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Molecular docking-based in silico evaluation of punicic acid as a potential inhibitor of respiratory influenza viruses, including SARS-CoV-1 and SARS-CoV-2

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Abstract:

Emerging trends in migration, urbanisation, and worldwide travel have rendered viral epidemics a serious hazard to human health. Viral infections are a major issue due to their intricate nature, diversity, and the scarcity of vaccinations and antiviral medicines. This often leads to epidemics and pandemics. By using a computational method, this work aims to aid in the creation of efficient treatment plans by examining the mechanisms pertaining to the binding and subsequent inhibition of different respiratory influenza viruses, including SARS-CoV-2 and SARS-CoV-1 targets. Different computer screening techniques, such as the docking process, ligand-based similarity searches, or pharmacophore-based screening, are used to filter large virtual compound libraries, lowering the number of candidate compounds to a more manageable number that is subsequently physiologically verified. The drug discovery process becomes more goal-oriented thanks to this rational method, which also conserves time and money.

There are limited licenced treatments for respiratory influenza viruses including SARS-CoV-2 and SARS-CoV-1 infections, highlighting the need for more chemotherapeutic drugs to combat the disease. In this study in silico research offers an overview of the potential antiviral profiles of punicic acid against respiratory influenza viruses. As a result, it paved the path for the development of promising next-generation antiviral medications to combat respiratory influenza viruses. This study contributes to the development of effective treatment strategies through a computational approach, investigating the mechanisms in relation to the binding and subsequent inhibition of ATP-bound state of BiP (5E84), main protease (Mpro) (6LU7), spike receptor binding domain (6LZG), RNA-dependent RNA polymerase (6M71), spike glycoprotein (6VSB), NSP15 endonuclease (6VWW), Nsp9 RNA-binding protein (6W4B), papainlike protease (6W9C), and neurominidase from H1N1 (5NZ4) the antiviral inhibitory effects of naturally occurring compounds punic acid was examined and compared with standard. Our comprehensive computational and statistical study indicates that the phytochemicals such as punicic acid can be used to design potential broad antiviral inhibitors against respiratory influenza viruses including SARS-CoV-2 and SARS-CoV-1.

Keywords: respiratory influenza viruses, SARS-CoV-2, SARS-CoV-1, Punic acid, molecular

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Introduction:

Respiratory influenza viruses including SARS-CoV-2 and SARS-CoV-1 is a fatal virus that causes the illness and spreads to people when they come into contact with infected people or animals. With the exponential growth of respiratory viral diseases, SARS-CoV-1 and SARS-CoV-2, there is an increasing demand for medications to treat these infections. Currently, no effective drug has been developed; however, several studies are being conducted around the world. Despite the fact that SARS-CoV-2 has a high infection rate, there are no reliable treatment approaches available to address the illness (1). On-going scientific endeavours are focused on discovering antiviral medicines for respiratory influenza viruses, including SARS-CoV-2 and SARS-CoV-1. An alternative method for discovering an efficient cure is repurposing drugs, which entails examining existing pharmacological molecules for their potential as antiviral medicines against respiratory influenza viruses such as SARS-CoV-2 and SARS-CoV-1. Leading pharmaceutical companies and research institutions have employed computer-aided drug discovery (CADD) techniques in preliminary studies that aim to speed up the process of drug discovery and development, thereby decreasing costs and failures in the final stage. As a result of recent developments in robotics, high-throughput screening using microfluidic systems may now be automated, which opens the door to the possibility of drug repurposing. There are a number of computational drug repurposing techniques available; the three main types of computational drug repositioning methods utilised are network-based designs, structure-based methods, and artificially intelligent (AI) methods used to discover novel drug-target relationships beneficial for new therapies. Repurposing of FDA-approved medications has been emphasised in numerous research to identify possible inhibitors utilising structure-based drug design studies (2).

Punicic acid, the major bioactive component of pomegranate (*Punicagranatum*) seed oil, is an omega-5 isomer of conjugated α -linoleic acid. It has powerful anti-oxidative and anti-inflammatory actions, which contribute to its favourable effect against a wide range of disorders. Punicic acid lowers oxidative damage and inflammation by boosting the expression of peroxisome proliferator-activated receptors. In light of the foregoing factors, we conducted a study to assess the anti-viral potential of physiologically active phytochemicals present in traditional medicines (Ayurvedic medicines, Chinese medicines, etc.) with potential inhibitory properties against the virus. Because the treatment was based on empirical findings, we chose to screen and identify the important bioactive components from plants that were already known to have immunomodulatory effects, such as liquorice, tulasi, and pomegranate, as well as plants that are used as rasayana medicines in Ayurveda (3).

1.0) Material and methods:

1.1) Retrieving Herbal Compounds and Preparation of Drug Library

The 3D structures of glycyrrhizic acid from liquorice were retrieved from PubChem database. Compounds with missing.mol/.sdf files were drawn and converted with the help of the Structure File Generator (<https://cactus.nci.nih.gov/translate/>) and Online SMILES Translator.

