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Navigating the Impact of Xenobiotics: Biodegradation Dynamics in Marine Ecosystems

M. Ponmani[1], P. Padmavathy[2], D. Manimekalai[1] and S. Manickavasagam[3]
[1]Department of Aquatic Environment Management, TNJFU - Fisheries College and Research Institute, Thoothukudi, Tamil Nadu
[2]Assistant Professor, TNJFU-DSA, Thanjavur Centre for Sustainable Aquaculture, Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu

SUMMARY

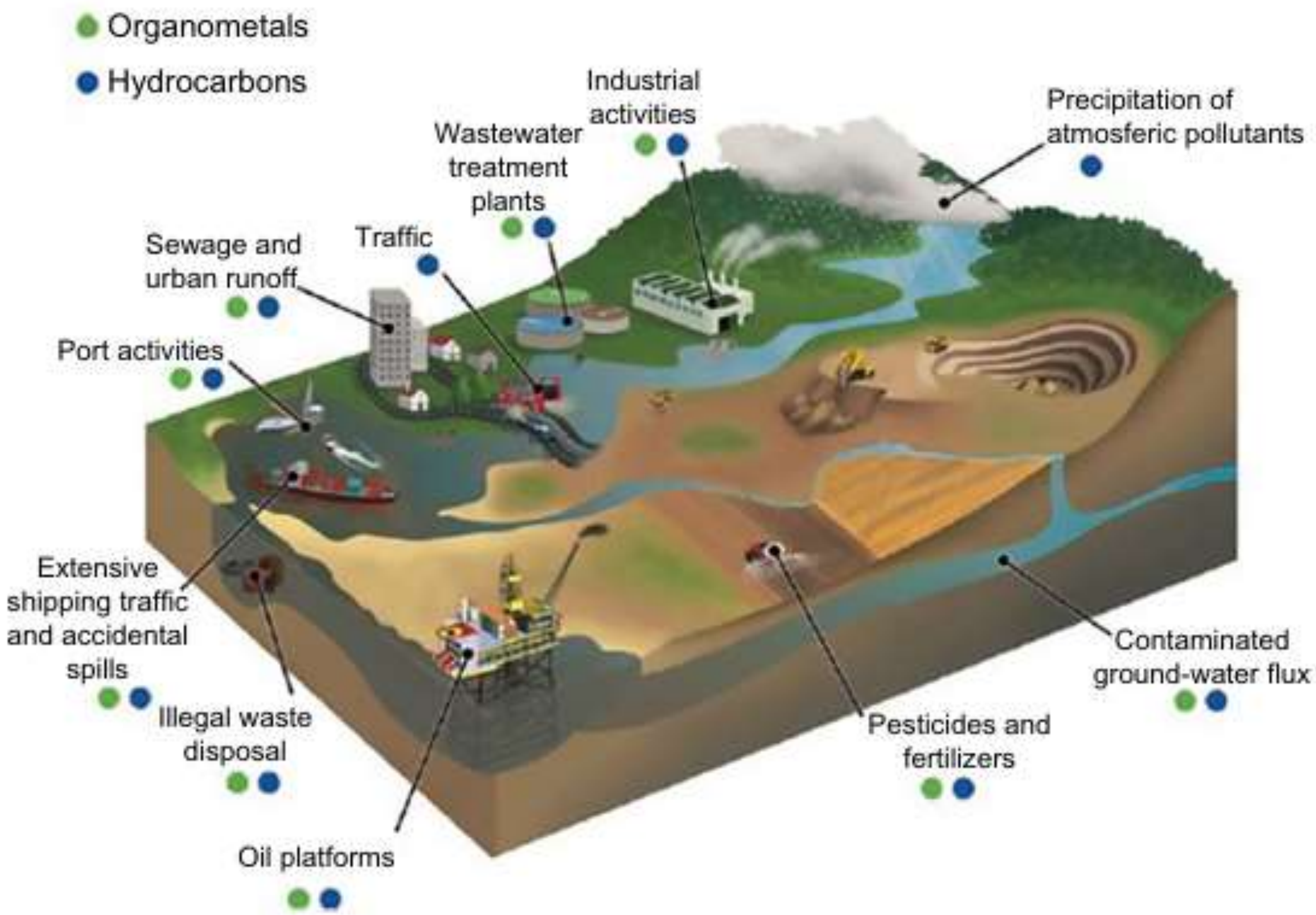
The increasing presence of xenobiotics, synthetic compounds foreign to marine ecosystems, poses significant threats to marine life, disrupting ecological balance and biodiversity. This review explores the impacts of xenobiotics on marine organisms and the mechanisms of their biodegradation in aquatic environments. Xenobiotics, comprising pesticides, pharmaceuticals, plastics, and industrial chemicals, enter marine ecosystems through various pathways, including runoff, direct discharge, and atmospheric deposition, leading to bioaccumulation and biomagnification within food webs. Marine organisms exposed to xenobiotics experience adverse effects such as developmental abnormalities, reproductive impairments, immunotoxicity, and genotoxicity, disrupting physiological processes like hormone regulation and metabolic pathways. Biodegradation, facilitated by diverse enzymatic systems in marine microorganisms, plays a crucial role in mitigating the environmental impact of xenobiotics. Comprehensive understanding of xenobiotic effects and biodegradation mechanisms is crucial for implementing pollution control measures and preserving marine ecosystems, necessitating further research into interaction dynamics and sustainable solutions for pollution mitigation.

