# PCB - effects on mammalian reproduction

By

J.E. Kihlström, J. Örberg, C. Lundberg, P.O. Danielsson and J. Sydhoff

Institute of Zoophysiology, Uppsala Sweden

Like many other chlorinated hydrocarbons PCB enhances the hepatic metabolism of sex steroids such as testosterone and estradiol (Peakall 1967, Nowicki and Norman 1972). It might therefore be suspected that the occurrence of PCB in animals would disturb the sexual functions and, perhaps, cause a decrease of the procreative ability of the animals, resulting in a continued decrease of the number of individuals per generation. From this point of view we have studied some sexual functions in mice of the NMRI-strain, given PCB in amounts corresponding to those found in wild life (Jensen et al. 1969, Jensen and Odsjö 1972).

## 1. Length of the estrous cycle.

The occurrence of heat in female animals is dependent upon the amount of estrogens circulating in the body. Consequently, a change in the catabolism of these hormones could be suspected to change the regular reappearing of heat periods. Therefore, we have studied the estrous cycle in mice by means of daily vaginal smears before and after one single intraperiotoneal injection of PCB (Clophen A 60, 20 mg/kg body weight). As seen from the following table the mean length of the estrous cycle increases upon administration of PCB (Örberg et al. 1972).

Length of the estrous cycle before and after one single injection of PCB (20 mg/kg body weight)

| | Number of animals | Total number of cycles studied | Mean length in days Before injection | Mean length in days After injection | Analysis s | Analysis p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Control animals | 24 | 96 | 5.6 | 5.6 | 1.81 | 0.04 |
| Experimental animals | 12 | 48 | 5.5 | 6.8 | | |

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However, in the natural state PCB mainly enters the animals in food and water. For this reason we have given mice PCB orally, dissolving the drug in peanut oil. Mice happen to have a fancy for peanut oil and, consequently they consume the oil portions immediately and completely. The dose was 0.025 mg PCB/day/ /animal, approximately corresponding to 5 ppm in the food, and the experiments lasted for 62 days. The controls were given the corresponding volume of the peanut oil vehicle.

The results are given in the following table (Örberg and Kihlström 1972).

Effects of ingested PCB (0.025 mg/day/animal for 62 successive days) upon the length of the estrous cycle

| | Number of animals | Total number of cycles studied | Mean length, days | Analysis | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | t | p < |
| Control animals | 14 | 120 | 6.6 | 3.79 | 0.0005 |
| Experimental animals | 11 | 69 | 8.7 | | |

The observed prolongation of the estrous cycle implies a prolonged interval between the short periods of sexual receptivity in females, probably resulting in a decreased number of pregnancies per individual.

2. Frequency of implanted ova

2.1. Females ingesting PCB as adults

The process of implantation of fertilized ova in the uterus demands a very subtle balance between progesterone and estradiol. This balance might be disturbed by an increased metabolism of these steroids. For this reason we counted the number of corpora lutea and implanted embryos in females ingesting 0.025 mg PCB/day/animal during 62 days before being mated and also during early pregnancy until being sacrificed on day 8-10 of pregnancy. The results given below (Örberg et al. 1972) show a decreased frequency of implanted ova in the treated animals.

Frequency of implanted ova in females ingesting PCB (0,025 mg/day/animal)

| | Number of animals | Number of corpora lutea | Number of ova implanted | Per cent of ova implanted | $\chi^2$ | $p <$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Control animals | 22 | 288 | 250 | 87 | 5,60 | 0,025 |
| Experimental animals | 23 | 313 | 249 | 80 | | |

2,2 Males and females sucking PCB-containing milk

It is well known (Harris 1965 and others) that the sex steroids present during the early postnatal period determine the development of the sexual functions and thus influences the reproductive ability of the adult animal. Sucking of PCB-containing milk during this period, possibly resulting in an increased catabolism of steroids, could therefore be deleterious to the sexual activity in the adults. In order to tackle this question we reared 20 different litters of mice. On the day of parturition ten mothers were given 50 mg PCB/kg body weight intraperitoneally and the ten remaining mothers the corresponding volume of the oil vehicle. The injections were repeated once a week throughout the period of lactation. When reaching sexual maturity the young animals coming from these litters were mated according to the scheme in the table below. The pregnant females were sacrificed on day 10-12 of pregnancy and the number of corpora lutea and placentae counted. The experiments are still going on, Consequently, the results in the following table are preliminary. When mating a control animal with an experimental one no effects upon the frequency of implantation have been observed so far. However, when both the animals of the couple had been sucking PCB-containing milk there is a significant decrease in the frequency of implanted ova.

Frequency of implanted ova in animals having sucked PCB-containing milk

| Paired animals Male | Female | Number of pairs | Number of corpora lutea | Implanted ova Number | Per cent | Analysis $\chi^2$ | $p <$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Control | Control | 16 | 211 | 199 | 94 | - | - |
| Experimental | Control | 17 | 216 | 200 | 93 | 0,27 | 0,7 |
| Control | Experimental | 19 | 240 | 219 | 91 | 1,13 | 0,3 |
| Experimental | Experimental | 21 | 262 | 191 | 73 | 35,57 | 0,0005 |

Thus, even small doses of PCB, given for short periods, may cause a decrease in the number of youngs per litter in mice.

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