1.2) Target Protein Retrieval and Preparation

On the basis of literature survey, we found that various targets, such as the ATP-bound state of BiP (5E84), main protease (Mpro) (6LU7), spike receptor binding domain (6LZG), RNA-dependent RNA polymerase (6M71), spike glycoprotein (6VSB), NSP15 endonuclease (6VWW), Nsp9 RNA-binding protein (6W4B), papainlike protease (6W9C), and neurominidase from H1N1 (5NZ4) are major target to study antiviral activity against respiratory influenza viruses including SARS-CoV-1 and SARS-CoV-2. Therefore, the fasta sequence of the above-mentioned various targets for antiviral activity against respiratory influenza viruses, including SARS-CoV-1 and SARS-CoV-2, was retrieved from the National Centre for Biotechnology information server as well as searched resembling biological sequences available on Protein Data Bank using the Basic Local Alignment Search tool (BLAST), where we sorted the top 5 to 10 selected sequences for their better

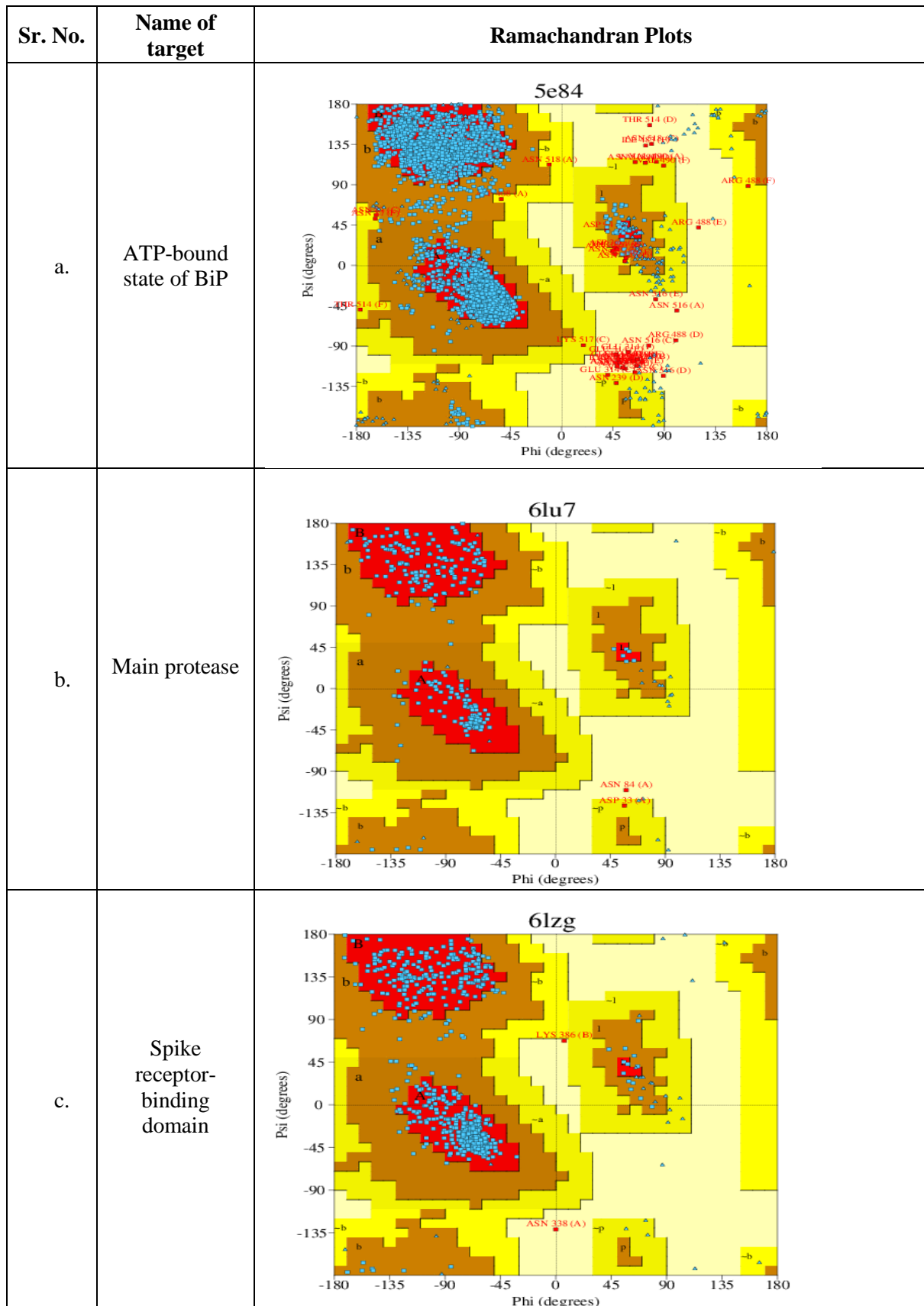
query coverage, percentage identity, and E-value. The PDB databank was used to obtain the three-dimensional X-Ray crystallographic structure of various targets, including the ATP-bound state of BiP (5E84), main protease (Mpro) (6LU7), spike receptor binding domain (6LZG), RNA-dependent RNA polymerase (6M71), spike glycoprotein (6VSB), NSP15 endonuclease (6VWW), Nsp9 RNA-binding protein (6W4B), papainlike protease (6W9C), and neurominidase from H1N1 (5NZ4). The accession number of each target was validated using parameters such as resolution, Mutation, wwPDB Validation, co-crystal ligand, and Ramachandran plot.

