Synthesis and evaluation of 2-heteroaryl and 2,3-diheteroaryl-1,4-naphthoquinones that potently induce apoptosis in cancer cells†

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This article describes the preparation of 2-heteroaryl and 2,3-diheteroaryl-1,4-naphthoquinones by an environmentally benign short synthetic route with the goal of finding 1,4-naphthoquinone derivatives that induce apoptosis in cancer cells. We have identified three most active naphthoquinones 10, 12 and 15 that potently induce apoptosis in human cervical carcinoma (HeLa) cells. One of these three compounds perturbed both microtubule and actin filaments.

Introduction

During recent years the biological effects of 2-heteroaryl and 2,3-diheteroaryl-1,4-naphthoquinones have led to synthesis of 1,4-naphthoquinone derivatives by nucleophilic substitution and addition reactions in non aqueous medium leading to a mixture of products and lower yields.[1–10] This prompted us to devise a new synthetic route for regioselective synthesis of 2-heteroaryl and 2,3-diheteroaryl-1,4-naphthoquinone derivatives in high yields by carrying out nucleophilic substitution reactions "in-H_2O" using micelles as a catalyst which has not been reported earlier for the title compounds.

Naphthoquinones have a wide spectrum of anticancer activity.[11] They covalently bind and intercalate into DNA, which leads to DNA breakage and chromosomal aberration.[12,13] Naphthoquinones are also able to modulate receptor tyrosine kinase activity.[14,15] Recently naturally occurring 1,4-naphthoquinone derivatives[16] as well as synthetic 1,4-naphthoquinones[17] have been found to induce apoptosis in HL-60 (human promyelocytic leukemia cells) and HT29 (human colon adenocarcinoma cell line).

One of the recent approaches in drug design which includes pharmacophore modelling and three dimensional quantitative structure–activity relationship (3D-QSAR)/comparative molecular similarity indices analysis (CoMSIA) methods applied to 2,3-disubstituted-1,4-naphthoquinones and heterocyclic quinones possessing nitrogen and sulfur atoms have unraveled the pronounced cytotoxic effects of these compounds.[18,19]

Results and discussion

In the course of a medicinal chemistry program aimed at discovering 1,4-naphthoquinone derivatives containing nitrogen and sulfur atoms endowed with cytotoxic activity, we have synthesized a series of 2-chloro-3-(sec/tert-arylamino)-naphthalene-1,4-diones 10–13, 2,3-diarylaminonaphthalene-1,4-dione 14, 2-amino-3-arylsulfanyl-naphthalene-1,4-diones 15, 16 and 2,3-diheteroaryl-naphthalene-1,4-diones 17–23.

Recently organic reactions performed in water have attracted considerable attention with respect to unique property of water in promoting reactions and enhancing selectivity.[20] The surfactant-type catalyst plays a dual role both as a catalyst to activate the substrate molecules and as a surfactant to increase the concentration of organic reactions to form micelle particles in water which have been extensively used.[21,22]

The synthesis of 1,4-naphthoquinone derivatives 10–23 in water was performed as described in Scheme 1. Nucleophilic substitution reaction of 2,3-dichloro-1,4-naphthoquinoe 1 with primary and secondary aryl amines 3–6 in H_2O using Et_3N as a base and LD or SDS[23,24] as catalyst resulted in the regioselective synthesis of 2-chloro-3(sec/tert-arylamino)-naphthalene-1,4-diones 10–13 in 74–99% yield. The reaction of 1 with 2-aminobenzonitrile 6 (2 eq.) under identical conditions afforded 14 regioselectively in moderate yield. 2-Chloro-3-amino-1,4-naphthoquinone 2 on nucleophilic substitution reaction with aryl thiol 7 and 9 (1 eq.) under identical conditions resulted in the formation of 15 and 16 respectively in excellent yields. In order to synthesize 2,3-diheteroaryl-naphthalene-1,4-diones 17–23; 10–13 were reacted with aryl thiols 7–9 under identical conditions to afford 17–23 in excellent yields.
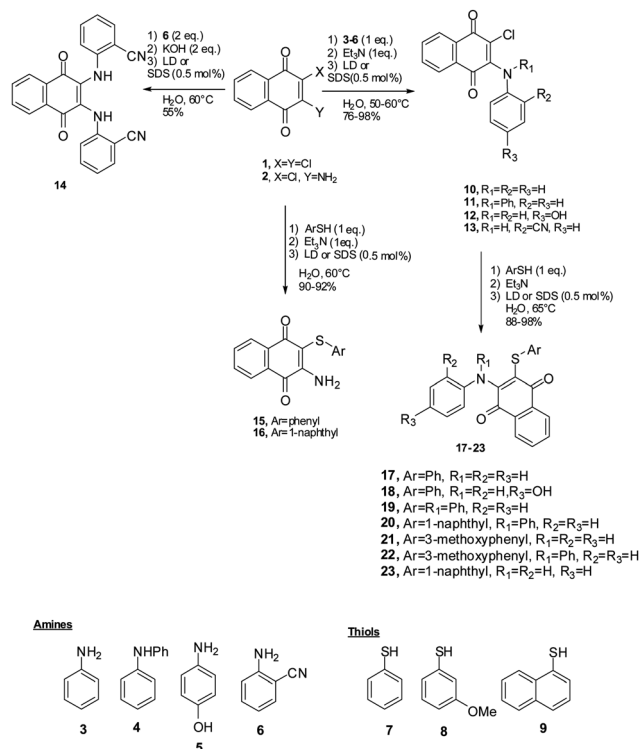
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Scheme 1 Synthesis of 1,4-naphthoquinone derivatives 10–23.

