

1 **Tetraspanins from *Opisthorchis viverrini* stimulate cholangiocyte migration and**  
2 **inflammatory cytokine production.**

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17 Short version of title: Tetraspanins of liver flukes stimulate cell migration.

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35 **Abstract**

36 The liver fluke *Opisthorchis viverrini* secretes extracellular vesicles (EVs) bearing CD63-like  
37 tetraspanins on their surface. Fluke EVs are actively internalized by host cholangiocytes in the  
38 bile ducts, where they drive pathology and promote neoplasia through induction of cellular  
39 proliferation and secretion of inflammatory cytokines. We investigated the effects of  
40 tetraspanins of the CD63 superfamily by co-culturing recombinant forms of the large  
41 extracellular loop (LEL) of *O. viverrini* tetraspanin-2 (rLEL-*Ov*-TSP-2) and tetraspanin-3  
42 (rLEL-*Ov*-TSP-3) with non-cancerous human bile duct (H69) and cholangiocarcinoma (CCA,  
43 M213) cell lines. The results showed that cell lines co-cultured with excretory/secretory  
44 products from adult *O. viverrini* (*Ov*-ES) underwent significantly increased cell proliferation  
45 at 48 hours but not 24 hours compared to untreated control cells ( $P<0.05$ ), whereas rLEL-*Ov*-  
46 TSP-3 co-culture resulted in significantly increased cell proliferation at both 24 hr ( $P<0.05$ )  
47 and 48 hr ( $P<0.01$ ) time points. In like fashion, H69 cholangiocytes co-cultured with both *Ov*-  
48 ES and rLEL-*Ov*-TSP-3 underwent significantly elevated *Il-6* and *Il-8* gene expression for at  
49 least one of the time points assessed. Finally, both rLEL-*Ov*-TSP- and rLEL-*Ov*-TSP-3  
50 significantly enhanced migration of both M213 and H69 cell lines. These findings indicated  
51 that *O. viverrini* CD63 family tetraspanins can promote a cancerous microenvironment by  
52 enhancing innate immune responses and migration of biliary epithelial cells.

53 **Keywords:** *Opisthorchis viverrini*, Tetraspanins, cytokine, cholangiocarcinoma

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59 Infection of humans with the liver fluke *Opisthorchis viverrini* is a major risk factor for the  
60 development of bile duct cancer, or cholangiocarcinoma (CCA) in fluke-endemic areas (Sripa  
61 et al. 2012, Brindley et al. 2021). The excretory/secretory (ES) products released by flukes  
62 when residing in the bile ducts have been shown to have carcinogenic properties (Sripa et al.  
63 2007, Sripa et al. 2012, Chaiyadet et al. 2015a) that drive inflammation and induce proliferation  
64 of the biliary epithelial cells. *O. viverrini* ES products contain both soluble proteins and  
65 extracellular vesicles (EVs), the latter of which are released from the tegument and actively  
66 internalized by non-cancerous and cancerous human bile duct cell lines where they stimulate  
67 inflammatory cytokine secretion and abnormal cell growth (Chaiyadet et al. 2015b, Wilson and  
68 Jones 2021).

69        Tetraspanins are a highly conserved family proteins with four transmembrane domains, and  
70        two extracellular loops of unequal size: a small extracellular loop (SEL) and a large  
71        extracellular loop (LEL). The LEL region of TSPs contains between four and eight cysteine  
72        residues which from two to four disulfide bonds act as the “signal motif”. This allows for  
73        specific protein-protein interactions with adjacent proteins and other ligands (Levy and  
74        Shoham 2005). TSPs are involved in basic cell activities, including cell proliferation, cell  
75        fusion, motility, adhesion, migration, and signal transduction pathways (Hemler 2008).  
76        Previous studies have described three tetraspanins from the *O. viverrini* ES products belonging  
77        to the CD9 (*Ov-TSP-1*) (Piratae et al. 2012) and CD63 families (*Ov-TSP-2* and *Ov-TSP-3*)  
78        (Chaiyadet et al. 2017). These TSPs are highly expressed in the parasite tegument throughout  
79        the liver fluke’s life cycle where they play essential roles in maintaining the integrity of the  
80        tegument and formation of membrane-bound EVs. Indeed, *Ov-TSP-1* and *TSP-2* have recently  
81        been identified as markers of EVs (Chaiyadet et al. 2022).