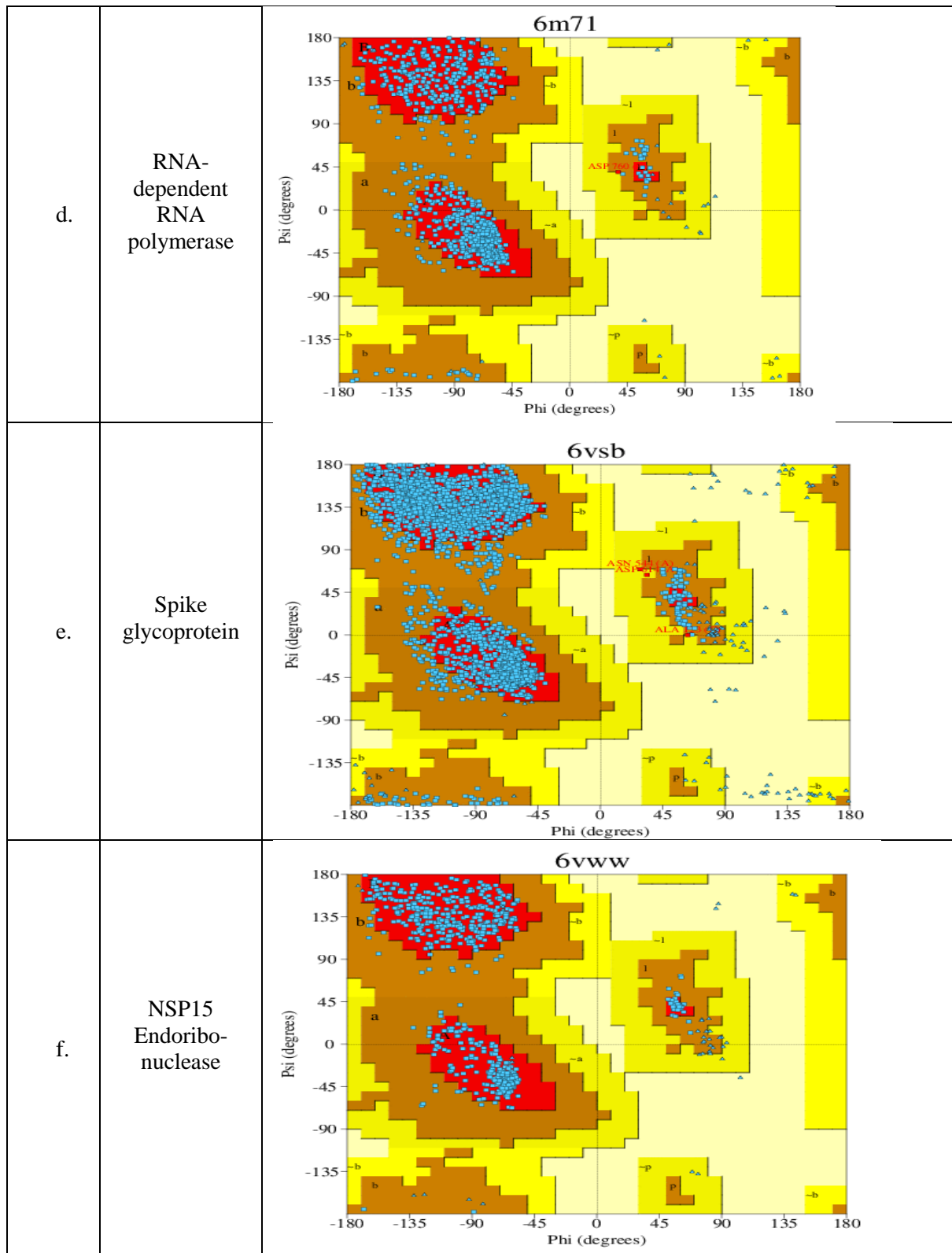
Table 1 compared standard values and recovered protein to validate docking study protein.

Parameters	Protein Details									Standards
Targets	ATP-bound state of BiP	Main protease	Spike receptor-binding domain	RNA-dependent RNA polymerase	Spike glycoprotein	NSP15 Endonuclease	Nsp9 RNA binding protein	Papain-like protease	Neuraminidase from H1N1	-
Protein Id	5E84	6LU7	6LZG	6M71	6VSB	6VWW	6W4B	6W9C	5NZ4	-
Method of Experiment	X-RAY Diffraction									
Mutation	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Resolution	2.99 Å ⁰	2.16Å ⁰	2.50Å ⁰	2.90Å ⁰	3.46Å ⁰	2.20Å ⁰	2.95Å ⁰	2.70Å ⁰	1.36 Å	Near about 2.00 Å ⁰
wwPDB Validation	Better	Better	Better	Better	Better	Better	Better	Better	Better	Better
Ramchandra Plot (by PROCHECK server) Residues in favoured + Allowed regions	89.8 %	90.6%	90.8%	87.2%	84.0%	93.1%	91.1%	86.1%	100%	>80 %

Table 1: Comparison between standard values and retrieved protein for validation of protein Selected for docking study.

