



Original Article

A Recent Review of Medical Uses of Bioactive Secondary Metabolites from Some Plants Available in the Kurdistan Region

Selar Izzat^{*1}, Hawbash Fars¹, Honey Azad¹, Soma Sirwan¹, Soman Atta¹, Rayan Barham¹, Hillin Gulladin¹, Firdaws Hassan¹, Dyary Mahdy¹

¹Department of Biology, College of Science, University of Sulaimani, Sulaymaniyah 46001, Kurdistan region, Iraq.

Received 3 November 2024; revised 19 March 2025;
accepted 25 May 2025; available online 19 August 2025

DOI: 10.24271/PSR.2025.486819.1802

ABSTRACT

Plant secondary metabolites (SM) exhibit a wide range of biological and pharmacological properties, and they have been and are still used to treat and improve many health issues and disorders. Therefore, this review highlights many important medicinal plants available in the Kurdistan region that contain potent bioactive secondary metabolites and have been investigated for their pharmacological activities by many researchers worldwide. It will provide information about the plants, their SMs, and their various applications: as antibacterial, antifungal, antiviral, antiparasitic, antidiabetic, antioxidant/anticancer agents, and human system function promoters, addressing the growing concern of bacterial resistance to synthetic drugs. This provides an opportunity to utilize them to improve human health and discover new herbal medicines. Also underscores the importance of further investigation into these natural compounds for developing novel pharmacological treatments, particularly in regions like Kurdistan.

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Keywords: Secondary metabolites, Medicinal Plant, Phytomedicine, Bioactive compounds, Herbal medicine.

1 Introduction

Plant secondary metabolites (SM), including terpenes, phenolic compounds, and alkaloids, hold promising potential for medicinal and pharmaceutical use ^[1]. Historically, humans have primarily relied on medicinal plants to treat a variety of illnesses and infections ^[2]. Still, they are used by many people around the world due to their wide array of bioactive SMs with biological and pharmacological properties ^[3]. In modern medicine, many SMs are extracted and purified from different plant species and are used in various medical applications ^[4]. For example, as anticancer, antiviral, antidiabetic, and antifungal agents ^[5].

Recently, the use of plant phytochemicals has gained global popularity, as they are non-narcotic and typically have few or no side effects compared to chemically synthesized compounds ^[4]. Besides, it can be regarded as a promising option for identifying and developing novel antimicrobial drugs to combat multidrug-resistant pathogens ^[6].

Medicinal plants are an invaluable part of our natural resources, playing a vital role in delivering primary healthcare to

underserved communities and emphasizing their significance to the national economy ^[7], and they can contribute to income generation and sustainable livelihoods for the people ^[8]. Kurdistan is home to a rich diversity of plant species that have been valued for their medicinal benefits since ancient times. Their use by the local people is based on centuries of tradition, observations, and a rich medicinal history ^[9,10]. However, these plants have not received enough attention from researchers, resulting in a significant gap in scientific study and understanding. Highlighting plants from the region can draw attention to lesser-known species and their potential medicinal uses, contributing to global knowledge and possibly leading to new discoveries. By focusing on recent investigations, this review article could inspire further studies and innovations on the role of plants and their active compounds as potential sources of future pharmaceuticals. Additionally, it aims to help researchers address gaps in understanding the significance and value of these plants.

2 Plant Flora in the Kurdistan region

Iraq and especially the Kurdistan region is recognized as a significant hotspot for plant biodiversity due to the geographical and climatic conditions ^[8,11]. The exact number of plant species in the area remains unknown, while there are desperate documents and research about the diversity. For example,

^{*} Corresponding author

E-mail address Selar.izzat@univsul.edu.iq (Instructor).

Peer-reviewed under the responsibility of the University of Garmian.

according to various research, 64 plant species belonging to 30 families have been documented in areas like Hawraman^[12], 288 plant taxa belonging to 57 families and 200 genera were determined in Hujran Basin-Erbil^[13], 41 plant species in the Choman area^[14], 47 plant species within the BardaRash region^[15], and ongoing research continues to uncover new species. This botanical wealth includes a wide array of species that have been integral to Kurdish culture and daily life for centuries^[8].

The current review includes 21 plant species recorded in the Kurdistan region and have been investigated by global

Table 1: Scientific and common names of the studied plant flora in the Kurdistan region, along with their detected SM constituents (according to the references). Photos are sourced from the web for demonstration purposes.

