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Ali Gül

Gazi University, Gazi Education
Faculty Department of Biology
Education 06500 / Teknikokullar /
Ankara/Türkiye

Nurcan Uzel

Gazi University, Gazi Education
Faculty Department of Biology
Education 06500 / Teknikokullar /
Ankara/Türkiye

Ayhan Özkul

Ankara University, Faculty of
Veterinary Sciences, Department
of Pathology Ankara / Türkiye

Belda Erkmen

Aksaray University, Faculty of
Science, Department of Biology
Aksaray/Türkiye

Sezin Düzel

Gazi University, Gazi Education
Faculty Department of Biology
Education 06500 / Teknikokullar /
Ankara/Türkiye

Göktoğ Gül

Gazi University, Health Services
Vocational School
Gölbaşı/Ankara/Türkiye

Correspondence:

Ali Gül

Gazi University, Gazi Education
Faculty Department of Biology
Education 06500 / Teknikokullar
/ Ankara/Türkiye

Effects of some physicochemical properties of water on histopathological and hematological picture of fish inhabiting Emet Stream

Ali Gül, Nurcan Uzel, Ayhan Özkul, Belda Erkmen, Sezin Düzel, Göktoğ Gül

Abstract

This study deals with the physicochemical water parameters of Emet Stream and their histopathologic and hematologic effects upon *Squalius cephalus*, *Capoeta tinca*, *Barbus plebejus* and *Alburnoides bipunctatus* living there. The changes of the fish tissues were determined by the use of routine histological methods. The hematocrit levels of the bloods taken from the fish were also estimated. NO₂, PO₄³⁻, Ni, as and B values were observed to be above the stipulated levels. There were bronchitis, telangiectasia, epithelial lifting and passive hyperemia determined in gills; focal hepatitis, vena centralis, hydropic and vacuolar degeneration were seen in livers; there were hemorrhages in kidney tissue and enteritis was encountered. Bronchitis and telangiectasis were intensively observed in *S. cephalus* and *C. tinca* specimens. Focal hepatitis was much more intensive in *C. tinca*. The hematocrit levels were found to be 520.45% in *S. cephalus*, 17.55% in *A. bipunctatus*, 16.625% in *B. plebejus* and 22% in *C. tinca*. The elevated values of some water parameters of Emet Stream were actually affecting on both tissues and blood parameters of the fish.

Keywords: Emet Stream, Water parameters, Fish, Histopathology, Hematocrit.

1. Introduction

The environmental contaminants have potentially toxic effects on the aqueous ecosystems. The fish are significantly exposed to these toxic effects. The effect of the pollution on fish is determined according to mortality, leptosomatic index, hematological and blood biology as well as the pathological symptoms. The major manifestations of pollution upon the living organisms are the changes in tissues and organs [1]. Histopathologic parameters are very sensitive towards the contaminants. The most apparent symptoms of contamination are seen at the cellular level and the changes at the target organs are very important indicators of pollution. These organs may show similar or different response against the pollution [2]. Liver which shows specific histological changes with the pollution is a very good bioindicator [3]. The gills are one of the most affected organs due to the fact that they are directly exposed to the polluted media [4]. Studies carried out on gills give the most reliable results due to the fact that their structures are generally well known. The lesions in kidneys alone are not sufficient to reveal the effects of the contaminants and they must be supported by the histopathological results obtained from the other tissues [5].

The hematological parameters of the fish provide many information related the environmental factors and their physiology. The increased contamination is known to cause a very sharp decrease in the hematocrit levels of the fish [6, 7].

There are serious contamination problems regarding to some of the water quality parameters of aquatic areas located in Kütahya province especially regarding to boron and arsenic levels [8]. It was reported that there were very high heavy metal levels in the waters of Porsuk Dam Lake *Cyprinus carpio* and *Barbus plebejus* specimens living in the region [9]. It is important that the contamination level and the histopathologic and histological changes be evaluated as a whole. This study aims mainly for determination of the water parameters regarding to the contamination of Emet Stream and their histopathological changes on various fish tissues and the hematocrit levels of the fish living in.

2. Materials and Methods

The working site of the study was the Emet Stream, an aquatic land located in Kütahya province, with a length of 90 km and average flow rate of 130 m³/s (Fig. 1).