82        CD63 has been shown to be involved in metastasis of cancer cells (Seubert et al. 2015),  
83        where it acts as a pro-metastatic factor via  $\beta$ -catenin stabilization. While *O. viverrini* EVs are  
84        known to promote cell proliferation and inflammatory cytokine production in cholangiocytes,  
85        the specific role of CD63-like TSPs (which are abundant on the EV surface) in the development  
86        of *O. viverrini* infection-induced CCA has not been investigated. Herein we investigated the  
87        interactions between *O. viverrini* recombinant LEL domains of *Ov-TSP-2* and *TSP-3* and  
88        human normal cholangiocyte and CCA cell lines, and investigated their effects on cell  
89        migration and inflammatory cytokine production by cholangiocytes.

90

## 91 MATERIALS AND METHODS

### 92 Rodent model, parasite production and excretory/secretory products of *Opisthorchis* 93 *viverrini*

94        Male Syrian golden hamsters 6-8 weeks were infected with 50 *O. viverrini*  
95        metacercariae by intragastric intubation (Sripa and Kaewkes 2000). Adult flukes were  
96        recovered from hamsters and cultured *in vitro* to produce ES products as described (Chaiyadet  
97        et al. 2019, Chaiyadet et al. 2022). The animals were housed and cared for in the animal facility  
98        at Faculty of Medicine, Khon Kaen University, in accordance with approved protocols from  
99        the Animal Ethics Committee of Khon Kaen University (IACUC-KKU-92/63).

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101 **Recombinant protein production**

102 The large extracellular loop of *O. viverrini* tetraspanin-2 (rLEL-*Ov*-TSP-2) and  
103 tetraspanin-3 (rLEL-*Ov*-TSP-3) were produced in recombinant form using *Pichia pastoris* as  
104 described (Phung et al. 2019) and *Escherichia coli* as described (Chaiyadet et al. 2017),  
105 respectively. In brief, LEL-*Ov*-*tsp*-2 sequence was amplified by PCR and inserted into the  
106 pPICZαA plasmid. The recombinant plasmid was linearized with *Sac I* restriction enzyme after  
107 which it was used to transform *P. pastoris* X33 strain using electroporation (MicroPulser  
108 Electroporator, Bio-Rad, Hercules, CA, USA). Recombinant expression of transformed yeast  
109 was induced by 1% methanol for 5 days. Subsequently, the culture medium was clarified by  
110 centrifugation and then mixed with binding buffer (50 mM NaH<sub>2</sub>PO<sub>4</sub>, 300 mM NaCl, 5 mM  
111 Imidazole, pH 8.0) prior to chromatographic purification on Ni-NTA resin (Thermo Fisher  
112 Scientific, USA). After elution from the resin column, the purified protein was dialyzed against  
113 20 mM HEPES using an Amicon ultra-15 (Merck, Rahway, NJ, USA).

114 The LEL-*Ov*-TSP-3 sequence was cloned into plasmid pET32a (Novagen, Madison,  
115 WI, USA) which was deployed to transform BL21DE32 strain *E. coli* for protein expression.  
116 The transformed bacteria were cultured in LB broth and induced to produce protein by the  
117 addition of IPTG (isopropylthio-β-galactoside) to 1 mM for 6 hours at 37 °C. The bacterial  
118 pellet was harvested by centrifugation, recombinant proteins extracted from the cells, and  
119 recombinant LEL-*Ov*-TSP-3 isolated on Ni-NTA resin, under non-denaturing conditions using  
120 500 mM imidazole for elution. The concentration of the purified protein was measured by  
121 NanoDrop 2000c spectrophotometer (Thermo Scientific, Waltham, MA, USA).

122

123 **Endotoxin measurement by limulus amebocyte lysate (LAL) assay**

124 Recombinant proteins and *Ov*-ES products were evaluated for the presence of  
125 lipopolysaccharide (LPS) using a chromogenic LAL endotoxin assay kit (GenScript,  
126 Piscataway, NJ, USA) according to the manufacturer's instructions. A standard curve was  
127 generated using LPS concentrations ranging from 0.1-0.01 endotoxin units (EU) per ml (0.01-  
128 0.001 ng/ml) for sample measurement. The absorbance of the reaction was measured at 545  
129 nm using a microplate reader (Varioskan<sup>TM</sup> LUX microplate reader, Thermo Scientific).