Plant species	Main SM constituents	Plant species	Main SM constituents
	- Phenolics - Terpenes and Terpenoids^[16,17]		- Phenolics - Terpene - Alkaloids^[18–20]
1. <i>Gundelia tournefortii</i> (Kenger) ^[15]		2. <i>Silybum marianum</i> (Milk thistle) ^[21]	
	- Phenolics - Terpenes - Alkaloids^[22,23]		- Phenolics - Terpenes - Alkaloids^[24–26]
3. <i>Lepidium sativum</i> (Garden cress) ^[27]		4. <i>Rheum ribes</i> (Rhubarb) ^[28]	
	- Phenolics - Alkaloids - Terpenes and Terpenoids^[29–31]		Phenolics^[32,33]
5. <i>Matricaria chamomilla</i> (Chamomile flower) ^[15]		6. <i>Alcea kurdica</i> (Hollyhock) ^[34]	
	Phenolics^[35,36]		- Phenolics - Terpenes - Alkaloids^[37–39]

researchers as a source of bioactive SM for treating and improving human health problems (Table 1).

The plants were selected through a comprehensive search targeted web-based database and academic literature, focusing on plants deeply rooted in traditional medical practices. We utilized a combination of keywords, including the local and scientific names of the plants, and regional identifiers such as "Sulaymaniyah" and "Iraq." This approach ensured the inclusion of studies specific to our area of interest.

7. <i>Helianthus tuberosus</i> (Jerusalem artichoke) ^[40]		8. <i>Beta vulgaris</i> (Beet root) ^[15]	
	• Phenolics • Terpenoids ^[41–44]		• Phenolics ^[45–48]
9. <i>Thymus vulgaris</i> (Garden thyme) ^[8]		10. <i>Nasturtium officinale</i> (Water cress) ^[27]	
	• Phenolics • Alkaloids • Terpenes and Terpenoids ^[49–51]		• Terpenes and Terpenoids ^[52–54]
11. <i>Zingiber officinale</i> (Ginger) ^[8]		12. <i>Lactuca serriola</i> (Prickly lettuce) ^[55]	
	• Phenolics • Terpenes ^[56–58]		• Phenolics • Alkaloids • Terpenes and Terpenoids ^[59–62]
13. <i>Anethum graveolens</i> (Dill) ^[63]		14. <i>Ocimum basilicum</i> (Basil) ^[15]	
	• Phenolic • Terpenes and Terpenoids ^[64]		• Phenolics • Terpenes ^[65,66]
15. <i>Rosa canina</i> (Dog rose) ^[67]		16. <i>Verbascum thapsus</i> (Mullein) ^[68]	
	• Phenolics • Terpenes and Terpenoids ^[69]		• Phenolics • Terpenes • Alkaloids ^[70–72]

17. <i>Artemisia absinthium</i> (Tarragon) ^[73]		18. <i>Malva sylvestris</i> (Mallow) ^[15]	
	• Phenolics • Terpenes and Terpenoids ^[74–76]		• Phenolics • Alkaloids • Terpenes and Terpenoids ^[77–80]
19. <i>Spinacia oleracea</i> (Spinach) ^[8]		20. <i>Coriandrum sativum</i> (Coriander) ^[15]	
	• Phenolics • Terpenes and Terpenoids ^[81,82]		
21. <i>Mentha pulegium</i> (Pennyroyal) ^[15]			

3 Global research on medical usage of the plant's SMs

According to global investigations, the bioactive SMs from the selected plant species (Section 2) possess several potent properties that make them ideal for future research, and potential medical applications, as outlined below:

3.1 As antibacterial agents

Infection by bacteria has been a major problem from the past to the present, causing several diseases. To address this issue, traditional antibacterial agents have been widely used as a treatment option ^[83]. However, the emergence of bacterial resistance to synthetic drugs, coupled with their serious side effects ^[84,85], and the high cost of new antibiotic production ^[86], has prompted the urgent need to discover alternative antibacterial sources with novel chemical structures and unique mechanisms of action ^[87–89].

One promising alternative is the use of plant SMs, which may exhibit strong antibacterial activity against several pathogenic bacteria ^[86]. Despite the discovery of many biologically active compounds of plant origin, many others remain undiscovered ^[90]. This highlights the importance of identifying and utilizing these bioactive compounds in pharmacological designs ^[91,92].