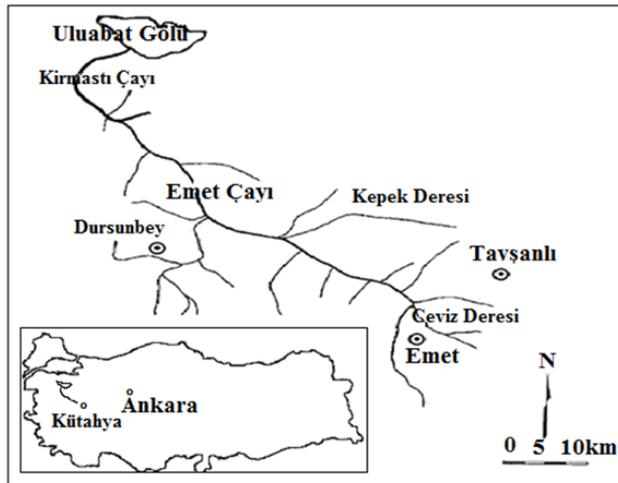


Fig 1: The map of the working site

The specimens were collected from the Hisarcık location (1st station) and the discharge point of the Eti Holding boron processing plant (2nd. station) at certain dates between 2011-2012. The temperature, pH, dissolved oxygen (DO), electrical conductivity and salinity values of the water were measured at the site using YSI brand site type oxygen meter. The NO₂, NO₃, K, Al, Mg, Zn, Cu, SO₄, Cl⁻, Fe, CaCO₃, Ni, Ca, F⁻, PO₄³⁻ levels of the water samples were photometrically determined in the laboratory by the use of Palintest kits. Arsenic and boron levels of the water samples were measured spectrophotometrically with the use of ICP-MS (Agilent 7600) instrument [10]. The fish were caught by the use of trammel nets with various mesh sizes and lengths, fishing rods and throwing nets. The fish were identified by the use of Balık and Ustaoglu [11]. The age was determined from the scales and the vertebrae of the fish. The blood samples of the fish were extracted with syringes under ice anesthesia for the biochemical and hematological investigation [12] and the fish was subjected to a necropsy for the routine histological analyses of certain tissues. The tissue samples with a thickness of 3-4 mm were fixed 10% neutral formal solution, treated with a series of alcohol, xylol and paraffin and blocked in paraffin. The cross section of 4-5 microns from these blocks was stained with Hematoxylin-Eosin (HE) [4]. The microscope pictures were taken and transferred in to the digital medium. The hematocrit levels in the blood were determined by the use of microhematocrit method. The samples taken from each fish by syringes transferred into hematocrit pipettes and placed into the microhematocrit centrifuge after their tips had been tightly sealed. The hematocrit concentrations were measured after a four minute centrifugation at 11.5 rpm [13].

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Fish

Table 1 lists the types and some biological features of the fish belonging to Cyprinidae family living in Emet Stream. Of course this aquatic land contains more than the fish species listed here. However this study was limited to the fishing periods. The most predominant species caught was *C. tinca* (30.9%) followed by a *S. cephalus* with 29.4%, *B.*

plebejus with 26.4% and *A. bipunctatus* with 13.2%. Among these species *S. cephalus*, *C. tinca* and *B. plebejus* are widely distributed in Turkish internal aquatic lands [11].

Table 1: Some of the biological features of the fish species living in Emet Stream

Fish species	N	Age range	Fork length (Min-Max)	W (Min-Max)
<i>Squalius cephalus</i> (L.,1758)	20	0-IV	12.86 (8.2-24.0)	34.67 (7.92-201.5)
<i>Capoeta tinca</i> (H.,1843)	21	0-IV	13.83 (10-20)	44.40 (15.5-144.7)
<i>Barbus plebejus</i> (B.,1832)	18	0-V	16.92 (12.8-22.5)	58.97 (26.78-141.34)
<i>Alburnoides bipunctatus</i> (B.,1782)	9	0-IV+	9.92 (9.5-11)	13.73 (11.31-19.3)

3.2. Water

The physicochemical features of the water are listed in Table (2); where as the fresh waters are classified as follows according to the quality standards: Class I: High quality water, Class II: Low contamination, Class III: High contamination and Class IV: Extreme contamination [14].