Table 1 Mean% inhibition of HeLa cells proliferation by naphthoquinone series of compounds at 5 μM concentration

Compd	R^1	R^2	log P^a	Mean% inhibition
10	–Cl	*N*-methylanilino	1.5	88 ± 2
11	–Cl	*N*-methyl-*N*-phenylanilino	3.79	46 ± 7
12	–Cl	*N*-methyl-4-hydroxyanilino	1.2	96 ± 7
14	(2-cyano-*N*-methylanilino)	(2-cyano-*N*-methylanilino)	2.26	59 ± 6
15	phenylthio	–NH$_2$	0.95	81 ± 17
16	1-naphthylthio	–NH$_2$	1.95	40 ± 4
18	phenylthio	*N*-methyl-4-hydroxyanilino	2.75	33 ± 12
19	phenylthio	*N*-methyl-*N*-phenylanilino	5.34	35 ± 16
20	1-naphthylthio	*N*-methyl-*N*-phenylanilino	6.34	48 ± 4
21	3-methoxyphenylthio	*N*-methylanilino	3.01	53 ± 3
22	3-methoxyphenylthio	*N*-methyl-*N*-phenylanilino	5.21	51 ± 18

^{a} log P was calculated using ChemBioDraw Ultra 10.0.

The use of surfactants LD or SDS invariably leads to almost identical yields of products **10–23**. It is pertinent to note that use of LD or SDS as a catalyst in presence of Et$_3$N results in excellent yields of **10–23**. The absence of catalyst results in poor yields of **10–23** (0–25%) in presence of bases (KOH, Et$_3$N *etc.*). In the presence of LD or SDS "in H$_2$O", micelles[25] are formed and are responsible for observed catalytic influence during the course of reactions outlined in Scheme 1. The synthesis of 1,4-naphthoquinone derivatives **10–23** carried out by us in non aqueous solvents is uneconomical and involves longer duration of time for completion of reaction.[26,27]

The antiproliferative activities of compounds **10–23** were tested against HeLa cells proliferation at 5 μM. At 5 μM, compounds **10–23** showed different levels of inhibition on HeLa cells proliferation (Table 1). The compounds **10, 12** and **15** were found to inhibit HeLa cells proliferation more than 80% suggesting that these compounds have most potent activity among the synthesized derivatives (Table 1).

Compounds **10, 12** and **15** were selected for further studies and were found to inhibit HeLa cells proliferation in a concentration dependent manner. Half maximal inhibitory concentrations (IC$_{50}$) of compounds **10, 12** and **15** were determined by SRB assay[28–33] and their IC$_{50}$ was found to be 3.9 ± 0.3, 3.2 ± 0.7, and 3.7 ± 1 μM, respectively (Table 2). Under similar conditions, cisplatin, a widely used anticancer agent, inhibits the proliferation of HeLa cells with IC$_{50}$ value of 8 ± 1 μM.[33]

Regarding Structure–Activity Relationship (SAR) among **10, 11** and **12**, replacement of H by the bulky phenyl substituent leads to considerable decrease in mean% inhibition of HeLa cells proliferation. The introduction of OH group leads to

enhancement of mean% inhibition of HeLa cells proliferation leading to identification of **12** as the most active compound of the series. The SAR among **14–22** leads to infer that replacement of H by phenyl and naphthyl leads to decrease in activity. Thus in general the presence of larger number of bulky groups in compounds **10–22** lead to decrease in antiproliferative activity.

