

1 **Non-targeted metabolomics reveals alterations in liver**
2 **and plasma of gilt-head bream exposed to oxybenzone**

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27 **ABSTRACT**

28 The extensive use of the organic UV filter oxybenzone has led to its ubiquitous occurrence in
29 the aquatic environment, causing an ecotoxicological risk to biota. Although some studies
30 reported adverse effects, such as reproductive toxicity, further research needs to be done in
31 order to assess its molecular effects and mechanism of action. Therefore, in the present work,
32 we investigated metabolic perturbations in juvenile gilt-head bream (*Sparus aurata*) exposed
33 over 14 days via the water to oxybenzone (50 mg/L). The non-targeted analysis of brain, liver
34 and plasma extracts was performed by means of UHPLC-Orbitrap MS in positive and negative
35 modes with both C18 and HILIC separation. Although there was no mortality or alterations in
36 general physiological parameters during the experiment, and the metabolic profile of brain
37 was not affected, the results of this study showed that oxybenzone could perturb both liver
38 and plasma metabolome. The pathway enrichment suggested that different pathways in lipid
39 metabolism (fatty acid elongation, α -linolenic acid metabolism, biosynthesis of unsaturated
40 fatty acids and fatty acid metabolism) were significantly altered as well as metabolites involved
41 in phenylalanine and tyrosine metabolism. Overall, these changes are signs of possible
42 oxidative stress and energy metabolism modification. Therefore, this research indicates that
43 oxybenzone has adverse effects beyond the commonly studied hormonal activity, and
44 demonstrates the sensitivity of metabolomics to assess molecular-level effects of emerging
45 contaminants.

46

47 *Keywords:* Oxybenzone, gilt-head bream, non-targeted metabolomics

48

49 1. INTRODUCTION

50 Benzophenone-3 or oxybenzone is one of the most widely used organic UV filters in sunscreen
51 products and daily use cosmetics. Like other pharmaceuticals and personal care products
52 (PPCPs), oxybenzone and its by-products are incompletely removed during wastewater
53 treatment (Tsui et al., 2014), resulting in their occurrence in many aquatic ecosystems.
54 Oxybenzone has been found in wastewater and surface waters, but also in fish due to its
55 bioaccumulation capacity (Al-Salhi et al., 2012; Molins-Delgado et al., 2018; Ramos et al., 2015;
56 Ziarrusta et al., 2018). Preliminary risk assessment studies indicated that oxybenzone
57 discharged from wastewater treatment plants may pose high risk to aquatic organisms in the
58 environment (Tsui et al., 2014).

59 Consequently, occurrence of UV filters in aquatic ecosystems and their potential effects on
60 non-target organisms is of growing concern (Blüthgen et al., 2012; Coronado et al., 2008; Díaz-
61 Cruz and Barceló, 2009; Fent et al., 2010; Ghazipura et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2014; Kim and Choi,
62 2014; Kinnberg et al., 2015; Kunz et al., 2006; Liu et al., 2015; Rodríguez-Fuentes et al., 2015;
63 Tsui et al., 2014). For instance, developmental and reproductive toxicity of oxybenzone
64 (Coronado et al., 2008; Ghazipura et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2014; Kinnberg et al., 2015) in fish
65 have been attributed to an altered hormonal balance as a result of its endocrine disrupting
66 effects (Ghazipura et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2014; Kim and Choi, 2014; Kinnberg et al., 2015).
67 Many studies have reported the complex hormonal activity of UV filters, since many of these
68 xenobiotics show up to three distinct modes of action, including estrogenicity, anti-
69 estrogenicity and anti-androgenicity (Blüthgen et al., 2012; Kim et al., 2014; Kim and Choi,
70 2014; Kinnberg et al., 2015; Kunz et al., 2006). Additionally, the scarce information available
71 regarding their effects on the antioxidant defense system in fish suggests that UV filters have
72 adverse effects beyond hormonal activity (Liu et al., 2015; Rodríguez-Fuentes et al., 2015). For
73 instance, a growing trend in glutathione peroxidase expression was observed in zebrafish
74 (*Danio rerio*) eleuthero-embryos exposed to oxybenzone, which is an indicative of oxidative
75 stress (Rodríguez-Fuentes et al., 2015). In the same context, Liu and co-workers also reported
76 that benzophenone UV filters generated oxidative stress in freshwater fish *Carassius auratus*
77 (Liu et al., 2015).