It is clear from the table that the nitrite, nickel, phosphate, arsenic and boron levels are above the nationally and internationally stipulated standards. The values of the other water quality parameters are not at the levels which may pose a serious threat to Emet Stream. The physicochemical parameters in the fresh waters effect the distribution, feeding habits, breeding season, physiological features and fecundity of the fish living there [18, 19]. Emet Stream can be classified as Class II aquatic land with low contamination.

The increase of nitrite above 1 mg/L is regarded as a serious signal for the initiation of contamination in fresh waters [20]. The nitrite level of Emet Stream was found to be 0.30 mg/L which poses no threat for the region. Nickel is introduced to the aqua lands by industrial effluents. The exposure of nickel above the acceptable levels causes serious physiological and histological complications [21]. That is why its levels should be closely monitored. The nickel level in this study was found to be 0.19 mg/L which shows that Emet Stream can be regarded Class III highly contaminated land regarding to nickel levels.

Phosphate (PO₄³⁻), which is an important indicator of the contamination of the aquatic lands, is introduced to the wet lands due to dissociation of organic matter, domestic effluents, chemical fertilizers and chemicals agents. Its excessive presence in water changes the pH value of water which has an important effect upon the organisms living there. It is reported that the phosphate content of 0.15 mg/L is the sign of high productivity while the values above 0.30 mg/L is the indication of presence of high level contamination [20]. The average phosphate level of Emet Stream was found to be 29.05 mg/L which is the indication of the heavy contamination regarding to phosphate level. Arsenic is known to be one of the most toxic metals on the living organisms. It is reported that it is densely present in soil, drinking water and streams much above the levels stipulated by the national and international standards [8]. The

average arsenic level determined in this study was 38.23 mg/L which was the indication of class IV extreme arsenic contamination.

Table 2: Emet Stream water quality parameters

Parameters	25.06.2011		21.07.2011		21.06.2012		20.10.2012		TSE 266, [15]	WHO, [16]	USEPA, [17]	YSKYY, [14] (Class 2.)
	1. Sta.	2. Sta.										
Temperature (°C)	25.3	22.4	25.0	23.7	18.8	23.5	14.8	17.2	-	-	-	25
pH	9.29	9.01	8.48	8.68	8.85	8.98	7.89	7.66	6.5-9.5	-	-	6.5-8.5
Dissolved oxygen (mg/L)	9.45	9.50	7.83	5.89	7.82	9.71	9.35	8.64	-	-	-	6
Conductivity (µS/cm)	319.1	828.0	856.0	995.0	759.0	833.0	721.0	807.0	2500	-	-	-
Salinity (ppt)	0.15	0.43	0.42	0.05	0.42	0.48	0.44	0.47	-	-	-	-
Nitrite (NO ₂) (mg/L)	0.26	0.87	0.08	0.95	0.053	0.105	0.043	0.053	0.50	-	-	0.01
Nitrate (NO ₃) (mg/L)	3.70	>>	2.04	>>	2.90	2.70	0.76	0.74	50	-	-	10
Potassium (K) (mg/L)	5.5	6.4	3.8	7.8	3.5	5.4	3.4	3.6	-	-	-	-
Aluminum (Al) (mg/L)	<<	<<	<<	<<	<<	<<	<<	<<	0.20	0.20	0.20	0.3
Magnesium (Mg) (mg/L)	50	42	39	42	70	75	43	45	-	-	-	-
Zinc (Zn) (mg/L)	0.03	0.01	0.02	<<	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.00	-	5	5	0.50
Copper (Cu) (mg/L)	0.02	0.00	0.02	0.01	0.08	0.02	0.00	0.00	2	2	1.3	0.05
Sulfate (SO ₄) (mg/L)	195	195	195	195	195	195	195	190	250	-	-	-
Chloride (Cl ⁻) (mg/L)	13	6	6	8	2	12	4	8	250	250	250	200
Iron (Fe) (mg/L)	0.02	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.03	0.00	<<	0.2	0.3	0.3	1
Alkalinity (CaCO ₃) (mg/L)	210	210	235	210	235	165	240	230	-	500	-	-
Nickel (Ni) (mg/L)	0.05	0.05	0.10	0.05	0.30	0.15	0.60	0.25	0.02	0.02	-	0.05
Calcium (Ca) (mg/L)	90	85	110	88	71	66	94	97	-	300	-	-
Fluoride (F ⁻) (mg/L)	>>	0.02	1.15	0.02	1.24	>>	1.11	1.13	1.5	1.5	2	1.5
Phosphate (PO ₄) (mg/L)	25.1	25.5	13.6	22.6	15.4	34.7	46.4	49.1	-	-	-	-
Arsenic (As) (mg/L)	-	85.00	-	2.421	4.697	107.9	14.49	14.90	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.05
Boron (B) (mg/L)	-	5.562	-	0.137	0.342	7.911	1.002	0.924	-	-	-	1