INTRODUCTION

Marine ecosystems, vital for global biodiversity and ecological balance face an escalating threat from the pervasive presence of xenobiotics—synthetic compounds foreign to natural environments. Xenobiotics encompass a broad range of substances, including pesticides, pharmaceuticals, plastics, and industrial chemicals, which enter marine habitats through various human activities such as industrial discharge, agricultural runoff, and improper waste disposal. Once introduced, these xenobiotics exhibit persistent traits, accumulating within marine organisms and traversing through complex food webs, ultimately impacting entire ecosystems. The consequences of xenobiotic pollution on marine life are profound, ranging from subtle physiological disturbances to catastrophic population declines. However, amidst these challenges lies a ray of hope: the natural capacity of marine microorganisms to degrade xenobiotics through biodegradation processes. Understanding the intricate interplay between xenobiotics and marine ecosystems, as well as the mechanisms governing their biodegradation, is paramount for devising effective strategies to mitigate pollution and safeguard the health and resilience of marine environments. In this review, we delve into the multifaceted effects of xenobiotics on marine life and explore the intricate mechanisms underlying their biodegradation, aiming to elucidate pathways towards sustainable management and preservation of our precious marine ecosystems.

Xenobitics and their sources

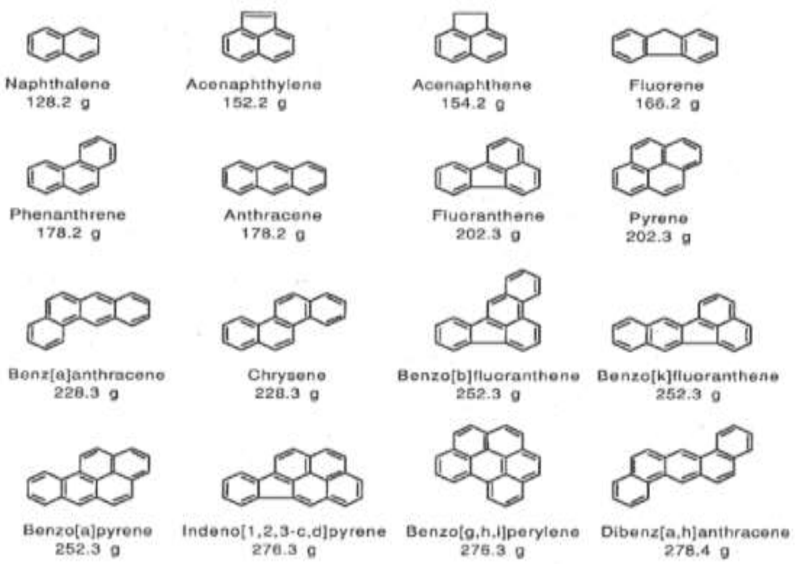
Xenobiotics, synthetic compounds foreign to natural ecosystems, infiltrate marine environments through a multitude of human activities and industrial processes. Industrial discharges, stemming from manufacturing, chemical production, and mining, release a plethora of xenobiotics into water bodies via effluent discharge, including heavy metals, organic solvents, and various industrial chemicals. Agricultural runoff presents another significant source, as pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers applied to agricultural lands leach into waterways during rainfall or irrigation, carrying xenobiotic compounds that accumulate in marine ecosystems. Moreover, domestic wastewater from residential and urban areas contributes a diverse array of xenobiotics, encompassing household chemicals, pharmaceuticals, personal care products, and cleaning agents, which find their way into marine environments through sewage systems and runoff. Atmospheric deposition further exacerbates the issue, with airborne pollutants from industrial emissions, vehicle exhaust, and particulate matter settling into marine environments through wind and precipitation, carrying heavy metals, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), and other toxic substances. Maritime activities, including shipping, oil drilling, and marine transportation, pose additional threats through accidental spills, leaks, and routine discharge of ballast water and waste products, releasing hydrocarbons and other toxic substances into marine ecosystems. Lastly, plastic pollution compounds the problem, as plastics degrade in marine environments, releasing xenobiotic chemicals such as plasticizers, flame retardants, and additives, which leach into surrounding seawater, endangering marine organisms through ingestion and entanglement. These diverse sources highlight the complex and interconnected nature of xenobiotic pollution in marine environments, necessitating comprehensive strategies to mitigate pollution and protect marine ecosystems from the adverse effects of synthetic compounds.