The angles from a Ramachandran plot can be used to verify the solution to a crystal structure as well as determining the role of an amino acid in secondary structure. It also helps with constraining structure prediction simulations and defining energy functions. It shows the regions in protein structure that are energetically permitted for backbone dihedral angles ψ against ϕ of amino acid residues. The below table 2 shows Ramachandran Plots for several study targets. The three-dimensional geometry of the protein model was determined using the PROCHECK web tool, which calculated the Ramachandran plot and generated results for residues in various coloured regions, namely red (favoured), yellow (additionally allowed), pale yellow (generously allowed), and whitish yellow (disallowed).





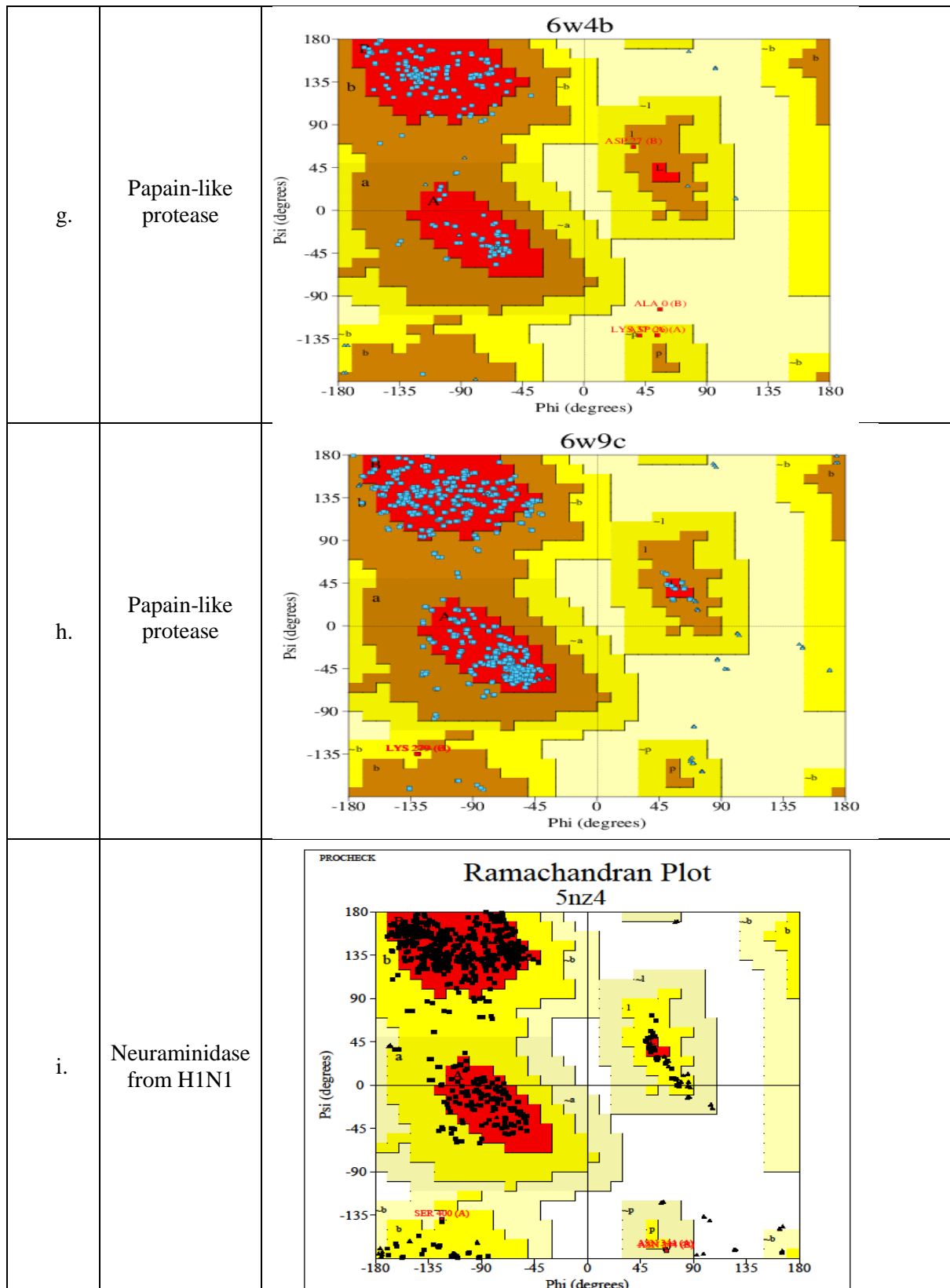


Figure 1: Ramachandran Plot of 5E84, 6LU7, 6LZG, 6M71, 6VSB, 6VWW, 6W4B, 6W9C, 5nz4 obtained from PROCHECK serve

