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Research Article

IN SILICO APPROACH OF STRUCTURE PREDICTION AND FUNCTIONAL CHARACTERIZATION OF ZAIRE EBOLA (EBOV) AND IDENTIFICATION OF BINDING SITE FOR DRUG DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Zaire ebolavirus (EBOV) is one of the dangerous and a negative-stranded ssRNA virus. EBOV is a zoonotic pathogen that causes severe hemorrhagic fever in humans. Nowadays epidemic outbreak caused by EBOV is incurable with present technologies; thus figure out as a major health risk which needs enhanced surveillance. The study was conducted with seven proteins of Zaire ebola (EBOV) and gene sequences are available in NCBI database. The homology modeling was done by SWISS-MODEL, Phyre2 and HHpred. The obtained model was verified with structure validation programs such as PROCHECK, Verify3D and ERRAT. PROCHECK analysis of seven proteins showed that 85-96.6% of the residues are in the most favored region, the verify 3D value of 80-100% indicates that constructed model is good and ERRAT value of 87.442-100% indicates that overall good quality factor. In this study, we also reported phylogenetic relationship, physico-chemical characteristics, secondary structure, 3-D structure. Moreover, active sites were identified by CASTp suggests that these proteins can be utilized as a potential drug target. Furthermore, the initial findings were reinforced by the results from I-Mutant and mCSM as these tools predicted significant and functional instability of the mutated vp35 protein.

Keywords: Zaire ebola, EBOV, Computational Tools, Active site, Mutation Point.

Introduction

Ebola virus is a negative-sense, single-stranded RNA virus that causes a severe hemorrhagic fever in humans with high case fatality rates ranging from 47 to 91% (Fedmann *et al.*, 2011). The genus *Ebolavirus* is inside in the family *Filoviridae* and order *Mononegavirales*. Viruses within this genus called ebolaviruses (Kuhn JH *et al.*, 2010) and consists of five species- Bundibugyo ebolavirus (BDBV), Zaire ebolavirus (EBOV), Reston ebolavirus (RESTV), Sudan ebolavirus (SUDV) and Tai forest ebolavirus (TAFV) (WHO, 2014). Disease from *ebolavirus* is marked by fever, shock, and coagulation defects with 50–90% mortality occurring 7–12 days after infection (Bwaka *et al.* 1999). This species was first identified during an outbreak on August, 1976 in Yambuku (Suzuki *et al.*, 1997).

From the genetic studies, Zaire ebolavirus (EBOV) is linear and is about 18,959nt as well as consist of seven genes (Bukreyev *et al.* 1993). These genes are arranged as 3'-NP-VP35-VP40-GP-VP30-VP24-L (Volchkov *et al.*, 1999). Various proteins have various functions in the life cycle of Ebola. GP is a type-I transmembrane protein cleaved by furin proteases in GP1 and GP2 subunits

(Neumann *et al.*, 2007; Neumann *et al.*, 2002; Wool-Lewis *et al.* 1999; Volchkov *et al.*, 1998). VP24 is a peripheral viral membrane protein in viral binding that also plays an important role in the suppression of host interferon activity (Ziying Han *et al.*, 2003; Basler *et al.*, 2009). The VP30 is essential maintaining the balance between transcription and replication process in ebolavirus replication cycle (Martinez *et al.*, 2008). NP is a nucleoprotein that forms a ribonucleoprotein complex when binds to the viral RNA. The L protein (Large structural protein) helps in the synthesis of mRNA from negative-stranded ssRNA and hence is an RNA-dependent RNA polymerase (Watanabe *et al.*, 2006). VP35 has been shown to prevent phosphorylation and dimerization of IRF-3 (Pires *et al.*, 2014), to block induction of IFN α/β expression (Basler CF *et al.*, 2003; Basler CF *et al.*, 2000), to inhibit activation of protein kinase R (PKR) (Feng *et al.*, 2007, Schumann *et al.*, 2009), and to serve as a suppressor of RNA silencing (Haasnoot J, *et al.*, 2007). VP35 possesses double-stranded RNA (dsRNA) activity. Two VP35 mutant points K309A and R312A were found to be greatly impaired in their dsRNA-binding activity (Cardenas *et al.*, 2006). There are three basic residues, R305, K309, and R312, as numbered in the

Zaire species of ebolavirus, are critical for binding dsRNA and blocking IFN expression (Christopher *et al.*, 2010).

Materials and Methods

Data and Materials

The protein sequences can be retrieved from NCBI (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.gov/>) 'protein' database. The search listed seven proteins as – Nucleoprotein (GI:788304299), L (Large structural Protein) which is RNA depended RNA polymerase (GI:788304307), Glycoprotein (GI:788304302), VP35 (GI:788304300), VP40 (GI:788304301), VP30 (GI:788304305), VP24 (GI:788304306). The FASTA sequence was retrieved and used for the further bioinformatics analysis.

Multiple sequence alignment

These sequences were analyzed on ClustalW (<http://www.ebi.ac.uk/clustalW/>) for the multiple sequences alignment.

Construction of phylogenetic trees

The phylogenetic trees were first constructed using the neighbor joining method (Saitou N *et al.*, 1987) from the MEGA6 package (Tamura *et al.*, 2011). Sequences were also analyzed using MEGA6 and a ClustalW algorithm was used to align multiple sequences in parallel. Confidence on each node was assessed by 2000 bootstrap replications (Felsenstein *et al.*, 1985). Also the maximum likelihood method from MEGA6 package was used to construct a phylogenetic tree and 2000 replicates were used for bootstrap statistical test.

Physico-chemical characterization

Different properties including number of amino acids, molecular weight, theoretical isoelectric point(pI), amino acid composition (%), number of positively (Arg+ Lys) and negatively charged (Asp+ Glu) residues, extinction coefficient, instability index, aliphatic index and Gran Average of Hydropathicity (GRAVY) were calculated using ExPASy's ProtParam tool (Gasteiger *et al.*, 2005) (<http://expasy.org/tools/protparam.html>).

