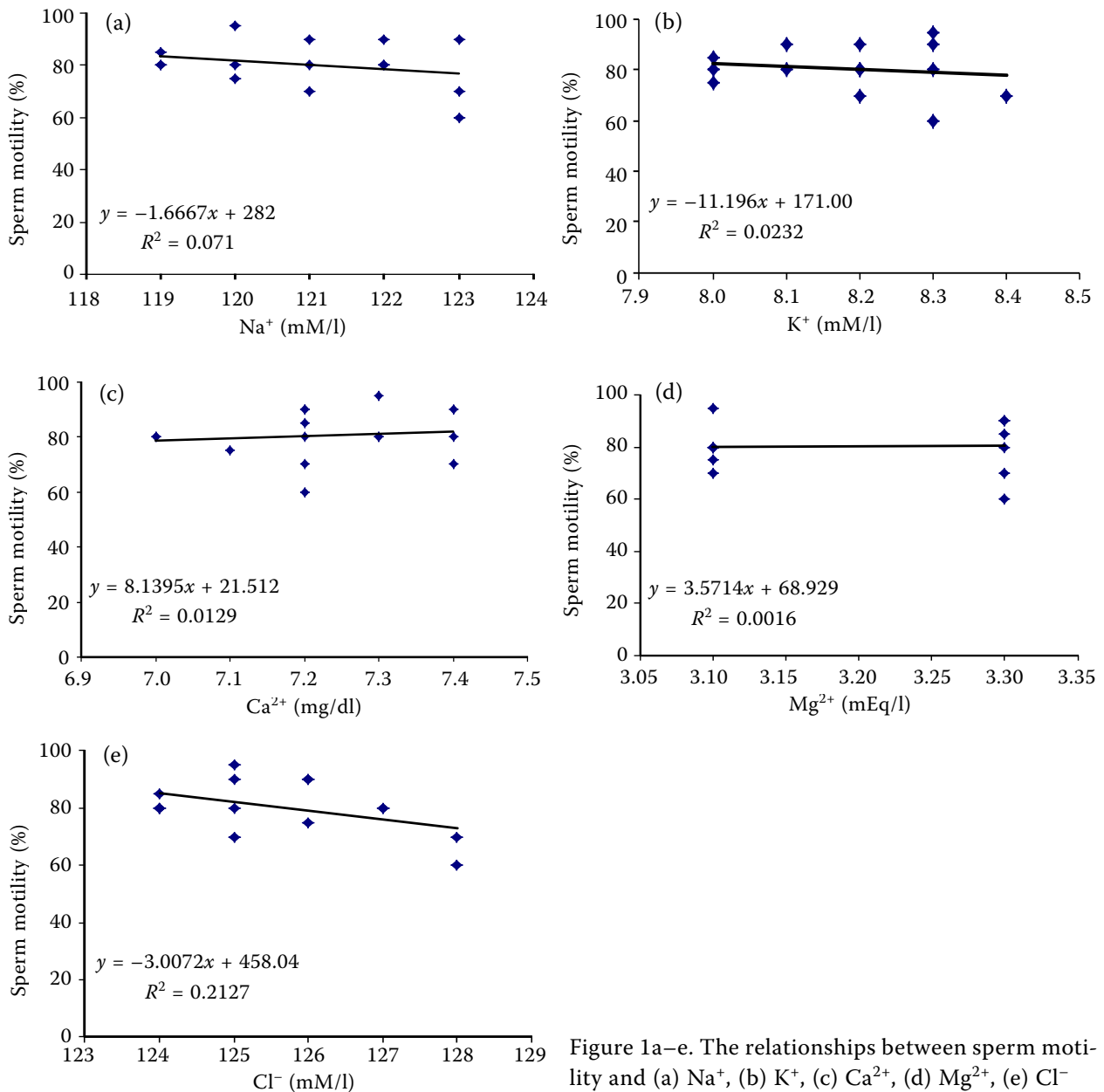
### DISCUSSION

The composition of fish semen and its physical characteristics have been found to vary with the species and are important from the aspect of semen quality (Kruger et al., 2006). The semen quality also varies considerably among the individuals of the same species (Piironen, 1985). The semen quality, particularly in aquaculture species,