130

131 **Cell proliferation assay**

132 H69 cells were maintained in Dulbecco's modified Eagle's medium (DMEM)/Ham-F12  
133 (Gibco, USA) supplemented with 10% fetal bovine serum (FBS), 100 Units/ml Penicillin and  
134 100 Units/ml Streptomycin (Life Technologies, Carlsbad, CA, USA), insulin, adenine,  
135 epinephrine, T3-T, epidermal growth factors (EGF) and hydrocortisone (Ninlawan et al. 2010).  
136 The M213 CCA cell line was cultured in RPMI (Gibco, Thermo Fisher Scientific)  
137 supplemented with 10% FBS and 100 Units/ml Penicillin and 100 Units/ml Streptomycin.

138 Cell proliferation was measured using the MTT assay (Invitrogen, Thermo Fisher  
139 Scientific). Initially, 15,000 H69 cholangiocytes were seeded into 24 well plate and then grown  
140 overnight at 37 °C in a 5% CO<sub>2</sub> environment. Three hours prior to adding recombinant proteins  
141 or *Ov*-ES products, the growth media was replaced with a low nutrient of H69 media containing  
142 0.5% FBS (Smout et al. 2015) for 3 hours before protein exposure. The cells were cultured  
143 with various concentrations (0.8- 6.4 µg/ml) of rLEL-*Ov*-TSP-2, rLELO*Ov*-TSP-3, 1.25 µg/ml  
144 *Ov*-ES, or PBS in low nutrient media for 24 and 48 hours. Viable cells were quantified using  
145 the MTT assay with absorbance of 570 nm. The experiments were conducted in triplicate for  
146 each condition.

147

#### 148 **Quantitative RT-PCR**

149 H69 cholangiocytes were cultured with 1.6 µg/ml of the r*Ov*-TSP-2 and r*Ov*-TSP-3 in  
150 a low nutrient media for 24 or 48 hours then cells were preserved in Trizol reagent (Invitrogen,  
151 Life technologies) and stored at -80 °C until further processing. To measure cytokine  
152 expression, total cellular RNA was extracted using TriZol® reagent and reverse transcribed to  
153 cDNA using a RevertAid First Strand cDNA Synthesis kit (Thermo Fisher Scientific). The  
154 cDNA was amplified using gene-specific primers designed to amplify a portion of the coding  
155 sequences. The amplification was performed using Maxima SyBr green qPCR master mix  
156 (Thermo Fisher Scientific). The qPCR was performed using a single 10 minute denaturation  
157 step at 95 °C, followed by 40 cycles of 30 sec at 94 °C, 30 sec at 55 °C, and 30 sec 72 °C, and  
158 a final extension step at 72 °C for 10 min. IL-6 primer sequence was: Forward; 5'-  
159 ACCCCTGACCCAACCACAAAT-3', Reverse; 5'-CCTTAAAGCTGCGCAGAATGAGA-  
160 3'; IL-8 primer sequence was Forward; 5'-GTGCAGTTTGCCAAGGAGT-3', Reverse; 5'-  
161 CTCTGCACCCAGTTTCCTT-3'. Gene expression was normalized the  $\beta$ -actin gene,  
162 forward; 5'-TCCCTGGAGAAGAGCTACGA, Reverse; 5'AGCACTGTGTTGGCGTACAG.  
163

#### 164 **Transwell migration**

165 The adenosquamous carcinoma cell line M213 which originated from human CCA  
166 tissue (Sripa et al. 2020) and H69 normal cholangiocytes were co-cultured with recombinant  
167 TSPs to assess cell migration. Briefly,  $5 \times 10^4$  of M213 or H69 cells were seeded in the upper  
168 chamber of a Transwell polycarbonate insert with 8.0  $\mu\text{m}$  pore size (Corning, NY, USA). After  
169 1 hour, rLEL-*Ov*-TSP-2, rLEL-*Ov*-TSP-3, or *Ov*-ES were added into to the lower chamber,  
170 and the cells were incubated for an additional 24 hours to allow migration to occur. The insert  
171 was removed, and cells on the upper side of the membrane were removed using a cotton bud.  
172 The membranes were fixed with 4% paraformaldehyde, washed with PBS, and stained with 5  
173  $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$  Hoechst for nuclear visualization. The migration of cells was assessed by counting the  
174 number of positive cells in ten random microscopy fields (10 $\times$ ) of each membrane. Images  
175 were taken using a Nikon Eclipse Ti microscope and analyzed with NIS-Elements version 4.3  
176 software. The cells were counted using ImageJ version 1.52p.

177 **Statistical analysis**

178 The data were presented as the mean  $\pm$  standard error of three independent  
179 experiments and analyzed for normal distribution using GraphPad Prism using one-way  
180 ANOVA with post-hoc Tukey's test. A *P* value of  $<0.05$  was considered to be significant.