Homology study

Homology study was performed by using NCBI protein blast package contain blast-p, psi-blast, delta-blast algorithms, BLOSUM 62 matrix, Existence 11 Extension-1, with non-redundant protein sequence (nr).

Protein 3D structure prediction

Protein structure homology modeling has become a routine technique to generate 3D models for proteins when experimental structures are not available (Biasini *et al.*, 2014). The 3D structures of seven proteins of Zaire ebola virus were predicted by different tools, using SWISS-MODEL (Bordoli *et al.*, 2009) (<http://www.swissmodel.expasy.org/>), Phyre2 (Kelly LA *et al.*, 2009) (<http://www.sbg.bio.ic.ac.uk/phyre2/html/page.cgi?id=inde>

[x](http://www.sbg.bio.ic.ac.uk/phyre2/html/page.cgi?id=inde)), HHpred (Agarwal *et al.*, 2008) (<http://toolkit.tuebingen.mpg.de/hhpred>) . The input data was in FASTA format.

3D Model Validation

The program PROCHEK (Laskowski *et al.*, 1996) by Ramachandran plot analysis is used to define the stereo chemical quality of the generated model and it was also validated by ERRAT (Colovos *et al.*, 1993) and Verify 3D programs (Eisenberg *et al.*, 1997). Finally, proteins were visualized by using Chimera 1.8.1 (Pettersen *et al.*, 2004).

Active site prediction

To identify the ligand binding capacity with the determined model, CASTp server (Dundas *et al.* 2006) was used. The predicted active site in generated model will help in further work to study on docking site.

Protein-Protein Interaction networking

Protein interacts with other proteins to execute accurate functions. To identify virus-host protein-protein interactions. by VirHostNet 2.0 (Guirmand *et al.*, 2015) (<http://virhostnet.prabi.fr/#>) . VirHostNet 2.0 is based on Cytoscape web library and provides most complete and accurate resource of virus-virus and virus-host protein-protein interactions networks.

Prediction of Change in Stability upon Mutation

I-Mutant 2.0 (Capriotti *et al.*, 2005) and mCSM (Pires *et al.*, 2014) were used to predict the change in stability due to mutation. This tool can automatically predict the change in structural stability analyzing the structure or the sequence of the protein. I-Mutant 2.0 and mCSM can used as classifier for predicting the sign of protein stability upon mutation and a regression estimator which predicts the change in Gibbs free energy. The resulting DDG value is the difference between the Gibbs free energy of mutated protein and wild type protein in kcal/mol.

Results

Pair-wise Distance

The pairwise distance method of phylogenetic analysis revealed on a measure of genetic distance between the sequences being classified. This exploration showed the divergence and percent identity of each sequence pair in the current alignment. Sequence comparison between the seven proteins of EBOV (Fig-1). The overall average is 9.7568 and there were a total of 225 positions in the final dataset.

Evolutionary Relationship

Phylogenetic tree shows evolutionary relationship among the seven proteins. The phylogenetic tree (Fig-2) classified the proteins into five groups. Group-1 contains of two proteins (Nucleoprotein and Glycoprotein), Group-2 contains one protein (VP24), Group-3 contains of two proteins (VP30 and Large structure protein), Group-4 and Group-5 contains one protein (VP35 and VP40).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Nucleoprotein(NP)		5.1332	3.0578	2.6721	4.1542	1.9252	2.4792
2. VP35	15.0714		1.4469	1.7978	1.5296	3.6230	2.4086
3. VP40(matrix_protein)	10.8421	6.7586		2.0669	2.2390	2.7060	1.6107
4. VP24	9.7143	8.0000	8.3750		5.5904	1.6054	1.7130
5. VP30	13.0625	7.0357	9.2273	16.3077		3.7245	0.5160
6. GP(glycoprotein_precursor)	8.3750	11.5000	10.2500	7.3333	12.2353		3.8589
7. L(polymerase)	9.7143	9.7143	7.3333	7.6538	3.3269	13.0625	

Fig-1: Estimates of Evolutionary Divergence between sequences

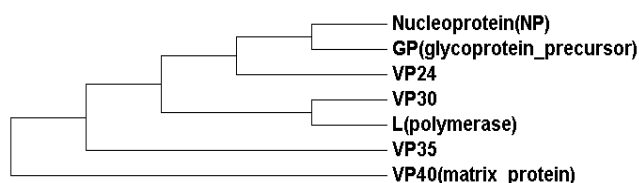


Fig-2: Phylogenetic relationship among the seven proteins of Zaire ebola

Physio-chemical Characterization

Isoelectric point (pI) is a pH in which net charge of protein is zero. pI of Nucleoprotein(NP), VP35 and Glycoprotein(GP) were observed to lie in the acidic range, while the rest of the proteins occur in alkaline range. From the study of instability index, it was found that Nucleoprotein (NP), VP35, VP30, Large Structural protein (L) were unstable, while the rest of the proteins were in stable. As instability index value less than 40 indicates stability of a protein (Table-2). Additionally, Aliphatic index (AI) refers to the relative volume of a protein occupied by its aliphatic side chains. The higher the Aliphatic index of proteins, the more thermally stable the proteins. Aliphatic index of VP24 (105.94), VP40 (95.43) and Large structural protein(90.10) classifies them as most thermostable, closely followed by VP35, VP30, Glycoprotein, Nucleoprotein. Grand average of Hydrophobicity index (GRAVY) indicates the interaction of the proteins in water. GRAVY values of all the proteins were within a wide range of -0.036 to -0.687 (hydrophilic).