78 In addition to this, Coronado and co-workers revealed that the alteration of endocrine and
79 reproduction endpoints in fish are linked to the exposure to oxybenzone, but at levels
80 significantly higher than those measured in the environment (Coronado et al., 2008).
81 Consequently, acute and chronic toxicity assays are required for a more accurate

82 environmental risk assessment (ERA). Preliminary studies reported that predicted no effect
83 concentration (PNEC) for oxybenzone was derived at 1.32 µg/L (Kim and Choi, 2014) and LC₅₀
84 value (48 h) was 1.9 mg/L (Fent et al., 2010), indicating that individual UV filters should
85 undergo further ecotoxicological analysis, as an environmental risk cannot be ruled out even
86 though the levels observed in water bodies are generally lower. Furthermore, Kim and co-
87 workers stated that oxybenzone is transformed into benzophenone-1, a more potent estrogen
88 agonist, which needs to be included in ERA in order to have a more realistic estimation of the
89 effects of oxybenzone exposure (Kim et al., 2014). On the other hand, although oxybenzone
90 has been frequently detected in aquatic organisms, limited information is available on its *in*
91 *vivo* toxicity, particularly in fish, and further *in vivo* testing is required since it provides the
92 most reliable data for predictive testing and risk assessment of xenobiotics (Díaz-Cruz and
93 Barceló, 2009).

94 Finally, although most of the studies investigating the hazards associated with UV filters in
95 aquatic organisms have focused on receptor binding and gene expression assays (Blüthgen et
96 al., 2012; Coronado et al., 2008; Kim and Choi, 2014; Rodríguez-Fuentes et al., 2015),
97 complementary approaches are needed for a more thorough ERA. In order to study thoroughly
98 the effects of xenobiotics occurring in the environment at non-lethal levels, it is important to
99 focus on the modes of action. To this end, metabolomics has proven useful by offering insight
100 into early biochemical perturbations at low molecular weight endogenous molecules triggered
101 by low dose of xenobiotics, which may lead to an adverse effect (Al-Salhi et al., 2012; Cajka and
102 Fiehn, 2016; Huang et al., 2016). For example, Huang et al. revealed that the exposure of
103 multiple class of xenobiotics at environmentally relevant concentrations produces specific
104 biochemical fingerprints in zebrafish (Huang et al., 2016), indicating that metabolomics can
105 complement toxicity assays with molecular-level information. In particular, a hypothesis-free
106 and non-targeted metabolomic approach allows the identification of many distinct features in
107 a single analysis, offering the opportunity to discover biomarkers that lead to a range of
108 breakthroughs in understanding the risks of xenobiotics (Al-Salhi et al., 2012; Cajka and Fiehn,
109 2016). Since generally highly dimensional and multi-correlated data are obtained for a few
110 replicate samples, both univariate and multivariate approaches (Vinaixa et al., 2012) have
111 been applied to identify the metabolites that allow the discrimination of case from control
112 groups. Additionally, pathway enrichment (Picart-Armada et al., 2017) helps to find plausible
113 biological explanations for those metabolic alterations taking into account compounds,
114 modules, enzymes, reactions and pathways in databases such as KEGG
115 (<http://www.kegg.jp/kegg/>).

116 In this framework, the main objective of this work was to evaluate the *in vivo* effects of
117 oxybenzone in juvenile gilt-head bream (*Sparus aurata*) using a non-targeted metabolomics
118 approach to measure perturbations in the brain, liver and plasma metabolome. To our
119 knowledge, this is the first study to investigate metabolic effects of oxybenzone in fish.

120 2. EXPERIMENTAL

121 2.1. Standards and Reagents

122 Stock dosing solution of oxybenzone (98%, Sigma-Aldrich, St. Louis, MO, USA) was prepared at
123 25 g/L in ethanol (EtOH) and diluted down to 0.83 mg/L in Milli-Q water. The final
124 concentration of EtOH in the dosing solution was <0.005%. Additional information regarding
125 the reagents of endogenous metabolites purchased from Sigma-Aldrich is detailed in Table S1
126 of the supplementary information (SI).

127 2.2. Oxybenzone exposure experiment and sampling

128 Exposure experiments were designed at the Research Centre for Experimental Marine Biology
129 and Biotechnology (PiE-UPV/EHU) using juvenile gilt-head bream weighing ~40 g and
130 measuring ~13 cm in length (Groupe Aqualande, Roquefort, France). The experiments were
131 carried out at controlled lab temperature (18 °C), water temperature (13.5 ± 0.5 °C) and pH
132 (7.3 ± 0.3), and light (14:10 h light:dark cycle). Fish were acclimatized for 1 month upon arrival,
133 stabilized for an additional 1 week in the exposure tanks before the exposure and they were
134 fed daily with 0.10 g pellets/fish (EFICO YM 868, 3 mm, BioMar Group, Denmark). The water in
135 the control and exposed tanks was continuously aerated and the water quality was assured by
136 measuring periodically the dissolved oxygen, nitrite, nitrate and ammonium contents.