Boron compounds are also extensively present in the ground and underground waters ranging from 0.01 to 1.5 mg/L [22]. Boron was reported to be densely present in the site investigated in this study [8]. The 2.65 mg/L average level of boron determined in this study was above the water quality standards and constitutes a serious threat against the fish living in Emet Stream. It is apparent that Emet Stream is highly contaminated as regards to arsenic and boron coming from the industrial sites and settlements located around the site which may cause histological and hematological complications.

3.3. Histopathological findings

The cross sections taken from the fish tissues were subjected to histopathological analyses (Table 3). There were bronchitis and hyperemia observed in the gills of *S. cephalus*, *C. tinca*, *B. plebejus* and *A. bipunctatus* species (Fig. 2). Also there was telangiectasis at the gills of *S. cephalus* (Fig. 3). There was epithelial lifting in some of the *A. bipunctatus*

specimens (Fig. 4). The liver tissues of *S. cephalus*, *C. tinca* and *B. plebejus* were observed to be degenerated. The livers of *C. tinca*, *B. plebejus* and *A. bipunctatus* specimens were seen to have focal hepatitis and vena centralis and the sinusoids *C. tinca* and *B. plebejus* samples were full of erythrocytes (passive hyperemia) (Fig. 5). In liver histopathology of some specimens there were mono nuclear cell infiltrations located as focal areas dominated by lymphocytes. In some liver samples there were occasional hydropic and vacuolar degeneration observed. The histopathological renal investigation of some *B. plebejus* revealed hemorrhages (Fig. 6). Also enteritis was determined in the digestion track of some of the *C. tinca* and *A. bipunctatus* specimens. Bronchitis and telangiectasis were observed to be dominant in *S. cephalus* and *C. tinca* samples. The focal hepatitis, determined in the livers of some fish, was found to be much more dominant in *C. tinca* samples (Fig. 7). There were no histopathological investigations made on gonads, muscles and brain tissues.

Table 3: Histopathological findings of the tissues of the fish living in Emet Stream

Tissue	Pathological findings	<i>S. cephalus</i>		<i>C. tinca</i>		<i>B. plebejus</i>		<i>A. bipunctatus</i>	
		1 st sta.	2 nd sta.	1 st sta.	1 st sta.				
Gills	Bronchitis	+	+	+	++	+	-	-	-
	Telangiectasis	+	++	++	++	-	-	-	-
	Epithelial lifting	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+
	Hyperemia	+	+	+	++	+	++	+	++
Livers	Degeneration	+	+	+	+	+	-	-	-
	Focal Hepatitis	-	-	-	++	+	-	-	-
	Passive Hyperemia	-	-	+	-	+	-	-	-
Kidneys	Hemorrhage	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-
Digestion track	Enteritis	-	-	+	-	-	-	+	-

(-): No histopathological finding; (+): Histopathology < 20%; (++) : Histopathology is between 20-60%

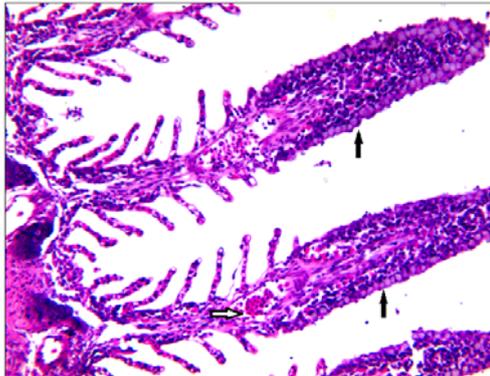


Fig 2: Hyperemia (⇔) and Bronchitis (⇨) in the gill lamellae of *C. tinca* (HE, x 10)