Paper

Table 2 IC$_{50}$ values of compounds 10, 12 and 15 in HeLa cells

Compound	IC$_{50}$ (μM)
10	3.9 ± 0.3
12	3.2 ± 0.7
15	3.7 ± 1
Cisplatin[33]	8 ± 1

The structures of compound **12** and compound **10** are quite similar, so we have chosen compound **12** for further analysis as its cytotoxicity on HeLa cell proliferation was comparatively higher than that of the compound **10**. Apoptosis is considered to be an important mechanism of cancer cell death. Therefore, we performed Annexin V/PI staining to determine the effects of compounds **12** and **15** on apoptosis.[29,30] Compound **12** significantly increased the Annexin V positive cell population as compared to control (Fig. 1). The number of Annexin V positive cells was almost double the number of PI positive cells suggesting that cell death occurred through apoptosis (Table 3).

Compound **15** also increased the number of Annexin V positive cells (Table 4) but the effect was less pronounced as compared to compound **12**.

Thus, Annexin V/PI staining results suggest that compound **12** is most potent apoptosis causing derivative among the synthesized naphthoquinone series of compounds **10–23**.

Upon initiation of apoptosis, caspase 3 is known to be activated and translocated to the nucleus.[31] Thus, the determination of caspase 3 localization can indicate the activation of cell death *via* apoptosis. Both compound **12** (Fig. 2) and compound **15** caused an increase in the nuclear localization of caspase 3 in the HeLa cells (Tables 5 and 6). However, the effect of

Table 3 % of Annexin V and PI positive cells in the presence of compound 12

Compound 12 (μM)	% Cells with Annexin V staining	% Cells with PI staining
0	2	1
3	17	7
6	30	12
9	43	21

Table 4 % of Annexin V and PI positive cells in the presence of compound 15

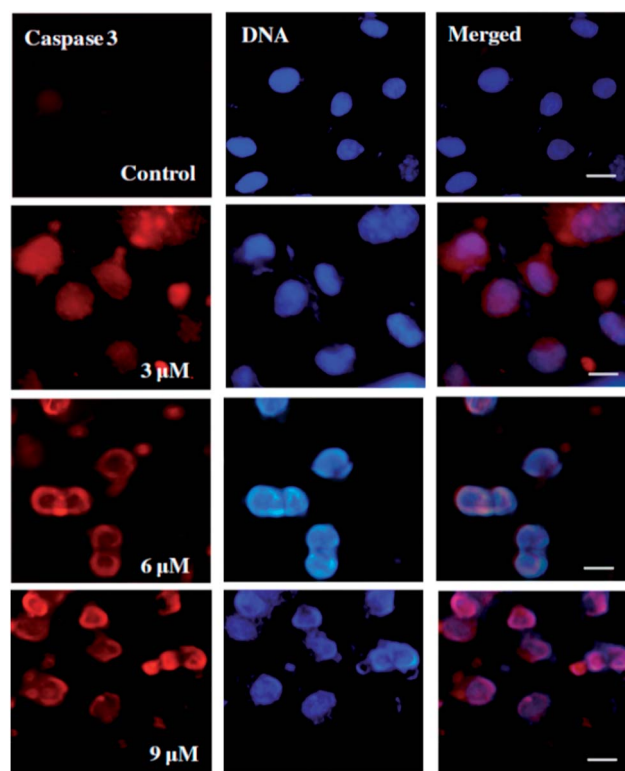| Compound 15 (μM)	% Cells with Annexin V staining	% Cells with PI staining
0	2.2	1
4	10	6
8	25	9
12	33	12

Fig. 2 Increased caspase-3 nuclear localization in presence of compound 12 (scale bar 10 μm).
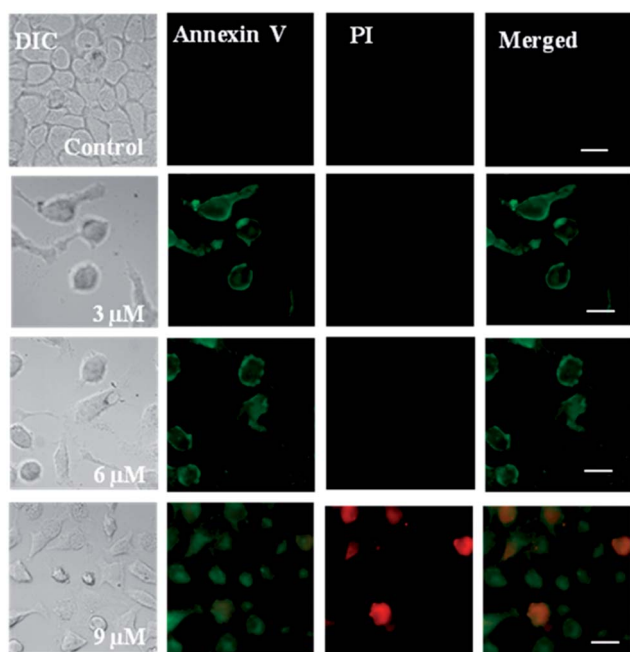

Fig. 1 Annexin V and PI staining in the presence of compound 12 (scale bar 10 μm).

compound **15** was lesser as compared to compound **12** (Tables 5 and 6).