It has been suggested that plant secondary metabolites may impede microbial growth through mechanisms similar to those of antibiotics. These mechanisms include the inhibition of cell wall synthesis, activation of enzymes that degrade the cell wall, disruption of cell membrane permeability, interference with protein synthesis, and modification of nucleic acid metabolism

^[93,94]. For further details, the mechanism of action of phenolic compounds involves disrupting the cytoplasmic membrane, and inhibiting enzymes such as topoisomerase, NADH-reductase, and ATP synthase ^[95]. Alkaloids have also been shown to disrupt membrane efflux pumps and membrane integrity ^[94]. Additionally, phenol derivatives can alter pH, permeability, and efflux pumping of the membrane ^[96]. Tannins have been demonstrated to impair the metabolic processes and induce damage to bacterial membranes ^[97]. Furthermore, flavonoids are thought to inhibit proteins associated with the cell wall, as well as those involved in metabolism and DNA synthesis ^[98].

Multiple studies have reported the antibacterial activity of extracts and essential oils derived from various plant species. For instance, the rhizome extract of *Zingiber officinale* has been shown to inhibit the growth of *Escherichia coli*, *Bacillus subtilis*, *Staphylococcus aureus*, and *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* ^[88]. Additionally, both aqueous and methanolic leaf extracts of *Lactuca serriola* exhibited significant activity against multi-drug-resistant clinical isolates of *P. aeruginosa* ^[99]. The ethanolic extracts of *Rheum ribes* root have also demonstrated antibacterial effects against *E. coli*, *Enterobacter aerogenes*, *S. aureus*, and *P. aeruginosa* ^[100]. Another investigation revealed that extracts of *Ocimum basilicum* exhibited the largest inhibition zone against *S. aureus* as a gram-positive bacterium and *P. aeruginosa* as a gram-negative bacterium ^[83]. Furthermore, research indicated that *Alcea kurdica* exhibited activity against several bacterial strains, including *S. aureus*, *Enterococcus faecalis*, and *Acinetobacter baumannii* ^[101]. Moreover, the seed oil of *Anethum graveolens* was found to completely inhibit the growth of *B. subtilis*, *S. aureus*, *B. cereus*, *E. coli*, and *P. aeruginosa* ^[102]. According to

^[103] the antibacterial activity of *Artemisia dracunculus* essential oil was effective against *S. aureus*, *Listeria monocytogenes*, *B. cereus*, *E. coli*, *Yersinia enterocolitica*, and *Salmonella Typhimurium*.

Several other studies have shown the antibacterial activity of plant extracts against specific bacterial species, such as the essential oil of *Matricaria chamomilae* against both *Bacillus cereus* and *Bacillus subtilis* ^[104]. *Silybum marianum* has been shown to inhibit the growth and biofilm formation of both gram-positive and gram-negative standard bacterial strains ^[105]. Methanolic extracts of *Rosa canina* seed exhibit antibacterial activity against *Lactobacillus plantarum*, *Staphylococcus epidermidis*, and *Proteus mirabilis* ^[106], *Beta vulgaris* root extracts demonstrate activity against *S. aureus* and *P. aeruginosa* ^[107]. The hydro-alcoholic extract of *Nasturtium officinale* shows activity against common oral pathogens, i.e., *Streptococcus mutans*, *S. aureus*, *Lactobacillus acidophilus*, *E. faecalis*, and *P. aeruginosa* ^[108]. Finally, *Thymus vulgaris* leaf extracts exhibit activity against methicillin-resistant *S. aureus* (MRSA) and multi-drug-resistant *A. baumannii* ^[109].

3.2 As antifungal agents

Numerous plant SMs with various chemical structures have been discovered to possess antifungal activities. These compounds are used to prevent the growth of spoilage fungi in food as well as various harmful fungi that cause infections in humans, animals, and crops ^[110].

Since there are few commercially available botanical fungicides and a large number of products have been developed as a result of intense study ^[111], showing the fungicidal potential of the aforementioned plant species may open new avenues for developing green fungicides with various applications in the Kurdistan region.

One of the most common plants in the region is *Gundella tournefortii*. A study demonstrated that its leaf extract effectively acted as an antifungal agent against different *Candida* spp., including *Candida krusei*, *Candida guilliermondii*, *Candida glabrata*, and *Candida albicans* ^[112].