137 This experiment was conducted in parallel with a bioaccumulation/biotransformation study,
138 and it was observed that oxybenzone was accumulated in different tissues and biofluids
139 (Ziarrusta et al., 2018). A 14-day exposure (50 µg/L nominal) was performed using two
140 1000 x 700 x 650 mm polypropylene tanks (one control, one exposed), containing 250 L of
141 seawater and 50 fish per tank. Exposures were carried out using a continuous flow-through
142 system with a peristaltic pump delivering 10 L seawater/h and another pump infusing an
143 oxybenzone dosing solution (refilled every 24 hours) at 0.6 L/h to the exposure tank. Identical
144 experimental conditions were maintained for control tank. Ten fish were sampled from both
145 tanks at the beginning of the experiments (day 0) and on exposure days 2, 4, 7 and 14.
146 Additionally, 2.5 L water samples were also collected on the same sampling days to monitor
147 oxybenzone concentrations in both tanks.

148 Fish taken for dissection were immersed for 5 minutes in a tank containing 10 L of seawater
149 with 100 mg/L tricaine and 200 mg/L NaHCO₃. Each anaesthetized fish was weighed, measured
150 and dissected to collect plasma, brain in 2-mL Precellys vials (Bertin Instruments, Montigny-le-
151 Breonneux, France) and liver in 7-mL Precellys vials. Blood was sampled from the caudal vein-
152 artery using a syringe previously rinsed with 0.5 mol/L EDTA solution (pH adjusted to 8.0 using
153 NaOH) and then centrifuged for 5 minutes at 1000 rpm to get the plasma. Biological fluids and
154 tissues were stored in liquid nitrogen during dissection and kept at -80 °C until extraction. Fish
155 processing described herein was evaluated by the Bioethics Committee of UPV/EHU and
156 approved by the Local Authority according to the current regulations (procedure approval
157 CEEA/380/2014/ETXEBARRIA LOIZATE).

158 2.3. Extraction and analysis of metabolites

159 Analytical method for metabolite extraction and analysis is fully described elsewhere
160 (Ribbenstedt et al., 2018). In brief, a mixture of 4 µL CHCl₃:MeOH (20:80, v/v) per mg sample
161 was added directly into the Precellys vials containing dissected tissues and biofluids (~100 mg
162 brain, ~400 mg plasma and 1000 mg liver) for a single step extraction of both polar and non-
163 polar metabolites. All samples were homogenized for 3x1.5 min at 4000 rpm (Precellys), under
164 controlled cooled temperature (4 °C) (Cryolys, Bertin Technologies, Montigny-le-Bretonneux,
165 France), employing 1.4 mm or 2.8 mm-zirconium oxide beads (Precellys) in the case of brain
166 and liver, respectively. Extracts were centrifuged for 15 minutes at 18,000 rpm (Centrifuge
167 Allegra X-30R, F2402H, Beckman Coulter, High Wycombe, UK) to get the supernatant
168 consisting on a single-phase solution.

169 Non-targeted analysis was carried out using a Thermo Scientific Dionex UltiMate 3000 UHPLC
170 coupled to a Thermo Scientific Q Exactive quadrupole-Orbitrap mass spectrometer equipped
171 with a heated ESI source (HESI, Thermo, CA, USA), and controlled by Xcalibur 4.0 software
172 (Thermo). Furthermore, to maximize metabolite identification coverage, aliquots of 5 µL of all
173 the extracts were analyzed in 3 different runs using different chromatographic columns and
174 ionization modes: hydrophilic interaction liquid chromatography (HILIC) column in positive
175 (HILIC_{pos}) and negative (HILIC_{neg}) ionization modes, and a reverse-phase octadecylsilyl column
176 in the positive mode (C18_{pos}). The Orbitrap was operated in full scan – data dependent MS2
177 (Full MS-ddMS2) discovery acquisition mode. One full scan at a resolution of 70,000 full width
178 at half maximum (FWHM) at m/z 200 over a scan range of m/z 70-1000 was followed by three
179 ddMS2 scans at a resolution of 17,500 FWHM at m/z 200, with an isolation window of 0.8 Da.
180 The stepped normalized collision energy (NCE) in the higher-energy collisional dissociation
181 (HCD) cell was set to 10, 35 and 75 eV (see more details about instrumental analysis in SI).

182 The extraction of the samples was carried out randomly and the samples were arranged in 9
183 separate sequences: one per matrix (liver, brain, plasma) and analysis conditions (HILIC_{pos},
184 HILIC_{neg}, C18_{pos}). In order to assure the quality assurance/quality control of the instrumental
185 analysis (Broadhurst et al., 2018), sample extracts were analyzed randomly along the
186 sequence. Instrumental blank samples (pure MeOH) injected every 5 samples ruled out the
187 presence of carryover, and procedural blank samples were prepared to estimate the
188 background concentration of metabolites during sample workup. Sequence quality control
189 sample (QC_{seq}) was also prepared for each tissue by pooling a small volume of each extract and
190 splitting it into several aliquots. These aliquots were injected after every 10 samples to allow
191 signal drift correction.