The amino acid composition of each protein sequence was calculated by using ExPASy's ProtParam tool (supplementary file, Table-3). High percentage of Leusine (above 10.1), Serine (above 6.7) were found in VP24,VP30 and VP40 compared to other amino acid. In all Zaire ebola protein (except Large structural protein) alanine content was found significant. Again VP35, VP30 and Large structural protein (L) have a arginine content above 3.4 . Moreover, a good percentage of Threonine content was found in Glycoprotein (10.5%), VP40 (8.9%) and VP35 (7.9%).

Homology study

The homology model study (Table-4) shows Nucleoprotein (NP), VP40, VP35, VP24, Glyco-protein query covered 93-100% with Bundibugyo virus, Tai Forest virus, Reston virus. On the other hand, VP30 query covered 90-100% with Bundibugyo virus, Tai Forest virus, Lloviu cuevavirus.

Moreover, Large structural protein (L) query covered 60-99% with Lloviu cuevavirus, Pocine para influenza virus, Human para influenza.

Model verification and validation

PROCHECK sever had been used for building Ramachandran plot that measure the accuracy of protein model. The results of PROCHECK (Ramachandran plot: % core) are depicted in Fig-3 and Table-1 and then verified by using Verify3D (% of the residues had an averaged 3D-1D score>0.2), ERRAT (Overall quality factor) were narrated in Table-1.

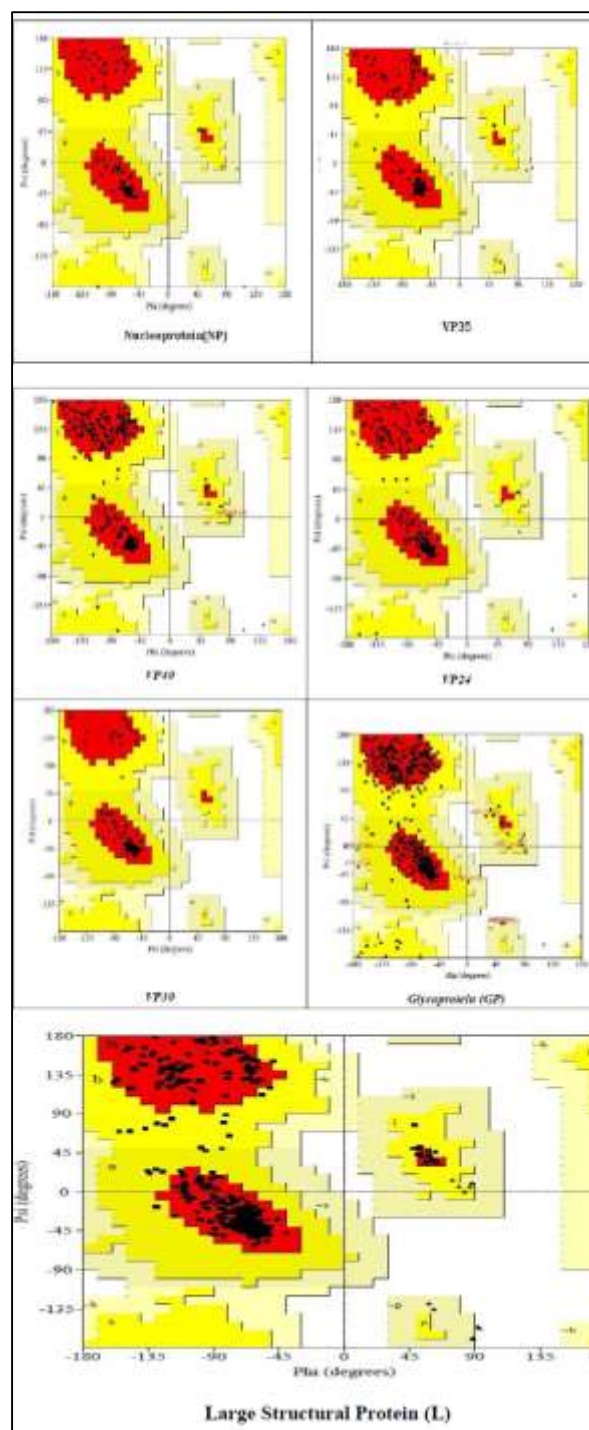


Fig. 3: Ramachandran plot of seven proteins of Zaire ebola (EBOV) obtained through the modeling tool.

Table 1: Model validation result of seven genes of Zaire ebola by different tools.

Gene Name	PROCHECK	Verify3D	ERRAT
NucleoProtein (NP)	95.2	100	100
VP35	95.2	100	98.291
VP40	90.7	92.47	87.442
VP24	93.1	98.99	89.529
VP30	96.6	87.30	100
Glycoprotein (GP)	85	93.95	95.093
Large structural protein (L)	95.1	80	97.808

Table 2: Physico-chemical parameters of seven proteins of Zaire ebola.

Gene Name	No. of Amino Acid	Molecular Weight	Theoretical pI	'-' charged residues (Asp+Glu)	'+' charged residues (Arg+Lys)	Extinction Coefficients	Instability Index	Aliphatic Index	(GRAVY)
NucleoProtein (NP)	739	83200.5	4.93	118	70	53540	48.97 unstable	73.52	-0.687
VP35	340	37448.5	6.01	38	34	25940	48.62 unstable	78.91	-0.402
VP40	326	35140.7	8.76	26	29	20065	39.04 stable	95.43	-0.060
VP24	251	28215.8	9.57	19	26	31970	36.51 stable	105.94	-0.036
VP30	288	32520.8	8.40	37	40	28460	52.08 unstable	78.36	-0.607
Glycoprotein (GP)	676	74434.5	6.30	70	64	101590	37.45 stable	76.35	-0.378
Large structural Protein (L)	2212	252495.1	8.64	209	231	287285	40.94 unstable	90.10	-0.235