Similarly, *Silybum marianum* has been shown to have anti-*Candida* activity, as confirmed by multiple research groups, including a study by ^[113], which highlighted its activity against *C. albicans*, *C. glabrata*, *Candida parapsilosis*, *Candida tropicalis*, and *C. krusei*. These researchers reported that the primary constituent of the extracts, silymarin, may inhibit biofilm formation and the secretion of phospholipases and proteinases (key virulence factors). Therefore, they recommended silymarin as a potential future treatment for candidiasis. Dichloromethane extracts of *Silybum marianum* fruit, obtained from Duhok (Iraq), have been found to have potent anti-*Candida* properties ^[114]. In another study from Turkey, researchers found that the extracts of *Silybum marianum* were effective against *Aspergillus niger* as well as *C. albicans* at different concentrations ^[115]. *Rheum ribes* is another plant that has anti-candida properties. According to ^[116], it is effective against *C. tropicalis*, *C. krusei*, *C. albicans*,

and *C. glabrata*. Moreover, *Matricaria chamomilla* has also been demonstrated to be a potent antifungal agent, especially against *Candida* spp. ^[117,118] and against *A. niger*, *Aspergillus terreus*, *Aspergillus flavus*, and *Fusarium culmorum* ^[119].

In the same way, *Helianthus tuberosus* has been used as an anti-*Candida* agent ^[120]. Another study suggests that its leaves, which have a high phenolic content, could serve as a potential natural fungicide ^[121]. *Mentha pulegium* is another plant with potential antifungal activity. A study revealed its effectiveness in inhibiting *C. albicans* germ tube formation at a dose well below the minimum inhibitory concentration (MIC) of 0.16 µL/mL ^[122]. In another study, silver nanoparticles (AgNPs) synthesized from *Mentha pulegium* leaf extracts were utilized as an inexpensive, nontoxic, environmentally friendly fungicide that inhibited the growth and spread of *Alternaria alternata* and *Fusarium solani* in the agricultural sector ^[123]. *Thymus vulgaris* extracts have also been reported to act as antifungal agents, specifically against *Aspergillus* spp. and *Candida* spp. ^[124,125].

The extracts of some other plant species have also been shown to have antifungal effects in investigations. For example, the ethanolic extracts of *Lactuca serriola* were effective against *Alternaria solani* and *A. flavus* ^[111]. The extracts of *Ocimum basilicum* have shown activity against *Rhizopus solanai*, *Penicillium* species, *A. flavus*, *A. niger*, *Aspergillus fumigatus*, *A. alternata*, and *Cladosporium* ^[126], as well as *Cochliobolus* and *Bipolaris* species ^[127].

Moreover, *Rosa canina* has demonstrated antifungal effects against *C. albicans*. ^[128] and *Syzygium aromaticum* has shown activity against pathogenic *Aspergillus* species, *Candida* spp., *Tricophyton rubrum*, *Tricophyton mentagrophytes* var. *interdigitale*, and *Epidermophyton floccosum* ^[129–131]. *Artemisia dracunculus* has shown activity against *Penicillium funiculosum*, *A. fumigatus*, *Aspergillus versicolor*, *Aspergillus ochraceus*, *Trichoderma viride* and *Ochrochloron penicillium* ^[132].

The leaf extracts of *Malva parviflora* has demonstrated activity against *Helminthosporium rostratum*, *F. solani*, *Fusarium oxysporum*, and *A. alternata* ^[133]. Finally, the essential oil of *Coriandrum sativum* has been shown to inhibit *F. culmorum* and *Zymoseptoria tritici*, which cause *Fusarium* head blight and *Septoria tritici* blotch on cereals, respectively ^[134–136].

3.3 As antiviral agents

This section of the review will discuss plant species that contain valuable SMs with antiviral activities. In recent years, COVID-19 has posed a significant threat to humanity, and there is still no specific approved drug for its treatment ^[137]. Recent research recommended several plant SMs as potential therapeutics for treating SARS-CoV-2. For example, *Matricaria chamomilla* is highlighted due to its two major flavonoid components, Apigenin and Luteolin ^[138]. Other examples include the essential oil and monoterpenes in *Mentha pulegium* ^[139], the essential oil of *Thymus vulgaris* ^[140], Apigenin-7-glucuronide and dihydrokaempferol-3-glucoside compounds in *Ocimum*

basilicum^[141], 6-Gingerol derived from *Zingiber officinale*^[142], and silymarin from *Silybum marianum*^[143].

On the other hand, viral hepatitis remains as a serious threat to human health^[144]. The plant species and their SMs recorded to have anti-hepatitis activity include verbascoside (acteoside) in *Verbascum thapsus*^[144] and artemisinin derived from *Artemisia absinthium*^[145,146] against hepatitis B virus. While phytochemicals in *Lepidium sativum*^[147], gingerol in *Zingiber officinale*^[148], eugenol in *S. aromaticum*^[149], linalool in *Ocimum basilicum*^[150], and silymarin in *Silybum marianum*^[151,152] have shown activity against hepatitis C virus.