Every molecule has the potential to be either a macromolecule or a micro-molecule, however it is necessary to optimize and minimize the latter before conducting a docking study. The protein data bank's PDB [sum server, a pictorial library of 3D structures for interactions of conventional inhibitors with protein, has been used to confirm the binding pocket. The proteins with missing

residues were completed and side chains were synthesized using CHIMAEERA v1.16. Subsequently, they underwent optimization and minimization before to being included in the docking study. The optimization of proteins is achieved by configuring 1000 iterations of the Steepest Descent algorithm, with a step size of 0.1 Å, followed by 100 iterations of the Conjugate Gradient algorithm, with a size of 0.1 Å. All hydrogen atoms, including the ones with slower rates of addition, were included. Protonation statuses were assigned to the histidine residues. Additional fees were applied for both conventional (using the AMBER ff14SB force field) and unconventional (using the AM1-BCC force field) residues. The net charges of all non-standard entities were stabilized to enable the computation of their atomic partial charges using ANTECHAMBER charges. The protein was purified by removing any nonstandard residues, such as water molecules, cocrystal ligands, and superfluous chains, using Biovia Discovery Studio visualizer V21.1.0.20298 after optimization and minimization.

1.3) Grid generation

Auto-Dock Tools, Chimera, and Maestro were used for receptor grid identification. The Workspace displayed various targets, including the ATP-bound state of BiP (5E84), main protease (Mpro) (6LU7), spike receptor binding domain (6LZG), RNA-dependent RNA polymerase (6M71), spike glycoprotein (6VSB), NSP15 endonuclease (6VWW), Nsp9 RNA-binding protein (6W4B), papain like protease (6W9C), and neurominadase from H1N1 (5NZ4) protein. The grid's volume was determined by utilising the pocket's dimensions. The size of the enclosing box was minimised to ensure its compatibility with the protein's active site and the predicted ligands for docking. Computer-based target identification primarily encompasses the identification of disease-related targets, the identification of binding sites, and the evaluation of drug ability. The ability of the ligand and target protein to interact can be ascertained using the binding site. The problem of low utility or druggability commonly encountered in clinical trials can be effectively mitigated through early druggability assessment of proteins. Moreover, it is necessary to ascertain whether the targeted protein is suitable for therapeutic purposes. The discovery of binding sites and assessment of druggability are necessary for protein function annotation, elucidating cellular activity mechanisms, conducting molecular docking, and designing rational drugs. The below table 3 shows active site for binding and grid generation

Protein	Active Sites Amino Acids
5E84	GLU201,ASP224,GLY226,GLY227,GLY228,ALA229,GLY255,GLU256,GLU293,LYS296,ARG297,ASP34,GLY36,GLY363,GLY364,SER365,THR37,THR38,TYR39,ASP391,VAL394,SER40,CYS41,ILE61,LYS96
6LU7	PHE140,LEU141,ASN142,GLY143,SER144,CYS145,HIS163,GLU166,THR25,THR26,LEU27,HIS41,MET49,VAL3,LEU4
6LZG	HIS345,PRO346,THR347,ALA348,ASP350,LEU370,THR371,HIS374,GLU375,HIS378,ASP382,ARG393,ASN394,GLU398,HIS401,GLU402,GLU406,SER409,LEU410,GLN442,TYR515,ARG518
6M71	ASP452,TYR455,TYR456,THR540,MET542,LYS545,ARG553,ALA554,ARG555,THR556,ALA558,TRP617,ASP618,TYR619,LYS621,CYS622,ASP623,ARG624,GLU665,VAL667,LYS676,THR680,SER681,SER682,THR687,ALA688,ASN691,LEU758,SER759,ASP760,ASP761,ALA762,LYS798,TRP800,GLU811,CYS813,SER814
6VSB	GLN1002,TYR756,PHE970,ASP994,ARG995,THR998,GLY999,GLN1002,TYR756,PHE970,ASP994,ARG995,THR998,GLY999,ALA363
6VWW	HIS235,ASP240,HIS243,GLN245,LEU246,GLY247,HIS250,LYS290,VAL292,SER294,MET331,TRP333,GLU340,THR341,TYR343,LYS345,LEU346
6W4B	ARG100,LEU104,LEU107,ALA108,LEU113,GLU71,PRO72,CYS74,PHE76,LEU89,PHE91,ASN97,MET102,ASN3,ASN34,GLU4,LEU5,SER6,VAL8,LEU98
6W9C	CYS111,LEU162,GLY163,ASP164,ARG166,GLU167,MET208,PRO248,TYR264,ASN267,TYR268,GLY271,TYR273,THR301,ASP302,LYS105,TRP106,ALA107,ASP108

Table 2: proteins with their active site amino acid.

The size of the enclosing box was minimised to ensure its compatibility with the protein's active site and the anticipated ligands for docking.

Table 3 displays the grid parameters for active site determination.

PDB ID	CENTRE CO-ORDINATES			SIZE CO-ORDINATES		
	X	Y	Z	X	Y	Z
5E84	32.688	-14.185	-39.441	30	30	30
6LU7	-11.514	16.061	67.4	30	30	30
6LZG	-23.866	13.4	-16.44	30	30	30
6M71	227.549	226.92	238.335	30	30	30
6VSB	-48.029	34.785	29.588	30	30	30
6VWW	40.238	-12.061	18.809	40	40	40
6W4B	40.238	-12.061	18.809	30	30	30
6W9C	-37.109	8.793	32.976	40	40	40

Table No.3 Different Grid Parameter

1.4) Ligands Preparation:

The ligand molecules were created using MarvinSketch v21.13 and saved in the 3D MOL2 format. All three compounds underwent processing and optimisation using UCSF Chimera v1.15 with the AM1-BCC semi-empirical force field. The default parameters were used, including 1000 steps of steepest descent and 100 steps of conjugate gradient.