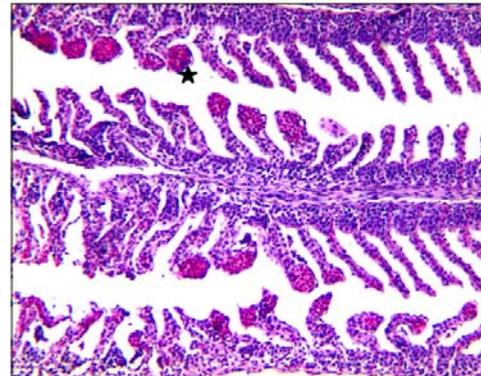


Fig 3: Telangiectasis (★) in the gill lamellae of *S. cephalus* (HE, x 20)

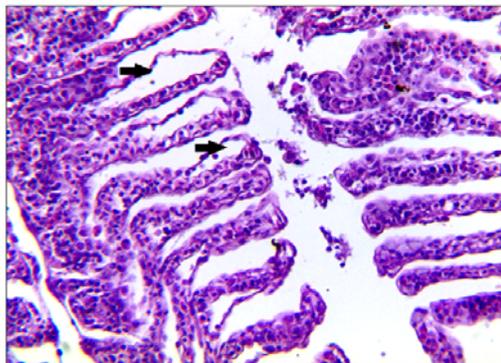


Fig 4: Epithelial Lifting (⇨) in the gill lamellae of *A. bipunctatus* (HE, x 20)

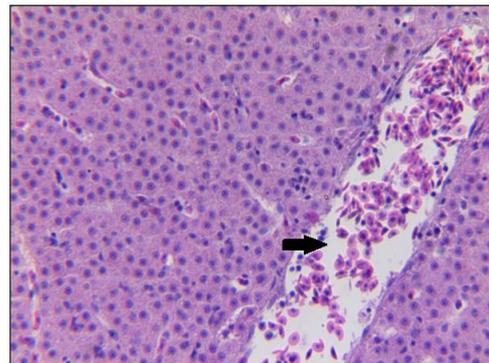


Fig 5: Passive Hyperemia (⇨) in the liver of *B. plebejus* (HE, x 20)

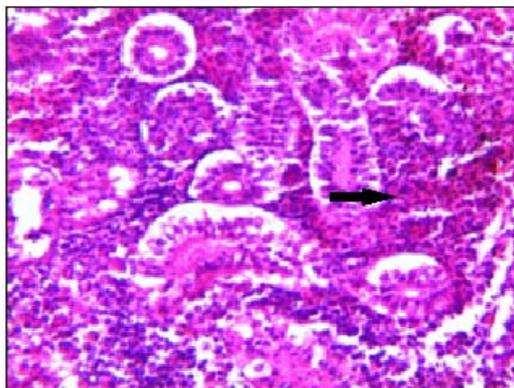


Fig 6: Degeneration and hemorrhage (⇨) in the kidneys of *B. plebejus* (HE, x 20)

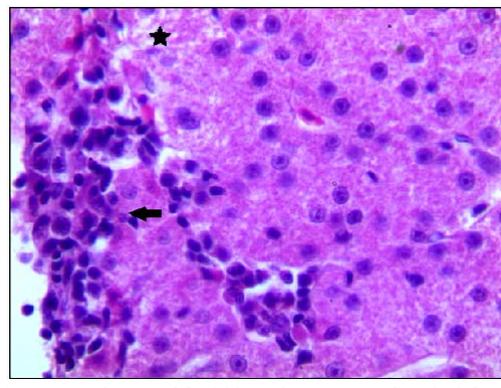


Fig 7: Focal Hepatitis (★) and Degeneration (⇨) in the liver of *C. tinca* (HE, x 20)

The investigations of the harmful effect of environmental factors on the aquatic organisms and the resulting structural and functional changes in histopathological point of view

have become very popular in recent years. It is known that the environmental factors have always a histopathological potential upon the aquatic media [23, 1].