Another significant threat is the herpes simplex virus (HSV), which can cause oral or genital lesions and even encephalitis with high infection rates across different age groups^[153]. Recent studies have shown that eugenol in *S. aromaticum*^[154], phenolic and flavonoid compounds in *Zingiber officinale*^[155], and flavonoids and phenyl-ethanoid glycosides in *Verbascum thapsus* have antiviral activity against HSV-2.

Moreover, chikungunya virus (CHIKV), which causes a febrile illness known as chikungunya fever (CHIKF), recently re-emerged in many parts of the world, causing large-scale outbreaks^[156]. Recent studies have shown several SMs in plants as a potent anti-chikungunya virus, such as silymarin in *Silybum marianum*^[157] and 6-gingerol in *Zingiber officinale*^[158]. Additional antiviral activities of plant SM include allicin, an active compound in *Zingiber officinale* against Influenza A and B viruses^[159], *Matricaria chamomilla* essential oil against Bovine Herpesvirus 1, strain TN41^[160], and, rosmarinic acid in *Ocimum basilicum* against Dengue Virus serotype 2^[161].

3.4 As antiparasitic agents

There are several medicinal plants with diverse SMs around the world, including those found in Kurdistan that possess anti-parasitic properties. These plants can serve as alternative remedies for combating parasitic diseases, particularly as many parasites have developed resistance to standard medications^[162]. In this review, we will highlight some of the plants found in Kurdistan, and explore their anti-parasitic benefits.

First and foremost, there is *Lepidium sativum*. Studies have shown that its seed crude extract exhibit anti-trypanosomal properties^[163]^[164]. Additionally, the extract can reduce the viability of the *Echinococcus granulosus* protoscolices of sheep origin^[165]. *Rheum ribes* is another plant with potential anti parasitic properties. Results from an investigation demonstrated the potent protoscolicidal activity of its extract^[166]. The essential oil and extracts from *Matricaria chamomila* have shown promising as a therapeutic approach for treating several parasitic diseases. These include leishmaniasis^[167], reducing *Ichthyophthirius multifiliis* infections in guppy fish (*Poecilia reticulata*), as a safe option for enhancing fish health and reducing mortality rates^[168], and treating hydatid cysts^[169]. *Beta vulgaris* is another plants with antiparasitic properties. According to a study, oral administration of its fresh juice demonstrated strong antimalarial action^[170]. It has been suggested that

phytochemicals in both the aqueous and ethanol extracts might account for this property^[171]. *Mentha pulegium* has also been reported to have anti-parasitic effects. Its extract exhibit anthelmintic properties, particularly against *Haemonchus contortus*^[172]. On the other hand, *Thymus vulgaris* was found to have anti-coccidial effect, leading the author to suggest its oil as an effective agent for combating rabbit coccidiosis^[173]. Additionally, its extract has shown potential for both in vitro and in vivo trypanocidal effects, which may hold promise for the future treatment of trypanosomosis^[174]. *Zingiber officinale* is another plant, and the gingerol compounds extracted from it were successful in preventing fish infection by *Ichthyophthirius multifiliis*^[175]. According to another study, its extract is a viable and effective alternative for the treatment of trichinellosis^[176]. The antiparasitic potential of *Anethum graveolens* has been well investigated by researchers. It is believed that its essential oil holds promise for preventing sheep gastrointestinal nematodes^[177], and is considered a promising hepatoprotective agent against amebic liver abscesses induced by *Entamoeba histolytica*^[178]. Furthermore, the ethanol and hexan extracts of *Ocimum basilicum* contain promising bioactive phytochemicals, with anthelmintic activities^[179] and exhibit extraordinary effectiveness against both adult and pre-adult stages of malaria vectors^[180]. Another plant, *Coriandrum sativum* has been found to have therapeutic potential. Its essential oil can be used to treat some *Trichomonas vaginalis* infections^[181], and its aqueous leaf extract has been used to assess the survivability of *Toxoplasma gondii*^[182]. On the other hand, the aalcoholic extract of *Verbascum thapsus* has been shown to have antitrichomonal activity and induce apoptosis in *T. vaginalis*^[183]. Other researchers found that *Syzygium aromaticum* oil has an anthelmintic effect on adult and muscle larvae of *Trichinella spiralis*^[184] and also exhibits an inhibitory effect against *Trypanosoma cruzi*^[185]. Scientific studies have established a wide range of biological activities of *Artemisia absinthium*'s constituents, including its use as an alternative treatment for piroplasmosis^[186] and its anticoccidial action in both ruminants and poultry^[187]. Lastly, *Malva sylvestris* extract was successfully used to treat mice infected with *Trypanosoma brucei*, and the extract significantly reduced the parasite count in both blood and cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) compared to the animals in the negative control group^[188].