181

182 **RESULTS**

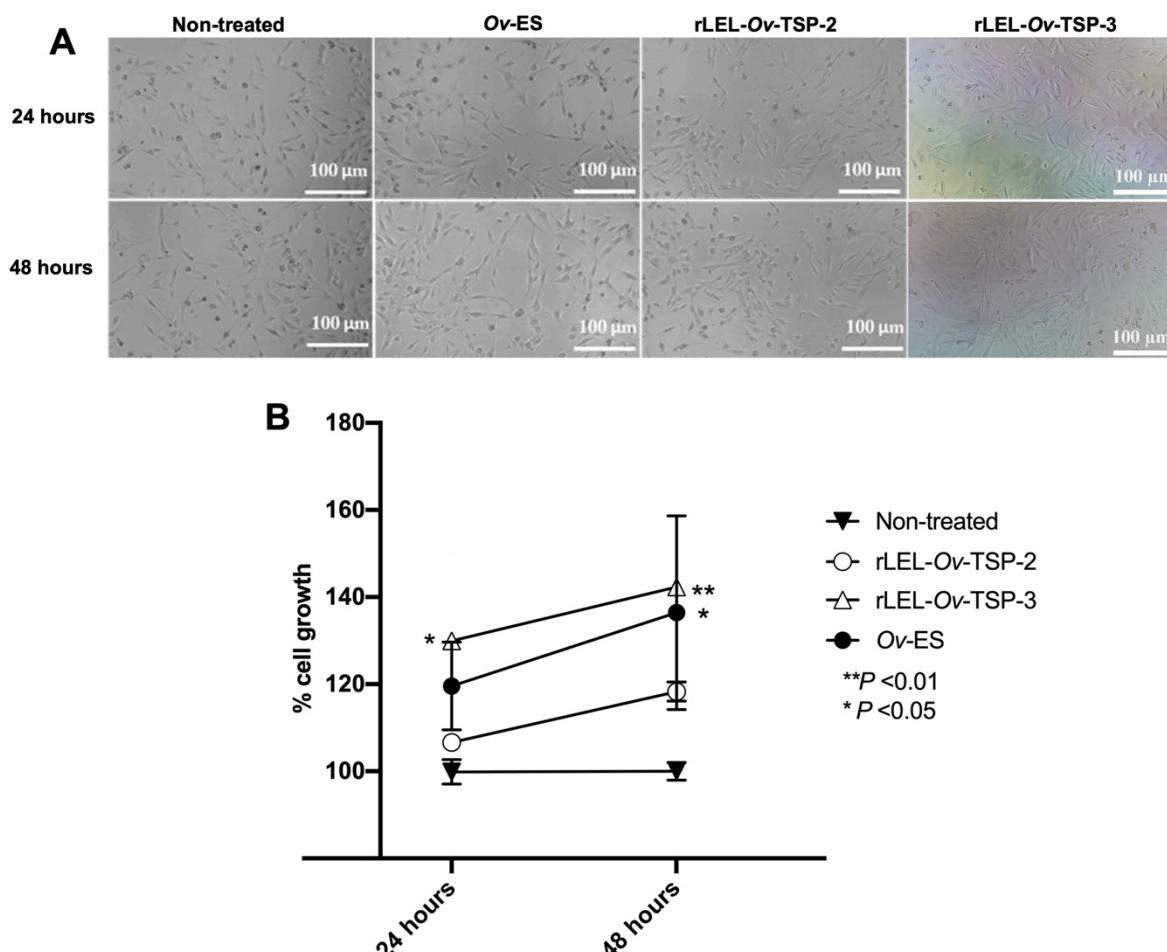
183 **rLEL-*Ov*-TSP-3 and *Ov*-ES stimulates bile duct cell proliferation.**

184 The recombinant protein was assessed for endotoxin using LAL assay. The result  
185 showed that the LPS concentration in 1.6  $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$  rLEL-*Ov*-TSP-2, 1.6  $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$  rLEL-*Ov*-TSP-3  
186 and 1.25  $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$  *Ov*-ES was 0.019 ng/ml, 0.022 ng/ml, and 0.023 ng/ml respectively (Fig S1.).  
187 These values fall within the acceptable range for cell culture, as outlined by the manufacturer's  
188 instructions.