Table 2. Seminal plasma ion and metabolite composition of *Salmo trutta macrostigma* sperm ( $n = 15$ )

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SEM
$\text{Na}^+$ (mM/l)	119	123	121	0.37
$\text{K}^+$ (mM/l)	8	8.4	8.18	0.03
$\text{Ca}^{2+}$ (mg/dl)	7	7.4	7.23	0.03
$\text{Mg}^{2+}$ (mEq/l)	3.1	3.3	3.19	0.02
$\text{Cl}^-$ (mM/l)	124	128	125.60	0.36
Total Protein (g/dl)	0.4	0.6	0.48	0.02
Triglyceride (mg/dl)	6.2	6.3	6.24	0.08
Cholesterol (mg/dl)	5.7	6.4	6.07	0.06
Urea (mg/dl)	8.56	12.84	9.97	0.39





depends on various external factors such as feeding regime, feed quality, rearing temperature and spawning season of males (Bromage and Roberts, 1995; Rurangwa et al., 2004). In the present study, the mean sperm motility was determined to be  $80.37 \pm 2.36\%$ . Motility varies in vigour and duration depending on the ripeness of male fish (Tekin et al., 2003). Most studies on fish species have shown that the duration and motility of spermatozoa can vary seasonally (Benau and Turner, 1980; Akcay et al., 2004). The differences may be due to differences in feeding conditions, age, environmental factors, spawning time, dilution ratio, and

ionic composition of the seminal plasma (Bozkurt et al., 2009a).

The ionic composition of seminal plasma has a significant influence on sperm motility in fish. In salmonids, the motility of spermatozoa is mainly controlled by the K<sup>+</sup> concentration. It is generally known that a higher K<sup>+</sup> concentration inhibits sperm motility in salmonids (Morisawa and Suzuki, 1980) but it increases sperm motility in carp (Billard and Cosson, 1992, Bozkurt et al., 2009b). In our study, the K<sup>+</sup> concentration ( $8.18 \pm 0.03\text{mM/l}$ ) was lower than in Atlantic salmon ( $28\text{mM/l}$ ; Aas et al., 1991), *Salmo trutta abanticus* ( $38\text{mM/l}$ ; Bozkurt, 2008a),