Effects of xenobiotics in the marine ecosystem

Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons

PAH compounds directly affect the environment through depletion of the ozone layer, affecting the Earth's heat balance, adding acidic air pollutants to the atmosphere, and reducing visibility (Chauhan, Samanta, & Jain, 2000). Most of these compounds are carcinogenic, mutagenic, and teratogenic, for example, benzopyrene and its derivatives.



The polished layer on the surface of water bodies due to oil/hydrocarbon waste can prevent gas exchange and block the passage of sunlight, ultimately affecting respiration and photosynthesis. Oil spills cause lesions, disorientation, and deformities in many marine animals such as fishes, sea turtles, dolphins, and sea birds. In addition, various psychological, physical, endocrine, and genotoxic effects are also reported in humans.

Crude oil:

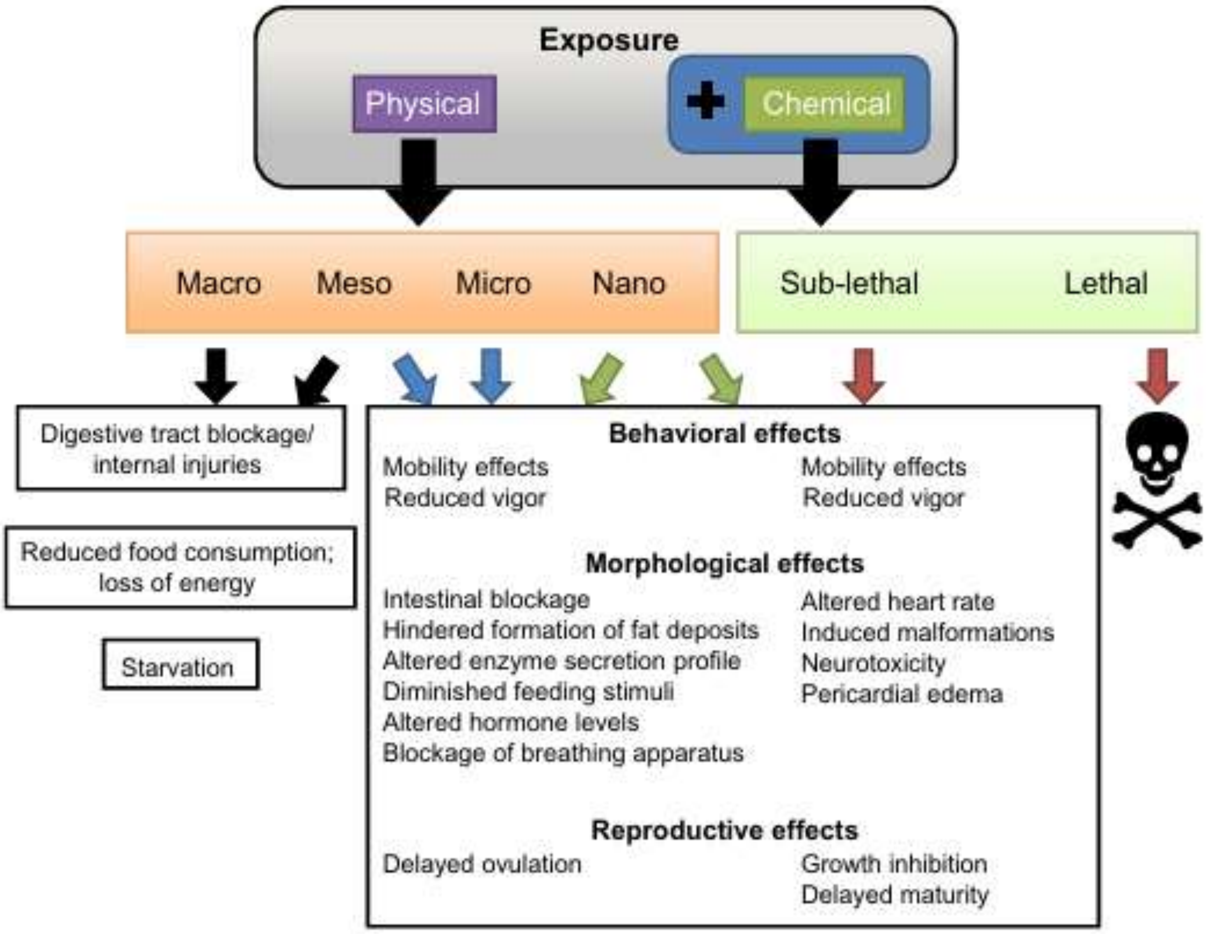
Crude oil, a complex mixture containing approximately 20,000 chemical compounds naturally present in the environment, predominantly comprises alkanes with straight and branched chains, mono-aromatic compounds, cycloalkanes, and various polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) (Van Hamme, Singh, & Ward, 2003). Human activities, particularly incomplete combustion of fossil fuels, petroleum, and its derivatives, lead to the accumulation of petroleum hydrocarbons in the environment, ultimately resulting in adverse effects. Of significant concern are the mutagenic, carcinogenic, and immune-modulatory properties of these compounds, posing risks to diverse forms of life including humans, animals, and plant species.