Table 3: Composition of amino acid of seven proteins of Zaire ebola (%):

Protein	Ala	Arg	Asn	Asp	Cys	Gln	Glu	Gly	His	Ile	Leu	Lys	Met	Phe	Pro	Ser	Thr	Trp	Tyr	Val
Nucleo-Protein (NP)	7.0	4.6	4.3	8.1	0.5	7.2	7.8	5.7	3.9	3.7	9.1	4.9	2.7	3.5	5.7	6.4	5.7	0.5	2.8	5.8
VP35	7.6	5.3	4.1	5.3	2.4	6.8	5.9	5.9	2.1	6.8	7.4	4.7	2.6	2.6	7.1	4.7	7.9	0.9	1.8	5.6
VP40	7.1	3.4	4.3	5.2	0.6	3.4	2.8	6.4	2.1	8.0	10.1	5.5	2.5	3.1	11.3	6.7	8.9	0.6	1.8	6.1
VP24	6.4	4.0	6.8	3.6	0.4	4.8	4.0	5.2	2.8	7.6	14.7	6.4	3.2	4.4	3.6	8.4	6.8	2.0	1.2	4.0
VP30	7.3	8.7	2.1	5.6	2.8	6.2	7.3	4.5	3.1	3.5	11.1	5.2	1.0	2.8	5.2	9.4	6.6	1.4	1.4	4.9
Glyco-protein (GP)	7.2	4.9	5.6	5.2	1.8	4.0	5.2	7.8	2.5	6.1	7.7	4.6	0.6	4.3	5.3	7.0	10.5	2.1	2.4	5.3
Large structural protein (L)	5.3	5.3	5.0	4.7	1.9	4.8	4.8	4.6	3.6	6.6	11.3	5.1	1.6	5.2	4.6	8.3	7.1	1.3	3.8	5.1

Table 4: Homology parameters for the proteins studies

Protein	Accession Number	Homology	Query cover	Identity	E value
Nucleoprotein(NP)	GI:788304299	Bundibugyo virus	100%	75%	0.0
		Tai Forest virus	100%	75%	0.0
		Reston virus	100%	68%	0.0
VP35	GI:788304300	Tai Forest virus	93%	80%	4e-178
		Bundibugyo virus	96%	78%	9e-172
		Reston virus	93%	69%	1e-158
		Sudan virus	94%	69%	3e-153
VP40	GI:788304298	Bundibugyo virus	100%	83%	0.0
		Tai Forest virus	100%	82%	0.0
		Sudan virus	100%	75%	3e-174
		Reston virus	100%	74%	2e-172
		Lloviu cuevavirus	84%	53%	1e-95
VP24	GI:788304306	Tai Forest virus	100%	88%	2e-161
		Bundibugyo virus	100%	86%	4e-160
		Reston virus	100%	82%	3e-153
VP30	GI:788304305	Bundibugyo virus	100%	80%	5e-162
		Tai Forest virus	99%	78%	3e-158
		Lloviu cuevavirus	90%	53%	1e-78
Glycoprotein (GP)	GI:788304302	Bundibugyo virus	100%	65%	0.0
		Tai Forest virus	100%	65%	0.0
		Reston virus	95%	58%	0.0
Large structural protein (L)	GI:788304307	Lloviu cuevavirus	99%	55%	0.0
		Porcine parainfluenza virus	60%	26%	2e-116
		Human parainfluenza	60%	26%	8e-115

Table 5: Active site prediction of selected proteins of Zaire ebola.

Protein	Area(\AA^2)	Volume(\AA^3)
Nucleoprotein(NP)	82.5	64
VP35	110	92.5
VP40	709.4	1365.6
VP24	163.1	254
VP30	362.7	1169.9
Glycoprotein(GP)	642.5	796.5
Large structural protein(L)	1351.2	2216.7

Protein 3D structure

The 3D structure of protein is very crucial for comprehending the protein functions, their sub-cellular localization as well as protein-protein interactions. Based on homology modeling, SWISS-MODEL, Phyre2 and HHpred results showed 3D models for each of the given sequences and ranked them according to the scores of Ramachandran plot and validation program Verify3D, ERRAT and were visualized by chimera (Fig. 4).

Active site Analysis

The active sites of seven proteins were predicted (Fig-5). Further, in this study, we have also reported the best active site area of the experimental enzymes as well as the number of amino acids involved in it; showed the number of pockets, with their area and volume (Table-5).Among all

the proteins, the highest volume of the pockets of Large structural protein(L) is 2216.7Å³ and area is 1351.2Å². There are some variations in the area of pockets for VP40, it is 709.4Å² and volume 1365.6 Å³. In case of Glycoprotein (GP), area and volume of the pockets is 642.5 Å² and 796.5 Å³ respectively. For VP30, VP24, VP35 and Nucleoprotein(NP); the area of the pockets are 362.7 Å² ,

163.1 Å² , 110 Å², 82.5 Å² and the volume of the pockets are 1169.9 Å³ , 254 Å³ , 92.5 Å³, 64 Å³ respectively

Network generation

The protein-protein interacting was occurred VP35,VP40,VP24,NP, L proteins of EBOV with 154 proteins of Human by VirHostNet 2.0 tools and interaction network was depicted in Fig-6.