189 To optimize the effect of protein concentration on H69 cell growth, rLEL-*Ov*-TSP-2 and  
190 rLEL-*Ov*-TSP-3 at various concentrations (0.8-6.4  $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$ ) were co-cultured with H69 cells and  
191 compared to the effect of ES products at a concentration of 1.25  $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$  as described elsewhere  
192 (Chaiyadet et al. 2015a). In agreement with our earlier findings, *Ov*-ES also resulted in  
193 significantly elevated cell growth. Based on these findings, further studies were conducted  
194 using concentrations of 1.6  $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$  of rLEL-*Ov*-TSP-2 and rLEL-*Ov*-TSP-3, and 1.25  $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$  of

195 *Ov*-ES in co-culture with cholangiocytes for 24 and 48 hours to investigate cell proliferation  
196 using MTT assay. rLEL-*Ov*-TSP-3 but not TSP-2 resulted in significantly enhanced  
197 cholangiocyte proliferation when compared to non-treated cells at 24 and 48 hours (Fig. 1).

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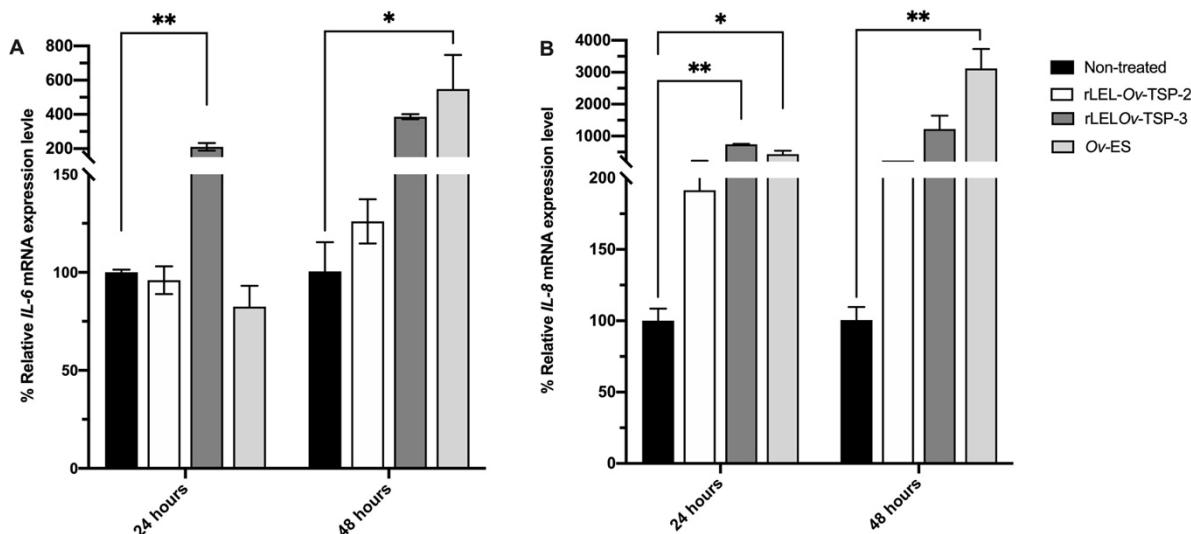
201 **Fig. 1. Growth of H69 cholangiocytes co-cultured with rLEL-*Ov*-TSP-2, rLEL-*Ov*-TSP-3  
202 and *Ov*-ES using the MTT assay.** The H69 cholangiocytes exposed with the 1.6 µg/ml rLEL-  
203 Ov-TSP-2 and rLEL-Ov-TSP-3, 1.25 µg/ml *Ov*-ES for 24 and 48 hours (A). The effect of rLEL-  
204 Ov-TSP-2, rLEL-Ov-TSP-3 on cholangiocyte growth compared to those exposed to *Ov*-ES as  
205 a positive control and non-treated as a negative control, using the MTT assay (B). \*\*P < 0.01,  
206 \*P < 0.05

207

208 **rLEL-*Ov*-TSP-3 and *Ov*-ES stimulate pro-inflammatory cytokine secretion by H69  
209 cholangiocytes.**

210 To investigate the innate immune response of bile duct cells exposed to recombinant TSPs,  
211 gene expression levels of interleukin-6 (*Il-6*) and interleukin-8 (*Il-8*) were assessed after