3.5 As anti-diabetic agents

In Kurdistan, numerous plants can be used as anti-diabetic agents. Starting with *Gundelia tournefortii*, studies have demonstrated that both ethanolic and aqueous extracts from various parts of this plant play a significant role in the treatment of diabetes mellitus^[189–191]. Another plant with documented bioactive compounds representing anti-diabetic properties is *Lepidium sativum*^[192,193]. More precisely, the potent hypoglycemic activity of the aqueous seed extract of *Lepidium sativum* was demonstrated in vivo in streptozotocin-induced diabetic Wistar rats (albino outbred strain) without affecting basal plasma insulin concentrations^[194]. Another plant, *Silybum marianum*, has been demonstrated to decrease blood sugar levels in rabbits with diabetes mellitus^[195], specifically, this activity may be attributed to the silymarin

flavonolignan in its seeds and fruit extracts ^[196]. *Matricaria chamomilla* is another common herb used as an anti-diabetic ^[197], particularly due to its terpenes, such as α -pinene, β -myrcene, α -thujone, and γ -terpinene constituents ^[31]. As it is well known, the inhibition and suppression of α -glucosidase and α -amylase enzymes are therapeutic strategies in the management of type 2 diabetes mellitus ^[198]. Furthermore, the following plants have also been documented to possess antidiabetic properties: *Helianthus tuberosus* ^[35], *Beta vulgaris* var. *vulgaris* ^[199], and *Anethum graveolens* extract ^[200], known for containing significant amounts of compounds such as tannins, terpenoids, steroidal saponins, flavonoids, cardiac glycosides and anthraquinone ^[201], *Nasturtium officinale* ^[202,203], *Thymus vulgaris* due to its volatile compounds ^[204,205], and *Rosa canina* ^[206,207], particularly its oligosaccharides, which enhance insulin production in the beta-cells of the islets of Langerhans ^[208].

3.6 As antioxidant and anticancer agents

Antioxidants have garnered significant interest from researchers due to their protective activities in food and pharmaceutical goods ^[209]. Meanwhile, laboratory and animal studies have shown that increased levels of exogenous antioxidants can prevent the types of free radical damage associated with cancer development ^[210]. Thus, by decreasing free radicals and oxidative stress, antioxidants play a role in ameliorating DNA damage, reducing the rate of abnormal cell division, and decreasing mutagenesis ^[211].

Several plant SMs have been investigated for their radical scavenging activity and high antioxidant properties. Examples include quinic acid, protocatechuic acid, chlorogenic acid, protocatechuic aldehyde, caffeic acid, and acacetin from *Gundelia tournefortii* ^[212], glucosinolates from *Lepidium sativum* ^[213], phenolic compounds and flavonols from *Rosa canina* ^[214], *Nasturtium officinale*'s polyphenols ^[215] and its flavonoid contents ^[216], phenolic acids and flavonoids from *Ocimum basilicum* ^[217], extracts from *Silybum marianum* ^[19], *Matricaria chamomilla* ^[218], *Rheum ribes* extracts containing rutin hydrate, kuromanine, procyanidin, and sinapic acid ^[219], SMs in the extracts of *Beta vulgaris* ^[220,221], and gallic acid, syringic acid, chlorogenic acid, and quercetin in the extracts of *Alcea kurdica*, which have also been concluded to reduce oxidative stress ^[101].

Additional plant-derived bioactive compounds reported to have antioxidant properties include catechin and gallic acid from *Zingiber officinale*'s rhizome extracts ^[222], kaempferol from its leaves ^[223], isocembrol from *Lactuca serriola* ^[224], eugenol from *Syzygium aromaticum* ^[225], camphor, camphene, and α -pinene from *Artemisia absinthium* ^[226], phytol from *Malva sylvestris* ^[227], and also its diterpenoids contents such as malvin and coumarin derivatives ^[228]. In addition, *Coriandrum sativum* has been identified by many researchers as one of the main sources of antioxidant plants due to its contents, especially β -linalool ^[229], tannins, saponins, polyphenols, and flavonoids ^[230], as well as linalool, γ -terpinene, and α -pinene ^[231].