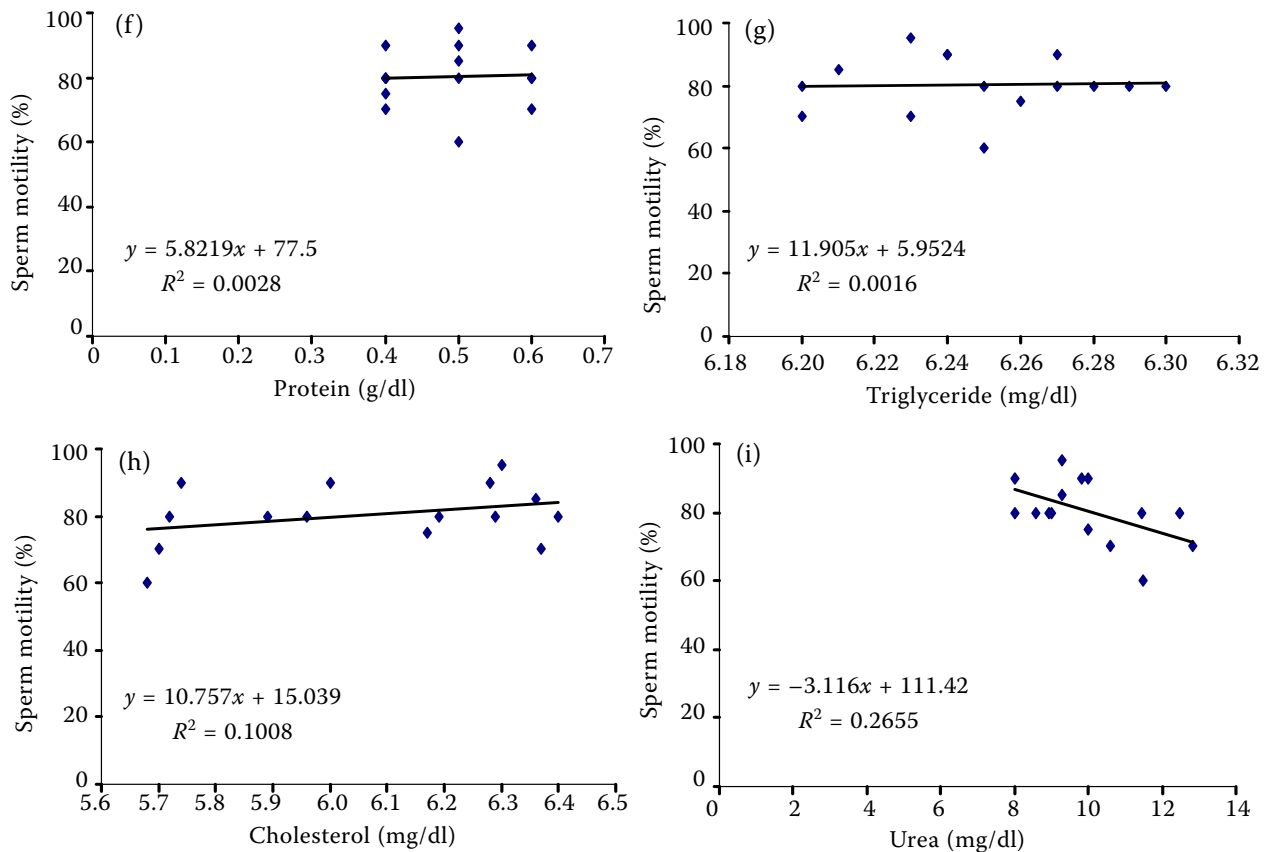


Figure 1f–i. The relationships between sperm motility and (f) protein, (g) triglyceride, (h) cholesterol, (i) urea

rainbow trout (46mM/l; Secer et al., 2004), perch (10 mM/l; Lahnsteiner et al., 1995), and Asian catfish (18 mmol/l; Tan-Fermin et al., 1999). It can be concluded that the  $K^+$  ion at certain concentrations also tends to inhibit the *Salmo trutta macrostigma* spermatozoa since a negative allometry was determined between  $K^+$  and motility.

The seminal plasma of *Salmo trutta macrostigma* has a higher  $Na^+$  content ( $121.0 \pm 0.37$  mM/l) than rainbow trout (80 mmol/l; Secer et al., 2004) and grass carp (98 mmol/l; Bozkurt et al., 2008b) but lower than other freshwater species such as perch (124 mmol/l; Lahnsteiner et al., 1995), Asian catfish (164 mmol/l; Tan-Fermin et al., 1999), and muskellunge (129 mmol/l; Lin et al., 1996). It is interesting to note that there is also a negative interaction between  $Na^+$  and motility ( $P > 0.05$ ) in spite of the higher  $Na^+$  level than that reported for the rainbow trout (Secer et al., 2004). It seems that this situation can be a species-specific characteristic and the negative relationships between  $K^+$ ,  $Na^+$  and motility show that the sperm motility in *Salmo trutta macrostigma* sperm depends

on other ions such as  $Ca^{2+}$  and  $Mg^{2+}$  concentration.  $Ca^{2+}$  and  $Mg^{2+}$  also contribute significantly to the ionic composition of seminal plasma in fish semen. Divalent cations (mainly  $Ca^{2+}$  and  $Mg^{2+}$ ) are more effective in antagonizing the inhibitory effect of  $K^+$  on sperm motility than the monovalent  $Na^+$  ion (Baynes et al., 1981; Billard and Cosson, 1992). The inhibition of sperm motility by  $K^+$  can be overcome by an increased external  $Ca^{2+}$  concentration. Preliminary results indicate that the intracellular  $Ca^{2+}$  concentration increases when motility is initiated (Billard et al., 1989; Cosson et al., 1989; Boitano and Omoto, 1991). Similarly, the motility of *Salmo trutta macrostigma* spermatozoa was increasing when the  $Ca^{2+}$  and  $Mg^{2+}$  ion levels in seminal plasma were high. In addition, Billard et al. (1995) reported that external  $Ca^{2+}$  ions were necessary for motility initiation.