1.5) Molecular Docking of Target Protein with Ligands:

Once the ligands and proteins were obtained, their structures were converted to the pdbqt format using an internal bash script created with AutoDock tools 1.5.6 for ligands and ADFRsuit for proteins. In this script, all of the ligands' rotatable bonds were left free to rotate, and the receptor was regarded as stiff. For docking studies, we utilised the AutoDockVina 1.2.3, with 0.375 Å spacing between grid points. The grid box was precisely positioned at the active site of the enzyme with great accuracy, enabling the programme to explore potential interaction sites between the ligands and the receptor. Alternative arrangements were deemed as the standard. The XYZ centre has coordinates (X*Y*Z), and the grid box has dimensions of 20 * 20 * 20 Å. The CPU parameter was set to 23, the exhaustiveness parameter was set to 32, the number of modes parameter was set to 9, and the energy range parameter was set to 3. The redockings were executed using identical settings as the previous dockings.

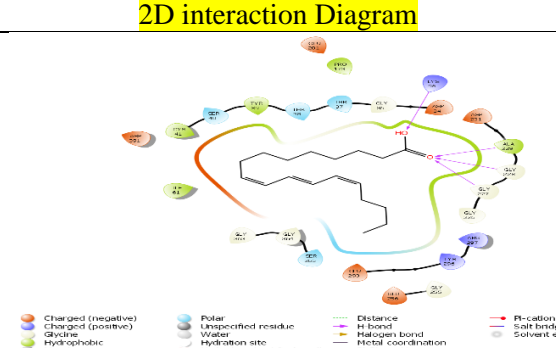
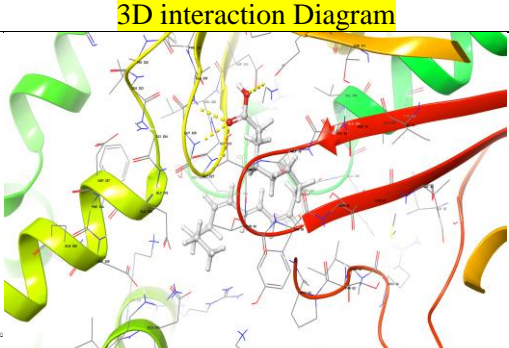
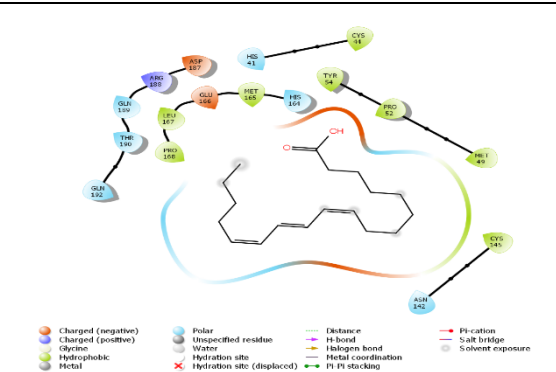
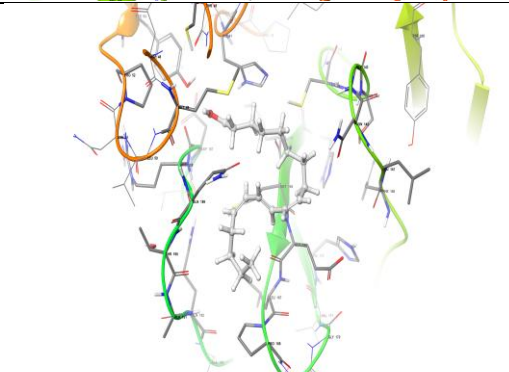
1.6) Visualization:

The results received from AutodockVina processing were used to create a complex utilising the Biovia Discovery Studio visualizer. Maestro 12.3 (academic version) and LigPlus 1.2 were

		BiP		bindin g domai n	RNA polym erase		nuclease	protein	e	H1N1
Protein Id		5E84	6LU7	6LZG	6M71	6VSB	6VWW	6W4B	6W9C	5NZ4
1	Ribavirin	-8.825	-6.61	-6.18	-6.151	-6.067	-6.921	-4.847	-5.867	-8.855
2	Punicic Acid	-6.542	-4.646	-5.766	-4.414	-6.013	-6.101	-5.847	-5.532	-7.068

Table 4: Docking Score and intermolecular interactions of ligands ATP-bound state of BiP, Main protease, Spike receptor-binding domain, RNA-dependent RNA polymerase, Spike glycoprotein, NSP15 Endoribonuclease, Nsp9 RNA binding protein, Papain-like protease and Neuraminidase from H1N1 using LigPlot v1.4.5, PLIP server, Maestro V12.8 and Biovia Discovery studio visualizer