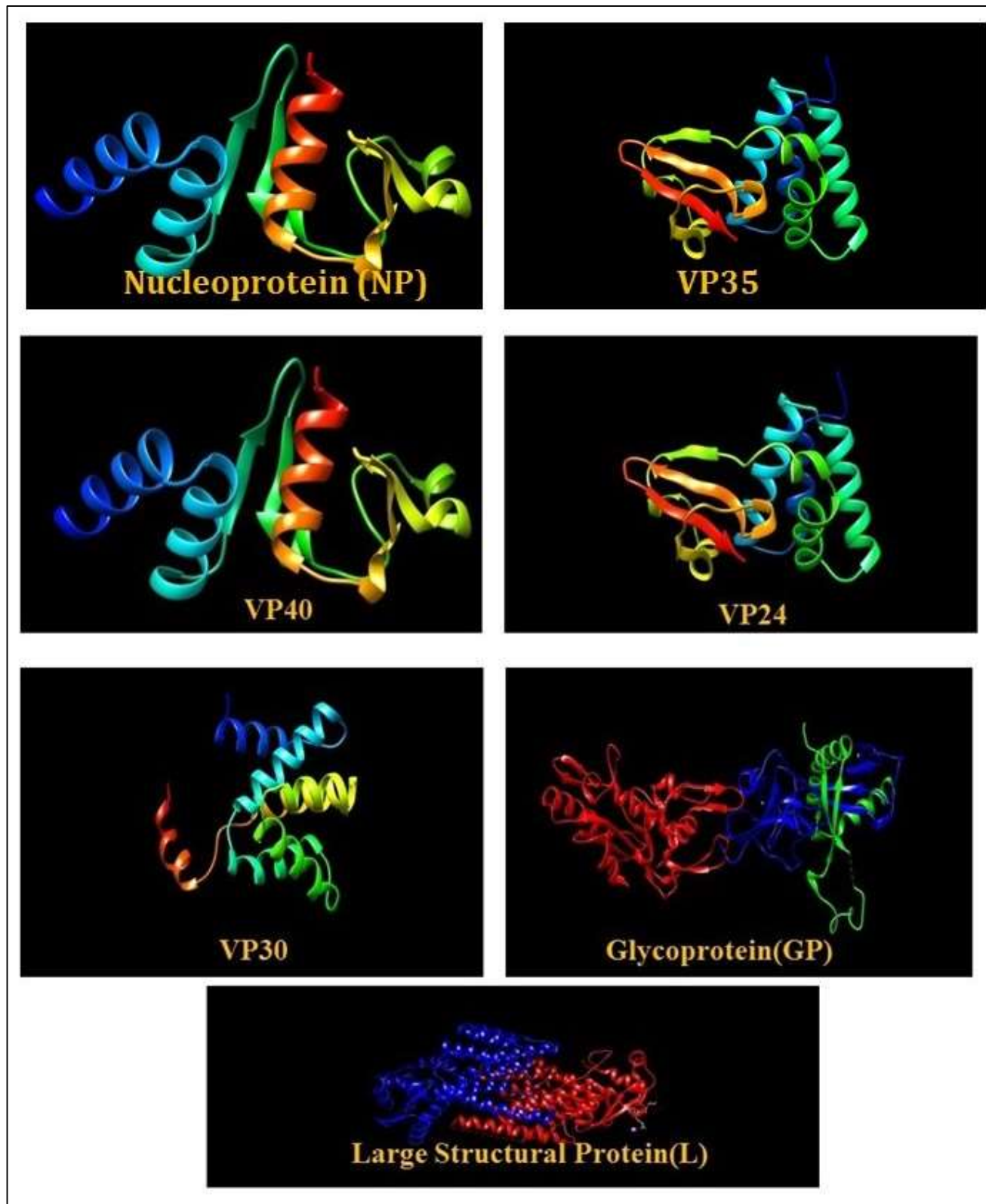


Fig-4: 3D structure of seven proteins of Zaire ebola.