192 2.4. Data Handling and Statistical Analyses

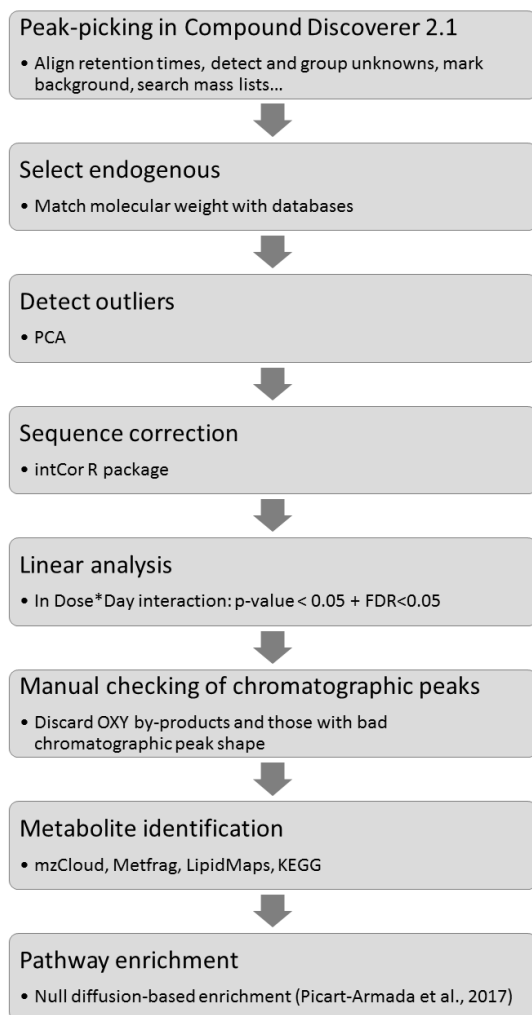
193 Condition factor (K) and hepatic somatic index (HSI) were determined as a general assessment
194 of fish health. K was calculated using the equation $K = (\text{fish weight} \times 100) / (\text{fish length})^3$
195 (Fulton, 1904), while HSI was determined using the equation $\text{HSI} = (\text{liver weight} \times 100) / (\text{fish}$
196 $\text{weight})$. K and HSI were statistically evaluated between exposed and control groups using
197 one-way ANOVA.

198 Identification of metabolites involved in altered metabolic pathways was performed separately
199 for plasma, brain and liver following the workflow shown in Fig. 1. First, each sequence of
200 chromatograms was processed using Compound Discoverer 2.1 (CD; Thermo-Fisher Scientific).
201 The specific details of the workflow and settings are described in SI. Thereafter, each data set
202 was filtered to keep only endogenous metabolites by searching the detected exact masses in
203 the database containing up to 4400 endogenous compounds or in LipidMaps
204 (<http://www.lipidmaps.org/>) database.

205 All statistical analyses were carried out using the R software for statistical computing (v 3.4.3).
206 Firstly, using Principal Component Analysis (PCA) as an unsupervised discrimination approach,
207 possible outliers, samples outside the 95% confidence regions of the total dataset, were
208 discarded in each sequence. Signal drift over the course of the sequence (identified from QC_{seq}
209 data) was corrected afterwards using the R package intCor (Fernández-Albert et al., 2014), via
210 a two-step method that combines Common Principal Components Analysis (CPCA) and the
211 medians method. To create this model, we defined three classes (i.e., control, exposed and
212 QC_{seq}) and the number of components of the model in each specific sequence. Once the drift
213 was corrected, the 3 sequences (HILIC_{pos}, HILIC_{neg}, C18_{pos}) of each matrix were merged to
214 subsequently perform multiple linear analysis ($Y(\text{Day, Dose}) \sim \text{Day} + \text{Dose} + \text{Day} \cdot \text{Dose}$, where Y
215 is the feature response). Since the objective was to find out the metabolites that showed

216 significantly different concentration evolution during exposure between the exposed and
217 control samples, we paid special attention to the interaction Dose·Day. Therefore, applying
218 linear analysis and multiple testing, we selected the chromatographic features with a p-value <
219 0.05 and a false discovery rate (FDR) < 0.05 in the interaction Dose·Day. We manually checked
220 the features that showed up as significant in order to discard those with bad chromatographic
221 peak shape and/or incorrectly integrated, as well as those features that corresponded to
222 oxybenzone by-products (Ziarrusta et al., 2018).

223



224

225 **Fig. 1:** Workflow followed to identify metabolites involved in altered metabolic pathways.

226 After selecting significant features, we performed metabolite annotation (Schymanski et al.,
227 2014) comparing the exact mass, isotopic profile, fragmentation and abundances with those
228 available in the mzCloud library. When the metabolite was not available in the mzCloud library,
229 experimental fragmentation pattern was compared against *in silico* fragmentation obtained in
230 MetFrag (<https://msbi.ipb-halle.de/MetFragBeta/>) that uses KEGG and LipidMaps databases
231 for metabolite annotation. In this sense, when the standard was available (see Table S1),
232 retention time was also used for the last confirmation.