212 cholangiocytes were exposed to rLEL-*Ov*-TSP-2 and rLEL-*Ov*-TSP-3. Expression levels of the  
213 *Il-6* gene were significantly increased in H69 cells co-cultured with rLEL-*Ov*-TSP-3 after 24  
214 hours and with *Ov*-ES after 48 hours, whereas rLEL-*Ov*-TSP-2 had no effect (Fig. 2A).  
215 Expression of the *Il-8* gene was significantly upregulated in H69 cells co-cultured with both  
216 rLEL-*Ov*-TSP-3 after 24 hours and *Ov*-ES after 24 and 48 hours. rLEL-*Ov*-TSP-2, however,  
217 did not induce changes in *Il-8* gene expression in cholangiocytes (Fig. 2B).  
218

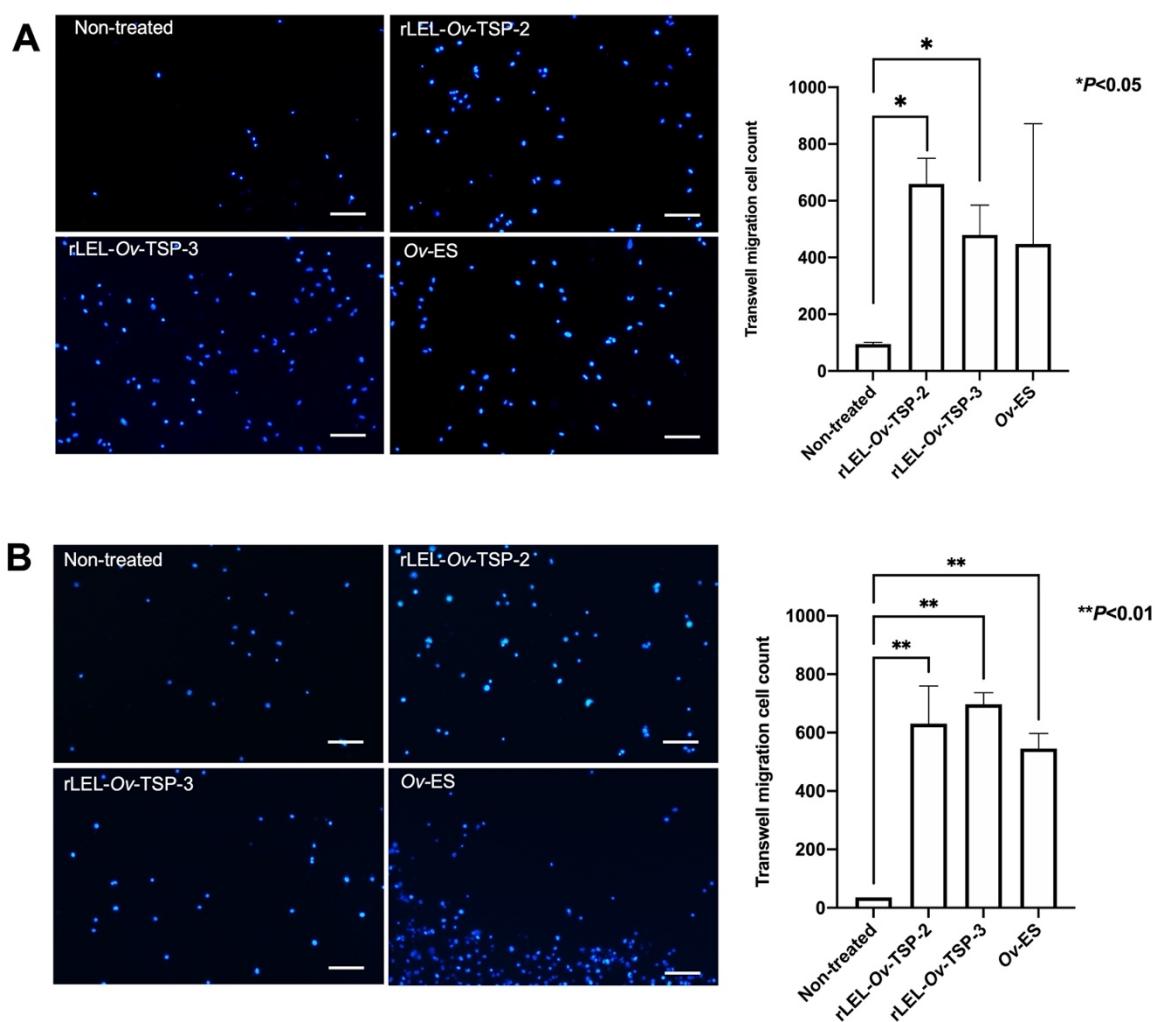


219  
220 **Fig. 2.** The mRNA expression levels of *Il-6* (A), and *Il-8* (B) in H69 cells after co-culture with  
221 rLEL-*Ov*-TSP-2, rLEL-*Ov*-TSP-3, and *O. viverrini* secretory products (*Ov*-ES) at 24 and 48  
222 hours determined by qRT-PCR. \* $P < 0.05$ , \*\* $P < 0.01$