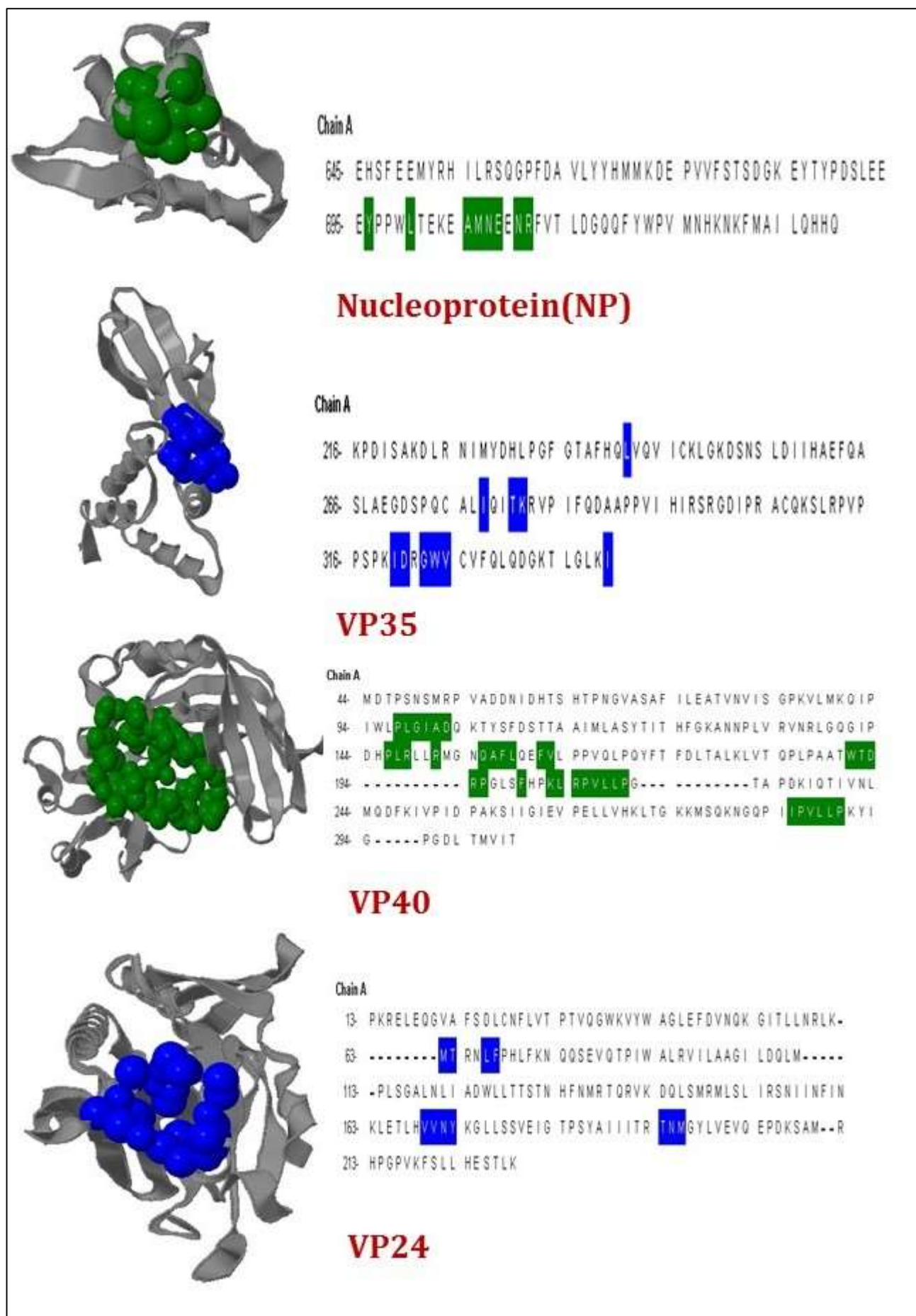


Fig. 5: Active site prediction of selected proteins of Zaire ebola

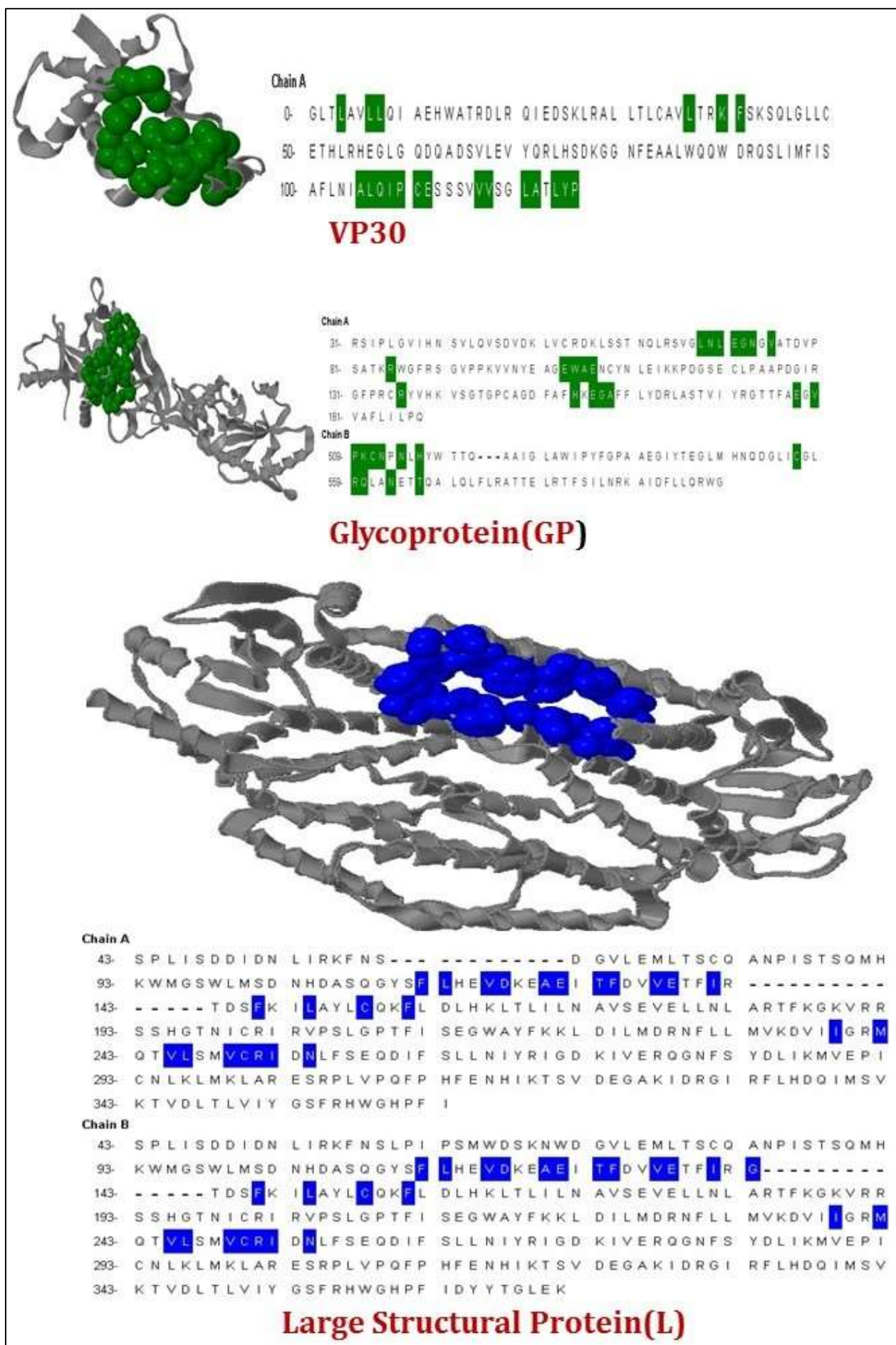


Fig. 5(contd.): Active site prediction of selected proteins of Zaire ebola

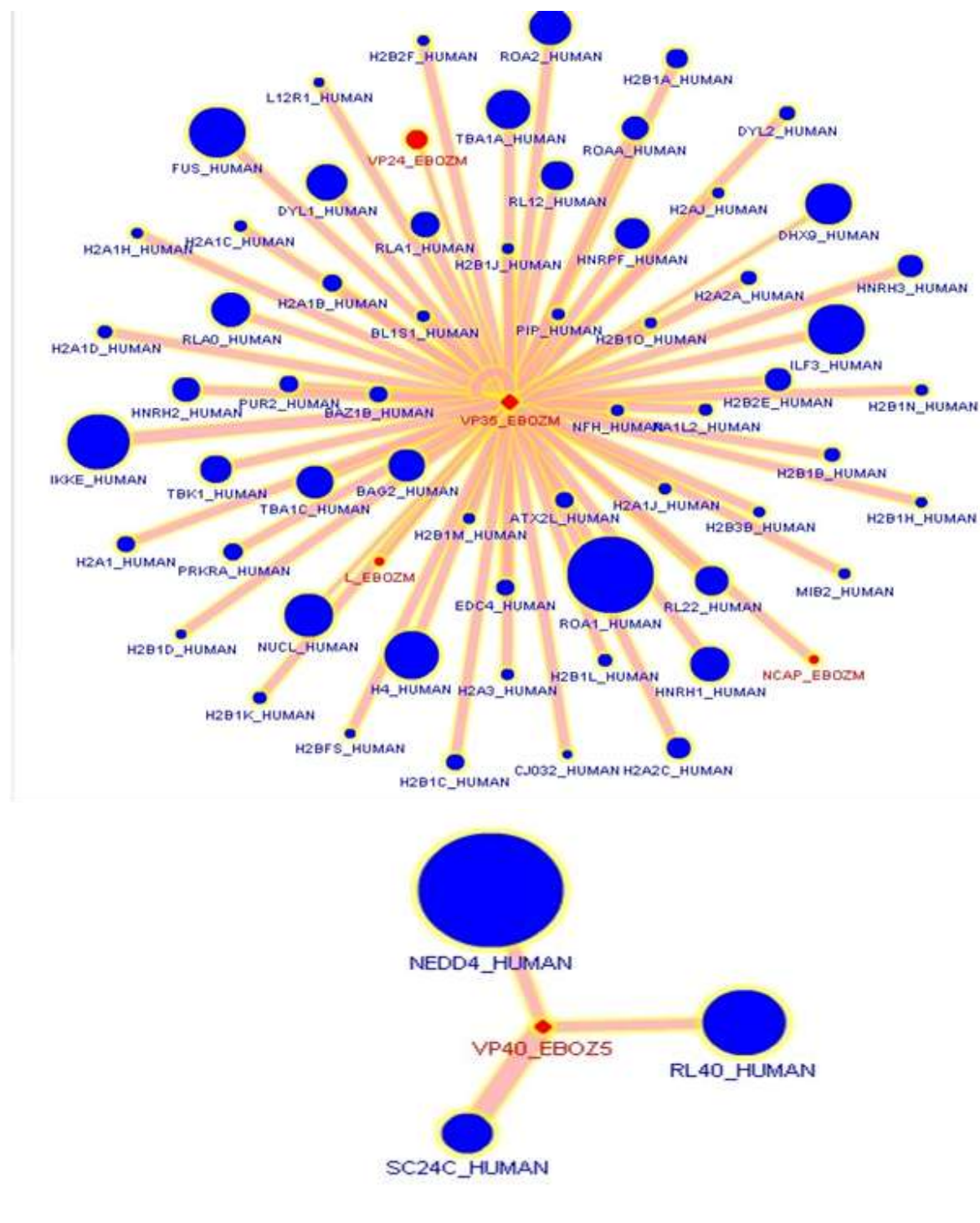


Fig. 6: Protein-protein interaction of Zaire Ebola virus (EBOV).

Prediction of Protein structure Stability

To assess the applicability of I-Mutant 2.0 and mCSM signatures in predicting the structure and the impact of mutations in protein stability. mCSM tool took pdb format file of wild type protein resulting RSA(%) and visualized mutant structure. 80% or 70% accurate prediction can be achieved by using protein structure or sequence, respectively, by these tools (Fig-7). Models with following mutations R305A, K309A and R312A of VP35 were submitted to the server for DDG stability prediction and

RSA calculation. All the mutations decrease protein stability. The effects of the amino acid substitutions on the domain structure of protein were received in detail form I-Mutant 2.0 and mCSM server. The mutation R305A results (Table-6) in a alanine residue in place of Arginine at 305 position located in the VP35. The highest reliability index score 8 in R305A and this score followed by R312A and K309A. Mutation R305A accounted for the lowest DDG value (-0.56Kcal/mol) followed by R312A (-0.38kcal/mol) respectively.