The docking software GOLD (version 5.7.3) was used for virtual screening. The GOLD software suite's DockingWizard was used to configure the docking runs. The number of docking runs per molecule was set to 15 for each ligand. The scoring function ChemPLP was chosen as the fitness function, with default values. The default settings for the genetic algorithm parameters that dictated docking speed were applied, specifically "slow/automatic". The dependability of the molecular docking approach was initially evaluated using self-docking, which effectively recovered docking poses of the relevant ligands from the protein structures. RMSD values less than 1 Å. The docking results for all nine protein structures were assessed separately using the following criteria: the top 100 molecules rated by the Chem PLP score from the IHDB database were selected for visual examination. To analyse the MNPDB data, a specific threshold was established for each protein structure based on the Chem PLP score of the redocked ligands. The threshold was set at 80.00 for 7JN2 and 4OW0, and 70.00 for 6W63. Subsequently, all docking stances exceeding this criterion were assessed through visual examination.

Sr.No	Targets	2D interaction Diagram	3D interaction Diagram
1.	ATP-bound state of BiP (5E84)	 <p> ● Charged (negative) ● Charged (positive) ● Glycine ● Hydrophobic ● Metal ● Polar ● Unspecified residue ● Water ● Hydration site X Hydration site (displaced) — Distance — H-bond — Halogen bond — Metal coordination — Pi-Pi stacking — Pi-cation — Salt bridge ○ Solvent expic </p>	
2.	main protease (Mpro) (6LU7)	 <p> ● Charged (negative) ● Charged (positive) ● Glycine ● Hydrophobic ● Metal ● Polar ● Unspecified residue ● Water ● Hydration site X Hydration site (displaced) — Distance — H-bond — Halogen bond — Metal coordination — Pi-Pi stacking — Pi-cation — Salt bridge ○ Solvent exposure </p>	

<p>3.</p> <p>spike receptor binding domain (6LZG)</p>		
<p>4.</p> <p>RNA-dependent RNA polymerase (6M71)</p>		
<p>5.</p> <p>spike glycoprotein (6VSB)</p>		
<p>6.</p> <p>NSP15 endonuclease (6VWW)</p>		