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224

225 **Tetraspanins induce cell migration in normal cholangiocyte and cholangiocarcinoma  
226 cell lines**

227 To study the impact of *Ov*-TSPs on the migration of host cells, H69 cholangiocytes and  
228 M213 CCA cell lines were exposed to rLEL-*Ov*-TSP-2, rLEL-*Ov*-TSP-3, and *Ov*-ES for 24  
229 hours using a Transwell migration assay (Techasen et al. 2014). The results indicated that both  
230 rLEL-*Ov*-TSP-2 and rLEL-*Ov*-TSP-3 induced significantly increased migration in H69  
231 cholangiocyte (Fig. 3A) and M213 CCA (Fig. 3B) cell lines. However, *Ov*-ES only induced  
232 significant cell migration in M213 cells, but not in the cholangiocyte cell line.



233

234 **Fig. 3. Tetraspanins of *O. viverrini* induced migration of normal and malignant**  
235 **cholangiocytes.** The cholangiocyte H69 (A) and cholangiocarcinoma M213 (B) cell lines  
236 migrated through Transwell membranes following co-culture with rLEL-Ov-TSP-2, rLEL-  
237 Ov-TSP-3, and Ov-ES for 24 hours. Hoechst dye stained nuclei stained blue. ImageJ was  
238 used to count migrating cells \*P < 0.05, \*\*P < 0.01.

239

## 240 DISCUSSION

241 In helminths, TSPs play a key role in maintaining tegument biogenesis and stability  
242 (Chaiyadet et al. 2017) and are defined as markers of EVs (Chaiyadet et al. 2022). However,  
243 the effects of these proteins on cholangiocytes were, until now, unclear. Herein, two  
244 recombinant TSP LEL domains of *O. viverrini* were expressed and their impact on human  
245 cholangiocyte cell lines (normal and cancerous) were assessed.

246 Previous earlier reports revealed that Ov-ES stimulates proinflammatory cytokine  
247 secretion by cholangiocytes and induces abnormal cell growth (Ninlawan et al. 2010, Syal et

248 al. 2012). Additionally, *Ov*-ES can increase the production of IL-6 and IL-8 from peripheral  
249 blood mononuclear cells of *O. viverrini*-infected human subjects (Surapaitoon et al. 2017).  
250 TSPs on the surface of *O. viverrini* extracellular vesicles (*Ov*-EVs) are important in the entry  
251 of vesicles into host target cells (Chaiyadet et al. 2022), whereupon the EVs trigger multiple  
252 pathways involved in cancer development, including Wnt signaling that can promote cell  
253 proliferation (Chaiyadet et al. 2015b). *Ov*-EVs that are taken up by cholangiocytes induce cell  
254 proliferation and secretion of IL-6 (Chaiyadet et al. 2015b), events that have been shown to  
255 promote tumorigenesis in liver fluke infection (Sripa et al. 2012). Antibodies against *Ov*-TSPs  
256 have been shown to bind to the EV surface and block EV internalization by cholangiocytes,  
257 thereby attenuating cell proliferation and reducing IL-6 production (Chaiyadet et al. 2015b,  
258 Chaiyadet et al. 2022).

259 The interactions of TSPs with various binding partners, including integrins and other  
260 TSPs triggers cellular activity such as downstream signaling in response to migratory signals  
261 (Hemler 2008, Bassani and Cingolani 2012, Schroder et al. 2013). This regulation occurs in  
262 both normal and pathological processes such as cancer metastasis and inflammation. For  
263 example, CD151 promotes migration of epidermoid carcinoma cells via  $\alpha 3\beta 1$  and  $\alpha 6\beta 4$   
264 integrin-dependent cell adhesion and migration (Hong et al. 2012). A number of studies have  
265 shown that N-glycosylation in LELs of TSPs regulates adhesion and motility of the cell by  
266 binding with  $\alpha 3$  and  $\alpha 5$  integrin domains (Ono et al. 2000). Moreover, the interaction of CD63  
267 to CXCR4 via the N-glycans triggers downstream signaling of the chemokine receptor  
268 (Yoshida et al. 2009). The large extracellular loop of most TSPs are glycosylated via one or  
269 more potential N-linked glycosylation site (Wang et al. 2012, Marjon et al. 2016), and *O.*  
270 *viverrini* TSP LELs are also predicted to be glycosylated via the presence of asparagine  
271 residues (Chaiyadet et al. 2015a).