The mostly affected organ of the fish by the contaminants is the gills. The gills of the fish which were directly exposed to the contaminants were observed to develop bronchitis, telangiectasis, epithelial lifting, hyperemia, enlargement of the capillaries and necrosis [4, 24 and 25]. The fact that some chemicals such as heavy metals result a very heavy damage on the gills of the fish exposed to the contaminated media is in good compliance with the findings of the current study [26, 27, 28, 29, 30 and 31]. There are important histological changes take place in the livers of the fish exposed to the toxic compounds [32]. It is the most susceptible organ to the toxic effect where the complications such as degeneration, hyperemia, fattening, clogging in capillaries and sinusoids, necrosis and changes in the hepatoid structure are observed [33, 34]. The kidneys are as seriously affected as livers and gills by the toxic compounds. However the lesions in kidneys are not enough to verify the contamination. It must be supported by other histopathological data of the other organs. The histopathological findings frequently observed in kidneys are necrosis, fibrin and hemorrhage [35, 1]. The histopathologic complications observed in the digestive track are the hydropic degeneration of digestion gland, proliferation of the mucus cells and lesions [35]. There was also enteritis observed in the digestive tracks of *C. tinca* and *A. bipunctatus* in this study.

The literature data upon the effects of the environmental factors on the various tissues are in good accordance of the data obtained in *S. cephalus*, *C. tinca*, *B. plebejus* and *A. bipunctatus* living in Emet Stream. There is a serious indication that Emet Stream is being rapidly contaminated as regards to some parameters and these factors cause significant changes in the gills and liver tissues of the fish species living there. The the most exposed organ to the contaminants in the aqueous media are the gills. This is manifested by a significant increase in mucus secretion as a reaction to this exposure. This decreases the oxygen diffusion through the respiratory surfaces. The hyperplasia observed especially in the supporting cells and the cells rich in mitochondria also proves that the gills are the most effected organs by the external factors. However the effects of these factors upon kidneys and digestion tract are much less than their effects on livers and gills.

3.4. Hematocrit value

The hematocrit levels of the blood are the most important indication of the health of fish (Table 4). The hematocrit levels are dependent upon the height, weight, gender composition and seasonal variations and change according to the species of the fish [36]. The hematocrit levels found for different fish species at different water systems are as follows: At the study they carried out by Haşiloğlu and Atamanalp [37] on *Leuciscus cephalus* living in Demirdöven Dam Lake (Erzurum) reported the hematocrit levels as $37 \pm 5.4\%$. Atamanalp *et al.*, [6] reported that these levels were $46.22 \pm 4.55\%$ in the first and $44.00 \pm 5.29\%$ in the second station for *Capoeta capoeta capoeta* living in Tuzla stream. The other results obtained for different species were 12-35% for *Acanthobrama marmid*, living in Keban Dam Lake [38], $30.5 \pm 2.2\%$ for *Cyprinus carpio*, $28.9 \pm 1.8\%$ for *Leuciscus cephalus*, $27.6 \pm 1.4\%$ for *Capoeta trutta* and $31.4 \pm 1\%$ for *Capoeta capoeta umbla* in Sultansuyu (Malatya) [39]. The literature data show that the hematocrit levels show great variation according to the species investigated. The increase in the contamination parameters also cause the hematocrit

levels to decrease. It is reported that the hematocrit levels of *Cyprinus carpio* decreased from 27.4 to $24.9 \pm 1.9\%$ in contaminated media [40]. The changes of hematological parameters of fish, which constitute an important protein source for humans, give important clues about the environmental factors and their physiologic development [7]. The hematocrit levels of the fish living Emet Stream show parallelism with some of the results reported in literature. However the results are different compared with the majority of the data reported. This may be due to the adverse effects of the contaminants.

Table 4: Hematocrit levels of the fish living in Emet Stream

Species	N	Hematocrit (%) \pm S (Min-Max)
<i>S. cephalus</i>	5	20.45 \pm 2.81 (17.3-25.6)
<i>C. tinca</i>	5	22.04 \pm 4.61 (16.4-27)
<i>B. plebejus</i>	5	16.63 \pm 6.08 (9-25)
<i>A. bipunctatus</i>	5	17.55 \pm 2.09 (15-20.5)

4. Conclusion

YSKYY [14] criteria indicate that Emet stream is a 2nd. class low polluted aqueous region according to water parameters. The nitrite, nickel, phosphate, arsenic and boron levels were found to be above the nationally [14, 15] and internationally [16, 17] accepted standards. Among these parameters the level of boron (with a mean value of 2.65 mg /L) constitutes an important threat to the environment as regards to water quality standards. The arsenic and boron pollution was thought to be the result of the industrial plants located within the close vicinity of the stream. The histopathological complications and hematological changes observed in fish were attributed to these pollutants. Therefore it was concluded that the fish caught from Emet stream should not be consumed by the local people.

5. Acknowledgement

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