Compared to the other vertebrates, the quantity of proteins in seminal plasma of fish is rather low (Krol et al., 2006). In this study, the seminal plasma protein content was determined to amount to  $0.48 \pm 0.02$  g/l, which was a similar value to *Salmo trutta*

*caspius* (Hatef et al., 2007). The total content of proteins in seminal plasma decreases in the second phase of spermiation (Sanchez-Rodriguez et al., 1978). It is supposed that this component may play an important protective role for spermatozoa and it contains a number of key enzymes of the metabolic process (Lahnsteiner et al., 1995; Kowalski et al., 2003). On the other hand, notable concentrations of urea ( $9.97 \pm 0.39$  mg/dl) were also determined in seminal plasma. Urea contamination of semen may cause reduced sperm motility and fertilizing ability (Dreanno et al., 1998) influencing the variability of other semen parameters (Glogowski et al., 2000).

Lipid levels are highly variable among fish species, e.g. 0.007 g/l for Arctic charr and 1.00 g/l for Euroasian perch (Piironen and Hyvarinen, 1983; Piironen, 1994). In the present study, the mean triglyceride level ( $6.24 \pm 0.08$  mg/dl) was positively correlated with sperm motility. According to Lahnsteiner et al. (1993) triglycerides serve as an energy source for spermatozoa during immotile storage and during the regeneration phase after motility. In this study the cholesterol level was determined to be  $6.07 \pm 0.06$  mg/dl. There is insufficient information about the role of cholesterol in seminal plasma in spite of its identification in the seminal plasma of freshwater fish (Billard et al., 1995). Lipids and cholesterol may have a protective effect against environmental changes (especially in temperature) that occurs when the fish semen is released (Bozkurt et al., 2008b). Another interesting point is the lack of glucose in seminal plasma. Piironen and Hyvarinen (1983) also noted a zero glucose concentration and low motility in *Salmo trutta m. lacustris*. The lack of glucose in seminal plasma can be explained by the spawning stage or contamination with bacteria that quickly decompose glucose in sperm.

The present study showed that the *Salmo trutta macrostigma* produced sperm with a very low density ( $6.02 \pm 0.46 \times 10^9$ /ml) compared to the other salmonid fish. For instance, sperm densities were reported in the range of  $8.9\text{--}11.8 \times 10^9$ /ml for rainbow trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) (Ciereszko and Dabrowski, 1993; Glogowski et al., 2000) and  $14.1 \times 10^9$ /ml for brown trout (*Salmo trutta*) (Piironen and Hyvarinen, 1983). These differences can be related to many factors including age and weight of the male (Suquet et al., 1998), ecology and spawning behaviour of broodstock (Piironen and Hyvarinen, 1983), sampling period and spawning method (Suquet et al., 1994) and also spawning

stage (Tekin et al., 2003). In the present investigation, spermatocrit value was also calculated for quick estimation of sperm density. Like in most fish species, after semen centrifugation, there exists a clearly defined interface between the packed sperm cells and the clear seminal fluid which gives true estimates of spermatocrit. A significant highly positive relationship ( $r = 0.661$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ) between spermatocrit and sperm density was determined in this study. A similar significant correlation between sperm density and spermatocrit was reported in rainbow trout (Baynes et al., 1981) and for several other teleost species such as Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar*) (Piironen, 1985), rainbow trout (Ciereszko and Dabrowski, 1993) and carp (Takashima et al., 1984).

## CONCLUSION

The knowledge of physical and chemical constituents of spermatozoa and seminal plasma is a prerequisite for the successful evaluation of the reproductive ability of different fish species. This may also lead to the better understanding of fertilization mechanisms. On the other hand, there are some species-specific characteristics in terms of the mineral and organic composition of seminal plasma that should be considered for artificial insemination or sperm storage. It can be concluded that the relationship determined between spermatocrit and sperm density in the *Salmo trutta macrostigma* also recommends the use of spermatocrit as a simple, fast and cheap method of determining the sperm density in this salmonid species.

In addition, the findings of this research can be used to select high-quality mature males for egg fertilization in a commercial aquaculture operation and, as a result of reducing the number of male broodstock, the economic efficiency of the farm can be increased. The information on sperm physiology obtained in the present study could lead to more efficient gamete management and increase yields, and enhance the suitability of semen for cryopreservation.

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