Also, many plant extracts have been used for centuries as anticancer agents. To illustrate; *Gundelia tournefortii* extracts

have been shown to exhibit anticancer activity against different cancer cell lines (Skov-3, CaCo-2, and U118) ^[232] and hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC) in rats ^[233]. Besides, chlorogenic acid, quercetin, and kaempferol from *Lepidium sativum* ^[234], caffeoylquinic acid, isoxazolidine, feruloylquinic acid, camphene, and caffeic acid from *Helianthus tuberosus* ^[35], and phenolic compounds from *Malva sylvestris* flowers ^[235] have all been shown to have the most cytotoxic activity in both Hela and Hep G2 cell lines. Furthermore, it was found that curcumin from *Rheum ribes* exhibited anti-proliferative activity on the growth of the human colonic epithelial Caco-2 cell line ^[25]. Additionally, aromadendrene, α -humulene, and viridiflorene from *Thymus vulgaris* ^[236] and betalains from *Beta vulgaris* ^[237] have shown strong anticancer activity against breast cancer cell lines. On the other hand, betanin from *Beta vulgaris* has also been shown to inhibit the growth of colorectal cancer cells ^[238], and thymol and p-cymene from *Thymus vulgaris* demonstrated cytotoxic activity against lung carcinoma and an acute lymphoblastic leukaemia cell line ^[239].

Further investigations have been conducted on the anticancer activities of several plant phytochemicals as follows : gallic acid, salicylic acid, syringic acid, catechin, and ellagic acid from *Nasturtium officinale* which were found to improve intestinal morphology in mice challenged with colorectal cancer ^[46]; 6-shogaol, quercetin, and rutin from *Zingiber officinale* displayed cytotoxicity against liver cancer, human lung adenocarcinoma, breast cancer, and colorectal tumor cell lines ^[240]; gingerol, thymoquinol, heptanol, and hexanol conjugated with nanoparticles which exhibited significant cytotoxicity against breast cancer and colorectal cancer cell lines ^[241]; L-borneol, farnesol, beta-sesquiphellandrene, alpha-curcumene, and zingiberene, which induced apoptosis in HeLa cells in a more recent study ^[242]; piperitenone oxide and piperitenone from *Mentha longifolia*, which were found to have anticancer activities on colorectal cancer cell lines ^[243]; and Naringin, cryptochlorogenic acid, and rosmarinic acid, which exhibited the highest activities against Jurkat, breast, colorectal, and HeLa cell lines ^[244]. Eugenol from *Syzygium aromaticum* showed growth inhibition against the hepato-carcinoma cell line ^[245] and also against breast, HeLa, and lung cancer cell lines ^[246]. *Matricaria chamomilla*'s bisabolol oxide A and (E)-tonghaosu from the flowers and apigenin-7- β -d-glucoside from the stem extracts, showed anticancer effects against Caco-2 colon cancer cells and breast cancer cells ^[247]. Phenethyl isothiocyanate, phenolics, flavonoids, pigments, and ascorbic acid from *Nasturtium officinale* have shown anticancer activity against human malignant melanoma ^[248]. Additionally, and later, hexaprenol, phytol, and 18-[(1-oxohexadecyl) oxy]-9-octadecenoic acid from *Spinacia oleracea* exhibited remarkable antiproliferative activity against myeloid leukaemia cells ^[249].

3.7 For promoting system functions in the human body

The use of plant extracts for medical purposes to treat disease and support body functions has existed since the beginning of time. Owing to their higher cultural acceptance, better compatibility with the human body, and fewer side effects ^[250].

The Kurdistan region is home to a wide variety of herbal plants that are used as promoters for human system functions in a wide range. Some are used to support the nervous system, while others impact systems such as the circulatory, gastrointestinal, integumentary, urinary, respiratory, reproductive, and immune systems. Below is a brief review of the most recently used plants:

As neuroprotective agents, several plants mentioned in this review have such properties, such as *Ocimum basilicum* [251], *Beta vulgaris* [252], mainly due to betalain content [253], Silymarin from the seeds of *Silybum marianum* [254], *Coriandrum sativum* essential oil, known for its analgesic and as anti-Alzheimer properties, especially for migraine relief [255], *Lactuca serriola*, which is rich in flavonoids, phenols, and terpenoids and acts as anxiolytic and anti-epileptogenic agent [256], *Anethum graveolens* due to its phytocomponents (apiol, carvone, and dihydrocarvone) [257], and *Spinacia oleracea*, that contains phytoecdysteroids and flavonoids [258]. In addition, research has shown that the SMs in *Zingiber officinale* extract may help enhance diabetic retinopathy, primarily due to the compounds gingerol and shogaol found in its extracts [259].