Further, we investigated the effects of compound **12** and **15** on HeLa cell cycle progression by determining mitotic index[32] (Fig. 3) and phosphohistone staining.[30] In control, 3% cells were found to be in mitosis whereas 11.7 ± 0.4% and 8.3 ± 0.3% cells were present in mitosis in presence of 6 μM compound **12** and

Table 5 Increase in caspase 3 localisation in presence of compound **12**

Compound **12** (μM)	% Cells with caspase 3 staining
0	2 ± 1
3	15 ± 3
6	25 ± 2
9	41 ± 3

Table 6 Increase in caspase 3 localisation in presence of compound **15**

Compound **15** (μM)	% Cells with caspase 3 staining
0	2 ± 1
4	12 ± 4
8	20 ± 2
12	27 ± 3
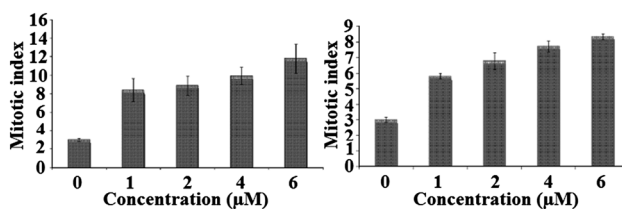
Fig. 3 Effects of compound **12** & **15** on the mitotic index in HeLa cells.

compound **15**, respectively. Compound **12** and **15** treatment also increased the number of phosphohistone positive cells. For example, 3.2 ± 0.3% control HeLa cells displayed phosphohistone staining while 13.3 ± 1% and 12.7 ± 5% cells showed phosphohistone staining in the presence of 9 μM compound **12** and 20 μM compound **15**, respectively.

Furthermore, upon short exposure of compound **12** to HeLa cells, microtubules and actin network got disassembled, while short exposure of compound **15** did not seem to cause any effect on microtubule and actin network. The actin network of 20 μM compound **12** treated HeLa cells was disassembled in a similar fashion as 60 μM cytochalasin D, a known actin depolymerizing agent. Compound **12** also caused an increase in the cyclin B1 staining[33] (Table 7).

The redox potential being the most significant physico-chemical property determining the cytotoxicity of naphthoquinone derivatives, the reactive oxygen species (ROS)

Table 7 Compound **12** treatment increased nuclear localization of cyclin B1

Concentration (μM)	Cyclin B1 positive cells (%)
0	3.3
3	11.5
6	15.2
9	17.3

formed due to quinone redox cycling seem to be relevant to cytotoxicity of 1,4-naphthoquinone derivatives in addition to their hydrophobicities.[10]

Conclusion

In summary, we have identified a potent 1,4-naphthoquinone derivative **12** that induces apoptosis in HeLa cells as well as environmentally benign synthetic route for the synthesis of compound **12** and other derivatives has been developed. We are currently studying the details of selectivity of the potent naphthoquinone derivatives that induce apoptosis in HeLa cells.

Experimental section

General

^{1}H and ^{13}C NMR spectra were recorded on Perkin Elmer model R.32 spectrophotometers (300 MHz H, 75 MHz C) in deuterated chloroform (CDCl$_3$) or deuterated dimethylsulfoxide (DMSO-d$_6$). The data is reported as follows: chemical shifts in ppm (δ), multiplicities are indicated as s-singlet; d-doublet; t-triplet; q-quartet; m-multiplet, br-broad. Coupling constants, J, are reported in Hz. Infrared spectra were recorded on FTIR 8201 PC, Schimadzu spectrophotometers in KBr discs, and the peaks reported in cm^{-1}. All compounds showed satisfactory elemental analysis for C, H, N and S. Progress of reactions and purity of compounds were monitored by thin layer chromatography (TLC), which was performed on silica gel G and the plates were visualized by visible, UV light and iodine (I$_2$). Spectral facilities and elemental micro-analyses were carried out by SAIF division of Central Drug Research Institute, Lucknow, India. Melting points were determined on an electrically heated Townson Mercer melting point apparatus and are uncorrected. Chemicals and reagents were purchased from Aldrich and used as received.

General procedure for the synthesis of 1,4-naphthoquinone derivatives (10–23)

1 mmol nucleophile (**3–6** or **7–9**) was added to 5 mL aqueous suspension of surfactant (0.5 mol% LD) and Et$_3$N–KOH (1 mmol). After stirring for five minutes, quinone **1/2/10–13** (1 mmol/2 mmol) was added and stirred at temperature (Table 2, ESI†). The products were filtered after neutralization with 5% HCl, if required, followed by column chromatography (hexane–EtOAc) of the product to yield the desired products (**10–23**): (Table 2, ESI†).