Dyes and paints

Dyes are synthetic chemicals and recalcitrant in nature. More than 100,000 commercial dyes including basic, acidic, reactive, azo, and anthraquinone-based dyes are produced annually (Campos, Kandelbauer, Robra, Cavaco-Paulo, & Gübitz, 2001). These dyes are used in several substrates used in daily life including cosmetics, paper, food, plastic, clothes, and textile industries and approximately 50% of the dyes are released in industrial effluents, ultimately reaching the oceans (Zollinger,1991). Dyes and paints present even in very low amounts reduce the penetration of sunlight, prevent gas exchange, and ultimately adversely affect life in aquatic habitats Commonly used dyes like azo, anthraquinone, and phthalocyanine in the textile and paper printing industries produce nondegradable aromatic amines which are also known to be potently toxic, carcinogenic, and mutagenic.

Insecticides and pesticides

Pesticides and herbicides routinely used in agriculture and daily life consist of chemicals such as organophosphorus, endosulfan, nitrophenols, morpholine, synthetic pyrethroids (SPs), and carbamates. These compounds contaminate groundwater and runoff flows to rivers, finally reaching the sea or ocean



Heavy metals

Heavy metals like mercury, cadmium, lead, and arsenic exert various harmful effects on living beings. A major problem associated with heavy metals is bioaccumulation and biomagnification. Key concerns with these metals are their high toxicity and carcinogenicity. In addition, they exert undesirable effects on different metabolic processes, especially in developing fish embryos, resulting in morphological and functional deformities, developmental retardation, or sometimes death.

Plastic

Plastic is the most important xenobiotic and exerts a notorious effect on all living beings (Plastics Europe, 2014). According to Sheavly and Register, 80% or more of the plastic debris in the oceans comes from land-based sources (Sheavly & Register, 2007). A low number of plastic debris ingested by aquatic organisms can cause severe effects, especially, causing growth inhibition and reproductive dysfunction (Sussarellu et al., 2016), behavioral disorders (Mattsson et al., 2014; Rehse, Kloas, & Zarfl,2016), feeding disorders reduced viability, mortality and various other effects on these various aquatic species including algae, protozoa (especially ciliates), invertebrates, many crustaceans, and fish

CONCLUSION

The effects of xenobiotics on marine life and the mechanisms of their biodegradation underscore the critical need for comprehensive approaches to mitigate pollution and preserve marine ecosystems. Xenobiotics, originating from various human activities and industries, pose significant threats to marine biodiversity and ecological balance. These synthetic compounds disrupt physiological processes in marine organisms, leading to adverse effects such as developmental abnormalities, reproductive impairments, and genotoxicity. However, the natural capacity of marine microorganisms to biodegrade xenobiotics offers hope for remediation efforts. By harnessing microbial degradation processes through bioremediation strategies, it is possible to mitigate the environmental impact of xenobiotics and restore the health and resilience of marine ecosystems. Moving forward, continued research into the interactions between xenobiotics and marine organisms, optimization of biodegradation processes, and the development of sustainable solutions are crucial for safeguarding the future of our oceans. Through collective efforts, we can work towards a healthier and more sustainable marine environment for generations to come.

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