Some plants that affect the cardiovascular system have been found useful in treating hypolipidemia hypertension, and hypotension in humans, such as *Beta vulgaris* [260] due to its phenolic and flavonoid contents [261], and *Ocimum basilicum* due to its phenolic compounds such as quercetin [251]. Others have cardioprotective activity, such as inulin obtained from *Helianthus tuberosus* [262], silibinin from the seeds of *Silybum marianum* [263], *Zingiber officinale*'s components such as zingerone, gingerols, and shogaols [264,265], extracts of *Spinacia oleracea* [266], and *Matricaria chamomilla* due to its high flavonoid contents [267].

Several important plants have been shown to affect the gastrointestinal system, mainly for their hepatoprotective activities. Examples include: *Rheum ribes*, as it contains various flavonoids and phenolic compounds [268], *Matricaria chamomilla* due to the action of many bioactive compounds in its extracts [269], isothiocyanates and carotenoids as the main components of *Nasturtium officinale* [270], and *Lactuca serriola* extract [271].

Moreover, several plant extracts have been found to improve digestive system function and bowel movement. These include *Alcea kurdica*, due to its flavonoids and phenolic contents [272], *Rheum ribes* extracts [273], *Beta vulgaris* by the action of betalain [274], *Thymus vulgaris* essential oil [275], *Anethum graveolens* [276], and *Ocimum basilicum*, mainly due to its content of phenolic compounds [277].

Furthermore, some of these plants offer benefits for maintaining gut microflora balance. For example *Rheum ribes* [278], promotes gut health due to its various phenolic compounds in mice infected with enteropathogenic *Escherichia coli* (O157:H7) [279], *Beta vulgaris* due to its betalains, especially betacyanins [280], *Gundelia tournefortii* due to its high total phenolic content [281], *Zingiber officinale*, contributes to gut health through the action of 6-gingerol and 6-shogaol [282]. These plants may also be advantageous for facilitating weight loss and addressing obesity.

Dermatological problems can also be improved by using different plant extracts. Examples include *Helianthus tuberosus* because of inulin content [283], *Silybum marianum* for its silibinin and flavonoids [284], *Nasturtium officinale* due to its phenolic compounds [285], *Zingiber officinale* due to the presence of 6-shogaol in its extracts [286], and *Thymus vulgaris* extracts, especially for their gallic and ferulic acids, which act as anti-ageing compounds [287].

Equally important, some other plants may act as a protective agent for the urinary system, such as *Rheum ribes* due to emodin, rhein, and aloe-emodin [288], *Zingiber officinale* due to the presence of high levels of polyphenolic (such as gingerol) and flavonoid content [289], and phenolics and flavonoids of *Beta vulgaris* extract [290].

Further studies have shown that some other plants are used for promoting functions of respiratory systems. For instance, *Thymus vulgaris* has been shown to improve coughing and nasal disorders [291]. Also, many plant extracts have been recorded to effects the reproductive system, such as *Zingiber officinale* [292] and *Rosa canina* [293]. More importantly, some of them influence processes like spermatogenesis, sperm development, and increasing fertility, specifically *Zingiber officinale* [294].

Finally, *Silybum marianum* has been recorded as an immunostimulant due to the existence of four primary silymarin flavonolignans (silydianin, silybin, silychristin, and isosilybin) [295].

Conclusion

The investigations of secondary metabolites (SMs) from various plant species show their significant potential in medical applications, especially as antibacterial, antifungal, antiviral, antiparasitic, antidiabetic, antioxidant/anticancer agents, and human system function promoters. The increasing resistance of bacteria to synthetic antibiotics, their possible adverse effects, and the limited availability of effective medications underscore the urgent need for alternative solutions. Plant-derived SMs hold promise due to their broad range of actions and effectiveness against various health issues. The global study of these compounds demonstrates their potential for developing novel and effective pharmaceuticals. Therefore, identifying and characterizing these bioactive compounds from locally grown plant species is crucial for utilizing their potential in treating diseases and health problems, as well as contributing to sustainable medical practices, especially in regions like Kurdistan.

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