2-Chloro-3-(phenylamino)naphthalene-1,4-dione (**10**).[26,27] Red powder from methanol; yield 99%; mp: 210–211 °C; IR (KBr): 1597 and 1675 (>C═O of quinone), 3243 (N–H) cm^{-1}; ^{1}H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl$_3$): δ 8.19 (d, J = 8.0 Hz, 1H), 8.12 (d, J = 8.0 Hz, 1H), 7.77 (t, J = 8.0 Hz, 1H), 7.69 (t, J = 8.0, 1H), 7.35 (m, 3H), 7.22 (t, J = 7.6, 1H), 7.09 (d, J = 7.6, 2H). ^{13}C NMR (100 MHz, CDCl$_3$ + DMSO-d$_6$): δ 115.1, 124.7, 125.9, 127.3, 127.3, 128.7, 130.2, 132.9, 133.3, 135.3, 137.9, 142.1, 177.8, 180.8. Anal. calcd for C$_{16}$H$_{10}$ClNO$_2$ (284): C, 67.74; H, 3.55; N, 4.94. Found: C, 67.10; H, 3.53; N, 4.91; Beilstein test:[34] Cl positive.

2-Chloro-3-(diphenylamino)naphthalene-1,4-dione (11).[26,27] Yellow fine needle shaped crystals from methanol which on exposure in air changed color yellow to fluorescent light green; yield 62%; mp: 130–132 °C IR (KBr): 1592 and 1678 (>C=O of quinone) cm^{-1}; ^{1}H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl$_3$): δ 8.22 (m, 1H), 8.15 (m, 3H), 8.09 (m, 3H), 7.81 (m, 1H), 7.75 (m, 6H); ^{13}C NMR (100 MHz, CDCl$_3$): δ 127.3, 127.3, 128.7, 131.2, 131.4, 134.3, 134.7, 157.2, 179.9, 180.1; MS: 360 (M$^+$). Anal. calcd for C$_{22}$H$_{14}$ClNO$_2$ (360): C, 73.44; H, 3.92; N, 3.89; found: C, 72.96; H, 3.98; N, 3.92; Beilstein test:[34] Cl positive.

2-Chloro-3-(4-hydroxyphenylamino)naphthalene-1,4-dione (12).[26,27] Violet powder from methanol; yield 96%; mp: 181 °C; IR (KBr): 1593 and 1678 (>C=O of quinone) 3269 (N–H), 3468 (O–H) cm^{-1}; ^{1}H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl$_3$): δ 8.19 (d, J = 7.6, 1H), 8.12 (d, J = 7.6, 1H), 7.90 (s, 1H), 7.75 (t, J = 7.6, 1H), 7.69 (t, J = 7.6, 1H), 7.35 (d, 2H), 7.05 (d, 2H), 4.75 (s, 1H). ^{13}C NMR (100 MHz, CDCl$_3$ + acetone-d$_6$): δ 112.1, 114.4, 126.2, 126.9, 127.0, 129.3, 129.4, 131.9, 134.3, 139.0, 142.0, 155.51, 179.9, 180.1; anal. calcd for C$_{16}$H$_{10}$ClNO$_3$ (300): C, 64.12; H, 3.36; N, 4.67; found: C, 63.92; H, 3.42; N, 4.72; Beilstein test:[34] Cl positive.

2-3-Chloro-1,4-dioxo-1,4-dihydronaphthalen-2-ylaminobenzonitrile (13).[26,27] The general procedure was followed for 24 h to give orange crystals on crystallization with EtOAc–hexane; yield 76%; mp: 233–234 °C; IR (KBr): 554, 680, 734, 836, 879, 1002, 1158, 1229, 1274, 1380, 1478, 1539, 1591, 1679, 2364, 3450, cm^{-1}; ^{1}H NMR (CDCl$_3$): δ 7.08 (d, J = 7.6 Hz, 1H), 7.31 (d, J = 7.6 Hz, 1H), 7.56–7.82 (m, 4H), 7.67 (s, 1H) 8.19 (dd, J = 7.6 Hz, 1.0 Hz, 2H); ^{13}C NMR (CDCl$_3$): δ 99.6, 113.3, 117.1, 118.3, 119.4, 127.3, 128.8, 130.1, 131.3, 133.9, 134.2, 135.1, 136.6, 151.7, 152.2, 178.3, 179.1; MS: 309 (MH$^+$); anal. calcd (C$_{17}$H$_9$ClN$_2$O$_2$): C, 66.14; H, 2.94; N, 9.07; found: C, 65.85; H, 2.70; N, 8.94; Beilstein test:[34] Cl positive.