233 In order to identify the key metabolic processes and to find out a feasible biological
234 explanation for the variations observed, null diffusion-based enrichment (Picart-Armada et al.,
235 2017) was run with KEGG annotated compounds based on the following parameters: diffusion
236 method, simulation approximation with 15,000 iterations. The database was built using the
237 KEGG release 84.0+/10-08, Oct 17 2017, the zebrafish (*Danio rerio*) organism (organism code
238 "dre") and excluding the unspecific "dre01100" metabolic overview pathway. The network
239 consisted of 161 pathways, 176 modules, 973 enzymes, 4803 reactions and 3450 KEGG
240 compounds. We also discussed the biological relevance of the lipids identified as significant
241 metabolites but not included in KEGG. Finally, daily fold change (FC) values (see equation 1) of
242 the suggested metabolites were calculated as described elsewhere (Vinaixa et al., 2012).

$$243 \quad FC = \bar{X}/\bar{Y} \text{ when } \bar{X} > \bar{Y} \text{ or } FC = -\bar{Y}/\bar{X} \text{ when } \bar{X} < \bar{Y} \quad \text{Equation 1}$$

244 Where, \bar{X} and \bar{Y} are the average concentrations of the metabolite in the exposed and
245 control samples, respectively.

246

247 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

248 No significant changes in fish weight and length were observed at the 95% confidence level,
249 regardless of experiment tank or exposure day (p-value > 0.05). There was no mortality and K
250 and HSI were comparable between fish of exposed and control groups (p-value > 0.05) at in all
251 the exposure days. Furthermore, following the workflow detailed in section 2.4, no metabolite
252 concentration was altered significantly in brain, concluding that the brain metabolome was not
253 affected by oxybenzone. Although according to the literature oxybenzone can accumulate in
254 the brain and result in neurological effects by disrupting the brain homeostasis in rats (Fediuk
255 et al., 2010), in gilt-head bream we observed no metabolome profile modification in this
256 tissue. Contrarily, in the case of liver and plasma, the number of significantly altered features
257 was 8 and 10, respectively. From those peaks, 4 and 9 were KEGG annotated in liver and
258 plasma, respectively, and the rest of the peaks were putatively identified as lipids that are not
259 included in KEGG (see Table 1). Additionally, pathway enrichment was performed using the
260 significant metabolites previously mapped on KEGG for each matrix. Overall, the largest
261 alterations were observed mainly in the last day of exposure (see the daily FC values and
262 individual average peak areas for each metabolite in liver and plasma in Tables S2 and S3,
263 respectively).

264

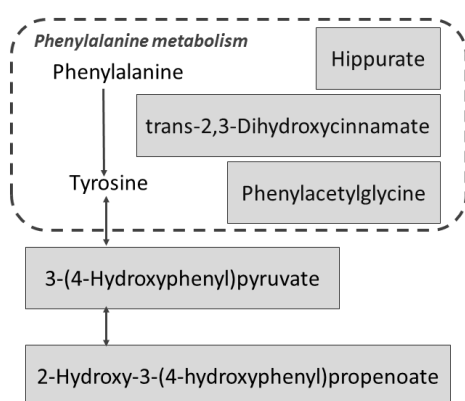
265 **Table 1:** Identification of the features whose concentrations were significantly altered after the
 266 oxybenzone-exposure.

Matrix	Peak	Molecular Weight	MS/MS fragments	RT	Name	KEGG Code	Level
Liver	C18pos_Peak1222	180.0421	163.0388; 149.0232; 65.0393	14.04	trans-2,3-dihydroxycinnamate	C12623	2b
	C18pos_Peak1293	180.0421	163.0388; 149.0232; 65.0393	10.92	3-(4-Hydroxyphenyl)pyruvate / 2-hydroxy-3-(4-hydroxyphenyl)propenoate	C01179/ C05350	3
	C18pos_Peak529	193.0739	162.0547; 152.0703; 120.0444	11.25	Phenylacetyl glycine	C05598	2a
	HILICpos_Peak1073	179.0582	162.0550; 105.0335; 95.0491	6.64	Hippurate	C01586	2a
	HILICneg_Peak114	791.5487	283.2649; 124.9999; 123.0436	1.67	18 candidates belonging to glycerophospholipids lipid category ^a	*	3
	HILICneg_Peak1178	406.1271	243.0670; 227.0714; 123.0436	7.09	5 candidates belonging to polyketides lipid category ^b	*	3
	HILICneg_Peak1333	493.3538	311.2956; 283.2649; 184.0733	6.78	2 candidates belonging to glycerophospholipids lipid category ^c	*	3
	HILICneg_Peak421	420.1064	123.0436; 108.0200; 93.0328	6.95	7 candidates belonging to polyketides lipid category ^d	*	3
Plasma	C18pos_Peak1037	138.1045	121.1013; 97.0657; 93.0703	13.23	3,6-Nonadienal	C16323	2b
	C18pos_Peak715	105.0428	88.0398; 70.0295; 60.0453	2.05	D-Serine	C00740	1
	HILICneg_Peak29	366.3501	183.1391; 169.1234; 141.0921	1.61	Nervonic acid	C08323	2a
	HILICneg_Peak498	172.0141	152.9958; 96.9696; 78.9591	6.66	sn-Glycerol 1-phosphate / sn-Glycerol 3-phosphate	C00623/ C00093	3
	HILICneg_Peak12	328.2407	283.2431; 229.1962; 119.0490	2.21	Docosahexaenoic acid	C06429	2a
	HILICneg_Peak344	336.3033	95.0862; 85.0277; 57.0710	1.63	Docosadienoic acid	C16533	2b
	HILICpos_Peak112	105.043	88.0399; 70.0295; 60.0453	10.80	D-Serine	C00740	1
	C18pos_Peak688	278.2245	261.2217; 243.2115; 95.0859	17.64	γ -Linolenic acid / α -Linolenic acid / Crepenynate	C06426/ C06427/ C07289	3
	HILICpos_Peak11	129.0426	102.0554; 84.0451; 56.0505	10.73	5-Oxo-L-proline	C01879	2a
	C18pos_Peak158	733.5618	184.0733; 124.9999; 86.0970	21.39	14 candidates belonging to glycerophospholipids lipid category ^e	*	3