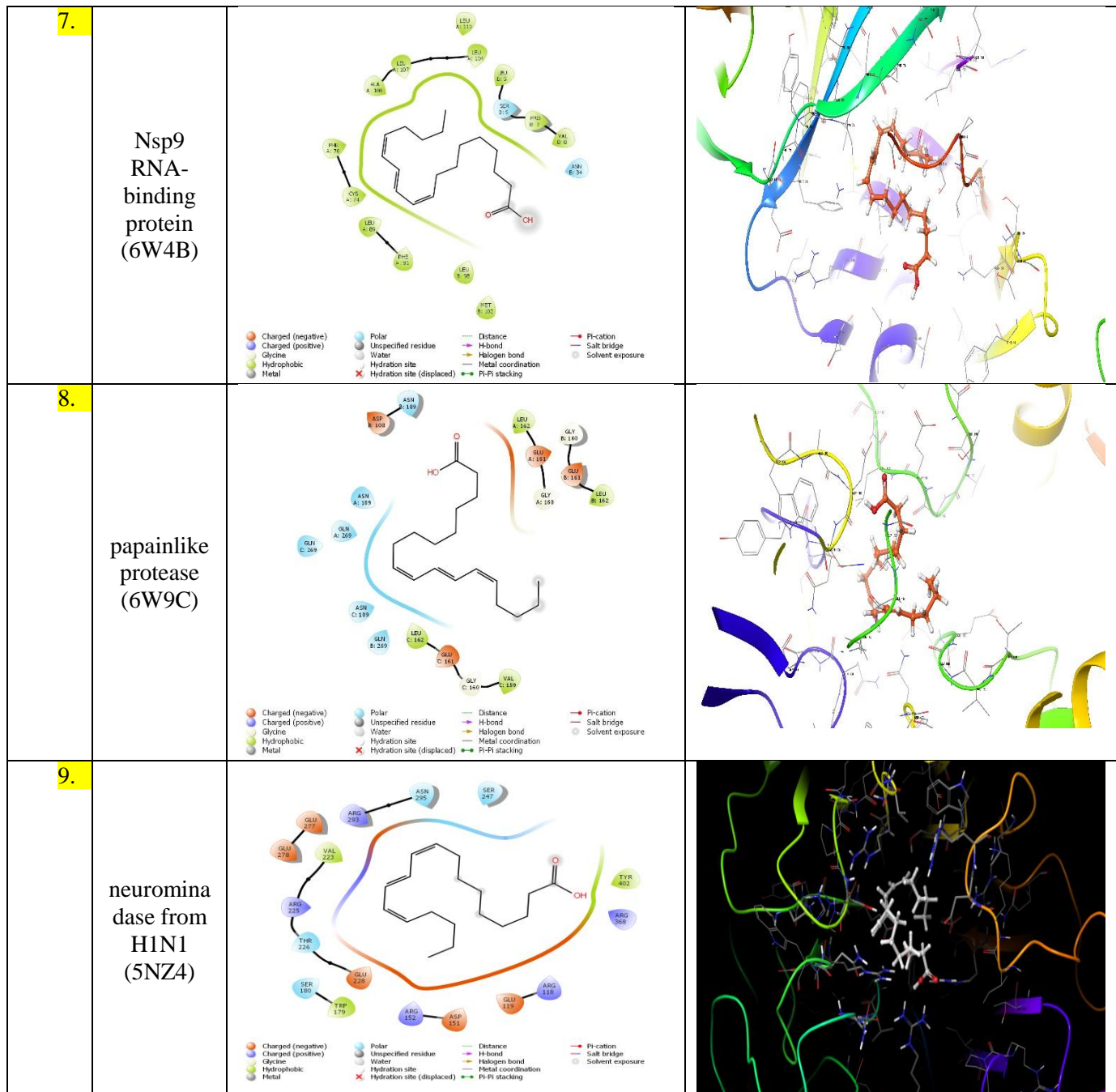


Figure 2: 2D interaction diagram 3D interaction diagram of Punicic acid with ATP-bound state of BiP, Main protease, Spike receptor-binding domain, RNA-dependent RNA polymerase, Spike glycoprotein, NSP15 Endoribonuclease, Nsp9 RNA binding protein, Papain-like protease and Neuraminidase from H1N1.

3.2) Target prediction:

Protein-Ligand Interaction Profiler

SR.NO	Targets	MOLECULES	BINDING ENERGY	INTERACTION	RESIDUE ID	DISTANCE A ⁰
1	ATP-bound state of BiP (5E84)		-6.542	Hydrophobic Interactions	LEU162A	3.54
					LEU162B	3.8
					LEU269C	3.51
					GLN269B	3.59
					GLN269C	3.71
				Hydrogen Bonds	ASP108B	3.22
					LEU162A	2.76
2	Main protease (Mpro) (6LU7)		-4.646	Hydrophobic Interactions	MET165A	3.52
					GLU166A	3.78
					PRO168A	3.87
					GLN189A	3.64
					GLN189A	3.91
				Salt Bridges	HIS41A	3.99
3	Spike receptor binding domain (6LZG)		-5.766	Hydrophobic Interactions	PHE40A	3.66
					PHE40A	3.6
					TRP69A	3.54
					LEU73A	3.72
					ASP350A	3.57
					PHE390A	3.73
					PHE390A	3.7
					LEU391A	3.71
				Hydrogen Bonds	ARG393A	3.8
					ALA348A	2.3
4	RNA-dependent RNA polymerase (6M71)		-4.414	Hydrophobic Interactions	ASP618A	3.74
					ASP618A	3.76
					LYS798A	3.94
					GLU811A	3.95
				Hydrogen Bonds	TRP800A	2.25
5	spike glycoprotein (6VSB)		-6.013	Hydrophobic Interactions	TYR756A	3.44
					TYR756C	3.69
					PHE970B	3.77
					PHE970B	3.88
					PHE970C	3.73
					ARG995C	3.94
					THR998A	3.91
				Hydrogen Bonds	THR998B	3.71
					THR998C	2.04
6	NSP15 endonuclease (6VWW)		-6.101	Hydrophobic Interactions	LEU201B	3.83
					LEU252B	3.58
					VAL295B	3.82
					ASP297B	3.79
				Hydrogen Bonds	ASP268B	3.12
					Salt Bridges	LYS90B
				LYS277B		4.21
7	Nsp9 RNA-binding protein		-5.847	Hydrophobic Interactions	LEU5B	3.67
					VAL8B	3.7

	(6W4B)				VAL8B	3.57
					PHE76A	3.53
					PHE76A	3.57
					LEU89A	3.85
					LEU89A	3.66
					PHE91A	3.94
					LEU104A	3.1
					LEU107A	3.66
					LEU107A	3.77
					ALA108A	3.63
					LEU113A	3.68
					LEU113A	3.66
8	papainlike protease (6W9C)		-5.532	Hydrophobic Interactions	GLU161A	3.96
					LEU162A	3.55
					LEU162B	3.49
					GLN269A	3.11
					GLN269C	3.93
				Hydrogen Bonds	THR158A	2.49
					GLN269B	2.47
9	neurominadase from H1N1 (5NZ4)		-7.068	Hydrophobic Interactions	LEU113A	3.66
					GLU161A	3.96

Table 6: The interaction and distance between inhibitors and critical amino acids of nine different targets in docking complexes was assessed using the LIGPLOT software.

3.0) Conclusion:

It is determined that natural products can serve as an effective source for drugs targeting respiratory influenza viruses, including SARS-CoV-2 and SARS-CoV-1. Therefore, ursolic acid, punic acid, and Glycyrrhetic acid have the potential to be utilised as antiviral medications against respiratory influenza viruses, including SARS-CoV-2 and SARS-CoV-1.

As a result of our findings using a structural bioinformatics approach, we believe that all of these natural drugs have the potential to be used against Respiratory influenza viruses including SARS-CoV-2 and SARS-CoV-1 and should be investigated further as Respiratory influenza viruses including SARS-CoV-2 and SARS-CoV-1 preventative therapies.

4.0) Declarations :

Author contribution statement :

All listed authors made substantial contributions to the conception and composition of this article.

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Conflict of interests :

The authors have disclosed no conflicts of interest.

Reference:

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