2,2′-(1,4-Dioxo-1,4-dihydronaphthalene-2,3-diyl)bis(azanediyl)dibenzonitrile (14).[26,27] Dark red solid after crystallization with EtOAc; yield 55%; mp 258–259 °C; IR (KBr): 505, 617, 645, 716, 761, 793, 851, 912, 1016, 1095, 1135, 1241, 1287, 1332, 1383, 1469, 1509, 1598, 1677, 2222, 2366, 3265, 3416 cm^{-1}; ^{1}H NMR (CDCl$_3$ + DMSO-d$_6$): δ 6.72–7.32 (m, 6H), 7.67–7.80 (m, 6H), 8.15 (dd, J = 5.5 Hz, 3.0 Hz, 2H); ^{13}C NMR (100 MHz, CDCl$_3$ + DMSO-d$_6$): δ 99.1, 118.5, 119.0, 119.8, 120.8, 126.9, 131.9, 134.8, 135.4, 137.0, 151.2, 181.8; MS: M$^+$ (M$^+$ + 1): 391; anal. calcd (C$_{24}$H$_{14}$N$_4$O$_2$): C, 73.84; H, 3.61; N, 14.35; found: C, 74.02; H, 3.82; N, 14.60.

2-Amino-3-phenylsulfanyl-[1,4]naphthoquinone (15).[26,27] Red crystals after crystallization with methanol; yield 92%; mp 160–161 °C; IR (KBr): 1598 and 1676 (>C=O of quinone), 3243 and 3462 (NH$_2$) cm^{-1}; ^{1}H NMR (300 MHz, CDCl$_3$): δ 8.08 (m, 2H), 7.65 (m, 2H), 7.38 (m, 2H), 7.26 (s, 3H), 7.09 (bs, 2H); ^{13}C NMR (100 MHz, CDCl$_3$ + DMSO-d$_6$): δ 126.0, 126.9, 127.1, 127.3, 129.5, 131.1, 132.9, 134.2, 135.5, 136.5, 153.9, 179.3, 180.7; anal. calcd for C$_{16}$H$_{11}$NO$_2$S (281): C, 68.31; H, 3.94; N, 4.98; S, 11.40; found: C, 67.98; H, 3.88; N, 4.93; S, 11.35.

2-Amino-3-(naphthalen-1-ylsulfanyl)-[1,4]naphthoquinone (16).[26,27] Brown powder from methanol; yield 90%; mp 170–171 °C; IR (KBr): 1585 and 1662 (>C=O of quinone), 3270 and 3440 (NH$_2$) cm^{-1}; ^{1}H NMR (300 MHz, CDCl$_3$): δ 8.17 (m, 2H), 7.98 (m, 2H), 7.77 (m, 4H), 7.50 (m, 3H), 7.30 (bs, NH$_2$); ^{13}C NMR (100 MHz, CDCl$_3$ + DMSO-d$_6$): δ 125.0, 126.0, 126.1, 126.9, 127.1, 127.1, 127.5, 128.2, 128.9, 129.0, 131.2, 131.9, 133.0, 134.0, 134.2, 134.3, 135.5, 153.9, 179.4, 180.7; anal. calcd for C$_{20}$H$_{13}$NO$_2$S (331): C, 72.49; H, 3.95; N, 4.23; S, 9.68; found: C, 71.92; H, 3.92; N, 4.27; S, 9.60.

2-Phenylamino-3-(phenylthio)naphthalene-1,4-dione (17).[26,27] Brown solid from methanol; yield 99%; mp 143–145 °C; IR (KBr): 1589 and 1664 (>C=O of quinone), 3265 (N–H) cm^{-1}; ^{1}H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl$_3$): δ 8.18 (d, J = 7.6, 1H), 8.13 (d, J = 7.6, 1H), 7.93 (bs, 1H), 7.76 (t, J = 7.6, 1H), 7.69 (t, J = 7.6, 1H), 7.17–7.15 (t, 2H), 7.13–6.98 (m, 4H), 6.75–6.68 (m, 4H); anal. calcd for C$_{22}$H$_{15}$NO$_2$S (357): C, 73.93; H, 4.23; N, 3.92; S, 8.97; found: C, 74.22; H, 4.21; N, 3.98; S, 9.03.