272 *Ov*-TSP-3 induced upregulated expression in cholangiocytes of *Il-8*, a potent  
273 chemoattractant, implying that this process may drive cell migration through the chemokine  
274 receptors, CXCR1 and CXCR2, both of which are highly expressed in cancer cells and can  
275 trigger liver cell migration and invasion (Bi et al. 2019). Taken together, *O. viverrini* TSPs may  
276 interact with their partner molecules in cholangiocytes and stimulate downstream signals that  
277 promote cell migration, and ultimately contribute to malignant transformation.

278 In conclusion, *Ov*-TSP-2 and *Ov*-TSP-3 stimulate cell proliferation and increase the  
279 production of the pro-inflammatory cytokines, IL-6 and IL-8, leading to increased migration  
280 of both normal cholangiocyte and cholangiocarcinoma cell lines. These processes contribute

281 to the known carcinogenic properties of liver fluke infection and help to explain why this group  
282 of parasites is recognized as a group 1 biological carcinogen (Humans 2012). Our findings  
283 also highlight the importance of interrupting the molecular interactions between fluke EVs and  
284 host biliary cells by vaccination (Chaiyadet et al. 2019, Phung et al. 2019, Phumrattanaprapin  
285 et al. 2021a, Phumrattanaprapin et al. 2021b) to develop therapeutic strategies that prevent this  
286 carcinogenic infection.

287

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297

## 298 **Author Contributions**

299 A.P., S.C., and T.L. conceived the project and designed the experiments. A.P. and S.C.  
300 performed the experiments and analyzed the results. All authors reviewed the manuscript.

301

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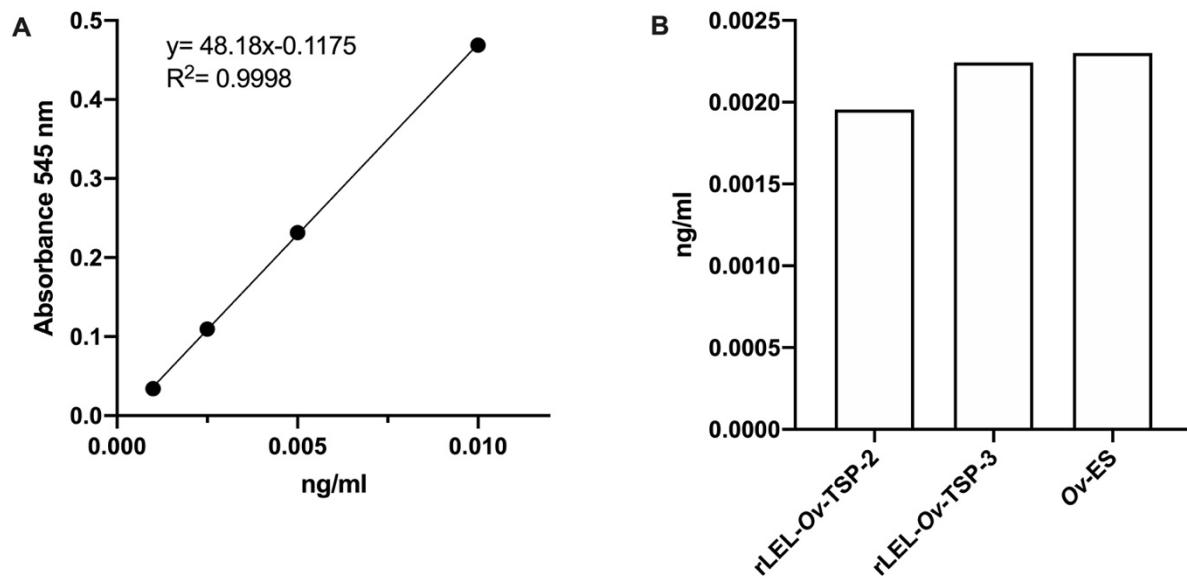
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412 **Figure legends**



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414 **Fig S1. A standard curve of endotoxin concentration at 0.01-0.001 ng/ml was developed**  
415 **using the Limulus Amebocyte lysate (LAL) assay (A) to measure the endotoxin levels of**  
416 **rLEL-*Ov*-TSP2, rLEL-*Ov*-TSP-3, and *Ov*-ES (B).**

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