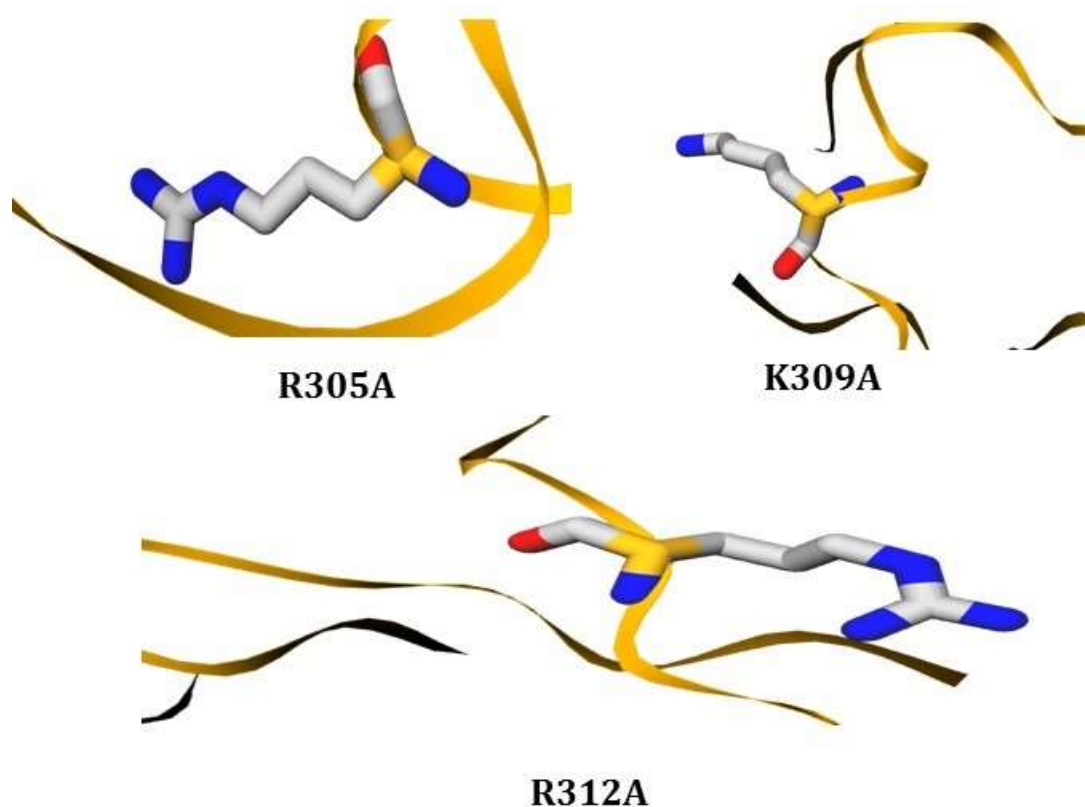


Fig. 7: Close-up of the mutation R305A, K309A and R312A of VP35 generated by mCSM.

Table. 6: I-mutant 2.0 and mCSM predictions for selected VP35 protein.

Mutation	Sign of DDG	DDG value prediction Kcal/mol	RI	RSA (%)
R305A	Decrease	-0.56	8	101.4
K309A	Decrease	-0.11	4	89.2
R312A	Decrease	-0.38	7	52.3

Discussion

In recent period, severe outbreak of Ebola virus covered not only in a naive region but also transmitted through the world (Feldmann *et al.*,2011).The aim of this study was to develop homology model with active site prediction and mutagenesis experiment using computational based biological approach (Pipasha *et al.*,2014). The future work is docking the active site for drug developing and Designing a potential siRNA against VP35. This study was executed with seven proteins of Zaire ebola (EBOV) and gene sequences are available in the viral gene bank database from NCBI. The pairwise distance indicates that the maximum genetic distance of 15.0714 occurred between Nucleoprotein (NP) and VP35. Multiple sequences alignment and Phylogenetic tree constructed using Clustal W and MEGA6 algorithm. The physical and chemical characterization of selecting protein done by ExPasy's protparam Tool, where Vp35, Nucleoprotein and Glycoprotein showed less than 7

isoelectric point. Whereas, Instability index value showed only Glycoprotein as a stable protein. Aliphatic index of VP24 (105.94), VP40 (95.43) and Large structural protein (90.10) classifies them as most thermostable, closely followed by VP35, VP30, Glycoprotein, Nucleoprotein. Grand average of Hydropathicity index (GRAVY) values of all the proteins were within a wide range of -0.036 to -0.687 that proved protein interaction with water. Alanine content was showed positive significant for collected Zaire ebola virus protein except Large structural protein.

VP35, VP30 and Large structural protein(L) had arginine content above 3.4,whereas good percentage of threonine content was found in Glycoprotein (10.5%), VP40 (8.9%) and VP35 (7.9%).The homology model study (Table-4) shows Nucleoprotein (NP), VP40, VP35, VP24, Glycoprotein query covered 93-100% ,VP30 query covered 90-100% and Large structural protein (L) query covered 60-

99% with Lloviu cuevavirus, Pocine para influenza virus, Human para influenza.

Ramachandran plotting done by PROCHECK sever that measure the accuracy of protein model. The results of PROCHECK (Ramachandran plot: % core) are depicted in Fig-3 and Table-1 and then verified by using Verify-3D (% of the residues had an averaged 3D-1D score>0.2), ERRAT (Overall quality factor) and visualized by chimera (Fig-4).

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To assess the applicability of I-Mutant 2.0 and mCSM signatures ,mCSM tool received pdb format file of wild type protein resulting RSA(%) and visualized mutant structure with 80% or 70% accurate prediction, can be achieved by using protein structure or sequence, respectively, by these tools (Fig-7) to predict the 3D structure and protein stability due to mutation. Models with following mutations R305A, K309A and R312A of VP35 were submitted to the server for DDG stability prediction and RSA calculation which showed all the mutations decrease protein stability.

Finally, after mutation amino acid substitutions on the domain structure of protein were received in detail form I-Mutant 2.0 and mCSM server where the mutation R305A results (Table-6) in Alanine residue in place of Arginine at 305 position located in the VP35. The highest reliability index score 8 in R305A and this score followed by R312A and K309A. Mutation R305A accounted for the lowest DDG value (-0.56Kcal/mol) followed by R312A (-0.38kcal/mol) respectively.

Conclusion

In this study, the 3D structure of seven proteins of Zaire ebola(EBOV) were predicted and validated by various bioinformatics tools and software. Analysis of evolutionary relationship reveals that all of the proteins shared a common

ancestor. These findings help us to realize the characters of these proteins. It is obvious that VP35 is highly unstable and contain high percentage of Alanine. On the other hand, VP30, VP24, VP40 are predominated by Serine, Leucine, glycine, proline. These amino acids have important role in protein structure. In future, broad screening inhibitor against VP35 will help for effective drug designing.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of this paper.

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