2-(4-Hydroxyphenylamino)-3-(phenylthio)naphthalene-1,4-dione (18).[26,27] Shining brown solid from methanol; yield 88%; mp 220–221 °C; IR (KBr): 1546 and 1624 (>C=O of quinone), 3315 (N–H), 3375 (O–H) cm^{-1}; ^{1}H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl$_3$): δ 8.18 (d, J = 7.2, 1H), 8.12 (d, J = 7.2, 1H), 7.90 (bs, 1H), 7.68–7.76 (m, 3H) 7.31 (m, 1H), 7.03–7.05 (m, 3H), 6.77–6.80 (m, 2H), 6.62 (m, 3H); anal. calcd for C$_{22}$H$_{15}$NO$_3$S (373): C, 70.76; H, 4.05; N, 3.75; S, 8.59; found: C, 70.02; H, 4.01; N, 3.70; S, 8.63.

2-(Diphenylamino)-3-(phenylthio)naphthalene-1,4-dione (19).[26,27] Red oil; yield 90%; IR (KBr): 1590 and 1678 (>C=O of quinone) cm^{-1}; ^{1}H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl$_3$): δ 8.04–8.08 (m, 4H), 7.94–7.98 (m, 2H), 7.60–7.80 (m, 4H), 7.43–7.49 (m, 3H), 7.02–7.11 (m, 3H), 6.60–6.69 (m, 3H); ^{13}C NMR (100 MHz, CDCl$_3$): δ 127.0, 127.3, 127.6, 127.8, 128.0 (4C), 129.4, 129.5, 130.7, 131.7, 131.8, 134.0, 134.4, 137.5, 178.5, 180.8. anal. calcd for C$_{28}$H$_{19}$NO$_2$S (434): C, 77.57; H, 4.42; N, 3.23; S, 7.40; found: C, 77.42; H, 4.38; N, 3.18; S, 7.45.

2-(Diphenylamino)-3-(naphthalene-1-ylthio)naphthalene-1,4-dione (20).[26,27] Yellow powder from methanol; yield 98%; mp: 120–121 °C; IR (KBr): 1590 and 1678 (>C=O of quinone) cm^{-1}; ^{1}H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl$_3$): δ 8.04–8.08 (m, 4H), 7.94–7.7.98 (m, 2H), 7.60–7.80 (m, 9H), 7.43–7.49 (m, 6H); ^{13}C NMR (100 MHz, CDCl$_3$ + DMSO-d$_6$): δ 125.6, 125.8, 125.9, 126.0, 126.6, 127.0, 127.5, 127.7, 128.3, 128.6, 130.0, 130.6, 130.7, 131.3, 131.5, 132.8, 133.0, 133.3, 158.5, 178.8, 181.1; anal. calcd for C$_{32}$H$_{21}$NO$_2$S (484): C, 79.48; H, 4.38; N, 2.90; S, 6.63; found: C, 78.98; H, 4.34; N, 2.92; S, 6.58.

2-(3-Methoxyphenylthio)-3-(phenylamino)naphthalene-1,4-dione (21).[26,27] Shining brown solid from methanol; yield 99%; mp: 143–145 °C; IR (KBr): 1587 and 1662 (>C=O of quinone), 2359 and 2925 (OMe), 3310 (N–H) cm^{-1}; ^{1}H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl$_3$): δ 8.18 (d, J = 7.6, 1H), 8.13 (d, J = 7.6, 1H), 7.96 (bs, 1H), 7.77 (t, J = 7.6, 1H), 7.69 (t, J = 7.6, 1H) 7.19–7.17 (t, 2H, Ar-H), 7.15–7.09 (t, 1H, Ar-H), 6.96–6.92 (t, 1H, Ar-H), 6.73–6.71 (d, 2H, Ar-H), 6.60–6.58 (d, 1H, Ar-H), 6.38–6.39 (d, 1H), 6.22 (s, 1H, Ar-H), 3.63 (s, 3H, OCH$_3$), mass (Fab): M$^+$ = 387, M$^+$ + 1 = 388, M$^+$ + 2 = 389; ^{13}C NMR (400 MHz, CDCl$_3$): δ 55.0, 112.0, 112.7, 113.0, 114.1, 120.6, 123.0, 124.6, 126.7, 127.0, 127.7, 129.0, 130.3, 132.7, 133.3, 134.7, 136.3, 142.6, 159.3, 180.7, 181.0; anal. calcd for C$_{23}$H$_{17}$NO$_3$S (387): C, 71.30; H, 4.42; N, 3.62; S, 8.28; found: C, 71.24; H, 4.39; N, 3.58; S, 8.32.