267 *Putatively identified/not in KEGG. LipidMaps ID: ^aLMGP01011430, LMGP01011544,
 268 LMGP01011573, LMGP01011906, LMGP01011935, LMGP01012101, LMGP02010094, LMGP02010678,
 269 LMGP02010766, LMGP02010864, LMGP02010894, LMGP02010924, LMGP02010953, LMGP02010981,
 270 LMGP02011087, LMGP02011115, LMGP02011142 or LMGP20020015; ^bLMPK13090007, LMPK12020031,
 271 LMPK12020264, LMPK12020009 or LMPK12020025; ^cLMGP02070004 or LMGP01070007;
 272 ^dLMPK12113361, LMPK12113362, LMPK12113363, LMPK12113382, LMPK12113381, LMPK12113364 or
 273 LMPK12113383; ^eLMGP01010463, LMGP01010704, LMGP01010444, LMGP01010564, LMGP01010537,
 274 LMGP01011080, LMGP01010997, LMGP01011062, LMGP01010970, LMGP01010739, LMGP01010418,
 275 LMGP01010488, LMGP01011267 or LMGP01010397.

3.1. Liver metabolome alterations

276 Pathway enrichment suggested that the more significantly altered metabolites in liver were
277 those involved in the amino acid metabolism, specifically, in the phenylalanine metabolism
278 and the tyrosine-related metabolites (see Fig. 2). Phenylacetylglucine, hippurate and trans-2,3-
279 dihydroxycinnamate levels were increased in oxybenzone-exposed fish (see Table S2). Apart
280 from those targets in the phenylalanine metabolism, tyrosine-related metabolites 3-(4-
281 hydroxyphenyl)pyruvate/2-hydroxy-3-(4-hydroxyphenyl)propenoate also showed the same
282 concentration profile. Both pathways are related since phenylalanine-4-hydrolase converts
283 phenylalanine into tyrosine (Li et al., 2011). Therefore, all these perturbations might be
284 associated. Additionally, 4 putatively identified lipid levels were also altered.
285



286
287 **Fig. 2:** Altered metabolites and pathway in fish liver.

288 The perturbation of the metabolites involved in amino acid metabolism in liver could pinpoint
289 a way to overcome the stressing exposure to oxybenzone, similarly to what occurred with
290 other environmental pollutants (Wang et al., 2017; Zhang and Zhao, 2017). Additionally,
291 several studies have shown that the oxidative stress owing to pollutant exposure can induce
292 changes in concentration levels of amino acids and lipid metabolites (Ling et al., 2014; Yuan et
293 al., 2016). Furthermore, in this work we have also observed alterations in 4 lipidic metabolites
294 (see Table 1), which is consistent with lipid storage disorders observed under exposure to
295 PPCPs (Buron et al., 2017). To sum up, the evidences to conclude that the pollutant-exposed
296 fish showed oxidative stress are the alterations in lipidic metabolites (Buron et al., 2017), the
297 perturbation in hippurate levels (Zhang et al., 2014) and the significant changes in the
298 precursor metabolites of carbohydrate metabolism such as 3-(4-hydroxyphenyl)pyruvate/2-
299 hydroxy-3-(4-hydroxyphenyl)propenoate (Ling et al., 2014; Yuan et al., 2016).