2-(Diphenylamino)-3-(3-methoxyphenylthio)naphthalene-1,4-dione (22).[26,27] Red oil; yield 95%; IR (KBr): 1588 and 1662 (>C=O of quinone), 2359 and 2925 (OCH$_3$) cm^{-1}; ^{1}H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl$_3$): δ 8.03–8.07 (m, 4H), 7.92–7.96 (m, 2H), 7.59–7.78 (m, 4H), 7.43–7.45 (m, 2H), 7.02–7.11 (m, 3H), 6.62–6.70 (m, 3H), 3.73 (s, 3H, OCH$_3$). Anal. calcd for C$_{29}$H$_{21}$NO$_3$S (464): C, 75.14; H, 4.57; N, 3.02; S, 6.92; found: C, 75.42; H, 4.58; N, 3.08; S, 7.00.

2-(Naphthalene-1-ylthio)-3-(phenylamino)naphthalene-1,4-dione (23).[26,27] Light brown solid from methanol; mp: 119–120 °C; yield 96%; IR (KBr): 1590 and 1662 (>C=O of quinone), 3329 (N–H) cm^{-1}; ^{1}H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl$_3$): δ 8.04–8.08 (m, 4H), 7.94–7.98 (m, 2H), 7.68–7.80 (m, 4H), 7.43–7.49 (m, 3H) 7.32–7.26 (m, 2H), 6.62–6.56 (m, 2H); ^{13}C NMR (100 MHz, CDCl$_3$ + DMSO-d$_6$): δ 123.29, 125.15, 126.03, 126.08, 126.60, 126.75, 127.71, 127.95, 128.82, 130.89, 131.48, 133.00, 133.36, 133.73, 133.87, 135.28, 136.87, 141.93, 143.13, 181.24, 181.60; anal. calcd for C$_{26}$H$_{17}$NO$_2$S (407): C, 76.64; H, 4.21; N, 3.44; S, 7.87; found: C, 75.92; H, 4.19; N, 3.41; S, 7.91.

Evaluation of anticancer activity

SRB assay. Human cervical carcinoma (HeLa) cells were cultured in Minimal Essential medium (Hi Media) containing 10% fetal bovine serum.[35] For cell proliferation assay, 1×10^5 cells per mL were seeded in 96 well plates and for microscopic studies, 0.5×10^5 cells per mL were grown as monolayer on glass cover slips.[35] After 24 hours of seeding, 5 μM of each of the compounds tested was added to the wells and control cells were treated with vehicle (0.1% DMSO). Concentration of DMSO was kept 0.1% in both control and treated cells. Cells were incubated with the compounds for 24 hours and then, sulforhodamine B assay was performed.[28] The half maximal inhibitory concentration of **10**, **12** and **15** compounds on HeLa cell proliferation was determined after one cell cycle using sulforhodamine B assay.[28]

Annexin/PI and caspase 3 staining. HeLa cells were incubated with either vehicle or different concentrations of compound **12** (3 μM, 6 μM, 9 μM) and compound **15** (4 μM, 8 μM, 12 μM) for 24 h. Then, cells were stained with FITC labeled Annexin V and propidium iodide.[29,30] The cells were observed with an Eclipse TE 2000U microscope (Nikon, Japan) at 40X magnification. The images were analyzed using Image-Pro Plus software (Media Cybernetics, Silver Spring, MD, USA).[29,30] HeLa cells were incubated in the absence or presence of different concentrations of compound **12** (0, 3, 6 and 9 μM) and compound **15** (0, 4, 8 and 12 μM) for 24 hours. Then, cells were fixed with 3.7% (v/v) formaldehyde and caspase 3 staining was performed using anticaspase 3 antibody (1 : 200 dilution). The coverslips were washed with BSA–PBS at room temperature and then incubated with secondary antibody (anti-mouse Alexa-568 conjugate) for 1 h at 1 : 200 dilution. To visualize nuclei, cells were stained with Hoechst 33258 (1 μg mL^{-1}). Immuno-stained cells were examined using 40X objective.

Determination of mitotic index. HeLa cells were treated without or with different concentrations of compound **12** and compound **15** for 24 hours. The mitotic index was determined by staining DNA with Hoechst 33258 (1 μg mL^{-1}) for 10 min as described previously.[32] 500 cells were counted for each data set. HeLa cells were incubated without or with 3, 6 and 9 μM compound **12** for 24 hours. Subsequently, cells were fixed with 3.7% (v/v) formaldehyde. The cyclin B1 staining was done by incubating cells with 1 : 300 dilution of anti-cyclin B1 antibody.[33] To visualize nuclei, cells were stained with Hoechst 33258 (1 μg mL^{-1}). Immuno-stained cells were examined using a 40X objective.[32]

Microtubule and actin staining. HeLa cells were incubated without or with either 20 μM of compound **12**, or 20 μM of compound **15** for 2.5 h at 37 °C. After treatment, cells were fixed with 3.7% (v/v) formaldehyde. Microtubules, actin and DNA were stained as described previously.[29] Immuno-stained cells were examined using a 40X objective.

Acknowledgements

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