300 Oxidative stress has been previously linked to the disruption of energy metabolism (Ling et al.,
301 2014; Yuan et al., 2016), which is reported to be perturbed by the exposure to pollutants

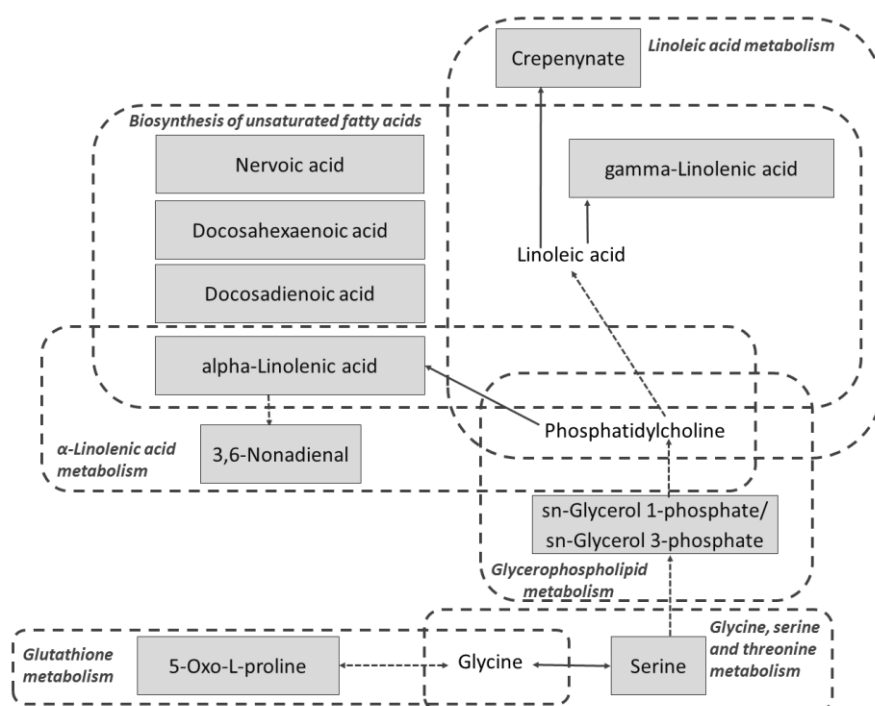
302 (Amorim and Alvarez-Leite, 1997; Colet, 2015). For instance, Colet and co-workers revealed
303 that the alteration of hippurate was a consequence of a disruption of the energy metabolism
304 in liver mitochondria (Colet, 2015). In fact, increased hippurate levels after oxybenzone
305 administration (see Table S2) are not surprising since it was also observed with other
306 xenobiotics such as toluene or arsenic (Amorim and Alvarez-Leite, 1997; Colet, 2015; Zhang et
307 al., 2014), suggesting a non-specific mechanism of action (Robertson, 2005). In addition to
308 hippurate, in the phenylalanine metabolism, we also observed the perturbations of trans-2,3-,
309 dihydroxycinnamate and phenylacetyl glycine, and the later was also found as altered
310 metabolite in children exposed to bisphenol A (Khan et al., 2017). Therefore, similarly to other
311 xenobiotics (Zhang et al., 2016), we conclude that oxybenzone alters the phenylalanine
312 pathway.

313 Lastly, although oxybenzone is widely reported to have estrogenic activity (Blüthgen et al.,
314 2012; Coronado et al., 2008; Kim et al., 2014; Kim and Choi, 2014; Kinnberg et al., 2015; Kunz
315 et al., 2006), we did not observe clear evidences for that adverse effect. It is reported that the
316 estrogenic signaling pathway includes the regulation of tyrosine hydroxylase, which catalyzes
317 the synthesis of catecholamines from tyrosine (Maharjan Shreekrishna et al., 2005).
318 Meanwhile, the only perturbation in the tyrosine metabolism was in the above mentioned
319 3-(4-hydroxyphenyl)pyruvate /2-hydroxy-3-(4-hydroxyphenyl)propenoate, which is linked to
320 tyrosine. Therefore, this observation might also be associated with the estrogenicity described
321 for oxybenzone.

322 According to the literature, liver has been found to be a key organ for absorption,
323 bioaccumulation, energy metabolism, protein biosynthesis, xenobiotic detoxification,
324 endocrine as well as immune responses in multiple toxicity studies (Qiao et al., 2016).
325 Therefore, the specific reason behind the alterations found in this work in liver might be the
326 effect of any of them or even the combination of a few ones.

327 3.2. Plasma metabolome alterations

328 In the case of plasma, the metabolites suggested by pathway enrichment were combined
329 based on KEGG to form a metabolic network, giving a holistic view of metabolic changes in the
330 organism. As can be observed in Fig. 3, those metabolites are mainly involved in the alteration
331 of the lipid metabolism and the suggested perturbed pathways were: fatty acid elongation, α -
332 linolenic acid metabolism, biosynthesis of unsaturated fatty acids and fatty acid metabolism.



334
335

Fig. 3: Altered metabolites and pathways in fish plasma.

336 The alterations of 8 metabolites in lipid metabolism can be related to oxidative stress since
 337 several authors have reported that UV filters such as oxybenzone generate oxidative stress in
 338 fish (Liu et al., 2015; Rodríguez-Fuentes et al., 2015). Similarly to the present work, lipid
 339 storage disorder associated with oxidative stress has been already reported as an adverse
 340 effect of different xenobiotics (Buron et al., 2017; Lin et al., 2014; Salihovic et al., 2016; Wafa
 341 et al., 2011). In this work, the concentrations of 5 unsaturated fatty acids (γ -linolenic acid, α -
 342 linolenic acid, docosahexaenoic acid, nervonic acid and docosadienoic acid) in plasma were
 343 altered in oxybenzone-exposed fish. Unsaturated fatty acids serve as substrates for
 344 lipoxygenases, which are capable of oxidizing many xenobiotics (Kulkarni, 2001). Actually,
 345 oxidized oxybenzone degradation products were observed in a previous work of our research
 346 group (Zarrusta et al., 2018).

347 Among the altered fatty acids, docosahexaenoic acid is used for assessing oxidative stress *in*
 348 *vivo* (Yoshida et al., 2013), and its alteration was observed with other xenobiotics (Salihovic et
 349 al., 2016; Wafa et al., 2011). Metabolites belonging to linoleic acid and linolenic acid
 350 metabolism are used to identify oxidative stress episodes (Lin et al., 2014; Yoshida et al.,
 351 2013). Concretely, similarly to other exposure studies (Lin et al., 2014), we observed
 352 alterations in the levels of lipid peroxidation products of both linoleic acid (e.g., γ -linolenic acid
 353 and crepenynate) and α -linolenic acid (e.g., α -linolenic acid and 3,6-nonadienal) pathways,
 354 which are consistent markers of higher oxidative states (Shearer and Newman, 2008).

355 Observing lipid abnormalities in different lipid classes is common (Chen et al., 2017; Salihovic
356 et al., 2016), and we also detected the alteration of *sn*-glycerol 1-phosphate/*sn*-glycerol 3-
357 phosphate in the glycerophospholipid metabolism.

358 Lastly, we observed the alteration of the amino acid serine, which is an essential precursor for
359 the synthesis of lipids (Hanada, 2003). The alteration of amino acid metabolism, including
360 serine, is also reported with other xenobiotics (Eguchi et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2014). In fact,
361 Zhang and co-workers stated that the disruption of the amino acid metabolism related to
362 serine is indicative of oxidative stress (Zhang et al., 2014). Therefore, the lower serine levels
363 that we detected after 14-day oxybenzone exposure (see Table S3) might have caused a more
364 significant cellular response to oxidative stress and higher reactive oxygen species (ROS)
365 content, which is consistent with other works that observed serine deficiency in plasma under
366 oxidative stress (Zhou Xihong et al., 2017). The reason behind this might be the role of serine
367 linking biosynthetic flux from glycolysis to the synthesis on antioxidant glutathione (Parker and
368 Metallo, 2016), because glutathione depletion causes accumulation of ROS (Dixon and
369 Stockwell, 2014). Actually, in the present work there is a sign of glutathione metabolism
370 perturbation since 5-oxo-L-proline was altered in the exposed fish. 5-oxoproline is an
371 intermediate in the biosynthesis of glutathione, and although it is known as a potential
372 biomarker for hepatotoxicity, xenobiotic-induced 5-oxoproline alterations are observed in
373 various biofluids/tissues including liver, urine and plasma (Geenen et al., 2011). In exposure
374 studies, finding alterations of glutathione-related pathways is common since there are
375 enzymes that are important in xenobiotic metabolism (Eguchi et al., 2017). As an example of
376 glutathione-related pathway disruption, Eguchi and co-workers (Eguchi et al., 2017) reported
377 glutathione as possible candidate biomarker for polychlorinated biphenyls exposure.
378 Furthermore, in a study with zebrafish, oxybenzone also perturbed glutathione peroxidase
379 expression involved in cellular redox balance (Rodríguez-Fuentes et al., 2015), which is
380 consistent with the observation in this work.

381 4. CONCLUSIONS

382 The present study showed that despite an absence of mortality or alterations in general
383 physiological parameters (i.e, fish weight and length, K and HSI) and brain metabolome,
384 oxybenzone produces significant metabolic perturbations in both liver and plasma of fish.
385 Briefly, from the results it can be concluded a possible energy metabolism modification and
386 oxidative stress. The latter has important health implications (Chen et al., 2017) since it
387 damages cellular structures and functions, significantly influencing life histories of fish through

388 interactions with growth, reproduction and body maintenance and, hence, future fitness and
389 survival (Birnie-Gauvin et al., 2017). Therefore, this research indicates that oxybenzone has
390 adverse effects beyond the commonly studied hormonal activity (Blüthgen et al., 2012; Kim et
391 al., 2014; Kim and Choi, 2014; Kinnberg et al., 2015; Kunz et al., 2006), and proves the
392 usefulness of the metabolomic approach to study the modes of action. Consequently,
393 complementary to receptor binding and gene expression assays, ERA should consider
394 metabolomic studies to detect perturbations at molecular level caused by to investigate the
395 effects of xenobiotics at non-lethal levels.

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